

THE
PRIZE
TO
THE
HARDY

By ALICE WINTER

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J. R. Nurse

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PRIZE TO THE HARDY

By
ALICE WINTER

With Drawings by
R. M. CROSBY

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TO T. G. W.

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“I sing New England, as she lights her fire
In every prairie’s midst”



THE PRIZE TO THE HARDY



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CHAPTER I

A VISION FROM THE PAST

When he had leisure for any occupation so unremunerative, old Nicholas Windsor's mind was wont to lose itself in wonder at the curious contrasts of his own career—contrasts that generally took on the concrete forms of Vera and her mother. Familiar as were these musings on his past and his present, they struck him with all the freshness of a new sensation as he let himself out of the threatening twilight of a certain October day into the subdued luxury of the library of his home.

The gray light of late afternoon, struggling in through the windows, was lost in the glow of triumphantly blazing logs. There was serenity and rest in the atmosphere of home. He sank silently into a big easy chair that he might watch and listen, without interrupting the half-somber, half-emotional music

that seemed to belong both to the girl and to the hour. Vera was at the piano, where the aquiline outlines of her face against a latticed window beyond, the dusky white of her evening gown and bare arms, the very curve at the back of her neck, raised in his memory the old vision—the vision of a day long years ago. Through the scintillating mist in his eyes he looked at it. He seemed to see himself in the level lights and shadows of late afternoon, peeping through untamed underbrush at a half-breed girl in a dingy, straggling gown, raising and twisting just such arms and neck as Vera's, as she shook the wild rice into a much patched canoe. Like the notes of the piano was the wild song she sang, partly music and partly the murmur of her self-communings; and he, on the shore, followed her progress among the shallows, as she pushed her boat through the water-growing stalks, that bent and snapped before her birchen prow.

Her beauty caught him like that of the wild country into which he had come. He could see the dazzling blue of the clear Minnesota sky that Indian-summer day; he could see the very cockle-burs and the wild pink plants over which he stumbled; he could see the sedges that rose between himself and her, the straight leafless bulrushes beyond her, and, farther, the ruffled edges of the lily pads. Still beyond he saw the fringed,

far-away lake-shore, where yellow flames of birches, scarlet maples and the polished bronze of oaks lost themselves in no mystery of horizon, but stood sharply outlined as was this Indian girl's head. Among the trees he caught a glimpse of a whiff of smoke, the top of a tepee, a lazy brave lying on the shore and indolently teasing a dog that snarled and snapped in friendly response. The very sounds came crisply through the air, and the quick lapping of the water played an accompaniment to the girl's song. It was a sparkling, clear-cut landscape, where the very air he breathed, instinct with life and vigor, seemed to sharpen a man's senses and spur his blood.

But at that time he was not thinking of the artistic setting of his unconscious rice-gatherer. After weeks of chopping trees and grubbing roots, after the rough pioneer scramble for food and shelter, and the still rougher company of loud-voiced men who were sharing his struggle for the elements of civilization here in the northern wilderness, the thought uppermost in his mind was that it was good to hear a woman sing, be she but a high-cheeked half-breed, slaving for her men. Around a promontory shot the canoe, sinking ever nearer and nearer to the water-line as its burden grew heavier, and, with the noiseless tread which the trapper learned from his savage enemy lest a snap-

ping twig should betray him, he followed over ground that looked like gold from the falling yellow leaves. She caught a low-bending branch and twisted herself with the grace of a wild animal to pass below it; and now the canoe tipped to the point where a ragged tear in its aged side let in a flood of water. The girl uttered a quick cry, and he gallantly waded waist deep among the tangled weeds. The blush that met his rude chivalry filled him with half-forgotten, strange emotions. Love there was as simple and spontaneous a growth as the virgin forests around them.

How simple a thing it had then seemed that she should come to share his cabin and his rough life and humbly to accept the crumbs of a white man's kindness! How natural it was then; how remote and unthinkable now! With half-shut eyes he wholly forgot the girl at the piano as he recalled the gentleness, the faithfulness, the loving service of that other girl, long dead. Had anything in later life been better than their elemental love? Painted on something deeper than memory was the little log hut where they had shared two low-roofed rooms and the crude furniture that he hewed out with his own hands. He heard again her words as she leaned her dark head against his shoulder and told him, shyly and happily, of that which was coming to them out of the eternal mystery. His own

Puritan conscience, half-stifled out here on the frontier, awoke to sudden life and cried aloud to him, as it did that night, when he realized that he was to be the father of a nameless child. The other men laughed at his qualms; she did not understand them; but he knew. He opened his eyes suddenly now in the warm room and, startled, stared at his daughter, all unconscious of these dead happenings, all ignorant of the simple-hearted mother, whose little dream of happiness had ended when her baby's life began. Most of the time he forgot her himself. But he shivered to think what it would mean to him if this gracious presence, who had built up the thing called home around him, had been from the first an outcast. "Thank God, I married her before Vera was born!" he muttered.

She saw or felt his movement and, rising, went and flung her arms around him.

"That was wonderful, wasn't it?" she cried. "Those bars were true October—a shudder at the thought of winter coming, and a delicious dreamy touch of Indian summer!"

"Perhaps—perhaps. Is that what it meant? I confess I wasn't paying much attention to your music, Vera." His voice was commonplace and prosperous in spite of the very gentle emotions that had been surging within him. "I don't pretend to understand those

things, you know. But somehow it set me to thinking of other things and times."

"What wonderful things and times?" she asked, with a warm and welcome arm about his neck; for was he not her only parent, and was she not the one touch of romance that leavened his prosperous career?

"I never get over a kind of astonishment to think of the changes I have seen. Can you realize that when I came here there was nothing but a few scrub oaks and a few shabby huts? Why, in those days they didn't even know you could grow wheat in Minnesota, and now—"

She clapped the embracing hand over his mouth and sprang up in amused indignation. Her father had not the gift of poetic expression, being very much a man of deeds rather than words.

"And you think I am going to leave the finest of arts to listen while you tell me what land is worth a front foot on Lesseur Street, and how many hundred thousand people we have by the last census, and how many million feet of lumber passed through the mills last year? If that is what all my music sets you to thinking of, I will hire a hurdy-gurdy to play beneath your windows, love, next time!"

He struggled laughingly away from the repeated shakes with which she emphasized her feelings.

"I'm a humdrum old dad, ain't I, Vera? But perhaps I can retort, Miss, that there is dramatic point in the thought that one man's memory can span the leap from Indian warfare to the life of a great city. I've been through it all. It's grained into me, and it isn't all business enterprise, I can tell you. There is a heap of romance and tragedy and living goes with it. And I dare say you ain't any sorrier than I am that I am a rich man, instead of the rough adventurer who made your first cradle out of a hollow log." He looked whimsically down the long room, and they both fell into silence as a servant transformed the dimness of a moment before into brilliancy.

"We didn't have palms and Persian rugs in those days, I can tell you." His vision came back to the girl who stood with downcast eyes before him. "And your mother thought I was too good to live because I occasionally helped her to wash the dishes, and wouldn't let her chop her own wood. People don't seem to think I'm too good to live nowadays. It's an unappreciative world. You don't altogether like to remember it, do you, little girl?" he said gently. "But to me you are the most astonishing part of the whole business. Where on earth did you get your music and your air, and all the rest of it? Why, you're a fairy tale, Vera!" She grew even paler as he stared at her. It is no easy

thing to a girl who has been delicately nurtured for as long a time as her memory goes, who has traveled and grown familiar with all that makes life and the world, to carry in her breast such a sense of incongruity as Vera bore—to know that one-quarter of her was of the savage forest, that the strain of Indian blood was as visible to her own consciousness as it was in her face, whose beauty it marked but did not mar. The touch that differentiates one from his fellows counts so much! Sometimes she felt herself a thing apart. Yet she was ashamed of that very shame of hers at her birth.

A New England conscience grafted on a western tree is a troublesome alien growth. Vera loved out-of-doors, she loved the physical exhilaration of winter sports, she loved laughter; but a peaked-hatted, long-visaged conscience with a confident assurance that convinced both her and himself of the truth of his Puritan doctrine, told her that whatever was agreeable was wrong. Being a self-willed young person, she did what she liked, but she never failed to see that sour-faced creature watching her from his corner.

But of late a new revelation had come—a revelation that she hoped would reconcile her with this reproachful conscience. She had found a new friend, a woman older and wiser than herself, who assured her that

the conflict between her higher and lower natures was but the prelude to something better. Mrs. Lyell was ecstatic. She lived on a plane where sordid every-day considerations played only a minor part. She had attached her trolley to some celestial wire that whirled her along the heavenly way; and Vera began to hope that she might clamber aboard the same roseate car and leave her conscience to trudge along on foot far behind her. But as yet that triumphant stage had not been reached. The worldly in her was still unsubdued. She enjoyed the box of chocolates that stood on the piano while she played Chopin. The body was yet tangible. And so the struggle between nature and education went on below the surface, while outwardly she bore herself with a dignity straightforward yet restrained, unconscious of the charm that had come to her from the mingling of the Puritan and the red man.

Now this was not the philosophy which old Nicholas Windsor had built up out of his experience of men and things; but he loved her, and love lent him sympathy with her mood, though, after his kind, his sympathy found prosaic expression. With intent to change her thoughts, he said:

“By the way, Vera, a sort of cousin of mine from down in Maine turned up at the office to-day, and I told him to come up to dinner. Thought I'd like to

have a chance to get a little better acquainted with him. He seemed a very decent kind of chap, rather better than the average. Will you order an extra plate?"

Vera's lips curled scornfully. They could sometimes look as aquiline as her nose.

"I should think the whole of Maine was populated with impoverished cousins of yours by the way they 'turn up at the office'. They seem to consider you a career. And it's rather too bad to have a stranger to-night. Mrs. Lyell and Mr. Kemyss are coming to dinner too."

"Kemyss coming to dinner again?" the old man asked sharply. "I didn't suppose he'd had time to get hungry since he was here before. Can't he get anything to eat at his boarding-house? I didn't agree to give him his board in addition to his salary." He looked at her with mingled tenderness and anxiety and took an agitated turn down the long room. "What does this Kemyss business mean, Vera?" he asked wistfully.

She pushed him back to his chair and seated herself in his lap.

"I'm glad you asked me that," she said. "It makes it easier for me to break the silence. Mr. Kemyss has asked me to be his wife. Was I a naughty girl not

to tell you, dad? I have not said a word even to Eugenia, and I've been trying to get up courage to consult you, but you're such a savage old bear of a father!"

"And you've accepted him, Vera,—and not told me?" Her father's arm tightened around her, and he tried to keep the hurt tone out of his voice. It wasn't like Vera.

"No, dad, I haven't decided yet," she said as he looked his grateful relief. "What am I to say? What do you want me to say?"

"The only object I'm hunting for on this earth is for you to have any mortal thing you want, and you know it. I'd buy you anything you could mention, but when it comes to husbands, I'm afraid, little girl, you'll have to do your own picking. You don't want the kind I can buy for you."

"Well, that does not answer my question. Way up here, in this big empty space you call your mind, what is your opinion of Mr. Kemyss?" She tapped his forehead sharply, feeling quite gay and frivolous, now that the ice was broken, and she and her father could talk freely.

"I can produce one useful piece of wisdom out of that maligned quarter. You don't care a button for him, or you wouldn't be here asking my advice. You'd

be pawing the air and defying me to stop you from having him."

"I don't know," said the girl wearily. "He always seems to understand without the explanations you have to give most men, and he feels just as I do about things in general. He's very good to look at, too, don't you think so, dad? He seems just the kind of man who ought to suit me."

"He isn't half good enough for you. If you have to get married, which, mind you, I don't for a moment admit, I wish I could get a man made to order for you, straight from the higher regions. And I don't want none of your angels either. I want a man. But they're not so plentiful as you might think by the number of things in trousers that you see on the streets. You'll have to stay with your old dad, Vera—he's the only one who really suits you. He's the one who really understands you. He needs you so badly that he can't get along without you. Nobody else needs you as badly as I do, little girl."

"Jean thinks Mr. Kemyss perfection," Vera answered; "I know she does. She says he is one of the few men she knows who has soul enough to be immortal with. She does not want me to marry a piece of earth."

"Well, I'm not on the lookout for a mud-pie son-

in-law myself; but I never noticed that Kemyss' soul stuck out any farther than the next man's, when he's at the office. I don't know how it may be in those sacred conclaves where you three discuss the stars."

"Well, sir, the subject is laid on the table for the present. I told him that I would take plenty of time to think it over, and he's not even to speak of it for—oh, ever so long."

"I believe I'll send Kemyss to the north pole on permanent business. But I suppose if you've put him in cold storage, I can't ask anything more. Which reminds me, I had a hundred prairie chickens put in today. We'll pick their bones later on. Vera, I believe the kind of husband who would suit you best, if you really want my advice, would be a good practical hard-headed drummer."

He had been dreading for a long time the moment when his little girl should spread her wings. It was a relief that it had not yet come.

"And you, you frivolous old man, you'd better be dressing for dinner or you'll be disgraced when the others come."

"Don't you worry about me! I'll eat dinner in my shirt-sleeves if I feel like it. I used to do it, in those good old times we were talking about, when you weren't here to make me walk a chalk line and pretend

I'm civilized. I'll defy you, and do it again to-night if I want to. A man can't look like very small change when he's got as many millions as I have salted down. I've lived long enough in this cold hard world to learn that, young lady." And he departed with dignity to his room.

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CHAPTER II

A VISION OF TO-DAY

It was on this very October day, beginning in sunshine and ending in cloud, that Francis Lenox arrived in St. Etienne.

Age may sneer at the crudities of youth and comfortably congratulate herself on her higher outlook; but youth laughs in his frivolous sleeve at her superiority, knowing well that the sour grapes he dangles before her spectacled eyes are the most luscious of fruits. To be young is in itself answer to all the specious arguments that reason may set up on the other side, for youth creates while age but dissipates; best of all, youth believes in himself, while age pitifully admits her failure. So St. Etienne knew itself young, and rejoiced therein, like the strong man who is to run a race.

Perhaps Hercules led a more amusing life when, as an infant, he was strangling serpents than when, in experienced maturity, he cleaned Augean stables in

bondage to Eurystheus. The glory of the imperfect, let it once get possession of the imagination, has a charm of its own. It lures the traveler on and on. It intoxicates with the joy of doing—the greatest joy there is. It paints the possible in rainbow hues unmatched by the actual.

When Francis Lenox came to St. Etienne the town was young, yet old enough to be sure that it was a precocious infant, and Lenox, himself young, fell into ready sympathy with his surroundings. He was born and bred in a little college town in Maine, in an atmosphere both conventional and bookish, and yet only superficially scholarly. At least it knew but the scholarship of books, being much shut off from the deeper wisdom which lies behind the printed page in the surging life of men. For it the doings of men were chiefly reduced to gossip. It reversed the rightful process, and instead of measuring books by the amount of life in them, it measured life by the amount of book-lore it held. Lenox had always lived a life that, to him, meant partial suffocation. Here the very sun-imbued air, glowing and fresh, stimulated every sense, as after a pent-up night in a sleeping-car, the train disgorged him into the radiance of an early Minnesota morning, where the untamed virility of the fresh northwest, like ether, pervaded the atmosphere.

There was an unwonted sense of isolation from his kind to the home-bred boy, even in the preliminary manœuvres of finding a hotel and eating breakfast in the big room filled with indifferent strangers. When one is without belongings, a new city takes on an almost foreign aspect. One regards it from the outside. In truth a western town is enough of a curious phenomenon to merit some peculiar emotions, even if it has less individuality than St. Etienne, which bears its brief history and its ruling passion as clearly stamped upon its face as any hoary ruin of the past.

Lenox began a solitary ramble through the crowded and noisy streets, feeling like a stranger in a strange land. It was evident that the town had grown too fast for its clothes. The city and the village vied with each other and the city was but a few laps ahead. The young man stared curiously at the little wooden shanties that nestled half-confidingly, half-shamefacedly against their neighbor sky-scraping office buildings of granite and marble, as though St. Etienne should say: "This is what I was. Look at me now! Imagine what I shall be!" Like a true westerner, St. Etienne wrote the "Imagine what I shall be" in capitals.

Lenox trod lightly on the latest device in paving for a block or two and picked his way over lumpy mud a little farther on. His eyes followed a dashing turn-out

with immaculate coachman as it flew down the wide straggling street. Then he gazed at a strange ante-diluvian farm-wagon standing before a spectacular shop window. Still farther afield he went from the roar of the electric car and the rush of feet toward those miles of comfortable homes for every-day people which are characteristic of America, the land of the every-day man. He climbed the hilltops that surrounded the city, where houses that in Europe would be called palaces rose in more pretentious state, their polished lawns interspersed with unkempt, empty lots where Russian thistle, burdock and ragweed rioted undisturbed. It was a strange bundle of incongruities, this St. Etienne, a city of one generation, where the things that no one had yet had time to attend to hung about on every side waiting until civilization got time to pick up its loose bits of chaos.

His mind went back to the great elms of the main street of Winterhaven, and the trim line, lawn after lawn, stately house after stately house, that flanked it. But new as all this was, here too was something home-like. This overgrown youngster was the child of that respectable dame, less precise than his mother, but more virile; less courteous, but more spontaneously generous. As Lenox sat on a hilltop, his back comfortably set against a scrub oak decorated by a huge

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"For Sale" sign that proclaimed a much-vaunted corner lot, he forgot these commoner features to stare at the great structures which showed why St. Etienne had come to be. Everywhere they rose, engirdling the city in all directions, ungainly monsters, gray, elephant-like, the elevators that carried in their huge maws untold stores of yellow grain for the bread of the world. From season to season this son of the prairies renewed his strength, like a giant Antæus, by contact with mother earth and hoarded his heritage here, making of himself, while still in his youth, a feeder of nations. No wonder he believed in himself! No wonder he was broad and big-hearted and hopeful!

Lenox stood up on his hill-crest and counted the big buildings, as many as he could see. There stole over him a little of the true American awe for the millions of bushels of wheat here stored before his eyes and the millions of dollars of which they were the visible token. Far northward, where the twisting river gleamed like a serpent's scales, lay pale yellowish tracts of piled lumber, edged by big mills.

Now he knew why he had come to St. Etienne. He was no longer a stranger in a strange land. This was his field to work. Hitherto he had peeped at this phase only through other men's eyes; but life was not an

ordered existence, to be devoted solely to discussing the classics, and keeping up with the magazines. It was a maelstrom, with Scylla shrieking and reaching out her slimy fingers and Charybdis whirling below, —and yet, get into it one must if the man is to take the place of the college boy. His time was come, and he dreaded the plunge.

He fumbled a little nervously at a letter in his pocket. His mother had written and rewritten it, that it should prove at once appealing and unsubservient to the great cousin to whom it was addressed. It had seemed an easy thing, fifteen hundred miles away in a placid little town, to take St. Etienne and Nicholas Windsor by storm. Now as he looked down on the tumultuous life below him, the undertaking did not look so simple. He sat down again to think about it. As he pieced together the bits of information that lay scattered in his brain he felt as if he were witnessing the great drama of Nicholas Windsor's career, with St. Etienne, lying glowing in the sunlight below, as the scenic background.

Of course, everybody knows, at least in outline, the facts of Windsor's life. In *Master-Builders of the Great Republic*, a book that has had an extensive sale, through agents in the country districts, and which may be found in all public libraries under the caption

"Collected Biographies," it is said that "his history is one of the most striking examples of the success with which America rewards energy, brains and persistence." He is an embodiment of all that toward which young Jonathan should aspire—power and wealth. What need to analyze or cavil? As so prominent a figure in the up-building of the Northwest, his life has been again and again subjected to what the newspapers call "the lime-light of publicity"; and many events that never took place are quite as familiar to the eager public as the more prosaic details. It seems important that we should be kept informed that he retains his boyhood's affection for baked apples, and that magazines should extract from him brief articles on *How I earned my first dollar*.

Many of his fellow citizens, chiefly, be it said, those whose careers are least marked by success, regard him as a monster, striding, dragon-like, over groaning widows and orphans, over wrecked railroads and ruined investors toward his goal—domain. Others there be of more lenient judgment, or perhaps of less sensitive conscience, who maintain that when a man has laid the foundations of a great civilization where once stood a wilderness, when he has scattered mills and farms along streams and prairies, when his far prevision has gazed on possibilities where his neighbors

saw nothing but their bald surroundings, such a man has come fairly by his millions and gained his power by the tacit consent of his fellows.

But Francis Lenox knew of Windsor mainly through the agitated gossip of his native town, where the great man had been discussed and rediscussed with painstaking minuteness. He knew that Winterhaven had once produced a black sheep, though that distance which empurples mountains had now turned the fleece to a dazzling white. In the days of his youth no one had doubted that Nicholas Windsor's fleece was black. He was as restless, tumultuous a boy as ever perplexed a mother. He shook the side curls of the town by his lawless escapades. When he went, as all Winterhaven boys do, to Winterhaven College, he was not content to accept the traditions that were good enough for his forebears, though one would have thought he knew too little of his books to question the learned gentlemen who labored conscientiously to take him by the scruff of the neck and bump him into the paths of religion and scholarship. He was watched with breathless apprehension, and dreaded more on account of his unexpectedness than from any evil that he actually did. A town of eminent respectability did not understand him,—and all mankind are agreed in condemning what they do not understand.

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Young Nicholas had steam in him; and human steam, like any other, must find its legitimate outlet and be harnessed into turning wheels, or it will tear and rend its way to freedom without deference to broken boilers and outraged proprieties. Winterhaven gave young Nick Windsor no safety-valve, and the town breathed more freely when the explosion was over, and the offending element had been spewed into outer darkness. At heart it congratulated his dead father and mother that they had not lived to see the son's career. He was gone into some sink of iniquity, beyond the ken of Winterhaven's ordered existence,—gone, to be mentioned only as a curious and tragic phenomenon of the comet-like order. People said he had gone West. It was a convenient expression, and sufficiently vague. Ten years went by. Nicholas Windsor was no longer very young, but he remained unforgotten in a town that hoarded its traditions.

To induce a satisfied curve on many a firm-set mouth came the agreeable piece of gossip that he had married—or had he married?—a half-breed, and was living the life of a lawless frontiersman. This was a fate as satisfactory as any to be found in a Sunday-school book. And then years passed, and more years, and it began to be told that Nicholas Windsor's steam was setting wheels to buzzing, faster and faster—in-

conceivably fast. He was cutting down forests and harnessing streams and building towns. He was creating the very order which he had once defied.

At last, one day a comfortable, middle-aged, well-dressed man came to Winterhaven, and laughed good-humoredly, as if it were the best of jokes to recall his youthful iniquities. People held their breath that scandal should be treated so flippantly, but gaped at him because he had become a man of power. Winterhaven was accustomed to maximum incomes of two thousand dollars a year, and knew that one could live thereon with dignity and nobility.

And now the town was presented with the Windsor Library, and Windsor Hall was built at the college. The ex-scapegrace seemed to have a real affection for the college to which he had been a disgrace. He believed it was a good thing.

A drinking fountain of marvelous design was set up where the roads crossed in front of the post-office. The younger scions were fired with wonderful tales of Nicholas Windsor's doings, from the time when he went into the vague far-away with thirty-eight cents in his pocket up to now, when he counted his money by millions and set the seal of his genius on a hundred enterprises. After he had gone, the bi-weekly Winterhaven *Chronicle* included in every issue some para-

graph about "our distinguished son, Mr. Nicholas Windsor," or some item about Miss Vera Windsor's foreign trips. When an unusually promising boy appeared in Winterhaven he was apt to find his way to St. Etienne, to be set to turning one of the minor wheels in Windsor's great machine.

Frank Lenox knew the whole story, but he realized it as he never had before, now that he leaned against his tree-trunk and looked at the picturesque huddling of steeples and houses below, with the stately tower of the City Hall accenting it all, and even the unwieldy elevators blending harmoniously with tree and house-tops under that soft pinkish haze into which nature somehow transforms the unlovely element of city smoke.

It was here that the old man had fought for that multi-colored thing called Success. St. Etienne was a great thing for a man to watch springing from nothing and growing like a young giant before his very eyes. Windsor had watched it all, and helped to make it. He had laid his hand on the life of the pioneer, and on the life where pioneering begins to look romantic in the haze of the past.

Lenox drew a deep breath and thought nervously of the letter of introduction. There swept over him a horrible realization that he was a poor relation. We

all sympathize with the trials of the rich who have the daily wear and tear of hangers-on to endure, but perhaps the other side is even harder to bear. To be baffled, humiliated, helpless, dependent on the caprice of one whose caprice is less likely to be kindly as his sense of absolute power grows greater—this is bitterness indeed.

Lenox clenched his teeth and his hands and felt the whole of it for an instant; then half-startled at himself, he said aloud:

"That I will not endure. I'll go to see him once, but if he so much as flecks a scornful eyelid at me I'll never go back again. I am going to stand on my own feet. I guess a boy from Maine has grit enough to hold on to his self-respect. After all, I've got the same blood in my veins that Windsor has in his, and he didn't wait for some one else to put him on the express train."

At this my Lady Fortune, who is always listening around corners, and seems to have a real affection for those who defy her, laughed in her sleeve and prepared to give her wheel a twirl, but Lenox heard only the rustle of the oak leaves above him.

Then he realized that he was hungry, and that it was long past lunch time. He turned again toward the center of things. Before him, down the wide sidewalk

that edged an immaculate lawn, raced a Russian thistle, wind-blown and self-confident as though it had a whole prairie to itself. Down together they went, past the gracious homes, back to the roar of business. Half-fascinated, he watched the clumsy thing, wondering what fate St. Etienne would mete it. But the thistle mysteriously disappeared long before it joined the whirl. And as for Frank Lenox, he lingered as he went, dreading to present himself in the guise of one who begs a favor from a man he does not know and who may be indifferent or even insolent. The bigness of Nicholas Windsor and the littleness of Frank Lenox oppressed him in spite of his recent self-confidence.

Where Sauveur and Bottineau Streets come together, unoccupied amid the rush of business, Lenox halted idly for a moment. An electric car on the opposite side of the street came to a stop and toward it, on his own side a second car rushed at full speed. He watched with absent vision a girl step from the farther car and come around its back toward him. Suddenly his senses came back. She did not see nor hear the on-rushing destruction whose jangle was drowned by the louder noise around it. In another moment it would be too late! Even now she stepped into the nearer track. She raised her eyes quietly, and on the instant he lifted his hand and made an imperative motion as though,

if he were near her, he would push her from him. In a flash she understood, drew back, and the flying car dashed by, blotting her out of sight.

The one swift act transformed his state of mind. He was no longer the idle, dilatory creature of the moment before, but full of energy and desire. "Enter in with hope. Here all things are possible," seemed written above the portals of St. Etienne.

As for the girl, when the car had whirled on its way, and she could again see the opposite sidewalk, she stood in the middle of the street and gazed in dismayed astonishment at his retreating back.

"Well!" she said to herself, "to think he should not wait to let me get a square look at him! Such is the rescuing knight of to-day. The dragon has gone, and St. George does not even wait to be thanked. Another hopeful seed of romance has fallen on barren ground!"

Meanwhile Lenox, not meditating at all on fair damsels rescued from all-devouring trolley cars, was facing the problem of bread and butter, in the nearest restaurant.

Windsor's particular office, with scattered offices which represented his various enterprises all about it, was in a huge caravansary. Looking up from the bottom of its central opening through its innumerable stories, Lenox felt like an ant, but the elevator that

jerked him upward left no time to meditate on bigness or littleness, past, present, or future.

In the outer office he delivered his letter to a clerk and set himself to endure a period of nervous suspense with what grace he could. He wandered about, looking at the pictures on the wall and at the maps of the Northwest, seamed with gory lines of railroad and covered with an eruption of dots and crosses marking the spots which, for one reason or another, came within Windsor's spider-web of activity. People passed and looked at him with fishy, unsympathetic eyes, and he was awaiting trial for his life. The time seemed interminable. The door of the inner room opened and four men came out. They were large men, with that look of unctuous self-satisfaction which betrays some varieties of success. As he watched their departure, Lenox's heart sank still lower, sank to the zero point as the period of waiting prolonged itself with no relief except the distant click of a typewriter and the muffled ring of telephone bells. At last a clerk approached him.

"Mr. Lenox?"

"Yes."

"Will you step into Mr. Windsor's office?"

The boy's heart came up in his mouth. This interview comprehended, or at least he thought it did, his

whole future. His mind began to fumble mazedly with the question of what he should do if this failed him. Then he found himself in the presence. A handsome, well-dressed young man, broad-chested, wide-shouldered, small-legged, with a face to which Lenox took an instant dislike, leaned against a desk talking toward a big chair wherein was a vision of expansive back. The young man honored him with a long stare, while a voice on the other side of the back spoke.

Lenox waited mutely.

"The fellow's made about as much of a botch of it as he can, and be allowed to live on this green earth. Fire him, Kemyss. I'll give you permission to use all the explosive language you can, in my name. Pile it on. It's time somebody started a factory for the manufacture of backbones. Great Scott, that man is nothing but rolled oats! Why doesn't the Lord make more men and fewer dummies?"

As though he were used to such outbreaks, and unmoved by them, the younger man turned with the familiar air of a privileged person and gathered some papers from the desk.

"I thought you advertised to run the universe, Mr. Windsor; but perhaps," he added, going toward a side door, "your success would not have been so great if the proportion of dummies had been smaller."

"Very likely, very likely. It seems an outrage, though, that an idiot should have the power to foil a wise man's plans. Well, it's a great game playing with them, anyway." And Kemyss was gone.

Lenox stood and watched the large hand which belied its phlegmatic character by tapping nervously for an awkward moment; then the chair wheeled about; he was face to face with the tin god, and behold! the idol was flesh and blood—a big cheerful-countenanced man, of the human type that every one calls by the first name.

"Well, my lad, so you're Nellie Windsor's son?" said Windsor, holding out his hand without rising. "Haven't heard of her for years. It's hard to think of her in anything except a gingham apron and pigtails tied with pink ribbons. How is she?"

"She may have grown a bit older since you and she painted stars and stripes on all Uncle Joseph's market eggs," answered the boy. "But I assure you I don't think she could be in any way improved on."

Windsor put back his wide head and laughed. "Great Scott!" he said, "that's another important event I had forgotten! Nellie was great stuff in those days—game for any deviltry I could invent."

As this did not seem to Lenox to describe his gentle little mother with accuracy, he kept silent.

"I'm glad to hear from her," went on the great man, a shade more cordially. "And prospering,—I hope she's prospering?"

"She is leading the life of a quiet Winterhaven widow. I don't know whether you would call it prosperity or not."

"And her chief interest in life, I suppose, is the young sprig she has sent out here." Windsor was already glancing at his desk, and picking up an unopened envelope. "Well, what can I do for you, Mr. Lenox? I always help a boy from Maine if it's in my power. They're generally worth helping. Not always, though. By gum, not always!"

"It is the other way, Mr. Windsor. I came hoping I might find something I could do for you."

"Been through Winterhaven College?" Windsor was scrutinizing the youthful face with the eye of experience.

"Yes."

"That's all right. Forget it as soon as possible. So you want employment?"

"No," said Frank with a flush. "I want work."

"So?" For the first time Lenox received a glance that was not wholly indifferent. "You think there's a difference, do you?"

He laid his papers deliberately back on the desk.

"Sit down a minute, and let me talk to you, Frank Lenox. If you want work, you did right to come West. There's always plenty of room at the top for those who aren't afraid to begin at the bottom. And that's where you'll have to begin."

"So long as you'll let me work like a man and not like a dummy, Mr. Windsor, I'll be contented."

"So you heard me talking to Kemyss, did you? Well, I can tell you there are gold mines that aren't salted, and there are fellows who aren't looking for a chance to earn fat salaries by putting their feet up on the office desk. But they aren't either of them abundant. All I can do for you is to give you a chance to show whether you're one of them or not."

"That's all I ask, sir."

Windsor gave him another of those measure-taking, under-eyebrow stares, but all he said was :

"So Nellie is a quiet little widow, is she? And I remember the time when she could beat all the boys shinning up a tree."

The nervous hand began its rat-tat again, as he looked out of the window, back forty years, for an instant. He turned alertly.

"Find out where my house is, and come up and have dinner with us to-night, and let me talk to you about the old place. I haven't any time for you now. You

mustn't expect too much. You're young and you're green, and your life up to now hasn't been on the same lines as life out here."

"I don't expect anybody but myself to make a career for myself," said the lad, a little stiffly.

"There are plenty of opportunities waiting around to be taken, but most people mistake them for hindrances. Every lump in your path ought to be something to climb on. Oh, I know that ain't the whole of it, but just mix in a little good old Puritan foreordination with this doctrine, and you'll have a pretty good philosophy of life, my boy. See you this evening."

Windsor tore open an envelope with a nod that indicated that he was busy. At this period of the world's history it is no distinction to be busy, but this man had more pressure of urgency to the superficial minute than most.

So Francis Lenox came to be an obnoxious fifth at Vera Windsor's table.

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CHAPTER III

FOOD

With a little ruffling of plumes, and the slight coolness of manner that comes from a sense of personal injury, Vera rose to welcome the unwelcome young man. He had added to his guilt by coming a few moments early, having been invited without a specified hour, and her father was still up stairs.

"Mr. Lenox," she said languidly. Then she flushed warmly, and Frank felt the change that came over the eyes that met his.

"I—I have reason to know you already, and to be grateful to you," she said.

"That is very fortunate for me. But will you tell me when our meeting took place? I do not see how it was possible for me to have met you and—and have forgotten it."

He was conscious of a new sensation, as his eyes met hers fully and cordially. Her clear-cut face, the skin dark yet delicate, and touched now to more than

its usual beauty by a faint flush, most of all the eyes, deep and glowing, that looked fearlessly at him with unconscious integrity—he knew he should never forget them in the future. How could he have forgotten them in the past?

“Is it so common an experience for you to go about saving strange young women from ignominious death that this morning’s episode has already slipped your memory? I thought it must be, from the nonchalant way in which you made off. But if it is nothing to you, it means a great deal to me, I assure you. Think of the humiliation of being demolished by a trolley-car! If I must lose my life, I hope it will be in some more heroic fashion.” She smiled at him, and the smile brought out a sudden dimple, so unexpected in her reserved face that Lenox lost himself in bewilderment.

“Was it you?” was all he could weakly say.

“Stupid thing!” she said internally, but with still the same smile. “Stupid and commonplace. Another characteristic of the knight-errant of to-day. Not a word to say for himself. St. George would have written an epic, all besprinkled with lyrics, about it.”

Her father came in, and Vera sank into a chair and listened to their talk about things that bored her,—Winterhaven, its town-meetings, its gossip, and the

boyhood pranks that her father delighted to rehearse and that she knew by heart. Cyril Kemyss arrived and greeted her in a fashion that in some subtle way gave her to understand that he read her innermost thoughts and sympathized with them; that he, too, was annoyed by the presence of the alien, but of course too courteous to show it—except to an adept. He and she sat apart and talked in low tones that made Lenox, wholly occupied with Windsor, feel himself shut off in remote cold regions, though his eyes kept traveling toward the soft fan that sometimes hid and sometimes revealed the glowing face.

Last came Mrs. Lyell, calm and shedding benignity, regardless of the fact that she was a quarter of an hour late.

“So sorry to keep you waiting, dear,” she said in a voice that indicated that she never let little matters disturb her.

A small thing often changes the life-course. There was nothing stirring or eventful in the informal dinner that followed, and yet, in retrospect, it seemed to others than Frank Lenox that new relations sprang into being and old ones were weakened during the casual conversation. In the first place, the feeling that this particular guest was unwelcome to the rest of the party made Windsor unusually cordial to the lad

whom he half liked before; and it meant much to be taken into the old man's favor.

"Lenox, we'll give you a dish to-night that I'll wager a saw-mill you never tasted before, and a mighty good dish it is,—the only tangible memory that is left me of the days when soused bear-paws and beaver tails and roast muskrat were our favorite table delicacies. I'm afraid you'll never know the delights of dried buffalo tongue, but at least you can taste *pesich-ah-towahapa*. Ha, ha, Vera! You didn't know I was a linguist, did you? Olaf, pass Mr. Lenox some of my wild rice. There, taste that, and if you don't like it, take the midnight train back East. Minnesota is no place for you."

Lenox laughed.

"I am convinced that wild rice is the true and original ambrosia."

"Don't you think—" began Mrs. Lyell. She had a tentative way of putting forth her opinions, as if appealing to the wisdom of the "questionee"—a method highly soothing to his self-esteem. "Don't you think that the conception of ambrosia is a most horrible one? It is loathsome to me to think of the immortals eating and drinking. I always try to forget such a blot on the Greek ideals."

"Oh, come now; I'm sure you are vastly superior,

both in mind and in morals, to any Greek god I ever heard of, and you enjoy a square meal, don't you?" said Mr. Windsor good-naturedly.

"I can't say I enjoy it," she answered in her pleasant drawl. "I always like to emphasize that side as little as possible. I find it a very small stretch of the imagination to conceive of a life independent of such necessities."

She looked at Lenox with a distant gaze that made him feel that he was a physical obstruction to her range of vision, but that she would soon reduce him and all other corporeal bodies to films of air. He was a commonplace young man, and he rather resented the position.

"Well, I can't say I have any great scunner against my body," the host went on amiably, "except that mine grows a little unwieldy as I grow old; but even if I did, I should feel obliged to put up with the poor thing as long as it's on deck. And I intend to make the wretch as comfortable as possible, and even try to get a little amusement out of it."

"But don't you feel"—Mrs. Lyell spoke with the air of one giving psychology lessons in words of one syllable—"that the world in which we live is made by the thoughts by which we surround our true inner selves? And since we create our own world by the kind of

thoughts we think, doesn't it behoove us to think only of a beautiful and noble world?"

"And what about the millions of other people whose bodies are so placed that they can't create beauty or nobility?" asked Lenox suddenly.

She had not considered the commonplace young man hitherto, her remarks being chiefly for the benefit of her new disciple, Vera Windsor, and for the private secretary who trod wherever Vera trod, so she answered a little coldly.

"Every soul must work out its own salvation. I can't afford to defile my inner self by knowing anything about such a state of mind." She drew herself up with a slight degree of stiffness.

Lenox glanced around the table. Mr. Windsor wore an expression such as one might wear who watched an interesting performance on a trapeze. Kemyss' cue was to be one of the few young men who could enter into the ideals of the higher life which Mrs. Lyell represented, and Vera yearned after; but he was evidently undesirous of expressing this ardent sympathy too clearly in the presence of his business chief. Vera's eyes bore a troubled look, as though she would like to find some pleasant way to lay hold of the higher life at a single jump, and rather hoped this was it. As he looked his mood changed. Hitherto he had felt very

shy and strange, but Mrs. Lyell's serenity irritated the lesser emotions out of him.

"That seems to me the philosophy of incarnate selfishness," he said sharply.

"Why?" asked Mrs. Lyell, not with irritation, scarcely with interrogation, but as one who would lead to an opening for demolishing the enemy's logic.

This was not the kind of subject on which he was in the habit of thinking, yet his ideas came clearly and ready-made; and Windsor's amused face said, "Go in and win!"

"The medieval ascetic hid himself from the world and ignored the work that needed him. This is the modern equivalent. You would make a hermit of your mind instead of your body; and, by constantly affirming it, perhaps you can convince the world, as he did, that to be self-centered is spiritual and religious."

"And the medieval ascetic preserved the core of Christianity in a time when the world was filled with turmoil. So he did a higher service to the world than if he had merely mingled with its misery."

"I don't agree with you. It seems to me that the sturdier brethren, who vowed to work and serve, preserved the core of Christianity."

"By lofty spiritual ideals we create a noble world," she said; "physical experience is but a shadow."

"Why should we try to create a world? Hasn't God already created a world for us and put us in it—a world where the physical laws are as true as the spiritual laws? Why shouldn't we live in this great, stirring, suffering, climbing and imperfect world, and not shut our eyes to its facts, for fear the even routine of our thoughts should be disturbed? Aren't the laws of physics and human nature as divine as the laws of spirit? Are one-half the experiences that God gives us merely lies?"

"But what if there is no such thing as death and suffering except as they are created by abnormal minds?" said Vera.

He was ashamed of being so strenuous, and his face and voice grew gentler as he turned to her.

"I think both our sense and our senses tell us that they are facts, no matter how we may shuffle and ignore them. It seems to me that however ugly truth may look at first sight, in the long run it is more beautiful than the most specious falsehood, and it looks to me like falsehood to deny all the universe outside myself. Nowadays our ideal is not repose, but eternal conquest over ourselves and the world. That old belief, that the perfect life was the life led by the soul disjoined from the body, has been outgrown among other childish things, and it is a return to medievalism

to revive it. We know—or we ought to know—now, that the developed soul and the developed physical nature go hand in hand. When we try to help the degraded and the poor, the first thing to do is to improve their conditions of life, instead of giving them tracts, because we realize that dirt on the body conduces to dirt on the soul. Even Heaven does not, any longer, mean rest. Do you know the nonsense rhyme,—

“There once was a spirit who died.
‘I have finished my job now,’ he cried.
But the Lord said, ‘Not so,
For to work you shall go,
On a far harder task than you’ve tried.’”

He stopped suddenly, rather ashamed of his unwonted outbreak. He had not been accustomed to think on these things, but habits of life create, unconsciously, their own philosophy.

There was a general laugh, but Mrs. Lyell answered, unruffled:

“Some time, perhaps, you will grasp the measure of our thought. Argument on such subjects is impossible. Truth is felt by the soul. It is not to be proved by logic. One can always find plenty of arguments in favor of what one already believes.”

“I’ve no doubt you are right there. Therefore one

should never consider his own little fragment of truth the final measure of things. Our ideas are created by our temperaments more than by our logic, and you can't be argued out of your temperament."

Vera pushed back her chair with an impatient sigh. She and Mrs. Lyell left the room, but as she went toward the door she gave Frank a swift look that said, "You are not stupid after all." Straightway he forgot nature and spirit, truth and untruth, in an instant of delight as he met her eyes. He could affect only a languid interest in Nicholas Windsor's big laugh.

"Well, Lenox, you've got a little of the good old straight Puritan blood left in you! It did me good to hear you uttering such heresies around here. We've been having a lot of spirituality and mighty little horse sense in this community lately, I can tell you. Say, Lenox, did you say that all out of your own head, or did you learn it out of a book? They didn't teach that kind of stuff at Winterhaven College in my days."

