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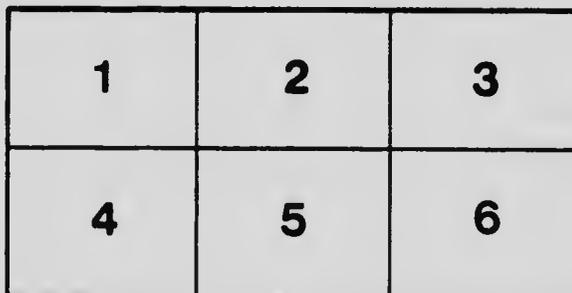
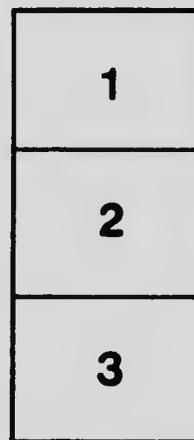
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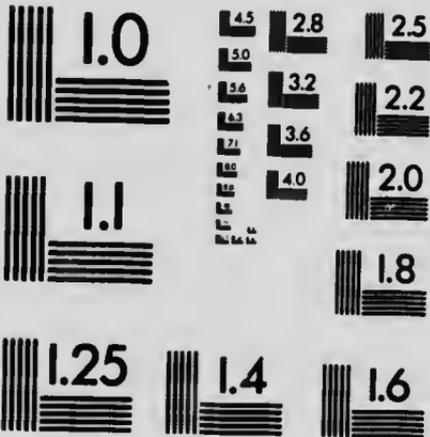
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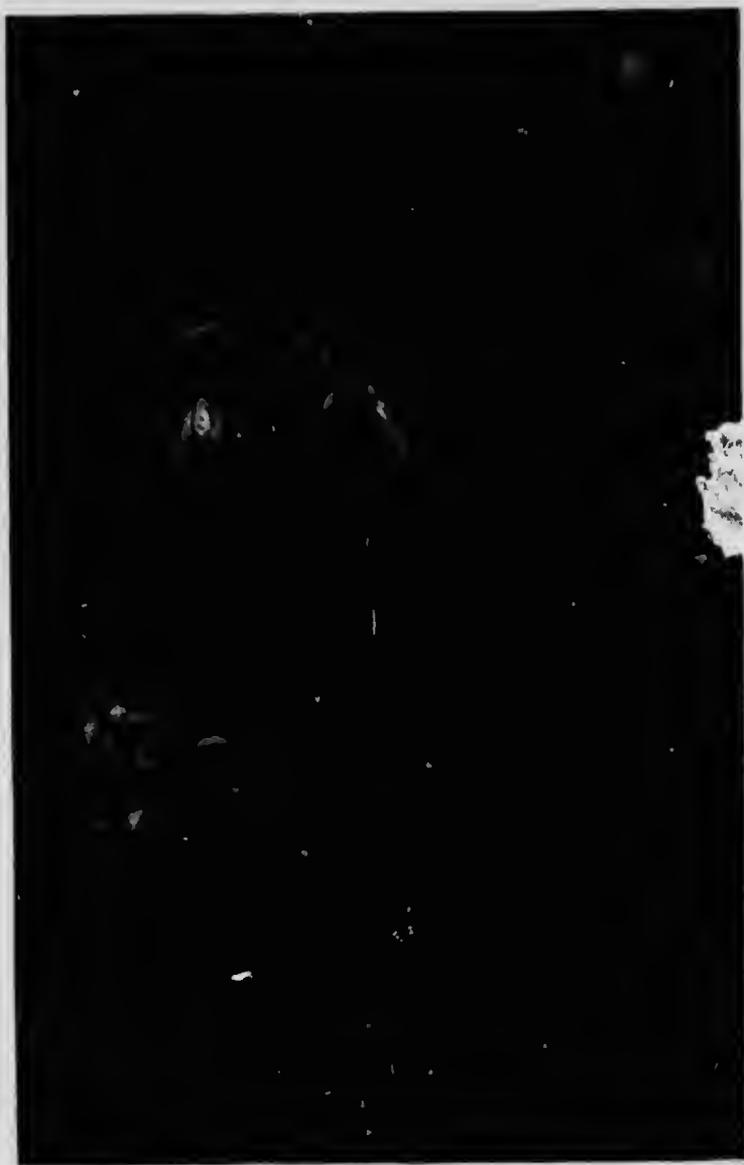


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THE NEEDLE'S EYE



FLORENCE
MORSE
KINGSLEY



LYING ON THE HAY AT HIS FEET WAS
THE FORM OF A WOMAN

[See Page 12]



PLATE 10. 1900. THE GREAT CANAL
116

The Needle's Eye

By

FLORENCE MORSE KINGSLEY

*Author of "Paul," "Titus," "Prisoners of the Sea," "The
Transfiguration of Miss Philura," etc., etc.*

ILLUSTRATIONS BY

WILLIAM E. MEARS

TORONTO

WILLIAM BRIGGS

1902

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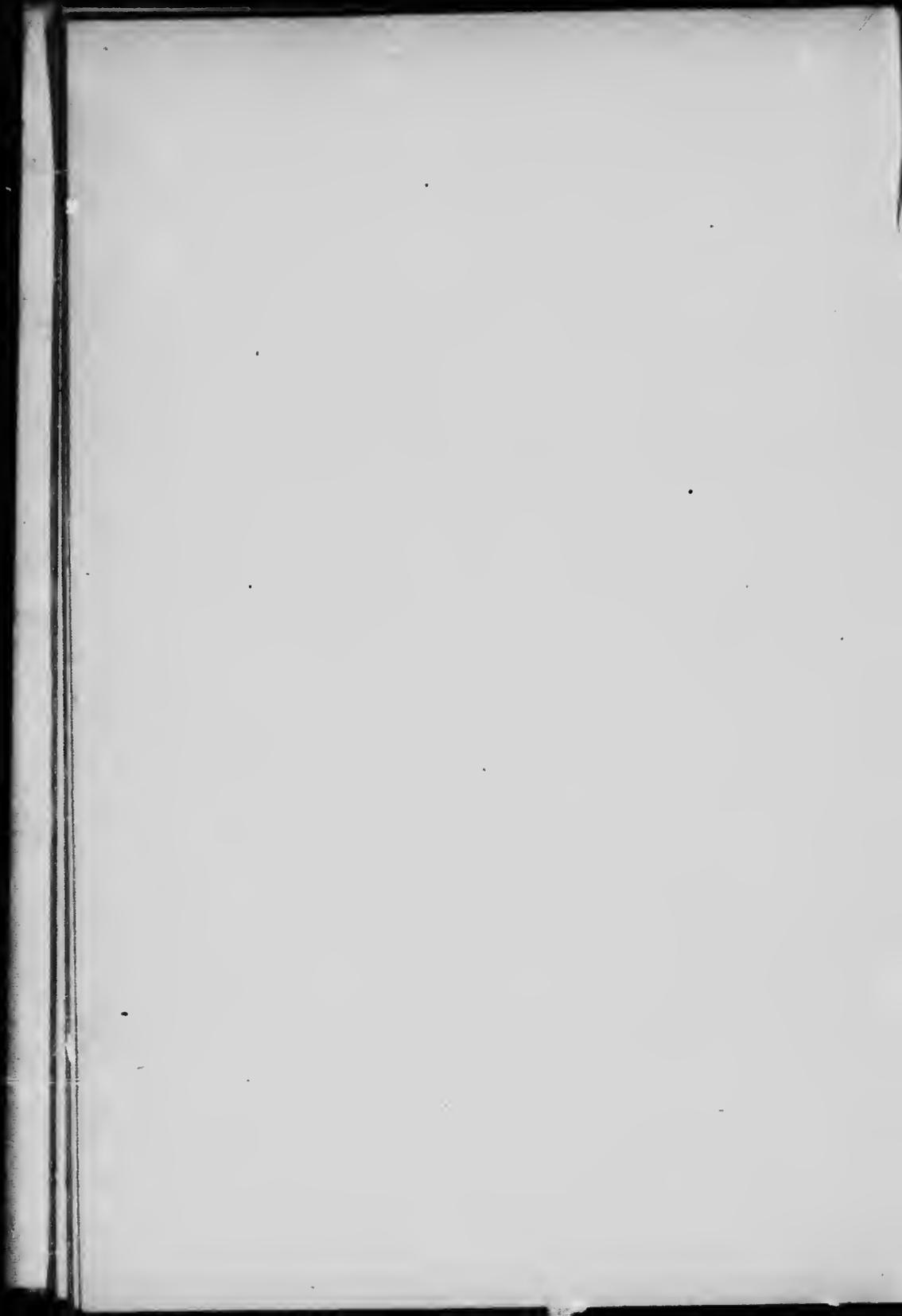
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PART I
The Foundling



CHAPTER I

A Wintry Dawning

ABOVE, biased myriad stars set close in a heaven of infinite darkness; below, shone the dimly luminous face of earth, piled high with fresh-fallen snow. Betwixt the two a bitter wind whined fitfully, the snow leaping up in misty swirls to greet it, only to sink again in fantastic ripples and curiously-wrought crests in fence-corners and hollows.

Erastus Winch emerged from his house into this mystery of cold and night, and stood for an instant, staring about him with the blank, unseeing eyes of one newly aroused from sleep. The wind hurled itself upon his heavy, stoop-shouldered figure, tearing savagely at his garments, which became on the instant all white and sparkling with the transfiguring snow crystals. He raised his smoky lantern that he might consult the black-vised thermometer, which rattled uneasily on its rusty nail beside the door. "Five below!" he ejaculated, scowling at the unoffending register of temperature. "Humph!"

The immediate result of his subsequent cogitations appeared in a brisk reopening of the closed door. "'Liz'beth! I say, 'Liz'beth! Be ye goin' to lay abed all day? It's more'n four o'clock a'ready, ye'd ought to have yer fire a-roarin' by this time. Consarn it! didn't I tell ye yiste'day I was goin' to kill to-day?"

The sound of stove-lids and poker in active cooper-

ation appearing sufficient answer to this harangue, the door clapped to a second time, and without further pause the man plunged into the drifted path leading to the barn, which loomed huge and black amid the spectral whiteness of the surroundings. As he opened the door—with difficulty—because of the clogging snow, a mingled odor of hay and feed, of steaming bodies of cattle and horses, of harnesses and wagons, grease-besmeared; of huddled fowls, of nests and haunts of swallows, rats and mice—an odor indescribable and not to be mistaken—in a word, the smell of a barn, as tightly closed as possible against wind and cold, rushed out like an invisible presence to greet him.

Erastus Winch loved this smell, though he was doubtless unaware of the fact; it was the pleasantly suggestive odor of "prop'ty"—as he was wont to term his material possessions. With the odor came sounds, also indicative of the presence of "prop'ty." There was a subdued but expectant stirring in the darkness, a noise of shuffling hoofs, of deep-chested breathing, of heavy bodies rubbing uneasily against frosty stalls, of grunting and squealing from the pen of the condemned swine, the quick flutter of wings, and the shrill note of the cock challenging the familiar twinkle of the smoky lantern. Pleasant sounds every one, and welcome to the ear of the farmer as the "All's well!" to the sailor on board his flying vessel, or the long-drawn call of the muezzin to the inhabitant of an Eastern city.

The master of the barn responded to these tokens of fealty from his dumb slaves after the manner of his kind. "Whoa, thar!" he bawled loudly, as he set

down his lantern on a convenient barrel. "Fia'n't ye got no more sense 'an to tear yer insides out, ye tarnal critters?"

There being manifestly no possible answer to this inquiry, the man proceeded to his task of forking down hay into the mangers, of measuring grain and chopping turnips for the hungry cattle. In the midst of these operations another sound smote upon his ears, a sound which caused the heaped measure to drop from his shaking fingers. It was unmistakably the cry of a young infant. It seemed to arise from the black depths of the haymow.

Now if there be anything on earth more helpless or more harmless than the young of the human species, it is yet to be found. Perhaps because of this, a baby's cry shakes the soul of a man and wrings the heart of a woman. Erastus Winch had heard this sound once before on a winter's morning—a single cry, then silence. Whether he would or no, in the stillness that followed this singular interruption of his labors, he lived over again the hour which saw his first-born and only child breathe and wail—once.

He frowned as he refilled the measure. "I hope I ain't fallin' into the ways of them fool spirichulists," he muttered. Enlivened by the humor of this conceit, he called loudly upon the poultry to approach and be fed. Sounds of satisfaction, of greed, of anxiety, of anger arose here and there from feathered throats. Into the midst of the clamor struck again that other sound, faint, yet insistent, the cry of the helpless human atom newly arrived out of eternity. The man seized his lantern and strode determinedly toward the haymow. "I ain't no fool!" he strenuously assured

himself. "If thar's anythin' in that thar hay 'sides fodder, I'll find it, or my name ain't Winch."

There was something. Having found it, he stood stark still for a full minute at a loss for words of sufficient significance to express his wonder. What he saw by the light of the lantern was solemn enough and mysterious enough and sad enough to have melted a heart of stone. Lying on the hay at his feet was the form of a woman. This much he saw at a glance; then his amazed eyes told him more. This motionless figure was not huddled frowsily together, after the manner of homeless vagabonds who take refuge from the storm and cold in the first rude shelter that offers; it lay upon its rude couch in the majestic attitude of a queen, who, having relinquished an earthly crown, passes on into kingdoms eternal.

The woman was dead—this much was evident even to the dull perceptions of Erastus Winch. He stared at the still loveliness of the white face unwinkingly. "What—what——" he muttered, stammering thickly in his bewilderment. Then he stooped to draw aside the folds of a heavy cloak which concealed something that had hitherto escaped his notice. The something stirred feebly, and for the third time sent forth its piteous appeal for human aid.

"'Liz'beth! 'Liz'beth!"

The woman turned quickly from the hot stove where she was superintending the frying of the maternal pork. She recognized in the tones the familiar appeal of masculine inability to feminine efficiency. "Wall, 'Rastus," she said resignedly, "what's happened now?"

"What's happened?" repeated the man, stamping

the snow off his cowhide boots with vicious emphasis. "You kin well ask! Say! how many tarnation times hev I got to tell ye to lock the door to the barn? You must ha' left it open agin las' night when you fed the calves, an' a tramp's got in thar an' died."

"You don't say!" The woman's hands were uplifted, sympathy and horror dawned in her dim eyes. "In the barn! An' we asleep an' warm in our bed! Why didn't the poor fellow come to the house; he could ha' slep' by the kitchen stove's well as not."

"Not much he couldn't," growled her husband, unwinding the woolen comforter from about his neck. "'Tain't a man, anyhow; it's a woman, an' thar's a baby—Come now, ye don't need to fly off the handle like that; if 'tain't dead a'ready 'twill be time you see it. I want my breakfast first thing, d'ye hear?"

The woman had snatched up the lantern, and, casting the skirt of her calico gown over her head in feeble defiance of the storm, was already out of hearing.

"Women are such consarned fools!" soliloquized Erastus Winch, regarding the frying-pan sourly. "Pork a-burnin', an' everythin' goin' to thunder, an' don't keer, ef thar's a baby in a hunderd miles of 'em!"

He clumsily removed the smoking utensil from its position over the blazing sticks, spattering his hands with the boiling fat as he did so, a circumstance which by no means soothed his already ruffled temper. After which he followed his wife in her hasty flight to the scene of the tragedy, communing with himself as he went concerning the unforeseen circumstance which threatened to upset his plans anent the inmates of the pig-sty.

Elizabeth Winch had found her way to the side of the dead woman, where, first wrapping the baby in warm arms of compassion, she stood gazing into the white purity of the sleeping face.

"Lord save us!" she was murmuring to herself. "Now did you ever! Poor thing—an' we asleep an' warm in our bed."

"'Twa'n't our fault," said her husband, sulkily eyeing the dead woman, whom he conceived on the instant to be the cause of his smarting fingers as well as of his disordered plans. "S'pose I'll hev to hitch up fust thing an' git the cor'ner up here," he continued, with rising irritation. "What bizniss had the likes of her to come sneakin' 'bout other folk's prop'ty—and the poorhouse not a mile further on! The Lord knows I pay taxes 'nough to git quit of paupers, dead or 'live!"

"Now, 'Rastus," protested his wife, "prob'ly the poor critter couldn't walk another step. But, land! I mus'n't stan' here; she's stun dead, that's plain; but this 'ere baby's as live as a cricket—poor lamb!"

"That young un's a-goin' to the poorhouse; soon's I c'n git my breakfas' an' hitch," quoth the man loudly. But Elizabeth, being a thin, agile woman, was again out of hearing.

He repeated his words with added emphasis half an hour later. The two had partaken of their meal in haste and silence, the woman casting an occasional glance toward the wooden rocking-chair, where warmly covered the waif slept quietly.

Erastus Winch had followed these glances with frowning eyes. Now he pushed back his chair with a loud scraping sound, and deliberately wiped his

mouth upon the back of his hand. This was the familiar signal for a prompt renewal of the grinding labor which made up their daily lives. Elizabeth was wont to respond by springing at once from her chair and instituting a vigorous attack upon the breakfast dishes. This morning she sat still in her place; her eyes as she lifted them to her husband's face shone with an unaccustomed light.

"'Rastus," she began timidly, "I wish—that is, I've been a-thinkin' that——"

"Yas!" broke in the man, noisily ruminating the departing flavors of his recent meal, "I know what you've been a-thinkin' well 'nough. You want I should 'low ye to keep that thar young un; but I ain't a-goin' to do it. It'll start fur the poorhouse in jes' ten minits f'om now. I'll stop to Dundor's on the way back, an' he'll see to gittin' the corpse away."

He paused with his hand upon the latch and fixed his small greenish eyes full upon the woman. "An' I'll tell ye 'nother thing I ain't a-goin' to hev neither—an' you'd better pay 'tention to what I tell ye. I ain't a-goin' to hev all the women-folk in this 'ere neighborhood a trapsin' through this house an' runnin' all over my barn, peekin' an' pryin' an' clackin'. Don't ye tell nobody what's up. Time 'nough fur gabbin' when the hull thing's out the way. That's *my* way of tendin' to bizness, an' it's been my way fur more 'n forty years back. I'm going out to hitch up the critters now; whilst I'm gone you c'n git the water a-bilin'. I'm goin' to kill them hogs jes' 's I said, if we be late. Consarn the trame an' howl!"

Elizabeth had not stirred from her chair during this harangue. Her husband suddenly became aware of

this. "What you settin' thar for?" he demanded. "Looks like you was waitin' fur kingdom come. I hain't no time to fool away, I tell ye!"

"'Rastus Winch," said the woman slowly, "I'm a-goin' to keep that baby."

"You're a-goin' to keep that baby—eh?"

"Yes, I be. The Lord ain't never giv' me none of my own 'xcept——" Her voice broke and she raised her apron to her eyes.

Erastus Winch set his back against the door; his grim face hardened. "You ain't no call to bring that up," he said harshly. "The Lord's done by ye 'cordin' to his will. You ain't got no childern 'cause he don't want ye to have none."

"He's give me this one. I'm a-goin' to keep it!"

"Wall now, I say ye ain't, an' I'm the one to say, I guess! Why, goi durn it, hain't ye got 'nough to occ'py yer time? Thar's the cows a-comin' in afore long—thar'll be a dozen or more calves to look arter. An' hens an' turkeys an' geese to set, an' chicks an' goslin's to feed; an' all the while the milk to take keer of an' butter to make. You ain't a-goin' to tie yer han's with no beggar brat, if I know it. 'Sides we can't 'ford it. He'd eat his blamed head off in no time!"

Elizabeth Winch arose from her chair. She was a tall, angular woman, whose dress, complexion and hair had long since acquired the hopeless tints of her surroundings. But the eyes in the faded face shone suddenly bright and clear, and the voice rang out in the forgotten tones of youth. "'Rastus!" she cried, "you say the Lord ain't sent me no childern 'cause he don't want me to have none. Then why did he give

me sech a hankerin' after 'em? He does want me to have 'em, an' he meant I should have 'em!"

"Why ain't you got 'em then?" sneered the man, repenting the words as they escaped his lips in the light of the answering flash from the eyes of the woman.

"You don't need to ask that question," she answered bitterly. "If I'd ha' had half the care you give the milk critters mebbe—— But they ain't no use talkin' 'bout it. That's *my baby* in the cheer yonder; an' he ain't a-goin' to the poor farm this day ner any other day!"

The man shifted uneasily from one foot to the other, then he burst out in loud, blustering tones. "Whose house is this, anyhow? Ain't it mine? Say, ain't I a right to tell what I'll hev' an' what I won't hev' in my own house? Consarn it! What d'ye mean by talkin' that way to me? I tell ye, ye hain't got no time to fool with that young un! It's a-goin' wnar it b'longs jest as quick as I kin git it thar!"

Elizabeth walked swiftly to the side of the rocking-chair. She laid her work-distorted fingers lightly, caressingly on the soft-heaving wrappings which betrayed chrysalis-like the life pulsing within. "'Rastus," she said, tremulously, "this is your house; but ain't it mine, too? Ha'n't I slaved and worked for what we've got ever sence we was married jest as hard as you have—an' harder mebbe? Ain't I got some rights here? I've took keer of calves an' chickens faithful all my life; now can't I give a little time to him?—It won't be much, husband; I kin do more fur you ef I have him!"

"Now, 'Liz'beth, you're a-talkin' what ain't good horse sense," said the man, tugging argumenta-

tively at the short tuft of gray whiskers which depended from his chin. "An' what's more, you know you be. You don't want that boy any more'n a cat wants two tails; an' I'm blamed sure I don't; so that's settled!" He turned peremptorily as he spoke and laid his hand once more upon the latch. "I'm a-goin' to hitch now; I'll stop at the door fur the young un an' mind you don't hender me with no more of your dummed nonsense!" He slammed the door heavily behind him.

Elizabeth dropped on her knees beside the rocking-chair, her thin shoulders shaking with suppressed sobs. "*My* baby!" she whispered, "*my* baby!—mine—mine!"

When ten minutes later the frosty jingle of bells and harness apprised her of the fact that the "hitchin' up" had been accomplished, she opened the door, closed it carefully behind her and stood waiting ankle deep in the unswept snow.

Her husband eyed her sourly as he pulled up his horses. "Hand it out," he commanded briefly.

"I've got somethin' to say to you, 'Rastus."

"Wall!"

"If you take that baby away from me, 'Rastus Winch, I'll never feed another chicken; I'll never look at another calf; I'll never cook you another meal of victuals, nor lift a finger in your house agin as long as I live—— So help me God!" The woman's face was pinched and colorless, but solemn determination was written in every line of it.

The man's jaw fell; he thrust one leg tentatively out of the sleigh, then slowly pulled it in again and mechanically drew the blankets closer about his knees.

"You're a durned sight bigger fool 'an I took ye fur, 'Liz'beth," he said, with a rasping cough. "You'll be mighty sorry for this afore you're through!" With that he curled his lash with vicious emphasis about the flanks of his shivering horses, and disappeared in a cloud of glittering snow dust which smote the woman's white face like needles.

"I'll never be sorry for it!" she cried exultantly. She laughed aloud in the face of the rising sun, the white long shafts of pink and yellow splendor streamed across the dazzling blue-white of the fields, transfiguring the haggard figure with the celestial tints of morning. From the gnarled orchard closes sounded the gay carol of a chickadee; sparrows called shrilly from their ragged nests under the eaves. The woman stared about her with wide eyes, her starved soul swelling in her shriveled breast.

Then the thought of the dead mother seized her like a threatening hand. "I must look," she muttered. "There'll be a letter mebbe—or a name. Somebody'll take him away from me!"

There was no letter, no name, no sign—even on the worn clothing in which the unknown was clad; Elizabeth satisfied herself of this. A sweet-smelling mystery, flower-pure, snow-cold, the dead mother vouchsafed no answer to the burning questions in the eyes of the living mother who bent over her. She reverently touched one of the waxen hands. "I ain't like you," she whispered, "but I'll love him an' take keer of him faithful as long 's I live!"

Then she uttered a short, sharp cry. There was something after all, lying on the hay and half covered by one exquisite palm. Elizabeth drew this object

toward her with shaking fingers, and wrapping it in her apron fled toward the house.

In the rosy light of the new day which streamed in at the kitchen window she examined what she had found. It was a book—a Bible, bound in shabby russet-colored leather. On the fly leaf something was written in a delicate hand; to Elizabeth's unaccustomed eyes it seemed almost illegible. She spelled it out word by word: "The stretching forth of his wings shall fill the breadth of thy land, O Immanuel!" Below this were two other words written in bolder characters. She stared at them intently, but the strangely twisted letters conveyed no meaning to her brain.

"It's a name, mebbe," she muttered. "I—I'll keep it keerful for him."

CHAPTER II

The Temptation of Eliphalet Dundor

DURING the three days in which the dead woman lay in the back room of the undertaker's shop in Tacitus Four Corners, all the countryside emptied itself before the door. Solemn-faced farmers with their wives; children on their way to school; grimy young women and grimier young men, operatives in the cotton factory across the river; old people scarce able to drag their bodies from the warm nooks and corners where they dozed away their vacant days, one and all found their way into the bare little room dignified for the nonce by the terrible name—morgue.

There had been set on foot, as a matter of course, certain official inquiries, which had led up, after the frequent manner of official inquiries, to the dead wall of the unknowable. A vast number of excited rumors and gossiping surmises ended at the same impassable point. If the white mystery in Erastus Winch's barn had been dropped there out of the icy arms of the storm, its story could not have been more deeply shrouded from prying eyes.

Eliphalet Dundor—familiarily known on ordinary occasions as Liph—was disposed to regard the present "sad occasion" as an auspicious event in his business career. As coroner and undertaker, his professional pride had been deeply gratified by the prominent posi-

tion in the eyes of his fellow-citizens which he now occupied. He wore uninterruptedly his most impressive air of perfunctory solemnity—becomingly tempered with alert politeness, together with his official suit of black clothes.

In the front of the shop certain elaborately trimmed coffins were displayed, at which the visitors cast curious glances as they passed in and out of that other room, where lay the cold presence of the dead.

“Walk right up, ladies an’ gentlemen, an’ view these elegant goods at your leisure,” said Mr. Dundor, with a professional wave of the hand. “Now that you’ve taken a look at her you really can’t afford to go away without seeing how comf’table we c’n make the dear departed here in Tacitus Four Corners. There’s only jest one thing we’re certain of, ladies, in this ’ere vale of sorrers—we must all die some day or another, each an’ every one of us. An’ whilst we’re su’vivors it’s the greatest of all earthly comforts to feel that the dear departed is laid away by one that knows how to conduct the arrangements so ’t you may say it’s a pleasure to be the corpse.” Many of the women shed tears excitedly as they left Mr. Dundor’s emporium. It was unanimously conceded to be “more interestin’ than a reg’lar fun’ral.”

