

mother's, only not the woman her mother was, yet."

"You would find it hard to improve her," I said.

"Eh? what?—you?" said the old man suspiciously, with a directness altogether contemptuous of the conventionalities. "I'll tell you what, young man; the man that gets her will have to fight for her—see? No coward gets Adele Haughton; no sir!"

His manner nettled me.

"I regret to say, sir," I replied, "that circumstances entirely preclude my ever being in the running, so to speak, for you daughter's hand."

"Spoken like a man! Spoken like a man! Young man, you've got your uncle's cut and your uncle's ways. I respect you for it. I do, upon my word. But you must know I'm a bit particular. No coward gets my daughter. She's got no mother, God bless her, and I've got to keep guard over her—I've got to keep guard over her." His voice broke as he spoke, and his fatherly affection made his vulgarity tolerable. As he sat there, in evening dress which seemed to sit so awkwardly upon him, I could not help wondering what had been his past. I imagined him struggling for his own in a mining camp, railroad-making over the prairies, opening fresh claims in Dakota. And now he was wearing conventional attire in a Washington drawing-room.

But what did he mean by saying that whoever wanted his daughter would have to fight for her? He surely could not mean that he would leave her fate to be decided by wager of battle. The idea seemed absurd. Adele Haughton, having had all the educational and social advantages that money could buy, was a refined woman of taste. Her father was neither refined nor æsthetic. His civilized attire simply accentuated his uncivilized idiosyncrasies. He was no more of a gentleman, really, than any man chosen by lot out of a crowd of navvies or miners. He was, I thought,

invited to my uncle's entertainment simply on account of his daughter, and I could not help pitying the girl who was subject to the caprices of such a father. And yet, as I reflected, he certainly was rich, and probably kind to her, in a way. She had whatever she wanted, except, perhaps, the husband of her choice. I now felt sure that that man was Spotley, but thought I might hear some more details if I waited a little.

I found that old Haughton's respect for my uncle, to a certain extent, included me. He was inclined to be communicative, and as the dancers swung round to the delicious strains of the best string band in Washington he admitted me to his confidence.

"She dances well; don't she now? Look at that; see how she makes the turn at the end, eh?" said Mr. Haughton, half soliloquizing.

"What I was telling you," he continued, "was that anybody that gets her has to fight for her. That may seem curious to you, eh?"

I owned that it did.

"Well, now, look here. What I say is this. Man has to protect woman. Now isn't that right? Man should therefore be stronger than woman; he should be all there—ready—in one word, a fighter. Now I, myself, mister, have been a fighter from the word 'go.' I look out on the world, and what do I see? A crowd of fighters and a crowd of ninnies; a crowd of dudes without an ounce of muscle or an ounce of pluck, left money by their fathers, uncles, aunts, and what not. But can they fight for their own? Can they fight for the women that's entrusted to 'em? No. I say no! a puny lot o' white-livered, half-hearted trash."

"Yes, that's no doubt true," I said.

"True? you bet it is! I say, mister, come into the smoking-room and have a cigar with me—they're all amusing themselves here, and we shan't be missed. But not if you want to dance."