Kemyss looked at Lenox with ill-concealed dislike. He was inwardly cursing his own difficult situation, which kept him silent during the discussion, fearful of offending either his ethereally-minded love or his materially-minded chief.

"I don't know which looks the worse, a Philistine, or a damn fool, but I'm inclined to give the fool the

preference," was the message that his inner self communicated to his inner mind.

Meanwhile Mrs. Lyell, in the drawing-room, settled herself comfortably in the easiest of chairs very near the blazing fire.

"It is really too bad, Vera, that your father's business life should be constantly bringing you in contact with this type of mind. It makes it very hard for you to live the higher life. That young man has almost ruffled me!" And she laughed pleasantly.

Vera's eyes shot a little flame.

"My father has helped to build a great city and put comfort and prosperity into the lives of thousands of people. Can I be sure, Eugenia, that it is better to live alone on the hilltop than to do as he has done?"

Mrs. Lyell sat up. Really, the disciple was growing unruly.

"You are speaking out of a mood, Vera, and a mood that to-morrow you will recognize as unworthy. You should learn not to be influenced by minds inferior to your own. Remember that it is greater to be than to do."

"The question is whether one can be without doing," said the disciple, still rebellious.

After the gentlemen came in, the most contrary of moods took possession of her. While Windsor ab-

sorbed the unwilling Kemyss, she talked the smallest of small talk with Lenox. Mrs. Lyell listened with dismay. It is not easy to indulge in lightsome and meaningless sallies while one's mentor sits by in disapproving silence, but Vera ignored Mrs. Lyell, and to Lenox it was as if she were not.

"Mr. Lenox, I owe you at least two good turns for your service to me this morning," said the girl, "and the path of the tenderfoot is a thorny one. Would it not smooth your future in life if you had some elementary instruction in western ways and manners?"

Mrs. Lyell fell to wondering why such simple words should make a man's expression that of a fatuous fool. It is one of the fundamental differences between man and the lower animals—a distinction stupidly ignored by students of evolution—this tendency of the youthful male to slip out of possession of man's towering intellect at the slightest provocation from the youthful female.

"Rule one," continued Vera; "when you meet another person, you must not begin to talk about the weather. In deference to the summer cyclone, and the winter blizzard, we think it bad form to mention weather."

"What, then," he asked, with a direct look of smiling interest, "is the staple of conversation here?"

"Well, the older inhabitant always begins by asking the younger, 'Where did you come from?' You see, no one but myself was born in St. Etienne. Really, it never occurred to me before, that perhaps I am the lodestone about which this big city has been drawn together from the four quarters of the globe. I know there is a popular impression that its water-power was the creator of St. Etienne, but I prefer to think it was because I set the good example of coming first. However this may be, 'Where did you come from?' is a good opening to a conversation, because you can then glide easily into a discussion of your native place and the other man's, and so on gracefully to staple question number two, which is, 'How do you like the West?'"

"And then?" he asked.

"I think this ends the standard conversation," she replied. "If you have any brains you may branch off into rational intercourse. But with ordinary ingenuity these subjects may be prolonged enough to cover quite a crop failure of ideas. You'll hear it done every day."

"But if you please, Madam Instructress, you have failed to enlighten me on the most important point of all, in these 'First steps of a Tenderfoot'."

"And what may that most important point of all be?"

"What, most illuminating, am I to say when the questioner asks me how I like the West?" He looked at her with frank good nature.

Vera laughed gaily.

"Nay," she said. "Instruction can't do everything for you. There must be some scope for genius. But I warn you, the community will judge you inside and out, your insight into life, your knowledge of men and things, by your answer to that crucial question."

"You alarm me. But it occurs to me that I may always escape from this horrible dilemma by being the first to ask the other fellow what he thinks of the West."

"Come, I begin to have hopes of you. Are you to stay in St. Etienne?"

"I—I hope so." Lenox glanced at Windsor.

"Oh, I see. I think you'll stay. My father likes you," she said kindly.

"I hope so," he said heartily. "My first impressions have been so—so pleasant, that I am quite longing to know more of the inhabitants of my adopted native city."

"That is the true spirit. You won't have to be here long before the 'native' will seem to you more true than the 'adopted'. I believe I can give you your first opportunity to meet your fellow townspeople, at least

on any large scale. Thanksgiving Eve we always celebrate by a semi-public ball, to which we go *en masse*. You will see the noble army of pioneers, and the later comers, who are respectable, but of course not to be compared with the originals. You must gather together all your forces in preparation for meeting the genuine western girl, Mr. Lenox."

"Have I not been meeting her all the evening?" he asked.

But she ignored his question and went on.

"It is the opening function of the winter's gaieties, and to be left off its list would be to sink into insignificance; all of which, being interpreted, means that I am going to have a wonderful new gown for the occasion, and I am sorry for any poor mortal who does not have the opportunity of gazing on me. You may thank me for saving you from such a fate."

"I am most grateful," said he humbly, "or at least I shall be, if, from the position of a nobody who by this investiture is transformed into a somebody, I may beg for the privilege of a dance with the investing power."

"So you think boldness is the first requisite of the higher life—at least of society?" She glanced with kindly maliciousness at Mrs. Lyell. "Yes, I will complete my benefactions. You shall have the first dance

—just five weeks from to-night. I shall tell any one else who asks for it that I am saving it for Mr. Lenox, the most—”

“The most what?” he pleaded.

“The most recent arrival in St. Etienne, of course. And the man who saved me from the demon street-car.”

Mrs. Lyell got up a little abruptly, and Vera rose, too, with an apologetic gesture. Other girls talked small-talk, and why should not she?

Mr. Windsor and Mr. Kemyss joined the group around the fire, and conversation became general until the carriage for Mrs. Lyell was announced, and that lady departed with Mr. Kemyss as escort.

Lenox made a move to go at the same time, but Windsor laid a detaining hand on his arm.

“Wait a bit, I want to have a moment’s talk with you.”

Vera went to her refuge at the piano, and began to play softly, as if crooning to herself. Windsor handed Lenox a cigar.

“Have another,” he said; “the one after dinner didn’t seem to amount to anything, and Vera doesn’t mind.” He turned down the lights, as if settling himself for a comfortable homelike time, and the two men, masculine fashion, sat with crossed knees before the



"THE TWO MEN SAT, MASCULINE FASHION, BEFORE THE FIRE."—See page 50

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fire. There flashed half-humorously across Lenox's mind the contrast between this interview with the potentate and that of the morning.

"Who and what is Mrs. Lyell?" he asked, as Windsor did not seem inclined to take up the conversation.

"She's an incarnate woman's club, that's what she is. And if you want my opinion, a woman's club is the most unnecessary concatenation of atoms that has come to my notice."

"Is she a widow?"

"She's worse than that," Windsor answered glumly; "she's the superior wife of an inferior husband. She's the ripe fruit of the Lord's experience during the long period that he's been engaged in the manufacture of women; but her husband is descended from Adam after the fall."

Lenox laughed, and Windsor went on.

"She's Mrs. Appleby Edward Lyell, and her husband is Ned Lyell. Society gives her the distinction of all his Christian names, and leaves him such poor fragments as any poor fellow might have. There you have it in a nutshell."

"I think you are very unjust to Mrs. Lyell," said Vera in an even voice, from the piano. She did not stop her playing. "I think the deprecating tenderness with which Eugenia always speaks of Mr. Lyell shows

how she tries to conceal even from herself the knowledge, that she can not help having, that he is nothing but a clod."

"The solid earth on which we stand is made up of clods, my dear. He supplies her with the leisure and money that she needs for this chifon higher life of hers—not too much money, be it said to his everlasting discredit, though he works like a horse to get that little."

"And very fortunate he is to serve so good a purpose. She is the inspiration of a good many women's lives."

"Well, if I were picking out wives, I'd rather have one that petted me when I came home than one that knew every date from primordial protoplasm to Darwin. There's a pointer for you, Lenox. And there's another thing I'll tell you. It isn't safe for a woman—or a man either, for that matter—to cut loose from the conventionalities and traditions as she does."

Vera came over and stood beside her father's chair, slender and tall in the flickering fire-play, and her eyes seemed to Lenox to glow with light within, not sharp but soft, as she fixed them on her father.

"What do you mean?" she asked.

"I'll tell you what I mean," said the older man, clasping the hand that hung loosely at her side, and

patting it as he spoke. "You needn't be surprised if I generalize a little myself. I've lived a good many years on this old ball, Vera, and I've seen a good many different kinds of men, from trappers to princes. I shouldn't have made the enterprises I've turned my hands to a success if I hadn't used my brains to study people and principles a little, should I? I can piece things together quite a bit, little girl, when most folks think I'm thinking of nothing except how to make another dollar. Now, then, there are two ways in which you may get philosophy of life. Don't smile at your old dad, Vera. You haven't got a monopoly of the family brains. I say there are two working philosophies of life. One you get by sitting down all alone in a quiet room and thinking about the things that are true, and resolving to live by them. The other you get by banging up against people and finding out that things are *so* whether they're true or not. Mind you, I don't say one of these ways is right and the other is wrong. Very likely you've got to combine them both. Anyway, if you stick to the last you're apt to forget one set of principles, and if you stick to the first you're apt to forget another. That's what I want to speak of now, because that's where I think your friend, Mrs. Lyell, trips up, and I don't want you to be like her. There is no one human mind so absolutely reasonable

that it can evolve truth all by itself, and ignore the sum of other people's thoughts. This old world's habits have been built up out of the hard experience of an awful lot of folks. When a man tells me that he can prove that there isn't any God, I say, 'Great Scott! It's given heaps of trouble to thousands of generations to work out a moderately decent conception of a God who isn't an unjust savage and a disgrace to humanity. Do you think I'm going to throw away the result of all that struggle, just because I ain't smart enough to see any flaw in your little two-by-four argument?'"

"But if we always insisted on accepting things as they are, there'd never be any progress," said Lenox.

"That's all right, my boy. That's all right. But progress has got to be built up on things as they are. You don't get it by knocking everything down and starting over again. Now, I'll tell you what happens. When people begin to play fast and loose with accepted ideas of truth, you'll find—mind you, I'm speaking of my observation of real folks, and I could give you plenty of examples—you'll find those same people are very apt to play fast and loose with ordinary morals, too. Now you take marriage. It's been a tough pull for the human race to get it as decent as it is, and I'll admit it isn't ideal. But you let a man or woman begin to say, 'I, being on a loftier spiritual plane, won't

be trammelled by the conventionalities that are meant for lower nature, and marriage, as the world recognizes it, is a poor kind of thing.' Well, ten to one, after your superior soul has run away with his affinity and left his wife and children, he falls into a pit of vileness, and deals a staggering blow in the face to such decency as the commonplace world has already achieved. I tell you, conventionalities aren't just stupidities. They're crystallized common-sense."

"How it would rejoice Winterhaven to hear you hold forth as the apostle of tradition!" said Lenox, and Windsor put back his head and gave a great laugh.

"Winterhaven isn't such a fool of an old place as I used to think. I'm going back there to die some day. By heaven, I'd die, if I had to live there!" he said.

"And all this," said Vera slowly, "means that you're such an old foggy that you don't like Mrs. Lyell to come here to dinner without her husband, and so you expect to see her elopement chronicled in to-morrow's *News*."

"Nothing of the kind. That single act doesn't signify; but I don't like her attitude in general. I don't know, and I don't care very much what folly Mrs. Lyell is guilty of, so long as you don't follow her lead too far. Don't you let her teach you that it's only the superior minority that know wisdom, and that the in-

ferior majority are fools. I belong to the majority myself, little girl, and I don't want you to desert me. There, I've been gradually accumulating this discourse for some time, and I'm glad I've shot it off. You never heard me explode that way before, did you, Vera? Do you think you can get me an opportunity to address your club on the *Ethics of every-day life?*"

He drew down the hand he held and kissed it and then gave her a sharp push, as if to send her away.

"Never mind about Mrs. Lyell now. She's only a soap-bubble. I want to speak to Frank, here, for a moment."

Frank looked up startled at the sound of his first name. Truth was, there was a little feeling of kinship behind the shrewd eyes with which the man of experience had been studying the boy all the evening. Windsor measured him up, a wholesome, dependable young man with latent possibilities.

"Lenox," he said, "I'm doing a little grain-commission business on the side. It isn't generally known that I am in it, and I don't intend that it shall be known in the country. There's nothing the farmer is so much afraid of as the other man's getting a dollar. He thinks I've got too many, anyway; so I don't let him know that I'm after a few more. I've half a mind to send you out into the country to drum up trade a

bit. You'll learn as much about things out here that way as in anything I can give you, and in a few months I shall know what you are good for. Come to my office to-morrow afternoon at two o'clock. This isn't the place to talk business."

And Frank, understanding himself dismissed, said good-night cordially to Windsor and deferentially to Vera, feeling that the doors of his new life had suddenly been flung very wide open. He was glad to be alone for the dark walk—to ask what it was that had happened to him. He had been conscious all the evening of a new sensation that was half anguish and half bliss. And now in the dim night air Vera Windsor's face moved before as he tramped along. A policeman, standing under a gas light, stared at him suspiciously, wondering what that fatuous grin might portend. There is a great deal more falling in love at first sight than the world is willing to admit to itself—the self-deceiving old world that poses as a creature of reason, while all the time it is as warm-hearted and impulsive an old thing as ever moved. And in the less sophisticated regions, where conventions play a lesser part, the primal instincts have freer scope.

Frank had inherited a tendency to fall in love from some thousands of generations of ancestors, and it did not even occur to him to try to struggle against hered-

ity. He stopped suddenly, too much self-occupied to move.

"There is one thing Windsor does not know," he said to himself. "Whatever chance he gives me I am sure to make the most of, now that I've seen her. Yesterday I might have failed, but now—I won't!"

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CHAPTER IV

THE MALCONTENTS

When they got into the carriage together both Mrs. Lyell and Mr. Kemyss were in a very unpleasant state of mind, though it was hard to define what had produced it. The young man had a feeling that his patent right of intimacy in the Windsor household was coming dangerously near to infringement. His father, Jim Kemyss, had been the companion of Nicholas Windsor in the old pioneering days when friendship meant something. Their cabins stood near enough together to warrant their being termed "neighbors," and, when the patient little half-breed wife slept her last sleep, Mary Kemyss soothed the wailing baby, Vera, and brought comfort to the despairing household. If Jim Kemyss had stayed in St. Etienne, his fortunes—as he often said—might have been like those of Nicholas Windsor. "Why, the land I built my cabin on is now held at three hundred dollars a foot. If I'd kept it I'd 'a' been a millionaire!" How often one hears that in the West!

But the great wave of progress, which enriched the land like the overflowing Nile, swept the brood of Kemyss on its front billows ever farther and farther, from place to place, and stranded him at last. Now, when his old friend was a man of prestige and money, he was still a drifter. Yet there is no bond of brotherhood stronger than that which binds those who have endured together the stress of the frontier; and so, for the sake of old times, Cyril Kemyss had found a warm welcome in Windsor's hand-clasp, and had fallen into a place which many another young man envied. He, himself, considered his fortune rather a matter of desert than of luck.

To Windsor's private secretary it was no difficult task to develop an intimacy in Windsor's household, nor was Mr. Kemyss a young man to neglect his opportunities. For feminine methods of reasoning, Cyril Kemyss cared not a whit, having a strong liking for women because of other excellences than those of brain capacity; but he perceived that in their pleasant fancies they must be humored by him who would afterward master them; and he further saw that, if they were of the class for whom their men provide food and clothes and warmth, they must beguile their leisure with some such airy toys as these philosophies. There were even advantages in having them discuss Brown-

ing and Kant rather than gossip and clothes. He could talk easily on these subjects himself, and, in fact, enjoyed doing so in his hours of leisure, though, being a man, he was sooner bored by these trifles than were the women. It would be better if they were less strenuous, less in earnest about affairs of little practical moment. He liked women. He frequently told himself and other young men that they were his one weakness, though there was as much self-laudation as self-criticism in the confession. He enjoyed the study of the eternal feminine. The development of its intricacies had a fascination for him, and he was fastidious enough to be attracted only by women of refinement and grace—though that which he liked was not the nobility which creates grace, but the beauty that accompanies it.

It did not take him long to discover that Vera was his fate. She meant ease, distinction, a relief from the haggling with fortune which he loathed. And yet he must often confess to himself that she lacked the magnetism of her friend. Vera was slender, somewhat angular, strenuous, rigid in her judgments, too ethical. Mrs. Lyell, soft and curved in every outline, with flesh that made one long to touch it for its sleek delicacy, and lips that curved in response to the multitudinous emotions within her, charmed his senses. If he could but transform this alluring creature into Nicholas

Windsor's daughter, it would make the path of duty much easier. But he held himself in leash—a thing not easy when one has been accustomed to let the impulses be guides-in-chief.

Cyril Kemyss, like his father, was essentially a drifter, and the trouble about drifting is that it is apt to send one whirling over a cataract or bumping against a stone. An inherent love of approbation, or even an affection for the elegancies of life, is not sufficient to guide the craft. It needs a strong hand, and once in a while a vigorous push against the current.

The intimacy with Vera began as naturally as that of brother and sister. Had they not been babies together, even though they knew of that far-off time only by hearsay? In proportion as Vera was beloved by her father, she might prove valuable to another man; and since, to her strenuous nature and her lack of humor, Mrs. Lyell's ecstasies and ideals appealed so strongly, it occurred to him that a lover who possessed like ecstasies and ideals might gain even greater influence. Forthwith he set himself to cultivate, with eminent success, a lofty spiritual nature. But it was a difficult situation. Windsor himself had anything but an idealist's temperament, and, though he humored what he considered his daughter's foibles, because he loved her, he was not likely to endure with patience the same

foibles in others. So far Kemyss had played his rôle admirably. The foundations of his Spanish castle were substantially laid, but for some reason he felt them rudely jarred by this villager from 'down in Maine,'—this straightforward young man, who spoke his mind, and yet offended neither father nor daughter. Kemyss was not in the habit of fearing the youths who hovered, ineffective, about his divinity—youths who were characterized by names and a few features, but were otherwise indistinguishable. But Francis Lenox, he instinctively felt, was a dangerous type. There was that which showed, in the face and unwavering eyes, a boy clear-headed, clean-hearted, courteous in spirit and vital in energy. What is the use of inventing intricate paths if another man can walk straight to the same goal?

"Rather a disappointing evening, wasn't it?" Mrs. Lyell interrupted his unquiet thoughts. "It's trying to think that one unatmospheric person can so spoil things. Now I had made up my mind to one of the quiet, inspiring talks we sometimes have when Mr. Windsor has gone off to his own sanctum."

"You put it very amiably, Mrs. Lyell, as you generally put your criticisms of other people. I confess I found Mr. Lenox aggressive and intolerable."

"Yet Mr. Windsor seemed to take quite a fancy to

him, and Vera, too. It would be a great pity if she should fall under such an influence."

He looked at her quite startled.

"I trust you will do all you can to prevent such a catastrophe, Mrs. Lyell."

"There is only one way to rise above littleness. That is to fill one's mind with the great thoughts of the ages, the great facts of science and history." Mrs. Lyell waved her little plump hand gracefully. She loved to revel in greatnesses without too petty an attention to detail. She was very pretty, and her eyes grew luminous. Her mouth quivered with tender curves. Mr. Kemyss was susceptible to beauty and he caught the soft hand and kissed it.

"If you could make Vera such another as yourself!" he exclaimed. "You are my ideal of womanhood, Mrs. Lyell. I admire you more than I can say,—all the more because you are yourself under such adverse circumstances."

In the little pause during which they waited for the door to open, Mrs. Lyell could not down the discontented thoughts that rose in her. How different life might have been! Suppose marriage were a continual inspiration instead of a clog. She looked at Kemyss, not with love, but with a covetous desire for something in him that had not been given her. Her husband, who

opened the door for her, seemed even less attractive than usual, in a pair of down-at-the-heel slippers. She followed him into the little parlor, lit by a single gas-jet. There had been a fire burning in the grate, but now there were only gray and hopeless ashes.

Her radiant philosophy, which bubbled easily into what her critics called "hemorrhages of words," had a fashion of deserting her sometimes in her need; not that she had anything of the hypocrite in her, but that, in spite of her ardent beliefs, her own emotional nature, susceptible to every wind of circumstance, proved stronger than her intellect and will.

The bleakness of this room and man depressed her after the smooth comfort of Vera's home.

"I sent Tilly to bed, and told her I would wait up for you," said Lyell apologetically. He was chronically apologetic in the presence of his wife.

"Couldn't you have made things a little more cheerful for yourself, Ned? This doesn't seem much of a place for spending an evening."

"I should have had a fire to greet you with, certainly; but I came in only a moment ago. Took dinner down town," he said quietly.

Mrs. Lyell stared at him a moment in contrition.

"I beg your pardon, Ned. I believe I told Tilly I was going to be out, and she probably took it for granted

that you would not be here. It wasn't like me to forget to order dinner for you, was it? I am very much ashamed of myself. I mean to do my duty better than that. It's rough on you. I wish, for your sake, that I could be a different type of woman."

If she had completed her thought she would have added: "But it is hard to remember the things in which one is not in the least interested."

"And I wish you would not always insist on considering me a burden, Jean. About dinner, it did not make the least difference. I should not have cared to sit down alone. As it was I had a very pleasant time at the club with the boys."

But his voice did not sound jubilant.

To his wife his words raised a vision of eating and drinking and loud laughter over poor jokes. She turned away abruptly.

"Did you have a pleasant time?" he asked.

"Oh, like you, I had a sufficiency of food and drink, but I can't say that it made what I call a pleasant evening. Mr. Windsor was much in evidence, and I do not enjoy him. He had another of his own type there to-night—younger and more effervescently offensive. Isn't it queer that sometimes everything in the world looks worth while, and at other times nothing is worth while? It's all tiresome, and one longs to have it over.

How astonished some of my friends would be to hear me talk in such a way! Well, at least I am not a coward. I can help cheer other people, and keep my moments of dejection to myself."

"And to me," said her husband, a little bitterly.

"Ned," she rose, "you can not accuse me of often thrusting my moods upon you. I know that you do not sympathize with either side of me."

"That is the worst of it. I am entirely aware that both your depression and your burst of confidence are based on indigestion. I shall not presume on them."

"I think I will go up to bed at once," she said.

Her husband sat and stared moodily at the discouraging ashes until long after silence had fallen upon the second floor. Then he went up stairs. His wife stirred uneasily.

"I forgot to tell you, Jean, I'm going to take the midnight train north. Probably be gone a month or so. Will it disturb you if I light the gas while I throw a few things into my bag?"

"Can I help you?" she asked languidly.

"No, thank you, dear." He worked in silence, glancing now and then wistfully at her closed eyes. To some people he found it easy to say the things that were in him, and many a time he evolved a long discourse that should somehow bridge the gulf that con-

tinually widened between himself and his wife, but her complete indifference stifled his power of utterance. He could have said it now, if she would but open her eyes, he thought. He looked at his watch, and moved to her bedside.

"Good-by, Jean, I must be off." ,

"Good-by, Ned. Take care of yourself."

He opened his lips, for her voice was gentle and cordial, but she interrupted.

"And, oh, will you please take a look at the furnace before you go?"

"Yes, dear, I'll attend to it. Good-by."

"Good-by." He stooped and kissed her unresponsive cheek.

CHAPTER V

THE TEMPTER

As Mr. Kemys came down the steps of the Lyell house, he discovered a man of substantial proportions awaiting him.

"Hello, K.," said an aggressively cheerful voice.

Kemys half hesitated a moment, then nodded a curt good night to the still waiting coachman.

"I'll walk, thanks," he said, and the new-comer and he strode off into the night together.

"Old Windsor's carriage?" asked his friend. Kemys nodded.

"Say, you're pretty thick with the old man, ain't you? Who was the pretty girl you were seeing home in his rig?"

There was no reply, and Mr. Timothy Norton eyed his companion askance and changed his tactics.

"Say, I've got some of the finest ever in the way of Canadian rye. Step into my rooms and sample it with me, won't you?" he said with unabated cordiality.

It was evident that this suggestion met with a more

cordial reception, for Kemyss growled an assent and followed Norton's latch-key into a dark hall and thence into a stuffy but showy room, which might properly be called a "den" as a tribute both to its odor and to the evidently animal propensities of its owner.

As Mr. Norton lit the gas, laid aside his coat and busied himself in getting out a bottle and a couple of glasses, Kemyss still watched him silently. He was a person with pretensions to be called a gentleman, but the trouble was that his pretensions remained pretensions. They influenced him only so far as to affect his outer garments, and did not penetrate even to the sanctum of his finger-nails. A wolfish head he had, hung a little too far forward on his shoulders, and his mustache, which young ladies of his acquaintance described as "handsome," did not wholly hide a cruel mouth.

"I suppose all this friendliness means that you want your money, Tim," Kemyss broke in abruptly. "I wish to heaven you could have it, and I be done with you. But I haven't got it and that's the truth. Curse you and your cards!"

"Oh, well, come! You needn't blame me. You like the cards as well as I do, old fellow."

"I have to thank you for that as well as for my losses," Kemyss answered bitterly.

"Well, never mind all that," Norton replied in a singularly amiable voice to be coming from such a mouth. "I'm in no hurry, and you needn't think that's what I wanted to talk about. I've known what it was to be pretty hard up, myself, and I'm the last man on earth to press a friend on a debt of honor. Pay me when you get ready. Till then say no more about it."

Mr. Kemys's strained manner relaxed, either under the influence of his kindly creditor or that of the excellent whisky. Already this evening, Kemys had borne the air of an ascetic in the home of Miss Windsor, he had been a young man of emotional temperament in the carriage with Mrs. Lyell, and now he lapsed into the hail-fellow-well-met of Mr. Timothy Norton; and, although he would have felt very loath to let his own particular little world see him in his present surroundings, for the first time in several hours he felt comparatively at ease and at home. An inferior friend is after all a rest. One does not have to pose. The ability to become all things to all men, admirable as it is in an apostle, in the man who does not endow it with the backbone of sterling principles is apt to become a source of stumbling.

"No, I ain't going to press you on a debt of honor. I'm gentleman enough to know how to treat another gentleman, I hope," repeated his companion.

"I appreciate it, I assure you," Kemyss answered, and an amicable silence fell between them.

"Been dining at Windsor's?" asked his companion at length.

"Yes."

"Well, I don't doubt you deserve your position, but there's a good deal of luck in it, too. No son of his own. Son of an old friend. Almost like his own. The old man's getting on. Some one will have to step into his shoes one of these days."

"Oh, I don't know," Kemyss laughed the laugh of the flattered. "Windsor has a good many pairs of shoes, and no one man is going to step into all of them. And I'll tell you another thing, his shoes aren't anywhere worn out, either. He's good for a century. I never saw a man take business the way he does. It does not play him out. He acts as if it was a big game and as if he couldn't lose. If he makes a false move, why, it's only a bishop gone anyway, and he's nowhere near a checkmate. It does not wear on him the way it does on most men."

"Well, when it comes to games, two can play at 'em, you know. I understand you stand a pretty good chance at capturing his queen yourself."

"What makes you think so?" Kemyss asked quickly.

"Oh, it's kind of understood among all the boys."

"You don't know her, do you?" Kemyss' question was humorous, and accompanied by a sudden vision of this man in conference with Miss Windsor.

"Naw, how should I? But of course I've seen her. She's a high-stepper and a beaut, but I guess you'll have to walk a chalk line when she's Mrs. K., at least as long as old Nick pervades this ball. Of course, she ain't my style."

"Mine eitlier! She thinks the only purpose in life is to be great and good. I don't know whether the game is worth the candle," Kemyss blurted out, and instantly wished that he had held his tongue.

"Don't be a fool! Of course it is," replied Norton.

"And I suppose this is why you are willing to wait for your money?" asked Mr. Kemyss pointedly.

"Cert. I ain't going to cut in with any little fuss that might queer your chances. Go in and win and let me have the crumbs that fall from the table. That is all T. Norton asks."

"Well, you needn't bank on it too much."

Norton got up and moved restlessly about the room. Then he came back to his seat, shut one eye, and surveyed his upraised glass with the other.

"Kemyss," he said, "you have a hundred chances to make money, marriage or no marriage. Look at the things that Windsor is into, and you at his elbow all

the time. You must get a lot of tips, say on the stock market, that other fellows don't have. If I were in your place you can just bet I'd have money in my pocket."

"Would you? I can tell you the old man is morbidly sensitive on the subject of speculation—in his employés, at least. He calls his own operations 'business enterprises.' That is a different thing. But, I tell you, let him catch any one, especially a prospective son-in-law, speculating, and the fur would fly. I don't dare risk it. Besides, he thinks my salary is enough for all my needs. And so it would be, if you hadn't got me in this tight place." Kemyss reverted to his original injury.

"It ain't my fault if the luck run against you. And it's bound to turn some day. But about this other business. I tell you if I were in your place, I wouldn't be such a blank coward. Why, you could find a hundred ways to operate without his knowing anything about it. If you are scared to do it yourself, you can let some one else do it for you, can't you?"

Norton extended a long deliberate forefinger toward the weak young fellow in front of him.

"Look here, Kemyss, just say you did happen to drop on to something, and suppose you tipped me the wink. If you put me in the way of making a tidy sum,

I would be willing to let it wipe out your debt to me, and as you know, that has reached a good round figure. Why shouldn't you and me go into a kind of partnership, you supplying the information, and me doing the business? Profits equal." Kemyss sat long with boots extended before him gazing at them as though they interested him deeply, while Tim watched him in silence.

"Well, what do you want me to do? I've sometimes thought of some such arrangement myself. Mind, I don't say I'll agree to anything, but if you've got any safe plans I'm ready to listen to them," he said abruptly.

Tim hunched his chair confidentially nearer and the two talked far into the night.

CHAPTER VI

AN EPISODE

When two o'clock and Lenox arrived together, Windsor, absorbed in the daily mill, had time only for that big human smile behind which he hid his inflexibility.

"Afternoon!" he said. "I'm going to send you out into the country to solicit grain." It was not his custom to ask men whether they wanted to do the things he intended they should. "Don't know anything about wheat, I suppose? Well, you'll know a little before you get through with my kindergarten. It's a big subject. And the commission business is a small part of it. Incidentally you'll learn a little about Minnesota and the Swede farmer, and you'll just jot down a few points in which he isn't a bit like the Puritan. It wouldn't astonish me if you even found out a thing or two about yourself of which you're not yet aware." He looked at the young man with quizzical kindness. "I can't take my time to talk to you about details, but Kemyss is in

the next room there. I told him to help Holton make out a kind of rough itinerary for you. He has a little interest in this concern himself. Come and speak to me before you go. Good day."

Frank went through the door to meet Mr. Holton, the head of the firm that Old Nick ran under another name than his own—the name of a benevolent saint of long ago, who knew little of the wheat-commission business, but whose cognomen came easily to hand in a country where Jesuit fathers preceded grain, and whose well-known virtues now cast a pious luster over the trade of heretic business enterprise, as in huge white letters, decorating the red country elevators, their patronage was proclaimed.

A large part of the world eats its daily bread with a certain modicum of gratitude, and does not ponder deeply on the subject; but the interview of that morning gave Frank a sense that the great structures of civilization and of the arts and sciences were founded on grain. He perceived that your true Minnesotian surveys the world from the lofty ridge of a wheat elevator. Mr. Holton had an aggravating way of assuming that any intelligent creature understood the preliminary facts that sounded to Frank like Eleusinian mysteries, and awed him into diffidence in discovering the depths of his ignorance. Not that he would have

minded Holton so much, but greenhorn questions died at the lips in the presence of Mr. Kemys. All he could do was to store his memory with undigested facts on which to ruminate at leisure. He longed to develop brain tentacles that he might keep a tight grip on all the instructions that were poured over and into him.

"Kemys here has made out, at Mr. Windsor's suggestion, an outline of the route he proposes for you. It lies through a portion of this state and the Dakotas, where we have, so far, done hardly any business, so you will have a chance to make a clean record. All that comes in to us from that region will be credited to you, and the line elevators are not so thick up there either, but that there is quite a field for an independent commission business. Think over what I said to you, Mr. Lenox, and come back to the office to-morrow if you want any further explanations or instructions." The session came to an end, and Frank found himself with a scrap of paper covered with names of towns, Greek, Indian, Scandinavian, and even occasionally English.

"I think that is all at present, Mr. Lenox. It might do you good to drop over on 'Change for a moment. Perhaps it will stir up your interest and make you feel that you're part of a big machine. I think you might start off to the country by day after to-morrow

morning. After all, the only qualification for success must be your own experience, your own horse sense, and your own tact. Let me see, Kemyss, about a month's trip this is you've planned, isn't it?—six weeks, yes."

Frank thanked him and started for the door. "Six weeks, yes." He came to a halt and a sudden flush spread over his face. He turned on his heel and met Kemyss' eyes and cynical smile. She had invited him for five weeks. He could not well say, "But, please, kind sir, I want to come back in five weeks' time to dance with Miss Vera Windsor. What, sir, is the wheat business compared with a waltz?" Yet in his present state of mind the ball loomed almost as large as the business chance that was to be his making or his undoing. Such is the erratic mind of youth.

Running to catch one of the numerous elevators which eternally slipped up and down like the rods of an engine, Lenox found himself pushing a more leisurely personage into the already crowded cage. The hypnotic influence of rushing machines sets human legs to rushing, too. Frank had to catch that elevator though he was not in a hurry, and another was on the point of arrival.

In the somber profile that turned slowly, as if in remonstrance to his rapid movements, Frank recog-

nized a half-familiar face. He and this other young man had been good strangers in Maine, but here, fifteen hundred miles from the fresh sniff of salt water, mere recognition meant warmth and friendship.

"Aren't you Henry Repburn?" Lenox asked. "It does my heart good to see a Winterhaven face."

"Well, I swan, if it ain't Frank Lenox! Used to go to school with you! I'm glad to see you. When d' you come out?"

"Arrived yesterday. And you?"

"Oh, I've been in this hole two or three weeks. I wish I was back. I haven't heard a word of home news for an age. I can't hardly believe there is such a place."

"I'm fresh, and primed. I can tell you all the gossip," said Lenox.

The elevator came to a stop that set his heart beating against the base of his brain, and left his diaphragm without company. He was a country lad. As soon as he could readjust his internal organs he went on.

"Come over to the St. Etienne and have dinner with me, and let me tell you about the good old town."

"I don't care if I do," said the other. He walked apathetically by Lenox's side, listening to the young man's hopeful chatter about his own affairs, his coming westward, his impressions of Mr. Windsor, his

confidence in his own future. But at last his companion's listlessness began to tell on Frank's effervescence. The human sympathy, generally uppermost in his make-up, thrust his personal doings into the background, and Lenox tried to get something like a responsive confidence. It struck him that he was doing all the talking and all the rejoicing, and that his companion grew every moment more despondent.

"Of course we never knew much of each other at home," he said, "but I am under the impression that some one told me you intended to marry and settle down. Isn't it rather a new departure, you're coming to St. Etienne?"

"Yes; it's all of a piece with my confounded bad luck. It got so I couldn't stand it there, and now, upon my word, it looks as if I couldn't stand it here."

"Come up to my room and have a cigar and tell me about it," said Lenox, as they rose from the table.

Whether it was the agreeable fume of tobacco or Frank's cheerful geniality that penetrated Repburn's gloom, he suddenly dissolved into almost tearful confidence, to which the other listened in silence.

"I think there never was a fellow who had a worse streak of luck than I've had,—and I can't see that I'm in any way to blame either. Things have just happened. I've been misunderstood and abused and

hounded around until I'm clean discouraged. There comes a time when a fellow ain't called on to be cheerful any more.

"It began back at home, and it's followed me out here, just as if Providence had a spite against me. It seems as if it wasn't only big things, but in every little thing I've done, some piece of bad luck has happened to me. I'm at my wits' end, I can tell you; and to hear you talkin' about how cordial old Windsor was to you, and his invitin' you up to dinner, and givin' you a good job right off, well, I don't want anything bad to happen to you, but it just sets me wild. You understand I ain't envious of any one else. Now, he doesn't know you any more than he does me, and he hasn't any call to behave decent to you and give me a cold turn-down, has he? Ain't I from Winterhaven just as much as you? But some folks is born lucky, and some is born unlucky, and it's better not to be born at all than to be born unlucky."

"But, with all this, you haven't told me what's the matter yet. Perhaps it will ease your mind a bit if you let it off. Swear a little, if you feel like it. Maybe it'll do you good."

"No, sir, all the cuss words in *Webster's Unabridged Dictionary* wouldn't do me any good, and besides I'm not a profane swearer. See here, I'll go back to the be-

ginning and tell you how it happened. Did you ever know old Jim Mitford? He had a big warehouse down on Waterford's dock in Winterhaven, and my Uncle Henry—Uncle Henry brought me up, both my parents being dead, which was another piece of my bad luck—but Uncle Henry was pretty well off, and took care of me, though he 'most nagged the life out of me from day to day. However, I'd got used to his irritable ways and I never paid much attention to them. If there's one thing I am it's good-natured, though a fellow hadn't ought to praise himself. Well, Uncle Henry he always gave me to understand that he'd see me comfortably fixed in life; and he got me a situation with old Mitford. He was tickled to death, Uncle Henry, and he said it was a bang-up place for me, and there wasn't no reason why I shouldn't rise and buy a partnership in the business if I done anywhere near half decent.

“Well, sir, what happened? The very morning I went down to begin work, that old Mitford had to go off somewhere, and so there wasn't nobody around to give me instructions what I was to do. I hung around, kind of waiting, but it wasn't much fun, and I noticed a little sail-boat of the old man's moored a piece out, and lookin' very inviting, especially as there was a tidy little breeze and not a cloud in the sky. I thought

I might as well put in my time instead of hangin' around and waitin' for the boss, and a good time I had, though I was a bit later than I anticipated, havin' miscalculated the breeze a little. Well, bless me if when I come back, there wasn't old Mitford standin' on the dock and waitin'; and, as ill luck would have it, just as I was roundin' up a sudden whiff of wind took the boat and smashed her nose up against the dock and did considerable damage. No mortal bein' could know that the wind was comin' at just that moment, but the old man was swearin' mad, and when we went into the office he didn't seem to conquer it, like I always try to any of my evil tempers, so he got me real upset, too. He jawed and jawed, but by-and-by he set me to work on some accounts.

"I thought that was as easy as rollin' off a log, for I was always smart at figurin'. He had great big books and all kept like apple-pie. He evidently set a heap by them books, and he handled them like they was babies. I was working away, and everything would have been all right except the old man kept growling and rumbling like an amateur volcano. He made me nervous. First thing you know, I happened to upset the ink bottle, and if the blamed thing didn't go all over that book like a tidal wave. The old man, he jumped so he, most hit the ceiling and he

yelled, 'You get out of this office, and don't you never show your loon face here again. Anybody might know your father come from South Ca'liny! He wan't never born in Maine.'

"Well, of course, if he was such an old dragon, I didn't want to work for him anyway, but Uncle Henry, he was considerable riled, and he made it rather uncomfortable for me at home—as though it was my fault. A couple of accidents like that might have happened to anybody, as I told him; but there are some folks that can never see the difference between a visitation and a fault. If things go wrong, some one is always to blame.

"I made up my mind I'd fix Uncle Henry, and the very next day I went off and proposed to Nannie Means, and she just jumped at me. There aren't any too many young men in Winterhaven anyway, and a girl knows she's lucky if she gets one. She had a nice tidy little fortune of her own, and it looked as if I was all fixed. Uncle Henry was pleased as Punch. He forgot he'd ever said an ugly word, and was as smooth as grease to me. But, of course, my luck had to turn. It always does.

"I told Uncle I'd rather study law, anyway, than go into business, and he said there was no reason why I shouldn't. I always took better to the repose of a

student's life than to any work with my hands. I suppose I was made that way. I'd ought to have had a better education.

"I always thought Nannie was a good-natured girl. She was big and stout, and I've been told fat women are always sweet-tempered, but I know now that isn't true. No sooner did she have me good and tight than she began to pick at me about the way I did everything. Nothing seemed to suit her. It kep' goin' from bad to worse, until one day this summer when a whole lot of us went on a picnic to Knox Beach, and some of the young folks went in bathin'. Nothing would do but I must teach Nannie to swim. Her only idea of swimmin' was to flap her hands up and down, and I was holdin' her chin in about two feet of water and tryin' to explain, and she not listenin', when all of a sudden my hand slipped. She just grabbed my legs and threw me like a shot, and she came down on top of me. There we lay. She hadn't sense enough to get up. She just covered me all over and scabbled. I couldn't do a thing. And we'd have both been drowned with our feet sticking out of water if some of the others hadn't rushed in and dragged her off. They were all laughin' fit to kill. Well, you'd have thought it was all my fault. Anyway, that was the end of me and Nannie. Uncle Henry was furious. He said

I'd thrown away my luck twice, and I needn't look for another chance. The worst of it was, Nannie sent home the few things I'd given her. I opened 'em right then, and there was a little locket heart that used to belong to Aunt Maria among them. Uncle Henry said I hadn't any business givin' away things that wasn't mine to give. I told him I'd seen it kickin' around for years and I didn't suppose he set any store by it. It wasn't no good, only the kind of fool thing that pleases a girl.

"But he wouldn't listen to reason, and he gave me a hundred-dollar-bill, and he said, 'Here, that's the last time you'll see the color of my money. I'm sick of you. You just clear out and look out for yourself!'

"Everybody was laughin' at me, for Nannie had made me look plumb ridiculous. I couldn't stand it, and besides I didn't see any chance for a man in Winterhaven anyway. I made up my mind that my place was the West. So I shook all those folks from my soles, and came to St. Etienne."

"Go on. It's deeply interesting. What happened here?"

"Oh, of course I went straight up to Windsor's office; but do you know, I went four or five times before they even let me see him. All nonsense, acting as if he was some royal potentate that was just a little

too good for common folks to gaze on. I call it an insult to American manhood for a man to shut himself up that way."

"You must remember that he's busy. It isn't because he's haughty, but such a man's time is immensely valuable."