The short December day was drawing to its close with a gorgeous pageant of crimsons and purples which streamed far across the wintry land, kindling the village vanes and windows into gem-like splendor. This celestial radiance penetrated the dusty window-panes of Mr. Dundor’s shop and mingled with the uncertain light of a smoky kerosene lamp, which, for convenience sake, was placed on the upturned end of

a pine coffin. After the active duties of the day the worthy undertaker had permitted himself the relaxation of a short clay pipe stuffed with malodorous tobacco, the while he "set up" a receptacle of the poorest and commonest kind for the meek figure which lay in the shadows beyond.

The article upon which Mr. Dundor was industriously engaged differed widely from the fantastic affairs which he had displayed to an admiring public earlier in the day; a combination of wood shavings, euphemistically termed excelsior, with certain scant breadths of sleezy cambric of an unpleasant bluish white, were the simple materials with which he was lining the narrow pine box of ominous shape. It was, in short, a pauper's coffin, on which profits were reduced to a point which brought a commensurate scowl to the workman's forehead. A sound of a shrill tink., twice repeated, which marked the opening and closing of the outer shop door, Mr. Dundor laid down his hammer, and tiptoeing across the room, applied one eye to a knot-hole in the partition. After a brief reconnaissance he hastily divested himself of his overalls and extinguished his pipe.

The newcomer stood in the midst of the shop, glancing about him somewhat uncertainly over the collar of his greatcoat. He was a short man, much muffled up, and wearing a slouched hat pulled well down over his eyes; Mr. Dundor's alert eyes took in these details as he advanced on creaking tiptoe from the inner room. He bowed his sleek head with a tentative air of concern and sympathy. "Ah, my dear sir, good-evening," he began, sucking in the corners of his lips with a windy sigh. "Was there anything—a—l

could do for you in the mortuary line, sir? A sudden bereavement perhaps—yes, yes!”

“There was a woman,” said the stranger, in a harsh metallic voice, at sound of which the undertaker again bowed low, caressing the glossy knees of his trowsers with uncertain fingers. “A woman, found dead—in a barn, was it? Can’t say; just chanced to see it in newspaper. Detained at your junction for an hour or more. Concluded to pass away the time by looking the matter up.”

“There was a woman; yes, sir; certainly—quite right. Found dead, as you say, sir, in a barn. Sad case—very. Funeral to-morrow.”

“Let me see her.”

“Certainly—to be sure. The public has been admitted as a matter of precaution—that is, with the view of securing some further evidence. I have the honor of being coroner of this deestrick, sir.”

The stranger made no comment; but a certain alertness in his manner called forth a further remark from Mr. Dundor. “We have not as yet succeeded in identifying the remains,” he said, frowning and thrusting out his lips with an air of judicial wisdom. “Sad case—very. Now you don’t happen to be a possible acquaintance of the deceased, do you, sir?”

They were standing at the side of the dead woman, and the observant undertaker fancied that the aquiline features visible above the high coat collar quivered for an instant. “You don’t happen to—ah—know this unfortinit young woman, do you, sir?” he repeated, with an insinuating smile.

The stranger turned sharply around. “What do you mean—by asking such a question?” he demanded

in a low, fierce voice. "No, I don't know the woman. Why should I? Didn't I tell you what I came for? I came to please myself—to amuse myself! I said so, didn't I?"

"Oh—ah, yes, certainly, my dear sir; no offense intended; no offense whatever. But as coroner of this 'ere deestrick, you know, an' with no evidence whatever — Sad case, very, an' a nameless child, too — a very sad an' melancholy occasion, to be sure!"

"A child!" interrupted the other, sharply. "But nonsense, I don't see it!"

"There was a child—yes, certainly. The child was living—is living, I may say."

"Humph!"

"I beg your pardon, sir. I didn't quite catch the remark."

The stranger turned his back upon the dead woman. "The funeral is to-morrow, I believe you said?"

"Yes, sir, to-morrow, at ten o'clock sharp; at the expense of the town—an' mighty little expense it is. I've buried the paupers in this 'ere community nigh onto twenty years, an' there ain't a dollar of profit in it—not a dollar."

The stranger glanced at the pine box with its cambric linings. "This is for her, I suppose," he said coldly.

"Yes, sir; an' a mighty roomy an' stylish coffin it is for a pauper. She'll lie quiet enough, once she's put away. I ain't sure it makes much difference to 'em anyhow; it's the su'vivors 'at's pertic'lar. I c'n show you some elegant goods in all the latest styles, if you was interested in seein' 'em, sir."

"I have a fancy—mind you, it's a mere whim of

mine to see this—this pauper buried decently," said the stranger, fixing his frowning gaze on the undertaker. "I shouldn't care to think of a dog in that!" He indicated the box with a slight gesture.

"If you—ah—happened to know any one who is an acquaintance, or perhaps a relative of the deceased, you——" Mr. Dundor's eyes were roving inquisitively over the person of his visitor, but his words died away into an inarticulate mumble before the fierce eyes above the high coat-collar. He rubbed his hands together apologetically. "You understand my position, sir, as coroner of this dees——"

"You heard what I said," broke in the stranger with a scornful shrug. "If you care to listen to what I say, then do so without remark, my time is limited."

"Certainly, my dear sir; I beg your pardon, I'm sure. I'm always ready an' anxious to ah—serve the b'reaved in any an' all——"

"Have the goodness to attend me. Place the body of the woman in your best casket. Seal it up and bury it without delay. What has passed between us need not be mentioned. This whim of mine—a mere fancy which came into my mind as I saw the woman—need not become common talk. Do you understand?"

Mr. Eliphalet Dundor's lean hand closed upon the roll of bills which the other man offered. "Very generous of you, sir, I'm sure. Nothing to be ashamed of, certainly. I—ah—quite understand, I assure you. Natural modesty of benevolent gent'man; prevent left hand knowin' right hand's doin's—eh? Everything shall be as you wish, sir; elegant casket, satin linin's,

pillers soft and easy to the head, silver trimmin's, an'——"

The sound of the outer shop door as it shut to with a sharp protest from the rusty bell informed Mr. Dundor that he was once more alone.

"Curious circumstance—very," he muttered to himself. "If there had been any marks of violence on the body now, I should have felt justified in making an arrest—yes, to be sure, an arrest! But everything was quite regular; young woman, identity unknown, found dead—froze. Nothing out of the way or suspicious in freezing. Any young woman sim'larly situated would have froze. Sad case—very. Ah."

Mr. Dundor had climbed to the high stool behind his desk during this soliloquy; the roll of bills lay spread out before him in the light of the smoky lamp. "Ah," he repeated, rubbing his hands as he eyed the crisp green notes, "very generous indeed—very handsome! What a pity not to speak of the matter.

"It would get into the papers," he said, smiling pleasantly to himself. "Something like this—say: 'Mr. Eliphalet Dundor, the well-known coroner and undertaker of Tacitus Four Corners, receives visit from mysterious person, who insists upon paying handsomely for funeral of the unknown woman found dead in that township. Mr. Dundor is a prominent citizen an' active business man in this thrivin' village. We visited his elegant emporium at the Corners yesterday an' give the story in his own words.' If there's money in advertisin'—he!—he!" he chuckled, "I'd get a plenty of it without paying the printer a red cent."

This brought him back quite naturally to the agree-

able presence of the greenbacks on the desk before him. "It'll pay the expenses," he muttered, "an' leave a handsome margin. There's the money from the town besides. I'll have to take that or they'll ketch on to this 'ere curious circumstance."

He arose, lamp in hand, and walked slowly to the front of the shop; the long shadows of the coffins danced grotesquely on walls and ceiling, mingling with that of Mr. Dundor's own spare shape. "This 'ere 's too big for her," he muttered; "they ain't no sense in wastin' room on folks that ain't called on to move. Besides, ol' Mr. Snell's ripenin' for a better world, an' he's a hefty man. If I have to set up one like this we can't have no fun'ral to-morrow at ten; can't fetch it nohow under a day an' a half. That black cloth case 'ud do, but I as good as promised to set that one side fur Mis' Turner, an' I don't like to disappoint her; her second husband's buried in one sim'lar to it. The Lord knows I can't afford to play fast an' loose with a big fambly like the Turners an' all of 'em onhealthy."

His mind reverted to the meek presence in the back shop. "She ain't goin' to dictate 'bout it, i guess," he said meditatively, as he tiptoed softly to the side of the dead woman. "All any of 'em ask is to be put away comf'table."

The smoky lamp shed a feeble glimmer on the pathetic young face framed in its masses of red-brown hair. "I'll miss my guess if he hadn't put eyes onto her before," said Mr. Dundor. "But she ain't dressed suitable to be laid on white satin whoever she is; an' I'm legally bound to stick to my contract with the town." He turned with decision, and, setting the

lamp in its former position, resumed his operations on the narrow pine box of ominous shape.

It was growing bitterly cold in the little back room, but great drops of moisture stood out on the workman's forehead. "Stylish an' roomy," he repeated to himself, with a furtive glance at the quiet figure in the shadows, "an' there ain't no su'vivors."

CHAPTER III

The Stretching Forth of His Wings

ON the following day Elizabeth Winch stood in the open door of her house, a smile of timid welcome on her face; the minister's wife was coming up the path. "Do walk right in, Mis' Holditch," she said hospitably; "it's awful cold, ain't it? You'd better take your things off, I guess, while you're settin', or you won't sense them when you go out."

The minister's wife untied her blue veil and unpinned her heavy blanket shawl. "'Tis cold," she admitted; "but I was well wrapped up." She was a stout, motherly woman, with a countenance composed to a comfortable acquiescence in the inscrutable ways of Providence. "I'd like to see that baby," she added, as she emerged like a substantial beetle from its encumbering chrysalis.

"You—you wouldn't be wantin' him?" asked Elizabeth, hesitatingly.

"Dear, no!" said the other, with a pitying smile. "I know too well what a piece of work it is to bring up a bottle baby! But, of course, we all take an interest in the poor child."

Elizabeth drew her guest into the tiny bedroom off the kitchen. "He's asleep," she whispered, her face glowing with joyful pride. "He sleeps most all the time when he ain't eatin'. He ain't a mite of trouble.

He's growin' jest like a little weed—no, I ain't a-goin' to say that neither, weeds is ugly things. He's more like a little pink flower. There now, look at him; ain't he lovely?"

Mrs. Holditch leaned over the sleeping form, a fine motherly smile dawning in her kind eyes. She touched the soft rose of the tiny cheek with a wise forefinger. "I should say he was as healthy a child as I ever saw," she said judiciously. "And I guess you know how to do for him as well as if you'd had more experience. You want to dilute his milk with boiled water, and don't feed him every time he cries."

"He ain't hardly cried sence I've had him," breathed the other, with a triumphant smile. "An' jest look at his hair, will you, a curlin' all over his blessed little head! His eyes is as black as velvet, an' he knows me a'ready; you wouldn't believe it, would you now, Mis' Holditch?"

"They're more knowing than most folks give 'em credit for," responded the minister's wife briskly. "What does Mr. Winch say about him?"

Elizabeth's face clouded. "He don't want him," she said sullenly. "But I've made up my mind."

"You might name him after your husband," suggested Mrs. Holditch, elevating her eyebrows with an understanding glance.

"No, he's named a'ready. He's named 'Manuel. I named him first thing."

"'Manuel I' repeated Mrs. Holditch, wonderingly. "Why, that sounds kind of a foreign and outlandish name for him, doesn't it?"

"It's in the Bible," said Elizabeth; "an' I seen it on the communion table over to Turner's Crossroads

once. 'The stretchin' out of his wings shall fill the breadth of thy land, O 'Manuel!'"

"I understand now—Immanuel. It means God with us." Mrs. Holditch glanced at the soft-heaving wrappings on the bed with a sigh. "Dear me, it's pretty hard to understand the dealings of the Lord sometimes!"

Elizabeth laid her hand on the good woman's plump arm. "'Rastus is jest a-comin' in," she whispered beseechingly. "If you could say anythin' to kind of reconcile him, I'd be terrible 'bleeged to you, Mis' Holditch."

Erastus Winch shook hands with the minister's wife, with a reluctant widening of his grim mouth. "You ain't been out to see us fur quite a spell," he began agreeably. "But of course, as I was tellin' the parson, las' Sunday, there's them 'at pays more fur his support 'an I do; an' I s'pose they're entitled to his partic'lar 'tention."

"I believe Mr. Holditch expects to see all the members of his congregation at least twice a year," replied the lady, with becoming meekness. "He's been very busy this week with funerals."

"Yas, it's a mighty bad season; terrible onhealthy. I've been laid up most all winter with one thing or 'nother. Crops was bad, too, an', what with money scurser 'n hen's teeth, an' everythin' way up in gee, 'tain't a very good time to incur extry expenses. What do you say, Mis' Holditch?"

"It would depend a little on what the extra expense was," said Mrs. Holditch, cautiously.

"Humph!" ejaculated Winch, with a sour look at his wife, "I s'pose you've seen it."

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"Do you mean the baby? Yes, I've just seen it. He's a fine child; he'll soon grow into a strong, active boy."

"He won't be wuth his keep fur ten years," growled Winch. "My wife here is set on keepin' him; but I don't want him. I've been thinkin' of consultin' the parson on the subjec' of a man's rulin' his own house. That's Bible, ain't it?"

"I heard Mr. Holditch say that a likely boy, that cost practically nothing to raise, was a good investment for a farmer," observed Mrs. Holditch, in a hard, practical tone. "You'd have his services till he was of age, I suppose; I should advise you to keep the child."

Mr. Winch had been engaged in cutting a liberal mouthful of plug tobacco with a clasp knife. He shook his head with a surly glance at his wife; his jaws were occupied with the fragrant weed, but they ceased to move for a full minute in the light of the look she flashed him in return; the same unalterable determination he had faced once before shone in the faded eyes.

"Wall, I dunno," he said at length. "I guess I'm a blamed fool fur bein' so soft-hearted; but jest to please you, Mis' Holditch, I reckon I'll hev to give in 'bout the boy. 'Tain't likely he'll ever be any good to me; an' Mis' Winch 'ull hev to look out 'at she don't neglect no reg'lar dooties a-waitin' on him; can't put up with that nohow, an' money tight as 'tis now. The poor-house 'll be open fur quite a spell yet, an' one day'll do as well 's 'nother as fur 's I'm consarned."

* * * * *

Those systematized numerical collections of facts known as statistics, however coldly dull they may appear, are the concise expression of prolonged effort, the colorless residuum in life's seething alembic. If it be stated, for example, that Elizabeth Winch has fried some fifteen thousand slices of pork; that she has washed dishes five thousand, four hundred and seventy-five times; that she has fed the chickens and calves three thousand times, upon which occasions she has been the patient recipient of some twenty-seven thousand rasping complaints from her yoke-fellow— all this since the December morning when Immanuel first opened his eyes to the light, it may be simply inferred that a period of five years has been added to the term of her earthly existence.

Fortunately for Elizabeth, as for many another, she was not accustomed to view her labors from the statistical standpoint. If she was bound to her narrow wheel of labor, she at least forbore to often look at her chain. At times her wan face seemed to reflect the rosy glow which pulsed in the round cheeks of Immanuel.

During these years the child grew in strength and beauty; the spreading of his wings had indeed come to fill the whole land for Elizabeth. That he linked the sordid seen with the celestial unseen she never doubted; the memory of the strangely beautiful face of the dead mother had remained with her in the guise of a living presence. She came to regard herself as in somewise guided and directed by this benign intelligence, known in the secret of her own heart as "his mother."

"She couldn't be contented in no heaven whilst he's

here," she would say to herself. "More especial as she kin see 'at I ain't no ways experienced in the fetchin' up of children. It says in the Bible 'at they're all ministerin' sperits, sent forth to minister; an' that, I take it, means 'at they ain't allowed to stay inside no pearly gates a-singin' an' playin' on golden harps as long's their own folks needs lookin' after here below."

This curious sense of intimate and helpful companionship so grew upon her that she formed the habit of conversing familiarly with the imagined presence while about her work. "Ain't he growin' perfec'ly wonderful?" she would whisper, stooping to look at the child wrapped in the rosy sleep of babyhood. "jest look after him a spell, an' keep him asleep ef you kin whilst I step out to feed them chickens."

The unseen mother was often similarly called upon to "keep him mighty still while 'Rastus is round;" and many were the fervent outpourings of gratitude when some dreaded crisis was safely past.

"What in under the sun would I ha' done ef you hadn't managed to quiet him down jest as you did?" she whispered on one occasion, when the child's loud crying had elicited a savage threat from her husband. "Seems 's'o I'd go crazy; but land! he shet right up the minute he laid his pretty eyes on you! I seen him a-lookin' at you as plain as day. I s'pose mebbe your wings—all shiny like—must ha' 'tracted his 'tention!"

Erastus Wrench appeared as unconscious as an animal of the heavenly change in the atmosphere of his home. He went his way after his old surly fashion, and for the most part paid no manner of attention to

the child. But the time came when Elizabeth detected a speculative gleam in his dull eyes as they rested upon the boy. Winch was smoking his pipe on the back porch on a summer evening; Elizabeth sat on the steps watching Immanuel as he industriously gathered fragments of wood in a basket.

"What's he doin'?" demanded the farmer, removing his pipe and pointing it toward the child. "Why, 'Rastus, he's gittin' kindlin' fur me to use in the mornin'," said Elizabeth, her heart beating fast with pleasure at this token of tardy interest. "He's awful smart fur his age, 'Manuel is; he helps me all the while. This mornin' when I was stemmin' goose-berrie fur pies, he set an' worked at 'em as stiddy as I did. I wish't you'd notice him a little more, 'Rastus," she added, laying her hand on her husband's knee.

He recognized the tentative caress with a scowl, continuing to puff at his pipe a full half-minute before he made answer. "I'm a-goin' to take consid'able notice of him f'om now on ef he's got to the pint whar he'll be useful," he said, rising from his chair and knocking his empty pipe against the door-post. "It's 'bout time I was beginnin' to realize a leetle somethin' on my val'able investment—he—he!"

He paused on his way to the barn to look more narrowly at the child, stooping to feel his arms and legs. "Fur all the world as if he was a colt or steer!" murmured Elizabeth, her eyes filling with indignan' tears. She called the boy sharply. He came running toward her, his curling locks flying in the wind.

"'Manuel!" she exclaimed, and held him fast, her eyes wide with sad forebodings.

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The child wound his arms about her neck. "What is it, mummy?" he whispered.

"Nothin'!" said Elizabeth, shortly. "Come now, I'm a-goin' to put you to bed. You must rest while you kin, deary."

The boy drew himself up to his full height. "Here's lots of kindling, mummy," he said joyously. "Tomorrow I'm goin' to bring water from the spring. I won't spill it!"

"No—no, child," said Elizabeth, shaking her head; "I don't want you should carry water. I'm a-goin' to sen' you to school; you've got to get learnin'. Yes, I'm a-goin' to sen' you to school to-morrow."

She knelt by the open window for a long time after the child had fallen asleep, looking out with anxious, questioning eyes into the rosy splendors of the evening sky athwart which swallows flitted by twos and threes, crying shrilly to their fellows of night's approach. "I wish 'Rastus wa'n't so hard," she murmured, wiping away one or two slow tears; "seems 's'o he was made of stone. 'Twa'n't always so with him; when we was first married an' come to this house to live, I remember he says to me—'twas right down on the back porch of a summer evening like this—'Liz'beth, he says, ef thar's anythin' I kin git fur you, or do fur you, all you've got to do is to name it. He was awful kind in them days, 'Rastus was; an' I was willin' an' anxious to work my fingers to the bone fur him. I don't know how it come—I didn't take notice—I know I never stopped a-tryin' to please him. But —"

She started to her feet with a faint exclamation of dismay at sound of his slow, heavy step at the back

door. "It got dark so kin' of gradual like, husban', I didn't think to light up," she said apologetically, as she struck a match in the dark kitchen; "'slong as I'm alone, thinks s' I, they ain't no use in wastin' ker'sene."

"Humph!" growled the man, "I know what you was doin' well 'nough. I reckon I'm jest a leetle mite smarter 'an you take me for, Mis' Winch. Now I'm a-goin' to set my foot down on this 'ere foolin' once an' fur all, an' you might's well put yer min' to it first as las'."

"I—I don't know what you mean, 'Rastus," faltered Elizabeth, with an imploring look. "I ain't never neglected nothin' fur—fur him; you know I ain't. I never had better luck with the chickens an' ——"

"That ain't the p'int," he interrupted, dropping heavily into the one rocking-chair. "I've had my eyes peeled onto you—an' him, too—fur quite a spell back, an' I see 'at yer idees wants overhaulin' on the subjec'. You ain't a-fetchin' up no fine gent'man, Mis Winch, 'at's a-goin' to dress in broadcloth an' patent leathers when he's growed, any more 'an I'm a-settin' out to raise prize-winnin' trotters. I'm a-raisin' useful critters fur the farm, an' that's what you set out to do; but I guess you kin' of los' track of the idee all these years—eh?"

Elizabeth moistened her dry lips with a furtive look at the grim face opposite. "You ain't serious, 'Rastus, in namin' a child 'at's got an immortal soul along side of dumb critters, be ye? 'Course"—she made haste to add—"he'll help's soon's he's big 'nough. He doos 's much as ever he kin now. I—I was

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thinkin' wə'd ought to sen' him to school, beginnin' to-morrow."

"You don't say," sneered her husband. "You're gittin' awful smart an' knowin' lately, ain't you? Mebbe we'd better sen' him to college an' make a professor outen him. Ef you git to thinkin' so, Mis' Winch, why o' course I ain't got nothin' to say. I gin in to ye once, an' so you guess you c'n come it over me every time; but I reckon you've got the wrong pig by the ear this time. Now ef you'll give me your 'tention, Mis' Winch, I'll tell ye what ye'r a-goin' to do—beginnin' to-morrer. First off, you'll cut that redic'lous mop of hair, an' then——"

"I was a-goin' to cut his hair, 'Rastus; but it look so pret——"

"I'm a-talkin', Mis' Winch. After his head's in order you c'n sen' him out to the barn to me. I'll fin' somethin' fur him to do. That's the kin' of school he'll git fur a spell."

Elizabeth's pillow absorbed more than one bitter tear that night. "Oh Lord!" she groaned, when the loud husky breathing at her side revealed her slackened chain. "Oh Lord! You love him more'n I do—more even 'an she doos, an' you kin take care of him. Don't let 'Rastus be ha'sh with him, Lord, 'cause he ain't much more'n a baby! Oh Lord—Lord—Lord!" The anguish of her fears found vent in dry, inarticulate sobs, which penetrated the wakeful ear of Omnipotence in guise of compelling petition. The answer was peace and deep sleep.

CHAPTER IV

A Squaring of Accounts

"**H**E wants you should help him out to the barn, honey," said Elizabeth. "That's why mummy cut yer hair; big boys don't want no curls, do they?"

The child looked soberly at the long, bright tresses which hung from Elizabeth's trembling fingers. He shook his head, his dark eyes sparkling. "I'm glad I'm big," he said, squaring his small shoulders. "I like to help!"

Twenty times during the morning did Elizabeth strain eyes and ears for some token that all was well with her darling. "I-s'pose she's with him," she sighed, while a hot tear dopped on the potato she was peeling. "But I dunno what in creation she c'd do fur him ef 'Rastus gits mad. He's allers awful ha'sh with colts when he breaks 'em to harness; I remember one time he killed a steer 'at wouldn't turn into the yard jest when he wanted it to. Land! I can't stan' it another minute nohow; I mus' see what he's doin'!"

The barn was empty, but a heap of corn-cobs and a measure of shelled corn revealed the initial task. "With his baby fingers!" muttered Elizabeth, shaking with indignation; "they'll be fairly raw! Well, I kin do that, an' I will after this."

She crept cautiously up into the loft and looked awry across the fields. "'Rastus 'll be plantin' fodder

corn this mornin', I reckon," she whispered, then caught her breath in a quick sob. "Yes, I kin see him—in his little pink aperl 'Rastus is makin' him drop corn. The sun's turrible hot, an' he ain't used to it neither. Oh, Lord—Lord!"

At noon time the small head drooped wearily over the full plate. "I don't feel hungry—very," said the child, smiling bravely into Elizabeth's anxious face; "but I guess I helped a lot!"

"You're a durned sight more trouble 'an you're wuth, that's what you be," observed Winch, as he shoved back from the table. "You'll hev to do better 'n ye did this forenoon, or I'll try what lickin' 'll do." With that he lighted his pipe and strode out toward the barn. To Elizabeth's immense relief, she presently saw him drive away toward the village.

"I guess you'd better lay down on the lounge an' rest a spell," she said to Immanuel. "It's nice an' cool in the settin' room. Come, honey, I'll bake you a big cookie with currants in bimeby."

The child slipped off his chair with a sigh; his eyes wandered wistfully to the open door.

"Would you drather go out, 'Manuel?" asked Elizabeth, tenderly. "It's pretty hot in the sun, but I guess there's some strawb'ris gettin' ripe down by the brook where it's shady."

She watched the little cropped head as it bobbed in and out amid the lush tangle of greenery which overhung the roadway. An oriole called softly to its mate from the top of the tall elm which held its swinging cradle; a bumblebee yellow with pollen boomed past in the sunshine; crowds of bright-faced flowers and tasseled grasses wagged their young heads in the

warm breeze. Elizabeth heard nothing—saw nothing of it all. She turned back to her kitchen and fell to scraping an iron kettle with feverish energy. "Oh, Lord—Lord!" she groaned, to the discordant accompaniment of the broken knife, "I'm awful 'fraid of what's comin'!"

Isaiah trotted soberly along the dusty road till he came to the brook, which lay across the fields like a twisted ribbon, touched here and there with a glint of silver where its busy ripples caught the blaze of the sun. The child slipped down the steep bank into the jubilant life of the meadow. A warm, sweet smell of wild strawberries, blent with a thousand subtler fragrances of unfolding buds and full-blown, passionate flowers, greeted him like a kindly presence. He stretched his small, tired body on the soft earth with a deep sigh of content, all the vague unhappiness of the morning falling away from his spirit like a torn garment. Thousands of fluttering leaves shot through with emerald splendor spread a cool shelter above his head; peace sang in the low gurgle of the stream and breathed in the caressing wind. The child listened drowsily, and presently the sound of the brook carried him away into a dream.

So Elizabeth found him. "Poor lamb!" she sighed, and wakened him to the sight of a big ginger-bread man, plentifully besprinkled with currants.

