

Armitage, the blonde young man, and Paul rendering all due assistance; and Paul was aware in an indefinite way that Madame Ceriolo was somehow anxious to keep him off as much as possible from the golden-haired Pennsylvanian. But as this gave him the opportunity of conversing more with Nea, and as, duty to the contrary notwithstanding, he very much preferred Nea to the heiress of Pactolus, he by no means resented Madame's obvious anxiety in this respect. On the contrary, he salved his conscience with the reflection that it was Madame rather than inclination that kept him away from the lady of the golden hair and prospects.

Such a picnic as that December morning's Paul had never before borne a part in. There were dishes from Rumpelmayer's, cunningly compounded of aspic and olives, whose very names he had not so much as heard, but whereof the rest of the party, more instructed in cookery, talked quite glibly. There were curious salads, and garnishings of crayfish, and candied fruits and pastry and nougat of artistic manufacture. There was much champagne, and vintage clarets, and Asti *mousseux* for those who liked it sweet, and green chartreuse poured from a Cantagalli bottle. For though the picnic was nominally a joint affair of Nea's and the American's, it was Isabel Boyton who contributed the lion's share of the material provision, which she insisted upon doing with true Western magnificence. The lunch was so good, indeed, that even the beauties of nature went unnoticed by comparison. They had hardly time to look at the glimpse of calm blue sea disclosed between the ridges of serrated peaks, the green basking valleys that smiled a couple of thousand feet below, with their orange and lemon groves, or the flood of sunshine that poured in full force upon the mouldering battlements of the grim and wasted Alps in front of them.

After lunch, however, Paul somehow found himself seated on the slope of the hill with Nea. They had discussed many things—Mentone, and the view, and the flowers, and the village—and Nea had just told him the strange old legend of the castle that clings to the topmost peak—how it was founded by a Saracen who levied tax and toll on all the Christian folk of the country round, and finally became converted to the faith of Europe by the beautiful eyes of a peasant-girl whose charms had enslaved him, when suddenly