"Well, anyway, when I did get to see him he wan't any too sweet. He might have been a fish for the way he looked at me. But I didn't kneel to him, I can tell you, for all he thinks he's so big. I started in to talk to him, but he just cut me off, and he said, 'I like to give any Winterhaven boy a chance. Perhaps Mr. Harrison can find you an opening.' Well, under that infernal Harrison I've been for three weeks, and mighty unpleasant weeks they've been. These western fellers haven't got any manners. Harrison is about the biggest savage I ever saw, and you'd think that every little mistake a man makes was a crime by the way he hauls you over the coals. I don't suppose I could have stood it much longer anyway, for I won't be treated like a nigger; but, sir, the way things came to an end was just too much for me."

"So things are at an end, are they?"

"Well, I should think so! Yesterday was a wild day on 'Change. I don't believe in speculation myself, but I tell you, you hear it talked about in that old repro-

bate's office. Some one was having great fun, everything his own way, and thinking he was the greatest man on earth because every one else was scared blue. Mr. Harrison and a beast of a fellow, who's Windsor's private secretary, were talking about it. Harrison's office opens right out of a room where four or five of us were working, and I was right near the door that was open a little way. I suppose I hadn't ought to have listened, but it was so interesting I couldn't help it, and I held my pen still and my ears cocked. They were laughing and having great jokes about the fun there'd be, because old Windsor was goin' to sail in and explode everything. That fellow, the secretary—he's the kind that holds on tight to some big man's coat tails, and thinks he's the whole show. Perhaps you've seen him?"

Lenox nodded.

"He says, 'I'll send over a note by one of the clerks,' just as if we were dogs. Pretty soon Harrison comes out and says, 'Here, Repburn, do you know Mr. Rugg, over on 'Change, by sight?' and I says, 'Yes, sir, I think so.' 'Well, take him this note right away,' he said. He used me like an errand boy several times before. Well, I took the note, tickled to death to think I was goin' to see a little of the fun. I went up to Rugg and said, 'Mr. Rugg, I've got a note to you

from Mr. Kemyss.' Kemyss is the name of the secretary. 'Have you?' says he, very pleasantly; 'What is it?' 'I think it's an order to buy all the December wheat you can,' I said. 'Very likely. That's just what I should expect. But you're mistaken in your man. There's Mr. Rugg over there,' says he. So I thanked him, for he talked to me like a gentleman, and went to look for Rugg. I saw the fellow I'd spoken to by mistake just streaking across the room. He 'most knocked down every one in his way. And it was funny, too. He seemed leisurely enough a minute before."

Repburn stopped and looked at Lenox in a puzzled kind of way.

"Oh, go on, man, I want to hear it all," said Frank.

"By the time I found Rugg—for he turned out to be in the opposite direction from where the fellow pointed, and I took my time, for I wanted to see all I could of the 'Change—they were yelling so in the pit that I couldn't make out what was happening. They were more like a pack of hyenas than anything I ever heard. I tell you, men wouldn't think it was respectable to act that way in Winterhaven.

"Well, it turned out that the fellow I'd spoken to by mistake was the last man in St. Etienne that Windsor would want to take into his confidence. Harrison

somehow found out about it all, and he just exhausted the dictionary on me because I'd made a perfectly innocent mistake. My luck again! This afternoon, while I was workin' I got a note from that infernal Kemyss sayin' Mr. Windsor did not desire my services any longer, and inclosing a month's pay. I'll show you the letter. It's a perfect insult."

He fumbled in his pocket, and his face began to work. He sprang to his feet and began to clap his hands wildly here and there.

"By jingo!" he exclaimed. "I've lost my pocket-book. I've lost the letter, and 'most every cent I had in the world! I must have had my pocket picked in that elevator. They hadn't ought to allow people to crowd you that way!"

He sat down and stared at Lenox with a white face.

"Doesn't it just beat all? Isn't it all of a piece? Here I am in a strange city, penniless, without a friend. What on earth am I going to do?"

"Do!" said Lenox. "Why, man, any one can see that there's more work waiting to be done in this town than there are men to do it. If you've failed as clerk, get out and break stone or drive a grocery wagon, and do it well."

"It isn't fair that Providence should spite me all the time. I haven't done a single thing that was wrong

except perhaps to listen to all that talk. And that wasn't a crime, that it should ruin me. Any man would have done it. And now I haven't the month's pay I earned!"

"Or didn't earn," said Lenox to himself, but aloud: "Didn't they pay you with a check?"

"Yes, but I got them to cash it. I don't know anybody at the banks."

"Go out and advertise it in to-morrow morning's papers, and see the police. It's possible you may get it back."

Repburn buried his face and moaned. Lenox could not help feeling sorry for the loosely-knit, abject creature, so he clapped him on the back and spoke encouragingly.

"Cheer up. A night's sleep will set you on your feet again, and if the sky is as bright to-morrow as it is to-day, you'll feel courage to begin all over again. You can't feel blue in this air. It's like electricity. There's plenty of work to be done, and I'm sure you'll find your place."

"It's all very well for you to talk. It isn't you that have had bad luck."

"Well, I'll stand by you to the extent of my power. I'm not opulent, and I haven't any influence out here, I know, but I'll try to be a friend. You must let me

lend you something to see you through this emergency. Come, be a man."

"You're the only friend I've got, Lenox."

He gave a sob or two.

"I know one thing that would do me good, and that would be to lay out that infernal Harrison cold, and Kemyss beside him. But I'm just plumb discouraged. Did you ever hear of such luck?"

"Now go home and go to bed," said Lenox.

CHAPTER VII

LOVE BY NIGHT

In her own little parlor, Mrs. Lyell gathered a few of her friends to listen to the reading of a tiny book of hers, now on the eve of publication. In *Paradise on Earth* she had unfolded, with charming variety of illustration, her philosophy. A basis of solid education had served not to make this little lady a prig, but simply to illuminate her world, and the sum of her reasonings was this: fix your mind simply on what is noble and beautiful, forget the sordid, the belittling, the cruel, and it will be as though it did not exist. Your universe shall consist of the harmony which you create.

Never was a planet considered entirely fitted up for business without a satellite, and Mrs. Lyell had a perfect nebula of such surrounding her. Yearning to share her spiritual peace, with fluttering consciousness of half-stifled aspirations, with the adoring love which an humble-minded woman feels for the nobler of her

own sex, they listened. While her words flowed like honey, it seemed the simplest thing in the world to slip off the fettering harness of care, and live that supernal existence; to let worry, like an outworn mantle, drop, leaving celestial white linen to gleam in the radiance of the sun.

Occasionally a listener—for the little group was not made up of the rich and fashionable women to whom life is easy-going, but largely of those who must face daily drudgeries and problems—a listener would wonder dully how one shuffles off a colicky baby or a big week's mending. But Mrs. Lyell, with her calm eyes, was a proof visible that it could be done. Her lips wore a smile almost as continuously placid as that of a kindergarten teacher. When she did not rise above the littleness of the world, she forgot the trivial in the great,—and many there were who would do likewise, but few who attained.

Vera watched her, fascinated. Miss Windsor was determined that life should be a problem whether it wanted to be or not. She did not sympathize with the simple-minded William Henry of beloved memory, who said, "Dory's mother is teaching him to enter a room. Why do you have to learn that? Just walk in."

Within herself she found such a tumultuous self-conflicting creature, that the sight of her friend's

serenity lured her like waters in unruffled moonlight, from the pure force of contrast.

And now they were all gone and Mrs. Lyell sat alone. She was glowing from the sweet words of the worshiping circle. Her nature, electric and vibrating in response to the pulsating needs of her fellow women, left her still quivering after her afternoon's effort. She could not eat dinner, and the very room where she had spoken seemed to her fragrant with adulation. She would not leave it to drop to any lower plane. The servant brought her a cup of coffee and a bit of toast, and she lingered in the little parlor, from which the atmosphere of delight gradually thinned and passed away. It was not a luxurious room, but it fitted her because it had the charm and austerity of herself. Just now it was sweet with the perfume of roses with which the visitors had marked their tribute.

Here and thus Mr. Kemyss found her. The memory of the softness of her hand the night before, when he had kissed it, haunted and lured him, first to restlessness, and then to seeking her.

"Mr. Lyell is out of town, but Mrs. Lyell is at home, sir," the servant said, and the information seemed too good to be true. It fitted his mood to see her alone.

"How festive you are with all these flowers! Have you been having great doings?" he asked.

He became conscious, from her very smile, that she was in some unusually high-strung condition, and this again pleased him like a draft of wine.

"Nothing very exciting—only a few friends to whom I've been reading my book. And now I am quite alone, as you see, and the reaction, after the company of appreciative people, was a little depressing; so I am particularly grateful to you for coming this evening, Cyril. Of course one ought not to be depressed, but I was, just a bit. We always crave more than we get, don't we?"

He looked at her curiously.

"I think you have every reason to be hungry," he said. "You have never yet been fed."

"Why, what do you mean? My life is a great deal richer than that of most people. What makes you think I am starved?"

"I don't know whether I dare to tell you what I mean."

"Nonsense! We are too good friends for you to talk in such fashion. You may dare to tell me anything, and now that you have roused my curiosity, I insist that you be frank. I'm woman enough for that."

She smiled at him again, and he surveyed her in silence. Her dress was of soft gray, and her mouse-colored hair had a peculiar curve, like that of Clytie,

in the way it grew on her temples. Everything around her was full and round and delicate. She was such a dove-like creature, that it filled him with a certain masculine rage that she should not be cooing, instead of discoursing philosophy to a lot of silly women. He could feel her presence and the opportunity to talk to her alone as long as he pleased mounting to his brain like the fumes of alcohol.

"Come," she said, "convince me that I am hungry. It isn't often a man's duty to try to waken discontent."

"I don't need to stir it up. You've only to ask yourself. Do you think yourself wholly satisfied?"

"Sometimes, yes. Most of the time, no," she answered slowly, half-reluctantly. "But I suppose that is universal human fate. We are all dissatisfied so long as we are imperfect. I don't know exactly what I long for."

"I do," he blurted out.

She looked at him suddenly, and a great wave of color swept into her face.

"Tell me," she asked breathlessly.

"First tell me," he answered. "You married at seventeen or eighteen, didn't you?"

She nodded.

"Why did you do it?"

"Cyril, even you have hardly the right to tread on

that ground," she said sadly; "but I will allow your friendship its privilege. I was alone in the world, and I married out of what I might call a sentimental impulse."

"And you've outgrown that?"

"Of course I have. It didn't last long. I learned almost immediately that it was based on the senses; and no such love—why, it wasn't love—it was a mere instinct—unreasoning. I've learned now what higher love is."

"And what is it?"

"It is what I have for my women friends. It is based on a sympathy of souls and not the attraction of bodies. It is placid and calm and satisfying."

"But you just told me it wasn't satisfying," he answered.

"Well, sometimes—just for a few moments," she laughed. "I admit you've caught me, Cyril."

"But there are marriages that give content. How do you account for them?"

"Oh, there are some people who never outgrow that childish stage, and there are others—and these I believe are the really happy marriages—where that is all left behind, or a sympathetic companionship takes its place."

"Is that really your thought about it all?"

He waited for what seemed a long time for his answer, and then she said in very low tones:

"If it isn't, don't probe me any further. I refuse to think deeper on that line."

He looked around and drew a deep breath.

"Now let me tell you what I believe," he said. "I always think, when I come here, that this room is typical of you. It is virginal. It is warm and glowing and lovely, but it looks like the home of a woman who has not learned what love is."

She half rose, but he waved her down with his hand and went on.

"You asked me to tell you—and now I have begun you must hear me out. I don't mean the love which you talk about as satisfying you—the love of a horde of women who adore in you that which they lack themselves—the superabundance of your nature. Why, that is only a titillation, not love. It warms and tickles you for a moment, and as soon as it has passed it leaves you feeling cold and half-despairing, as I found you to-night."

She did not look up now, and after a moment of hesitation he went on.

"Look at yourself. You have the most splendid great heart. You are full of the possibilities of emotions you never feel. If you drank the cup of love you

would not just sip a little from the top, as most women do, with their eyes on the world and their minds divided between the lover and the next new gown. You would drink it to its glorious depths, and let it intoxicate you. You are capable of giving yourself to it wholly, and yet you waste your life in communion with a lot of women about poetry and philosophy. Why, Jean, those are only the preliminaries to life. Life itself is love, nothing but love. And you are letting it slip! Pretty soon the power of feeling emotion will fade out of you, and that lovely body of yours, which is a thing for a man to dream of, will wither, and it will be too late. Life will be gone, and you will be nothing but the shriveled husk of a woman with no sweet nut within."

"You are cruel—cruel to say this; but I know it, Cyril, God help me—I know it, though I have tried never to think it. But I can't help myself now. It's too late! Here I am. I am—married!"

She threw out her arms despairingly.

Even while he spoke he cursed himself for his folly—and yet let himself be possessed by the impulse to get a thing so sweet and lovely as this—to taste pleasure for the moment and forget the days to come. And it was more than interesting to penetrate into the recesses of a pretty woman's heart. He enjoyed it.

"Married!" he answered scornfully. "Do you call that marriage? I know you don't. Is Ned Lyell your mate? Do you think he could ever abandon himself to passion? And if he did, would you respond? I know what he thinks. He admires you. What man wouldn't? No man could be near you without having some red blood creeping into his admiration, and that, too, Ned has experienced; but his love is such a shallow weakness that all it amounts to is this. Thinking that you do not love him, and that he has marred your life, he feels it the act of chivalry to wipe himself out as much as possible and demand nothing of you. If I despise Ned Lyell for one thing more than another, it is because he doesn't rise up and tread everything under foot until he really owns you,—that he has such a possibility within reach, and that he is not man enough to grasp it. He walks all around you and never touches you. He is a coward."

She sat very still now, not even shrinking, as most women would, from his home thrusts, and the sight of her goaded him to still further loss of self-possession.

"If I were your husband," he said, "I would make you love me, and even without being your husband, I mean to make you love me, as I love you, with everything there is in me."

Now would she look up? Yes, she did, and there

was a glow in her eyes that he had never seen there before. It almost rewarded him for having got himself into such a tight place. How lovely she was! He sprang impulsively to his feet, but quickly as he moved she was swifter, and now stood with her chair between himself and her, though she shook from head to foot as she waved him imperiously back.

"No," she said. "No, Cyril. This has come as a bolt out of a clear sky, and almost stunned me, but not quite. I must have time to think, before either of us acts. Is it really true?"

"It's the truest thing in the world," he answered.

"Yes," she said musingly, "I have dreamed of it, but it was nothing more than a dream. Do you truly offer me the reality? If I knew that—if I knew that—how infinitely alluring it would be!"

"Let me prove it!" and again he stepped forward, but her eyes forbade him. Yet she seemed transformed from the fragile dove-colored beauty to some glowing oriental creature. The temptation to touch her cheek and see if it was as soft as it looked surged in him. So they stood gazing at each other, he seeing in her the embodiment of warmth and passion, she with a vision of some spiritual ecstasy in him. So solitary are souls even when they think themselves most at one, that neither of them could imagine the other's point of

view. And yet when she broke the breathless silence, her quiet, measured tones startled him. He could not understand her self-control, when he was at white heat.

"Cyril," she said, "whatever this is to mean to us—and I must have time to search myself and see if there is anything in me that responds to your demand—but whatever is to be the result of all this, I thank you for what you have said. I thank you for having let me catch a glimpse, even through a half-shut door, of love. The thing I most respect in you is what most people would condemn. That is your superiority to conventions. If my marriage is a sham, as we both know it is, I reverence you for ignoring its unreality, and abandoning yourself to the primal human instincts."

"If only you, too, would abandon yourself to them!"

"Not yet! Not yet! I do not dare to yield without thinking, and so I must not look longer at your castle in the air, lest it lure me beyond the power of my reason."

"Then look!"

"No. To-morrow—the next day—you shall know. And yet how can I refuse to yield? I thought—forgive me for even thinking it—I thought you loved Vera."

He started as if a knife had pricked him. The heat

of passion into which he had worked himself, lured by his own very fluency of expression, seemed to fade in an instant, leaving him clammy and faint. He had a sense of nausea. What demon had possessed him? Her very beauty sickened him with apprehension, for this was the very type of woman to give herself entirely to a passion once awakened. Suppose he had opened the flood-gates, was he not like to be drowned by the out-rushing stream? Some reflection of his new mood communicated itself to her, and she drew still farther away from him, but, being herself honest, her doubts did not take the same form as his. She leaned against the mantel and covered her face with her hand while he waited in speechless agony for his doom. Would she compromise him? Why had her emotional nature pulled out of him the semblance of a passion he never felt, and never meant to feel? Love the whole of life, forsooth! Love was a toy to amuse the idle hour, or perhaps a ladder to help one in one's ambitions. And he could think of no immediate way out of this.

"As I said, what this is to mean to you and me, Cyril, I don't yet know. I am dizzy from the very idea of its meaning anything. You must go, and let me think."

"Yes, dear, I realize that there is duty as well as love." He managed to get this out, and congratulated himself on its neatness as an entering wedge.

"Yes, there is duty as well as love ; but whether love is not the highest duty we must consider," she said softly. "Good night now." She put out both her hands, and he kissed them, awkwardly he felt, agonized by this first sign of melting.

And, out of doors, the stars were shining as serenely as ever, the night air was as cool as though there were no heated blood, and the distant chime of bells in the city hall rang out the close of the hour in which he had made a fool of himself. He cursed them and her as he walked home.

CHAPTER VIII

DAYLIGHT LOVE

It was in the common light of noontide of the next day that Mr. Kemyss rang the bell of Mr. Windsor's house, stepped into the library—the room in which he was most at home—and waited. A statuette of the Venus of Melos looked at him with her supercilious head on one side. He felt uncomfortable, and shifted his position, only to meet the stony glare and long suffering contempt of a bust of Dante. There was no avoiding the fact that everything in the world was out of harmony.

When Miss Windsor came into the room in answer to his summons, he could not help contrasting her in his mind with the voluptuous creature of the evening before. She looked so slender and girlish. Her beauty seemed to him meager in its type. It did not appeal to his senses.

"Miss Windsor," he said, "your father asked me to come up and get some stones about whose re-setting you spoke to him this morning. He forgot them."

"Isn't he coming home to luncheon?"

"No; a couple of eastern men, looking after investments, fell on him, and he said he would take them to lunch at the club and drive them about a bit afterward."

"He did not need to make such haste about the jewels. I spoke of them, but I was in no hurry to have the work done."

"Have you yet to learn that to gratify your slightest desire is to him the most imperative business? This is the attitude of mind you extort from most men," he said, smiling.

She frowned a little and turned to go up stairs.

"Since you were so good as to come for them, I will get you the stones," she said, "but it really wasn't necessary."

As she came down again a footman was just entering the hall to announce luncheon, and she turned to Kemyss impulsively:

"Won't you come in with me? Father's place is set for him. You may see if you can fill it. It quite takes away my appetite to eat alone."

The instant she had spoken she regretted it, but, so accustomed had she become to meeting this man familiarly, that at times she forgot the new rôle of lover which he had taken upon himself. But she colored

with annoyance when, by the instant lighting of his eyes, he told her he had not forgotten. It was too late now to recall her invitation, and she led the way to the dining-room, resolving that the servants should not leave them for a moment alone.

But his manner was so much that of the easy-going, good comrade she had known for a year or two, that she threw precautions to the wind, a little ashamed of her own self-consciousness, and joined in his cheerful chatter.

As they rose from the table, he said:

"Mr. Windsor told me he had some beautiful new orchids. Will you show them to me?"

"Yes, if you are not too busy to wait."

"Which means, I infer, that you think I ought to be. Well, it so happens I am not, and I will not affect an untruth—even to live up to your ideals of duty."

"Come then, sinner. I shall tell my father on you when he comes home."

The atmosphere in the conservatory was warm and indolent, and the orchids suggested laziness and luxury. In the center stood a little pool where butterfly-tailed Japanese goldfish darted about, and fascinating little plants, that righted themselves every time they were turned upside down on the surface, floated in branchy masses. The two found themselves playing

like children with these toys, and trying to organize a procession of fish through the miniature arch below. Once their hands came in contact, and Kemyss seized her fingers under the water.

"Let me go, sir," she cried. "You are trying to catch goldfish, not me."

"On the contrary, I'm trying to catch you. The fishes may go where they please, for all I care." He lifted the dripping hand, still holding it tight.

"I wonder if it will be mine some day," he said.

"I wonder, too. I'm sure I haven't the least idea," she answered, smiling. "Who do you think can tell us? Cyril, I've grown so accustomed to you as a friend I really do not know whether you are necessary to me or only familiar. And yet if I loved you, I should know it, shouldn't I? You see, I've had no experience to tell me." She was blushing and laughing at her own confusion.

"Well, as I have no doubts," he replied, "and am having plenty of experience, couldn't you take me as an instructor?"

"You are biased. No, I fear me I must learn the lesson by myself, and as yet I have not begun its alphabet. I'm afraid even Eugenia Lyell can't help me, though I would follow her advice about anything else."

Kemyss dropped the imprisoned hand and caught the

tilted coping of the pool as if to steady himself against his faintness.

"Vera," he said hoarsely, "for heaven's sake don't consult Mrs. Lyell. Don't consult any one. Let this be a sacred relation between you and me. It makes no difference what any other mortal being thinks. If you can learn to love me, the service and devotion of my life are yours. Don't, I beg you, submit it to the reason of an outsider—as though love could be anything but a spontaneous growth in your own heart. If you would only yield to it, Vera—the sweetest, happiest, most natural thing in the world—if you would only give yourself to it!"

He watched her, tense with anxiety, as she dipped her fingers again and again into the water and lifted them, watching idly the drops that fell. Could it be only last night that he had jeopardized everything? It seemed ages ago. He had suffered the torment of years since then. What devil made that woman so enticing that he forgot all sense and all his future? Whenever a man makes a fool of himself there is a woman behind it. It is the woman's fault. He longed to curse the woman aloud and rid himself of his terror and fury. And now suppose Vera should drop the faintest hint of all this to her philosopher and friend? One breath would blow away his fabric of ambition, and even

alienate his business chief, and leave him helpless. He must do something to quiet that other woman, but as yet, he was too agitated to think what. And at last Vera spoke.

"Cyril, I don't believe in hothouse wooing. And really, after luncheon one ought to be having a siesta, not playing with little fishes."

"I do not see that time and place make any difference. It is the central fact that signifies, nothing else."

She sprang up and gave a quick little motion as if to dismiss thought.

"Go away, now. I don't want you, and I don't want to talk about this. You promised me that you would not speak of it again till I gave you permission."

"You should not exact promises that are too hard to keep," he said. "I think about this day and night. How can I help it, if words will come?"

"Well, I'm not going to marry a naughty little boy who doesn't keep his word. Good-by, Cyril; you really must go."

She still sat idly trailing her fingers, regardless of the alarm of the fan-tailed fish.

"It must indeed be the sweetest thing in the world," she thought, "if the mere thought of it is so entrancing." She leaned over and laughed at her own broken image in the pool, and then the memories of her be-

ginnings came back to her. Again she wondered how much they meant. A little more somberness, born of ancestors who prowled the dark woodlands, a little greater lack of conventionality descended from those who wandered the prairies at will, a little lack of humor left from those to whom the daily necessities loomed big—this was all there was of it.

"I believe I will give the whole subject some fresh air. It's horribly hot and stuffy in here. A brisk canter will knock the atmosphere of love-making out of me."

Still dreamily she went to her room, and Sophie, her new little Swedish maid, came obedient to her bell to twist the dark hair into a tightly braided knot, and help to encase her in the close sheath of her riding habit. Sophie was light of step and neat of dress, and her soft light curls were piled in a coquettish puff upon her shapely little head. Vera found herself thinking how Sophie, too, had departed from the type of her ancestors, slow and phlegmatic.

"Sophie," she said, "you certainly do my hair wonderfully well, considering that you must have learned your art since you came over to this country."

"Oh, yas, Miss Windsar," answered the girl, with a little toss of her head. "Ay navar did anny vork in the ol' country."

"You never did any work? Tell me about your home, Sophie."

"Vall, my fader hay had big farm, and many servants to do all the vork, so Ay navar did but little sewing."

"Then why did you come away? Don't you want to go back?"

The girl hesitated a moment and then said slowly:

"Vall, you see, Miss Windsar, it vas das way. Ay could navar go even away from the gate without Ay ask my modar. Ay navar haf anny money for myself. Ay vas always little girl vithout Ay gat married. No, Miss Windsar, Ay rathar stay har and vork, and van my vork is over Ay do vat Ay lak. And my broodar and two sastars coom now, so Ay am nat lonely. They lak be Americans, too."

"So you call yourself American already?"

"Ay hope so," answered the girl cheerfully. "As your har right, Miss Windsar?"

"Quite right, Sophie. I'm glad you like being an American, and I hope you will be very happy here."

"Sure!" answered Sophie, for though the accent of the United States may be slow to acquire, its slang is as easy to get as its citizenship.

Vera laughed, gathered up her long skirts and went down stairs. "After all, her fate is like mine," she

said to herself. "Two generations will see the work complete. I see it going on all around me. Pole or Italian, Swiss or Swede, we are all dipped in some magic alembic and come out American. Our traditions and our inheritances serve but as picturesque memories, which are dominated by this newer and more vital nature. Why should I think myself any more exceptional than Sophie? My hair is dark and hers is yellow. My eyes are black and hers are blue. The country sets a new star in her flag for each new state, and the new one blends into the same constellation as the old. So she takes in all races and mingles them to make her new solar system, and our likeness becomes greater than our differences."

Here Miss Windsor caught sight of her horse, and ceased to care about the color of her eyes or the number of stars in the flag. Only she rejoiced in her young blood and the sunshine.

Mr. Kemyss, meanwhile, left the house in an unenviable state of mind. He walked slowly cityward, feeling every moment more and more how intolerable was his position. When half-way to the office, he turned and looked back at the hill. He must see Mrs. Lyell at once—within the hour—and end this matter. Anything was better than suspense, and if she intended to ruin him, the sooner he knew it the better.

A little later, on this same afternoon, Frank Lenox found himself again at the office and deep in all its mystic lore. All his preparations to start the next morning were made, but he wanted a few last instructions from Mr. Holton, and that gentleman, having gone over, in outline, his policy, was now gathering the scattered papers on his desk, while Lenox glanced through the note-book in which he had gathered all his new-found wisdom. The young man was a little bored by the redundancy of his superior, but he lingered, because he had come down not really so much to get information, as to see Mr. Windsor, partly for the sake of the old man himself, and partly because Miss Windsor did him the honor to call him father.

So, though Lenox was a little relieved to find Mr. Kemyss absent, he was not so grateful for the Providence which had suddenly called Mr. Windsor away on some unknown business, and so deprived him of a last encouraging hand-shake and a God-speed from his great cousin. There was a cheerful self-confidence, a belief in his own power, in Windsor, that communicated itself to the younger men whom he gathered about him, and made it easy for them to assure themselves that old Windsor could do anything, even to bringing about the millennium by this time next month, if he only put his whole mind and strength to

it. The electric impulse he gave them pushed them confidently along on their working highway with a speed which they never thought of stopping to calculate, however hard they might be going.

"And by the way, Mr. Lenox," Mr. Holton finished, looking over his spectacles, "it might not be a bad plan for you to take a bicycle along with you. A good many of our traveling men are in the habit of doing so. It will often save you a half-day's wait for a train at some out-of-the-way place, and—"

The door opened and a somewhat perturbed looking clerk appeared.

"Mr. Holton," he said, "Miss Windsor has rung up her father's 'phone. She's somewhere out of town and seems to be in trouble. I didn't catch exactly what Mr. Windsor and Mr. Kemyss are both away. Could you come to the telephone, sir?"

Holton started up, and Lenox followed anxiously to Mr. Windsor's private office, to listen to the disjointed ends of the colloquy.

"Miss Windsor? Yes—this is Mr. Holton—I'm sorry to say your father is out—good heavens!—Yes—No one but women in the house?—How far away is he?—On the Nushka Lake Road, you say?—Yes, beyond the fountain—I hope it is not so serious as it looks—Yes, I'll get Doctor Norris if it's possible

—We'll be there as soon as horses can bring us—
Good-by!"

He turned to Lenox.

"It's Miss Windsor. Most unfortunate. She was out on her horse alone on the outskirts of the city, and she ran across a man very badly hurt. She thinks some one must have attacked him. She got hold of a telephone in a house not far distant, and she wants a carriage and a doctor. I suppose I'll have to go out. I have an important committee meeting at four-thirty, but Mr. Windsor wouldn't consider any business that ever was made in comparison with Miss Windsor's needs. He's a little daft about her."

He took out his watch and looked at it in evident perplexity, as he rang up again and ordered a carriage from the nearest stable.

While this one-sided conversation was going on, Lenox had been screwing his courage to the sticking point, and he now spoke.

"May I not go out in your place, Mr. Holton? I have met Miss Windsor, so I shouldn't be an entire stranger, and my time is not so valuable as yours, though I may be able to serve her equally well."

"Thank you, it would be a real favor if you would do so, Mr. Lenox,"—Mr. Holton spoke with evident relief. "Now I'll just arrange matters with Doctor

Norris, and if he's gettable you can stop for him on your way out. The coachman will know the way. The big drinking fountain on the Nushka drive is a landmark."

A horse tied to a tree and a group of two or three women near the road-edge marked the goal; and Vera stepped forward to meet the carriage as it came to an abrupt stop, her eyes glowing with evident relief, and her face tense with anxiety, but self-contained as usual.

She spoke no word to Lenox, though the swift glance and the extended left hand warmed him like a caress, while she gave her right hand and her brief explanation to the doctor.

"I heard this man moan in the bushes as I was riding. His throat is cut and he can not speak, and as there were no men in the house near by where I went for help we made no attempt to move him. I'm afraid some one has tried to murder him."

They were moving together toward a clump of small trees that lay between the gleaming roadway and one of those innumerable lakes that star the uplands of Minnesota.

"Murder! gammon!" said the doctor. "He's tried to kill himself, and slit his windpipe by mistake."

Lenox looked over the doctor's stooping shoulders

at the inert form, lying with face half turned toward him, and uttered an exclamation of dismay.

"Good heavens, it's Repburn!"

The doctor and Vera looked up together in surprise.

"You know him?" she said.

"Yes, a little. He's a Winterhaven boy."

"And do you know why he should have done this?" asked the doctor.

"I don't, unless it was because he lost his position, and was terribly discouraged."

He spoke with some embarrassment.

"I saw him yesterday, and he told me he was at his wits' end. He—in fact he's had a long run of bad luck."

"A man deserves bad luck who doesn't know the difference between his trachea and his jugular artery. He's a blamed fool!" growled the still kneeling doctor, whose hands were busy.

"Here, Mr. Lenox, help me to carry this fellow to the carriage and we'll get him into a hospital. It's the business of us unfortunate doctors to force people to stay in the world when they don't want to, and the world hasn't any use for them."

"Doctor Norris, you're a brute!" said Miss Windsor vehemently.

"We're a set of pretty benevolent brutes, after all,

my dear young lady," the doctor answered with an unruffled grin, as he bent his back to the load.

"Now then, steady. Here he goes. Lenox, I'm afraid you'll have to ride outside with the driver to give this fellow more room."

"Thank you, I think I can strike a car somewhere within walking distance, if Miss Windsor will be good enough to direct me. If you are going to a hospital, you won't need me, and I shall be more useful off your load than on it, shall I not?" Lenox answered, with the ready excuse a man always finds for doing the thing he wills.

So the carriage rolled away, and the gathered women returned to the near-by house, and Lenox stood for an inestimable moment alone with Miss Windsor.

The sky hung over them bluer than it had ever been before in the history of the world, and the glory of autumn, still too luxuriant and abundant to be mindful of coming death, made the golden setting that held this gem of a girl.

He felt the pressure of her foot in his hand as he helped her to mount; he smoothed a friendly wrinkle from her habit, and still she lingered while his hand stroked the glossy neck of the mare that had the privilege of carrying her.

"I was so much interested in that poor wretch that I forgot to be surprised that it should be you who came. How did it happen?" she asked.

"I was in Mr. Holton's office," he replied, "and as he was very busy, he was good enough to let me take his place."

"You seem destined to come to my rescue nowadays."

"It is a gentle office."

"If you intend making a business of knight-errantry, I wish you would do it with more manner. I refuse to accept you as my permanent champion unless you assume some pomp and circumstance. I want you to arrive with prancing steed, full armor, big plumes, instead of wearing tweeds and rushing up with a livery-stable hack."

"I apologize for my inadvertence. Next time you need a special rescuer, if you will kindly give me a few hours' warning, I'll astonish you by my get-up. Meanwhile," he ventured with an air of seriousness, "will you kindly advance your sleeve as a token which your true knight may wear?"

"Thank you, I decline to cut off my sleeve until I get home. St. Etienne's population might not understand."

"Then perhaps your glove will do as well."

"Here it is," she said. "Let it be on your helm—not a soft hat, mind—when I next summon you. Mr. Lenox, how silly you are! It must be your fault that I am so frivolous."

"Then you owe me most profound gratitude," he replied. "One can hardly have too much caper sauce to life."

"Do you think so?"

"I have no doubts on that score. Surely you like to be frivolous!"

"I like it," she admitted, "but my mentor tells me that is because I am an unregenerated young person."

"She is an unhealthy adviser then. Only when you're unmitigatedly light-hearted may you be assured that your body and soul are perfectly well."

She looked at him fixedly for an instant, without answering, but a quick movement made him afraid that she was about to start, and he hastily anticipated that catastrophe.

"Miss Windsor, to-morrow I am to go away for a month's trip. May I call this evening to bid you good-by and to assure myself that you are not wholly done up by to-day's adventure?" He looked at her eagerly.

"I can reassure you on that point at once. I'm quite myself already."

"Which is the best thing it is possible to be," he said.

She flushed slightly, but went on.

"And I am going to be well enough to keep a dinner engagement, and therefore not to be at home this evening."

The color came a little more to her face as she saw his look of disappointment, and she added gently:

"Let me show you the way to your car line. If you aren't too proud to walk at my side, I'll keep my horse back, and we can have our farewell call here and now."

"With all my heart."

"Tell me about this man, Repburn. Was it—was it my father from whose employ he was discharged?"

"Yes."

"I thought so from your embarrassment."

She fingered the end of her tiny whip nervously and her face clouded.

"Doesn't it seem cruel that one human being should have the power to make the life of another intolerable?" she said.

Lenox's hand involuntarily traveled toward the neck of the mare, and her troubled eyes met his.

"It's pitiful, perhaps, but you mustn't blame your father, because the man was utterly incompetent, and



SHE LOOKED AT HIM FIXEELY FOR AN INSTANT.—See page 123

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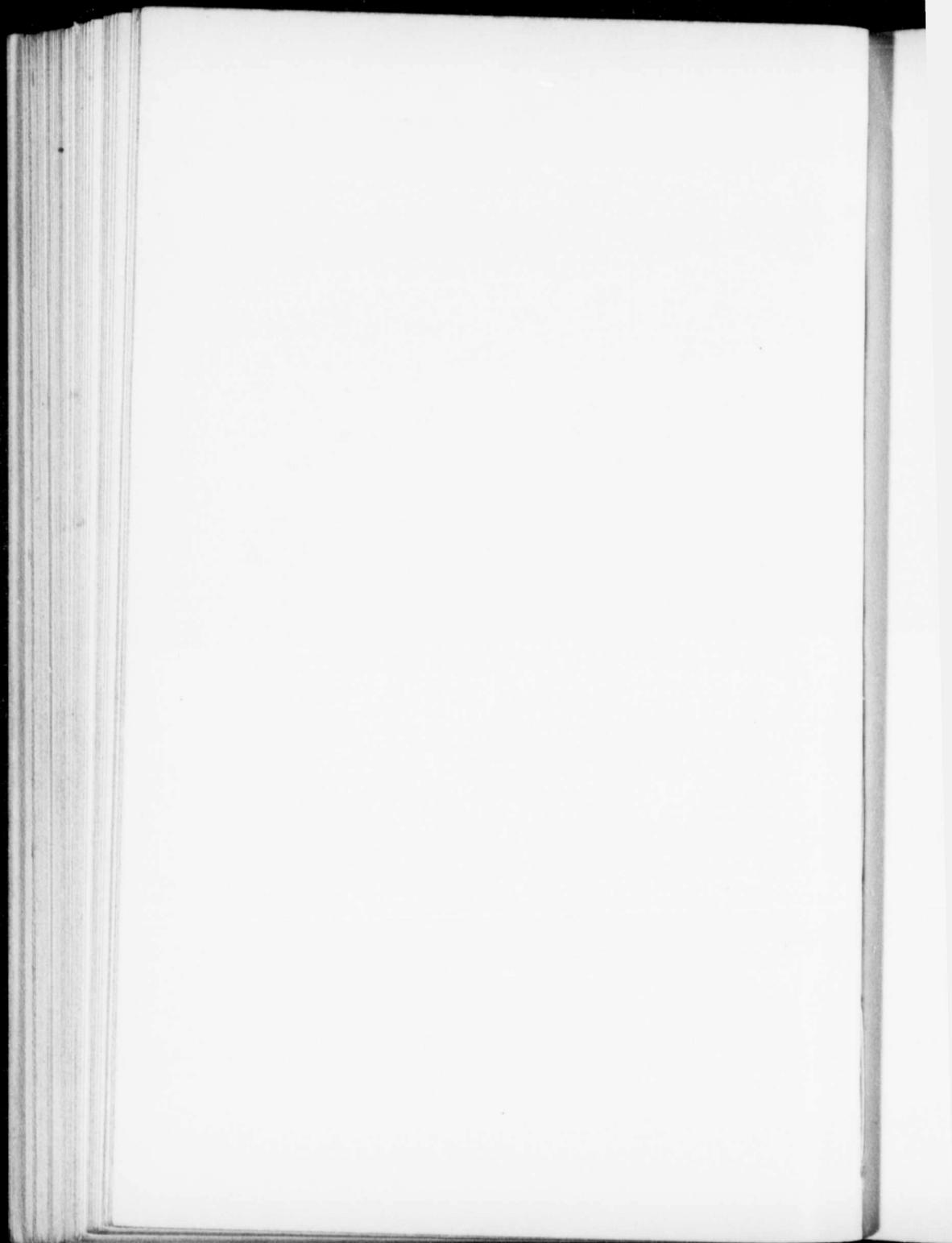
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besides that too much of a coward to conquer his own fate."

"Oh, it isn't so easy as all that, to dismiss the inequalities of life. It makes me feel wicked to be looking hopefully forward, when here right beside me is a man who is wretched enough to choose death. Imagine what that means!"

She shivered.

"Well, even suicide may have its humorous aspect, especially where, as in Repburn's case, it fails to connect. Will you allow me, Miss Windsor, to justify your father in your eyes? I should like you hear the tragedy of Henry Repburn's bad luck, as I learned it from his own eloquent tongue last evening."

He watched the care-worn expression slip from her face and the dimple appear and disappear as his story went on.

"Isn't it a pity," he said, "that there was no photographer at hand to catch your father's face when Mr. Kemyss told him of the Rugg episode? I think it must have been at the tail end of the hearing that I saw Mr. Windsor's back. Even that was expressive. Of course I didn't know him then, but it gave me the shivers."

"And do you think you *do* know him now?"

"I am sure of one thing, Miss Windsor, and that

is that it was worth my while to come to St. Etienne just to know him as well as I do. I had read of such men and dreamed of them, but I never had a chance to meet one. I'm glad to have seen him while I'm young enough to have it influence me."

Her eyes kindled a little and she said:

"I wish you'd tell me why you feel that way."

"It's pretty difficult to explain. But he makes me feel that life is made hard on purpose to strengthen the arm that conquers it."

"Yes, that is dad," she said.

"I want to feel the same way, before I begin, and all the way through," he said; "and your father is a convincing argument."

"I'm glad you see into him. There are so many people who don't. Sometimes it hurts me."

She glowed and made the young man looking up at her glow too.

"What are you to do? I infer that you are to work for dad," she asked.

"Yes," and he flushed a little. "Perhaps you won't be so ready to have me wearing your glove as I enter the lists, when you know of my commonplace doom. Your father is going to make a drummer of me, you see."

"Not really."

"Yes, he's going to send me out into the country tomorrow to get trade."

"You're certainly not the type that one reads about in the funny papers," she said dubiously. "I can't imagine you making fat jokes. Please don't."

"No doubt, by the time I come back, I shall be an excellent representative. But perhaps the newspaper drummer isn't any truer than the newspaper Uncle Sam."

"And I should think drumming—if that's what you call it—would be very hard work."

"Come, after what we've just said, you don't consider that a drawback, do you? Your true American likes things all the better because they're hard. Did you ever notice that even the children coasting in winter despise a perfectly smooth hill to slide down? They elaborately build bumps out of snow, in order to give themselves the pleasure of some rough handling. I shouldn't want your father to think me incapable of anything but the easiest work, so you can't frighten me that way. There are only two things I'm afraid of."

"And what are they?" She looked at him closely.

"One is that you are so analytic that you will pick me all to pieces. I don't want to be murdered and dissected in your opinion."

"Well, then, I'll promise to think about you as a whole. What's the other thing?"

"The other is the stars out here. When I'm out alone at night, I'm afraid that something has gone wrong in the celestial region, they're so big."

"They *are* big here. I am always astonished afresh every time I go away and come back. That oughtn't to frighten you. Wherever the atmosphere—mental or material—is as clear as it is in St. Etienne and you, Mr. Lenox, the stars loom large. Insight and oversight are clear, you know."

He looked a little silly, and seeing that he liked a bit of flattery as well as the next man, a ripple of amusement passed through her.

"Now here is your car line, and I must say good-bye. I hope your trip will be both pleasant and successful. When you come back you must tell me all about it, and I shall have a laurel wreath ready to crown my own knightly drummer victorious over all other drummers. Really, Mr. Lenox, I shan't dare to say such pleasant things to you when you do come back. You don't know how idiotic it makes you look." She laughed exultantly at his confusion.

"And please don't forget that you are to have your first dance in St. Etienne with me!"

She leaned down and gave him her hand, nodded

with friendly emphasis, and was gone. He watched with lifted hat as she appeared and disappeared and flashed out again through the trees that edged the lake-shore drive, but she did not look back.

"She's just that mixture of tease and angel that keeps a man stirred up and contented at the same time," he said to himself.

But though her eyes did not turn, her thoughts did.