At six o'clock of a summer's morning a corn-field is a place of enchantment, even if one be encumbered with a hoe, the handle of which is higher than one's head. The long arching aisles are full of gleaming lights, where the sun strikes through the blue-green leaves; the wind urges them to mysterious whisper-

ings. Crowds of yellow butterflies—those innocent lovers of midsummer—float in mid air. Higher up little flocks of snow-white clouds wander peacefully in the blue.

Immanuel dared not look up to watch them; there were too many lusty weeds growing in the shallow trenches under the waving ribbons of the corn. Some of them stoutly resisted the big hoe in the small hands. It appeared that a personal encounter was necessary; but if a long, fibrous tap root has taken firm hold of the tenacious clay beneath the crumbling loam, and its crown of green leaves be succulent, it sometimes happens that one may decapitate a weed without destroying it. Having added a fraction of this fact to his stock of agricultural knowledge, the boy beheaded many weeds with joyful haste, burying the telltale stumps of the foe in the loose earth. Thus he traveled down the long row, pausing now and again to straighten his aching shoulders with a long breath of satisfaction.

Through the twinkling, green leaves, the heavy, stoop-shouldered figure of his taskmaster could be seen approaching in the opposite direction. The farmer was cutting and thrusting thither and yon with a mixture of skill and strength, which the child regarded with honest admiration. He glanced down at his own small person, righteous ambition swelling in his soul. "I am growing," he said to himself, "and I am learning—every day, mummy says so!" Many times during the past weeks he had sobbed himself to sleep; but always the morning brought the white page of a new day.

Erastus Winch had also paused to mop his wet fore-

head and ease his aching back; during this period of respite he fixed his savage eyes on the small toiling figure in the adjoining furrow. In another instant his heavy hand descended with crushing force on the delicate shoulders. "Ye tarnal fool!" he shouted, his face purple with rage. "I seen yer! ye needn't try to lie out of it—ye doggoned beggar brat! A-pullin' off the tops of the weeds an' hidin' 'em—I seen yer!"

There is no spectacle on earth more revolting than that of helpless childhood cowering beneath the brute strength God has set for its defense. Woe is decreed for the man who thus offends one of the little ones. Aye, let a millstone be hanged about his neck and let him be drowned in the depths of the sea; it were better for him! There was no visible presence in the corn-field; no hand appeared to stay the threatened blows, yet on a sudden Erastus Winch stopped short in his torrent of abuse and stared open-mouthed to the right and left.

"I am sorry," faltered the child. "I didn't know the weeds would grow again. I'll dig up all the roots. I'm sorry I didn't know."

"Wall, you'll be a durned sight sorrier than you be now, time I git through with ye!" growled the man. "Now you dig them weeds, roots an' all; I'll see 'at you don't never furgit 'bout it agin, when I git ye up to the barn!"

"You'll be needin' some help for harvestin' this week, won't you, 'Rastus?" asked Elizabeth, as she set a platter of steaming beef and vegetables before her husband at noon. "Billy Giddings was here this mornin'; he's lookin' fur a job. I tol' him——"

"I seen him," interrupted Winch, spearing a potato

with an iron fork. "He's comin' to-morrer at sun up."

Elizabeth involuntarily glanced at Immanuel, who was washing his hands at the back door.

"We're goin' to make the ten acre lot first," pursued Winch. "The boy thar c'n take a holt of the pertaters, ef he ain't too lame come to-morrer."

Elizabeth turned her face aside to conceal the look of satisfaction that crept over it. She could hoe potatoes, and the field was well out of sight of the ten acre lot. "Come in to dinner, honey," she said to the child; "I've got some nice cherry pie."

"You ain't got none fur him," said Winch, speaking thickly through a big mouthful. "That young feller's a-goin' to git his belly full o' somethin' 'sides pie, 's quick's I git through eatin'."

Elizabeth gripped the back of her chair. "What's he done to anger ye, 'Rastus?" she faltered. "He—he's nothin' but a child, husban'. You furgit 'at he's only——"

"I don't furgit nothin', Mis' Winch; I ain't the furgittin' kin'. Fetch on yer pie, will ye; I ain't got no time to fool away."

Elizabeth turned blindly. "Here's the pie, 'Rastus," she said huskily. Then she walked to the door with sudden determination. "'Manuel," she said in a low voice, "don't ye want to go down to the spring an' fetch mummy a pitcher of nice, cool drinkin' water; there ain't a drop in the house."

Winch dropped his knife and fork with a clatter. "You're a-lyin'!" he burst out. "Yer bucket's full, an' ye know it. Durn ye! you c'n come back here; I'll ten' to yer case now!" The last words were ad-

dressed to Immanuel, who, with ready obedience, had started for the spring. "Mummy!" cried the child, his eyes wide with terror. "Come on!" shouted Winch, seizing a heavy horsewhip, which stood in a corner. "I'll larn ye both who's boss in this house!"

Elizabeth caught imploringly at her husband's arm. "'Rastus!" she begged, "don't ye—don't! Fur God's sake—'Rastus! Fur the sake of our own child 'at's dead—don't ye tech him!"

Without a word, the man wrenched himself loose from the clinging hands. In another minute Elizabeth heard the heavy door of the barn shut to with a bang. "My God—he'll kill him!" she muttered, wringing her hands weakly.

She darted into the road. There was no one in sight, but from beyond the crest of the hill there arose the faint intermittent creak and rattle of wagon wheels. The vehicle itself shortly hove into view. Elizabeth ran toward it wildly.

It was a long wagon, painted black; the man who drove the single white horse sat stiffly erect. He wore black clothes, and interposed the shelter of a black umbrella betwixt the fierce rays of the July sun and his uncovered head; a straw hat of the same sombre hue, albeit tempered by age to a dubious brown, reposed on the seat beside him. In the bed of the wagon, a wrinkled oilcloth, also of rusty black, imperfectly concealed the outlines of a long box.

Elizabeth threw up her hands with a smothered scream. "It's an awful bad sign!" she muttered. Then the more urgent fear conquered. "Mr. Dundor!" she called; "fur pity's sake do stop a minit!"

The driver of the wagon drew up at once. "Is that

you, Mis' Winch? I declare I scarcely knew you! I was just on my way to ——"

"Don't wait a minit!" cried Elizabeth wildly. "He'll kill the child ef somebody don't stop him! Fur the land's sake hurry! I'll hold the horse!"

The undertaker scanned the flushed face of the woman in obvious perplexity.

"It's 'Manuel! He's done somethin'—I don't know what—an' 'Rastus got mad at him. He's got him in the barn now a-lickin' him! He's turrible ha'sh, 'Rastus is. Go an' knock on the barn door, do—I beg of ye! Tell him you called to see him 'bout somethin'!"

"Why—ee, Mis' Winch, I'd like to 'bleege you, I would really, but I can't say 'at I feel called upon to—ah—interfere in a case of fambly discipline. Who'd I understan' you to say was gettin' c'rrected?"

"Oh, Mr. Dundor, it's 'Manuel; an' he's only six years old. You know 'Rastus, how turrible ha'sh he's allers been! Don't wait another minit! Please get out! I—I'll do most anythin' fur you, ef you only will!"

"'Manuel?" repeated Mr. Dundor with exasperating deliberation. "Why didn't I hear you'd named that there child found in your ——"

"Yes, that's him! Won't you go? God bless ye, Liph Dundor!"

Mr. Dundor climbed stiffly down over the wheel, his face curiously mottled as if from the stirring of some strenuous inward motive. "The mare'll stan' all right," he said, turning to the woman. "I guess if I was you I'd make myself scurce. 'Twon't do to let him mistrust what we're up to." He made his way through the tangle of blossoming mayweed, which

bordered the road, the pungent odor bringing an unaccustomed tear to his eyes. "Seein' it's *her* young one, I'll do it," he muttered. "It'll kind of square accounts along of that casket." He bent his head to listen, then brought down his whip-handle in a smart rat-tat on the closed door of the barn. A wailing sob from within caused him to repeat the operation with urgent emphasis.

This time the door flew wide, and Winch stood on the threshold, a threateningly belligerent look on his big-featured face. "Wha'd yer want?" he demanded.

"Why, gosh old hemlock, neighbor! but I'm mighty glad to find ye so easy," began Mr. Dundor, with a free and exuberant friendliness of manner. "I was just on my way over to Jabez Turnerses' with a fust-class casket for ol' Mis' Turner—I dunno as you've heard 'at——"

"I don't see as that's any of my biz," growled Winch, laying hold on the door, with the manifest intention of closing it in his visitor's face. "I ain't got no time to fool away gassin'."

"Hold on a minit, neighbor—not s' fast!" cried Mr. Dundor, with infinite tact. "That's just what it is—a little matter of business this time; it'll fetch you in mebbe—half a dollar. That's worth a word or two—eh?"

Winch cast a frowning glance over his shoulder, then he stepped out and set his back against the closed door. "Wall!" he ejaculated with a tentative relaxation of his grim mouth.

"As I was remarkin'," observed Mr. Dundor, resuming something of the solemnity incident to his profession, "I'm on my way to Turnerses', with a fust-

class, a-number-one casket for ol' Mis' Turner, 'at passed away yiste'day to a better lan' in an apoplectic fit; I dunno as you've heard the sad intelligence?"

"I ain't heerd it," said the other doggedly, "an' what's more, I don't keer now 't I hev heerd. Them Turners was always a mee 'hin' lot. I ain't never took no stock in any of 'em."

"They are a weak set and that's a fac'," acquiesced Mr. Dundor pleasantly. "They ain't none of 'em long for this vale of tears, I reckon. That's why I stopped here. I got started with the casket, an' thinks s' I, when I git there, like enough there won't be a soul 'bout the place able to help me in wit'. it. I want you should get onto the wagon with me an' ride out. If half a dollar'll be any injucement, why——"

"Make it a dollar an' I'll go with ye," said Winch. "You c'n put it int' the gen'ral expenses," he added with a wink. "I'll never be able to hev a fun'ral to my place; I ain't rich 'nough."

The two men were walking slowly toward the wagon, when Winch caught sight of the anxious face of Elizabeth. "Gol-durn it all!" he muttered. "I'd like to hev forgot what I was doin'. I'm 'bleeged to hev a word with my wife afore I go."

He thrust his shaggy head in at the open window. "I seen yer—a-peekin'," he growled. "Say, Mis' Winch, I'm goin' out fur a spell; you leave that thar boy alone whilst I'm gone, d'ye hear? Don't you go nigh him."

"Why, where you goin', 'Rastus?" asked Elizabeth, with well feigned surprise. "Ain't that Liph Dundor? I was jest a-lookin' to see who 'twas."

"Give me my coat thar an' shet yer gab," responded

Winch, agreeably. "An' say! If I ain't home by four o'clock, you c'n hev him drive up the cows; you c'n milk."

Elizabeth stood in the kitchen door watching the departure of the black wagon drawn by the white horse; the mournful creak and rattle of the slow-revolving wheels floated back to her on the hot breeze. "My!" she murmured, shaking her head with a deep sigh; "it was an awful bad sign—a-meetin' that coffin plumb in the middle of the road! I'm most afraid to go out there an' look!"

CHAPTER V

Revelation

ELIZABETH found the child sitting motionless in the haymow where his mother had died. Long, cloudy shafts of yellow light descended upon his bowed shoulders from the one window high up in the dim wall. To the tearful eyes of the woman this dazzling glory appeared like mighty wings stretching up and away from the lonely little figure. "Oh, 'Manuel," she whispered, "look up, an' speak to mummy!"

The child threw his arms about her neck with a little sob. Elizabeth covered the small tear-stained face with passionate kisses. "He's gone, deary," she whispered; "an' he won't be back fur a spell. Come in with mummy an' eat some dinner; I saved a nice little pie a purpose fur you."

The boy shook his head and struggled to his feet. "I want to go," he said; "I want to go outdoors."

Elizabeth involuntarily drew back before the dumb pain in the childish eyes. Then she stretched out her arms longingly. "I want to tell you somethin', 'Manuel," she pleaded. "Jest wait a minit, deary! I didn't mean to tell you till you was growed up; but I reckon I will—though I don't sca'cely know what good it'll do."

She paused, picking absently at the folds of her

checkered apron. "Ef 'Rastus was yer father," she burst out at length, "it 'ud be diff'runt! You ain't like us; I allus knew it, an' the breed's more'n the pastur' every time. Yes—if you was like him it 'ud all be diff'runt."

"Who is my father?"

The question brought Elizabeth's wandering thoughts to a standstill. "Your father?" she repeated. "Why, I——" Her face whitened a little under the impact of a sudden, startling thought which had reached her from out of the unseen. "'Manuel," she said, solemnly, "I'm a-goin' to fetch somethin' out of the spare room; you stay here till I come back."

When she returned she carried the russet-bound Bible, wrapped carefully in a white cloth. "This 'ere Bible's yourn, 'Manuel," she said, reverently unwrapping it. "I was 'lottin' to give it to you when you was growed; but I'm goin' to give it to you now. This book was yer ma's; it tells all about yer Father which is in heaven."

The child took the book in his hands, lifting grave, questioning eyes to the woman's flushed face. "You are mother," he said, simply.

"Yes," she said, breathlessly, "as fur's lovin' you's concerned, I be. But your own mother was a beautiful lady; she died when you was a teenty baby. I've been a-takin' care of you for her. She's with you most all the while, times 'at I can't be."

"Yes," said Immanuel, nodding emphatically. Elizabeth leaned forward to peer into the downcast face. "But you ain't never seen her, deary."

The child shook his head. "Sometimes I dream

of a beautiful lady," he said. "She loves me very much."

"Yes, that's her," sighed Elizabeth, patting the little brown hand which was folded in both of hers. "She was han'some as a pictur'l. But yer Father, 'Manuel, loves you a sight more 'n either of us women-folks. I couldn't begin to tell you how much store he doos set by you. I'm a-goin' to read somethin' out this 'ere boo'. right now, then I'll have to go in an' wash the dishes. Bimeby you kin read it yerself; you know yer letters a'ready, an' I mean you shall have learnin'."

"I know all the words on the mowin'-m'chine, an' most all the words on this page," said the child, eagerly producing a fragment of newspaper from his pocket. "I found it in the road," he explained; "an' the sounds of the letters make words. I found it out."

"Fur the land's sake, child, you'd really ought to hev schoolin'," was Elizabeth's comment. "Now you listen, 'cause my dish-water's gettin' stun cold."

She read from the sixth chapter of Matthew's gospel, and on through a part of the seventh, pausing now and again to wrestle with a difficult pronunciation, then gliding on triumphantly through an easier passage. "There!" she exclaimed, shutting the book with a long breath; "them's the words of Jesus; you've heard of him frequent a'ready. He knew more'n any other man 'bout yer Father. Somewhere's I remember 'at he said you was to call no man on airth father, 'cause there is one 'at is your Father in heaven."

"Where is heaven?" asked the child wonderingly.

"It's up——" began Elizabeth, then she stopped short, a strange look of triumph dawning in her dim eyes. "It certainly says in this 'ere Bible, that yer

Father is in heaven—same's I read, 'Our Father which art in heaven.' An' ag'in it says 'at he's everywhere. He made everythin' you kin see—everythin' pretty 'at you set store by, flowers an' butterflies an' the brook, yes, an' strawb'rries an' apples an' sich—everythin'. Now it jest come into my mind, tno I ain't never thought so before, that if yer heavenly Father's everywhere, then heaven mus' be—everywheres 'at he is."

"Am I in heaven now?" asked the child, in an awed whisper. "Is my Father here?"

"Oh, Lord, don't ye let me tell him anythin' 'at ain't so!" petitioned Elizabeth, silently. Then with sudden illumination, she cried: "Yes, 'Manuel, you be in heaven now; 'cause it says 'at in him we live an' move an' have our bein', an' there can't be anything better than that anywheres! I don't seem to sense it allers when things go cross-ways in the kitchen, but mebbe you kin, ef you begin when you're little an' think 'bout it frequent."

With that she slipped away in sudden trepidation, fancying that she heard the sound of voices from without. "If I've said anythin' 'at ain't so, Lord," she ejaculated, as she hurried along the narrow path, "jest see 'at he furgits it! I furgit easier 'n I remember, an' there's times 'at I'm awful glad of it!—Good land! I wonder who that is, an' my dishes a-settin' round."

Two female figures were standing under the shelter of the stoop at the side door; while beneath the shade of the big soft maple a superannuated sorrel horse nibbled languidly at the fence post. "Well—well! Mis' Winch, here you be at last!" cried the visitors in chorus. "We've been a-knockin' fur quite a spell," continued one of them, a stout, purple-faced lady,

attired in a much-creased linen gown. "Lidy, she would have it you was out burryin'; but I says, she can't be fur, I says, 'cause the kitchen doors an' winders is wide open."

"I jest run out to the barn a minit," said Elizabeth, awkwardly, her face on fire as she regarded her disordered kitchen from the coign of vantage occupied by the newcomers. "Do walk right in the settin' room, where it's cool. I guess you foun' it pretty warm a-ridin' in the sun, didn't you, Mis' Harney?" she added interrogatively, when her two visitors were seated.

"Yes, 'twas turrible warm," said the person addressed, plying her palm-leaf fan with long, easy strokes. "I s'pose I sense the heat more 'n most folks on 'count of my heft. We've been to the buryin'-ground, me an' Lidy; it looks real neat at this time of the year; don't it, Lidy?"

"It cert'nly doos," assented the other, with a long-drawn plaintive sigh; "an' it's really edifyin' to read off the tombstones; it keeps us in mind of our approachin' end. I says to Mis' Harney, it won't be long, I says, before you'll be a-layin' me away in this 'ere spot. I've got my grave all picked out. How've you been feelin' this summer, Mis' Winch? Seem's so you wa'n't lookin' as well's usual. An' how's that poor unfortinit child you took to raise?"

Elizabeth's thin face flushed hotly. "I guess I'm 's well's usual," she said, stiffly.

"An' the little boy?" persisted the lady, peering sharply out of the shuttered windows. "I don't see him 'round anywheres. But mebbe school ain't out yit."

"Manuel don't go to school," said Elizabeth, com-

pressing her lips tightly, as she plaited her apron strings into a frill. "He—he's a-learnin' to home," she added, with a defiant lift of the head. "He ain't but six; there's plenty of time fur his schoolin'."

"My Benny had his primer read through twict afore he was six," observed Mrs. Harney, complacently. "But, of course, Benny was extry smart; he takes after my folks, Benny doos. Course it ain't to be expected 'at a pauper 'ud ——"

"I never see a brighter child 'an my 'Manuel," said Elizabeth, sharply. "He—he kin read in the newspapers, 'Manuel kin; an' I guess there ain't many children any smarter 'an that!"

"I want to know!" ejaculated both ladies, in long-drawn incredulity. They leaned forward and stared searchingly at their hostess' flushed face.

After a pregnant pause, Mrs. Harney settled back heavily in her chair. "We've been thinkin' fur quite a spell of takin' a boy to raise," she said, wiping the moist creases of her features with a limp pocket-handkerchief. "Our Benny don't take to the shop; I tell his pa he ain't built fur a blacksmith, and there ain't no use in talkin' 'bout it. I'd ruther he'd clerk it after a spell. Of course, Ben, he's allers wanted the boy in the shop; but Benny's too much like my folks. So I says to Ben the other day when he was goin' on 'bout it; 'Ben,' I says, 'why don't you take a likely boy an' fetch him up to take a holt in the shop? He c'd begin,' I says, 'a-fetchin' an' carryin', a-blowin' the belluses an' holdin' the horses.' Ben says to me, 'Whar's yer boy,' he says. 'I don't want no fool boy,' he says; 'but a smart, likely boy 'at could earn his salt I'd take in a minit.' Then thinks s'l, mebbe Mis' Winch 'ull

be glad to get red of that boy she's got. As I says to Ben, she's done her full share toward fetchin' him up, I says."

Elizabeth, sitting rigidly erect in her chair, stared at the speaker without replying.

"Why don't you tell her right out what's goin' the rounds of the village, Jane?" demanded the other lady, smoothing her bonnet strings with an air of importance. "I believe in comin' right out with the trewth every time—there's nothing so hullsome as trewth. I'm always fur tellin' things jest as they be without fear ner favor, more especial when I feel 's'o it was my Christian dooty, as I cert'nly do to-day."

Elizabeth's eyes had shifted from the purple expanse of Mrs. Harney's countenance; her gaze seemed concentrated upon the spinster's ill-fitting artificial teeth, which clicked an animated accompaniment to her words.

"Yes," clicked that lady with growing earnestness, "when a child gets abused so it's the talk of the town, I think it's time to inte'ferel!"

"Ben, he hears it mentioned at the shop ev'ry once in a while," broke in Mrs. Harney. "Most everybody knows 'at your husban' is a turrible ha'sh man. I says to Ben, I guess Mis' Winch won't be the one to stan' in the way of the boy, ef it's once named to her, I says. *We'd* give him 'nough to eat, an' ten weeks of schoolin' a year, *an'* a trade."

Elizabeth had risen to her feet; red spots glowed on either sallow cheek. "You want I should give you my child!" she cried. "My child 'at I've took keer of all these years! Ain't you 'shamed to set in my house an' go on with sech talk? You'd give him

'nough to eat, would ye, Mis' Harney? Well, I'm terrible 'bleeged to you, but I guess I kin make out with my cookin' 'long side o' yourn any day in the week. I ain't forgot the cake you brought to the donation! My 'Manuel's learnin' to work on the farm, an' of course he hes to be c'rrected same as other children, but ——"

Her voice died away into silence, as her eyes wandered uneasily toward the open door.

Her guests looked at one another with meaning smiles. "I guess we'll hev to be gettin' along," remarked Mrs. Harney, rising with alacrity. "Your man'll be comin' in fur his supper pretty soon, I shouldn't wonder. When folks don't git their dinner dishes outen the way 'fore three o'clock in the afternoon, they're likely to git flustered 'long 'bout tea time."

With this parting shot the two ladies turned their backs on their hostess and made their way down the narrow path to the front gate. The spinster's high-pitched giggle, in evident comment upon some sotto voce remark of the blacksmith's wife, reached Elizabeth's ears and brought the angry tears to her eyes.

"An' I tol' 'Manuel 'at I reckoned we was in heaven a'ready!" she muttered, as she flew about her kitchen with savage energy; "Lord, what a liar I bel"

When the child came into the house, holding the book lovingly in both hands, his eyes shining like evening stars after rain, Elizabeth regarded him with a fretful wrinkling of her worn forehead. "Put yer Bible into the spare room under the bolster of the bed," she said crisply. "You won't hev much time to be studyin' it 'cept Sundays. Then I want you should go after the cows 's quick 's ever you kin. You kin eat

this piece of bread an' butter to stay yer stomick till supper's ready."

"The simple ideel" she muttered to herself, as she stood on the back steps watching the small figure armed with the big piece of bread, "Mis' Harney mus' think 'at she's smart. Her cookin' can't hol' a candle to mine!"

Erastus Winch returned from his expedition with Mr. Dunder in unwonted good humor. "I ain't got much app'tite," he remarked, as he reached across the table for his fourth biscuit; "we e't pretty hearty to Turnerses'. Liph, he's a cute one; whilst we was eatin' pie an' doughnuts inside, his mare was feedin' out to the barn. I heerd him givin' Al Turner spashul d'rections. 'Be sure you rub her down keerful, Al,' he says; 'caskets is heavy haulin'. An' you kin slip an' extry feed of oats into the bag if you don't mind,' he says, kind of mournful like. 'They ain't nobody so free with things temp'ral as the b'reaved,' he says to me, as we was walkin' into the house. 'seems 's 'o they didn't sense it same's at other times,' he says. 'It doos 'em good to spend an' be spent; it ca'ms their sorrer an' relieves their feelin's.' Say, 'Liz'beth, if I go first don't you furgit to keep yer eyes peeled fur Liph. I swan it 'ud make me swearin' mad to look down f'om above an' see sech goin's on to my place!"

Elizabeth fetched a long sigh of pleasurable excitement. "Be you goin' to attend the fun'ral, 'Rastus?" she asked timidly.

"I dunno but I be," admitted Winch, fingering with satisfaction the large round of a silver dollar in his trowsers pocket. "Liph, he mentioned my name as one of the bearers. They're goin' to put on style an'

sen' kerridges. I s'pose you kin go in the buggy ef you're a min' to," he added grudgingly.

Elizabeth's face lighted up. "My! I'd like to go real well, 'Rastus; I've stayed to hum pretty stiddy lately, an' fun'ral's is always so interestin'. To-night 's 'the reg'lar prayer-meetin'," she went on, with a timid cough; "we ain't neither of us 'tended a meetin' fur quite a spell."

"I s'pose I kin hitch," growled Winch; "you ain't wanted to go 'n 'count of him, an' you know you ain't."

"Land! 'Manuel's big 'nough to go to meetin'; it'll do him good," said Elizabeth cheerfully. "We don't want folks talkin' 'bout us anyhow." She ventured the last remark with an apprehensive glance at her husband's grim face.

"Who's been here?" he demanded, pausing with his hand upon the latch. "Some clackin' hen, I'll bet a dollar!"

"Oh, 'twa'n't nothin' of any 'count, 'Rastus; on'y Mis' Harney an' Lidy Smith stopped fur a minit, an' they said——"

"Let 'em min' their bizness, an' do you min' yourn!" responded Winch, with a sudden lapse into his usual marital manner. "An', say! I ain't goin' to no prayer-meetin' to-night; I've fooled away 'nough time."

"I might 'a knowed better," murmured Elizabeth with a resigned sigh. She was standing with folded arms at the open door of the kitchen. In the west, behind dark masses of orchard foliage, the sky glowed with a clear pulsing amber, yearning toward the violet hues of mid-heaven through illimitable depths

of vivid green. - At the verge of the violet hung the new moon, a slender thread of light; above it swung the burning lamp of the evening star.

"There now! ef I ain't gone an' seen the new moon over my lef' shoulder agin," she muttered. "All the signs is fur bad luck!" Her eye fell upon a small figure perched on the topmost rail of the fence. "'Manuel!" she called with sudden sharpness, "come right in ouden that dew this minit! Nex' thing I know he'll be down sick with malar'y—what with the hot sun beatin' down on him daytimes an' all."

The child clambered down from his perch with manifest reluctance. "I was lookin' at it, mummy," he said, pointing his small finger at the solemn pageant of heavenly color. "I'd like to go there!"

"Don't you be a-talkin' nonsense, 'Manuel," exclaimed Elizabeth severely. "You're a-goin' to bed this minit, that's where you're a-goin'."

"Does my Father live way up on the hill?" asked the child, his eyes turning wistfully to the window, as Elizabeth energetically scrubbed his face with a coarse brown towel.

"I guess so," answered the woman, absent-mindedly, "now I want you should say yer 'Now I lay me' an' go right to sleep. 'Tain't healthy fur children to be too smart."

CHAPTER VI

His Father

"**N**OW mind 'at you set still, 'Manuel, when we git inside, jest's if you was in church!" The two were walking soberly up the broad path which led to the residence of the afflicted Turners, as Elizabeth repeated for perhaps the twentieth time the exhortation quoted above.

Old-fashioned perennials bordered the walk on either side; the child's beauty-loving eyes were dazzled by the heavy clusters of pink roses, the clumps of *fleur-de-lis*, and the low-growing masses of clove pinks over which bees hung amorously. Against green ramparts of fragrant box geraniums flashed their scarlet fires, and petunias spread the crumpled velvet of their royal robes.

"My! ain't the flowers han'some!" whispered Elizabeth, pausing wistfully, "I wish't I had a slip of that g'ranium!"

"Lookin' at the blows, Mis' Winch?" inquired a nasal voice from behind. "It doos seem strange to see 'em a-bloomin' so bright in this vale of tears, don't it?"

"Why, I declare, Mis' Dundor, I don't know when I've seen you before!" exclaimed Elizabeth, turning quickly around. "You ain't lookin' very well."

"No, I ain't well," responded the other with a heavy sigh and a subdued sniff. She was a tall, stoop-

shouldered woman, with a curiously mottled, lavender-tinted complexion, which contrasted unpleasantly with her pale blue eyes and reddish hair. "I've been awful poorly most all summer; I tell Dundor 'at he'll be buryin' me come fall." The woman's eyes had been busying themselves with the small figure of Immanuel as she spoke. "I s'pose," she went on, with increasing animation, "that this is the child 'at was born in your barn. I never seen him before."

"Yes," admitted Elizabeth, a mixture of pride and reluctance in her manner; "this is 'Manuel." She picked an imaginary bit of lint from his tunic, and settled his hat more squarely over the short dark curls. "Say how-do-you-do to the lady, 'Manuell" she added, in a severe voice.

The child glanced up shyly into the watery blue eyes of the stranger. "How do you do?" he repeated, obediently.

"Where in creation do you suppose his mother come from?" ejaculated Mrs. Dundor, blinking thoughtfully. "I s'pose you ain't never found out who his father was, have you?"

"No, I never have; an' what's more, I don't never want to," said Elizabeth, shortly.

The child lifted his eyes in manifest astonishment. "I know," he said softly.

"It does seem a nawful pity to be lef' alone in this cold world," sighed Mrs. Dundor. "But it's a terrible responsibility to raise a child; you can't never tell how they'll turn out. There's Dundor standin' in the door; I guess if we want seats clost to the mourners we'd better be goin' in. Land, child, what do you want?"

Immanuel had grasped a fold of the woman's gown

with determination. "I want to tell you about my father," he said eagerly. "I do know who he is. Mummy told me." He pointed his finger at Elizabeth, who flushed with annoyance.

"You don't say!" cried Mrs. Dundor, nodding and blinking with pleased attention. "I thought mebbe you knew more'n you was willin' to let on, Mis' Winch! Some folks would have thought twict afore tellin' what wa'n't so in the house of mournin'. Who is your father, bub?"

"Come right along in the house, 'Manuel,'" said Elizabeth, struggling with her mortification. "Don't pay no 'tention to what he says, Mis' Dundor; 'tain't likely I'd tell a lie 'bout it,—'specially right afore the child."

"But you did tell me 'bout my father, mummy," persisted the boy. "He lives up on the hill, an' he loves me more'n anybody else; you said so, mummy."

"You might's well own up, Mis' Winch, seein' the cat's out the bag," put in the undertaker's wife, her pale lips widening with a smile of malicious enjoyment. "They say it takes chi:dern an' fools t' tell the truth."

"Well, if you mus' know, Mis' Dundor, I tol' the child 'at God in heaven is his Father," said Elizabeth, goaded into speech. "That's gospil truth, an' you can't deny it."

"Fur the land's sake!" ejaculated the other, with uplifted hands. "It ain't no less 'an blasphemious to talk that way, seein' it ain't no ways likely 'at he's one of the 'lect."

Elizabeth turned her back upon the speaker and hastily mounted the steps, dragging the child after

her. "What a nawful naughty boy you be!" she whispered indignantly; "you ain't got no manners after all I've done fur ye!"

The child's large brown eyes filled with astonished tears, through which he gazed in silence about the dim room into which Elizabeth was pushing him. Presently he was set emphatically upon a wooden-bottomed chair, Elizabeth taking her place beside him with compressed lips. There were a great many people in the room, the child perceived,—women mostly, dressed sombrely. Between the closed and darkened windows stood a long, black object heaped with white flowers, tortured into stiff shapes of stars and anchors and crowns. Among the sad-faced women tiptoed the thin, active figure of the undertaker, with all the inconsequent bustle of the blue-bottle fly which boomed at intervals on the window-pane. A broken slat of the tightly closed blinds gave dazzling glimpses of green sunlit grass, and the scarlet and yellow of nodding blossoms. In the fields beyond, meadow larks called and answered one another with wild sweetness. There were other sounds nearer by, the stamping of restless horses, the creaking of wheels, the shutting of distant doors; men's voices subdued to an inarticulate murmur, the going and coming of hushed feet in the room overhead. High above all struck in the nasal voices of the village choir, tuned to piercing insistence in the long-drawn, dolorous notes of China:

Why-e-e should we mourn depa-a-a-ating friends?
Or sha-a-ke at death's a-alarms?

Immanuel, depressed by Elizabeth's unwonted reproof and the general gloom, hid his face in Elizabeth's

shawl; an aching lump struggled in his throat, forcing at last a loud wail from his lips.

"Why, 'Manuel," whispered Elizabeth with an emphatic little shake, "do you keep quiet this minute; don't you see the minister's a-goin' to speak?"

"Man that is born of woman is of few days and full of trouble. He cometh forth like a flower, and is cut down: he fleeth also as a shadow, and continueth not!"

Again the child's voice filled the solemn pause with a choking sob of inarticulate misery.

Elizabeth glanced about her in perplexed distress to meet a fire of shocked and displeased glances. Mr. Eliphalet Dundor was already tiptoeing his way across the room with an air of professional omniscience.

"I'd let him go outside, if I was you," suggested a kindly whisper from behind.

Elizabeth turned, her face on fire. "Oh Mis' Haskil," she breathed excitedly, "I don't know what in the world ails 'Manuel; I wouldn't ha' brought him only he always's been so awful good in church!"

"My Rosy's somewheres in the yard," returned the other, beaming encouragement from her broad, ruddy face; "fun'ral's ain't no place for childern. Run 'long outdoors, sonny."

"Yes, do go, 'Manuel; an' don't you come back, neither. Go quick, before Liph Dundor gets here!" urged Elizabeth.

With a long sigh of relief the child slipped from his chair, and darted swift and noiseless as a frightened bird into the sunshine. Still breathing hard, his shoulders shaken with recurring sobs, he made his way to

the far side of the deep, old-fashioned yard where ancient apple-trees, unpruned for many a year, stretched their branches earthward. The grass grew lush and tall here, quite shoulder high indeed, and tasseled out into fragrant plumes. Immanuel dropped on all fours into the midst of this verdant cover, and crept animal-wise to a snug hiding-place roofed and walled with green.

The long flute calls of the meadow larks: "Oh—sweet! Oh—sweet! Oh, my own sweet!" flooded the silence with tranquillity. The boy lay flat upon his back and stared into the leafy arches above his head; dazzling reflections of sky and cloud shimmered on the budding spheres which loaded the gnarled boughs. He wondered vaguely why he had wept. The comfort of this one among his Father's many mansions had already penetrated his soul.

A human voice broke harshly into the harmonious chord of peace: "I sez to m' wife, you women-folk gits smarter and knowin'er every day, I sez; but Mis' Winch takes the cake so fur!" The muffled tones ended in a low chuckle.

From his hiding-place Immanuel discerned other tokens of human proximity in two black shadows which blotted out the sunshine among the nodding grass plumes at his feet.

The voice went on in a tone of lazy enjoyment: "We men-folks 'ull git whipped clean out at the polls some day or other, an' I'll bet ye on it! Ef the critters don't 'low us the priv'lege of c'rectin' our own young uns, onct they git a holt of the franchise they'll keep us f'om votin' altogether, an' I'll bet ye on it!"

"What yer gassin' about, Lute?" demanded a gruff

voice, at sound of which the child involuntarily shrank closer to the trunk of the friendly apple-tree.

"Liph Dundor tol' me 'bout it yiste'd'y; he thought 'twas too all-fired good to keep, an' I'm blamed if I don't. Liph, he tol' me to keep it to myself, but I reckon you'd ought to know it. Say, I'll bet *my* wife 'ud think twict afore she'd call in anybody offen the street to interfere when I'm busy a-lickin' the boys! Why, ye can't gin 'em too much of it; ez I tol' Liph. 'Spare the rod,' I sez, 'an' spile the ——'"

"Who's been interferin' with who? What in thunder you taikin' 'bout anyhow?" demanded Winch, raising his voice.

"Don' you git 'xcited now, Ras, or they'll hear ye inside. You was givin' that 'dopted boy o' yourn a little taste of the gad day b'fore yiste'd'y, wa'n't you?"

"Yas, I was, an' what of it?"

"Wall, you'll remember 'at you was int'rupted by Liph kind of unexpected like, an' ——"

"*She* didn't dare ask Liph Dundor to ——"

"That's jest what she done, by jingo! I thought 'twas mighty brash of Mis' Winch, same's I tol' my wife. But say, you ain't a-goin' to make no fuss 'bout it, I hope! Thinks sez I, it's sech an all-fired good joke on Ras, 'at mebbe he'll enjoy it as much's the rest on usi"

"It's mighty enjoyabie, thank ye, Lute," said Winch dryly. "Mis' Winch hes enjoyed it a'ready, I persoom. I'll see to it 'at the boy don't lose nothin' by it!"

"I'll bet ye!" agreed the other, with a hoarse laugh. cut suddenly short by a spasm of propriety.

At sound of the long-drawn windy cadence of a

hymn, the two shadows moved slowly away. The child sat up and gazed about him with the furtive air of a wild creature confronted with some nameless peril. A friendly gap in the hedge behind the apple tree offered safe passage into the sunlit, blossoming meadow, where yellow breasted lovers still called entreatingly, "Sweet—sweet! Oh—my own sweet!"

"My father loves me!" whispered a small choked voice. "He lives up on the hill an' he loves me. I am going to find him!"

CHAPTER VII

Hilda

LIKE other seekers after the divine in all ages the boy lifted up his eyes to the hills, whose swelling sides clothed with multi-colored squares of corn and pasture were crowned and belted with dark woods. His roving fancy reverted for an instant to the patchwork quilt with which the provident Elizabeth had tucked him snugly from the night since he could remember; the thought forced large tears through which the landscape wavered as in a dream. Nevertheless he pushed on determinedly, following the line of fences, laid negligently of rough-hewn rails half hid in the lavish growth of weeds and low-growing trees.

A narrow road winding up by slow degrees from the lap of the valley next tempted the wandering feet. Here the child, mindful of Elizabeth's oft repeated admonitions, paused to divest himself of his shoes and stockings. For awhile he carried these useful articles in the skirt of his tunic, his brown toes sinking luxuriously in the dust cooled by a recent shower. Then led by fast-springing hopes, he carefully deposited them behind a clump of mullein which spread its stately velvet leaves by the roadside. "My father will let me go barefoot even on Sunday!" he thought, and ran forward with a new sense of joy and freedom. A little later the "Sunday hat," bound beneath his

smarting chin with a strenuous rubber cord, found its way to a green bank where he fancied that it might serve as a nest for certain friendly and inquisitive crows, who craned their necks from the fence rails to stare and chatter after the small figure.

Vild raspberries grew by the roadside, the steep bank twinkled with their scarlet fires; beyond the fence also, where an upland meadow clad in sparse grasses lay sweet and silent beneath the warm afternoon sun. This meadow dipped toward a brook on its further side, and beyond, the white walls of a farmhouse shone through dark trees. Far beneath lay what appeared to the child's wondering eyes as the whole great world—a pageant of field and wood in the bright valley, with houses no bigger than his thumb and the loose-flung coils of the river gleaming blue and silver. On a narrow thread of road, dust-white, a line of black dots moved slowly.

The wanderer sat down on the mossy top of a giant rock which shouldered its way out of the hillside, and looked long at the amazing picture. For the moment he was quite as happy as the little black crickets which sang at his feet. Like them he was filled with the joyous life which throbs at the heart of all nature. *Just to be is to be divine ; and to know this is the end of all life !*

Wrapt in the sweet silence the boy did not hear small stealthy footsteps which crept quite up to the big rock, but he felt the touch of warm fingers which essayed to pull from his grasp the cluster of berries, which he had refrained from eating because they were too beautiful.

"I want 'em; they's bigger 'an mine!" said a voice, sweet as a thrush's.

Immanuel involuntarily tightened his grasp upon his treasure as he turned grave, startled eyes upon the intruder.

Blue eyes, shaded by a fluff of yellow curls, met his look of inquiry bravely. "I want 'em dis minute!" repeated the sweet voice imperiously.

"Whose child are you?" demanded the boy, unconsciously assuming the half stern, half patronizing air with which this inquiry had invariably been put to himself.

"I'm my mama's lttle girl," answered the child, and immediately burst into loud crying.

"Why do you cry? Here, you shall have my berries," said the boy, eagerly pressing the bunch of fruit into the small rosy hands which hid the blue eyes.

The tears ceased as suddenly as an April shower. "Why did you cry?" he repeated.

"Because," answered the child, puckering up her face as if undecided between tears and berries, "my mama's gone to heaven—gran'ma says so."

"What's your name?"

"Hilda—that's my name, Hilda."

"You're small, Hilda, much smaller 'an I, an' I'll tell you somethin'; heaven's where God is. God is my father. I'm goin' to find him. When I do, I think I shall stay with him all the while an' never, never come down."

The child stared at him with round eyes. She made no answer, her mouth being pleasantly filled with berries; but she nodded her yellow head understandingly.

"I'm goin' now," said the boy with decision. "You c'n come if you want to."

"Pick me some more berries, boy; I like berries."

"Will you come then? I guess your mother'll be at God's house."

Hilda shook her head. "My mama's gone to heaven in a black box," she said positively; "I saw her go—just a little while ago. I don't want to go to heaven in a box."

"This is heaven," said the boy eagerly. "God made these berries an' that pretty stone, an'—an' ev'rythin'!"

"'Tis not heaven; it's my gran'pa's meadow!"

"Yes, 'tis, 'cause —"

"'Tisn't!"

"You're a naughty girl to conterdict," said Immanuel with dignity. "This is heaven 'cause God's here. He's ev'rywhere, an' ev'rywhere 'at he is is heaven."

Hilda looked at him with a shrewd twinkle in her blue eyes. "Where you goin' then?" she demanded.

"I'm goin'—well, way up to the top of this hill, I guess."

"Then I'm goin' home; Aunt Em's fryin' doughnuts an' I want one. The sugar bush is up there, but there isn't any sugar now, so I shan't go."

"Oh! What a bad, naughty girl to run away! Come here this minute!" The words delivered in a high-pitched monotonous voice caused both children to turn suddenly. A stout sunbonneted figure was coming slowly toward them across the field.

"I—I must go now," stammered Immanuel, a sudden doubt as to the righteousness of his proceedings clouding his bright eyes.

"It's only Aunt Em," said Hilda coolly, reaching after another berry. "I never mind her an' you needn't. Let's run; she couldn't catch us."

The sunbonneted figure was drawing nearer. "Good-by," said Immanuel, oppressed by a proportionate sense of guilt.

"You must stay; I want you!" Two imperious hands fastened upon his sleeve. "You shall stay, I tell you! Mustn't he stay, Aunt Em; mustn't he, when I want him?"

"What a naughty—naughty girl!" exclaimed the woman, who now loomed tall above them. "I'm 'fraid gran'ma'll warm you up good fur runnin' away! What little boy is this?"

Immanuel hung his head and dug his bare toes into the earth. "I found him," announced Hilda complacently. "I'm goin' to keep him to play with."

"What an idee!" cried the woman, her fat face creasing itself in a smile. Seen nearer at hand she was not at all formidable. Indeed she now sat down with a long, easy sigh and drew the little girl into her capacious lap. "You're a nawful naughty girl to plague Aunt Em so, Hildy," she said mildly. "Didn't your gran'ma tell you you shouldn't go out the yard? My, my! jus' see how wet your little feet are! You must ha' waded right through the brook!"

"Yes, I did," said Hilda conclusively, "I wanted to. I want him too, an' I shall have him."

"Where did you come from, little boy?" asked the woman.

"From down there," answered Immanuel, pointing toward the valley.

"For the land's sake! Where was you goin'?"

"He was goin' to God's house; God lives way up on the hill, an' he wanted me to go too, but I sha'n't,"

said Hilda pouting. "I'm goin' to make him stay with me."

"Why, there ain't any church up there," said the woman, with a vague smile. "Well, I guess we'll be goin' up to the house, perhaps mother'll know." She rose slowly and held out a hand to each of the children. Immanuel held back.

"Come, boy! you've just *gotta* come!" cried Hilda.

"I guess you'd better come 'long," assented the woman, "mother, she'll know."

Immanuel reluctantly laid his brown, berry-stained hand in the broad, warm palm which was extended to him, and all three turned their faces toward the farmhouse. "There's lots of rosb'ries ripe," the woman was saying, in a tone of mild satisfaction. "I shouldn't wonder if you an' me'd better come out an' bring our pails after supper, Hildy. Some rosb'rry pie'ud be nice for dinner to-morrow. Do you like pie?"

"Tell her yes'm!" whispered Hilda, hanging back to address Immanuel across the expanse of lavender-colored calico which billowed between them. "An' say, boy: when gran'ma talks to you, you mus' speak right up. Gran'ma don't like folks 'at don't speak right up."

"I guess mother'll know," chimed in the woman pleasantly. "She 'most always does."

"Well, Em'line," observed a crisp voice from the open window, "I see you've found that naughty child. Where was she?"

"In the strawb'rry meadow, ma; but I guess she didn't mean to run away, did you, Hildy?"

"She can come right in here, an' set in her chair half an hour," said the voice sternly.

The corners of Hilda's rosy mouth drooped dolefully. "I don't want to!" she muttered. Then her eyes brightened. "I found a nice boy, gran'mal" she cried in a tone of triumph, "an' we've got him."

"Found what!" A rosy, spectacled face appeared at the window and was hastily withdrawn to reappear an instant later in the open door. "Where did that child come from, Em'line?"

"I don't know, ma," said she of the sunbonnet, smiling broadly. "I couldn't get nothin' out of him. He said he was goin' to church up on the hill; didn't he, Hildy?"

"I'm goin' to keep him to play with!" asseverated Hilda, dancing up and down and clapping her hands. "He's mine, 'cause I found him. Isn't he a nice boy, gran'ma?"

"You can come in an' set in your chair."

"Please, gran'mal!"

"Come right in!" The small, rotund figure advanced with an air of authority, before which the smaller individual wilted. With her blue eyes brimming over with tears, the child threw both arms around Immanuel's neck. "I've got to go, boy," she whispered. "Be sure you speak right up an' say yes'm an' no'm!"

"You go in, Em'line, an' take off her wet shoes. I'll talk to this boy." The spectacles were carefully lowered now, and two brown, bird-like eyes were fixed full upon the fugitive. "Can you tell me whose little boy you are, bubby?"

"Yes'm; I'm God's little boy."

"I guess you'd better come in the kitchen and get a

doughnut," said the old lady, pursing up her lips.
"Do you like doughnuts?"

"Yes'm."

"Now mebbe you'll remember what your name is," said his hostess briskly, when Immanuel had swallowed the last crumb of the crisp, brown cake.

"Yes'm; I didn't forget it."

"Well, what is it?"

"'Manuel Winch."

"'Manuel Winch! Why there's Winches that lives the other side of the Corners, ain't there, Emmeline? They go to the Cong'egational church. But how'd he ever get up in our strawb'rry meadow from way the other side the Corners?"

"P'r'aps his folks was up this way, ma," suggested Emmeline, beaming placidly at the little boy across the heaped up pan of crullers. "Don't you want 'nother doughnut, sonny?"

"I want one!" piped a little voice from the door.
"I'm hungre-e!"

"Not till you're through a-settin' in your chair, miss; naughty girls can't have no doughnuts. Go right back or gran'ma'll have to spat your han's."

"Then I'll cry!"

"Yes, indeedy! I just guess you will!" agreed her grandmother, taking two decided steps toward the small culprit who fled shrieking toward her chair. The old lady turned to the boy with a spice of severity in her manner. "Now, child, I want you should tell me just where you come from, an' how you got here."

"I—walked," said Immanuel, winking rapidly to keep back two big tears. "I wanted to find my father."

"Land, did you ever!" exclaimed Emmeline, opening her pale blue eyes to their widest. "What makes him talk so queer, do you s'pose, ma?"

"I guess he's run away; that's what I guess," said the old lady, nodding shrewdly. "Did you run away from your ma, little boy?"

Immanuel shook his head. "I'm goin' to find my father," he said doggedly.

"After supper pa or one of the boys could hitch up, couldn't they?" suggested Emmeline, looking vaguely out of the window.

"I guess that's the only thing to do," said her mother, stepping briskly toward the inner room. "Now, Hildy!" she began, then threw up her hands with an exclamation of horrified amaze. "Em'line, Em'line! do come here quick an' see what that child's done now! I declare, I don't know what in creation she'll think of next! She's got her gran'pa's hair-oil an' poured it over the top of her head. It's drippin' all over the carpet! Fetch me a pail of hot water as quick's ever you can!"

Finding himself thus unexpectedly released from the fire of observation and interrogation, Immanuel sidled quietly out of the open door. Then gathering headway with renewed determination, he ran swiftly across the door-yard, frightening into sudden cachination a flock of hens which were dozing pleasantly under the lilac bushes, slipped through the palings of the whitewashed fence, and pattered noiselessly down the dusty road, across which the shadows were already stretching long and purple.

CHAPTER VIII

Ol' Mose

THE infrequent traveler on what was commonly known as "the back hill-road from Turner's Crossroads" invariably paused to water his team at the trough in front of "Ol' Mose" Armitage's red barn. Here a generous spring, decoyed from its source in the hillside, gushed into the great log hollowed out to receive it, then hurried joyously away in guise of an eager little brook to join its parent stream under the shadow of the bridge.

Opposite the barn, across the narrow track of the road bordered on either side by dense masses of snowy mayweed, stood a farmhouse, its pine walls innocent of paint toned to a dull purplish gray by uncounted storms. Closely-drawn curtains defended the front windows of the house from curious eyes, while a tangle of unpruned lilac bushes, overrun by a vagrant vine of the wild clematis, opposed a rampart of greenery to the petulant assaults of the west wind. Below the house the land dropped suddenly away toward the deep valley, which stretched east and west in smiling richness folded in from the world by the vaporous blue of distant hills.

"A sightly spot, but turrible lonesome," was a frequent comment of guests at the hospitable watering trough. If Ol' Mose Armitage shared that opinion he

at least made no effort to enliven his solitude. He was seldom to be seen about his house or barn on those rare occasions when he might have exchanged a word with his fellows. Still more rarely did he visit the village. It was known that he held his land free from encumbrances, and that he paid his taxes regularly. Twice each year he presented his bronzed face framed in a tangle of snowy hair and beard before the window of the village post-office. But once only in the memory of the present postmaster had he received a letter.

His manner on this occasion had not differed a whit from its usual slow gentleness. He pocketed the letter without apparent surprise or interest, climbed into his shabby wagon and drove away. It was then that Mr. Al Parsons, the postmaster and proprietor of the general store, in one corner of which was conducted the leisuredly business of the government, perceived the single token of agitation displayed by Ol' Mose. "He's furgot his coffee by gum!" he exclaimed.

"Who is the ol' haysced?" languidly inquired the oily young man, engaged in representing "an elegant line of teas, coffees and baking-powder."

"That's Ol' Mose Armitage—queerest ol' customer y' ever see," replied the genial Mr. Parsons, craning his neck after the departing wagon. "He lives up on the hill 'bout six miles f'om here all by his lonesome. He mos' gen'ally buys a poun' of coffee when he comes to the office; but I reckon he was so dodgasted by gittin' a letter at he clean furgot it. I'd kinder like to know what was in that letter," he added, thoughtfully ruminating a fresh-cut plug of tobacco.

"Oh, he'll be back afier his coffee fast 'nough when

he finds out himself," suggested the oily young man with an insinuating smile; "an' if you c'n show him some of these 'ere elegant goods, he'll prob'ly tell you all 'bout it."

Mr. Armitage displayed no undue haste to acquaint himself with the contents of the legal-looking envelope, which he had bestowed in his most inaccessible pocket. He drove briskly until he had reached the confines of the village; then as the road merged into the difficult incline of the hill he allowed the reins to drop loosely on the back of the mare, leaned forward and rested his elbows on the patched knees of his butternut-brown trowsers. Seen in the mellow light of the late afternoon sunshine, the face beneath the picturesque brim of the slouched hat glowed ruddy-brown like frost-bitten oak leaves amid light wreaths of early snow. From under the shaggy brows blue eyes looked out—eyes clear and brilliant as those of a child, kind and sagacious as those of a noble dog, keen and penetrating and unfathomable as those of a man—or an angel.

These strange eyes were cast down for a time after their owner had left the last house behind him. Apparently they busied themselves with the play of the mare's agile hoofs, as she scrambled up the steep incline of the stony road. Then the broad shoulders lifted, and the ruddy face expanded into a smile of pleased attention. Bobolinks were rising and falling in ecstatic song curves in a neighboring pasture; a sparrow hid in the thicket proclaimed his devotion to his brooding mate; butterflies white and yellow fluttered in mazy swirls almost under the mare's feet. The smile deepened into a mellow laugh, as a pair of

red squirrels scampered at full speed along the topmost rail of the fence, up the trunk of a big butternut-tree, and out onto a limb that overhung the road, chattering angrily the while.

"Ah, you remember me, greedy rogues!" cried Mr. Armitage, staring up into the green depths above his head, "and you'll be warning me off your premises two months before nut harvest, will you? You may as well stop and let me out, Nelly," went on this singular person, now addressing himself to his mare. "Wait for me at the top of the hill, that's a good girl!"

He wound the reins about the whip-stock as he spoke and jumped nimbly to the ground. The mare paused to look around at him with large, intelligent eyes, then at his gesture of dismissal soberly continued her scramble up the hill. Left to himself in the stony road, Ol' Mose plunged his hand into his pocket and drew out the letter. He stared at it long and earnestly, then bestowed it still unopened in another and more remote pocket, shaking his head with a pucker of his frosty brows.