"What a different type from Cyril!" she said to herself. "I wonder which I like best. This man is fresh and sane and healthy. I wonder if it is possible to be healthy and think about health at the same time. Perhaps Jean is wrong. At any rate she seems to keep me turned inside out, and examining my internal mechanism; and, after all, that isn't the natural way of wearing one's mental anatomy."

In the evening, Lenox found his way to Doctor Norris to commission him, a little awkwardly, with a missive for Repburn. The physician looked quizzically at the fat envelope.

"Is the fellow a friend of yours?" he asked, rather abruptly.

"Not exactly that," Lenox laughed. "But he needs at least the semblance of friendship. I don't want him to get well only to return to the same hopeless mood. He's had a long run of ill-luck, and he's destitute."

"Young man, if 'fail' is to be left out of the bright lexicon of youth, you'll have to leave out 'luck' too."

"Well, make the dictionary to suit yourself, but give him my letter."

"I hope it isn't much," said the doctor grimly.

"You needn't be afraid. 'Much' would be an impossibility to me," said the young man, smiling.

CHAPTER IX

LOVE LAUGHS

After leaving Miss Windsor, Mr. Kemyss hurried down the hill, then half-way back again, a second time down, and again up in haste, at the dictation now of cowardice, now of resolve. At last resolution had its way.

He found Mrs. Lyell sitting alone with a volume of Keats lying open in her lap.

"Cyril!" she said, putting out her hand without rising. "How delicious of you to come at this time of day, and how unexpected!" He took her hand, held it apathetically, then stooped and kissed it, because he knew she would expect it, and he always lived up to the standard of what other people expected of him.

"I had to come. I couldn't stay away," he said.

"Come and sit down then," she said. "Take this big chair by the fire. I am just in the mood to be very comfortable, and I hope you are. I have been longing for you. Did you know it, that you came?"

"*Comfortable!*" he thought.

"Silence is the symbol of harmony," she said to herself. But it may last too long. She looked up with a start.

"Why are you so ill at ease, Cyril? You are in distress. Tell me."

She leaned forward eagerly, and then drew back, annoyed at the interruption as the maid brought her a letter.

"It's—it's a note from Ned," she said faintly; "I won't look at it. I won't think of it now. Cyril, do sit over here; one can't be confidential at long range."

But he did not move.

"Tell me what is the matter."

"That is the matter," he said, pointing at the letter which she still held. "I am in torture. I've been in torture ever since I left you last night."

"About Ned?"

"About you and your husband. After all, he is your husband."

"Only in a limited sense, as you told me last evening," she said with abominable cheerfulness.

"I know it. I was crazy. I could not remember anything in the world except you and my love for you. Nothing else seemed real."

"Is anything else real?" She leaned forward once more and sat looking at him fixedly.

"Yes, Jean. For you and me, duty is more imperative than happiness."

"But you told me—"

"Never mind what I told you. I tell you I had lost my reason. Since then I have done nothing but think. It isn't easy to say this, and I would to God I didn't have to, but we have got to face conditions as they are; and the fact is you are the wife of another man, and I beg your pardon for speaking to you as I did last night."

She grew very pale and drew a long breath, as if gathering her strength.

"Cyril, these are only the words of other people that you are speaking. *Then*, you spoke spontaneously, your own emotions. What is my marriage to such as us? You and I have reached a point where the things that are mere words, without any reality behind them, are hardly worth considering. We want only that which is vital. As I am not married in spirit, I do not care a straw for the marriage bond of form. I do not care what the world calls it. You see I speak frankly, because last night you broke down all the barriers between us. Now that we both understand things, let us both lay reserve aside."

"I mean to," he answered desperately. "You don't understand at all yet, Jean. It is true, what I told you

last night, that I love you, but the things we both forgot are true also. I wish I had not spoken. It would have been better for me to have suffered alone and left you in ignorance. As it is, love can bring nothing but suffering to both of us."

"Is this what you came to say?"

"Look what would happen if even a whisper of our relations got abroad. Mr. Windsor wouldn't have me in his employ for a moment, and the mere question of bread and butter would not be an easy one. We should be outcasts."

"And what of that?" She did not look at him, but her eyes glowed with some heroic vision. He grew desperate.

"Well, to be an outcast, as I tell you, means more than obloquy, though heaven knows that is unendurable. It means starvation. I have an idea that love and hunger are in inverse ratio, as even you would find. I will not subject you to this."

"You do not force me to it. I freely choose it—for your sake." Her face was still radiant. "This is your answer, Cyril."

He burst out: "Then you compel me to say that you shall not subject me to obloquy. See here, I don't want to be brutal, Jean, but I have had a hard time beginning life, and now at last I have a good business



SHE LOOKED AT HIM AT LAST WITH BIG, STARTLED EYES.—See page 125



opportunity and a social position. I can't afford to throw them away for an impulse. Even if you don't care for such things yourself, if you love me, you will consider me."

She looked at him at last, with big startled eyes.

"We must steer our course in such a way that our love shall not violate public proprieties," he went on.

"What is it that you *do* want? You have been beating about the bush, Cyril. Speak plainly."

"I love you, you know," he spoke awkwardly. "Let me come here as your friend, if you will. Let no one but ourselves dream that there is between us anything sweeter."

"Sweeter!" she said, and there was a tone of rising scorn in her voice. "And I am to remain a wife! I suppose you may with equal propriety become a husband?"

"Perhaps; why not?" It was a relief to have her take it so quietly.

"And our love is to become an intrigue?" she went on.

"You need never call love by such a name."

"Cyril Kemyss," she said, leaning forward, her eyes burning with excitement, "I could throw everything to the winds. I could suffer starvation and cold; I could suffer excommunication and glory in it, if I had

love, such love as you have made me dream of—a passion that should satisfy my soul, no matter what miseries my body suffered. Such love might not be what the world calls honorable, but it would at least be honest. But one thing I will not do. I will not pretend to be Ned's wife, and be in thought, if not in deed, your mistress. I will not belong to one in public, and to the other in secret."

There was a tense silence for a moment, and she added: "I care little for the world's estimate of me; but I care much for my own sense of integrity."

"Very well, then," he said stiffly; "since you put the alternative before me, I, on my part, will not risk scandal, or even gossip. My reputation means a good deal to me, and yours ought to to you. Pleasure is only for a day. One's good name is valuable for a lifetime."

"And you call love the pleasure of a day?"

"Well, it belongs to youth and hot blood. You can't expect passion to last when they are gone."

"Then I want no love of yours, Cyril Kemyss. That is not my kind." He heaved a sigh of relief.

"What an escape I have had from a thing like you!" she went on, in spite of her evident emotion speaking calmly and firmly. "Last night I thanked you for opening my eyes. Now I have to thank you for open-

ing them still wider. One may learn something from everything that crawls. Last night you called my husband a coward. Perhaps he is. But you are both a coward and a sneak."

She had risen now, and she made a swift motion with her foot as though pushing something on the floor. He took a step toward her when she called him a coward, but changed his mind.

"You will understand me better sometime," he said in his even tone. "You will learn that, of us two, I am the braver, because I have the heroism to hold myself to the right."

"Oh, I read you now through and through. You worshiper of the god 'Reputation', go!"

"Most people would think you and I had no business to be talking about gods, after our ungodly self-revelation," he said sneeringly. Her eyes dilated.

"No," she said; "because most people worship this same god of yours, Convention, Reputation, whatever you call it, and they think his name too awful to be taken in vain by infidels who would live according to light and not according to rule. Your god, too, poor Cyril! Your god, too. I can see you now. Last night's vision was a dream of a hashish den."

He rose abruptly, scorning his own miserable pose, and yet immensely relieved to have this over. He had

half feared that he might turn traitor to his resolve when he met her face to face. He congratulated himself on his own heroism, and half believed that he was actually sacrificing himself to duty.

"Good-by, Eugenia," he said. "You have yet to learn the first lesson of love. Your love is utterly selfish."

"You are mistaken," she answered. "I haven't any love. Go!"

Left alone, Mrs. Lyell subsided into her chair and stared at the crumbling logs of the fire. Poor Keats lay with his crumpled leaves face downward on the floor, like the dreamer that he was. At first she shook with confused feelings, all of them numb, but at last thought began to take on coherence.

"Only one day. Only one day, I lived, and I am never to live again. To think that the craving for love was so strong in me, that at the first touch, even of such a one as he, it kindled to a flame. And I never knew it. How could so vital a thing lie there unguessed? To-day he seemed a different creature. The sunlight was pitiless on him. He needed midnight and roses and dim lamps to seem real. I could read his littleness so plainly. And yet here in me is that dreadful monster to which he has given birth. Hereafter, all my life, I am to be hungry for such love as

I thought he could give me, and I am never to have it. Always hungry!"

Absent-mindedly she tore open the envelope that lay crushed in her hand. Her husband always sent her these daily bulletins when he was away on his trips, and half the time she did not trouble to read them through. They were as commonplace as their writer. She stared now at the lines that told of his whereabouts with a strange sense of the unreality of all experience. This thing and that thing and the other thing happen to us, and they are all meaningless. People touch the outer rim of life, but I remain alone, and solitude is the most dreadful of fates.

Suddenly the humiliation of being the plaything of such a man as Kemyss swept over her, and she bowed her head and moaned in impotent fury, while through her there raged such storms as had never before troubled her serene self-satisfaction.

CHAPTER X

A FRIEND

October was still in its prime, warm and hazy with morning, when Lenox boarded the train bound for the Northwest, and walked through car after car of fusty, ill-smelling people who bore every evidence of having spent the night in close quarters and positions of discomfort. He pushed past the two frowzy young women occupying two seats apiece, past the heaped peanut shells and orange peelings of a family group, and found at last what he looked for—a seat on the left side, simply that, as the train steamed out of the station, he might catch, between the freight cars, elevators and warehouses that lined its unlovely way, a glimpse of the hillside far beyond, and of the big gray stone house that had the honor to shelter her. He grinned sardonically, with full appreciation of his own folly as he craned his head to see it. Just a gray streak—and it was gone again. He straightened himself back in his chair.

With a mixture of delight and astonishment that

so wonderful a thing could have taken possession of him so suddenly, he kept repeating it to himself over and over, "I love her! I love her!"

"I used to think Shakespeare rather overdid the business in the *Romeo and Juliet* affair, but I dare say there was the same variety of lunatics loose in the streets of Verona that is riding around in dirty plush seats in the Northwest to-day. Wise or unwise, I don't mean to give it up. It's the biggest possession I've ever had. Vera,—Vera,—Vera,—," he repeated the name in the luxury of his private thoughts. Then he thrust his hands deep into the recesses of his trousers pockets, because a man must have some outlet for nervous energy.

"By the spirit of the Pilgrim Fathers, and as I am a westerner, I will not begin by confessing myself beaten by any private secretary that walks. I'll do that business, and I'll do it well, and I'll do it in five weeks if I have to haul the farmers out of bed and work them night as well as day." He spoke almost aloud. A sudden sense of exultant power ran down his spine. He felt like a war-horse going out to battle. It should be a battle for love, for success, for all that makes young life. The world became picturesque and vivid with interest.

A solitary railroad ride, when it lives up to its ideal,

is a resting spot in our world of rush. Shut off from duties past and duties to come, with no responsibilities knocking at the gateway of the brain, it is easy to fall into the serene and blessed mood when one loafs and invites the soul. The world, from the flying window, is indeed a fleeting show. One has time to think things over, to readjust the relations, put the few important affairs of life into a pile by themselves, and consign the unimportant majority to the ash-heap which is their eternal doom.

But Lenox's temper, just now, was not of this self-indulgent kind. The tingling of his energies forbade such delicious obliviousness of time and space. His senses kindled to keener activity; and he turned from his introspection to nature with a delicious freshness of appreciation.

The train was winding up the river, and the landscape unfolded itself in a long pennant before him, captivating, not as hill country captivates, with none of the snap and tang of New England, but with a gently rolling richness of its own. The Father of Waters, blue as the boasted Mediterranean, possesses here a certain dignity which he loses when he gets down among the poor whites and colored populations of the South. The one lovely thing that perpetuates the memory of the red man—Indian summer, painted

as no impressionist ever dared, a whirling vision of color—the pale yellow of poplars, the dull red-orange of oaks, the flame of the scarlet sumach, with gleams of particolored birch and maple and beech, piled in careless and impossible harmony. Like an accent, man's handiwork helped nature's. The rich brown of freshly plowed land on the hillsides, the yellow stubble and green pasture, the stooked corn where golden cannon balls of pumpkins glowed in consciousness of their own mellowness, interrupted the woodland.

Here was the open meadow, with its racing shadows and lights. Goldenrod, windswept and nodding, already turned to a pale shadow of itself, perhaps in envy of the coreopsis, whose splendor it had never rivaled. An errant Scotch thistle shook his purple bonnet and spiky coat of mail, and the wild grasses reared strong and high their dainty heads, that one of these days they might raise their seeds above the winter's snows, and provide a repast for the wandering snow-birds and hungry cotton-tails. Down close to the ground lay the seed-vessels of wild buckwheat, a store for the tiny mouse who would have his private tunnels under the snow, two feet below the prowling fox who would be on the lookout for such small gentry.

Lenox looked out and glowed with the beauty of it, with his youth and his new-found purpose. "This is

my home now!" he said to himself. He turned back to his fellow men. The day was growing warm; and, after the well known principle of physics, the people around him seemed to expand under the influence of heat, until they quite filled the car. One of the frowzy girls had revived and was audibly chewing gum. A baby at the other end was low in his mind and high in his register. Across the aisle a fat red man with a stubbly scarlet beard had taken off his collar for comfort in his altercation with a thin neck-tieless seatmate.

"Awh, don't give us any more of your western lies!" said the tieless one.

"Lies! Them ain't lies. I tell you the biggest yarns you can tell out here ain't lies. They're only prophecies. You believe in the spirit of prophecy, don't you?"

"All men are not equal," said Lenox to himself. "It would take a gallon of *eau de Cologne* to make some of us equal."

Preferring the landscape of his new domicile to his neighbors, he stared out of the window again and saw, around a curve, the engine of his own train, a big powerful locomotive seemingly conscious of its own strength and the ease with which it whisked the fast mail away northwestward. Parallel with the rail-

way ran a wagon road, along which painfully toiled a threshing engine, pulling its "separator" and water-tank. It lay far below the grade of the railroad, a puny thing compared with the great, rushing, iron horse; but it was a well-bred engine, and evidently understood the courtesies of the road, for, with a tiny jet of steam from its whistle, its thin voice piped out a greeting, "Clear track to you, brother!" To which the great locomotive responded with a mighty shriek, "Smooth be thy way, little one!" And the sun shone brighter, hearing the cheerful greeting between those of high and low estate. Lenox, on the dirty plush seat, felt a surging sense of the democracy which was his heritage.

"Goin' far?" The red man across the aisle was leaning toward him.

"To Dakota," Frank answered pleasantly.

"Stranger in these parts?" asked the friendly soul.

"New-comer," corrected Frank.

"That's better. Shows you mean to stay. And we all want you. Help out the next census. Now let me give you a pointer. Don't you smoke bad cigars, nor ruin your constitution with poor whisky; but learn Swede and vote the Republican ticket, and in time we'll be proud of you, my son."

Frank made no answer.

"Say, all a man wants to succeed out here is horse sense. Horse sense. You want to adapt yourself to circumstances. Look at me!"

He spoke very loud, evidently desiring the attention of the whole car. "I came out here, just six years ago, sir, without a penny, and now I've got a tidy bank account and own my own house."

Frank restrained a lawless impulse to ask him whether the house contained a bath-room. After all, a snub was not the fitting answer to effervescent friendliness.

"I have got the goods to suit every complexion. I go on the road with two or three things, and every one of them a seller. Look at these Bibles, now, illustrated with nigger angels. I tell you, sir, every coon in the Northwest is a customer. No discount. That's only one of my winners. Now, lemme show you—"

The train slowed up at a station, and a loosely built man with the appearance of a gentleman came down the aisle, evidently looking for the least objectionable spot to sit in. He chose the other half of Lenox's seat, produced a magazine, and shut off the collarless overtures from across the way.

There was an hour's silence; then his neighbor laid an open page on Frank's knee.

"Interesting article, that," he said quietly.

"Thank you; the country is new to me, and I don't care about reading while I can see a bit of it."

"Like to catch men in the act of westward hoeing?" The stranger nodded gravely at a passing glimpse of a farmer putting his strawberry bed to bed for the coming winter.

Frank laughed and turned to survey the other's face, an attractive and wholesome face, but with the self-depreciatory look of a man who had been hit by the world, and never quite recovered from the blow.

"The river is certainly worth looking at. Though it isn't so big as it is in the South, it is more picturesque. It gets brown instead of blue lower down."

"Why is that?" asked the tenderfoot.

"I don't know, unless it's the corrupting influence of the muddy Missouri, which is enough after they come together, to blacken even these waters."

"But why should the Missouri be dirty when the Mississippi is clear?"

"I have always supposed," answered the stranger solemnly, "that it was because the cow-boys washed in it."

"Oh, I see." Frank meditated a few moments. "But then, why aren't the cow-boys clean, if they wash so thoroughly? I've heard that they were not an immaculate tribe, at least in the old days."

"They aren't. How could they be, washing in such a dirty river?"

This was a poser. Frank could only laugh his answer.

The man promised well.

"Everything interests me out here; it seems so big." He gave himself a stretch as if he, too, would like to grow.

"The country's big, but the people aren't," the other man answered glumly. "Men of little minds are in the majority everywhere, my friend. We're only younger, not larger. Perhaps we have neither the balance—nor the sin—of the East."

"Are you going far up the line?"

"A couple of hundred miles."

"Then we shall be companions for a time."

"Dinner is now ready in the dining-car. First call for dinner!" yelled a porter, walking down the aisle.

"Suppose we go in and get something to eat?"

"Meals on the train are goblins damned, but I'll go you," returned the stranger.

Frank jumped at the chance of having a table-companion and lingering over his meal, instead of stoking from the mere instinct of self-preservation.

On the principle that anything is fun at sea, so anything moderately human will do to talk to on a train.

Moreover, food loosens a man's tongue, even if it be the cinder-bedecorated food of a "diner." Long before the meal was over, the stranger knew that Lenox was making his maiden trip on behalf of one of Windsor's minor concerns, and Frank knew that the other was on a similar errand for another firm. But there was this difference, that the one journeyed in the hope of better things to come, and the other journeyed in the sodden way of a man who has been doing the same work for years and who sees no rosy clouds on his horizon.

"It's a miserable life, spent mostly in waiting for delayed trains, with brief intervals of intense activity scattered here and there." Thus the older man summarized the situation; but the two talked on, talked business to the monotonous rhythmic rolling of the wheels. Lenox asked a hundred questions that he had been half ashamed to put either to the cynical Kemyss or the preoccupied Holton, and his companion answered with good-natured insight, unfolding a world of new interests. Each was unconsciously revealing himself to the other; the elder looked at the clean face of the young one, feeling his integrity, envying his mixture of boyishness and manliness, and liking him; the younger fumbled with the question of why this man, who showed human qualities, good sense, and

even a bit of philosophy now and again, should convey such a pitiful sense of failure. Though his nose was what the botanists call indeterminate, the chin was strong enough. Frank's god just now was "Success." What was success? What must one have to gain it? And why had the other man failed? "Hustle" seemed to be the westerner's watchword; yet hustling had not availed him, but had left him, after years of energetic drudgery, still "a man on the road."

He certainly was not a waster of time.

"If you get on a train that lives up to its name of accommodation, and lingers puffingly at the station while you do your business and get back, you're all right," said the man of experience; "but usually you drop from the platform of an express before it fairly stops, interview a prosperous farmer or two, measure an elevator that belongs to your company, or address a meeting of local celebrities who generally can't talk English well enough to answer you back, so they have to listen to your oratory. Then you seize a hasty lunch, notice that the freight train which followed in the wake of the passenger has arrived and is about to depart, cram a few fried oysters that are too hot to be eaten in haste into an envelope in your pocket, to be devoured later in the caboose, and make a sprint for it. You catch on just as the train is beginning to make

speed, and so on to the next station, where you do it over again."

"I don't see how you get time to do so much between trains," Frank found himself saying in reply to the description of his companion's rushing methods.

"Time! You don't expect to have time given to you on this planet, do you? Do it anyway! After all, when is there any time? Not even in infancy, when it is necessary to have ten or twelve meals daily, or later when the absorbing manufacture of mud-pies gives way only to the pursuit of gingerbread; certainly not in one's school-days when one is beset by a complication of measles and whooping cough, alternating with cube root; and if any fellow thinks four years of college life supply unlimited leisure—why, let him try it—that's all. Yes, it's a voluminous world, and even here in the primeval west, where man might be supposed to live in aboriginal simplicity, civilization is more or less complex. The world is a great deal with us, and the flesh and the devil are hourly expected by the Chicago express. There is 'muchness' out here—not the kind that the dormouse found at the bottom of the treacle well, but the kind that infests this century."

"So we shall have to leave out the element of time?"

"Yes, sir, we've got a long row to hoe, and it's got to be done in no time. Did you ever think that we've

got to do in fifty years, out in a new community like this, what older places have taken two to five hundred years about? I sometimes envy the Indian gentlemen, since deceased, who lived about here in the blessed days before there was any wheat grown in Minnesota. Did you happen to notice them moving any houses while you were in St. Etienne?"

"Yes."

"That's part of it. The very homes are imbued with the western spirit of unrest, which makes them unwilling to endure the dreary monotony of staying in the spot where they are built."

"You aren't quite fair. They are only being removed because they occupy valuable ground, and must give way to something better."

"Put it any way you like. But you want to go slow if you can, for the longer you live here the greater your impetus will come to be."

"Well, I was just going to remind you that we've been having a very leisurely day on this train," said Lenox. "But I suppose you would say that we've been going along at a strenuous pace, something less than fifty miles an hour, not to mention the thousand miles an hour the earth is making on its axis, and the thousand-miles-a-minute waltz around the sun, and the thousand-miles-a-second rush in the orbit of the solar

system. How the old concern is sliding to its bases on the home runs, when you come to think of it! It's a swift place."

"Don't! I'm a little car-sick already."

"I rather like the pace. It's glorious to get out and see things."

"It might be," said the stranger, with a somber look coming into his face, as if he were stabbing himself with some inner misery of his own. "It might be, if one could see the world without taking oneself along. The worst about traveling is the eternal presence of your own personality."

"What do you mean by that?" Frank felt himself growing interested in what his companion had to say.

"Why, see here, I knew a man once who couldn't find anything to enjoy during a winter in Italy, because he couldn't get buckwheat cakes for breakfast. That's what I mean. It's so with everything and everybody. Our deepest experiences take the mold of ourselves, and so we miss completeness. I dream of some perfection in music, in art, in poetry, even in love; and when the time comes for that ideal thing to touch my life, my own personality pops up and lays its disfiguring hand on the faultless vision. All I get out of it is a caricature of myself. I always stand between my soul and the ideal."

He sat silent a moment, and then shook himself as if to forget it.

"I wish I were as young as you, and could do it over again," he said. "How do you like Mr. Windsor?"

"He's fine. He's like an old oak-tree!"

"Let me see, Kemyss is in that firm too, isn't he? What do you think of him?"

"I think I only need to know his opinion on any subject to adopt the opposite," said Frank.

"You're all right. I'm with you there, too. He's a ladies' man."

"I hope not. I've too much esteem for women to think so."

"Well, it's not their fault that they don't read character very well. They don't see enough of the world to know the difference between a man's pose and what he is. And even Mr. Windsor seems to like Kemyss, though that is largely a matter of tradition which transfers the affection for the father to the son; but perhaps you and I are mistaken. I haven't any right to be asking you such personal questions."

Frank flushed shamefacedly.

"I had forgotten that we are comparative strangers," he said. "Your comments on life have transformed to-day's journey into a sort of essay of Elia."

"Look," said the other; "that's Lake Orono we're

passing. The wind is getting up and the nymphs and mer-gentlemen are doing a rushing soda-water business along the shore. That's the nearest to surf you'll find in these unsalted longitudes."

The glory of midday had slipped into the level lights and shadows of afternoon. The stranger, now a stranger no longer, pointed at the whirling landscape that they had forgotten, as they had forgotten the human atoms in the car.

"By the same token that is the last of Minnesota's ten thousand lakes. We are getting to the prairies, and I shall soon be leaving you to your own devices in a land where never a tree or shrub belittles the West for many a mile. You'll find it quite large enough to suit even your expansive tastes; but I question whether you'll find a big man in every village, unless you are wise enough to take one with you. But here we part. The next station is Venice, my lad."

Frank laughed, and the other man looked at him in astonishment. It had ceased to be funny to him to think of Venice on a boundless prairie.

"The West, as you remarked with singular originality, is extensive," he said. "We have to use up all the old names, and invent a lot of new ones in order to have enough to go round. So there you are!"

"Yes, but that does not make it the less ridiculous."

"See here! It does not become a boy from Maine, with Essiqualsagook and Anasagunticook still sounding in his ears, to make fun of any of our Minnesota names."

"I hope we shall meet again," said Frank, putting out his hand. "My name is Lenox."

"I shall certainly look you up in St. Etienne," replied the other, clasping Frank's hand warmly. "Meanwhile good luck to you. My name is Lyell."

"Ned Lyell?" The words seemed to slip out, with all that Windsor had told him crowding memory behind them.

Lyell looked at him quizzically. "I'm glad my name is a household word," he said. "You seem very familiar with it."

"I met your wife a few nights ago at Mr. Windsor's," Frank explained.

There was no apparent reason for the little constraint that fell on both of them.

"Ah?"—and Lyell turned about to gather up his bag and umbrella. Frank followed him out to the platform, and looked at the three elevators, seven saloons, two dingy hotels and water-tank that constituted Venice.

"Is this the Grand Canal?" he shouted, pointing to the dirty ditch that skirted the track. Lyell gave him

a friendly nod and waved his hand by way of farewell,
but Frank saw that he looked tired and depressed.

CHAPTER XI

THE MAKING OF A DRUMMER

With a fine disregard for geographic probabilities, the station beyond Venice proved to be Mexico, and here Lenox made his *début* on business life.

If one is but young enough, even the begging of grain from Swede farmers looks like a roseate occupation. Lenox's budding westernism was like the enthusiasm of a new convert; but in spite of this, Mexico looked to him a discouraging place. Twilight was depressing the world. The train shrieked away into the shadows. The little wooden platform presented pitfalls in the shape of loosening boards that sprang up at one end when his stalwart foot was placed on the other. Not a tree was visible; but an iron pipe, sticking its ugly nozzle from under the sidewalk, disgorged water from some unknown depth into the gutter, down which it ran, providing a bath for a flock of dirty and belated ducks before it lost itself in mother earth. A sign-post, with an outstretched finger, sug-

gested that it was a good thing to move on and added the further information, "Fillmore St."

Lenox could not refrain from smiling to himself at the implied pun, the name seemed so apt.

The Mexico Hotel rose a hundred feet away, a barn-like building with a false front that stuck up half a story above its actual roof in a transparent makeshift at importance. Lenox had in his note-book the name of one Lars Hagenon, a gentleman quite unrelated to the illustrious Porsena of Clusium, but the manager of the Mexico Farmers' Elevator Company, and a person from whom it was desirable that he should solicit business. He sought the hotel in search of food and information.

The outer office of the hotel was full of ill-smelling threshers, gathered from all quarters to share in the labors and returns of the great harvest fields, and after weeks of drudgery and isolation from the temptations of the lively city to pour out the whole of their hoarded earnings in a single night of orgy. As yet that joyous time was not come. The resources of Mexico were unequal to affording an adequate outlet to uncivilized young blood; and they contented themselves with chewing tobacco and decorating the floor. But perhaps, after the fashion of the laboring man of romance, they were innate gentlemen. At any rate

when one inadvertently stepped on Frank's toes, he said, "Excuse me!"

Escaping from their society, Lenox penetrated to an inner room, about five feet by ten, where an old man rocked feebly in an ancient chair whose half-dozen upright spokes, since the head-board was gone, stuck into his neck. A large blackboard in the back wall bore the mystic characters, "Corn 5.00, Hay 6.25, Pork 6.50." Except for this decoration and a tiny counter with a few boxes of cigars, the room was empty and inhospitable.

The old man continued his futile rocking, and Frank looked helplessly around.

"Can I get a room here?" he asked at last.

"Hay?" said the old man loudly, and stopped his rhythmic motion.

Frank repeated his question fortissimo. He found himself seized by the collar, whirled around until his face was in full light, and scrutinized at six-inch range.

"Well, have you classified me?" he asked at length, much amused.

"Yip, I guess so. You want a room to yourself. I dunno whether there is one or whether you'll have to share up with some one else."

"Not with a thresher, on your life!" said Frank.

But the old man pushed the rocking chair toward him, and made off in silence. Sitting gingerly on the front edge of the chair, Frank absently picked up the sole representative of literature, a green-covered cookbook in whose blank-paged latter end additional wisdom had been inserted in a scrawling feminine hand. Automatically he read the recipes for gingerbread, throat wash for diphtheria, dandruff cure and snow cake, and then the old man came back. After he had learned that the farm of Lars Hagenson was three miles "cross prairie," Frank was glad to retire to a stuffy bedroom, smelling of wall-paper paste, to wash his be-cindered face and polish it with a towel of the rough variety that needs no washing but is refolded for each succeeding guest. As he lifted his face from its unsavory depths he murmured:

"I wonder if Kemyss was ever in Mexico. I wonder if this is part of a diabolical scheme."

He found himself in front of a neatly painted sign, "Dining-room," where his healthy appetite faced a shadowy steak, a baked potato, two diminutive rolls, and one-eighth of a canned pear swimming in its own gravy. It was vain to try to get a bit of extra nourishment out of the potato skin, for the waiting maid had her eye on him, and dignity forbade too great an effort. He went out and wandered up Fill-

more Street, in deepening gloom inside and out, before turning in to go to a dubious bed, diversified by hill and plain, promontory and table-land.

The next morning the world, if not more lovely, was at least less gruesome, and the boy found himself singing *Marching through Georgia*. This is a sure sign that spirits are up. He ate everything on which he could lay his hands for breakfast, took the bicycle he had brought with him, and started in pursuit of fortune. Away he sped in the unblemished sunshine, with the treeless level around him. A distant speck loomed bigger and bigger and became a small patched-up, manure-banked, never-painted shanty. Half the windows were stuffed with rags. Garbage and fluttering refuse lay around the door. All the surroundings pointed to poverty and squalor in this prairie slum, save the instruments of husbandry; for the sun beat on an expensive self-binder, left where it had been hauled at the completion of the last harvest. At the end of the field the weeds grew rank through a new make of seeder, which stood at the end of its last round, though an uncut bit of crop was near the wheel top.

A stable built of poles, with crazy strap-hinged doors, was thatched with straw and manure, the straw part having been largely eaten away. On its floor two forlorn husbandless hens pecked for flies, because the

refuse, turned over many times, contained not another grain. But even the flies had gone, migrated to a sore-legged horse that basked hopelessly in the sunshine. Lenox got off his wheel and stared. This was neither the neat farmstead to which his Yankee eyes were accustomed, nor yet that which his imagination had painted as belonging to the rich and mighty West.

The door of the house opened and three great dogs rushed at him, followed at leisure by a lank creature with the expressionless face of country women.

"Is this where Mr. Lars Hagenson lives?"

"Huh?" said the woman.

"Does Lars Hagenson live here?"

"My no! I sh'd think not! He's one of those rich Swedes that takes the bread out of us folks' mouths, gettin' all the best land from us. That's what he is!" She spoke viciously.

"Where does he live?"

"'Bout a mile further 'cross prairie." She pointed at a distant speck.

"What kind of a crop are you having this year?"

Lenox asked in friendly spirit.

"Crops, nothin'! We ain't hed nothin' but bad luck sence we struck this country. In fact we've hed bad luck in 'most every state from Texas up, but this is the wu'st we ever had," she said listlessly.

Lenox looked at the stable, the hens and the rags.

"You seem to have some pretty good machinery," he observed.

"'Tain't paid fur. And we hed to mortgage the farm to get it."

"Then I should think it would pay you to build some kind of shelter for it."

The woman looked at him in a kind of dull astonishment.

"What's the use? We'll lose the farm on the mortgage in a year or two anyway. Besides, it ain't rained for two months. I never see such a dry season. Can't you see the whole country's scorched up?"

"I suppose it will rain sometime, and snow, too."

Lenox turned to his wheel with a deep sympathy for the man who owned the mortgage. The woman sat on the doorstep absorbed in contemplation of his disappearing back, and the flies moved from the discouraged horse through the open door behind her.

"Am I expected to earn my living by getting a commission on the grain these people raise?" Lenox asked himself, and his heart grew heavy within him, for indeed the prospect was not encouraging.

There came a change. The fields were no longer a thriftless waste. A big Swede and his wife were hard at work stacking, as Lenox rode up and dismounted.

"Can you tell me where I can find Mr. Lars Hagen-son?"

The farmer turned, stopped his work, thought profoundly, spat out the mouthful of wheat he was chewing with great deliberation, and answered:

"Ay guess that vas me."

"Oh, Mr. Hagen-son, let me take your wife's place for a while. I want to have a little talk with you." Frank tried to be as suave as the English language will allow. "I understand that you are the manager of the Farmers' Elevator. I want to talk to you a bit about the St. Pierre Company, which I represent."

The big Swede grinned agreeably.

"You are the ninth fallar thas veek," he said. "No, Ay tank Ay no change pooty soon. Ay ban all right lak Ay vas."

Stacking in the hot sun was not easy work, even for the Maine country boy, but doing business with a man who never heard of him and was manifestly indifferent to that deprivation, proved still harder. Frank, however, had enough of the blood of his ancestors in him not to know when he was beaten. By dint of imperturbable good humor and still more through a kind of big human sympathy that was in him, two hours of effort, physical and mental, and oratory that would have lent luster to the Lincoln-Doug-

las debates, resulted in the old man's saying, with the air of a monarch graciously conferring a favor on a subject:

"Vall, Ay send your damn company van car. Ay try dam!" Further he unbent so far as to add: "Ay go to town onny vay van Ay gat my dinner. You vant to vait Ay drive you in."

Lenox was hungry himself, but Mr. Hagenson extended no hospitable country invitation to his midday repast, and in full view of the neat farmstead into which Hagenson disappeared, our disconsolate hero sat down in the shade of a stack, munched a handful of wheat, and waited. The land about him was as different from that of the preceding farm as though it had lain in a remote country. Here the prodigality of the crop looked like nature's own. The home that lay before him was trim and freshly painted. Pots of flowers stood in white-curtained windows. But it was evident that the thrift of Lars Hagenson wasted nothing on the drummer within his gates. This Lenox could endure with equanimity. Greater than hunger was his appetite to see that first car, the fruit of his virgin effort, shipped to St. Etienne—the monster that waits to devour all the food that a tributary country can pour into its greedy maws.

Two freight cars stood on the track at Mexico. Sat-

isfaction rayed from Lenox's face as he saw the full one billed to the St. Pierre Company.

"Mr. Hagenson," he asked with a heartfelt sigh, "isn't there some place where I can give you a glass of beer?"

"Young fallar," Lars answered solemnly, "af you vant beer, you gat to go back to Venice. Day are bad people back dar in Meensota. You don't gat no beer in Nort Dakotah. You vant to coom 'cross das street, you can give me a cup of cold tea."

A roseate giant, blue-eyed and infantile, who was superintending the loading of the other car, laughed joyously. Lenox turned to him.

"Will you join us in a cup of cold tea?" he asked cordially.

"T'ank you. You bat Ay vill!" The giant's answer came with alacrity.

Seated in a back room, behind the elaborate secrecy of a cotton curtain, the three found three cans of exceedingly bad beer, its extra vileness being a tribute to the prohibition law. The blue-eyed giant grew so mellow after the departure of Mr. Hagenson and a second order of the evil mixture, that Lenox took fresh heart, and in consequence of this manœuver car number two went not to the J. T. Thruman Company, as it was originally destined.

"Ay guess dat odar fallar vill be mad," said the giant meditatively.

As the afternoon freight stopped, picked up the two cars from their siding, and pulled southward, Lenox stood looking after them with a conviction that the world was in truth his oyster, and with an elation to be satisfied only by fresh effort.

In the gathering dusk he looked at his map. If he could make his next town, Gracetown, that night, he might gain several hours on the Kemyss schedule. There was no train till the next day. Twenty miles! Well, what were twenty miles on a crisp October evening, even over a rough prairie road? Besides, Gracetown sounded as though the beds might be better than in Mexico. He folded his map and pushed his wheel up the platform to the little station.

"What kind of a place is Gracetown?" he asked the station agent.

"A six house, three elevator, one-horse town, with a bad hotel,"—and the agent went whistling about his work.

The wind was blowing in Frank's face as he started, but a mile or two out it whirled with a roar around to the south. The tumble-weeds, which had been piled on the upper sides of the fences, when the change came, started to race for the north pole. Hundreds of thou-

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sands of them rolled and jumped over plowed land and stubble and prairie; and, as the daylight waned, they looked like ghosts hurrying to some vast inferno, the greater ones, often four feet in diameter, leaping along and outstripping the babies. With them flew the bicycle.

It was dark and late for a country town where there was no saloon, when Lenox came to Gracetown. The wind howled across the prairie; not a light shone in the dingy little street of a few scattered houses and stores. Frank stumbled along until he came to the legend, "Hotel." He pounded twice or thrice without getting an answer. He tried the door, found it unlocked and walked in. The place smelled warm and populous. He lit a match and found an old lantern, by whose light he explored until, in a back room, he found his hostess fast asleep. After retiring from the room and knocking to awaken her, he explained politely that it was his desire to procure a room for the night. With some asperity, through a crack in the door, she answered:

"There ain't a bed to spare in the house. There's a populist convention goin' on, and we ain't got an extry bed, nor an extry cot. There's most of 'em sleepin' double as it is, anyhow!"

"But, madam," said Frank doggedly, "I can't sleep

on the doorstep, and I can't get anywhere else to-night."

"Well, that ain't my fault," she said.

He waited, hearing her fumbling around inside, evidently hunting for her clothes and an idea. At last she appeared. Frank considerately held his lantern on the off side while she looked him over with the eye of a connoisseur. He did not return her gaze, but her survey evidently satisfied her.

"They's an old sofy in the dining-room," she said at last. "Perhaps if we pulled it up clost to the stove you could sleep on that."

"I should be grateful for almost anything," said Frank wearily.

They joined in pulling the sofa out. She took the lantern and disappeared to return with a pair of clean sheets, or at least sheets that had been freshly ironed. She spread them over the sofa.

"Now for blankets," said Mrs. Josephs, "I don't know what *to* do." She looked helplessly at the young man.

"Do you think the Populists are fast enough asleep so that we might steal a few?" he suggested. Her face brightened.

"No, not in that room." She laid a detaining hand on his arms. "He's the chairman. But I don't like this

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feller, and I don't know as I care a mite if he does wake up cold on toward morning."

"Now, madam," said Frank, "will you kindly let me have a glass of milk and—oh, almost anything else to eat, while you make my bed?"

The "sofy" was only four feet long, and Lenox stood something over six feet, but he let his legs hang over while the rest of his anatomy took naps. The legs, however, soon went to sleep, too. Once, before final unconsciousness, the humor of it struck him and he laughed aloud.

"These are the sufferings of Miss Windsor's knight-errant. By Jove though, I must be up betimes. I shouldn't like the Populists to watch me shave while they eat their breakfast. There must be an extra lot of farmers in town. I will work them, as I am a true son of Minnesota."

In Gracetown therefore he put in an ardent but fruitless day's work. The farmers were evidently hardened to all the wiles of a grain solicitor, and much less susceptible to his admirable arguments than was he himself. Moreover, the joys of political discussion, for which the native American has a natural liking only a little greater than has the adopted American, and the vilification of both Republicans and Democrats, downed all other interests.

Another night on Mrs. Josephs' abbreviated sofa was beyond human endurance. Slowing up at the water-tank of Gracetown station, Lenox saw an interminable train of flat cars, laden with gravel and pulled by two monster engines. That which Lyell could do why might not Lenox? He took his grip and his bicycle and sought the freight.

"Nah, ye don't," said the conductor. "It's absolutely against rules to let any one on."

"Can't I get a special permission from the agent?"

"For way-freights, yes," replied the conductor; "but not for gravel trains."

The conductor went forward and Frank waited until the long snake got well under way; then he flung his wheel on one of the cars, swung himself on with one hand, holding his grip with the other, and congratulated himself on his cleverness.

"They can't possibly put me off until we get to the next station," he said to himself with saturnine glee.

The sky was crystalline and warm; a stiff breeze, pure and sweet from the harvest fields, filled his heart with the joy of living and his lungs with champagne. Once out of the little town, the broad teeming acres of wheat spoke of peace and prosperity, and the cry of wild geese came from nowhere up in the blue.

The engine crawled up a steep incline and Frank

settled himself comfortably on his tiny platform and was content with the day-dreams of youth.

And now the speed increased. The bicycle, lying on the gravel, gave a preliminary hop and skip before a livelier dance. Frank seized and fastened it over the brake wheel to steady it. A down grade lay before them and the engineer pulled the throttle wide open, so that with long leaps the train flew through the air, scarcely seeming to touch the tracks. Even the couplings were stretched to their utmost and the cars pulled far apart through their descent. A fine drift of pebbles and sand rose from the cars in front. The drift became a cannonade, thicker, swifter, bigger, shot and shell, all apparently aimed with unerring accuracy at Frank's hands and face. It took all his muscle and attention to keep himself from joining in the stony rain as it whirled backward. He had no extra strength for self-protection. Every available crevice and opening about him filled with sand. He closed his eyes and shut his teeth. The train roared and pounded ever faster and faster down the hillside and the bombardment grew to torture. There came a triumphant shriek from the engine which rejoiced in its cruel puckishness, the bumping and grape-shot grew less and stopped. Frank opened one eye cautiously and saw that he was at rest with a platform beside him. Tenta-

tively he shook himself, gratified to find not a mass of shapeless jelly, but a man intact.

"Gee whizz!" said a voice beside him. "Were you on there all the time?"

Lenox looked at the open-mouthed conductor and smiled sadly.

"Do I look as though I had had the smallpox?" he said. "I'm sorry I broke the rules of the road. I'll never do it again."

"Oh, that's all right! That's all right,"—and the conductor was obliged, as an outlet for his friendly feelings, to shake hands and even to help unload the bicycle.