"I don't like the feel of it," he remarked aloud. "Strange how dumb paper becomes saturated with thought like a sponge. But if there is only one substance ——"

He stopped short to examine a tuft of wild columbine, which displayed its coral trumpets at the foot of a lichened rock. The fairy frost-work of certain silver mosses, set here and there with tiny cups of vivid scarlet, next drew the keen blue eyes. Young winter-greens, their narrow leaves delicately tinged with pink, clustered in the shade of a low-growing hemlock. A cream white spider had set up her housekeeping here;

her frollocksome young ones invisible to the naked eye could be clearly seen through the magnifying glass which Ol' Mose produced from his waistcoat pocket.

"One substance," he repeated meditatively; "there is no doubt of it; and that substance is ——" As before he did not finish his sentence, but struck into a brisk walk with the resolute air of a man who reluctantly shuts his eyes to wonders yet unseen that he may accomplish a superior purpose.

The mare waited patiently at the crest of the hill, beguiling her solitude by munching the tender tips of the seedling maples which crowded the rocky banks on either side of the road. Having gained her side, her master turned his grave face toward the west, where in solemn splendors of purple and gold a scarlet sun lay at the verge of the world. He stood there silent, his head bared, the while stupendous wings of amber lifted and spread from out the flaming heart of the sun—spread and lifted and burned from amber to rose—from rose to ashen gray.

Then he climbed soberly to his seat behind the mare and drove rapidly down the long slope, plunging into a belt of dark woods at its foot, to emerge onto another hilly steep, rougher and stonier than the first. At the top of the hill the mare stood still, greeting with a joyous whinny the grizzled collie who rushed out with tumultuous barking to welcome his master.

It was quite dark by the time Moses Armitage made his way from the barn through the pungent tangle of mayweed to his own gate. The collie ran confidently ahead; then paused with a doubtful growl under the shelter of the porch. The keen eyes of the master had already detected a small, huddled shape lying prone

against the door. He stooped and laid a large, investigating hand upon it; something soft and heaving with warm life it was. The quick spurt of a lighted match revealed it—a sleeping child with rosy cheek pillowed upon brown dimpled hands.

It was characteristic of the man that he manifested no surprise at this unexpected sight. A humorous smile played about his bearded lips as he cautiously made his way past the sleeper into the dark room beyond. "Another message from the world," he murmured, as he kindled a light; "you needn't draw in your head like a box-turtle, you old hermit, you!"

Then he tiptoed back to the door, and with a warning word to the collie, who was poking a cold curious nose into the face of the sleeper, he lifted the child and laid him carefully upon a cushioned settle. The little bare limbs stretched themselves luxuriously, a sigh of content breathed from the parted lips; then the curly head turned away from the disquieting light, and the small shoulders once more heaved with the long, regular breathing of unbroken slumber.

The child opened his eyes upon white walls flooded with the pink light of morning, shot through with golden gleams, and seemingly taking its rise in a lovely greenish shadow whence it crept in tiny ripples inch by inch toward the ceiling. The small body still tranced in sleep lay motionless, the white unwinking eyes lulled the half awakened brain with the unimagined splendor.

After a little he began to remember vaguely—a dream perhaps? His lids drooped with the effort to recall the vanished pictures. The sombre room, the black shape heaped with ghostly flowers, the meadow sweet

with riotous red clover, the fluting of the love-sick larks, the yellow-haired child, the small stout figure of the old woman, all trooped confusedly past him. A narrow road filled with hard, round stones where he bruised his naked feet and wept large tears next lengthened interminably before him, merging at last into night, with solemn, winking stars, and a cold wind moaning sadly in black tree-tops. Then the familiar outline of a barn—a house, against whose closed door he huddled, and forgot the rest.

Betwixt the cold darkness and the pink dawn, stretched the long white bridge of sleep; Immanuel, having traversed that bridge, found himself in a new country. Realizing the fact with a start, he sat up and looked about him at the wide expanse of an unknown bed; then growing bolder, he let himself cautiously down to a painted floor, and trotted noiselessly toward an open door. Here he paused to peep out. He beheld a window through which sunshine streamed in an unbroken flood, and just beyond its yellow square a table spread with a white cloth. Upon the table were a number of objects which instantly riveted the explorer's pleased attention; there was a bowl filled with milk, a plate containing several thick slices of brown bread, and a honeycomb in a pink saucer. In the centre of the table a great, handled dish of blue and white held masses of wild roses.

The child crept nearer to this inviting table by slow degrees, casting bright eyes of inquiry at the paneled cupboard, whose glass doors revealed other curious dishes of blue and white; at the great empty arm-chair, standing in the full blaze of the sunshine; at the deep leathern couch, with its single pillow of vivid



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scarlet; at the moon-faced clock, ticking solemnly in its long carved case; at the rows upon rows of books, which filled the spaces above the mantel, over and beneath the windows and between the doors from floor to ceiling.

Having approached near enough to catch the honest smell of the brown bread, mingled with the sweet creamy odor of the new milk, and the subtler fragrance of honey and wild roses, the small adventurer drew a long breath. Then he reached out a cautious forefinger and touched the white cloth. A silver spoon presented its handle in convenient proximity; Immanuel seized it; his eyes sparkled. He was suddenly sure that here was his breakfast spread out before him. He also remembered the object of his journey. As he tranquilly ate the bread and milk he fixed expectant eyes on the open door.

He had finished the last drop of milk in the bowl, when "Ol' Mose" Armitage, who had been watching the scene with keenest satisfaction from the cover afforded by the lilacs, slowly crossed the narrow strip of green grass and stood in the doorway. His tall, broad figure cast a huge shadow across the yellow floor; his ruddy face beamed through cloudy masses of snow-white hair and beard like another morning sun; his deep eyes full of dancing light questioned the brown eyes lifted to meet them.

Immanuel laid down his spoon, his innocent face shining with satisfaction, but he did not speak.

Ol' Mose stepped across the threshold and sat down in the armchair; he held out his hand. Obedient to the tacit command the child came and stood at his knee. He looked up into the penetrating eyes which

were bent upon his face and smiled his bewitching smile.

"Where did you come from, my child?"

"I came a long way, my father," answered Immanuel in his sweet, clear voice. As he spoke his little brown hand stole into the man's broad palm.

"But how did you come?"

"I walked—all the way. It was a long, long way. I cried in the dark. But I'm glad now." He evidenced the sincerity of his words by a joyous little trill of laughter.

"Can you tell me what your name is, little one?"

"My name is 'Manuel; don't you remember?"

"Manuel—Immanuel, which is it?"

"Immanuel," said the boy delightedly. "It's your name too, mummy says."

"Ah?" said Ol' Mose interrogatively. "When did mother tell you that?"

"A long time ago—more'n a year, I guess. But she did tell me," asserted the child.

"Where is mother, my boy?"

"She's at the fun'ral. I cried; I don't like fun'ral, do you?"

"No."

Immanuel felt himself suddenly lifted in strong arms. He leaned back against the broad breast happily. "I love you," he murmured in the sweetest of child voices. "I shall stay with you always."

"But how about mother, little one; wouldn't you like to see her?" asked the man.

"Is my mother here?" said the child, looking up with sparkling eyes. "Oh, yes, let us find her. She is so beautiful; I love her too. But you love me

more'n mother does, more'n mummy does, more'n anybody else! You found me in the dark, didn't you?"

"I found you asleep—right out here on the porch." Ol' Mose set the child on his feet and led him to the door. "Right here," he repeated. "I brought you in and put you in my bed."

Immanuel nodded. "'Course you did," he said, laughing aloud, "wasn't I a silly to be 'fraid?"

"Can you remember which way you came, child?" asked the man anxiously. "Mother will want to see you."

The boy shook his head. "Mother sees me all the time," he said softly. "She'll be glad."

"Well, then, father will be looking for his boy; we must let him know you are safe."

"But you did find me—last night," said the child wonderingly. "I want to stay with you all the time. Mayn't I stay with you all the time? You won't send me back to him? No, no! I can't go back to him!" He clung close to the kind fingers with a sob, his dark eyes wide with fear.

Ol' Mose lifted the little figure in his arms. "If there is any great hue and cry after the boy, somebody will be here in the course of a day or two," he said to himself; "and somebody deserves a good scare." He sat down in his great chair and looked more narrowly at his find. There were half healed blisters in the small hands, over which he frowned and shook his head. The clean, carefully made garments with tokens of mother love in every cunning stitch told another story. "Let them look," he muttered, drawing the boy closer to his broad chest. "We'll

give these blisters a chance to disappear." He touched the largest of them gently. "How was it?" he asked.

"Working," answered Immanuel briefly. "I can work," he added, looking up wistfully into the face which bent down to him. "I can hoe and weed and do chores." He sighed deeply.

"Do you like to play with little boys?"

"I don't know."

"There were boys in school—eh?"

"I didn't go to school. I can read tho—a little. Will you teach me?"

"Why, yes, of course I will," cried Ol' Mose, his eyes twinkling. "But we must play first. Come, there are five kittens out in the barn, and two puppies."

Immanuel wound his arms about the old man's neck. "I'm so glad I found you, father," he whispered.

CHAPTER IX

The Making of a Hermit

THE story of Moses Armitage was not a singular one. Briefly, he was the son of a man who was wont to describe himself as a "plain, practical, hard-headed business man." The particular kind of business in which Moses Armitage senior displayed his plain, practical, hard-headed qualities was primarily the manufacture and sale of pickles, of which the American people have always been inordinately fond, and with which they continue to set the teeth of unborn generations on edge, both literally and metaphorically. Late in life this worthy gentleman married a woman who was neither practical nor hard-headed, and who hated pickles. Finding herself grievously unhappy with her loud-spoken, burly, red-faced husband, Marion Armitage seized an early opportunity of undoing her mistake by slipping away through the first narrow door which offered escape—it chanced to be pneumonia. She left behind her two sons, little fellows with round, ruddy faces, scarce a hand's breadth apart in size.

The bereaved father, having passed through that stage of paternal indifference wherein his boys appeared to him very much in the light of a brace of healthy puppies, to be endured, fondled occasionally, but for the most part relegated to hired keepers, dis-

covered in the course of time that the ruddy faces and stout-legged, active bodies of his sons represented totally different propositions. The older son, Moses, who should have inherited along with his big body his father's plain, practical, hard-headed characteristics, was found to have foolishly taken after his mother; while Jonas with his mother's smaller and less robust physique quickly developed a keen interest for money-getting and money-saving which delighted his progenitor.

When Moses Armitage senior, slapping his broad knee with his broad palm, a comprehensive frown on his broad face, declared, "Jonas is my sort; but Mose is the kind of fellow I haven't any use for!"—why, all was said.

Later the chasm widened, leaving Moses Armitage with his second son and the pickle factory on the one side, and the oldest-born on the other. There had been a stormy scene in the private office before this cataclasm took place, during which the head of the house had raised his voice to such a pitch that the clerks in the outer office grinned and winked at each other over their ledgers.

"College? Bah! Travel? Stuff and nonsense! You've proved yourself an idle, wool-gathering ne'er-do-weel, not worth your salt. Now here's my last word to ye. you'll settle down to business with your brother here, or you take the half of your mother's money and go. I'll have no more of your nonsense!"

Young Moses took the half of his mother's money and went. But whither, his father and brother snug behind their big desks in the private office of the pickle factory neither knew nor cared. In the course

of years marked newspapers mailed from widely different localities informed them of the marriage of Moses Armitage to Ruth Carlton, and of the death of one, Carlton Armitage, only son of Moses Armitage, aged six years.

Jonas Armitage sat alone in the private office when he read the last-mentioned item. He was dressed in black clothes, at which he glanced with a curious expression on his thin, sallow face. "I might return the compliment," he muttered, "only I'm sure the fellow hasn't a sixpence to his name by this time. He'd kick up the deuce of a row, and try to break the will like as not."

Mr. Jonas Armitage was wrong in certain of his conclusions. A large share of the maternal fortune had indeed found its way through the careless fingers of the wanderer; but in late middle life the primal desire to possess earth, rocks and trees had taken hold on him. "I will go," he said to the city real estate agent, "to the place where my money will buy the greatest number of acres." And so it was that Moses Armitage brought his wife to the weather-beaten little house on the hill-road between Turner's Crossroads and Tacitus Four Corners. They were very poor, for the land yielded little but beauty. After a time Ruth Armitage shut her tired brown eyes on the misty valley and was laid to rest beside her six year old son in the desolate graveyard behind the Crossroad's church.

Moses Armitage lived on alone in the gray old house, and the silent years brought him resignation with white hairs; and after resignation a kind of tranquil happiness, which grew apace till life's barren landscape turned to gold under calm evening skies. There was

happiness in the long winter evenings when the red logs turned to silver ash in the old stone fireplace, and the lamp cast a mellow light on pages beloved as familiar faces. There was happiness in the dark, sweet-smelling pine woods on a spring day, when the sombre aisles framed bright pictures of sky and field. There was happiness in the first faint gurgle of bluebirds singing in pink, frosty dawns. There was happiness—nay, there was ecstasy under broad apple boughs loaded with odorous bloom, in the earliest white violet pouring out its soul under vivid blues of May.

A stray passer-by once came upon Moses Armitage as he knelt in the grass gazing at a clump of late dandelions, which flaunted all the bravery of spring suns in the face of winter. He went away and told of it in the bar-room of the village tavern amid the loud empty braying of fools' laughter.

"Th' ol' cuss looked like he was actooally a-prayin' to them weeds—he, he!" declared the astute observer. "He's as crazy as a loon, he is, an' ort by rights to be occ'pyin' a room to the county-house, whar he'd be looked arter. His land's a-goin' plumb to waste!"

The Rev. Zenas Meek, pastor of the Methodist church in Turner's Crossroads once included the hermit in a round of parochial visits. He found him at work among his beehives, which stood in a long row behind the house. "Good-day, my dear, impenitent friend," began the Reverend Meek, with what he plainly supposed to be an apostolic tone and gesture—tempered with charity, yet sharply spiced with godly authority, "I am on the Lord's business, an' it requires haste!"

Moses Armitage turned his ruddy face upon his visitor with a quizzical smile. "If you come too near, sir," he said gently, "you'll shortly be in haste for more reasons than one. The bees are a bit out of temper to-day, and they'll find you a shining mark."

The Reverend Meek had removed his hat, and was wiping his heated forehead with a large, damp handkerchief. "Good Lord!" he exclaimed profanely, as an indignant bee thrust its lightning lancet into a spot of undefended territory.

His rapid footsteps beating a hasty retreat around the corner of the house, and the agitated rattle of wagon wheels brought a quiet twinkle to the eyes of the bee-keeper. The next day the Reverend Meek found on his door-step a basket containing certain squares of white clover honey, and a slip of paper which bore the words: "With humble apologies from the Queen Bee." There was no apology from the master of the bees, the reverend gentleman remarked. He and his family ate the honey; they also found the basket convenient for collecting other pastoral aliment.

Later he mentioned Moses Armitage to his successor as a hoary old reprobate, dead in trespasses and sins. That zealous laborer in the Lord's vineyard early discharged his responsibilities by leaving a bundle of tracts on the door-step of the lonely house on the back hill-road.

Moses Armitage, returning from a long tramp in the crisp autumn air, found them there. He examined the packet with a faint throb of pleasure. Some one had remembered him! Ten minutes thereafter the sleepy embers in the fireplace waked into merry life as they

devoured "The Eternal Torments of the Damned," "To a Lost Soul on the Brink of Eternity" and "The Unpardonable Sin."

The blue eyes under the frosty brows sparkled indignantly as they watched the leaping flames; then as the charred fragments danced merrily up the black throat of the chimney they softened into a smile. "So perish all lies!" quoth the hermit; then fetched him a great volume bound sumptuously in gilded leather and washed the last acrid flavor of false theology with such draughts as these.¹

"Religion is not a business by and for itself, which a man may practice apart from his other occupations, perhaps on certain fixed days and hours. It is the inmost spirit of Love that penetrates, inspires and pervades all our actions, which in other respects pursue their appointed course without change or interruption. That the divine life and energy actually lives in us is inseparable from religion, I said:

"Lord! let but thy will be done, then is mine done also for I have no other will than this—that thy will be done!"

"This divine life now continually develops itself within him, without hindrance or obstruction, as it can and must develop itself only in him and his individuality. His will is therefore always accomplished, and it is absolutely impossible that anything contrary to it should ever come to pass.

"Whatever happens about him, nothing seems to him strange or unaccountable. He knows assuredly, whether he understand it or no, that it is God's world,

¹ Fichte.

and that there nothing can be that does not directly tend to good. In him is no fear for the future, for the fountain of all blessedness eternally bears him on toward it; no sorrow for the past, for in so far as he was not in God he was nothing, and this is now at an end. For him all labor and effort have vanished; his whole outward existence flows forth softly, gently from his inward being, and issues forth into reality without difficulty or hindrance.

“Full surely there lies a blessedness beyond the grave for him who has already entered upon it here, and in no other form or way than that by which he can enter upon it at this very moment. By mere burial one cannot arrive at blessedness: in the future life and throughout the infinite range of all future life he would seek for happiness as vainly as he has already sought it, if he were to seek it in aught else than in that which already surrounds him so closely that throughout eternity it can never be brought nearer—the Infinite Love!”

CHAPTER X

A Story

AS the days passed and no anxious father, no breathless, wild-eyed mother appeared to claim the child, Moses Armitage began to hope that this human birdling which had somehow flittered away from its nest might be his. The eternal kindness had never seemed so immanent, the infinite love so near and warm as when he looked into the clear shining depths of the child's eyes. Words spoken long ago by the one man who was aware of his origin came to him with a new meaning: "He that receiveth one such little child, receiveth me."

The child had slipped into this solitary life as noiseless and as cheerful as a sunbeam which finds its way through shuttered windows. Nothing was changed, yet all was changed. Two now sat at the round table, and the divided bread became a feast; two wandered over upland meadows and gathered flowers and berries in fragrant solitudes, while the cruel blisters healed apace in the little hands; two sat in the great chair in the tranquil evenings, till the child slumbered happily on the man's broad breast.

Moses Armitage was a poet though he wrote no rhymes; so it did not occur to him, as to a more practical man, to proclaim his new found treasure. Strange dreams began to weave their misty cobwebs

in his brain. This child, who had come to him out of the dark (he thought) and who called him father, was his very own, blessedly restored to him through the mercies of omnipotent Love. This fancy was strengthened by the wonderful likeness which the boy, Immanuel, bore to his own dead son; a likeness which went deeper than the mere curve of an olive cheek or the trick of a drooped eyelash. It looked out from the serious eyes, sounded in the sweet, penetrating voice, found expression in a thousand attitudes and gestures. This was the dimmed picture of his vanished joy flashed once more into vivid life; his beloved son, come back to him across the empty chasm of time and night, newly named by the angels, Immanuel.

As for the child, he believed that he had found in this man his eternal Father; in his happy eyes the tranquil little house was heaven.

Moses Armitage, wrapped in his poet's dream, did not discover this till the two had lived together while the moon grew from its slender crescent to the full. They stood at the verge of the hill, while the great orb swung slowly aloft into mid-heaven.

"Did you make it, father?" asked the child, pointing his finger at the silver disk; "or did it grow?"

"I certainly did not make it," said Moses Armitage gravely. "Yes, I think it grew."

"But mummy told me that you made everything pretty that I liked—everything pretty an'—an' me."

The man shook his head with a troubled look. "Who do you think I am, little one?" The question died on his lips. When a mystery is sweet like the heart of a rose why tear it apart with rude fingers?

"Who am I, child; why do you love me?" The deep voice was firm and compelling now.

"I love you 'cause you—you are—my father," faltered Immanuel. "You are God. I wanted you! I can't go back to *him*—oh, I can't go back to *him*!"

Moses Armitage lifted the small trembling figure and held it fast. "We will go in now, my child," he said cheerfully. "I have a story to tell you." Strange words rose unbidden to his thought. "Even as I am sent into the world, so send I you. He that hath seen me hath seen the Father."

In the depths of the big armchair the two set themselves to understand the mystery of God in his world. Moses Armitage told the story that he had promised, slowly, and with thoughtful pauses. The child sat on his knee and looked at him with a shining face.

"Once upon a time," began the old man, smiling into the wistful brown eyes uplifted to his, "there was a little child born. He slept at first, and seemed to think of nothing but his food, just as all little babies do. But he grew very fast, and after awhile he began to look at the things about him with his beautiful dark eyes; and then he commenced to have thoughts. Do you know what thoughts are?"

The child nodded. "The think goes all the time," he said;—"except when I'm asleep."

"Yes," said Moses Armitage, sighing a little, "the think goes all the time. This child's thoughts were busy and constant, like a little fountain of pure sparkling water; and that is the most wonderful thing about this boy, his thoughts were always beautiful and pleasant and true. As he went on thinking they

grew more and more delightful. When he was quite a little child he understood clearly that the great God who made all things was his Father."

"He was just like me, wasn't he?" cried Immanuel delightedly.

"Yes," said the old man, smiling back into the sparkling face, "he was your brother. As he grew older this boy was always thinking about his Father, and because one very quickly becomes the exact image on the outside of what one is thinking inside, he grew more strong and beautiful and wise every day; he was very soon wiser than any other boy in the village,—wiser even than men who had studied all their lives out of big books. After awhile he was grown into a strong young man; and I am sure he had the kindest, sweetest, most cheerful face in the world, for by this time he had found out something wonderful; something that nobody else in all the world had ever thought of."

"What was it?"

"I am coming to that pretty soon, my boy. People had believed that God made the great world with his two hands, with all its mountains and oceans, its trees, grass, animals, and last of all men; and that when all was finished he went to live somewhere away up in the sky, where he sat always on a high throne watching the people down on the world he had made. He often grew very angry with them when they made mistakes (they thought) and punished them cruelly. Of course the people were very much afraid of this big, fierce God on his high throne, and tried in very strange ways to gain his favor, and to excuse themselves for what they supposed to be

wrong and foolish. They used to kill their prettiest and fattest animals, and burn them on piles of stone which they heaped together. They also burned their best apples and pears and grapes. They thought this God up in the sky would smell the smoke as it rose in the air, and that he would be pleased to think they had given up their nicest things instead of eating them as they wanted to do. Some people even took their dear little children and burned them up, for they thought if God liked animals to be burned for him, he would like nice, pretty little children still better. It was very sad and all wrong; but people always act out on the outside just what they are thinking on the inside. They can't help it, for the real self is the 'think' as you call it.

"Now this young man who had never thought anything but true thoughts had discovered that God not only made all things, but that *he was all things*. Instead of being a big man, sitting on a tall throne somewhere off in the sky, God was the unseen, living presence, under and in all things. He was both the thought and the thinker, the *real* behind the *seen*. Do you understand what I mean?"

The child nodded; his large eyes shining like stars.

"Now this was a very wonderful discovery, and the knowledge of it would make everything in the whole world different. The young man saw very plainly that no one, not even the wisest of the people, knew what he did, so he set himself very patiently to teach them to love the true God, who was the loving Father of all. But the people were proud; they said, 'How can this fellow who is only a carpenter's son, very poor and ignorant, know more than we who have

studied out of big books all our lives?' At first they did not pay much attention to what he said or did; they thought it was not worth while; but the people who were poor, and those who were sick, and many who were simply idle and full of curiosity began to follow this strong, beautiful, pleasant spoken young man about the country to hear what he had to say, and to see the very wonderful things which he did. Then those persons who supposed themselves to be so wise and learned began to be jealous and to hate him. They said, 'If this man keeps on talking nobody will pay any attention to us;'—which was quite true, for they were very stupid indeed, as you will see when I show you some of the books they studied and wrote."

"What did they do?"

"The stupidest and cruelest thing they could think of, my child; they took this beautiful, gentle, loving man, who was trying to make the world into heaven, and killed him. That is they tried to; they couldn't kill him you see, because the God in him could not be killed."

"Didn't any one love him?"

"Yes, all the children loved him, and a few of the grown-up people, who hadn't forgotten their child thoughts altogether. Some of them wrote down a few of the things he said and did soon after he left the earth. I will read to you out of their books some day. But there is even a better way than reading books to know what he knew. Can you think what it is?"

The child looked down at his folded hands in silence for a moment; then he said slowly, "If I should have the God think in me, I should know, shouldn't I?"

"Yes, my boy, you would, and there isn't any

other way. Once the man explained this very simply to his friends. 'The Spirit of your Father in you,' he said, 'will teach you.'

"But I thought you were my father; what are you?"

"I am your father—but not all there is of him. When I love you I am truly a part of him.—just as a single letter on the page of this book is a part of the whole book. We are meant to read it all, my child; but we must begin with the letters."

The boy threw his arms about the old man's neck. "I am glad!" he cried, then was silent for so long a time that the other wondered. "I have a book," he said at last; "it tells about my Father; mummy keeps it in the spare room, under the bolster of the bed. I should like to see mummy, she loves me too."

Moses Armitage drew the child a little closer. "Tell me about mummy," he said; "when did she go away?"

"She didn't go away!" cried Immanuel in a tone of surprise. "She *comed* to the fun'ral with me. I cried 'cause I didn't like fun'ral, an' mummy told me to go outdoors an' not to come back. Only some of the people can cry at fun'ral. I was a naughty boy to cry, mummy said so."

"You went outdoors because you cried," repeated the man, "and then?"

"Why then I went under a tree, an' *he* came an' talked. I was frightened. He hurts me sometimes. He didn't see me, an' I went into the meadow, an'—oh, such a long, long way! But I didn't spoil my Sunday shoes. I took them off, an' my best hat—it makes my chin ache. There were berries, an' a little girl an' a big lady—two ladies. She gave me a doughnut.

But I wanted to find my father, so I went on. It was dark an' I hurt my foot. Then it was morning, an' I was here—with you. I should like to see mummy," he added in a subdued voice. "She loves me."

"But you told me mother was in heaven, my child."

"Not 'Liz'beth; 'Liz'beth has to make butter an' feed the chickens; she hasn't got no time to fool away. My other mother—the beautiful lady—I only see her sometimes when I'm most asleep."

Moses Armitage sat for a long time in his great chair that night, holding the sleeping child. Again he scanned the still face feature by feature. "Have I forgotten?" he said aloud; "or have my eyes grown dim of late, so that I see what was but is not."

Tenderly he laid the child in his bed and fell to searching among his papers, presently bringing to light a tin-type, taken years before in a traveling car which had stopped at the hospitable spring by the barn. It was a picture of his own boy, Carlton, dead thirty years; but it might have served as a portrait of the child who slept. There was the same delicate oval face, shaded with short clustering curls, the same eager dark eyes, the same bewitching smile. "No, I was not mistaken," murmured the man, shaking his white head with a troubled smile; "the boy is Carlton himself." As he thrust the picture away with a trembling hand, a legal-looking envelope fell from the disordered mass of papers and lay, superscription up, on the lid of his desk. The seal was unbroken and as Moses Armitage regarded it wonderingly, it occurred to him that it was curiously linked with the finding of the boy.

It was a short letter type-written on a large sheet of

bluish paper. He read it three times. Then he dropped heavily into his chair and wiped the moisture from his forehead. "So they are all dead!" he said aloud, "all dead, and the accursed money is left!"

CHAPTER XI

'Liz'beth

BY the time the "hired kerridge" had left Erastus Winch at his own door, on the day of the funeral, he had formulated certain plans for his future course, which appeared to him very original and wise. "I'll let her know what's what, fust thing I do," he n uttered, as he ascended the kitchen stoop with slow, threatening tread. "Arter that, why, I'll tan that 'ar young un's hide so't he won't never forgit who's boss here!"

He laid hold upon the latch with truculent fingers. "I'll show her 'at I ain't to be monkeyed with!" he growled; then his jaw dropped. "What in thunder? Humph! the critter ain't home yit. Hangin' round to gossip, I'll bet! I tol' her she wa'n't to go up to the cem'tery. She'd ought to ha' been here long ago."

When, after an hour or more spent in aimless wandering about the silent house, in the course of which he lavished his entire vocabulary of drastic phrases upon the empty air, the quick beat of hoofs and the rattle of light wheels announced the return of Elizabeth, he merely grunted.

"Oh, 'Rastus!" faltered the woman, with a quick, fearful glance into the scowling face; "do tell if he's come home!"

"Who's come home? What ye talkin' 'bout? An'

say, what in creation d'ye mean by stayin' away like this? Here I've been a-hangin' 'round waitin' on ye sence four o'clock! No supper—nothin'! An' you with the key in yer pocket. Han' it out now, and git in the house, an' ten' to yer bizness lively! You kin bet you'll stay to hum arter this!"

"I—I couldn't help it, 'Rastus. Oh, I'm mos' crazy! I let 'Manuel go out in the yard, an' when I come to look fur him after you was all gone to the cem'tery, I couldn't fin' him nowheres! An' he ain't come home—I see he ain't! What shall I do; it's most dark a'ready!"

"You kin come in the house an' git supper an' stop yer gab, or by thunder, I'll—I'll hit ye." Erastus Winch had never touched his wife save with the lash of his tongue; but now his face grew purple with suppressed rage; his great hands clenched themselves. "I've heerd 'bout yer low-down, sneakin' tricks," he yelled; "a-coaxin' Liph Dundor to stick his nose into my bizness. I wonder ye ain't 'shamed to look me in the face. When ye do fin' the brat you kin lay to one thing, Mis' Winch, he'll git his sneakin' little hide tanned in a way he won't furgit, ner you neither."

Elizabeth climbed slowly down over the wagon wheel. She reeled slightly as she passed into the kitchen. "O God, I hope you've took him," she moaned, as her trembling hands fumbled aimlessly with her bonnet strings. "H'd be better off—better off."

She made no further mention of the lost child that day, nor the next. Then visions of his little figure wandering in dark stretches of woods, or lying white and cold in some neglected field urged her out and

away. Day after day she thrust her duties from her with frantic hands to search and call, "'Manuel, 'Manuel! Oh, 'Manuel, where be you?"

Erastus Winch, having emptied the windy chambers of his wrath upon her bowed head, and discovering to his dismay that she cared not a whit for his bitterest fulminations, actually shook her one morning till the teeth chattered in her head. "I b'lieve you're a-goin' plumb crazy," he cried. "You look like it, by thunder!"

Elizabeth stared at him with glassy eyes. "I want 'Manuel," was all she said.

Winch cast a glowering look about the disordered kitchen. "By thunder!" he repeated, "what in——" Then he stopped short. "Say, 'Liz'beth," he burst out, "ef you'll quit thi' doggoned foolin', I'm blam .d if I won't let ye take the team an' look fur the young un. Say, I'll go with ye. He's prob'ly snuger an' a bug in some farmhouse up on the hill. Little rat, I wish't I had him here this minit, I'd——"

The woman burst into frantic sobbing. "I hope he's dead," she wailed. "He'd be better dead." The dry sobs ceased as suddenly as they had begun. "I hope he's dead," she repeated in the lifeless tone of settled anguish. Her worn fingers picked nervously at her apron strings. "I've tol' his mother 'at I hope she'll fin' him. I seen her las' night in the barn over by the haymow, but he wa'n't with her."

The man's hair bristled. "I—I say, 'Liz'beth," he began after a long silence, "we—we'll go an' look fur the boy. Yes, you an' me, we'll both go. It's time to cut the oats, an' I ain't got a minit to fool away; but—but—— Why, you know, 'Liz'beth, we can't go on this way—eh?" He sidled a little nearer to the gray,

impassive figure. "I—I.—Mebbe I was a leetle ha'sh with the boy. I say, 'Liz'beth, I'll let you run him arter this, any way you want. I won't whip him no more, I swan I won't, ef you—ef you ——"

There was no reply. The still face looked as if carved from granite. "I'm a-goin' out to hitch up the critters now," he went on, raising his voice. "You git on yer bunnit an' be ready when I come 'round—won't ye, 'Liz'beth?"

He turned and strode heavily out toward the barn, his rugged face working strangely. "What in all creation 'ud I do," he muttered, "ef 'Liz'beth—'Liz'beth ——" His dim eyes fell upon a straggling bush of cinnamon rose, dusty and forlorn in the hot August weather, and visions long forgotten lifted above the seething surface of his thought. He beheld Elizabeth, a bride of twenty, roses blooming in her round cheeks and nodding above her hat-brim. He saw himself proud and awkward in his wedding clothes, stooping to gather a bunch of half-opened buds. "You're nigh as pink an' purty as the posies," he had said, and kissed the sweet curve of her smiling lips. How long—how long ago it was! "I guess I've been kind of ha'sh with 'Liz'beth," he groaned, his eyes still riveted on the withered thing at his feet. "But it was all that pesky young one; ef ' 't ha' been fur him, we'd been all right."

To his immense relief Elizabeth stood on the stoop, bonneted and shawled, as he drove up. "I think I'm mighty good to ye, 'Liz'beth," he began in a complaining tone, his every-day self reasserting itself with sudden strength. "By rights I'd ought to be a-harvestin', an' you know it 's well's I do. I tol' ye when you

would keep that boy 'at you'd be sorry for it. I knew you would, well 'nough. You'd ought to ha' done as I said."

The two were driving briskly along the dusty road at this point in Mr. Winch's agreeable monologue. "Now, this 'ere's a fool job ef I ever heerd o' one," he continued, his gorge rising at sight of the ten-acre lot brimming over with ripened grain, "a durned fool job, an' when it's done you'll remember, Mis' Winch, 'at you've 'greed to brace up an' quit yer nonsense. Ef we fin' the boy, well an' good; we'll fetch him home an' you kin send him to deestric' school, or anythin' you please; I wash my han's of him f'om now on. Ef we don't fin' him, I'll not'fy the overseer of the poor an' let hlm take the job in han'; but he don't come no more to my house, you bet. D'ye understan'?"

Elizabeth made no answer. She sat gripping the iron rail of the wagon-seat with both hands, as if to restrain herself from some desperate act. Her feverish eyes searched the tangled growths by the roadside.

"I'm a-goin' to make a thorough job of it while I'm about it," announced her husband, after a frowning silence. "I'm sick to death of the hull thing! First off we'll hev to stop to Ben Harney's while I git the mare shod. You'd better go in an' set with Mis' Harney a spell. Mebbe Ben'll know whar the brat is; he mos' gen'ally knows everybody's blz from A to izzard."

Mrs. Harney received her visitor with effusion. "Land, Mis' Winch, I'm awful pleased to see you," she gurgled. "I declare I was thinkin' 'bout you most all yiste'day aft'noon! Do come in, won't you, an' set down in the settin'-room. I hear you've lost yer 'dopted boy; at the fun'ral, wa'n't it? My! what d'

you s'pose ever become of him? I wouldn't be s'prised if they didn't any of us ever know. As I says to Ben; it reminds me, I says, of the time a boy was lost when I was livin' to Sidney Plains. He was jest 'bout as big as that boy of yourn, an' he wa'n't found till—my! I guess 'twas as much's five years afterwards; then they jest got his skel'ton. He'd fell down a blin' well. Blin' wells is awful dangerous. His folks had a reg'lar fun'ral jest the same, an' set up a tombstone. Seem's so it wa'n't hardly worth while, don't it?"

The good woman paused for breath, and complacently wiped her forehead with her checkered apron. "It's a pity you didn't give him to me, Mis' Winch; I'd ha' looked after him, an' seen 'at he didn't git starved ner 'bused by anybody. I'm awful fond of childern; I never could take it so ca'm as you do. I'm so awful tender-hearted. I says to Ben; if 'twas me, I says, I'd ha' had the constable out, an' ev'rybody else 'at could walk on two legs a-lookin' fur him. Where was you calc'latin' to go to-day?"

Elizabeth forced her dry lips to form an answer. "Goin' to look fur him!" echoed Mrs. Harney with round eyes. "Why, land o' love! you don't mean to tell me you ain't been out before? I knew I hadn't seen yer team passin', an' Ben said he hadn't neither. I don't b'lieve there's much use in goin' now; them blin' wells is ——"

Elizabeth pushed past the massive front of her hostess without a word. "Why, what's your hurry, Mis' Winch," cried that excellent lady. "You might jest as well set an' rest awhile longer. Ben ain't done with the horse yit, I see —— Land o' love!" she ejaculated, as she watched the thin figure climb to the wagon

seat with painful haste. "If she don't act onreasonable! I was a-goin' to give her a piece of that apple-custard piel"

Erastus Winch conducted his search for the lost child with his accustomed energy and thoroughness. He stopped every team on the road, and drew up at every farm-gate with the stereotyped inquiry: "You ain't seen anythin' of a stray boy 'round here, hev you? 'Bout six years ol', big of his age, black hair an' eyes."

"His hair's brown, 'Rastus—kind of red-brown," whispered Elizabeth timidly, on one occasion.

"Shet up, will ye!" snapped the man, as he started up his horses with a stinging cut. "I'm runnin' this shebang!" He had grown increasingly morose as the day wore and his tardy investigations promised to end in failure. "Ef it wa'n't fur your blamed foolishness," he burst out, "we c'd quit an' go hum. I've an awful good min' to turn smack 'round this minute! He's run away; 'tain't our fault. I don't see why you can't let him stay where he is!"

They had struck into the back hill-road to Turner's Crossroads an hour since, and the miles were lengthening slowly behind the jolting wagon; the noon sun beat fiercely on the sweating, toiling horses. Winch cast a look of veiled anxiety at the gray face beside him. "Say, ain't you had 'bout 'nough of this, 'Liz'beth?" he demanded roughly. "You kin bet I have, an' I don't know where we're goin' to git a bite to eat!"

The woman burst into a smothered scream. "Let me out! Oh, 'Rastus, let me out—I see somethin'!" An instant later she was sobbing over a little, sodden hat of straw, bound with a piteous blue ribbon faded

and discolored. "It's his ha', 'Rastus—his Sunday hat! Oh, 'Manuel—'Manuel!"

"Why, consarn it all, woman! don't stop to take on!" cried Winch excitedly. "We're on the right track now! He can't be fur off! Come on, I say!"

"He's in the woods yonder," faltered Elizabeth, hugging the hat to her breast. "I'm awful 'fraid he's in the woods. I want to look fur him there."

"Come, dry up now and git in the wagon! He'd foller the road like a calf. Si' Scott's place is jest 'round the bend; I'm goin' to inquire there."

A stout woman, mounted on a ladder, was picking berries in the deep, shaded door-yard of the next farmhouse; a blond child played with a kitten near the gate. "Seen a stray boy 'round here, sis; black eyes an' a little bigger 'n you be?" began Winch.

The child pushed the yellow hair out of her eyes. "He runned away," she said pouting. "I cried."

Elizabeth was on the ground in an instant; she caught the child by the arm. "Was he here—when? Tell me quick!"

A stout, sunbonneted figure moved slowly toward them across the grass. "A little boy?" she echoed, in response to Elizabeth's reiterated question. "Why, yes, there was a little boy—'bout two weeks ago, wa'n't it, Hildy? But come in, won't you, an' see mother; mother, she'll know."

"You'll set right down an' hev dinner with us," declared Mrs. Scott hospitably; "I declare I've felt worried 'bout that child ever sence he was here. He slipped out jest like a shadder whilst me an' Em'line was busy with this naughty girl here. I says to father that night, 'you'd ought to hitch an' look for him,' I says.

But he would have it that his folks wa'n't far away. So after a spell it kind of slipped my mind. An' so you found his hat! Well, well! I took notice 'at he didn't have no hat on, nor shoes an' stockin's neither."

"He had 'em or when he started," said Elizabeth, into whose ashen face a trace of color had crept. "But he liked to go barefoot, 'Manuel did."

"He prob'ly took 'em off," chirruped the old lady cheerfully. "I wouldn't worry a mite 'bout him ef I was you."

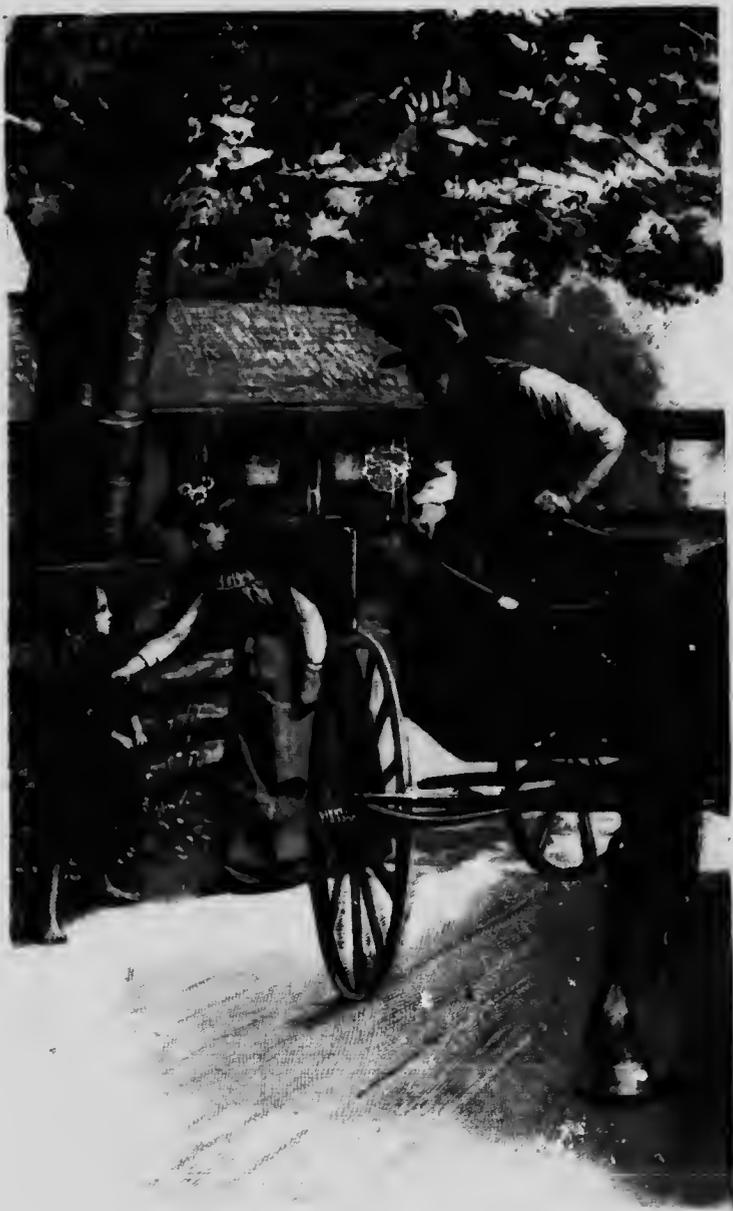
"Wouldn't you if it was her?" asked Elizabeth, pointing to Hilda, who sat nursing her kitten on the doorstep.

"Land! I s'pose I would if 'twas Hildy," admitted Mrs. Scott. "She's sech a little fidget. She's been with us sence her ma died," she continued, lowering her voice confidentially. "Her pa's my oldest son by my first husban'. He sets great store by Hildy. I tell him he'll spile her ef he don't look out."

Elizabeth had risen and was standing rigidly erect. "I guess we'd better be goin'," she said.

"Why, Mis' Winch, you don't mean it. They've jest took the horses out, an' dinner'll be on the table in no time."

"I guess I'll be goin' anyhow," repeated Elizabeth doggedly. "'Rastus kin stay to dinner; I'll go on. I—I couldn't eat nohow till I fin' out. Mebbe he's at the next house; an' mebbe—he's lost." The last words were spoken over her shoulder with a piteous smile. She was already half-way to the road. "You'll tell 'Rastus 'at I'm goin'," she said, as she laid her hand upon the gate. "I couldn't wait nohow."



"WAS HE HERE—WHEN? TELL
ME, QUICK!"

She walked stiffly without turning her head till a group of giant hickories hid the house, with the dismayed face of her hostess in the open door; then she gathered up her scant skirts in both hands and broke into an awkward run.

It was an unpainted house, stained with weather, quiet and sad in the afternoon sunshine in the midst of its unpruned lilacs and syringas. Elizabeth stopped short in the narrow road fringed with the dusty white and gold of mayweed. Her breath came in great gasps; her bonnet hung grotesquely about her neck; wisps of gray hair straggled across her face. Presently she crept nearer. "If he was to see me this way it 'ud scare him," she muttered, and lifted tremulous hands in a feeble attempt at readjustment.

No one answered her timid rap at the front door. "I guess mebbe she's washin' up the dinner dishes 'round back," she said to herself, as she stepped uncertainly onto the narrow, worn path. "They's folks been livin' here anyhow," she assured herself; "I kin see a milk pail; an' there's bees." Repeated knockings brought no response. An uncurtained window next tempted the anxious eyes.

Half an hour later, when Erastus Winch drew up with a loud "Whoa, thar!" to his tired horses, he heard the sound of loud sobbing mingled with frantic knocking on a closed door.

"'Liz'beth! I say, 'Liz'beth!" he shouted. "What in all possess' is the matter with ye? They ain't nobody livin' here now; I hurried arter ye to tell ye soon's I'd et my dinner!" He caught the frenzied figure by the shoulder. "Say, 'Liz'beth, listen to me, will ye! Si' Scott tol' me. An ol' man named Mose

Armitage used to live here; but he sol' out his stock to Si' las' week an' went off."

"Look, 'Rastus! look in there!" moaned Elizabeth; "it's his little shirt a-hangin' on a cheer; don't you see it?"

"Sho' I don't see no shirt. Listen to reason, can't ye? The ol' feller has lived here sole alone fur the las' twenty years; I guess Si's folks 'ud know. Come now, we've got to git hum; it's nigh onto milkin' time, an' we a good ten mile f'om the cows. We'll try it agin some day, mebbe."

Elizabeth clung obstinately to the latch. "I ain't a-goin'!" she wailed. "I'm goin' to stay here till he gits back. I want 'Manuel!"

Winch swore under his breath; then almost tenderly he lifted the frail figure in his arms and deposited it on the wagon-seat. "You're a-goin' hum," he said.

CHAPTER XII

The Lawyer's Story

MR. CALEB SMALLEY, of the law firm of Trent & Smalley, looked up from the document which he was inspecting with a deepening of his habitual frown. "I believe, I said to you, Short, that I wished to be left uninterrupted to-day during the morning hours," he said, tightening his lips into a thousand austere puckers.

"Yes, sir, I had not forgotten, sir," said the clerk, with anxious humility. "But Mr. Hicks, sir, thought you would wish to see——" He finished his sentence neatly by laying a visiting-card on the desk before his employer.

Mr. Smalley glanced at the card. Then he arose and straightened his spare figure. "Mr. Hicks was—ah—right," he said tentatively. "You may show the gentleman in at once."

The lawyer advanced to meet his visitor with interest, which deepened into an unpleasant feeling of surprise as his eyes rested upon the huge, picturesque figure, clad in rusty black, whose presence seemed to fill the small room to overflowing. "Mr. Moses Armitage, I believe," he said sharply, referring with automatic precision to the visiting-card. "I have not before had the pleasure of your acquaintance, sir; though my father—now retired—will remember you."

Moses Armitage sat down, looking ruddier and more imposing than his wont by virtue of contrast with the gray tints of his surroundings, which included the meagre figure of the solicitor. He made no haste to speak, but sat looking about with a troubled expression in his clear, blue eyes.

Mr. Smalley frowned judicially, and accosted his visitor a second time, with a touch of incisive keenness in his smooth tones. "We have not had an opportunity of informing you of the exact circumstances connected with your brother's death," he said. "We had hoped that your interest in the estate as possible—indeed, I may say as probable—heir might lead you to communicate with us promptly."

"I have no interest in the estate," said Moses Armitage, with deliberation. "I am not here as an heir, either possible or probable. I will not inherit my father's money under any circumstances."

Mr. Smalley fell to studying his visitor with his head very much on one side and eyes half closed. "That's a very singular notion of yours, Mr. Armitage," he observed at length, with some amusement evident in his voice; "in view of the fact that the property is an exceedingly handsome one. However——"

"I came," said the other, fixing his eyes with much earnestness upon the lawyer, "to find out if I have any kith or kin left alive."

"That," said Mr. Smalley, expanding his narrow chest, "is exactly what we cannot tell you. It is, in short, the point in question. You, I take it, have had very little communication with your family for some years."

"I have heard nothing from them for more than forty years."

"Ah, I thought as much," exclaimed Mr. Smalley, with apparent satisfaction. "What, may I ask, was the last word you had from your father?"

Moses Armitage started forward in his chair; his eyes blazed. "I had the last word from my father in this very room," he said, in a low, choked voice. "I was a boy of scarce twenty; I loved my father and my brother. They were all I had in the world. Your father sat where you are sitting now. He handed me an envelope; it contained a check—the half of my mother's money, and a letter—but, no, I will not tell you the words of that letter; they are best buried with the dead. Tell me what you know about the family, and be quick about it; the air of this place stifles me!" He leaned back and wiped the moisture from his forehead with a trembling hand.

Mr. Smalley regarded him attentively. "Thank you," he said civilly; "some identification was necessary, you know." He then proceeded to adjust the finger-tips of one hand against those of the other with the extremest nicety and precision, eying them with an attentive frown, as if they were so many legal instruments—which, indeed, they were.

"When your esteemed father deceased, some fifteen years ago," he began, punctuating his clauses with a silent opening and closing of his two forefingers, "he left the property unreservedly to his second son, Jonas, and his heirs. Mr. Jonas Armitage was at that time the head of quite a flourishing family; to be exact, there was a young wife, two sons and a daughter. It is with the subsequent history of this daughter that we

must now concern ourselves, since death early removed the sons. Miss Armitage, at the age of twenty, became entangled in a love affair with a young man of neither means nor position. He was, in short, a clerk connected with the correspondence department of the concern. Mr. Armitage forbade his daughter to communicate with this person, whose name I will now mention, since it has become unfortunately linked with the Armitage estate. His name was Immanuel Rossi."

Moses Armitage leaned forward in his chair. "Immanuel Rossi," he repeated. "And they were married?"

"I am sorry to be obliged to tell you that Miss Margaret Armitage, with the sad perversity of her age and sex, married this—ah—person," acquiesced the lawyer, raising his eyebrows and pursing up his lips. "In view of the fact that Mr. Armitage had expressly forbidden further communication between the two, you will not be surprised to learn that he sent word—through ourselves—to Mrs. Rossi, on the morning of her marriage, to the effect that he considered the relations which had previously existed between them as completely nullified by the act. In a word, he disinherited the young woman."

"Cruel!"

"Ah, it may possibly seem so to you. For myself I hold that obedience is the foundation of law. Disobedience merits punishment—or as Holy Writ puts it still more forcibly—'the wages of sin is death.'" Mr. Smalley seemed so excessively pleased by his line of thought, that at this juncture he readjusted his fingertips one by one with smiling deliberation. "My story

from this point is a perfectly logical illustration of the fact," he went on. "The foolish young people disappeared forthwith, young Rossi having received his discharge with a month's wages—the late Mr. Armitage was a just man, if somewhat rigid and unbending. A month's wages, I believe, I said; well, from that day the unfortunate Mrs. Rossi was never again seen by any of her former acquaintances. She had made her bed, as the old saying has it, and presumably she died upon it. It is known that she endeavored, at least on one occasion, to effect a reconciliation with her father. This deduction is derived from a communication bearing her signature, which we found among other papers of my late esteemed client.

"But before I proceed further, let me explain what has no doubt been a matter of some surprise to you—I refer to the fact that Mr. Armitage left no will. Quite naturally he had destroyed the original instrument which conveyed all the property to his daughter. Having done this he found himself somewhat at a loss; by the terms of his father's will he was precluded from giving play to his—ah—very natural inclinations, which might have prompted him in favor of the next heir in succession. I refer to yourself, sir; I trust you will pardon the reference to the rather unpleasant relations which existed at the time mentioned."

"There was a letter, you said," interrupted the other with some impatience. "Let me see the letter."

"All in good time, my dear sir; I am, in fact, coming to that directly. I was about to say that in justice to the very admirable qualities of my late client I ought to inform you that just previous to his unlooked for demise he actually did make a will, in

which he bequeathed his entire fortune, with the exception of some minor bequests, to be divided among the foreign missionary societies of three different denominations. The wording of this instrument was so singular that I had several conferences with my late client regarding it. I must add that the delay incident to my efforts to modify the somewhat unpleasant terms in which a munificent gift was conveyed to a most worthy cause undoubtedly led to the present difficulty; the will was never signed. I see that you feel some natural curiosity, which I will gratify before we dismiss the subject. The wording of a certain portion of the instrument, in no way necessary to its legal status—and even, as I pointed out to my esteemed client, calculated to invalidate the will as indicating an unsound mind, should the instrument be contested by either of the disinherited heirs, was as follows: 'The Methodists teach the heathen free grace, and sprinkle them; the Presbyterians teach election, and sprinkle them; the Baptists teach a mixture of both, and immerse them. Blind leaders of the blind; take my money and play the farce to the end.' You will, I am sure, agree that I was quite right in my policy of delay in the matter, tho the course of subsequent events led to the present dilemma."

A gleam of laughter shone from the face of the listener. "I perceive that Jonas was of near kin to me, after all," he murmured; "'tis a pity the will was not signed."