"Thank heaven I've got to a decent place, anyway," said the culprit.

"Oh, Betterton is all right, but next time you want to come in a Pullman. You ain't built for a tramp. So long!" The conductor waved a cheerful good-by and grinned.

An animated band without the least pretense at classical aims sounded through the little streets and a trim white hotel disported itself in patriotic bunting for the benefit of an enthusiastic village crowd, who had flocked to a fête-day by train, by bicycle and by wagons decorated with branches of flaming autumn colors. Fakirs, roulette wheels, cheers from a roped-in

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base-ball ground at one side mingled with the alluring "Lemo-lemo-lemonade" cry from temporary and temperance bars along the gay highway. Every face was glowing with soap and good nature. Every young man had money in his pockets and every girl knew it. Was not the harvest nearly over?

For a moment Lenox stopped to watch the truly rustic sport of potato racing. A greased pole stood at one side and a burst of applause rose for the small boy who, with the wisdom of his Connecticut ancestors, had treated his arms and legs to powdered rosin before entering the contest, and now proudly waved his cap above his freckled face at the top of his slippery eminence.

"I wonder what rosin I can use for the pole I am trying to climb," Lenox said to himself. "If I don't succeed in scaling it I shall soon be up a tree."

He passed on to the joys of a clean towel, a clean and abundant supper and, finally, of a clean bed.

So the days plodded by. A rough-and-tumble introduction to life was this, and often nauseating enough when, as frequently happened, it meant the currying of favor from the unwashed and ungrammatical.

Many kinds of men and many kinds of country he saw. There was the broad prairie, tricked with rainbow-colored flowers, continuous as the sea, and yet

slipping by imperceptible grades into rolling country where great forests fought with the small growth of the plain for possession of the earth. Strong rivers seamed this northland and marked a path of denser green. Multitudes of lakes hung like a string of sapphires upon the bosom of the mighty mother earth. Desolate villages, with no seeming reason for their existence, marred nature by their slovenliness, and thriving towns sprang into being, full of energy and hope, emulous of the growth of St. Etienne—that mushroom for rapidity and oak for sturdy sinews.

And various as were the types of nature, so various were the types of men. There was the westernized Yankee, bringing to bear his nasal humor and his energy on the problems of a new country, and vital with the same old force that compels new-come races to remodel themselves to his form. There was predominantly the Scandinavian, blond, hard-working, shrewd and honest; there was the primitive and unambitious Lapp; there was the colony of Englishmen, trying to transplant to this wayward young savage of a country the traditional exquisite country life of the long-cultivated, tight little island; there was even the prosperous Jew turned farmer.

But everywhere there was the great army of the shiftless, spawned by the very superabundance of these

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United States, and for ever looking for nature to lay in their hands the bread and butter that they are too lazy to harvest and to churn for themselves. Things come so easily, say they, surely there must be somewhere a land where they come still easier. Toward every point from which there comes a rumor of prosperity the shiftless wander, up from the southland, in from the eastland, always selling the old home for a trifle and moving on, for ever doomed to disappointment. For though nature never did betray the heart that loved her, neither the hand that labored for her, yet to the improvident as to the unpoetic, she is a bitter taskmistress with a sardonic smile always upon her mobile lips; and the farther north the do-nothings come, the more mercilessly she stings them with summer heats and lashes them with winter winds, as cruelly as though she had forgotten the radiant smile that she knows how to turn upon her more-favored servants.

There were up days and down days, but on the whole Lenox was aware that he was making no mean record for a beginner. Moreover, a little at a time, he gained on his schedule; and as his first week drew to a close, he had the satisfaction of seeing that he was a whole day ahead of his time-table. He was back in Minnesota by this time, on the border land where the

level monotony of the prairie slipped into gentle undulations, broken by limpid lakes and the swift murmur of occasional streams. The fringe of virgin forests, solemn mighty pines, thrust their long spurs into the open.

Here late one afternoon, Lenox rode into Minturn, to be told that the subject of his next attack, Sven Svenson, had gone to Pine Vale to look after some lumber interests. The representative of a rival grain firm, who stood on the platform, laughed sardonically as Frank's face fell at this information.

"Guess there's two of us disappointed," he said. "I was on his trail, too. He's a mighty potentate in this section. And now we're stranded in this hole; no train out for twenty-four hours, and a beast of a hotel! Hope you've got a good novel."

He laughed again, strolled across the street, followed by his novice competitor, and halted before a large placard meant to tempt inexperienced travelers from the train to the eating-room.

"'Warm meals and lunches!' Warmed up, they mean! 'Board by the day or week!' Not for me!" He read and commented. "'Cigars!' Home grown! 'Canned goods!' Part of Noah's stock! 'Nuts!' Warranted eleven years old! 'Fruits!' Dried apples and prunes! 'Oysters in every style!' Very dead!"

Thus spake the man of experience. Lenox left him and went back to the station agent.

"How far to Pine Vale?"

"A matter of thirty mile." The agent was a man of few words.

"Any town with a hotel between here and there?"

"Well, there's Valkyrie. Not much of a town. Kind of a place where nothing ever happens."

The night was coming on apace, but Lenox mounted his wheel and started forth, finding himself lulled into a serene state of mind by the gentle witchery of the moon, and feeling very friendly toward the gophers who came out of their holes to wear out their clothes by sliding down boulders.

At Valkyrie he took a short nap before breakfast, and was off again just as the sun peeped into the valley through tumbled pink clouds that proved to him that the old masters were right in their representations since, on close inspection, their billowy masses were certainly made up largely of heavenly hosts and radiant cherubim. For a long distance the road wound along a lake shore, with well-packed gravel under wheel and trees meeting overhead. The tree shadows extended out over the placid water. Moored boats lay with their muzzles toward shore, and out in the center was a curious circular ripple where a dozen turtles

danced, moving rapidly around, across and back, with heads raised above water.

An old mother muskrat and her little ratties were diving in the reeds on the shore. Above sounded the shrill cry of geese on their southward journey. The road itself was alive with small game. Gophers scooted hurriedly away, while over in a meadow some small foxes quarreled over one of their number. Scared rabbits, who failed to hear the silent wheel until it was upon them, sat by the roadside with big eyes of alarm. A skunk prowled through the sedges on the lookout for frogs. A queer object at the foot of a hill turned out to be a huge snapping turtle with great paws and spiked tail. Lenox dismounted and gave him good morning in spite of his surly vindictiveness of aspect; but when a hand came near his tail, his head shot out an incredible distance with a vicious snap, and the bicyclist bade him farewell and sped on, feeling that to go a-Octobering is as good in its way as to go a-May-ing.

Gradually the trees grew denser, and then came the great woods, somber in the gray light which blotted out the rejoicing dawn, morose, with the unsympathetic look of hermits whose life is spent apart from men. These were the pines which waited in solitude since time's beginning and resented any encroachment

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on their privacy by the all-invading creature of two legs.

There came a clearing of melancholy log huts, where unkempt stumps defied the native spirit of beauty, as if they would say, "This is the miserable pass to which we come when man enters our sacred silence!" Or it might seem as if some of the chaos left over from the time of creation lay here piled up, awaiting the hour when it too should be absorbed by cosmos.

On, on, led the road, and with it exultant went Lenox, speeding like the wind when it is late for a waterspout appointment in mid-ocean, until his legs were fairly out of breath.

And now there came a clearing of larger dimensions. The straight polished steel of the railroad shot through it, linking a city of the south to her sister of the north, separated from her by this untamed woodland. The crash of a waterfall made music on the serene morning air, and the faithful bicycle slowed up in front of the white little inn of Pine Vale.

CHAPTER XII

CARRYING THE TRUTH TO THE WOODS

One day, as Miss Vera Windsor sat at her desk, there entered Mrs. Lyell who, with the curiosity of intimacy, put her arm around the girl's neck and peeped over her shoulder.

"What are you scribbling so fast?" she asked.

Vera pointed at the little stack of envelopes lying addressed and stamped before her.

"I'm dabbling in the froth and scum of the world, Madam Mentor," she said. "These are my invitations to the Thanksgiving ball."

Now it so happened that the topmost envelope of the pile bore the name of Mr. Francis Lenox, and Mrs. Lyell took it up and looked at it pensively.

"Don't you find this kind of thing insufferably dull?" she asked. "I mean putting on purple and fine linen and spending an evening dancing with men with whom you have not a thought in common. I often wonder why you do so much of it."

"If you mean Mr. Lenox by that," said Miss Windsor, a little defiantly, "I am sure that if I knew him better I should have a great many thoughts in common with him. In the little I have seen of him he impresses me as a clean, honorable man, and I like him exceedingly."

"Is that the reason you talk with him the kind of twaddle I heard you exchanging the other evening? It evidently suited him. But surely you don't call that 'thought in common,' do you, Vera?"

Vera laughed lightly.

"It was pleasant to watch you writhe, Jean. I doubt if I can keep up to your standard."

"Mr. Lenox is a materialist."

"What is a materialist?"

"A materialist is a person who is sure that we are superior to Saint Paul because he did not have buttons on his underclothes and never used a telephone. That is the standard from which a materialist measures progress."

"And you think that is Mr. Lenox's type?"

"I think it soon will be. He is heading in that direction, and you are, or at least I hope you are, heading in the other."

Who shall say that there was not a tiny spark of jealousy behind Mrs. Lyell's outbreak? Of late she often

felt very lonely. The admiration of women satisfied her less than it had ever done, and sometimes she thought of Vera—different as were their experiences and fate—as her only friend. The girl, if less subtle, was as strong, perhaps stronger, than herself. She leaned on Vera a little. She must be growing old, it felt so agreeable to lean on some one. She had always thought that each individual should stand alone in that little world which he was to create for himself, untouched, uninfluenced by the vortex life of those around him; yet now she dreaded that there might be some loosening of the tie that bound her to this girl, and she might be left lonelier than ever. So she went on.

“And a materialist, my dear, does not generally find that he has a soul until just about as it is getting ready to slip out of his body. Then he begins to think on heavenly matters. He sends for a minister and begs to be shown some swift method of getting to the top of Jacob’s ladder. Modern invention has created all kinds of rapid transit, but it never has and it never will discover any way to get to the top of the celestial ladder except by climbing. A man can’t go down toward materialism all his life and then find himself, at eighty years of age, at the top, and just ready to step off into the clouds.”

"But for all that I am unconvinced that the best way to smooth the transition from this world to the next is to make this one an unhealthy miasmatic place. Why, isn't a normal life now the best preparation for the life to come?"

"It is," said Mrs. Lyell. "You know that is what I strive for."

"And it is just that continual striving, always self-conscious, always walking around its every experience, that sometimes looks to me morbid. If you had the making of clocks, Eugenia, they would never be allowed to strike anything less than twelve. I have recently begun to suspect that I am another of the same kind as yourself. We do a great deal of thinking about life, and comparatively little living. I am afraid people will run us two extremists out of town as a public nuisance. To prevent such a catastrophe, this clock is going, once in a while, to strike some of the lesser hours in the twenty-four, which, being interpreted, means I am going to dance with Mr. Lenox and other young men who don't worry much about their lungs, but just breathe. I like them, Jean." Vera spoke with decision.

Mrs. Lyell clasped her hands before her, and walked over to the fireplace. She stood for a moment looking into the blaze; then she faced swiftly about and

came to Vera again. Her face was pale and her eyes were brimming.

"My dear," she began breathlessly, "I am going to say to you what I have never whispered before—what I have hardly confessed to myself. Once I thought as you do, I thought that if a man was clean and honorable that was enough. For such a man to speak of love was Elysium. You know what my mistake cost me. You know I live absolutely alone, although I call Ned Lyell my husband. When all the new ideas began to come into my life, I never even tried to talk to him about them. Silence fell between us. I do not know what he thinks about, and I am sure that if I did know, it would not interest me. My relations with him are only an interruption to my real life. We eat and drink and sleep together, but to him all the things that are dear to me are as though they were not; and to me he is one whose eyes are on the earth and who never sees the stars. I remember the things we used to talk about. Nothings. So our bodies move along, side by side, and our souls have never, never met."

There was a moment's silence. Vera rose and impulsively kissed her.

"I think I never minded it until lately. I did not miss love. I was too much occupied with other things.

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Perhaps I might have tried harder to get it, if I had known; for lately—I don't know why,"—a flush rose to her cheeks,—“life sometimes looks very empty. I don't want you to make the same mistake. Now I have done. Never remind me that I have said it. I am afraid I have only made matters worse by formulating them. It is not easy for him, either. If he had a wife who laughed and hadn't an idea, and thought children were amusing playthings, he would be a happier man. Nature punishes a mistake in marriage more heavily than a crime.”

She turned away and caught up a book—any book. It astonished her to find how all this tore and upset her. She intended resolutely to thrust her recent experiences with Mr. Kemyss into outer oblivion, and to live as though they had never been; but her memory mastered her will. These things she could not tell Vera. Her shame, her misery, worst of all, the unappeased hunger which increased upon her day by day, she would keep to herself. They did not belong to that serene-faced girl.

Vera, respecting her wish for silence, went back to her desk, gathered her invitations and took them to a servant to post, staring as she went at the unlucky superscription, “Mr. Francis Lenox,”—the source of all this outbreak. Fifteen minutes later, when she

came back, Mrs. Lyell was moving about the room with her usual placid smile.

"What I really came to speak of this morning, Vera, is a new project of mine. Somewhere to the north of us, among the big woods I should think, there is a little town named Pine Vale. And it seems there are fifteen or twenty women there who have formed a club to study together. They have asked me to come up and give them a little talk, to start them off, you know. I propose to give them a lecture on modern poetry next week, and I want you to go with me. It will make the journey a delight if we can spend the time together."

"Indeed and indeed, I shall be more than delighted to go with you. How good you are to help people like that, and what a dear you are!"

So it happened that, a week later, Vera walked impatiently up and down the waiting room of the station, looking anxiously for Mrs. Lyell. A commonplace man, who also walked the platform impatiently, caught her attention, because they were evidently in the same box, and she watched with interest a little woman come hurrying in with a dress-suit case which the man hastened to snatch as he eagerly kissed her.

"I knew you'd get here in time," Vera heard him say, with infinite satisfaction.

The train had long since been called, and a sonorous "A-aw-awl aboard!" was echoing through the station, as Mrs. Lyell came hurrying in with her hat a little awry. Vera snatched her hand in silence and ran. A friendly brakeman caught their arms and deftly jerked them to the moving platform, and they found themselves seated before they had exchanged a word.

The commonplace man Vera had noticed in the station sat in front of them. She could hear him volubly conversing with another of his own type.

"Hadn't an idea of going north when I came down town this morning, but I found a telegram waiting for me. Only had twenty minutes to catch the train. I telephoned to my wife to pack my grip and meet me if she could catch me before we pulled out. Well, she got here. You bet she got here. She's a trump."

"It ain't any great thing to bring a bag to the station," said the other, unimpressed.

"No, it ain't anything great by itself; only it's just like her. She's the kind that never fails a feller. She never failed me yet in anything big or little. She is the whole deck."

Vera began to take a real interest in the little woman; but by this time she had gained her breath, and she turned on Mrs. Lyell.

"It is fortunate I bought our tickets and seats in the

Pullman. I thought you were surely going to miss it."

Mrs. Lyell laughed easily.

"People shouldn't write such interesting books," she said. "I was deep in *Newness*, and I meant to have brought it with me, for I want you to read it, too—one of those books of pure inspiration. We are fortunate in having so many of them nowadays. You remember Xenophon or Herodotus—or who was it?—never mind—telling of Xerxes' remark that circumstances rule men, and not men circumstances? Well, this writer shows how the progress of civilization is the conquest by man of the world outside of himself,—how more and more he rules circumstances instead of circumstances ruling him. It is just in accord with my idea, that when we have wholly mastered the material world it is to us as if it were not. We can afford to ignore it. We are really the creators of a new world."

"Goodness, Jean," Vera interrupted irrelevantly, "what is the matter with your dress? It's all torn around the facing."

"Dear me, so it is!" She looked down in amused dismay. "You see I was reading up to the last moment, and I quite forgot the time, so I had to dress in a great hurry. And just as I was hastily packing

my bag, I ran a needle into my finger. I am afraid that is what has made this horrid blood-stain on my sleeve. And then I had to hurry for a car, and just as I was getting in I found, to my dismay, that I had forgotten my gloves. I hope you have an extra pair with you that you can lend me; and I suppose I must have stepped on my dress and torn the binding."

"You ought to have let me call for you, as I proposed. Have you another dress in your case?" Vera asked anxiously. "You can't get up and speak to those women with your dress stained and torn."

"I'm afraid I haven't. I brought only my night things."

"Well, perhaps we can get your dress mended; and I have another silk waist that may do. If it won't fasten around you perhaps we can pin it and put some lace in front," said Vera sadly. Then she could not restrain her laughter.

"Jean," she said, "don't you think you would have mastered circumstances better this time, if you had got ready a little earlier?"

Mrs. Lyell answered her laugh with unruffled good-humor, which showed her self-poise undisturbed.

"You've rather caught me, haven't you? But I dare say I shall do very well."

"Perhaps, thanks to my extra waist," Vera an-

swered laconically. But in her heart of hearts she knew that her friend would do very well. What mattered a frayed skirt, when Eugenia faced her audience? Vera seemed to see the pathetic faces, as she had seen them before, the faces of women whose lives had been hard-worked and half-starved and who now, in middle age, awoke to the craving that was in them for something better. They were pathetic because they could never get it—because nothing that comes later compensates for the atmosphere of childhood.

There was once a woman who sat down one afternoon and read, for the first time, the whole of Macaulay's *Lays*, with the foot-notes and the prefatory chapters which explained their allusions and pointed out their excellences. When she had finished her task, she said, "Well, really I can not see how these poems have gained their reputation. I find them wearisome." And the man who, when he was ten years old, had learned Horatius by heart, and stamped up and down his room roaring it at the top of his passionate young lungs, with swingings of arms and legs, and with desperate lunges with unseen swords, the man opened his lips to answer, but shut them again. And there was once a little girl who lay flat on her small stomach upon the grass under an apple-tree, and saw Una with her lion, saw the host of false

Duessa, saw all those rainbow-hued creatures, half-man, half-fairy, pass in shadowy beauty before the thicket of greenery that hedged her in. She skipped the words she did not know and it never even occurred to her to wonder which character represented Queen Elizabeth, and which Sir Philip. But dragons stained the grass with their blood, enchantresses slipped their magic mantles and stood revealed in unimagined hideousness, heroes fought and shouted and clashed swords to rescue maidens with flowing hair, right there where the little clenched hand could have reached out and touched them. No college student, cramming his Spenser and analyzing the allegory, ever saw that aërial vision.

There is infinite pathos about those who, having missed the vision splendid in their youth, are trying to reproduce its misty elusiveness in the common light of day. Pity those who did not get the luscious romance of the *Eve of St. Agnes* while romance still pulsed in their own blood, but now listen in a closed room to a lecture on Keats. In mature years that becomes a mere crust of information which to the child is the heart of life.

So these women would look at this Eugenia, with her big luminous eyes, her particularly soft skin and her mobile tremulous mouth, with something between ad-

oration and envy. She was an illumination, because she was steeped in light, but somehow she made their darkness more visible to themselves. They could never attain to that wealth of thought and experience that was second nature to her. To awaken this emotion was Mrs. Lyell's mission to her sex.

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CHAPTER XIII

PINE VALE

After the desolate villages thrown together on the plain, Pine Vale looked fair indeed to Lenox's eyes. It was a cheerful little town with a touch of New England refinement and New England comfort brought westward with the village that had migrated in a solid body from the old home, bringing with it the schoolmaster and the minister along with wives, babies and stock. It seemed better, after all, to feel a little crowded, to live in a valley, cut by a stream that made a great noise about its work of carving out rock and stone, that splashed and laughed and surged, drowning out the softer swishing of the pines.

It rested Frank's spirit to light on a spot where thrift mingled with repose. It was like a touch of home after the indifference to beauty, the barn-yard hugging the front door, of the average foreign-born settler. That was a life where crops alone counted, and where sweet content and home delight were not

reckoned—the peasant point of view, imported and Americanized by craze for the almighty dollar. And yet, perhaps Lenox judged too quickly, mindful, as men are apt to be, of the phase which he saw, and not of that which lay before and of that which is to come hereafter. In another generation, when the little Ole and Christina are taking prizes in the schools for English composition, new ideals of life begin to creep in.

Of all the wonderful energies of this good land, there is none greater than that by which, in her vitality, she transforms men of all bloods of the earth into Americans, whose children sing, "Land where my fathers died," with the same confidence as those whose ancestors fought at Bunker Hill. Be that as it may, the voice of a woman singing *John Brown's Body* in the kitchen of a tiny cottage next to the hotel, almost brought tears to Lenox's eyes. The song seemed to stand for all that was born in him, and lay nearest to his heart.

Breakfast at Valkyrie was already a matter of ancient history, and the appetite of the pines and the plains combined was upon him, but even as he turned toward the white-curtained door that bore the alluring word, "Restaurant," a big wagon came whirling down the street. Two horses, evidently just making up their minds and spirits for a runaway, pounded wildly

along. A string of packages, a broken bag of flour belching forth its unhappy contents, flying apples and demoralized bananas strewed the road. Behind them, rushing from the store, came a burly farmer, snorting and puffing, and pouring forth a string of oaths meant to appal the imagination of the steeds, whether they considered themselves Swedish or American. Lenox sprang at the horses' heads and hung on. He was battered back and forth, and banged behind and before, but his grip held. Gradually the team slowed up and he found himself glad to put one foot gingerly to the earth. The puffing man of flesh drew near, waving great red hands like the flappers of a windmill, but his face now beamed with rosy sweat.

"Dam horses, Ay tank Ay kill dam!" he gasped excitedly.

"Why, man, they're splendid horses! It's the best team I've seen since I came to Minnesota. You don't think any the worse of them for having some blood in them, do you?" said Lenox.

"You bat! Ay gif more for dam horses dan anny man in Minturn! Shake hands, young fallar. You know a good horse van you sees him. An' you stop him too!" he roared with mingled appreciation of his own wit and admiration of his horses. "Ay mooch tank you. You coom vit me. You must ban thirsty."

"Thank you, I'm not so much thirsty as hungry. I think I'll try for food rather than drink," said Frank.

"Foot! Vat is foot? A man only eats stuff so as to keep hamself alive so hay can drink. Hay? You bat!"

The amiable stranger gave Frank a ponderous dig.

"You are evidently a man who thinks," said Lenox.

"Ay know vat Ay know. You stop my horses; Ay gif you trink."

Frank, suspecting that this was the long-sought Sven, followed in his steps.

"I wonder if your name happens to be Sven Svenson," he began as they picked up the parcels in company.

"Coom now, young fallar, no yokin'. You know pooty well, af my name ban Ole Olson nor Petar Petarson, it got to ban Sven Svenson. Don't you gat funny?"

The broad honest face now wore quite a belligerent look. No man likes to have his name bandied lightly about.

"You are quite mistaken, Mr. Svenson. I'm not inclined to joke. I guessed it because I was told that Svenson was the best farmer in Minturn, and I thought by the looks of those horses of yours that you must be the man I was looking for."

At the mention of the horses, good humor was restored. A ponderous hand slapped him on the back.

"Af dar ban annyting Ay lak, it ban a horse. Back in ol' country, Ay use look at anny man vat gat a horse and vish Ay gat van too. Dat vas van Ay ban yoost leetle fallar. Ay nefer tank dan Ay afer own a spankin' big team lak dat."

The big Swede was so fresh and wholesome that Lenox yielded to his charms at once. It was impossible to see him expand his wide mouth and show his huge white teeth without smiling in return. He had the shrewdness of the Yankee, but not his energy, for this man's vigor was not nervous, but of the phlegmatic Norse kind that wins its way by doggedness. Frank prolonged the drink he did not want, to listen to his serene good sense and to learn many new things. In half an hour they were old friends; but Lenox so entirely forgot business that it startled him when Svenson rose, or rather lifted his huge person, and returned to his muttons. Then the grain man reappeared.

Before the interview closed, Svenson said:

"Vall, you ban pooty goot fallar. Ay ain't got mooch use for most of dase man vat coom to me about grain. Day are too slick. Day tank day know all about business, and us farmers is yoost vaitin' to

haf dam pull vool ofer our eyes. Day know too mooch. Ay lak to do business vit you because you don't tank you know a whole heap more dan the naxt fallar. You hold up my horses, perhaps you can hold up price of my wheat." He particularly enjoyed Frank's appreciation of his wit.

"Ay ban shippin' to van of dase big firms. Day gat awful rich out of us farmers, dase fallars. Ay yoost try a little firm lak yours, dat hasn't gat big-had so mooch."

Lenox winked, lest in some way Svenson should read the name of Windsor in his guilty eyes.

Half-starved, but happy, at noon he sought the hotel with a feeling that Uncle Remus would describe as "complacy." Svenson was not only the owner of a bonanza farm, but also the president of a farmers' elevator company that could pour thousands of bushels into the open hands of the company of St. Pierre. Lenox felt that he had this day done his first big "stroke" of business—so big that it insured the success of his whole trip. He was entitled to an hour of repose and a serene smoke. He realized of a sudden that an hour of quiet was a thing he had not had since the train deposited him on the platform at Mexico. He recalled with some amusement Lyell's description of the strenuous life of the traveling man. And there

before him, by the commonest of coincidences, sat the man to whom his thoughts were that moment returning. Lyell was contentedly eating true New England baked beans, served by a lank, pleasant-visaged Vermont woman.

Lenox strode across the room with his face aglow. The bean-devourer looked like an old friend.

"It does my heart good to see a man whose name does not end in 'son,'" he exclaimed.

"So, so, my lad, you've exhausted the fascinations of the Viking breed already?"

Ah, how good boiled beef and cabbage after the leathern steak of the prairie, and how agreeable the nasal twang of the waitress!

"You and I are both a little out of our beaten track, aren't we?" asked Lyell. "Have you gone into lumber instead of grain?"

"No, but I have gone after the lumber man!" Lenox laughed and opened up his most recent chapter of history. Lyell watched his eager face and warmed to him.

"I know your man," he said. "He's the good healthy sort, whose blood strengthens our national sinews. I'm glad you've got hold of him. I'm glad you are making a success of yourself. I might have known you would," he added thoughtfully. "I might have

known you would. You've got the right mixture in you."

"What do you think is the recipe for me?" Lenox asked, amused.

"Pluck plus joy, my lad. It's all right. I'm glad to count you as a friend." He put out his hand and the young man took it warmly, flushing with pleasure.

"Come now," he said, "return my confidences. Why are you in Pine Vale?"

"If you knew, you'd call me a fool, so I think I'll keep it to myself."

"You just called me a friend. Do you think it is the part of friendship to call another a fool?"

Lyell smoked in silence for a moment, then he looked up with an expression of self-abandonment.

"I'll tell you, fool or no fool," he said. "I came to see my wife."

"Why, is she here?"

"I picked up a copy of the *St. Etienne News* the other day and saw that she was to speak here to-day. That's the way I hear of her movements," he said a little bitterly. "And the sight of her name and the thought of her set me crazy to see her. That's the kind of an idiot I am, though she gave me her cheek and not her lips to kiss when I came away."

There was another long pause. Lenox felt ill at

ease, and very inexperienced in the ways of husbands and wives.

"She needn't see me," said Lyell at length.

"But why shouldn't she?"

"She thinks I am as indifferent to her as she is to me, and her very coldness makes it impossible for me to tell her otherwise. But she needn't know that I've crept here like a whipped dog, just to catch a glimpse of her."

"Nonsense! Go and make yourself agreeable. She'll take it for granted that you're here on business, and she'll be glad to see your familiar face. She'll like it if you can do something to entertain her in this dull little hole. That's what I'd do," said Lenox.

"I dare say you would, though I believe every man is desperately afraid of the woman he loves—at least until he is sure that she loves him. But it's your nature to make every hole that has an opportunity in it a little larger, and it's my nature to make it smaller. I'm an onlooker and not a doer. I ought to be anywhere except in the West soliciting grain, and I ought to be anything and everything except the husband of Jean Lyell."

"Well, try my method this time."

"Perhaps I will. It's done me good to talk to you anyway. I have never managed to say so much be-

fore. Everybody knows the situation too well, but you—well, it was easier to speak to a man who didn't know."

The two men lingered long in the cleanly little smoking-room, not saying much, but enjoying the sense of companionship with their own kind. They were startled by the entrance of a tall girl with a lamp. She looked singularly gray and ghastly. Lenox started in dismay.

"Is it so late?" he cried. "I ought to have taken the afternoon train. Have I missed it?"

"It's not late, sir." He saw by his watch that she spoke truly.

"But it's so dark. I thought maybe you'd like a light. Do you suppose there's something wrong? Do you think we're going to have a cyclone?"

Her voice sank to a whisper at the last words, and she lingered, evidently glad of an excuse to keep near to company.

Lenox and Lyell moved together to the window. The whole world seemed to have turned to a somber gray that was almost brown. A deep, deep hush lay on everything. Only an occasional spurt of wind licked up the dust and sent it flying in a long swirl down the street. The silence of the outer world fell on the two men and the girl. It was impossible to

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speaking. Their tongues dried to the tops of their mouths, and their limbs grew tense and rigid, as they stood at the window motionless. Terror, vague and unreasoning, held them. Lyell swallowed a lump with difficulty, and spoke with an effort, in a voice that came from miles away. "There's certainly nothing cyclonic about this."

The hush grew more oppressive, and the air murkier and heavier. Their heart-beats suffocated them. A long shriek of wind rose and fell on the silence; and behind it, with whirling gown and uplifted hand that gleamed an unearthly white in the dusky air, there blew a Roman Catholic priest.

"If you love your lives, save them!" His voice was clear and steady as a bell, but instinct with terror.

"To the river! To the river! Leave all you have! The forest is on fire!"

The rapt heroic face swept on, and the sonorous tones echoed back, "Run to the river! Leave everything!"

And now where had been silence was pandemonium. A great tongue of flame leaped from the clouds and lit the world in an instant's glare more hideous than darkness. The sky which had been brown was of blood. Then a blinding fog of smoke shut out the universe. Another instant and the very firmament

reeled and crashed. Great balls of fire shot out of nowhere and exploded in a rain of lights as though the heavens were cannonading the earth. With a rumble as though an invisible express train were passing overhead, the wind rose, roaring, shrieking, wailing; and off to the southwest, far to left and far to right, an angry red glare flamed out its menace—that mighty army of fire, of which the snarling spheres were but the van.

Before they knew that they had moved, the men found themselves in the street. The horror had come so quickly that it had almost taken away the power of thought; but, led by an animal-like instinct, the whole population of the little town was out of doors, sweeping downward toward the river, a half-crazed train of souls, like one of Dante's mournful bands, fleeing, with cries that rose above the whirlwind, before the din of storm. Women covered their eyes as they ran, to shut out fate. Faces looked white, even in the red air. Lenox seized a child, half-trampled by the mad throng. Before an open door stood a tall man with his hands in his pockets. He looked out coolly at the hurrying figures and his calmness brought the fugitives to an instant's halt.

A frightened wife peered over his shoulder and made some desperate effort to push him before her.

"Keep still, Hannah. We aren't in any danger. There's plenty of water in the butts," he said.

"Howard," some one called, "ain't you goin' to the water? The town will be afire in a minute!"

"The town is perfectly safe. The country is cleared all about us. Your own homes are the safest places you can find." But his last words were screamed at the backs of those who would not wait for argument but were dashing madly on.

In the middle of the road the crowd divided around a wagon, and on the farther side Lenox found his new friend, Svenson, loosening his big team. The horses kicked and plunged, but the good farmer willingly risked his own life, rather than lose his most precious possessions.

"Here, Lyell, take this baby!" shouted Lenox. "Now, Svenson, whip off your coat and tie it over your horse's head so that he can't see!" He was pulling off his own as he spoke, and in an instant the two beasts followed their master's guiding hand as he glanced fearfully above him and behind him, but never relaxed his vigilance, picking his way and theirs down the rough bank, where men, women, and children were slipping and tumbling into the blessed safety of cold water. The banks were abrupt and jagged with stones, they were slippery with moss and fern, but no one

stopped to consider bruises. Here the stream lay in smooth stretches, there in deep pools, and beyond it whirled and eddied. It made no difference, so long as one got into the flood.

Lenox was struggling under the weight of a second child who clung, half-strangling him, about his neck, and the mother beside him, carrying her baby, besought him in anguish:

"You won't drop him, will you, sir? I don't know where my husband is. He would take the children. But you won't let the boy go, will you, sir?"

"If I get there alive myself, the boy shall get there, too," he answered shortly.

A woman, whose strength had failed her, hung, a dead weight upon his arm. She opened her eyes as the chill of the waters struck her, and he dragged her into midstream.

"Don't faint!" he shouted in her ear. "You may drown!"

"Ah, but my children!" she moaned, "they were at school when it came and I was afraid to go back for them! My little babies!—and my man!"

She stood rigid in the water, with eyes closed, lost in intolerable anguish. Lenox pushed her up against a stone, to shelter her against the strength of the current which swept along with considerable speed.

A man with two tots in his arms, and a third dragging at his coat, made careful haste down the bank, but at the water's edge the child on foot halted and let go her hold.

"Lena, Lena!" cried the father. "Come to the water, —come! Look, I am holding little Jack and Nora to keep them safe. I have not a hand to pull you in. Come yourself."

But Lena sobbed and looked back, and feared the rushing stream at her feet more than the fire that had not yet reached her.

"Mind me, Lena. Come at once." The father's voice was harsh with imperative, fearful love.

A gust of bitter smoke swept down, and the faces peeping above the stream gasped and fought for breath. They plunged under the flood for relief from the sting, and came up again for relief from suffocation.

A man came running from the opposite side of the river, threw himself with a mad splash in midstream, and, fairly gasping in the intensity of his fear, paddled rapidly from one group to another.

"My wife! Has anybody seen my wife?" he asked afresh, not waiting for the reply which his own haggard eyes could give him. He drew off by himself, teeth chattering, eyes glaring, mouth set in rigid seams.

A shout of something that sounded like triumph rose from the miserable water-girded refugees. Looking shoreward, Lenox saw a young woman driving before her a herd of children. Like silly sheep they ran, without knowing why or where, crying, stumbling; and with arms outspread, she ran behind, while a big collie bounded around, barking furiously as he rounded in the flock and kept them in a compact mass. The school-mistress' face was that of a madonna. Occasionally she dashed at some burning scrap of dress, and tore it from the running child. Sobs of ecstasy rose from the stream, as eager hands reached out and dragged the helpless children in.

The flabby creature, leaning on Lenox's arm, opened her eyes and a flash of color swept over her face. In an instant she was caressing, under water, the bodies of two mites, whose faces, streaked with soot, were to her eyes beautiful above those of the angels. "Nero! Nero!" called the father, who plead in vain with his little girl. The dog turned his friendly eyes.

"Bring Lena into the water! Good dog!"

The faithful collie, with singed fur, made again for the bank, caught the little dress, and dragged the child to safety, keeping, after he got her there, a tight grip on her clothes, while he blinked encouragement at her.

Farther up stream, near the waterfall, a man came

running out of the woodland, his hand laid on the neck of a doe, which, in the hour of peril, had forgotten her natural fears, and sought companionship in danger. Man and beast tumbled in together.

"Great heavens! Even the tamarack swamps are afire. I thought they were safe. I've been running over burning logs as if they were sidewalks. I don't know whether my feet are burned off or not."

"It is the Day of Judgment," said a solemn voice behind. "This isn't just a forest fire. Look at those balls of light flying through the air. God is destroying the world for its iniquities. This is our last hour on earth. We shall soon be face to face with Him!"

A family huddled in a back eddy started a hymn in high quavering voices. To most men God never seems so near as when His hand is lifted in menace.

"There goes Howard's house!" cried a voice. "His water-butts didn't save him!"

Sobs and prayers and cries for mercy rose from the water, and the shrill hymn added a weird terror to pain.

The smoke drifted in streaks, and when it came there was silence, except for gasps. When it passed there was air to breathe once more, though air that stung and burned.

From the town, mingled with savage hissings, came

the dying wails of those who, trusting to the clearing around them, started too late, only to stumble and fall, never to rise.

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CHAPTER XIV

CAUGHT

"The train—look! The train from the south!" was shouted in Lenox's ear.

Instantly every eye was turned down stream to watch a new drama in the fight between death and man's courage and presence of mind. A skeleton-like railroad bridge of steel spanned the river just where the banks grew most narrow and precipitous. On the south side there was no possibility of crawling down the steep rocks. The roadway by which the villagers had escaped their doom was too far from the track for those in the train to hope to reach it in the face of the flame, but on the farther northern bank a few ragged projections made something like a pathway. The northward-bound express, cut off from retreat by an unexpected arm of fire, now sped forward, stopping as long as it dared at each tiny woodland station to pick up the frenzied wretches who rushed toward it as their only means of escape. Now it was black and

crowded, and the flames had gained upon it, until further flight was out of the question. The whirling fire reached to heaven, and the earth seemed dyed in blood. The very sides of the cars burst out here and there with the red horror, or grew ominously black and charred.

Inside those chariots of destruction reigned the anguish of the damned: there were prayers and oaths and frozen silences. Those on their knees were in danger of being trampled upon by others whom fear drove to pacing frenzy, like that of a tiger in a cage. If only all the energy of the mad passengers could be put into the engine, which already strained its every nerve in the race!

Amid smoke and cinders, with now and again a glimpse of a great whirl of flame, the train plowed its way through the stifling heat. Sometimes it quivered and rocked as it passed over a shaking culvert; sometimes it lurched over a fallen branch of fire, righted itself resolutely, and sped ever on.

The bursting of window-glass, the hungry lapping of flames through the broken panes, the breaking out of fresh fires, mingled with the screams and the recoiling terror of the passengers. At each succeeding station, some of those within cursed and pleaded with the conductor not to stop, and some of those without

prayed him to wait yet a little longer for their loved ones. To each and all he answered unmoved:

"I must save every life I can. I will not risk the train-load by staying too long."

On which side was mercy, and on which side justice? Had he not waited too long? He held at bay the madness that dogged his responsibility.

Two brakemen, like the Great Twin Brethren, heroic, if not so beautiful, stood holding their lanterns on the tender, as the locomotive moved through the unearthly dusky glare. The water in the engine began to give out. And now the fiery cyclone was close upon them. In the fierce screaming of the red whirlwind, in the wild music of crashing forest trees it pæaned its victory over the children of a day.

The Pine Vale bridge rose before them. If they could reach the other side of the bridge, the freight of humanity might tumble down the banks into the stream. The engineer peered anxiously forward by the light of the man-held lights. He knew that the ties on the bridge must be on fire. Which was best, to await the swift flame, or to be dashed to destruction down craggy rocks and into whirling waters? At the head of the bridge stood the little cubby-house of the watchman, and the engineer saw his welcome lantern wave the signal, "Bridge all right! Go ahead!"

The last bit of steam, the expiring breath of the dying engine, breathed forth. Slowly, slowly, the train moved across the shaking spider-web of iron, not hastily, though death were tearing onward from behind. Safety comes to him who dares to take time. The bridge swayed and trembled, but held for its last service.

And the watchman—what of him? *Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friend.* But what of him who lays down his life, not for a friend, but for a multitude of fellow creatures who are to him nameless, and who shall never know his name? The watchman's charred body was found next day at his post.

From below, the huddled wretches watched with fascinated eyes the crawl of the train across the bridge—all except the mother purring over her recovered babies, and the man with the chattering teeth, the one absorbed in her joy, the other in his misery.

On the platform of the parlor car stood the colored porter, beating down the flames on the outside of his doorway with wet towels which some one inside dipped in the water-cooler and handed to him in relays. The flames scorched his black cheek and singed his curly hair. It was a slender girlish figure that Lenox saw through the smoke wreaths as she came out through

the door to hand the dusky hero a fresh batch of dripping cloths. Those two were doing what they could while pandemonium reigned within and the steady nerves of conductor and engineer guided their destinies. Those who could do something kept their self-control; those with nothing to think of except their own safety, jeopardized that.

"Those people are crazy! Half of them will be killed, getting down this steep bank!"

Lenox heard the words. He turned and looked at the speaker in a dazed way, and then moved toward Lyell, startled at the new anguish in the face of his friend.

"What is it?" he cried.

"My wife, she is there!"

"Come then! We will go up and help her and the others down!"

Lenox roughly shook him out of his torpor, and the two men scrambled out of their cover and wrenched their way up the rocks. A greedy hand of solid flame stretched itself across the bridge toward the last car, just missed its prey; and the spans of iron curled and hissed and lost their hold on the shore. The train was safely across.

On the platform, pushed to its edge by the crowd behind her, stood the girl who had helped the porter.

The train slowed to a standstill, and her eyes lit with a sudden relief as the two wet men ran toward her.

"Mr. Lyell! Your wife is in this car! I am afraid she has fainted. Can you get in to help her?" She was calling as the train still moved along, dragging its last cars over the tottering bridge.

"Vera!"

It was an intimate way of addressing a young lady whom he was seeing for the third time, but Lenox did not think of that.

"Vera, you here! Jump quickly, I will keep you from falling!"

"I am not afraid, Mr. Lenox," she said quietly, as he steadied her and others came springing behind her. "Ah, but do something to help these terrified people, or they will dash themselves on the rocks!"

She stood beside him at the top of the craggy pathway which was soon lined by men handing to one another the frightened creatures descending. The sight of the quiet girl at the head of the line acted like magic on other women. They grew calm like herself.

Lenox motioned imperatively to her, but she shook her head. Even while he worked, Lenox found time to steal a look at her pale self-contained face and to bless her for the order that she helped to create.

The flame caught her veil and she quietly tore it off

and threw it from her. Her dress blazed up in one spot, and she smiled as Lenox sprang at it and crushed it between his hands.

"For God's sake, Miss Windsor, go down now! All the women are down. Come, we may both go."

She heaved a great sigh, and put her hand in his to be guided down into the bath of life. It had all taken the briefest instant. Men wasted no time in words, but the organization of the descent was as swift and accurate as though it had been planned beforehand.

Meanwhile Lyell had been fighting at the car door. There was no stemming the outrushing stream of people, yet he must go mad or get in to that one woman who did not come out. His passion was impotent against the struggling throng. He stepped back for an instant, then caught the frame of a broken window, and though the spars of glass tore his hands, swung himself up and clambered in. The car was almost empty, but alone, crouched in a corner, white, staring, nerveless, covered his wife.