Mr. Smalley arose and tiptoed across the room. "The communication, to which I have referred, bearing the signature of Margaret Armitage Rossi, is of very little value," he said, fixing his singular client

with eyes of frosty disapproval; "except as it indicates a possible survival of the line of descent."

It was a short letter, written feebly, and blurred as if with the tears of the writer. It told in a few short pathetic sentences of the death of the young husband and of the dire need of the desolate wife. "I shall soon become a mother," ran the piteous appeal; "I have no money. Let me come home, dear father. For the love of my mother, do not close your heart against me!"

Moses Armitage's keen eyes were blurred as he lifted them to the face of the lawyer. "Well?" he said briefly.

"We have no reason to suppose that the communication was answered," said Mr. Smalley, regarding his finger-tips with narrowed lids. "My late client was not an emotional man."

"But why not search for her in the place from which this was written?" cried Moses Armitage, starting to his feet. "I will go at once."

"The letter is dated some seven years back, you will observe," said the lawyer, dryly. "I beg to inform you further, that upon the discovery of this piece of evidence we at once dispatched a trustworthy agent to the address mentioned. You may interview this person now."

In response to his summons, a lean, stoop-shouldered man, with a totally expressionless face, entered the room. "Hicks," said Mr. Smalley, sharply, "you may tell this gentleman of your visit to B——."

"I found the tenement where the woman, known as Mrs. Rossi, had stopped," said Hicks, without pre-

amble, and in a voice that matched his face. "I learned there, from a woman known as Bridget Kelly, that Mrs. Rossi, with a man said to be her husband, had lived in the house for three months. During that time the man, known as Immanuel Rossi, died and was buried. Mrs. Rossi, after exhausting the means at her command, left the house."

"Is that all?" cried Moses Armitage. "Why did you not make further inquiries?"

"I did," said the man, immovably.

"Well?"

"There was nothing more to be learned."

"You are now in possession of the facts, Mr. Armitage," said the lawyer, dismissing the witness with a practiced wave of the hand. "I have only to add that we advertised in all the leading newspapers for the woman or proof of her death, with no result. I will also state that it was by the merest accident that we learned your own address; we wrote you, but received no reply, and had almost given up hearing from you, so long a time had elapsed since notifying you of the event."

"I forgot to read the letter," said Moses Armitage, in a matter-of-fact tone. "There were other matters——" He stopped short and turned toward the door. "I shall search for her," he said strongly.

"Very good," acquiesced Mr. Smalley. "Very proper indeed. Of course, we hope that Mrs. Rossi's whereabouts may speedily be discovered, or some clear evidence of her death if she is dead. If there is anything we can do to assist you in the search, you will, of course, call upon us. An advance of some hundreds—say—would be——"

"I have not asked for money, sir," said the other, with unnecessary warmth, and shut the door behind him with no gentle hand.

The boy Immanuel was waiting in the lawyer's outer office, his short legs dangling uncomfortably from the high stool to which one of the clerks had lifted him. He greeted Mr. Armitage with sparkling eyes and a joyous sigh of relief.

"Are you tired, my child?" asked the old man, tenderly; "I was a long time in there—yes, a long, weary time—and what a story!" He was speaking to himself now, unconsciously quickening his steps till the child at his side was forced into a run to keep up with the irregular strides.

"Where are we going now, my father?" said the boy breathlessly, looking up into the ruddy face, where pain and anger struggled for the mastery.

Moses Armitage looked down at the questioner, and his eyes brightened. "Why here I am running your little legs off, boy! Why didn't you pull me up, as I do Nelly, when she has eaten too many oats? I'll tell you where we are going; we are going on a boat for a fine ride, but first we shall see what they can give us to eat in this pretty shop. I see some cakes in the window, which look as if they were made for a boy like you."

An hour later they were climbing a rickety staircase, whereon endless processions of slatternly women, ragged children, and slouching men passed up and down. Loud, discordant voices filled the intervals between slamming doors. A vague, sickening odor, lowered in the half darkness like a cloud.

"This isn't a nice house," said Immanuel. "Why do we come here?"

Moses Armitage regarded him with thoughtful eyes. "There are children who stay here all the time," he said; "but you and I will go away very soon."

It was Mrs. Bridget Kelly, her that had stopped nine years on the top floor, that could tell the gentleman what he wished to know if any one could, so said a big woman with half a dozen children clinging to her ragged skirts. And up five flights of the dirty stairs, through dark, ill-smelling passages, they went, escorted by an ever-increasing swarm of pallid, eager-eyed children.

"It's the second door to yer right, sir; the wan width hole in it," volunteered a small girl, who carried a big baby. "'Twas Mike Kelly wot kicked it through whin he wor drunk las' week."

"An' ye c'n shet yer dirty mouth, Kitty McGuire," cried a shrill voice from the door in question. "What yer doin' on me landin', the lave av yez? Git out or I'll tak' me poker to yez!" The speaker turned to her visitors with a broad smile of welcome. "Ye c'n walk in, sur," she said, apologetically; "they ain't no manners—the kids in this house."

When Moses Armitage had made known his errand, Mrs. Kelly heaved a reminiscent sigh. "Oh, yis," she said, "I mind it all as if it was yiste'day. She an' her man—a mere shlip av a boy he was, an' sick-lookin', thin; she come to me an' she sez, 'We hav'n't any furnitur,' she sez, 'an' on'y a little money.' She showed me what she had, poor dear, 'An' cud we board wid you,' she sez, 'till I gits a letter I'm expectin'?"

"I had tuk boarders off an' on, fur I've always lived respectable, an' in thim days I had three rooms. So I

tuk thim. Her man cudn't git no work, try as he wud; an' after awhile she towld me as how they wud git their own victuals. But sorra a bit she iver cooked, though I offered her the lave av me stove."

Mrs. Kelly paused to wipe her eyes on her apron. "I towld this same to a bit av a spalpeen as was here t'ree weeks gone," she said. "An' fur what do they want the poor thing? She was a lady, if iver I see wan; an' sure an' I ought to know, for before me marriage to Mike Kelly I lived out wid many a lady."

"I am Mrs. Rossi's uncle," said Moses Armitage.

Oh—her uncle? Lord, save us! thin you'll happen be the wan she wint to see afther her man died! He war tuk suddint wid fever an' on'y lived five days. Poor young thing—an' she that delicate herself. We all done what we cud to help her, an' he was buried by the city; it cudn't be helped. The day av the fun'ral I sez to her, 'What you goin' to do whin your own time comes, Mis' Rossi?' I sez. She hadn't paid me no money for the room in tin days, but I wudn't bring it up to her thin. 'I don' know,' she sez, an' wrung her bits av white han's. 'If my letter wud on'y come!' she sez. 'Why don't I git my letter?'

"'Well,' I sez, 'Billy 'ud give it to ye in a minute if they was wan,' I sez. Billy McGuire, he was the postman, an' an ilegant, respectable man; I've knowed his wife these tin years. 'If they was wan,' I sez, 'Billy 'ud surely give it to yez, an' so I guess there ain't no no.'

"That same day she slipped out, an' whin she comes in she had some money in her han'. I tuk notice 'at her weddin' ring was gone. 'I'll pay you for the room now,' she sez, 'thin I'm goin'.' The nex'

mornin' whin I got up she was gone, an' that was the las' I seen av her."

"Did you ask her where she was going, when she spoke of leaving the day before?" asked Moses Armitage, anxiously.

"I did that!" said Mrs. Kelly, nodding her head emphatically, "but it wasn't me 'at 'ud let on to the man that was here before, for, to tell you the straight truth, I didn't like the luk av him. But you bein' her uncle is different. I sez to her, 'Where you goin', Mis' Rossi, dear,' I sez. For as sure as I set in this chair I was that sorry for the woman I meant to keep her till after her trouble. 'Don't go,' I sez, 'till you're better.' 'I'm goin' to me uncle,' she sez; 'I kno'w he'll tak' me in. I know where he lives, too, for i heard father say.' 'In that case,' I sez, 'you're a-doin' sinsible.' I was manin' to ask her more perticular before she wint; but as I tol' yez, she was gone come mornin'. I've never forgot the poor thing."

The woman's eyes had wandered often during this recital to the face of the child, who leaned shyly against the great shoulder of his guardian. "I suppose," she continued, again wiping her eyes, "that this is her babby; six—ain't he? An' a fine, big boy av his age! I'd ha' knowed it widout your tellin', for he's the livin' image av her. I seen it whin I first laid eyes on him! What's your name, little feller?"

"My name's 'Manuel,'" answered the child, shyly.

"Av course it is, afther his pa! Many's the time I heard her callin' him that same!"

"But, my good woman," said Moses Armitage, "I never saw my niece. I do not know that I am the uncle she referred to. She did not come to me."

"She never come to you?" echoed the woman shrilly. "The saints defend an' guard us! an' ain't this her babby thin?"

"No," said Moses Armitage. Then he sprang to his feet so suddenly as to upset the rickety chair upon which he had been sitting. A strange thought had flashed across his brain. He thrust a piece of money into the woman's hand. "I shall not forget your kindness to her," he said. Seizing the child in his arms he made his way down the unsteady staircases in a fashion which called alarmed faces to doors and windows.

CHAPTER XIII

In the Valley

IT had rained in the valley for more than a week. The heavy midsummer vegetation drooped earthward, rank and dark. Grain mildewed in the sodden fields; in closets and cellars livid fungus started out on the dank walls; sharp, penetrating odors of damp and mold crept from closed parlors and "spare" bedrooms. Under the dense masses of drifting vapors people sickened here and there.

"It is an unusually unhealthy season," declared Mr. Eliphalet Dundor, and he became proportionately cheerful, while the discouraged farmers grumbled, and their overworked wives took to their beds with neuralgia, lumbago and what not, according to their varied constitutions and predilections. The village doctor, wiser than he knew, went about administering his favorite nostrum impartially. He had found from experience that a fine, strong decoction of certain bitter herbs—brewed in the privacy of his own kitchen—cured quite as well as a multiplicity of more costly drugs. Faith in the man back of the dose might or might not be the potent factor in the result; no one was better aware of the value of a cheery word, a jovial laugh and a warm hand shake than the worthy doctor. But to the absurd conjectures concerning the psychology of drugs, or the potency of mental suggestion, with which the medical journals were beginning

to concern themselves, he prudently paid no manner of heed. He had his working theory as mentioned above, and it served admirably in Tacitus Four Corners.

Mr. Dundor and Dr. Wirt, laboring thus amicably in their several callings for the weal of the community, paused in the muddy road one wet morning for a social interchange of news. Dr. Wirt opined sagely that if the weather did not clear, he would shortly have the bulk of the community on his hands for treatment.

Mr. Dundor inquired, with professional propriety, if any of the cases were likely to prove fatal; and expressed profound regret when informed that Mrs. Erastus Winch was not likely to survive the day.

"It ain't altogether the dampness that has affected her," quoth the doctor with a frown. "Neuralgia I can cure, and a weak stomach I can strengthen; but when it comes to a patient fretting herself to death, why it ain't in my books."

"'Course it ain't," acquiesced Mr. Dundor complacently, as he leaned forward to dislodge an overgreedy horsefly with his whip handle. "I s'pose 'twas losin' that boy. Queer thing, wa'n't it?"

"Mighty queer," agreed the doctor, gathering up his reins. "Physic don't touch the case. Good-day, sir."

"Hold on a minute, doc," cried the undertaker excitedly. "Say, ain't that the boy now in the wagon a-comin'? I don't know the man, though."

The doctor leaned out of his buggy and stared over the top of his spectacles at the approaching vehicle. Then as he turned out to make room in the narrow road he cried, "How-de-do, Mr. Armitage. Hold on a minute, will you, and tell me how you came by that

boy. I need him for one of my patients to-day more'n pills."

Moses Armitage pulled up sharply. "Do you know him?" he asked.

"Why, yes, I know him," said the doctor dryly. "He b'longs to a family named Winch over on the river-road. You'd better take him home, I guess; his mother ain't likely to live through the day."

Moses Armitage's ruddy face had blanched to a curious dusky pallor. "He was lost," he said briefly. "He came to my house."

"I guess the kid's a kin' of a tramp, same's his mother," put in Mr. Dundor with a wink. "She took to the road when she'd been better off to home, an' died in Winch's barn. Ain't you never heard the story, stranger? Most the folks in these parts knew 'bout it at the time."

Moses Armitage glanced at the child; his face was pinched with fear; his eyes brimmed over. "I want to see mummy," he whispered.

"To get to Winch's," volunteered the doctor, "you want to turn 'round and go back 'bout a quarter of a mile; take your first left, then follow the river-road for about a mile an' a half. The boy 'll know the place."

A rasping scrape of wheels, a spatter of mud and the quick plunge of hoofs acknowledged these kindly directions.

"Why didn't you tell me your name, my boy?" asked Moses Armitage, looking down at the little figure at his side. "I would have taken you home long ago if I had known."

The child nestled closer to the broad shoulder. "I wanted you," he said, tremulously.

There was a long silence filled with the monotonous slush—slush of the mare's feet in the liquid mud.

"Mummy lives there," said the boy at last, in a subdued voice. He ran eagerly to the gate when the man lifted him down, then stopped and turned with a scared face. "I see *him*," he whispered; "he's on the porch. Won't you come?"

"I am coming, boy, when I have hitched Nelly," said Moses Armitage. His face wore a curious expression as he glanced about him. The plain story and a half house, its thinly painted walls showing bluish white through the fine slanting lines of rain; the door yard drearily overgrown with long, coarse grass; the starved geraniums and a cactus or two in rusty tin cans, standing sentinel-wise before the seldom opened front door—these were the familiar sights of the countryside. So also was the slouching figure clad in blue jeans, which regarded his approach from the shelter of the narrow porch. Moses Armitage accosted this impassive figure with stereotyped greetings. "I have just learned," he added, "that this child who wandered to my door some weeks ago belongs to you."

A wicked light leaped up in the dull eyes. "Then ye heerd what ain't so," was the response in a savage guttural.

"Isn't your name Winch, sir?" asked Moses Armitage. "I met a couple of men near the village who directed me to this house; they told me ——"

"Oh, yas, I persoom so," sneered the other. "My name's Winch; but I don't lay no claim to that boy. My wife, 'Liz'beth, she's a-dyin' in thar," he continued, his voice breaking in a husky quaver. "My wife—

'Liz'beth—an' all along o' that beggar brat! You c'n take him away!"

"That is what I wish to do; but your wife—she is ill, you say. You will allow the child to see her, of course. I am not aware of the circumstances, but——"

Neither of the men had paid much heed to the child, who, during this short parley, had crept nearer and nearer to the door. "I want mummy!" he cried shrilly, and on a sudden flung the door wide and darted in.

A great broken cry answered the words, and Moses Armitage, who had unhesitatingly followed, beheld a piteous sight. The cold gray light of the weeping day fell full upon the grayer face of a woman who clasped the child in close embrace. "Oh, 'Manuel—'Manuel!" she murmured. "'Manuel—'Manuel—'Manuel!"

"I've come back, mummy!" cried the child, joyously. "I was looking for my father, an' I found him!"

The woman had fallen back exhausted upon her pillow; but she fixed her glazing eyes upon the man who stood with bared head at her bedside. "Yes—yes!" she said eagerly, as if answering some question. "I know him! I knowed him in a minute! I'm—mighty glad! The book—he'd ought to ——"

A stout woman in a sunbonnet bustled in from the kitchen. "Land! I wouldn't ha' gone even fur a minute if I'd suspicioned she'd go off into another of her spells! Here, Mis' Winch, take this." She slipped her arm under the sick woman's pillow and held a teaspoon to the blue lips. The gray head moved feebly from side to side. "'Manuel," gasped the faint voice, "give him—the—book!"

The stout woman presently faced about and straightened herself with an air of professional authority. "I

guess you'd better all go out now," she said crisply. "Tain't any more'n I expected all 'long; but I'm reel sorry the minister wa'n't here an' the doctor."

Erastus Winch started forward; his haggard eyes asked the question which his tongue refused to utter.

"Yes, she's gone," said the woman, raising her apron to her face. "Slipped away jes' like a shadder, to a better lan', I trust." She glanced curiously at Moses Armitage. "I s'pose mebbe you're a relation," she began uncertainly. "If you c'd not'fy the—Land of love! if it ain't that boy! I declare you'd ought to be 'shamed o' yourself! But this ain't no time to speak. I guess you'd better take him away afore he —"

The last words were uttered in a sibilant whisper, which seemed to penetrate the ears of the man who leaned against the wall, staring unwinkingly at the quiet face on the pillow. "She's dead—'Liz'beth is—dead! 'Liz'beth's dead!" He uttered these words in a dull monotone. Then he straightened his limp shoulders with a jerk. "Give me the boy," he said thickly; "he done it! 'Twas him she was callin' fur, an' he never come till 'twas too late." His terrible eyes seemed to devour the shrinking little figure; his great hands reached for it, where it cowered beside the dead woman.

Moses Armitage seized the boy in his arms. "Stop!" he cried. "You are crazed with grief, man! You don't know what you're saying." He turned and strode out of the house, the child struggling violently in his embrace.

"I want mummy," wailed the little voice; "I want to see my mummy!"

CHAPTER XIV

Documentary Evidence

THE great Mr. Smalley himself responded in person to the telegram sent by Moses Armitage on the day following Elizabeth's death. He complimented Mr. Armitage upon his discoveries, but shook his head over certain deductions which he had unhesitatingly drawn therefrom. "The evidence certainly points to the desired conclusion," he said. "This Bible now, which you tell me was found on the premises of Winch, undoubtedly contains the autograph of Immanuel Rossi with the probable date of his birth; this is very strong documentary evidence; but we must establish the fact that it was found on the person of the deceased. This I will endeavor to do in my interview with the man, Winch."

The man, Winch, when cross-examined by the lawyer on the day of his wife's funeral proved to be an unsatisfactory witness. "I foun' a dead woman an' a live young un in my haymow seven year ago come January," he said. "Now you know's much 'bout it as I do."

"Did you find this—ah—book, on or near the person of the deceased?" asked Mr. Smalley, producing the russet-bound Bible with dramatic suddenness.

Winch fixed his frowning eyes on the book. "I tol' ye what I foun'," he said shortly.

"Very good; but did any other person—your wife

say—find this book, on or near the person of the deceased.

"Well, ye to come here an' talk to me 'bout my wife?" demanded Winch, lowering his shaggy head. "You c'n git; that's what you c'n do. I ain't got no more to say."

Mr. Smalley narrowed his lids cunningly. "My good man," he said with an agreeable smile, "I will be perfectly frank with you, and tell you that if we succeed in establishing the claims of this child there will be considerable—yes, I may say a very considerable property coming to him. Now you maintained this young person at your own expense for some six years or more; did you not?"

"I didn't do nothin' fur him," began Winch; "'Lizabeth, she was allers a-fussin'. I didn't keer a darn fur——" He stopped short, his eyes fastening on the lawyer's face with a look, which the late Elizabeth would have recognized. "Why, yas," he said with a rasping cough; "I did, so to say, s'port the boy fur a matter of nigh onto seven year. He cert'nly wa'n't no expense to the town."

"In case we prove the boy's identity," pursued Mr. Smalley, still smiling blandly, "reimbursement would undoubtedly be made. In fact——" He paused and produced his pocketbook, which he opened with extreme nicety of movement. "Mr. Armitage requested me to give you at once a small token of his appreciation of your kind paternal care of the child. Mr. Armitage, you understand, wishes in any case to adopt the child legally."

"Wall, I don't know 'bout that," said Winch, his hand closing upon the note which the other tendered.

"Bein' as the boy was born on my premises, an' bein' as I've took keer of him at a consid'able expense fur nigh onto seven year, I guess I'll hold onto him myself,—if thar's any prop'ty in the case. I c'n look after him all right same's I've done."

"Quite natural, I'm sure, that you should wish to do so," said Mr. Smalley genially; "but you must understand, my dear sir, that it will be necessary to prove the identity of the child, before his claim on the—ah—competence in question will be valid. Now this book—this Bible, to which I have already drawn your attention—cuts a very considerable figure in the evidence. It contains a name and date which would go far to settle the matter, if we can establish the fact that it was taken from the body of the woman and not come by in some other way; do you understand?"

Winch reached out for the book which he opened and surveyed with frowning eyes. "I didn't see no book out to the barn," he said at last. "An' if 'Liz'-beth foun' it she didn't say nothin'. I've seed her though, come to think, of a Sunday afternoon on the back steps, a-readin' to the boy out of a book like this. I didn't take no notice. Whar 'd you git it?"

"The woman who cared for your wife, and who laid her out after her death, found it under Mrs. Winch's pillow," replied Mr. Smalley succinctly. "Remembering the singular last words which your wife uttered, she conceived it her duty to give the book to the child. She did this; and quite naturally it found its way into my hands."

"I'll hev the law on Mirandy Sproul fur that!" growled Winch. "She can't c'llect no pay fur services arter that, you bet! Consarn her, what in thunder

did the woman mean by takin' prop'ty ouden my house!"

"We shall—ahem—consider it a very fortunate circumstance if by means of it we establish the child's identity," said Mr. Smalley. "The question is, how did Mrs. Winch come by the book?"

"It's as plain as a pikestaff," said Winch with a contemptuous glance at the lawyer. "I never had no such book, an' 'Liz'beth didn't, that I know. An'—an'—she did say suthin' 'bout a book the las' thing."

"Then you are prepared to make an affidavit that this book was not in your house prior to finding the body of the boy's mother on your premises?"

"Yes, I be. I'll take my Bible oath onto it! But say, I want the boy fetched back here to my house right off. Here I've had the hull expense of his keep, an' he ain't never been no use to me so fur. I guess he c'n arn his board all right f'om now on,—ef thar ain't anybody to interfere." The man swallowed hard and glanced about the disordered kitchen, where he had chosen to receive his visitor, with a curious mingling of emotions on his hard face.

"Oh, as to that," said Mr. Smalley smoothly, "it will be advisable to leave the boy with his present guardian. To put it plainly the child is either the grand-nephew of Mr. Armitage, or he is nameless and penniless. In either case Mr. Armitage will reimburse you handsomely for his keep, but only on condition that he is left in undisturbed possession of the child. Of course I understand that it will be doubly painful for you to part with the boy in your present—ah—bereaved condition. I can assure you that due allowance will be made for all the—er—facts as they exist."

"Wall, I sh'd think it 'ud be wuth as much's fifty dollars extry—the partin' with him, I mean," said Winch, slowly rubbing his hands together. "An' what's more—thar's somethin' else. Say, this hull thing's cut into me in a mighty expensive way. Any of the neighbors 'll tell you that my wife—'Liz'-beth——"

He stopped short, the words seeming actually to choke him. He went on with a visible effort. "Wall, to put it straight to ye, the boy run away. My wife, 'Liz'beth, she wa'n't never the same arter that. We looked fur the kid. I went myself an' took my team when I'd ought to hev been harvestin'. I may say I los' nigh onto fifty dollars right thar, fur it took to rainin' the very nex' day an' the hull crop mildewed. Thar's a matter of a hunderd dollars, y' see. An' thar my wife, when we come home, wuz all broke up; an' she took to her bed. She—she never got up, an' dere I be, d'prived of her services, an'—an' fun'ral expenses to pay. It kind o' seems to me as though I c'd c'llect damages to a consid'able figur'. I've been thinkin' some of suin' the man. What bizniz had he a-keepin' the boy f'om his folks, I'd like to know?"

"I should not advise a lawsuit, my dear sir," said Mr. Smalley, dryly. "In point of fact you've no case whatever. It was not a case of kidnapping, you will remember; but as I have already assured you every possible allowance will be made. I will—ah—just note down the items you have mentioned." Mr. Smalley produced a fountain pen and a memorandum book from his pocket. "Parting with child; fifty dollars, I believe you said?"

"Better make it an even hunderd," said Winch,

with glistening eyes; "that boy's valuable prop'ty; he'd be wuth — Say, I've a right to his services till he's of age, the way I figur' it; I'd ought by rights —"

"It is altogether probable that you have no rights whatever," said Mr. Smalley, "but I will say a hundred dollars for the first item. Then you mentioned something else; grain, wasn't it?"

"Hold on, thar's another thing: five dollars fur use of team an' services of self a-lookin' fur him," said Winch. "An' that's dirt cheap too. By thunder, I wouldn't put in another day like it fur — You might's well put in dinner fur two an' feed. Call it seven dollars in all."

"Very good, and —"

"Seventy-fi' dollars fur my oats. An' that ain't 'nough neither. Oats has gone up to fifty cents. If you want to be common honest you'll call it a hundred."

Mr. Smalley's pen wrote busily.

"Fun'ral expenses an' doctor's bills 'll foot up pretty steep," said Winch, pulling at his tuft of gray whiskers. "I sh'd think —"

"Five hundred dollars, say —?" suggested the lawyer.

"Wall, I guess that 'll cover it," growled the other, his eyes bulging. "Say!" he burst out. "You ain't makin' a fool of me, be you? I ain't the kin' to fool with, I c'n let you know; no sir-ee, not by a jug full! I'll hev the law on ye, if ye try that—in my b'reaved condition."

Mr. Smalley looked up in some astonishment. "My dear sir," he said with awful dignity, "you for-

get yourself!—But of course that is only natural under the circumstances. The other items, the loss of your—ah—late wife's services, I believe you put it; and compensation for the child's maintenance for seven years, you may safely leave to Mr. Armitage's generosity."

"No you don't neither; we'll settle now, an' you c'n fork over the cash," cried Winch, bringing down his huge fist on the table with a sounding crash. "It 'ud be like that Armitage feller to make his sneaks without givin' me a cent!"

Mr. Smalley raised his eyebrows with an inscrutable smile. "Very well," he said dryly, "we will finish the matter now. And you will then sign a paper releasing Mr. Armitage and Immanuel Rossi—his heirs and assigns forever, from any further claim. I may say indeed, 'hat you have no legal rights in the matter whatever; but it is Mr. Armitage's express wish that you shall be treated with—ah—due consideration and fairness."

"He'd better, durn him!" growled Winch, expectorating fiercely; "money ain't a goin' to pay fur some things 't I've lost 'long of that boy. It comes down to a leetle question of how much is a man's wife wuth to him, don't it?"

"You must bear in mind the fact that Mr. Armitage did not abduct the child," said Mr. Smalley coolly. "In point of fact——" The lawyer hesitated for a moment, then he proceeded to lay certain well-known facts concerning Erastus Winch's life and general character before that individual in a manner which caused the great drops of sweat to start on his narrow forehead.

"Who tol' ye all that?" demanded the farmer.
"Say, who said I was like that?"