"Ned!" she gasped.

"Come, Jean!"

He caught her hand and she rose unsteadily to her feet. A long pennon of fire hissed in at the window, and she drew back with a shriek.

"I can't!—I can't face it!" She clung to him.

"One moment more may make it too late! Don't throw away both our lives!"

"I can't go out into that sea of fire! I would rather die here!" Lyell looked around in a fury. Every one else was in safety, and the flames were upon them. The memory of Svenson's horses came to him with a kind of bitter humor. He tore off his coat, still wet from the river, flung it over his wife's head, and caught her in his arms.

How he got out of the car, how the devil of anguish wrapped his face and hands as he fought his way through, he felt as in a nightmare. His eyes seemed to boil in his head; he heard the crackling of his hair; he heard his wife's moan inside of her damp prison house. At least her soft flesh was not cooking on the bones.

There was a lurch, a splash, a whirl of waters, a feeling of lifting hands, and the intolerable anguish of his burns. His eyes were covered now by the scorched and aching lids. They had lasted long enough to win her safety. The voices of his wife, of Miss Windsor, of Lenox, sounded far off and thin as in a dream. Pain absorbed all his senses. He sat in the water, and some one dashed it over the mass of stings that had been his face. Some one was sobbing. He gradually became aware of it.

"Ned!" he heard a low whisper. "Ned, you are a hero and I am a coward! I shall love and worship you as long as I live—if you care for the love of such a poor creature as I am."

He forgot the pain and joined in her sobs. Their hands met, two warm delicious spots, under the cold flow of waters. With his charred face shapeless and unhuman for the rest of his days, in the mud of the river-bottom, chin deep in flood, Ned Lyell sat perfectly happy. His wife beside him forgot terror in the wave of love and humility that swept over her for the first time.

"To think I never knew! I never understood!" she kept repeating.

Overhead long flames leaped the chasm of the stream, burning branches blew through the dyed air or fell hissing into the water, bursting balls exploded into a thousand sky-rockets as though Titans were at play with the elements. With groanings and crashings the age-old forests passed through their death agonies; and the red whirlwind swept onward until the blessed barrenness of the prairie should give it pause for lack of food to feed on. Following the hurricane there came a gentle rain of flame. Flecks of fire like snow-flakes fell softly and unceasingly. In the intense heat the houses nearest the river seemed

not to burn but to melt. Their walls dropped to the ground in a molten stream, showing for a flash the rooms within with all their furnishings; then the core disappeared too. Grateful for the greater coolness in the river channel, the wretches watched it apathetically, too tired to talk. They sprinkled water on each other's heads and they crouched close together to keep from dropping in exhaustion.

"You are the most wonderful girl I ever saw. I believe you were not frightened for a moment," Lenox said, watching, fascinated, the matted masses of Vera's hair and the drops that trickled from his fingers over her face. It was like a fairy tale that she and he should be so closely bound in this common experience.

"Were you frightened?"

"Oh, well, I am a man."

"I don't believe your sex has any monopoly of bravery."

"Neither do I."

"Then I will confess to you that I was horribly frightened," she said whimsically. "But you know I have the blood of Indian chiefs in my veins. It would be a pity if I disgraced them by losing my self-control."

"Self-control, the Greeks said, is the highest of all virtues, and comprehends all others."

"The idea of quoting the Greeks when we are soaking here!" she exclaimed. "Besides," she went on, "I think there is something better than self-control,—such self-sacrifice, for instance, as a man may show by leaving his own place of safety and coming to help others in jeopardy. Such men deserve all the good things of life."

She glanced at him half shyly, and her eyes traveled on to Lyell, seared but blissful.

"Put your head down. Here comes the flame! Look, here is a flat stone at just about the right depth. Let me move you, so that you can sit on it and be not quite so cramped. And the water is less cold over here in this back eddy."

"How good it is to cast all the responsibility on you! On the train I felt as if I were rigid from head to foot with anxiety. Now it seems to be your business whether we live or die, not mine; and I am free to be quite comfortable."

"I'm glad you trust me to that extent. See here, Miss Windsor, I used my coat for some one else, but if you'll let me put this wet waistcoat over your head it will keep your hair from scorching and save your ducking so often."

He rose to his feet and began taking it off during a lull in the red rain.

"I will take out my pocketbook, however," he said. "Although I know no way of keeping it dry."

She was looking up at him and he could not resist the temptation of opening the flat book and showing her what lay within—her glove. Mrs. Lyell looked over from her watery post and saw some gleam in the girl's eyes that matched the exultation in her own heart. She wondered vaguely what the two young people could be conversing about in such ordinary fashion, while every one else was absorbed in the world's tragedy.

"I didn't mean, Mr. Lenox, when I told you to come with all pomp and circumstance, that you should choose the lightning as your coursers and the prince of the powers of the air as your squire."

"I was afraid you were going to find fault with me for appearing in my shirt-sleeves!"

"I don't care what you wore so long as you came," she said.

"There are worse things in life than sitting in a river under a rain of fire," said Lenox irrelevantly, and, as she looked at him startled, he added: "Have you ever been in a Dakota country hotel, Miss Windsor? If you have, you know why I am so contented now."

It was a relief to see her smile. It struck him all at

once that he had forgotten that there was such a thing as amusement in the world.

"Do you suppose the damned ever laugh in hell?" he said.

"Of course not," she replied promptly. "There is no hope there. Here we are in purgatory, not inferno, and we have hope."

"Yes, we have hope," he echoed cheerfully.

It was impossible for him to keep his eyes from hers as he spoke, and the slow flush that mounted to her temples filled him with ecstasy.

"Is this thing never to end? I feel as if we had been years, centuries, æons, in this flood. I have forgotten that there is anything else in life."

"It can't possibly last much longer now. Almost everything that can burn is gone, and flames can't feed on air for ever."

"These flames can. They aren't like any other fire. They are horrible demoniac creatures. They are devils sent to torture us, not flames."

"You are getting dreadfully tired, aren't you?" He looked at her solicitously.

"Horribly," she said. "You see I am becoming weak and losing my boasted self-control."

She smiled at him, but the tears came into her eyes.

"Lean up against me, and relax every muscle. Try

to rest as much as you can. I'll watch, and see that you get under water whenever the torment comes worst."

He poured double handfuls of water over her ugly head-covering and took possession of her with anguish and tenderness. Now, indeed, the situation was growing intolerable, if she could endure it no longer.

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CHAPTER XV

THE NIGHT AFTER

Gradually the fiery flake-fall thinned—flickered faintly—ceased. Only a great pall of smoke hung over the desolate world. It was growing dusk as, from out the flood that had saved them, the miserable throng crawled like half-drowned rats up the roadway that pierced the steep cliffs on the south. Now that the excitement was over, the horror of their position seemed greater than ever. A cold October night was before them. Their dripping clothes hung to bodies shivering and utterly exhausted by the long bath and the terror of death. Around, above, lay blackness; the heat had been so intense that it left little on which itself might smolder, and only a few charred embers lighted the gloom with their still more horrible glow. For these fragments of humanity there was not a scrap of dry clothing, not a mouthful of food, nothing but the musical tinkle of the waterfall, and desolation; and the uninterrupted splash of the stream but intensified

the human silence. Men lay down on the rough baked earth that bordered on the river edge, too tired for further effort.

"Mrs. Lyell, you are better here in the gully than you would be in the open, you and your husband. See, here is a craggy projection of stone. It will give you a little protection and something to lean against. I'll lift you up, Lyell. Will you stay here, too, Miss Windsor, until I can find some better shelter for you—perhaps a cellar? Surely there must be a cellar left, though it does not look now as though human beings had ever lived here."

Lenox talked rapidly, fighting inanition. For such weariness there was nothing between feverish energy and despair.

"Let me go with you," Vera pleaded. "I shall be better moving about." He looked at her and saw from the pale anguish in her eyes that she was in the same mood as himself; and he gritted his teeth and held out his hand.

"Come, then," he said.

She took his outstretched hand in silence. They had kept up the show of cheerfulness in the river long enough. It was impossible to pretend any longer.

Immediately in front of them passed the man with the chattering teeth, staggering like a drunkard. He

snatched eagerly at Lenox's proffered arm and pointed mutely toward the spot where home once stood. It was not easy to find the exact place, but at last they halted before a roughly outlined hole, and stared down through the twilight to where, amid the debris, lay the huddled body of a woman, burned to nakedness, her bare shapeless arms stretched over the baby she would fain have saved. The man loosened his hold on the supporting arm, but no words came to any of them. At last the widowed husband raised his head and turned it toward Vera. His face was like a skull, with sockets in which the eyes were almost as sightless as those of Ned Lyell. With the cry of a madman he threw his hands upward and broke the silence.

"Nothing to live for!" he shrieked.

With unfaltering steps, now, he turned and ran back to the river, the indifferent river, willing to act either as savior or as murderer. With a sob, Vera caught Frank's hand and held it nervously. They heard a dull splash, but neither of them moved.

Around them people stood in speechless groups, knowing that the charred lumps scattered here and there were human bodies, but without comment to make. Even tears failed. Almost naked, cold, wet, hungry, they were nerveless and hopeless as well.

"Mr. Lenox," Vera whispered, "can't you do something? We shall all be maniacs before morning!"

Her appeal maddened him. It was so impossible to think of any refuge or resource; but in the impulsive movement which was his only answer, he stumbled over a rough spot, stooped to push away the heaped ashes, looked closer, and shouted aloud:

"Here are potato hills! Come, dig! We shall have food!"

The spell of apathy broke. A score of hands were scratching like wild beasts, exultant over the poor possibility of supper.

Lenox caught at the arm of a sturdy old man, whose two cows came with him from the water.

"Here," he said, "I'm sure you are willing to help the children out a bit. Let's gather them and see how far the milk will go."

"That's right, bring 'em along! I guess the kids have the first show," said the old fellow cheerfully. "But you'll have to get some one else to do your milk-in'. I can't." He held up a hand puffed and shapeless. "Ain't it lucky it's the left? Anyway, I saved the critters."

Another bonanza. Mothers who had lost their children gathered orphaned children around the font where, on his knees, a volunteer milked into one after

another of the little cups made by tiny pairs of blackened hands. Ah! The warm delicious milk!

And now the reaction set in. Society asserted its sway; regular bands set to work to clear a little shelter in the cellars, where women and children were bidden to huddle close together for warmth. Sometimes enough half-charred wood was found to build a little fire, where garments, ragged and scorched by their rough experience, might be dried.

Vera pointed out a bigger hole, where a bit of stone foundation rising above the ground and a few heavy beams still stretching from side to side, gave fair promise of shelter.

"Wait here, just a moment, Miss Windsor, while I go down and clear out a little of the rubbish. There is no reason why you should sit in such ashes."

Lenox caught the edge and let himself down, while the girl and the group that gathered instantly around her waited. Then he reappeared with muscles tense and eyes set.

"Not there!" he said to Vera's questioning glance. "Not there, in God's name! Come away!"

He caught her almost roughly and drew her toward another hole. She asked no questions, and if she had, how could he have told her that the pit held a dozen upright bodies, clasped in each other's arms in a last

witness to the love which had bound them together even in death.

But at last in one of these mean refuges, huddled against other women and children, and glad of the mutual warmth, Lenox left Vera, and went back for Mr. and Mrs. Lyell.

A score of those who had outlived fire and flood were now collapsing, and all that their fellow sufferers could do was to lay them gently on the earth. The devoted priest, himself in agony, shorn of his robes of office, because he had taken them from his back to soak in water and use for the protection of others, now knelt by the dying, prayed, and pronounced absolution. There was no question of creed.

Mrs. Lyell had been tearing to shreds her petticoat to bind poultices of soft mud over her husband's burns. She looked up quietly as Lenox approached.

"Mr. Lenox," she said, "a man just drowned himself in front of us."

"Yes, his wife and baby were burned."

"He was wise," she said simply. "Now, Ned, let me put my arm on this side. Don't try to hurry. Mr. Lenox, is there any possibility of getting food for my husband?"

"Miss Windsor is saving two or three delicious potatoes for you," Frank answered cheerfully. "To be

sure, we do not serve them with salt, but they are done to a turn by the natural method."

"That's my condition, too. They ought just to suit me," said Lyell grimly.

"Cellars are admirable places in their way. I believe they have never been half appreciated," Lenox went on.

He settled his own particular charges as comfortably as possible.

"And this is to-night. What will to-morrow be?" said Vera.

"To-morrow you will see your father."

"Don't! When I think of the grief he is in at this moment, I can't bear it!"—and she buried her face in her hands.

"I beg your pardon," he said contritely.

"I have nothing to pardon, and everything to thank you for," she answered. "And now are you not going to try for a little rest yourself?"

"Not just yet. There's plenty to be done yet."

"And of course you are one of those to help do it."

"Well, I trust so."

Near the hole he met Svenson.

"Har your coat, young man," he said. "Ay tak ham off van the horses gat in vater, but hay pooty vat. Ay ban rubbin' down the horses vit my own. Ay hope

thay nat hart. Ay tank you mooch. Ay navar gat tham down to the river, without you tall me poot dase coats on. You vas pooty goot fallar. Say, vat is the name of dat leetle farm you vant me to ship grain to? Ay ban tinkin' about so many odar things, Ay forgat."

"Oh, we can't talk business now. There is too much to do. If we ever get out of this place alive, I'll come to see you, Mr. Svenson."

"Yas, af we ever gat back to a place vere there ain't no damn trees. Ay tall you, a fallar vants to lif on farm. Ay ban buyin' lumber, an' das fire, he hurt me pooty bad."

Lenox looked at him curiously and passed on.

The wind rose with the night and flung a whirlwind of dust and cinders over the holes where men and women slept and shivered and slept again, hungry and scorched, but forgetting all in blessed unconsciousness.

Three or four times during the night Mrs. Lyell slipped away from her unconscious companions, and crept to the river bank, bringing back fresh handfuls of mud, to relieve the dried poultices.

"Jean," whispered her husband, "blessed as it is to have you caring for me in this way, I don't want you to lose the sleep you need so much. Don't keep me on your mind any longer."

"Let me practise a tiny bit of self-denial on my own

part. I believe it is the first time in my life. Do you wish me to forget at once the lesson you have taught me?" She stooped and kissed his blackened cheek.

"Ah, Ned, I am haunted by the old words about being saved as by fire. When this is all over, and you and I have begun to live, it will become, in memory, a holy baptism. But, ah," she said, "will morning never come? I wonder if the sun has been burned out of the heavens!"

CHAPTER XVI

HELP!

Meanwhile to east and south and west and north had sped the telegraphic message:

"A forest fire is raging around Pine Vale and surrounding villages. All communication is cut off. The north-bound express probably lost! Fearful loss of life!"

The excited "Extry! Extry!" of the newsboys, as they rushed out with the first news of disaster, reached Mr. Kemyss' ears late in the afternoon, and he opened the office window and beckoned. The impersonal horror with which one reads of the misfortunes of others gave way to startled apprehension. Did not Mr. Windsor say something about—

He took the laconic words in big black type and laid them on the desk before his chief. Windsor slowly put on his eye-glasses and peered questioningly at the head-lines for an instant. His jaw dropped and shut again with a snap as he whirled around to his telephone.

"Certainly the train would not have run into such a trap!" he gasped up at Kemyss, as he waited one horrible moment for his connection.

No, the railroad office could give no definite information. The express had passed the southernmost point of communication, and probably gone safely through. They were even now organizing a relief train, which should repair the track sufficiently to get at the point of distress. Medical assistance, trainmen, food, clothes, blankets were being rushed together.

"See here, this is Nicholas Windsor," the old man began very deliberately. "Do you hear? You let me have an engine with a good crew and a hand-car in half an hour, if it costs all outdoors. Don't keep me waiting five minutes, or I—I'll—I'll wreck your old road!" His voice rose to a perfect bellow, that might have shattered the receiver.

"Now, Kemyss, you'll go with me. Telephone Doctor Norris to join us at the station with cotton and liniment and stuff. I believe we'd better take some canned soups and blankets. Can you think of anything else?"

The puffing engine stood ready when the little party reached the station, and the engineer gave Nicholas Windsor a friendly nod. Everybody knew Nick Windsor. He was public property. An anxious official

touched his hat and laid a detaining hand for an instant on his arm.

"I only want to say, sir, that a train will be off in a very short time, and it is not necessary for you to go. And you're taking your life in your hands, not only on account of the fire, but even more from the danger of being thrown from the track if your engine strikes a bit that has been burned out."

"Well, you've given me a good engineer. That's his business."

"All his skill may not save you, sir."

"See here," said the old man solemnly, "my daughter is up in that hell somewhere. If she's alive, I mean to find her. If she's dead, I'm willing to follow her. She's all I've got in the world!" All he had in the world! And he a multi-millionaire! The official put this statement away to be thought about. Aloud he said:

"Very well, sir. I hope you may find Miss Windsor safe. Pull out, Dick."

The engineer opened the throttle.

"Make time while you can, Dick. The track won't be so smooth farther on," said Windsor.

It was a silent party that sped off to northward in the hazy late afternoon. They rushed on and on, with only an imperative shriek to clear the track, without

slowing up, through one little country town after another.

Once in a while the old man would mutter, "But she would have telegraphed!" and as promptly answer himself with a groan, "But she couldn't telegraph."

The night fell, intensely dark, and bands of smoke, dense, solid and greasy, like something tangible, lay across the way. The big headlight shot its message of safety only a little distance through the impenetrable air, and when the smoke lifted, now and then, far to northward lay a band of yellow light, sinister to watching eyes. The yellow band grew wider and more unearthly, and now a red spot flamed in front. The locomotive came to a halt and a fireman ran ahead. Could that possibly be the headlight of another train?

"Only a burning tree close to the track," shouted the returning emissary, leaping up to pile more coal on the furnace.

"Gentlemen, twist your arms all together, to steady yourselves if she lurches," said the engineer.

On again they sped through the blackness, the whistle screaming its warning to any mysterious thing that might lie across its track. And now tall columns of fire resolved themselves, on approach, into pine trees that loomed here and there; and ghastly spurts of blue flame sprang from what looked like solid ground on

either hand. The telegraph poles made a long procession of signal fires.

Suddenly the engine swayed, staggered and came to a standstill under the command of the imperative brakes, while the little group was flung from side to side.

In front of them lay a narrow strip where misshapen masses of steel instead of tracks told the tale.

"I guess this is our limit, gentlemen," said the engineer.

"And no sign of the express yet!" Windsor groaned.

No one tried to reassure him. There are times when conditions give the evident lie to hope.

In silence the hand-car was dragged down and pulled across the gulf to where the tracks resumed their course. And now, with broad backs and narrow backs rising and bending rhythmically, they hurried at a slower rate, until, with a fierce whirl, they found themselves on the ground over a sunken culvert. Then it was up and at it again through the dreary night, with infinite pains and maddening delays, sometimes where a burning tree lay across the track, sometimes where a tiny stream made them tug and sweat to get their heavy wagon across, sometimes where the hot earth compelled them to shovel a pathway before they

dared to cross it. Utterly forgetful of their pain and weariness, but with hearts heavy with apprehension, they toiled.

It was slow work at best, and the first gray of morning was creeping upon them when, in the waste, they came to the spot where a few twisted ropes of steel marked the bridge of Pine Vale. There was no crossing that gulf. The engineer pointed across at the disabled engine lying in a charred heap.

"I guess that's all that is left of the express train," he said.

Beside them, where once stood the country station, a heap of coal was burning fiercely. No vestige of a town remained. Even the dust of the streets was turned to ashes, and mingled with the eddies of smoke which hung over the scene of King Fire's devastating triumph. Sky and earth were a uniform gray, without sign of color to prove that there was a sun in heaven or life on earth.

A moment Windsor glared at the ruin, then he raised to heaven a great cry like that of a maddened bull.

And then, from nowhere, there rang out an answering cry. So unreal it sounded that the cluster of men on the hand-car gasped as though they were hearing the wail of ghosts. But now human heads peered from

the earth, and across the ashes a young man came bounding.

"Mr. Windsor! Mr. Windsor!" cried Francis Lenox. "She's here, perfectly safe! Thank God, you've come!"

The old man leaned on him a moment and fairly trembled in his relief.

"Take me there," he gasped.

"Relief! Relief!" The joyous shout passed from hole to hole.

Windsor and his daughter were sobbing in each other's arms, surrounded by an excited and voluble crowd, crying, laughing, clutching the new-comers in an anguish of joy, hungry for a hand-clasp with the dear world which had seemed so far away.

Windsor still held his daughter's somewhat sooty face tight against his big shoulder while Lenox, with many interruptions from the throng around, gave a brief outline of their adventures. With her hand still clasped by her father's, the girl turned shyly.

"It was fortunate for a good many of us, father, that Mr. Lenox was here to help us. He came up to the train. He didn't tell you that. Left his safe place in the river to lift us down. Thank him, dad."

Windsor grasped Frank's hand in a tight grip, but he said nothing. Only his eyes wore a satisfied expres-

sion, as though he were saying to himself, "I told you so."

"We were all in the same box. I did nothing," said Frank.

"Nothings are all like ciphers," she answered, with a kind of return of her usual gaiety. "How much they mean depends on whether the man, like other units, stands in front of them or behind them. There is a dark saying for you."

She turned again to her father in a kind of ecstasy. "I can't help it," she said, marking the half admiration, half amusement with which Frank watched her. "I have to hug him. He is so beautiful. Don't you think so, too?"

"He is as lovely as a seraph," said Frank. "At least his clean face is a novelty in Pine Vale."

There was good comradeship in the way these two spoke to each other that made Kemyss feel miles away as she turned now to shake hands with him and to answer his questions about the fire. Those others had thought of life and death in company. They were bound by ties of common peril, as close as those of common blood. He was a stranger to that new world which they were entering together.

A thousand schemes began to revolve in his brain at the moment of greeting her, but they were chiefly

schemes that left her out. She had once been a possible investment. Now she looked less desirable, and her clothes were tumbled and ragged.

"Now come and see Mr. Lyell. He was horribly burned in trying to save his wife. Ah, Doctor Norris is with him already."

"Lyell! Great Scott! He, too? Was all St. Etienne on this pleasure excursion?" Windsor exclaimed, as she drew him away. But Lenox saw the two brought to a halt by the solid Svenson.

"Say, as thas your boss?" he asked of Frank, as he stretched out a friendly paw. "You gat a pooty goot man har, old fallar."

"Your stock seems to be up to-day, Frank. You ought to get a letter of recommendation from your admirers. Glad to meet you, sir. Glad you think well of my hired man!"—and Windsor was gone.

"Hay as a quar ol' duck. Vall, Ay guess Ay go home now. My wife, she ban lookin' for me."

The excellent Svenson shook Lenox's hand, mounted one of his horses and started placidly on his way.

Like the disordered visions of an anguished sleep were the days that followed. The plain over which Childe Roland traveled in mystery and darkness could not appal the imagination as did this desolate waste on which the pitiless sunshine beat. Half suspected

horrors were here turned to bald realities, and in the midst of them were left a few fragments of human life, shut off from all other human lives, but bound in intimate ties with each other by their common needs and common peril. When, at last, far off, the puff of an engine rose skyward from the blank horizon, signaling the coming of help from the dear remote world of happiness, men and women gazed at it with awe, and sobbed aloud. A mile away it halted, and poured forth its human stream; then came soft merciful hands laid on aching burns, the carrying of the maimed, like Ned Lyell, to the train and to waiting hospitals, the burial of unknown dead in nameless graves, the vision of a white-faced man, silently digging, with his own hands, the long trench that should contain the crumbled fragments of what had once been his family, the childless mother snatching at the waif, eager to get something that she might love; and, when the springs of emotion and the secrets of the heart were laid bare, the reporters standing about and jotting down the details, that the ends of the earth might glut themselves with anguish. Always and everywhere, with food and clothes and doctor, the generous and kindly yet callous world must send the little ticking machine of a temporary telegraph, whose every metallic message rouses new generosity.

Every able-bodied man and woman was at work helping some one else, and waiting until there should be room on the outgoing train for the uninjured. Vera, like Lenox, had burns that at ordinary times might have counted as ailments, but now they were too busy to have any satisfaction in their maladies.

The first duty had been to care for the suffering but still living. When the hospital train slipped back to St. Etienne, it left behind it that other duty to the dead. There could be no great ceremony about it. The kindest office to those misshapen masses was to get them out of sight as soon as possible, with rude markings above that might hereafter serve to identify them. Here a shattered family sobbed while the priest spoke a few solemn words above the hasty grave; there lay the unknown and unclaimed in a long row, to be put away by strangers.

"Say, look at Windsor! He's as husky a grave-digger as any of us, ain't he? I tell you the old man hasn't forgotten how to swing his arms, though I bet it's a good many years since he quit cuttin' down trees."

Late in the afternoon, a man who was working side by side with Cyril Kemyss nudged him and pointed at the broad back in front. Kemyss looked, saw Lenox helping at the gruesome task, saw Vera come across

the ashes to speak to them, and hated and envied them all. He had been a long time in building up an intimacy with Vera Windsor by the most approved methods; now it seemed vanished into thin air. There was no reason why it should. The readjustments in human relations are such intangible things that we can not tell what or whence they are. Kemyss felt that, in some way, neither father nor daughter was so much his as before, and this other young man was to blame. And yet his suspicion was nothing but the reflex of his own budding disloyalty to them. Whatever its source, there it was, gnawing, growing on his consciousness.

"Ain't the old man lucky?" went on his fellow worker, unconsciously playing the rôle of Satan. "Tell you, the rest of the world can burn up, but he's all right. That is what it means to be born lucky the way he is. Other people lose their children and wives, but you can just bet he doesn't. It's always that way. They say the fire hasn't touched the Windsor lumber tract. Just went out of its way to let his timber stand, as if he'd built a barbed wire fence in the air to keep the flames off. It begins two or three miles east of here. You could most see the edge of it over there, if the smoke wasn't so thick. 'Twouldn't have hurt him to lose a little, and some of the rest of us, if we've saved our lives, that's about all we *have* got!"

"Oh, well, Windsor doesn't hold much in that company. They got him to give his name and take a little stock in order to float it. It is nearly all owned by small investors. So you needn't feel so badly about its not being burned." Kemyss was half amused at the small envy of the man, his mind being chiefly occupied by his own affairs.

Just then Doctor Norris came up.

"Mr. Kemyss," he said, "we are in need of some more medical supplies from the train. Would you be willing to go for them?" Kemyss stared at him absently for a moment, as though his thoughts were far away, still lingering about those hazy tree-tops in the east. Suddenly his eyes brightened.

"Certainly I'll go, Norris," he answered. "Just give me a list of what you want."

The train lay over a mile to the south, as near as it had been possible to bring it on the hastily-mended tracks. The greater part of it had already returned to St. Etienne, taking the wounded to the hospitals, and only a box-car or two with supplies was left to the helpers. At the end of one of these cars stood the little machine by which an occasional message sped back to the world. Just now it was deserted and unguarded like the rest of the cars. Providence—or the devil—was on his side. Kemyss looked around and

saw only a solitary man tinkering at a disordered wheel.

"Know where I can find the medical supplies?" he asked.

"I think they are in there, sir." The man hardly raised his head from his work.

"Thank you." Kemyss swung himself up and stood before the bit of brass work.

"Let me see, let me see," he said to himself. "What is the name of that reporter from the *Sun*? Howard? Howell? Howison? That's it, Howison. Luckily I know how to operate the thing. That's one advantage of banging around the world as I have. It gives a man resources. It's hardly necessary to sign a name, though. They're crazy for news from up here, and they'll take anything. However, it's just as well to cinch it."

Almost as he thought, his fingers began to play:

"Timothy Norton, 4 Sauveur Terrace, St. Etienne. If any of our companies slump, buy like mad. You understand. K."

The medical supplies lay heaped at the other end of the car. He leisurely picked out the articles for which he had come, and let half an hour slip by. Once in a while he looked out from the car door. At last, peering through the growing dusk, he thought he saw

some darker spots moving over the ground, and again he hurried to the sounder.

"To the St. Etienne Sun: Entire tract of Windsor Lumber Co. wiped out by the Pine Vale fire. Millions of dollars' loss. Howison."

"There, that will be in flaming head-lines with harrowing details in the morning edition. It's a 'scoop,' too. I need only give them a hint and they'll invent all the circumstantial particulars themselves."

He laughed to himself at the exquisite humor of it. How many people would chuckle at the thought that old Midas was going to lose a big sum! The misfortunes of the rich are a wonderful source of comfort to the rest of us. He could hear the unctuous satisfaction with which heads of families would read this particular piece of news aloud at the breakfast tables of numerous homes, and add, "Well, it isn't only the poor who are human. I'm glad Mr. Windsor pays his share of the bill." And the joke of it was that he wouldn't. After all, he, Kemyss, was doing his employer no harm. The stock would come back to its normal value as soon as the truth was known, and if the small investors were crowded out, why, small investors don't count. Moving nimbly with the exhilaration of their message, his fingers resumed their work.

"H. Millar, Secretary Windsor Lumber Co., St.

Etienne. Your woods, Pine Vale, wholly destroyed by the fire. Burron."

"He won't know who 'Burron' is, but it will give the old rascal a night of nervous prostration before he sees the morning paper. This is a real stroke of genius. Millar's the kind of a man who has panic latent in his brain all the time. I hope we'll get back to town in time to see some of the fun. At any rate, there's no possible means of detection that I can see."

The next moment he had leaped from the car and met the on-comers.

"I don't know but I may have to ask one of you to help me carry some of this stuff to the doctors; there's almost too much for one," he said.

"Well, I should say so. There's no use in your trying to carry two men's load," said the first new arrival.

"Oh, I guess everybody is trying to do a little more than he can," Mr. Kemyss answered cheerfully. "When people are suffering as they are here, a man does not stop to think about himself."

CHAPTER XVII

DEPRESSION IN STOCKS

Other trains came and went; the dead were buried and the living taken to homes far away, until a new Pine Vale should spring up—a Pine Vale not of the sweet-smelling woodland, but of the desolate waste where fireweed and unhappy brushwood only half hid the blackened earth, a widowed village, filled with memories of the dead. The wound healed and the world forgot it, but the ugly scar still marred the banks of the rushing little stream.

And now, when it came their turn to go and the train pulled off southward, Lenox came to the seat where Miss Windsor and her father were.

"I must say good-by to you here," he said. "I am going to change at the junction and go west in a few moments."

"Why, Frank, won't you come home with us?" Windsor looked up sharply. "You've earned a bit of a rest. Grave-digging is tiresome work, both for the arms and for the heart."

"Thank you," replied Frank. "I think I will go back to work."

"Well," said the old man whimsically, "I must say you are a shabby looking creature to be representing a respectable firm."

"I think it is hardly becoming for you to jeer at Mr. Lenox for his appearance when I am such a spectacle," Vera interrupted, smiling up at Frank. "What do you think, Mr. Lenox, of the brute of a father who permits his daughter to wear such a parody of a hat as that?" She waved her hand toward the bedraggled object that a day or two before had been a picturesque sweeping affair, with soft plumes.

"Never mind, Vera, no one will look at the hat. You are all right, whatever you wear," said the fond parent.

"Well, with what I left in my dress-suit case at Min-turn, and what I can buy, I hope I may at least live up to the country standard, Mr. Windsor," said Frank. "At any rate, I think it best to go on. I want to settle things with Svenson. He has promised me all his grain, and you know, sir, how much that will mean to me. I think I'd best bind the bargain while the fervor is on him."

Miss Windsor nodded her approval of his decision, and he was gratified that she should care. He felt re-

paid for his heroism in declining to go south with them. But her father said nothing except:

"Want me to send you anything?"

"Oh, I can probably get things of some kind in Min-turn."

"You're optimistic," said Windsor.

"Well, I should be glad to have a bicycle shipped up. And, Miss Windsor," his voice sank to a slight melancholy, "I had hoped to finish my work and get back to claim that promised dance. But with all this turmoil and delay I am afraid there is no hope of that. Will you pardon my failure to keep my engagement, pity me, and give the waltz to some luckier fellow?"

"I will certainly pardon you," she said, smiling. "And I will sit out the dance in memory of the whirlwind we have gone through together."

Their eyes met, and Frank suddenly bent and kissed the hand that lay on the back of her seat. He glanced at Windsor and blushed guiltily.

"Oh, don't mind me," said the old man. "I'm used to seeing boys make fools of themselves over Vera. In fact, it's a sort of condition of citizenship in St. Etienne. I don't think anything of it, and neither does she, thank goodness. Good-by, my boy. Let me call your attention to the very pretty Swedish girl there on the platform. That's the kind we have in this country."

Back in St. Etienne, Windsor dropped from the carriage, while his daughter went on. He wrote out a big check for the Pine Vale relief committee, and turned to his accumulated business.

A knot of expectant reporters stood or sat in his anteroom, but the old man waved them off.

"Not yet, boys. Business first, pleasure afterward. You'll have to let me take a whirl at my own affairs before I indulge in the luxury of telling you all about my adventures."

Just then a man came running in, haggard and anxious.

"Well, this is pretty bad news for our company, Mr. Windsor!" he exclaimed. "I suppose it does not hit you so bad, but it's a serious thing for me, let me tell you!"

Windsor tucked his arm through the other's and drew him to the inner room.

"What's the matter with you, Millar?" he asked. "You haven't lost anybody up there, have you? Speak, man!"

"I'd better have lost myself," Millar answered hoarsely. "I've lost everything else! Ruin's what's the matter with me! You know as well as I do that I put every penny I could raise or beg into the lumber company. And now every penny of it'll go."

"Come, now, don't have hysterics. What's the matter with the lumber company all of a sudden, Hiram?"

"Didn't you send that telegram?"

"I didn't send any telegram. I've been busy earning my living in Hades, and I don't recommend it as a summer resort."

Millar gazed at him in speechless astonishment, overcome by his frivolity: then he slowly took a crumpled piece of yellow paper from his pocket and spread it out on the desk. The old man looked at it in silence.

"The morning editions are full of it, too." Millar reached a trembling hand for the still folded paper that lay on the window-sill, and laid it beside the telegram.

"Gee whizz!" ejaculated the old man.

Millar's face and hands twitched, and his eyes twitched, following the deliberate tramp of Windsor up and down the room.

"You don't know who sent that thing?" Windsor asked abruptly.

"No, I supposed you told some one to do it."

"I didn't. What's happened?"

"They went crazy. There was a fearful slump this morning. You know it's mostly small holders. Telegrams coming in right along from the East, and fellows here wild."

"They bore with Christian fortitude the loss of life up there, didn't they?"

"Well, of course, every one's sympathy was very much worked up."

"Yes, but this touched their pockets. We all know a man is much more valuable than gold and precious stones, but he's less easy to convert into negotiable security. Oh, I'm not vilifying the human race. I saw some fine specimens up there at Pine Vale, Millar. The Lord's hero-mill isn't a large one, but He is still turning out a few of the genuine old brand."

"Great heavens, can't you talk about something more to the point, when I am on tenterhooks? What about this telegram?"

"It's a lie! Hi,—Kemyss!"

Kemyss appeared at the doorway, bland and fresh as usual.

"Do you know anything about this reported destruction of our property up at Pine Vale?"

"Only what I have just read in the papers, Mr. Windsor."

"You didn't hear anything of it when we were up there?"

"On the contrary, I heard that your tract escaped."

"Just call up the *Sun*, will you, and ask them how they got their information? I'd like to know."

The two older men listened in silence to the one-sided conversation with its bur of metallic answering voice through the telephone.

Kemyss turned with the receiver still in his hand, and his face composed.

"The *Sun* says their special correspondent at Pine Vale wired them the news."

"You just tell them to telegraph to their reporter on my behalf and ask him how he knows."

Windsor thrust his head through the door. "Boys, I'll be with you in about the time it takes to get 'central.' I've got some society news for you. Now, Millar, I suppose folks have been trying to unload their stock?"

"Unload!" groaned Millar. "They're giving it away."

"Found some takers, did they?"

"Yes, a few."

"Well, we'll just find out who these buyers are, won't we? But first I'm going to give my friends, the society reporters, a little talk in words of one syllable that the public will understand. I guess it isn't too late to get out some special editions to-night."

Kemyss listened to this rapid gun in growing dismay. He had expected a little more time to cover his tracks before the explosion came. What had Tim

done? How cautious had he been in his methods?
How soon would he get out of town?

Windsor's sharp voice interrupted his thoughts.
"Here, my lad, I think you can attend to these letters,
if you're not too done up. You are looking a bit
seedy."

Kemyss took the batch of mail to his own room, but
his head buzzed with excitement. He would have given
anything for an hour's freedom. He dared not even
use the telephone to call up Norton, for a trim, big-
eyed stenographer, with an abnormal bump of inquisi-
tiveness, sat on the other side of the room, perfunc-
torily drumming away at the letters he dictated to her.
Through the closed door, he heard the incessant ring
of Windsor's telephone, and now and then a disjointed
word. He heard the coming and going of feet and
voices; and, though this was the normal condition of
things, it filled him with apprehension. What were
they finding out? If he himself but knew the real con-
dition of affairs! One hour, two hours, three hours!
The stenographer snapped down her machine. Kemyss
sprang to the door to see Windsor humping himself
into his overcoat.

"I guess business is about over, Kemyss," he said
cheerfully. "Glad we've a roof over our heads to-
night. Beats sleeping in the open, doesn't it? Belongs

to us to see that those poor wretches up there have a roof as soon as possible, too."

"Have you found out anything?" Kemyss managed to articulate.

"About the lumber fire? The story was a fake all right. That's about all we know. Good night, my boy."

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CHAPTER XVIII

MRS. LYELL'S NEW GOSPEL

Oh, the luxury of warm water and clean dainty underclothes! To know it fully one must have passed through flood and smoke, thought Vera. But even to the physical delight of cleanliness she must not yield herself too long, so goaded was she by the desire to hear what a more leisurely medical examination had to say of Ned Lyell.

The soft little woman who came to meet her was another revelation. How different she had looked when they last met!

Mrs. Lyell's face was a study of delightful lines.

"He's better! He is really very comfortable, he says!" she exclaimed, as she came into the room.

"And you, Eugenia? It is a delight to see you looking like your own old self again!"

Mrs. Lyell stopped and picked at her skirts in a self-conscious fashion.

"Do I really look just the same?" she asked. "Isn't

that absurd? I was not quite sure that it was I. I keep examining my petticoats, like the little old woman in the nursery rhyme, to see if it is really I. My chief reassurance is that my little dog up stairs seems to recognize me, though he can't see me, poor dear!"

"You ridiculous woman, what do you mean?"

"Why, I mean that I'm half dazed by all the new things that have come over me. I am like a blind man that suddenly sees. I've been living in cloudland, where everything was rainbow, and I find myself on earth where trees are green, and sky is blue. I must tell you about it, my dear, because I am so full of it. I've stopped philosophizing and begun to live. I hope I have stopped looking inside and begun to look outside. I have always thought the most interesting things in life were ideas, and I find they aren't a patch on love. So this is my final preachment to you; don't love your own soul too much; love somebody else's."

"You dear old goose!" Vera exclaimed. "You were always right. You have only turned away from one noble side of yourself to another."

"But that is just it. Before, I insisted there was only one side to things. Ned has been telling me that I am a regular prism for sides. No, I am not going to be a many-sided genius any longer. I will tell you just one little thing more about myself, and then we'll

drop that subject for ever. I am only a woman who is madly in love with her husband!" She threw out her arms and looked radiant. Vera gave her a great hug.

"Now we'll talk about him," she went on. "Doctor Harper came up as soon as we got home, and poor Ned lies up there bandaged and waiting. It will be a long time before we shall know whether he is ever to see. Meanwhile we are getting acquainted as we never did before. You don't know what an interesting man my husband is!"

"Mr. Lenox talked to me a little about him," Vera said with a soft blush.

But Mrs. Lyell did not see the blush. She sat with downcast eyes and plump hands clasped after her fashion. Suddenly she looked up.

"Vera Windsor, I made a confession about my married life to you about two weeks ago. No! Was it two weeks—five hundred years ago! Now I am going to make another. I have discovered that I had literally carried out my own theory and created a world for myself, and a very unsuccessful world it was. I had assumed my own superiority and shut Ned out of my life. I had even helped the rest of the world to believe in his inferiority,—which does not exist. I took for granted that my marriage was a failure, and so I made it so. Can I abase myself too low? Ned and I have

talked it all over with perfect frankness. He says all my philosophy was good enough, only the opposite is true, too. He says the world consists not only of sweetness and light, but of coal-strikes and diphtheria. There is a class of minds that think it is impossible to believe in sunshine unless they deny shadow, and that was my kind. I realize now that I lived under a continuous nervous strain in trying to believe in myself. Ned is so tender and respectful to all that is good in me that I think we are going to begin to live the higher life together, now."

There was a long pause, and Mrs. Lyell went on in a lower, and less jubilant voice:

"The thing that impresses me about all our experience up in that dreadful place, Vera, is the heroism of the common people. It was the fireman, the conductor, the porter, who played the fire-extinguisher as if they were treating us to a sprinkling of cologne, the men who stood in line till the last woman was down the bank—and I thought only of myself, and so I was afraid." She looked up and laughed. "Isn't it the irony of fate? When I got home I found a letter from my publisher speaking of the tremendous sale that my little book, *Paradise on Earth*, is having. *Paradise of Fools*, I think I should call it now. However, it is going to bring me in the money to take care

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of that helpless lover of mine up stairs until we know whether he or I am to be the bread-winner for the family."

"But you surely do not intend to give up all your public work, do you, Jean? You were always such an inspiration to other women."

"Perhaps not. It seems to be my fate to instruct my fellow women, whether I know more than they do or not; and I shall keep on, I fancy, to the end of the chapter, being a little Buddha. But I shall talk about the glory of the commonplace now, instead of the glory of the unthinkable. I shall try to make them want to be themselves, rather than yearn for the remote."

Her eyes took on the luminous look the girl knew and loved so well.

They kissed each other in silence. Vera felt that she had nothing to say to this tumultuous bundle of impulses.

Mrs. Lyell went back up stairs to where the bandaged shape bore only a partial resemblance to a man.

"You are feeling more comfortable?" she asked.

"Very comfortable and very well, dear."

"You poor patient creature! you'd be sure to say so. And one of these days you are going to see again."

"One of these days I am going to see you, Jean."

"As though I were the only thing to be seen!"

"You are at least the chief thing for me."

She sat down on a footstool beside the bed, and leaned her chin meditatively in her hand, until her husband stirred uneasily.

"Is there anything I can do for you?"

"No, I was only afraid you had gone away."

She slipped her cool fingers around his neck where the flesh was unburned and unpoulticed.

"Now you can feel that I am here. I was thinking of something that happened a little time ago; and, before you can see again, I want to tell you about it. I am afraid that I should never have the courage to tell you, if your eyes were looking at me. And yet things can never be wholly right between us until you know."

"Could you really ever be afraid of me, Jean?"

"Yes. At least I am afraid and ashamed that you should know exactly what I am."

"I think I have known all along. If you have any faults, they are like the tip in Pisa's campanile, and serve only to make you more perfect in my eyes."

"Well, Ned, this bell-tower of yours once tipped so far that it nearly lost its balance entirely. Even you, I am afraid, wouldn't have admired it if it had tumbled in a heap."

"You wouldn't be talking in figures of speech if the

danger were present. I believe I can endure anything in the past, but nothing in the future. Go on."

Her fingers grew a little rigid as they lay upon his throat, but she told him unflinchingly her miserable little story. There was silence for a moment after the tale was ended, and he gulped hard.

"Jean," he burst out, "for the first time you have made it hard for me to lie here quiescent. It's cruel! It's intolerable!"

"Of what account is the serpent to us, so long as, instead of turning us out of Paradise, he has introduced us to it?"

"What do you mean by that?"

"I am deeply grateful to him. It was he who woke the hunger in me which you are to satisfy. He made me know that I needed love, and that I could give love. It is a little humiliating, to be sure, to reflect that it was his meanness and not my integrity that kept me on the straight and narrow path; but if my shame and anguish were the birth-pangs of this, I think we can afford to forget and ignore him."

"When I'm about again, I'll ignore him in a way he won't soon forget."

"What a revengeful, militant thing you are! Lie still, Ned. Don't thrash around so, or the doctor will accuse me of tearing off your bandages. If you don't

keep still, I shall go away and leave you all alone. Besides, I want to talk to you some more."

"Go on. What is it that you want to say?"

"Aren't we having a good time now?"

"Yes, we are. But I would prefer to do it all over again and do it differently,—to woo you and win you in the good old-fashioned way, and to be married and live happily ever afterward."

"Pooh! I think it is infinitely more romantic to be able to hold each other's hands here, comfortably, beside our own fireside, instead of seeking the cold damp, rheumatic seclusion of some shadowy church porch."

"Oh, you do, do you?"

"Yes, I do," answered his wife stoutly. "And I am very glad that we can indulge in any amount of affection without having to lock the library door for fear some member of the family may burst in unannounced."

"Will you kindly indulge a little now?"

"Why, Ned, it's perfectly thrilling to be living together. I don't care how uneventful it looks to an outsider. I believe I have discovered a great fact."

"And what is that, most sapient lady?"

"I believe it is all a mistake to credit youth with being the age of romance. Its sentiment is only tinsel

sentimentality. If you want the real gold, you must get it in mature years, when all the good things of life have been weighed and all, except love, have been found more or less of a failure."

"I agree with you, little woman. Youth is self-centered. Its idea of love means getting, not giving. But there are a good many people who never make your great discovery, even in all the wisdom of middle life."

"Poor things! I'm glad you and I aren't going to be guilty of the sin of second-best any longer," said Mrs. Lyell contentedly.

"Jean," said her husband, "have you ever given Miss Windsor a word of warning about Mr. Kemyss?"

"No, dear."

"There is a general impression abroad that she is to marry him. Don't you think you ought to give her a hint as to his character?"

"No, dear," said his wife complacently.

"Why not?"

"Because I once saw her look at some one else, and I know she is in no danger from Mr. Kemyss."

"What a tone of satisfaction! You are exulting in another love affair."

"Of course I am. Could I wish her anything better? Never mind Vera. She can take care of herself.

I'm going to give you your first curtain lecture. Before, we were never intimate enough for me to lecture you."

"It's lucky for me that I can only hear, and not see your severity."

"I don't understand, now that I know you for what you are, why you let things go on this way so long. Why didn't you make me love you?"

"Little woman, you are still determined to look at things from a one-sided point of view. Once you thought me despicable. Now you can't remember that I have a failing." He spoke sadly. "And yet it is my curse through life that I never have the courage to seize events and do what I like with them. Your indifference, the slightest scornful word from you seemed to make me numb. Again and again I tried; but I never caught fortune's forelock. I always fail. I'm afraid I always shall fail in anything I undertake. I never clinch things."

"Do you mean that you are lacking in the self-confidence that a man needs in order to make him act at the critical moment?"

"I suppose that is it."

"We'll soon fix that," she said confidently. "For the rest of your life you are going to succeed. Hereafter I'm going to praise and admire and generally

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cocked you up so that you will be a monster of self-approbation. I'm only afraid that your vanity and presumption and masterfulness will make you almost unendurable." They both laughed like children.

In the carriage on her way home, Miss Windsor too laughed softly at intervals.

But, though she laughed, one phrase of her friend's kept repeating itself to her own heart:

"Don't love your own soul too much; love some one else's."

"After all, it would be worth while to be such another extremist as she is to feel the extreme of love too, as she does," she whispered to herself.

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CHAPTER XIX

MORE LUCK

The village store at Minturn was chiefly remarkable for its large electric lights, and the absence of anything that a rational mortal could eat or wear. The brilliant red under-flannels with which Lenox was obliged to eke out his diminished store gave promise of enduring until their first wash, and seemed to offer an explanation of the prevailing prejudice, in those parts, against submitting garments to the wear and tear of the tub. The village hotel proved to be a place where the waiting maid shouted Swedish mysteries into a hole in the wall, and returned bearing dishes that filled Frank's mind with interrogation points. He fell with a thud from the glorious region where Vera Windsor irradiated peril and pain and stirred the manhood within him, to the commonplace earth, where, to adopt the vernacular, "a feller must hustle for his living."

Being clothed and partly fed, he set out for the fa-

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mous farm of Sven Svenson. That big blond, serene and unruffled as though his horses had never been in jeopardy, received him with a welcome as broad as his own breast. The farm was a thing to look at and rejoice. Lenox was thankful to accept an invitation to spend the night, glad to sit down to the wholesome profuseness of a good country supper. All around him were gems of art of domestic and factory manufacture. Here hung large crayon portraits of all the family; there stood brilliant blue and gold vases, such as one sees only in such wholesale houses of St. Etienne as cater for the country trade; here was the overgrown upright piano that marks rising gentility. Best of all there was Mrs. Svenson, clean, rosy-cheeked, blue-eyed and plump, and there were the little Svensons, clean, rosy-cheeked, blue-eyed and plump,—a long line of them, “every smaller,” as their father explained, with a descending wave of his broad hand as he introduced them.

Lenox was always genuinely interested in the other man, so, after supper, when there were pipes and leisure, he opened up.

“How did you come out here, Svenson?”

“Ah, Ay coom on a horse-car.”

“Oh, that will do!”

“Ay mean Ay coom on a car vat you ship horses

on. Me an' me broodar Eric, ve vas ofar dar behind the horses, an' the conductor, an' the brakeman, day don't dar to coom in dar an' gat anny fares from us. Day couldn't gat anny fares annyvay, because ve don't gat anny money. Dat's how ve coom."

"And what has become of your brother?"

"Eric? He vas about tray hondert mile nort of har. Hay got big farm, Eric. Hay vas vort most saxty tousan' dollar. Ay tell you vat! Ay gif you latter to Eric, an' Ay guess hay gaf you some grain, too. Hay vas goot fallar to know."

"You and Eric seem to get on a great deal better than some of the settlers here."

"Ay tall you vat, young fallar, das vas de best country in world for a fallar to gat rich in, van hay don't gat any money to start vith. A man coom out har, an' af hay got 'nough brains to tank vit one half-hour afery day, an' hay as villin' to work tan, twelf hours afery day, dan hay tanks hay fount the promised lant. Dan anodar fallar, hay har how dat fallar gat rich, an hay coom too; an' hay ain't gat no brains, an' hay ain't gat no push, an' hay sats down an' waits. Vat does hay fint? Hay fints ve got awful hot dry summers, an' awful cold vinters, an hay say at's a damn bad country."

"I guess you've sized up the situation. Is your

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brother Eric bringing up a fine family like yours, to vote for a Swedish governor every time?"

"Yas, Eric, hay vas married, but hay don't ban married so long as me, an' has family, it ain't so big. Ay vas oop dar var Eric lif van hay yoost got a leetle dug-out an' hay lif all alone. Dar vas a man name of Anderson, Ole Anderson, an' hay vas goin' away, an' hay vant to sall has furniture, an' hay sall her mighty cheap. At vas goot furniture. So Ay say, 'Eric, dat vas cheap furniture. You vant to buy that furniture.' Eric, hay say, 'Vat Ay do vit all dat furniture?' Ay say, 'You ought to gat married. Das vas goot chance.' So Eric, hay buy furniture; an' hay say, 'Ay vander who Ay batter marry?' So ve sat an' tank. Dan Ay say, 'Dat hired girl of Larson's shay mak goot vife.' Hay say, 'All right. Ay go out dar now. Ay guess Ay gat license before we go. Dat saf one trip.' Because Mr. Larson, hay vas ministar. Hay could marry dam right off. So ve go to gat a license, an' Eric say, 'Sven, vat you say har last name? Ay know har front name vas Tilly, but Ay don't know har last name.' The man, hay say, 'Ay can't gif you no license vitout you know her last name.' So Eric, hay say, 'Vall, put it down Petarson on chances. Ay guess dat do annyvay.' Vell, har name was Petarson, so that vas vay Eric got married."

Svenson put back his big head and gave a deep bel-
lowing laugh.

"Hay vas a goot man, an' hay got a goot wife," he
concluded.

Mrs. Svenson came in from her household tasks
and sat by the lamp to make a wonderful mat by
cutting red velveteen in long strips. Frank longed
to ask her what romance lay behind her matrimonial
venture, but he contented himself by taking a young
Viking on his lap and telling him the wonderful story
of how Brother Rabbit frightened his neighbors. Sev-
eral other young Vikings stood around and listened
solemnly and pondered long on what they had heard.
And then came bed, between coarse linen sheets, fra-
grant with cleanliness.

It was afternoon of the next day before the visit
and the business came to an end, and Frank said good-
by to all the little Norsemen. His bicycle had come
up on the noon train from St. Etienne, and with it a
letter from Henry Repburn, written the day before
the Pine Vale fire, and savoring strongly of ancient
history.

"My dear Lenox," it read. "At last I am strong
enough to write and thank you for your generous
gift, inclosed in the note which Doctor Norris gave
me a day or two ago. I appreciate your good advice,

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and, as you shall hear, I have reason to hope that I shall be able to pay back the money some day.

"Miss Windsor came to see me yesterday. I did not know till then that it was she who picked me up. She is all right, if her father is an old pirate. She brought me good things to eat and read, and was thoroughly kind. In fact, I could not help telling her my whole story, and she seemed very sympathetic with my undeserved sufferings. I hope she will give her father a piece of her mind on the subject. She finished by offering to help me, but I told her that you had already lifted me over a hard place, and she said that was just what she would have expected of you. I did not know you knew her so well. She is a peach.

"And now I must tell you what I had the pleasure of telling her. My luck has turned at last. The very day after I came to the hospital, a letter arrived from my Uncle Henry, begging my forgiveness for his unjust treatment of me. He has had a paralytic stroke that partly disabled him, and he implores me to come back and take care of him during his old age. All he wants is my company and my attentions, and he promises to make me his heir. Of course this good fortune makes me all the more ashamed of my recent act, and more grateful to you and Miss Windsor for saving me. I do not feel so grateful to Doctor Nor-

ris, for, though he has done his duty to me as a physician, he has spoken to me in a way that I must designate as hateful. A doctor has no call to administer morals.

"I do not wish to be un-Christian, but I can not help regarding this visitation of Uncle Henry's as a judgment. He probably brought it on himself by his evil passions against me. He has a daughter who was very impertinent to him years ago. He quarreled violently with her, so that, as she inherits his bad disposition, it is quite right that I should inherit his property.

"Of course I shall not twit him with the evident Providence shown in his misfortune, for it might turn him against me if I did. I shall be as kind to him as I know how.

"Your welcome gift will enable me to pay my fare back to Winterhaven, whither I shall go in a few days now, and I shall hope to return the money soon. I should not think Uncle Henry would last long. But I do not expect to return to St. Etienne. I do not think the West suits me.

"May the same good luck that has at last befallen me come to you.

Sincerely your friend,

Henry Repburn."

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As he folded up this epistle Frank could not help whistling softly to himself.

"Here is food for reflection," he said. "But being a 'man on the road,' I have no time for reflection. I will ride twenty miles north to Trondheim, and there try to intercept to-morrow's express on to Eric Svenson."

Over the level prairie road, with the wind at his back, he made the new wheel fly, but the road soon narrowed and faded out into mere ruts, so that ever his pace grew slower and slower. The gusts became fitful, uncertain of their own intention, then whirled around, bringing with them fierce sheets of rain, the first rain for two months. Lenox's first thought was, "If this had come three days ago, Pine Vale and her people would not now be in ashes!"

Slipping, riding and walking in the steady down-pour soon brought back his thoughts to his own small affairs. Again and again he fell from his wheel with no injury except a soft coating of mud from heels to head. Now and again the wheels blocked entirely, so that he had to leave the road and take to the uneven prairie, to stumble over the stubbly grass.

Every mile or so, a small stream crossed the road, and bridges there were none. At first he crossed these rivulets on the parallel railway, but soon, growing in-

different to wetness, he shouldered his wheel and gallantly waded the currents. For two mortal hours, with eyes full of damp real estate, plunging and lunging through the storm, he fought his way. Then the sun came brilliantly to the fore again and baked the mud picturesquely over him.

Thus decorated, he rode into Trondheim, to the great delight of the little boys who lined up to watch him. Like a dog with its tail between its legs, Lenox jogged his wheel between their loud-voiced ranks, and gladly flung himself into the shelter of the hotel. A portly German host, with discernment enough to perceive his underlying respectability, cheerfully proffered a suit of his own clothes, but to the wearied bicyclist bed was the most alluring of images; and to bed he went, handing his raiment through the door to be dried and cleaned according to the dictates of the German conscience.

But before the blessings of bed, there were new horrors to be endured. He discovered that, save for a few pale streaks on his legs, he was dyed a brilliant, indubitable, glowing red.

"Never again will I buy under-flannels at Minturn," he said, dejectedly surveying himself in the mirror. And as he scrubbed in growing desperation: "Will nothing but time and sapolio avail me? It's unrea-

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sonable that color that goes on so easily should stick so fast."

With chattering teeth, and weary with a weariness on which the unmeaning hotel supper, sent to his room, made no impression, he tried to settle himself to sleep. He was disturbed to find his pulse running a little wildly. No longer a youth out in pursuit of fortune, he became a desolate, homeless, friendless wanderer. He was without belongings. He wrote his mother's name and address on a scrap of paper and pinned it to the head of the bed, realizing, as he did so, that she was too far off, in the Maine village, to help him in case of illness. He thought of Vera, passionately, longingly; not, as he had hitherto loved her, for her girlhood, but with keen appreciation of womanly services. He envied Lyell the ministrations of his wife. A home seemed the most desirable thing in life. It is a threat of advancing middle life when the world looks this way, when the beloved becomes, not a lovely isolated image, but a representative of household joys. But this he did not know. He coveted even the crayon portraits of Sven Svenson, in so far as they stood for home; and then he fell asleep, to awake in glowing morning, as right as a trivet, and with an enormous appetite. Middle age was held at bay, and youth was triumphant. While

making a fresh attack on his dye, he indulged in scholarly meditations.

"I am going to write an article that will electrify the ethnographical world," he said, "and settle for ever the question as to whether there is a tendency on the part of settlers in America to revert to the Indian types. Here, as soon as I come to the land of the Dakotahs, I bloom out like a red man. I must be full-blooded Sioux up to my collar. I wonder if it will show. By Jove, I wish I had a collar to put on. I wonder why that Deutscher does not bring my clothes."

There was no bell, but he pounded on wall and door. Finally, in desperation, he paraded the deserted corridors to the very limits, but still no genial German face, no responsive garments. Time, after its invariable habit, went on, and the north-bound express would soon be due. He flung open the window, knelt beside it and hailed the first passer-by, who looked wildly up and down, in response to his, "Hi!"

"Would you be kind enough to go in and ask the landlord to send up my clothes? I am very anxious to catch the train. Thank you." And when at last he got himself into the stiffened and creased-at-all-the-wrong-places trousers, he muttered to himself:

"This is the greatest piece of luck I have had. Eric

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Svenson will take me for a backwoods farmer, and, instead of vituperating me for a city dude, as most of them do, he will fall upon my neck, and send me every bushel of his grain!"

One may become quite as much of a philosopher while on the hunt for wheat in North Dakota as when searching for an honest man in classic Greece.

And after Eric, the physical duplicate of Sven, had been seen and successfully interviewed, Frank penetrated still farther up the Keewis Valley, which, being off the beaten track, had devoted to its service the oldest and shabbiest cars that the company owned, cars now filled chiefly with farm-hands.

At each station the engine uncoupled to do switching and the train crew loaded and unloaded freight cars. There was plenty of time at each place for the energetic grain man to attack a few prominent citizens, and get here and there the promise of a shipment—a promise generally unfulfilled—while the bulk of the passengers ran to the adjacent village to buy luncheons with which they returned to the car and held high carnival, littering the floor with broken doughnuts and banana skins, and indulging in ponderous jokes about the North Railroad's buffet car, alternating with loud requests to the porter to make up the berths, because they were tired of this delay.

At Olga, Lenox decided to go no farther into a hopeless region, but to await the down-coming train and get back to the main line; and at Olga, accordingly, he descended. The place had not a cheerful appearance, for the station doors were all boarded up with old grain doors; but Frank met with a cheerful welcome from Judge Higgs, whose aged dignity was enhanced by the fact that he had the honor to be post-master,—though, to judge by the collapsed state of the mail-bag that hung awaiting the train, the position was not an onerous one. At any rate, the judge was delighted at the unusual spectacle of any one getting off at Olga. His face still bore traces of last week's tobacco, and he was quite deaf. The whole town came to its doors to listen to the conversation that took place between its own dignitary and the enterprising stranger within its gates. Frank launched into a dissertation on the great benefits which would come to a thriving town like Olga, if it would start a farmers' elevator, which, quite incidentally to its sending a large amount of grain to the St. Pierre Company, would prove an attraction to the entire neighborhood, luring surrounding farmers to trade in the vicinity, and thus rushing the town into that vortex of "boom," for which it had been waiting for years. The idea evidently intoxicated the citizens,

and they were very cordial to Frank. The general storekeeper even refused to accept payment for five cents' worth of prunes, from which the young man made a frugal lunch. And then the train came, a freight, which he determined to take in order to get back to a real town before night, to avoid the country hostelry, and to secure a good night's rest. He was learning these things.

"Hello!" said the conductor, as he got aboard. "Got off at Olga, did ye? Guess you must be green at it, sonny. Never knew a traveling man to get off at Olga before."

The ride was exciting to Frank's inexperienced eyes because of the deeds of this same conductor, a true Irishman, and a lover of a fight. The tramp was abroad in the land, and the official was having his little day. He would drop off, while the train was climbing a grade, catch the truss-rods, swing under the car, and deliver his personal compliments to the ride stealers. One of the tramps threw a stone at him while he was on the caboose, and the conductor promptly returned fire with a revolver, but neither of them hit.

"Say, there's a feller on those truss-beams. Watch me make him happy," said the joyous scrapper.

He took a piece of heavy chain, attached it to a long

rope, which he hung at the end of the box-car and lowered until the great links dragged and sent the fine gravel of the road-bed rattling and peppering the unfortunate creature below.

"Hear him swear? Naw, ye can't hear him, but he's swearing, just the same," the Irishman exclaimed rapturously. "Haw, crawl on to the brake-beams, would ye? I'll fix ye, my beauty!" and he set the brakes until they 'chattered,' shaking the prisoned tramp with continuous and intolerable jars.

"Now will ye get off?" he cried exultantly. "You bet ye will!"

The conductor went his way, knowing himself victorious.

Happy is the man who can pound a fellow man, and do his duty at one and the same time. That conductor would hardly have forfeited the proud privilege of fighting tramps to be division superintendent.

And yet, after Lenox had finally descended and stood a moment on the platform of the station, while the train zoned past him, an undetected vagrant waved a triumphant though ragged cap from the doorway of an empty box-car, and Lenox paid him the tribute of an elaborate bow, as they parted for ever.

And upon this—these contrasts were unbelievable—there came an excellent hotel buzzing with conven-

tional life, and with all the turmoil of civilization. Frank took his appetizing dinner, chatted with a thoroughly informed man of the world, spent a pleasing evening at a pretty provincial theater, and went to bed to wonder at the methods of nature and of man, when between them they start in to "open up" a new country. For these things alternated in streaks, like the fat and lean of bacon.

Day after day, night after night, it went on. The weeks passed, and now Lenox found himself far to the north, near that Canadian frontier where, it is reported, old Boreas keeps his blizzard factory.

A loud discussion on economics was raging in the car.

"Reciprocity!" He heard the argument come to a close. "I tell you there can't be no reciprocity between God's country and Canada until we can equalize things a bit, and send them as bad weather as they send us. Look at this storm! This is the kind of thing they make up there. I tell you the less we have to do with anybody that is fool enough to live up there, the better for us. If I was the gov'ment at Washington, I'd swing the Rocky Mountains around on a pivot, and string 'em along the border, and make them Canucks keep their cold winds to themselves."

Everybody was too depressed to answer this, and si-

lence fell upon the car. It was Sunday night, and the snow lay heavily across the northland. The train waited to start from a tiny junction on its course up a small branch line. Across the station, the great south-bound express puffed nervously as it halted for a brief instant. The lights of the comfortable Pullmans gleamed warm and alluring through the oncoming storm. Frank looked longingly at it through the windows of the mean, poorly lighted day-coach that was good enough for the Meryton branch. Five hundred miles away to the south lay St. Etienne and Vera Windsor. He felt the lump in his throat like a homesick boy. This was a dog's life; and it was only three days now to the dance when, he had hoped, he might see her and touch her. Five hundred miles!

He had that buoyant courage which itself fights half of every battle—the first half—and he had not been afraid of this rough and tumble of a civilization in the making. Each opportunity had opened out another, until the route originally planned had spread in all directions. He was far from through with his allotted task, though he had added to it frills on every side, and from a business point of view he knew that he had succeeded in making a goodly record.

Away to the south flew the big train, and the little one waited and waited. Hour after hour passed.

"Something wrong up the track," was all the satisfaction that impatient passengers could get out of taciturn officials. Already eighteen inches of snow lay on the ground, and all the afternoon the clouds had been working up from that ominous northwest quarter. Now the blast came. Starlight was wiped out in inky blackness. The wind shrieked in at the casements of the miserable car and howled about its eaves and those of the station beyond. Snow filled every crevice. A tired baby cried in a tired mother's arms and dropped asleep. Lenox tried to read *Jane Eyre* by the light of an evil-smelling lamp, and gave it up to stare moodily out at the storm and to fancy how horrible it would be to be a belated traveler abroad on the prairie, especially if one had taken too much "cold tea" before starting on his journey.

The train gave a discouraged jerk, as though it, too, wished that it could have gone south on the through express.

"How long do you think it will take us to get to Meryton at this rate?"

"Dunno," growled the conductor shortly.

The train stopped and waited another hour. People went to sleep in various attitudes of discomfort, to doze and wake and doze again while the wind rocked the lonely car like a cradle. And the final wakening

came to a world still white with eddying snow-drifts and hemmed in with gray wilderness.

On the platform Lenox found a brakeman who volunteered the information: "By the time they get the darned old bridge mended, we'll be blocked by darned old snow-drifts. What's the use of kickin', anyhow?"

All day the train stood still with that impenetrable whiteness accumulating like a wall in front of it. Society organized itself by the natural method; the passengers thus flung together by fortune were all on speaking terms, even speaking of each other to each other behind his or her back.

The passengers read and re-read the directions on the backs of the telegraph blanks, the only literary pabulum to be found. Occasionally the engine gave a heavy bull-like bunt at the drift and retired more discouraged than ever.

Once excitement rose to a fever heat. A small, much-be-muffled boy appeared at the car door, pushing before him a basket many sizes too large for him. He spoke into the monotony:

"Anybody want milk or pie?"

He was almost upset in the onslaught. Hands began to grab while the new Ganymede looked on in tearful impotence, until Lenox seized him and put him

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in a corner, saying, "Use this ledge for a counter, my lad, and I'll see that you get fair play."

"That's square!"

"Give the lady with the baby a whack at the milk, can't you?"

"I'll auction it off for you. Ladies and gentlemen, what am I offered for this remarkable piece of pie, guaranteed like mother used to make, or money refunded? It goes to the highest bidder."

So little Ole trotted back and forth from the farm of the Olsons, and reaped a golden harvest.

"Say, let's have a christening ceremony for this car," remarked the witty philosopher, who is found wherever two or three are gathered together.

"What do you want to name it?" asked the accommodating person who always asks what is expected from him.

"Well, it's painted on the outside, 'Kankakee,' but I'd sooner call it the 'Steadfast.'" There were several ponderous but hollow laughs, and humor's stock ebbed low.

Toward evening the train began to move slowly back, with heavy groans from the wheezy locomotive. Lenox sought the nonchalant conductor in frank dismay.

"Aw," said that functionary, "'taint no use. The

bridge ain't safe and the snow blocks us anyway. We can't get through."

"When is the next train to start?" Frank was inclined to be insistent.

"This train, sir," the conductor replied, with official humor, "runs every day except week days and most of the winter. Aw, they can't clear the track for as little traffic as there is on this branch. Mebbe 'twon't be open till spring."

Thus, when more than twenty-four hours had elapsed from the time of starting, the "accommodation," routed, returned to Leveret Junction. Lenox sent a telegram to Mr. Holton.

"Have covered all the ground proposed, except Meryton Branch, which is blocked by snow. Where do you wish me to go?"

He pretended to himself that he was quite indifferent to the answer to this message, but when it came, "Come back to St. Etienne," the leaping of his pulses gave the lie to the flimsy deception.

After another long period of waiting, he heard, far off through the stillness of the early morning, a sound of joy—he heard the distant whistle and then the arriving roar of an express, making a symphony of triumph. The black porter in the sleeping car looked like a guardian angel; and, after he was laid

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away on his shelf, between the starchy sheets, the rhythmic thump-thump sang a lullaby, as the train rushed southward through the night.

CHAPTER XX

A WALK AND A DANCE

The day was young, the air was crisp, the sky of a primary blue, as Vera Windsor, buoyant from the crown of her head to her feet, too buoyant for the prosaic inside of a carriage, started to walk down town. The sound of brisk footsteps behind reëchoed her own joy in activity, and she turned with a radiant greeting, as Mr. Kemyss joined her. To him, too, the world looked fair. He was square with Timothy Norton, and no one was the wiser as to their relations. The wretched old debt that had been rolling up like a snowball for the past two years was canceled. He had even a thousand or two to spare. He could face the world with freedom. He and his fellow conspirator had not even met face to face, so simple a thing had it proved to hoodwink the dull old world. He even began to take an interest in other people's affairs, and Mrs. Lyell had for him the fascination that the scene of his crime is supposed to hold for the murderer.

"Do you know how Lyell is getting on?" he asked.

"I have just come from there. It is quite certain now that he will regain his sight. Of course, his wife is exultant. But his face, Mr. Kemyss, is like a gargoyle. It has hardly a human semblance. He will be a monster for the rest of his life, and she does not seem to know it. She is so devoted that she has lost all consciousness of how he will look to other people. Of course she would love him all the more, since he paid that price for her."

Now, knowing what he did, this naturally amused Mr. Kemyss very much, and it also greatly relieved him.

"Then perhaps he was a lucky fellow to get a chance to prove himself a hero in the eyes of the woman he loves. Life is usually so humdrum that most men never have the opportunity to show that side of themselves."

"Oh, I believe there is a good deal of genuine manliness in the world in spite of our sophistications. It shows in little things as well as in great ones." She spoke softly, even tenderly, and Kemyss looked at her with a glow of something almost warmer than admiration. It was plain to him that she regarded him in a favorable light.

"Still Lyell is rather a dull fellow," he went on. "I wonder how it will be in years to come when Mrs.

Lyell has recovered from her present spasm of admiration. She will always be superlative, you know. She may end as a Roman Catholic, or she may end as a Buddhist, but, whatever she is, it will be with all her might."

"Yes, I admit that is true. It took me a long time to find it out. I used to think her enthusiasm was a testimony to the truth of her ideas."

"No, it is merely a matter of temperament."

"Well, one is always inclined to believe what some one else believes very hard. You were clever to read her so clearly." But Vera spoke as though she did not like his diagnosis. "Really, though," she said, brightening, "Mr. Lyell is not stupid. I suppose he has fallen into a habit of reticence through all these years. Mrs. Lyell says he used never to talk. But now he has opened up, and I assure you he is a delightful companion. I think his ideas have grown fine through his very genuineness. Perhaps, if one lives the truth, one can not help knowing the truth."

"It is a great pity, Miss Windsor, that you can not enter the pulpit." He could not resist giving her this thrust for the thing in her that he least liked.

"Do you think I am preachy?"

"I think it is a great pity that a girl so young and," —he hesitated a moment, and then as if it would come

out, added, "so beautiful as yourself, should be regarding the world chiefly as a lesson in ethics."

"And what is it, then?"

"A place to have a good time in, at least while you are young. And Mrs. Lyell is having a great deal more fun than you are, at present, because she is playing with love and not with morals. That is the great game, Miss Windsor."

She did not look up, but a warm glow spread over her face.

"Mrs. Lyell is playing with the combination of love and morals at last, I think," she said. "I have an errand here. Good morning, Mr. Kemyss."

And Kemyss strode on to the office with a happy and supercilious expression, betokening that he had just made a great hit, and was superior to the grubbing humanity through which he passed. Everything was coming to him.

In the early evening of late November, Lenox's train steamed into St. Etienne. It was the through train from the Pacific, delayed by northern snows until it was exactly twenty-four hours late, and so could conscientiously be posted as "on time."

How delicious was this rush of city life, after the unmitigated nature of Leveret Junction! The abrupt glares and shadows of the electric lights, the dashes

of color in lighted shop-windows, the rush and murmur of home-returning crowds, the cry of newsboys, and the imperative whizz of heavily laden electrics, made harmony for Frank's eyes and ears. The almost strange city looked like home; even the impersonal hotel room looked like home. Waiting on his mantelshelf was a pile of letters, the dear missives from his mother, the gossip of old friends, the signals from other boys, who, like himself, had gone out from the New England home to leaven the land with Puritan blood. He seized them eagerly, and uttered an exclamation of impatience as there came a rap at his door.

"They told me down stairs that you was just back this minute," said Repburn's drawl. "It seemed too good to be true, after all I've been through, to think you was really here. Upon my word, I need a friend."

Lenox laid down his letters and tried to assume a hospitable air.

"Sit down," he said. "What's up now? So you've come back to St. Etienne after all?"—as though the question were unnecessary, still less the lengthy answer.

"Yes, I'm back. I'm back. I've come back to St. Etienne, and I hoped to goodness I'd never do it again. But I might have known all that good luck was too good for me. It just had to turn. Say, if there's any

such thing as a goddess of fate, she'd ought to be throttled."

Lenox now resigned himself altogether. After all, it was several hours before the ball, and he had to put in his time in some fashion. Repburn crossed his legs and took a comfortable position, preparatory to abandoning himself to the luxury of rehearsing his woes.

"This is how it was. Uncle Henry was just too delighted to see me. Poor old feller, he was all laid up, and mighty lonely, I can tell you! You'd 'a' thought nothing ever happened between us. All he wanted to keep him contented was just for me to sit around and read to him and tell him about the great wicked West, and what an old reprobate Nick Windsor was. It is a real satisfaction to think that, when some of us ain't gettin' our fair show, still some of these men that seem to be havin' everythin' in the world are such old sinners that they are sure to get their come-uppance when they cross Jordan. Uncle Henry was tickled to death, and so was every one else. So we had a very pleasant time for a few days, and I was gettin' really fond of the old boy, when, of course, it had to go and happen."

"What had to happen?"

"Let's see. To-day's the twenty-fourth. Well, it was just twelve days ago to-day, I was helpin' him across from a sofy to his chair, and some one had been

careless enough to leave a kind of a hole in the carpet. Darned if I don't think it was a piece of spite on some one's part."

"Why, he didn't blame you for it, did he?"

"Blame me? Why, he never got the chance. As I told you, I was liftin' him, and, sir, if my foot didn't catch in that hole, and down I went, and him under me. If you'll believe me, he never spoke again, and two days afterward he died. And the trouble was, he had not made his will. The old villain, after he'd got me to go clear on there, and after me taking care of him and everythin', he had to go and die without makin' the will he promised!"

"He probably intended to, but hadn't time."

"Well, I hope so, for the sake of his immortal soul. I hope his intentions were better than his acts; but it was a mean trick to play on a feller."

"Why, you come in for the money anyway, don't you?"

"Don't you remember," asked Mr. Repburn in a grieved voice, "don't you remember that I wrote you that Uncle Henry had a daughter? She is an unregenerate, I can tell you, if one ever lived on this earth. She came postin' up to Winterhaven, she and her husband, almost before Uncle Henry was cold, and just as sassy as if she had a right there."

"She did, you know," observed Lenox.

"Legally, I suppose, but not by any higher law. I represented to her in the strongest terms I knew how what was her duty, but it didn't do no good. I told her that as Uncle Henry intended I should have everythin', the least she could do was to divide even. And do you know, sir, her husband had the audacity to tell me to leave the house. He said that I was answerable for the old man's death, and I'd ought to be thankful that they didn't have me arrested for murder. Yes, sir, that's the way they talked to me. They won't have any good come to them with the money they get, and thank the Lord, they didn't get it all."

"Then your uncle did make some will?"

"No, he didn't make no will. But I had lived there in the house with him, and I knew his ways. I knew he had some money hidden somewheres; and just as soon as I realized that he was dead, I turned to and hunted. I've had more bad luck than any man I know, but for once, I had my turn. I found it in an old sofy cushion before ever she turned up. I suspected that cushion, because uncle was so particular about always havin' it under his head. And you can just bet I didn't say a word to her about it. By everything that's right, I'd ought to have clost on thirty thousand, and do you think I was called on to give up that little bit, and

leave myself penniless? No, siree! It would have been wicked for me to do so."

"How much was it that you stole?"

"Stole! Why, what do you mean?" Repburn looked perturbed.

"I have an idea that is what the law, and Uncle Henry's daughter, would call it," said Lenox.

"Oh, come, you're jokin'! This was equity, and that's higher than law, ain't it? Well, sir, it amounted to clost on two thousand dollars, and it's goin' to be the making of me. I tell you, in a country like this there's lots of opportunities to make money, and I've begun my career already." He swelled out his chest and grew important.

Frank choked a moment, then laughed. After all, what was the use in his interfering? He might only make matters worse, so he said:

"And what are you going to do?"

"I've gone into business with a feller here. I see an 'ad' in one of the papers the day after I got here—and that's four days ago—saying that there was a good business opportunity for a man with a small amount of capital; and I says to myself, 'That's me!' So I looked it up, and it's all right. My partner is a smart kind of a man, and I'll bet he knows how to make money. I'll tell you all about it."

"You'll have to wait until some other time," said Frank. "I've just come back to town, and it's late, and I've had no dinner. It's time I got a bite and dressed."

"Undressed, you mean. What do you want to dress for at this time of night?"

"I'm going to a dance."

"You're going to a dance? Gee whizz! Who invites you to a dance?" Frank could not help laughing at his impertinence.

"Your benefactress."

"Miss Windsor? Is Miss Windsor inviting you to a dance? Say, Lenox, you're jokin' again. You ain't that thick with them." Then he added, enviously:

"You just wait till I've made my everlastin' fortune the way I'm bound to with this new scheme of mine, and I guess the Windsors 'll be sweet on me, too."

"Repburn, will you be good enough to clear out of here, and give me a chance to take a bath?" demanded Lenox, at the end of his rope.

Two or three hours later he shook hands with an imposing line of receiving ladies, who mumbled inarticulately in palpable ignorance of his name, and pushed on boldly through the crowd. His eyes lighted at last as he saw her standing amid a bevy of friends near the dancing-room door. He felt that till now he had not appreciated her beauty. It needed the background of

lovely faces and shoulders, and the glimmer of silks and laces to reveal her.

The musicians were going through their usual preliminary anguish before striking up the first two-step, and people screamed to make themselves heard. Before her stood two or three men, and as he neared them, he found that she was saying:

"No, no, that is final. I have positively vowed not to dance this except,—why, there he is now!"

She had turned her face toward him, and she put out her hand.

"Mr. Lenox, I did not expect and hardly recognized you. Really, how you have changed! The last time I saw you I was under the impression that you combed your hair with a match, and your collar—" She gave a little gasp. "I am ashamed of myself, that I can laugh at any memories of that dreadful time. What must you think of me? And how do we dare to do this kind of thing, when such horrors are in the world?"

"Because we can't afford to let the shadow of death darken all life, nor can we dress in perpetual black. We must take the world as we find it in all its various moods. I've been seeing several of them of late, Miss Windsor."

"And so have I. I've been working on the relief committee for the people who were left destitute by the

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fire. I wish you could have seen the poor creature in rags, who refused to take a jacket because the sleeves were last year's cut. She said there had been such a change in this season's styles that she would be ashamed to be seen in it."

"Well, isn't it lucky that there is some comedy leavening every tragedy?"

"And often I think there is some tragedy leavening every comedy, and redeeming it from the commonplace."

"Are you thinking now of Pine Vale or of Reburn?"

"Perhaps I am thinking of myself."

"You are neither comedy nor tragedy."

"What then?"

"Lyric poetry. But, come," he added quickly, "we are here to play to-night, are we not? The two-step is well under way."

"Yes, dance. I love it!" she exclaimed, and he put his arm around her waist, as blissfully happy as any right-minded boy could be.

Ah, that rhythmic movement over gleaming floors and under mellow softened lights! How it sets the pulses in tune! The swirl of silken skirts, the glimpses of lustrous eyes, the couples, self-absorbed, speak to the senses of the mating that has gone on in the good

old world since the morning stars sang together. The serene older pairs look on, as if ready to assure the young things that, having tried him, they have found Love a fulfiller of all his promises. Dancing was invented that soft breaths and snowy shoulders should repeat the same story.

At least, this was Francis Lenox's interpretation of the spiritual meaning in a two-step, on that November evening in St. Etienne.

And then the dance was over, and another man claimed her. After all, the ball was the usual ordinary assemblage of assorted humanity, and some of the women had on too much powder. He waited eagerly until his turn might come again, and although he dared not speak or hint of all that was in him, yet every commonplace sounded to his own ears like the most ardent love-making. When a man is in this fine electric condition, obtuse indeed must be the maid who does not thrill responsive to his passion. Vera was not obtuse to the song without words.

Frank followed her and Mr. Windsor to their carriage, to receive a cordial hand-shake from her father, whom he now regarded with almost reverential awe.

"If this weather keeps up," the old man said, as a cold blast struck them at the door, "we shall be having ice-yachting in a few days. Vera, you must get up a

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party. Lenox, you'd like to get a taste of it. It's great old sport."

Vera went home too strangely excited to sleep, and Frank rather envied the belated gamin whom he saw hanging on behind her carriage as it rolled smoothly over the asphalt.

CHAPTER XXI

ICE-BOATING

In front of the club-house, fluttering on the glassy surface of Lake Imnijaska, stood a group of ice-boats, poised like sea-gulls impatient for flight. Occasionally a gusty breeze, catching a sail, set it tugging and uttering quick moans of protest at the delay. Even the runners moved uneasily, as though they were aerial things longing to spurn the glittering solid below, and lift themselves in an ecstasy of motion. The sky overhead dazzled the eyes by its intensity of blue—not the pink liquid blue of the south, but an unadulterated passion of blue which found its reflection in great stretches of almost equally intense ice. The wind had swept bare the ice, but on the shores the snow was piled in blinding whiteness against which naked trunks of the birch-trees looked almost dingy.

The white oaks, clinging in miserly fashion to their crumpled dead leaves, gave one the impression of careless countrymen who had gone to bed with their clothes

on. Here and there a summer cottage peeped sheepishly and chillily from out the bleak trees, a little ashamed of itself to be found in undress, flowerless and hammockless, its wide piazzas bare of lounging chairs and inviting pillows, and the broad lawns only a smooth expanse of snow in the place of green velvet.

But little recked the group of gay young people laughing on the ice, of anything save the brilliancy of the day and the steely exhilaration of the crisp dry air. Dancing blood, like tugging sails, called out for movement. Every one was bundled up to the ears, and each was half-amused at the appearance of the other. Kemyss was there, dressed as became a practised ice-yachtsman, but looking bigger than ever from his waist upward; Windsor, because of the more frigid blood of older years, stamped to keep warm, in long fur overcoat and cap with ear tabs. Others, less prepared for emergencies of this kind, wore anything and everything, as regardless of appearances as the average football player. Of the feminine half, be it said, that, though the swathing furs might wipe out all distinctions of figure, they formed always a piquant and becoming background for faces whose heightened complexion and brightened eyes paid tribute to the day.

"Your color is a delight! You are like a spot of vivid human interest in this world of dazzling white."

Kemyss spoke approvingly to Vera, who, in short-skirted toboggan suit of scarlet, with high gaiters and fluttering tasseled toque to match, and with big collar and gloves of fur, looked the embodiment of vitality. She was ready for anything. When he saw her flash a pleased glance at Kemyss, Lenox cursed himself for not being the first to say the words that a moment before he had thought better unsaid. Frank felt a hand on his arm and whirled around.

"I want to introduce you to Miss Preston, Mr. Lenox," said Windsor, and the young man found himself bowing to a mass of furs, a glint of fair hair and a pair of large blue eyes that looked at him coquettishly.

"The *Wabasso* is waiting for us. Do you think you can hold Miss Preston in, Frank?"

"You know it is my first experience in ice-boating, Mr. Lenox!" The voice was plaintive and the big eyes looked appealing.

"Then we will live and die together, Miss Preston; I'm only a midshipmite myself."

He began gallantly to help her into the big net that swung between the pulsing rudders and to heap rugs around her, while internally he was wondering why the Lord made blonde girls, and watching from the corner of his eye the laughing embarcation of Vera and Kemyss on the *Polar Star*, that fluttered near them.

"Lucky it's freezing! It's not so pleasant ice-boating when there are pools of water on the ice," said Windsor.

"Why not?"

"Well, if a fellow gets thrown off, he goes scooting across the surface, and like as not the water that goes into his trousers' legs comes out at his neck. Hold on tight, now!"

Miss Preston shrieked in dismay.

An ice-boat does not, like everything else that moves, get up speed. One instant it is at rest, the next it moves on the wings of the wind.

"Are you ready?" Windsor's hand was on the tiller, and only his eyes showed through a narrow crevice above the collar and below the cap. Some one behind caught the *Wabasso*, and threw her around. Miss Preston gave a cry and a lurch. Frank gasped, caught her hand, and carried it to the railing. He was glad to fly,—more than fly. Not only conversation, but even thought was out of the question. There was nothing in the world but the rush of blue above, the rush of white below, and the scream of rigging.

Miss Preston, huddled among the rugs, gave constant moans of mingled rapture and terror. She wholly forgot the agreeable things she had intended the good-looking young stranger to say. Suddenly there was a

long scraping sound that jarred after the smooth flight and the *Wabasso* whirled up into the wind.

"There, look back and see where we have come from!" Windsor spoke as calmly as if the flight of an eagle was an every-day experience. The two young people peered back over the great stretch to where some microscopic figures dotted the whiteness.

"Good heavens, do you mean to tell me that we've come all that distance?" exclaimed the girl.

"It's great!" said Frank.

"About four miles in about four minutes," Windsor said proudly. "They'll have to get up early if they want to beat the *Wabasso*. Look out for the boom, now, we'll be coming about!"

Lenox ducked his head automatically, but his mind and eyes were fixed about a mile away, on a skimming sail, with a bit of black and a dash of red beneath. He would have liked to eliminate the bit of black.

"Let me take the tiller," Vera had asked imploringly of her companion. "I've always wanted to, and I believe I can beguile you into letting me."

"You must keep a steady hand, and not lose your nerve for a moment," said Kemyss. "One instant's hesitation, and we should find ourselves climbing a tree on the shore."

"Are you afraid to come with me?" she laughed.

"I am very much afraid lest some accident should happen to you."

He looked gravely at her, and for one wild instant she wished that she had not come off with him alone. At the club-house every one had taken for granted in the most abominable manner that they would go together. There was no time to think of that now. She must mind her course.

Kemyss watched her eyes, steady and resolute, and gleaming with physical delight. No man with red blood in him, he thought, could help admiring her. The yacht slowed in a narrow bay under her guidance.

"Did you need to ask me whether I was afraid to go anywhere—anywhere, with you?" he asked.

"Please don't!"

"Well then, I won't—yet. How are Mrs. Lyell and her husband getting along? You've had rather a severing of that tie, haven't you?"

"I think I love Jean more than ever," she said sharply. Something hopeful in his tone irritated her. "You used to say that you fully sympathized with her thought. You couldn't express enough on the subject. And now, whenever you speak of her it is with a slur."

"In a certain way, yes." He felt this was a crisis. Could he let her down from her foolish fancies without tumbling into the abyss himself? He spoke with de-

liberation. "I am an idealist in my views, as you know, but I think Mrs. Lyell has hardly learned the proper application of her philosophy to life. We live among real people, you know, and we have to adapt ourselves to them."

He looked at her to see how she took it so far.

"I don't care a button whether you or I are any kind of 'ists' or not," she said frivolously. "If you are trying to be all things to all men, I don't want to think about it. I want to ice-boat!"

She put out her hand to the tiller to start the boat again, but he laid a stronger detaining hand on hers.

"You shall not accuse me of double-facedness, Vera. I am not trying to be all things to all men, and you know it. I do want to be all things to you, though, and I have tried to be sympathetic with everything that interests you, dear!"

She did not respond to the eager voice and outstretched hand, but sat meditatively, with the rudder in her grasp, ready for instant flight.

When a man is not devoured by passion, it is not easy to invent passionate words with any great rapidity. He thought hard for a moment. She seemed to be waiting for him.

"Vera, I told you long ago that I loved you, and you bade me wait for your answer. Haven't I waited pa-

tiently? You don't know how patiently, for you don't know how much harder it grows every day to keep my love under control. Aren't you ready yet, sweetheart?"

"Did you think it was only a matter of time when I should be?" she answered, and she went on almost dreamily. "Once it did actually seem possible, but not now. When you call me, 'Vera,' and 'sweetheart,' then I know. Then I am sure. I wish you would never call me that again."

An eddy of wind caught the sail, and her hand tightened on the tiller. The next instant they were skimming swiftly toward the club. Anger surged in Kemyss' breast and blinded him like the rush of the yacht. He would have liked to strike her. She had cheated him of the future that he believed to be his. Windsor's son-in-law and partner! It had never looked so fair a vision as now, when it began to take on the semblance of a mirage.

The hot smell of luncheon, the big blazing logs in the club-house hall, how comfortable they were! Were there ever such appetites as those created by ice-boating and youth? Few chefs are fortunate enough to have their reputations so seconded by hunger as is that of the excellent cook who presides at the club.

Miss Preston, recovered from her wild experiences, secure in becoming array now that her enveloping

layers were off, was making mild running. She looked very pretty and inviting. Lenox felt as though he was a mechanical toy, wound up to flirt, and bound not to disappoint the winder. Other people came trooping in, all cold as to toes and fingers, all hungry.

Then came Vera; and Lenox forgot that he was wound up, and sprang to offer her a chair near the fire—surely an innocent thing for a young man to do, yet Miss Preston's pretty lips pouted and became sullen, and the anger in Kemyss grew more scalding.

"I thought better of Mr. Lenox, but I see he is like the rest of you, a worshiper of the golden calf." The girl spoke in a sneering half-whisper to Kemyss, taking a real satisfaction in seeing his black face grow a shade darker; and Vera, hearing, turned heavy-eyed and tired. The exhilaration of the sweet morning out of doors was gone. Was that what it always meant? She so tried to forget that she was different from other girls, and that men hovered around her for the sake of her money. The unconscious Lenox, on the other side of her chair, waited in vain for her to look up in response to his efforts.

After luncheon Vera missed her father. She slipped away from the group again gathered around the open fire, chattering, preliminary to their afternoon's storming of the domain of the ice-king. A long piazza gir-

dled the club-house, and she walked slowly down its length, looking outward until she saw him, standing with his back toward her on a little knoll, and gazing toward the north.

The world of youth in by the fire seemed out of harmony with her. She longed for some one to trust and comfort her.

Her father did not turn as she approached, and when she reached him there was a look in his face she had never seen there before, and something approaching tears in the good-humored unimaginitive eyes.

Every man, who is more than half a man, is a warm creature at heart, but he grows so used to hiding himself behind a mask of stiff commonplace from the inquisitive world that the mask comes to seem like his natural face. But the more consistently concealed is his "dear secret greenness," the more he delights in getting a glimpse of it in his hours of solitude. Windsor was inspecting his now, but his daughter's eyes questioned him.

"I felt upset and restless. I don't exactly know why. A good many little things trouble me. I must be getting old. It never used to disturb me, if things were out of joint. I thought it was all the more fun to set them right."

He gave a long sigh, and patted the fur-cased hand.

"There's really nothing. What I was thinking of now was a pathetic letter I got this morning from a wretch of a woman who lost everything she had when that fire-rumor knocked the bottom out of our lumber company stocks. And her all was so little, Vera. It kind of upset me. And to tell you the truth, you, too, trouble me."

"I, father? What have I done that can possibly trouble you, you dear old dad?"

"You have grown up. You aren't my little girl any longer. When I see all those puppies dangling around you and eager to snap you up, I want to murder the whole outfit."

"You needn't be afraid, dad. There'll never be but one *you* to me. If any new affection comes, it shall never wipe out the old. When I build a new chamber to my heart, it shall go off in a different direction, and not encroach on your room."

Her father caught her in a great bear's hug, and blurted out:

"Then you aren't going to take that infernal Kemyss? Perhaps I'll begin to like him, if I know there's nothing to be jealous of."

"But, father, when the right man comes, you mustn't be jealous," she said, with some misgiving.

"I hate him!" said her father vindictively, and she

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laughed again and kissed him. They stood hand in hand in silence.

The old man raised his finger and pointed.

"Do you see that point of land? Really and truly, that is what I came out here to see, though looking at it doesn't make it any more credible. That's where I first saw your mother, she in a canoe, and I on land. The tepee she lived in was a couple of hundred yards farther on. She must have known every inch of this ground. Sometimes it seems as if I'd give heaven to get her back and return to the good old time when we worked together, and could do all the cookin' we wanted in a fryin'-pan. People were to be trusted in those days, and you'd as soon have thought of cutting off your hand as locking your door."

"Don't you think we are to be trusted now, father?"

"You are, I know. I am glad I've got you, or I might have lost my grip. But she was a good woman, and you needn't be sorry that you are like her. Her white blood was always stronger in her than her red. All that did for her was to make her more faithful and more patient; and those are qualities that are good in any woman, be she red or white. You ain't got any call to be ashamed of your mother, Vera. She was a good woman. That's about the highest

praise. I wish she was alive to-day. I'd treat her like a princess."

Vera had never heard her father speak half a dozen words of her mother before, and now the emotion seemed to be too much for him, for he turned and stumped down the hill, leaving her standing alone. The crisp brown leaves, clinging to the oaks, rustled to each other, not in the soft tones of summer, but with bitter defiance of the power of the frost, and with sharp foreknowledge that, in spite of their persistence, their death would come in spring, when the rest of the world was preparing for new birth.

She gazed wistfully toward that stretch of ice of which she could catch a glimpse beyond the point. Like her father, she felt a longing for some half-savage condition of primitive integrity. With all her young pleasure in the attentions that came to her, the thought that men sought her for her money had never been a very insistent one, for most of the eager western wooing that she saw about her was of the genuine kind. Where there is no leisure class, and nothing for the non-worker to do with his time, the difference between wealth and mere competence is not so great. In this new land the rich man is not the idler, but, on the contrary, the hardest worker.

But now, suddenly, Kemyss looked to her like a

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monster, and he—Lenox—was he, too, of this type? Mrs. Lyell had called him a materialist, and perhaps Miss Preston had let a true word drop. If so, it was time to forswear the world. Were all men like this? Was she to be shut off from the heritage of simple love that is a woman's first right?

She shut her eyes and saw his clear-cut face, and when she looked again at the lake it was through tears. Surely her mother's tepee and frying-pan were better than her own abundance. Then she fell to longing to see the spot where that mother had once lived, and to feel the simple emotions her mother had felt. Below on the ice the groups were breaking about the yachts, and the sound of light voices came to her. She would have none of them. Her sport should be solitary.

In the club-house she met the steward.

"Have you a pair of snow-shoes that I could wear?"

"Yes, Miss Windsor, snow-shoes or skees, whichever you wish, but they're no use on the ice, you know."

"I know. I want to use them on the shore a bit. The snow is deep enough, isn't it? I believe the skees would suit me best."

He brought the long slender runners of wood, slipped her feet under the thongs and handed her the

pole with which the expert guides his swinging movement up hill and down.

She thrilled with solitude and the day. Across the unflecked snow and through the scattered woods, here and there, lay wandering tracks; the two broad, two long, where a rabbit had loped softly by, the scratchy footprints of young master squirrel, and here the marks of a slowly trotting fox, with the occasional swirl of his tail left in the snow. She loved them all. In the woods there is sweet sanity.

The wind was rising and tossing the lighter surface drifts in long blinding eddies, and over to the northwest a sullen bank of gray threatened the blue.

The ice-boat enthusiasts became less numerous.

"Believe we'll soon have more snow," said one. "I have an idea that we shall be glad enough to get back to town before long. It looks as if it might be a wild night."

"Oh, take me back! Take me back!" moaned a girl in fright, as the wind drove swifter and swifter, speeding the ice-boat to frenzy.

"Well, we're two miles out already, but I can get you back in a jiffy. Hold on for dear life," shouted her escort. With set teeth she clung to the ropes for the mad return. One after another drifted back to shelter and glowing firelight, until few adventurous

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spirits were left on the ice. Lenox peeped once in at the warm hall, saw she was not there, and preferred to stay outside in spite of the fact that she was probably far afield with one or another of the flying specks.

"I believe I'd like to try a turn by myself, if you don't mind lending the *Wabasso* to me, Mr. Windsor," he said, as the older man began to confess himself played out. Miss Preston had long since abandoned them and sought more promising fields.

"Go ahead, but don't steer her up a windmill. Remember you have to make up your mind before you think, or it's too late. Here, Kemyss is an expert. He can give you a pointer or two."

Frank would have smashed the *Wabasso* and himself to pieces before he would have asked help from that quarter. The two boats started on their twin flight in apparently amicable relations, while Lenox was still thinking with no cordiality of the man she had sailed with all the morning, though she snubbed himself. Kemyss' storm of indignation was beginning to grow cyclonic in shape, with its twisted tail turned toward this intruder. Nothing had gone right since Lenox came to St. Etienne. It outraged the private secretary's sense of justice that the structure he had reared with such attention to details should be threatened by a fellow of no diplomacy. There are certain

minds so constructed as to be unable to see that a straight line is the shortest distance between two points.

Back and forth, here and there, sped the sails. Occasionally the *Polar Star* came close enough for Kemys to shout some piece of advice to the inexperienced navigator, until up in a lonely bay, Lenox began a series of short tacks, in experiment with his new-found toy.

Vera plodded along over the few inches of light snow, halting now to look at a fantastic seed-vessel piercing the drift, now to trace strange characters on a bit of birch-bark torn from a tree, now to peer curiously at the rounded heap of a muskrat house and to wonder what kind of social life was going on inside its spiky shelter. On that level stretch of shore that her father had pointed out she paced back and forth, speculating in what spot her mother had lived. The very long reeds, piercing the ice, were the descendants of the plants through which the half-savage girl had pushed her canoe. And now all was white and cold and death-like, where once had been that vivid life. What a strange country was this, that in three generations had brought her out from the wilderness! People bewail the slowness of nature's methods. The very rapidity of the mighty mother's fate-loom dizzied

her, and she shut her eyes and shivered at the thought of it all.

The blue day was gone now, and a great grayness had swallowed up the world. A fine soft snow, driven in long slanting lines by the wind, began to fall.

"It would not take me long to freeze to death if I sat still. This wind carries the cold right in through everything. I must be getting back to the club-house," she said to herself.

And still she sat idly for a moment looking down on the misty beautiful world of ice below. Her eyes fastened on the one dark spot on its bosom, a great barrel racing-buoy, crowned by a miniature pine-tree. Near it, a mile away from her, a solitary boat was beating back and forth. She watched its meaningless manœuvres with half-awakened curiosity. Then another boat, swift and direct, came flying from behind the point, making straight across the course of the first.

She started to her feet. "I wonder if they see each other!"

The original sailor swerved suddenly and crashed against the buoy. It seemed to her that she could hear the blow and the long scream of the rudders. A black speck flew from the boat and lay still upon the ice. The second sail whirled up into the wind, came to a

standstill, and an ant-like creature leaped from it and ran toward the motionless bit of blackness. Vera leaned forward in excitement. Her breath came fast, and she gasped.

"No! no!" she cried aloud, for the moving figure seemed to touch its injured companion, hesitate a moment, then turn and hurry back to its own craft, climb aboard and seize the tiller. The next instant the yacht sped away to the south while the wind hooted and cheered it on its course.

Vera was running down the bank now. The skees were loosened from her feet and slung over her shoulder. She needed no thought for that; all her thoughts were whirling about other matters.

"Why did he go? Did he go for help? But the man will freeze to death long before he gets back! And why should he leave him, anyway? It would have been easy enough to get him on board and carry him to the club in no time." The pronouns were getting all jumbled up in her unuttered sentences, but her thought was clear enough, as she slipped and ran and stumbled over the glassy surface, catching her breath when an occasional wild gust swept the snow into her eyes. The speck grew to a heap, and the heap began to take on the semblance of a human form. He was lying on his back as though he had been deliberately turned

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so, and already a light film of snow blurred the outlines. She fell on her knees, with teeth shut and never an outcry, and brushed the tiny drifts away from the face she lifted. She pushed back his glove and felt his pulse with her bared fingers. Seizing a handful of snow she began with a kind of desperation to chafe the forehead, and then she laid her own warm cheek against his cold one.

"Ah, if I could only send some of my glow into him!"

Then she felt a convulsive movement and drew away half startled to meet his eyes.

"Vera!" he gasped, and shut the eyes again as if dazed by the light that leaped into his face as he spoke.

Some glowing spot within her cried out words of congratulation to her heart. "There was no pretense about that," it said. "He loves me!"

"You—how did you come?" He had now gained self-possession enough to think.

"Never mind how I came. The question is how are you to get away. You were just a little stunned, that's all. But you would have frozen. Do you think you can get up now?"

He tried to struggle to his knees, moaned and caught her hand as if to save himself from fainting.

"I—I am afraid something is broken." His face was white and drawn.

"Stay here a moment. Don't lose consciousness again!" She ran to the half-overturnd ice-boat and stamped her foot in dismay. One runner lay hopelessly smashed. What should she do? The snow and wind grew wilder every moment.

"Have you a knife?" She was back by his side.

"Somewhere in a pocket—if I can only get it." He began to turn painfully, but her hand was quicker than his.

"You are suffering dreadfully."

"Never mind that. But you—you must not stay here in this storm, Vera,"—but she had already run away again. From the yacht she cut rope after rope, and loosening the skees from her back she bound them side by side with the long steering pole she had carried to guide herself across them in front. She threw some rugs on top of them, and hitched a rope to the bar. Her pulses were bounding exultantly now.

"Look!" she cried, drawing up near him. "Here is a sledge fit for a king. If I can help you to roll on, we shall be back in no time. Isn't it fine?"

"And you drag me? Is thy servant a dog? It must be two or three miles."

"Supposing it is, what else is to be done?"

"You must make your own way back and tell some one to come to my help."

"The some one who helps you is going to be the some one who is here now," she answered in a tone of determination which would not be thwarted. "You would be frozen long before aid could come. There is nothing for it but for you to submit."

"Nonsense, I can't. You—I—I love the very ground you walk on. Do you think I can use you like a beast of burden?"

She knelt beside him.

"Do you love me?" she said tenderly. For an instant they forgot broken leg and sledge and whirling snow as their eyes met in a long embrace. She stooped and kissed him.

"I am glad you love me," she said, "because then you will let me do it. There is nothing love will not give and receive. Come, now, a few moments ago I was playing squaw over there on the bank. Do you know how you braves treat us poor wretches? You make us pull your great lazy heavy weights like the poor dogs that *we* are, and we submit to it humbly because we love you, brutal as *you* are. Come, roll on. We have not much daylight left us. Did you really think I would go off and leave you? On the march the braves often go on and leave the squaws to strug-

gle along as best they can; but the squaws leave the braves? Never!"

He drew her face down again. "Forgive me for accepting so much," he said.

"I'll forgive you if you mind quickly, not otherwise." She tugged and pulled and stopped now and then for an instant to get her breath and laugh and sob with happiness and terror; and he cursed himself for his impotence and hugged himself for joy though the pain grew worse and worse. The wind from behind did all in its power to help the course of true love.

In one of the halts, she came back to the sledge and half knelt by his side.

"Are you keeping the rugs around you, and are you warm enough?"

"Warmer than I have ever been before in my life. I begin to believe in slavery as an institution."

"Why did he do it?"

"Who?" he said, not meeting her eye.

"Oh, you know perfectly well. It was done deliberately. Why should you try to shield him?"

"It was my own lack of skill that brought me to grief."

"That may be, but he left you to freeze, if he did not think you already dead. There was murder in his heart, if not on his hands."

"What did you see?" He looked at her frankly now.

"I saw him go and leave you."

"He has always hated me for some reason of his own."

"Because I always loved you," said she, with as much conviction as though this were true. No doubt at this stage of affairs she thought it was.

"Vera, if what you say is true, leave me to deal with him, when—when I am strong enough. This is my battle, not yours, sweetheart."

She looked down at him quizzically.

"So you are issuing commands to your squaw already, are you? Very well, my lord and master, you shall be obeyed, but permit me to give him one look,—only one look, if ever we get there."

Then suddenly she realized that his face was growing whiter, and his strength, kept up by excitement, was ebbing, and she went back to her dray-horse work with desperation. As she turned the last corner before the club-house came in view, and saw her father, now anxious from her long absence, come running toward her through the storm, she fairly sobbed from very weariness.

"Good heavens, Vera!" he shouted as he ran.

"What are you doing?"

She laughed breathlessly. "I am not sure whether

I am hauling a captor or dragging a captive. It doesn't make much difference. But, oh, he is hurt; and you'll see that he is well taken care of, dad, for my sake!"

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CHAPTER XXII

THE SUBJUGATION OF A PARENT

That was an exciting night, a night when even Nicholas Windsor, who had known the vicissitudes of bears and bulls, and hung a dozen times on the verge where a tumble meant failure, found himself unable to sleep. After he had seen the now utterly collapsed Lenox safely back to town and comfortably ensconced in his own room with a trained nurse and an optimistic surgeon, Windsor returned to his own home, thinking that his agitations were over. The first glance at his daughter's face, as she sat tensely awaiting him, upset him more than all that had gone before. For, after all, one can endure with considerable equanimity the broken leg of a distant cousin, even if that cousin be a fine likable boy.

"You ought to be in bed, Vera," exclaimed the old man testily. "You are utterly exhausted by hauling that worthless fellow so far, and if I had dreamed that you would be so foolish as to sit up and wait for

me, I would have brought you home, and seen you tucked up before I lifted my hand for him."

"Then I am glad you did not dream. There are so many things I want to talk to you about, I simply couldn't go to bed. Don't be savage. And first tell me, how is Frank?"

Her father's jaw dropped. "Frank!" he exclaimed. "Well, I do think! 'Frank'! And since when has he been 'Frank' to you? 'Frank'!"

Vera stamped her foot. "Tell me how Frank is!" she said.

"Oh, of course, 'Frank'! Well, he's as well as you could expect. Why shouldn't he be? Why, when I was his age, and as strong as a young buck, I shouldn't have thought anything of a broken leg. But he used you like a pack-mule. He isn't half so much done up as you are, the ungrateful villain! I will say, I never saw a man take things with more grit. I wonder how much he smashed the *Wabasso*, confound him! Now, are you ready to go to bed?"

"Not yet," she said quietly. "I am going to have my say first."

As she told him the story of the pretty drama she had watched from the hilltop, her father's face grew more and more glum, but he waited silently until it was all told, and all he said was: "I liked him once,

and now it looks as if he was a rascal. This is my funeral, little girl. You do not need to worry your head about his punishment. Now, are you ready to go to bed? Because I am."

"Not yet, father, there is more still."

But this time she could not sit quietly in her chair to rehearse her little tale. She must needs squeeze down beside her father in his hospitable chair, and steal a cajoling arm around his neck and hide her face against his breast. And this time her father did not listen in silence, but with constant explosions of whatever expletives came nearest to hand.

"It's perfect nonsense!" he blurted out at last. "You don't know the creature at all—never saw him till a few weeks ago!"

"We knew each other better after two days at Pine Vale than if we had met at a thousand dances and dinners. And haven't I heard you say time and again that, however well people thought they knew each other before marriage, they had to get acquainted all over again afterward?"

"Yes, and I believe I once recommended you to marry a drummer, but I didn't mean a drummer like this fellow, with no experience and no prospects."

"Oh, you're quite mistaken on that score, dear. His prospects are of the finest. He's not going to stay on

the road, you know. You are going to find something a great deal better than that for your son-in-law. And if you don't, why you yourself told me that the only really desirable life to be lived was with a tepee and a frying-pan. I feel a little inclined to try it,—with Frank."

"Much you do!" said her father, with a groan.

"Come, you've been giving me my own way too long to hope to do anything else now. You may just as well give in gracefully and promptly. You won't have to feel sullen so long. And you know well how very unhappy you will be if you quarrel with me. It won't be pleasant, will it, dear?"

Her arm was very tight around his neck, and he groaned again.

"And if you don't consent to this, I shall insist on marrying an Italian count, with a palace of three hundred rooms, and an income of a hundred and fifty dollars!" she said threateningly.

"See here!" her father exclaimed fiercely. "You have got to keep on living right here in this house with me."

"Very well, dear," she laughed triumphantly. "That question is settled. I think I can venture to pledge Frank to it. You shall be allowed to live in this house with us. And now, remember you are to go to see

him to-morrow, and tell him that the fondest dream of your life is realized. You will, won't you, dear?"

"I'm an adept at lying!" said her father glumly.

"Then make it the truth."

"Oh, I'll try to be decent to him, for I know I'll get into hot water at home if I'm not. I really pity that young man if he's going to come under your thumb."

"Nonsense! You are lucky to get such a son. And you know you like him yourself."

"I may have a slight taste for him, but I'm not really hungry. Besides, I don't see that it makes any difference whether I like him or not. My course is all laid down for me. Vera, are you the girl who was consulting her old dad not long ago on the subject of matrimony?"

"Oh, that was different."

"Yes," said her father whimsically, "it was." But he patted her cheek and kissed her, and said:

"God bless you, little girl." And then he kissed her again. "Now," he said, "can we give Frank and ourselves a rest, and go to bed?"

The carriage stood outside the door as Mr. Windsor came down the steps the next morning, and a man who had been scuffing up and down, eyed suspiciously by the coachman, came quickly forward.

"Mr. Windsor?" he said with an air of bravery.

The old man looked at him with lowering brows.

"If I'm not mistaken, your name is Repburn."

"Yes, sir; I want very much to speak to you a moment."

"From all I can recollect, sir, it cost me a cool hundred thousand to speak to you before. I am feeling poor this morning. I can't afford it."

"Mr. Windsor," said the other desperately, seeing his chance slipping from him, "I must see you. I know all about the fire rumor."

Windsor turned with his hand on the carriage door-knob.

"You scurvy knave, were you in that, too?"

"That is not the way to address a man who has come to do you a favor. I have nothing with which to reproach my conscience, sir."

"I'd swear that you haven't brains to invent any deviltry. What do you want with me?"

"I can't tell you here, sir."

"Well, come back to the house, then."

Vera came forward, a little surprised by her father's return, and Repburn made her an elaborate bow. He was the central figure in a dramatic situation, and he meant to live up to it.

"Miss Windsor, I trust, by the revelation which I am about to communicate to your father, in some slight

degree to make amends for the kindness which you bestowed on me—an obligation which I do not owe in equal amount to him; nevertheless—”

But Mr. Windsor seemed to have no delicate appreciation of the occasion, for he beckoned the young man abruptly into a back room.

“Now then,” he said with decision, “out with your yarn.”

But Mr. Repburn was not to be hastened. He sat down with deliberation and began once more his tale, dropping his lofty demeanor and becoming more and more colloquial as his woes appealed in their total sum to his imagination. Windsor listened patiently. The bushy eyebrows moved up and down, and the corners of his mouth twitched, and he forgot the letters marked “Personal,” which were sure to be accumulating on his desk.

“Well, we’ve got you so far. Your uncle left you two thousand dollars by his earlier will.” On this point Mr. Repburn had judged it wise to depart from the strict path of truth. “All this has nothing to do with the lie about my lumber company. Are we getting near the dénouement?”

“Yes, sir, as I told you, I put this entire sum, all I had, sir, into a little business that I thought would set me up. And now—darn it!—I wisht I was a swearing

man—that's gone, and I haven't a penny between me and starvation."

Mr. Windsor instinctively put his hand in his pocket, but he drew it out again empty, and his anger flared up.

"See here!" he said. "You brought me back to the house to tell me something of importance, and you've taken fifteen minutes of my time to impart what I knew before, that you're not safe running the streets alone. Now will you give me your information in short order, or will you leave?"

"At once, sir. You see, I paid this two thousand dollars to enter into partnership with this Timothy Norton. He seemed a very smart man, but, sir, that fellow is a scamp. I hadn't been with him but a day or two before I began to have my suspicions. He kep' me busy all the time, but somehow I didn't seem to be doin' nothing; and he got me all muddled up about what the business was anyhow. I commenced to pretend that I was not payin' any attention, but I tell you, I kept tab on everythin' that took place and everybody that came in. I read every scrap of paper, and I listened to everythin' I could hear. I made pretty sure that all he wanted was my money, and that those big docyments he made me sign all about the partnership and everythin' was so much waste paper. Don't be

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impatient, sir, I'm comin' to it. Well, I found out that he had a lot of your lumber company stock. Of course, I didn't think much of that, but I was findin' out everythin' I could, you understand. Day 'fore yesterday, Norton was out, and there come a ring at the telephone, and a feller says, 'Is that you, Tim?' 'Yes,' I says, tryin' to imitate his voice. 'Well, this is Kemyss',—"

"What?" shouted Windsor, taking a step toward the cowering youth.

"Don't strike me, sir, I've got the proof. I've got a telegram from Pine Vale. I've got private notes I found in Norton's desk."

He stopped, for Mr. Windsor sat down heavily, and motioned to him to be silent. Then the old man rose again abruptly and shut the door on the rest of their interview.

When they came out, Mr. Repburn was effusive.

"Of course, Mr. Windsor, you understand this hasn't been pleasant work for me, but I owed Mr. Kemyss one, for I felt sure that he must have misrepresented me to you, or a man of your character would never have treated me as you did. So it was my duty to right myself."

"I think I understand you, and I'll see that you are paid for your dirty work," said Mr. Windsor glumly.

Late as he was at the office, Mr. Windsor stood tapping his desk with absent-mindedness while his private secretary communicated a matter of importance. The private secretary himself was ill at ease. He had taken the first train in from the lake after returning to the club-house the night before, and he had seen neither of the Windsors. But rumor had already informed him of Lenox's rescue, and he did not know how much more was known. He cursed himself a hundred times for yielding to the sudden impulse of rashness. He had meant the man no evil until he saw him lying there on the ice. Then hate seemed to enwrap him. An instant and the thing was done. Now how much of this was known? Already the idea of flight had suggested itself, but flight would make it look worse than it really was, for his wrong was only one of neglect. And perhaps Lenox himself did not realize the circumstances. There was the chance. Still he was distraught, while his chief listened absently.

Windsor broke in, and the attack came from an unexpected quarter.

"Kemyss, when my private secretary uses his information and his position to trick the investors who have trusted to my name, it puts me in an uncomfortable position, and him in a bad light."

Kemyss' lips grew white, and his body rigid.

"I really don't understand you at all, sir."

"Oh, you understand, fast enough."

"Mr. Windsor,"—Kemyss straightened himself—"you have no right to make an unfounded accusation against me."

"I'm not going to beat about the bush, Kemyss, and I'm not making accusations for fun. Do you think I enjoy it?" The old man's mouth snarled like a wild beast's.

"The cleverest scoundrel that ever lived may be tripped up by a fool, Kemyss, and that's what you were. It's no use in bluffing. I know the whole story. I understand it a great deal better than the poor buffoon who told it to me. There is the telegram you sent. I don't often dirty my fingers as I did in taking this from a sneak; but this time it had to be done."

Kemyss moistened his lips and tried to speak.

"Well?" said Windsor.

The young man looked square in his eyes.

"What are you going to do about it?" he asked insolently.

"If you ask me what legal measures I am going to take, I tell you frankly, none." Windsor's face grew quite pitiful, for the simplicity of old trapper days still clung to the corners of his heart. "It's a tough experience to watch confidence and friendship decay and rot

and smell bad. I have not the heart to kick them, even when they are dead. If you mean to ask me what I am going to do about the men you have pushed to the wall, I'll tell you I am going, in some way, to make good the wrong done by my private secretary. I can do it by indirect ways, and I do not intend to publish your infamy to the world. I've let you off pretty easy; but when I remember that your father helped me to bury my wife, I'm not sorry I've showed leniency to his son. Now, leave St. Etienne. It may console you for some of the evil you have done to know that your machinations have hastened the happiness of two young people—"

Kemyss turned without a word and walked out of the room. He swore at himself for a fool, but not for a knave.

The old man put his head down on the desk for a moment.

"Good Lord!" he said, as he raised it. "I'm glad I've got something more cheerful to think about. Compared with that, losing your daughter is sport. The minx! Getting up a full-blown romance without consulting her dad! Frank's a lucky fellow, and I may be able to make something of him if I am bear enough at the office to overcome the coddling she'll give him at home. And now, like the well-trained par-

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ent that I am, I'll go and tell that unmitigated rascal that he is the apple of my eye."

An hotel room is not an ideal place in which to be ill, but Lenox showed a countenance of cheerful submissiveness to his elderly relative. Windsor noted that a bowl of violets stood on a table at the bed-head and that a note lay beside them.

"The minx!" he said to himself. It seemed to be the only expression that covered the ground.

"No, nurse, I'm not going to say anything exciting. I don't want to drive him into a fever any more than you do. Why, I couldn't excite a baby. Pshaw! Lenox, there ain't a thing the matter with you. The nurse is making it up to keep her job. The doctor hasn't given you up, he tells me. Got to keep pretty flat, though, and take what's given to you for the next few weeks. It's a pity. I'm afraid you'll have to give up your job on the road."

Frank nodded weakly and closed his eyes. He found it impossible just now to concentrate his attention on Mexico and Trondheim. The old man got up and wandered around the room surveying absorbedly the few pictures on the walls. Then he came back to the bedside.

"Well, I came here to talk business, pure business, if you feel up to it. I am glad that nurse has cleared

out. She might think it was too exciting, or something of that kind.

"Kemyss is going away, and as soon as you are about again, I want you to get into training for his place. I shall want some one to take more and more of the burden from me as I grow older, and I'm not sorry to think that some one may be a man of the same blood as myself."

Frank felt distinctly bored, and showed it by nodding with his eyes still shut. The old man stood looking down at him quizzically. Then his tone grew distinctly belligerent.

"As a preliminary, I may as well tell you at once that there is one rather unusual duty that I always require of a private secretary, and I couldn't even offer you the position unless you feel that you can perform it. I require my secretary to make love to my daughter. It saves her from feeling neglected, you know."

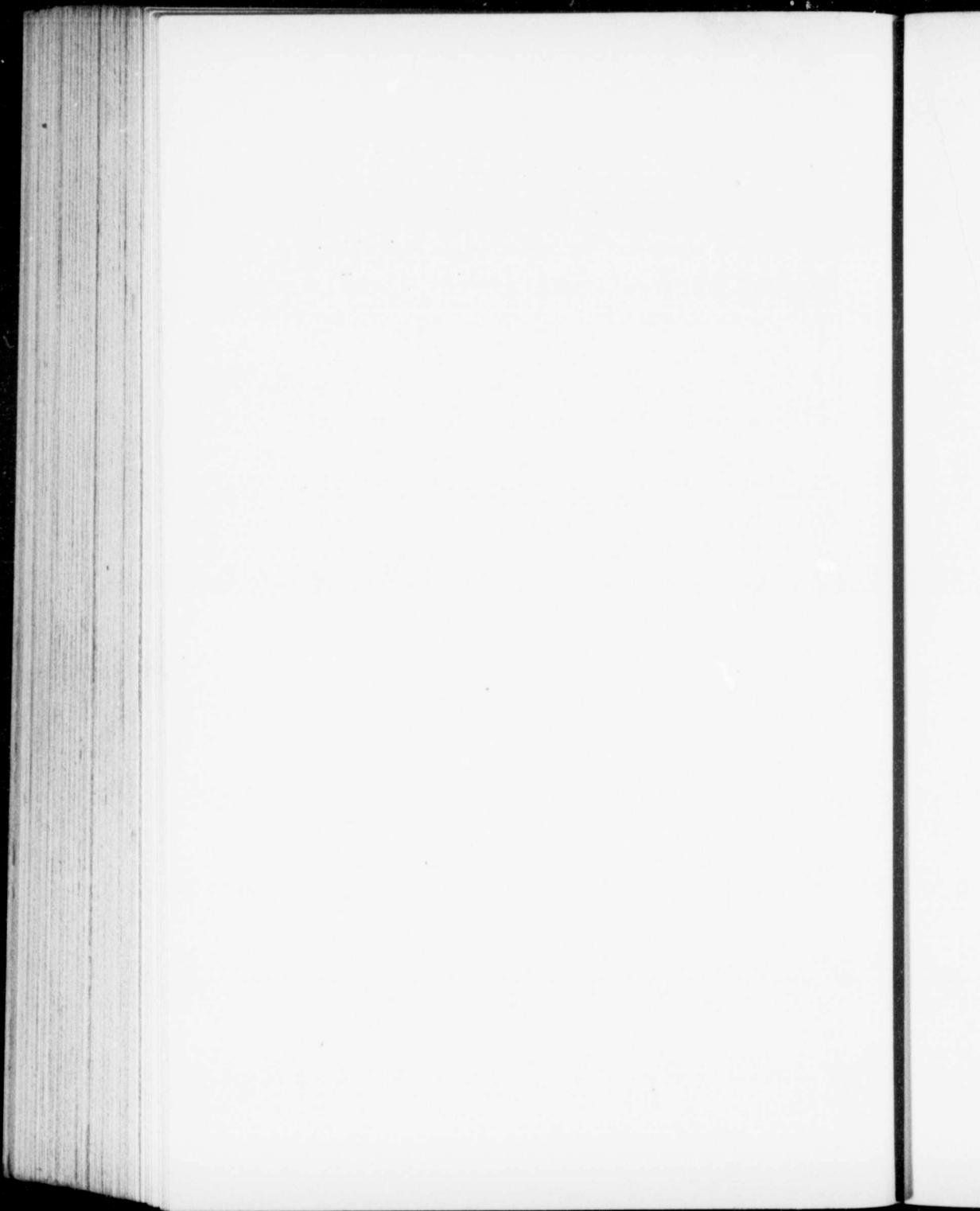
He buried his nose in the violets as Frank opened his startled eyes. A big bear paw was extended, and the young man found strength to grasp it warmly. The two men grinned at each other.

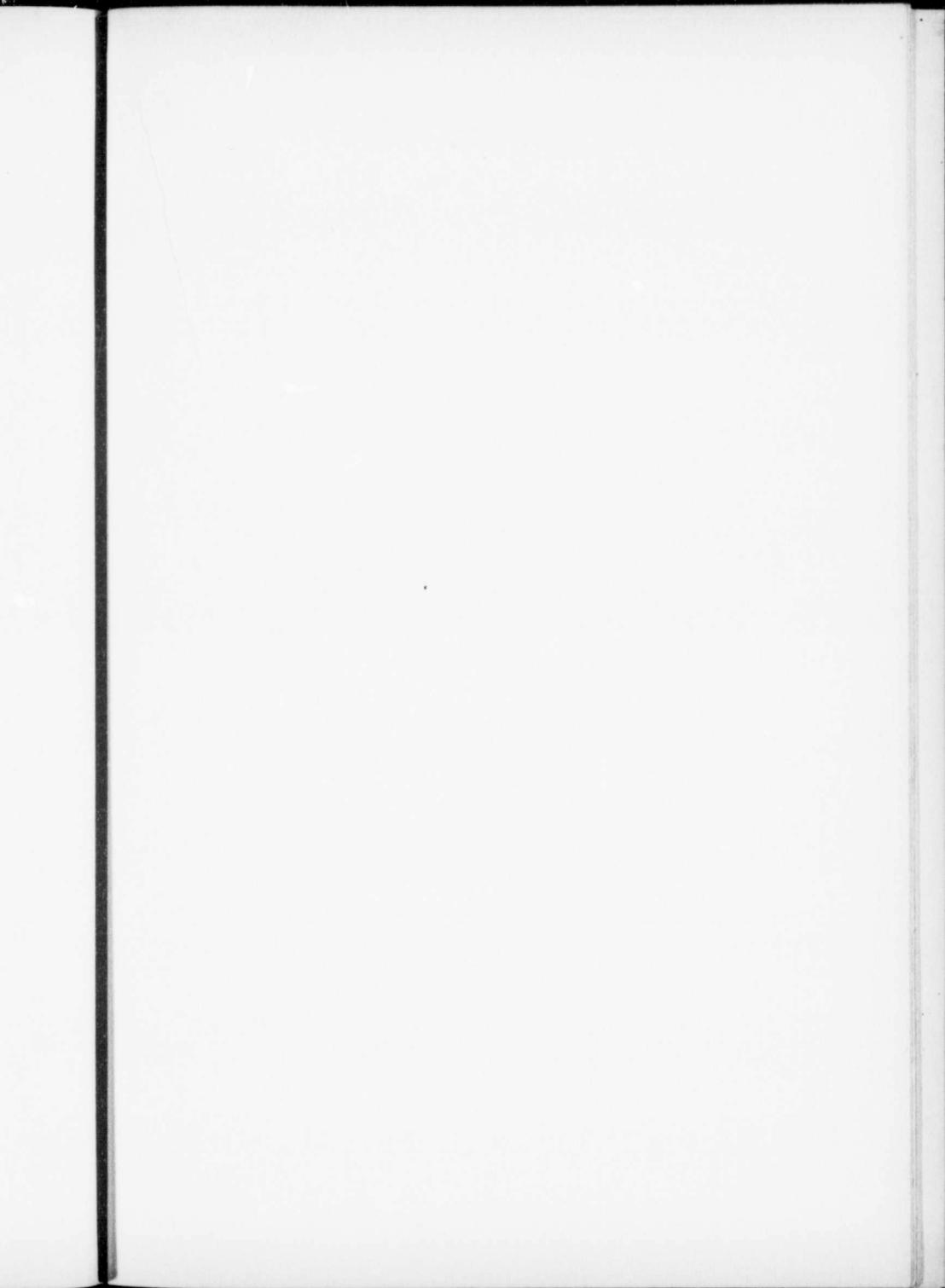
"I shouldn't wonder if Vera came down to see you to-day. I wish the nurse would shut her out as 'too exciting,' " said her father. "She hasn't a touch of maiden modesty or of filial obedience ; but I'm fond of the girl,

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and perhaps I ought not to blame you, if you feel the same way. If she wants you or any other little thing that pleases her, I'm not going to stand in her way."

THE END







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