"That is neither here nor there," said Mr. Smalley pleasantly; "but you cannot disprove what I have said. I will now offer you a sum to settle the matter. You can accept it or not as you like; but you will remember that beyond a moderate amount for the child's maintenance you have no claim whatever."

Something like twenty minutes afterward the lawyer left the house with a satisfied expression on his lean face. On that same day he held a conversation of exceeding interest with Mr. Eliphalet Dundor. That worthy individual was pretty equally divided between a fatuous pride over the circumstance of being closeted with the mysterious stranger upon whose movements the undivided attention of the village was concentrated, and certain long buried qualms of conscience which had of late shown an unpleasant vitality.

After half an hour of rigid cross-examination, conducted in Mr. Smalley's most skilful manner, Mr. Dundor suddenly volunteered the information that a stranger had called to view the mysterious dead woman the evening before her burial. The words were scarce out of his mouth before he mentally cursed himself for having uttered them. He had a curious sense of being held like a sponge in a relentless grasp and of exuding facts under the pressure. He moistened his dry lips and resolved to tell as little as possible of the interview.

"Describe this person carefully, if you please," said Mr. Smalley, narrowing his lids to a mere slit. "Was

he, for example, a tall man? and young—say about five and twenty?”

“No, sir,” said Mr. Dundor glibly; “he was short—quite short, no taller than yourself, sir. Of a spare habit, smooth face, black eyes and a hooked nose. He was, I sh’d say, fifty years of age, if he was a day. Yes, sir, I remember him very well.”

“Did this—ah—person betray any mark of interest in the deceased?” demanded Mr. Smalley, leaning forward and concentrating his penetrating eyes full upon Mr. Dundor’s perturbed countenance.

That individual wiped his damp forehead with a large black-bordered handkerchief. “Well—er—he——”

“Think carefully,” snapped Mr. Smalley, “and give us all the facts.”

“Well, yes,” stammered the other, “I—I may say ‘at he did. I was engaged in setting up a—a casket for the burial. The remains, was, you understand, to be buried by the town; in the usual manner you understand. Nothin’ stylish nor elegant about a pauper’s coffin, an’ mighty little profit to the trade. Why, I’ve conducted the county fun’rals in this ‘ere deestrick fur——”

“Never mind that,” interrupted the lawyer frowning. “This person said what—just what, if you please?”

“Well, I don’t know as I c’n recall the exact words,” said Mr. Dundor, rolling up his eyes to the ceiling with a candid air; “but the gentleman give me to understand that he was willing to defray the fun’ral expenses, if I would keep the matter private. I couldn’t see no real objection to what he proposed, so I consented, an’

he paid me right down for a first-class article. I had a line of extry fine sample goods ready set up, as it happened, so l—l——”

“You buried the woman, and kept the matter quiet as the gentleman desired,” said Mr. Smalley quickly.

“Very good; very good indeed. Now,——” he paused, and again fixed the undertaker with his ferret eyes—

“did the gentleman give you, or leave behind him any trace of his identity? his card, say, or——”

“I had almost forgotten the circumstance,” whispered Mr. Dundor, “but I recall now that the gentleman did drop his handkerchief. He pulled it out of his pocket along with——”

“Was there a name on it?”

“Yes, sir; I believe there was. I was——”

“Have you the article in question in your possession?”

Mr. Dundor fetched a long sigh of relief. “I see what you’re tryin’ to get at,” he said, recovering something of his air of professional authority. “As coroner of this ‘ere destrict an’ undertaker, I’ve found that a close mouth often makes a fat pocket—eh?”

“You’ll lose nothing by this,” said the lawyer tersely. “Produce the article, if you please.”

Mr. Dundor tiptoed across the room, where he rummaged a long time among piles of rustling papers in his desk. “I’m a close man,” he murmured, as he peered at the lawyer over the upraised lid; “close an’ cautious when it comes to dealin’s with the b’reaved.” He shut the desk, locked it with deliberation, and displayed a small packet, neatly tied with black cord.

Mr. Smalley tore it open with some impatience and

glanced at the name embroidered in one corner of the square of white cambric. "Very good," he said non-committally. "I will, if you please, retain this bit of—ah—evidence."

Somewhat later in the day, Mr. Smalley summed up the interesting data he had secured for the benefit of Moses Armitage. "Of course the evidence is purely circumstantial," he concluded; "and were you disposed to press your claims against those of the child, I have no doubt you would win your suit. But I may say that personally I have no doubt regarding the identity of the child. This handkerchief, now, bearing the name of Jonas Armitage, would seem to point to the fact that my late lamented client, actuated by a very commendable paternal interest in the deceased, visited this place and—er—provided for the disposition of the remains in a manner suited to his station in life. Very charitable indeed, it seems to me, considering the relations which had previously existed between ——"

"Damnable!" roared Moses Armitage, his ruddy face growing ruddier with honest wrath. "He had murdered her!"

Mr. Smalley glanced disapprovingly at the burly figure of his client. "You are of course entitled to your own opinion on that point," he said suavely. "Now if you choose to acknowledge this child as your brother's grandchild, it will be necessary to take the usual legal steps in the matter; after which you will assume your duties as his guardian. I trust you will be guided by—er—prudence in your future training of this young person. He will one day hold great power in his hands. In point of fact, we may say that

money is the chief power in the world to-day; a proper understanding of this, and—er——”

The blue eyes of his listener wore so distant and abstracted a look that the lawyer left his sentence trailing in mid air. He was not in the habit of wasting his valuable advice on unheeding ears.

The next day the idlers at the village station witnessed the departure of three persons on the morning train. They were “ol’ Mose” Armitage, from the back hill-road, the mysterious Mr. Caleb Smalley, and a small boy with a white, scared face and big brown eyes. The train had scarcely pulled out from the station when a ramshackle buckboard drew up beside the platform.

“How-de-do, Mr. Winch,” drawled the station-master, from his easy position on a pile of boxes. “You seem to be in consid’able of a hurry this mornin’. You wa’n’t calc’latin’ to take the train, was you?” He pointed his thumb over his shoulder in the direction of the vanishing train, then burst into a discordant “haw-haw!” at sight of the discomfited expression which crept over the face of the man in the buckboard.

“Did they git off?” demanded Winch.

“Depends on who yer talkin’ ‘bout,” responded the man in authority genially. “Mr. Armitage left us this mornin’, likewise the gent ‘at’s been stoppin’ to our hospitable frien’, Snider’s, an’ the boy. ‘Twa’n’t them you was wantin’ to see, was it?”—for the farmer was biting his nails and scowling. “I heerd you got paid han’some fur your well-known kin’ness to the kid. Lordy, what luck some folks do hev!”

“I ain’t got all ‘t I’m goin’ to hev, not by a long shot!” snapped Winch. “‘Tain’t a patch on what

I'd ought to ha' got. I wuz Intendin' to hol' the boy for a spell till they come to their senses an' giv' me my rights. An' now they're gone—goll durn 'em!"

"They got the dead wood on ye this time, sure, Ras," chuckled the station-master. "I'll bet we don't see 'em back in these parts fur a spell neither. You're tol'able cute an' knowin', 'Rastus, but you can't saw wood 'longside that little polliwog of a lawyer!"

The gentlemen of leisure assembled on the platform burst into appreciative guffaws. In the midst of their merriment Erastus Winch turned sharply around and drove toward his desolate house. Greed and grief fought together in his empty soul; one instant he wondered dully how he should live without Elizabeth; the next he regretted poignantly that he had not grasped more from the Fortunatus-purse so lately held out to him.

"I'll git even with the boy yit for losin' her," he muttered, bringing down his lash with savage emphasis on the lean back of his horse. "I'll git even with the little skunk, ef I hev to wait fur fifty years to do it—so help me God!"

PART II
The Altruist

CHAPTER XV

The Opinions of a Crank

IN a confidential conversation with his partner Mr. Smalley exploited his opinion of his new client. It was by no means a flattering one. "Armitage is an out-and-out crank," he concluded forcibly, "unbalanced, full of foolish sentiment; in short, impractical and altogether unfitted for the suitable bringing up of the heir."

The immediate cause of Mr. Smalley's irritation was a conversation just concluded in his private office where Mr. Armitage had listened with commendable patience to a long homily on the responsibilities of his position, as delivered by the sapient lawyer. "Let the boy understand his power from an early age," said Mr. Smalley; "instruct him in the rise and fall of stocks and securities; teach him caution and conservatism. Educate him liberally, of course: a first-class private school to begin with; finish him abroad perhaps. In short make of him an all-round man of the world. You can count on us, sir, for advice and assistance in all questions pertaining to these matters."

"It is my wish," said Moses Armitage tranquilly, "that the child should know nothing of the money till he reaches his majority."

"What!" exclaimed the lawyer, "you don't mean to cut the boy off from the anticipation of his good fortune, I trust. That would be a great mistake, my

dear sir; the idea of possession is very educative—very educative indeed, sir. Why I could show you examples of that right here in this city—young boys who are being trained for great positions of trust. They are made to understand their powers, sir, and obtain a grasp upon them, so to speak, which is more desirable than I can well explain to you."

"That is just what I wish," said the other slowly. "I wish the lad to grasp the idea of his power—to help others. But he must first learn the world's need; and find the love for humanity in himself."

Mr. Smalley shook his head and pursed up his lips. "That is all very well in its place," he said. "Most people can get rid of money easily enough. To wisely conserve it—to increase it—is the difficult thing, which I trust——"

"I shall teach him to get rid of it as quickly as possible," said Moses Armitage, with heat. "The money is the price of blood, of honor, of life!" With that he arose abruptly and terminated the conversation.

Could Messrs. Trent & Smalley have seen the guardian of the Armitage millions buried in the study of a certain ancient book in search of light on his future course they would have been further affronted by the spectacle.

"There once lived a man," said Moses Armitage to himself, "who learned to know so well the meaning of life that all power both in heaven and on earth was committed to his hands." He resolved to conform his training of the child as nearly as possible to that which produced that flower of the centuries, Jesus, the Christ. With this idea in mind he studied his New

Testament with a serious attention which he had never before bestowed upon it.

He derived from this study certain ideas which seemed to him applicable to the case in hand. The boy Jesus lived for the most part in the country. He was environed by human love and the beauties of natural scenery. His life was simple, yet not without comfort. He was obedient—subject to human authority. He was never idle, but labored in the tranquil Oriental fashion, so that neither hurry nor worry entered into his unfolding life. He had time to think; and he thought deeply, even in his earlier years. He was the inevitable product of his thought life—as is every man. What then was the nature and scope of that thought? At twelve years of age he asked the amazing question, "Wist ye not that I must be about my Father's business?"

His thought must have been turned habitually, not spasmodically, to the divine. He early learned to know God, whom to know aright is Life Eternal; so little by little his mortal became swallowed up in immortality, until from out the abundance of that life he was able to minister to suffering humanity in strange and unlooked for ways. And when death apparently overcame him, "it was not possible that he should be holden of it!"

The ideal which slowly took shape and substance to itself in the mind of this singular old man was in brief this. The child who had thus come to him out of the dark must learn through every channel of thought and sense to realize the Life Eternal. He must comprehend in the most intimate fibres of his being that all life is literally a part of the Father of Life—one with

its source and hence divine. He must learn to see in the most degraded of his fellows the child of God, wandering perhaps, ignorant of his heritage, but always and inalienably the son of the Father. He must understand further that power belongs to God, whether it be the energy of accumulated wealth, or the simple motion of one's arm—all an indivisible part of the God-force that rolls the stars along and shapes the destiny of nations. He must learn that to move in harmony with divine will is the highest ideal of humanity and the only way of true progress.

Such a man, reflected Moses Armitage, might safely be entrusted with millions unjustly wrung from his fellows. Such a man will best know how honestly and wisely to restore what has been dishonestly acquired. He will study deeply the laws of demand and supply; he will discover the true source of all abundance, which nature's God writes large over all his universe, but which man has not yet learned to read.

All of this, and more, gradually worked itself out from the wondrous story of the Nazarene. The man and the child studied it together, and with it many things more, in the quiet country, and in the throbbing heart of great cities; in places made terrible by man's hatred and injustice or illumined by the eternal qualities of love and self-giving.

As the child grew older, history, science, politics, all were examined—studied in the light of that luminous life. And because Moses Armitage knew from bitter experience that idealism is in itself weak and futile, and that the most useless of human beings is the man who in a world of uses dreams of high accomplishment, yet fails to accomplish, he early taught the

child to put into instant practice every truth which he learned, for thus and only thus does truth become an inalienable possession.

That the boy might become a citizen of the world, they traveled and lived in many countries, yet it was oftenest to a lovely village in New England that the two returned. Here in a modest cottage, furnished with the simplest comforts, the two passed many a stormy winter or peaceful summer. In this rural society Moses Armitage passed for a naturalist of some means, whose life was chiefly given to an eccentric but harmless study of bugs and beetles. He was commonly spoken of as "a real nice old gentleman," and his frequent and prolonged absences were set down as "natural for such a queer person."

During these seasons Immanuel attended the village school, and mingled freely with the village children in all their work and play. He learned to swim, to skate and coast, to build snow forts, and lead a spirited attack on a rival fortress. He was a favorite with everybody because of his beauty and the gay sweetness of his nature. During these joyous years all the unnatural seriousness which had fallen upon him like a blight from Erastus Winch's sour nature vanished. He was a happy, light-hearted child, growing healthily like a young tree into his appointed stature.

The old man watched over him with a yearning love which grew with the years. One daily custom of the two must be mentioned since out of it grew unmeasured results. It was simple enough. Moses Armitage inaugurated it thus on the very day the child was given over to him formally. "Immanuel," he said to him, "you are really my boy now."

"I am glad!" answered the child, and his face glowed like a flower.

"But you must not forget your Father. You are his child; you always will be that. In order that you may make the best of your living, you must every day take a lesson from the Father, just as that wonderful man did of whom I told you. God will delight to teach you if you will but listen. Presently you will take lessons in French, German and Latin from teachers who know these languages. But no one can give you lessons in the art of being what you can be except your Father. I made some terrible mistakes, my boy, before I found this out; I want you to be happier than I have been; there is only the one way. Do you understand?"

The child nodded his head; his great eyes were fixed on the face of his uncle with absorbed attention.

The old man observed this with a smile. "It really does not matter whether you understand me perfectly or not," he said; "I am not able to teach you as he will. Just as you are listening to me, my lad, and trying to understand, so you must listen every day to your Father. Sit quite alone, and keep very still, after you have bathed and dressed, and God will teach you just how to live during the day that is before you. Do not think your own thoughts; only listen. If you remember to do this faithfully every day of your life you will always be in the right place, and know how to do the right thing; and you will not fall into the tangle of foolish thoughts that make the world seem dark and wretched to those who do not care to learn from their Father."

This was no new idea, and Moses Armitage was

aware of it. He had found it universally observed with more or less understanding of its meaning during his travels in Oriental countries, and knowing the great tenacity of the eastern idea, he conceived that the custom was not unknown in the days of Jesus, and that to it, in great measure, might be traced the unfoldings of that wonderful life, which are summed up in the simple words "and Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and man."

"So," he argued, "did He listen among the hills of Palestine during those years of solitude, before He emerged into the light of sacred history. And so may a little child in any age grow in favor with God and man."

CHAPTER XVI

An Experiment

ONE sparkling afternoon in late October found the two—the old man, still hale and vigorous, and the child now grown into a handsome lad of twelve—walking slowly down a wide avenue in America's chiefest city. Palaces lined the street on either side; gorgeously appareled women with haughty faces lolled on the soft cushions of the rapidly driven carriages. There was opulence of life, of color, of motion, of magnificence everywhere visible. It was reflected in the boy's sensitive face as in a mirror. "I should like to live in one of these beautiful houses," he said eagerly; "I should like always to see this—to be in it!"

"Well, suppose we try it," said Moses Armitage, regarding him keenly. "Suppose we see if this is the best we can do at living." He paused as he spoke before a small but splendid mansion. "Curiously enough," he went on, "it happens that we may make our experiment in this house if we wish. The people who own it have gone to Europe; they will let it."

Nightfall of the following day saw them established in their new home. Immanuel was frankly delighted. The drawing-room, glowing with soft color and filled with objects of art seemed a vision of fairy-land to the wide brown eyes of the country-bred lad. So did the library with its rows and rows of books in costly

bindings, its rich carpets, its bronzes and paintings and its wide fireplace where many-colored flames danced up the chimney in the cool evenings. There was a troop of well-trained servants in the house, and life moved on noiselessly after the well-oiled fashion of a perfect machine.

"I like it," announced Immanuel conclusively at the end of the second day.

The solemn-faced butler had withdrawn, and the two sat alone together over their dessert. "Why have we not lived here before?"

Now the question of money had never been so much as named between these two. The child had accepted his life day by day with unquestioning faith and simplicity. "Why have we not lived in such a house before?" he repeated, his eyes roving curiously over the rich cut glass, silver and napery and pausing at last on his uncle's serious face.

"We are spending a great quantity of money on our two selves," observed his guardian.

"Money?" repeated the lad questioningly. "Yes, I suppose we are, but if we have it ——" He stopped short, and again riveted his bright eyes on the watchful face opposite him. "I do not know," he burst out after a short period of reflection; "I never thought much about money. Perhaps we ought not to live here; it was I who wished it."

"We have money to spend this winter, you and I," said Moses Armitage gravely. "And you shall decide how we are to spend it. We can afford to live in this house and—yes, we can buy many things beside, if you wish."

"I am glad!" cried the boy. "I do wish to live

here, and there are so many beautiful things in the shops—pictures and books and curious toys. I cannot think of everything at once, there is so much!" He drew his active figure to its full height—he had sprung from his chair and was walking excitedly up and down the long room. "We are very rich, are we not?" he demanded after a pause; "Jenkins, the man who waits on me in the morning, says that we are."

His guardian frowned. Then his face cleared and a curious smile crept into his blue eyes. "Well?" he said interrogatively.

"I like to be rich," said the boy positively. "I like to live in this house. I shall buy everything that I want. To-morrow I shall go to the shop that we saw yesterday—where the pretty old Florentine things are; I want that queer carved bell for my room, and——"

"To-morrow you will begin to go to school."

"Yes, I suppose so," assented the boy, a little dashed by the suggestion. "But why couldn't you teach me this winter, uncle?"

The old man raised his shaggy brows. "You must see the world on both sides, my lad, if you want to be a man," he said smiling.

On the following day Moses Armitage himself accompanied his ward to the school he had chosen. The manner of their procedure on that day and on every succeeding day, was this. The well-appointed brougham carried the two to the corner of a street some miles from the palace in which they lived. Here they dismissed the carriage and proceeded on foot through several dirty, choked thoroughfares which at that hour in the morning swarmed with poorly clad children.

"There are schools much nearer home than this," observed Immanuel, when they paused at length before the huge, dingy building which seemed an objective point for the diverging streams of children.

"Yes," assented his guardian briefly.

"Why must I come to this school if—if we are rich?"

"I did not say that we were rich, did I? Jenkins said so."

"But ——"

"Do you trust me, my child?"

"Yes, uncle."

When Moses Armitage met the boy that afternoon at the door where he had parted from him in the morning he perceived that the child was pale and drooping. His heart almost failed him as he saw the light spring into the heavy eyes at sight of him.

"Well, my lad," he began cheerily, as the two walked away together, "how goes the new school?"

"I liked my teacher," said the boy, with a long breath, "but ——"

"You liked your teacher—good! Now where does the 'but' come in?"

Immanuel drew closer to his side as a group of ragged, shouting children pushed rudely past them.

"They—they are hungry—some of them," he whispered. "The boy who sat next to me had no breakfast; I gave him my lunch."

"What, all of it?"

"I had breakfasted," said the lad, hanging his head.

The carriage waited at the corner, and they were soon rolling swiftly away from the grimy, unpleasant neighborhood of Mulberry Street. The boy sat silent

and thoughtful, his eyes busying themselves with the tall buildings and the hurrying crowds on the sidewalks. At dinner he ate hungrily at first, then leaned back in his chair, eying the table with its wax-lights and flowers.

"What do they do with all that is left?" he demanded, regardless of the man who waited behind his chair.

His guardian lifted his frosty brows and shook his head. "I couldn't tell you, my boy," he said easily, "suppose you ask the housekeeper."

"There is more here than we need," the boy went on, "—much more. I have eaten soup and fish, and it is enough. Yet there is all this, and birds and sweets to follow. It would do for their breakfast—ever so many of them. I suppose there were others who were hungry."

"Of whom are you talking, my child?" asked Moses Armitage, helping himself to some delicate dish which was handed to him by the attentive servant.

Immanuel stared at him with grieved astonishment. "If you had seen them you would not forget," he said. "I am thinking about them all the while."

When they were seated before the wide hearth in the library he began again.

"If we are rich," he said, "if I may choose how we are to spend some money—you said that I might, I know what I wish to do most of all."

"What, already?" laughed his guardian. "A new bicycle—eh? or a pony to ride in the park?"

The boy shook his head. "Not now—some time, perhaps. I was thinking of the boys in school—yes, and the girls, too; they look so different from the

boys and girls in Cohasset. They are so thin and gray in the face, and they look tired and oid."

"Of course," agreed Moses Armitage, stroking his beard; "they are city products."

"But I've seen them quite rosy and happy on this street," said the boy thoughtfully. "The baby in the next house has pink cheeks and the boy is plump and pretty. I think it is being poor—too poor to have comfortable clothes or enough to eat." He stopped short and stared into the red heart of the fire.

"What do you propose to do about it, my lad?" inquired his guardian lightly. "You are comfortable, are you not?"

The brown eyes flashed lightnings. "I can't think what ails you, uncle!" he burst out. "Comfortable! yes, I am more than comfortable. I am——" He paused as if in search of a word.

"I said that we were spending considerable money on our two selves," suggested Moses Armitage; "that is quite true. But so are many others. It is our own; we have a right to spend it as we will!"

"If I may choose," said the boy in a low voice, "I will buy lunches for the children who have had no breakfast."

It was announced in the Mulberry Street school on the following day that a friend of the school had provided hot soup and bread *ad libitum* for those who needed such refreshment.

Immanuel continued to come and go between the school on Mulberry Street and the palace on the Avenue. As the weeks wore away he became more and more silent and thoughtful. One evening he appeared before his guardian with a

folded paper in his hand and a determined look upon his face. "You said I might ask the house-keeper what was done with all that is taken away from our table," he began rapidly. "Mrs. Camp is very kind and polite; I learned many things. I put them down on this paper, for I wished to remember." He spread the sheet on the old man's knee, then retreated somewhat anxiously to a position behind his chair.

"What is this?" exclaimed Moses Armitage. "Expenses of table—expenses of servants' hall—salaries—wages! What is all this to you, my lad?"

"Mrs. Camp was making up her books for the month; she let me copy some of the figures. It seems so much—for just you and me, uncle!"

"But you like living in this house—you like being rich, my lad."

"I—I should like it if the other boys could live in houses like it; if they could be rich, too. But——"

Moses Armitage laughed, a curious husky laugh. "Would you like to go with me to-morrow and see how some of these schoolmates of yours live?" he asked.

"Yes, I should like it. I want to see."

And so it came about that these two—the child who held the power of a prince in his small, unconscious hands and the old man, his guardian—went down into the region of the fair city's shame and darkness. In company with a stolid sergeant of police they toiled up foul, rickety stairs in darkness haunted by evil, unnamable odors exhaling from fetid sinks and damp, rotting timbers. They saw innumerable children, all pallid, all dirty, all starved in mind and body. They saw women with terrible faces, hard, despairing,

deathlike. They saw men, sweating over their ill-paid work in stifling dens, or idling in narrow, filthy courts. Misery everywhere and horrors all the more horrible because the human beings hopelessly immersed in them seemed not to realize their sufferings. Sounds of laughter and singing hung on the foul air of a den where a hag-like woman served out some hideous decoction from the keg on which she squatted; the laughter was even more terrible than the unsmiling faces of the children.

"I have seen enough, uncle," whispered the boy after several hours spent in these explorations. His face was white, his dark eyes dilated with horror. When they were once more in the open air he looked up into the narrow strip of blue sky visible between the tops of the tall buildings. "Why does God let such things be?" he asked in a stifled voice. "Are these people wicked because they are poor, or poor because they are wicked?"

"Both," said Moses Armitage thoughtfully. "The pendulum swings betwixt the two; they are poor because they are wicked and wicked because they are poor."

"But the children—there are thousands of them. They have done nothing wrong."

"If the children could be saved from being wicked—which is to say ignorant, they would also be saved from being poor," said his guardian slowly. "There is enough for all."

"We have too much—far too much!"

"That may be true, my lad, but suppose I should bring down to this place every day a barrel of gold coin and give to these people; what then?"

The screen door of a vile saloon near by swung open to admit a couple of frowsy women. The boy glanced inside, then turned his face aside. "They would spend it there," he said with a gesture of loathing; "it would do no good. We can do nothing then."

"One who had money—a great deal of money—and who loved his fellow-beings—these poor little babies, these boys and girls—yes, and these wretched men and women more than his dollars could do much." The old man's voice was low and anxious; he looked down into the child's face almost beseechingly.

"I cannot do much," answered Immanuel, meeting the look with one of full confidence. "But I can give what I have. Let us come down here to live, you and I, uncle; we can find a clean place near the school. It would not cost much—not nearly so much as that great house. We do not need so many servants, nor so much to eat, nor the carriage; we can walk just as we used to do. Will you, uncle? Oh, say that you will! I just hate that house; I have hated it for a month! It makes me sick to look at our table and remember the miserable pinched faces at school. If we live near them, uncle, we could do something to help, couldn't we?"

And Moses Armitage, mindful of that other lad who at twelve years of age was fain to be about his Father's business, could not say him nay.

CHAPTER XVII

De Profundis

AND now began a new chapter in this singular education of a capitalist. Moses Armitage had come to believe during his years of contact with the pure young life which had come into his keeping that as the man of Nazareth was sent into the world to seek and to save that which was lost, so also is every man sent forth from the All-Father. He perceived that the world's saviors must be many and powerful, that the seeking and saving must be carried on without pause. He beheld in imagination the child—the man, Immanuel, moving amid the unseeing multitudes carrying the Christ-light into the dark places of the earth.

And first of all these depths must be sounded. The boy must also come into some knowledge of his power and of the transcendent joys of saving his kind. To this end they did as Immanuel had proposed; they left the palace on the avenue and went to live among that class which has been so truly and terribly termed "the submerged."

"We will make friends with publicans and sinners," said Moses Armitage, as they looked about the plainly furnished rooms in one of the tallest of the new tenements in the region of Mulberry Street. And the boy understood his meaning.

At first this seemed an impossible task; filth holds

aside its skirts at the approach of purity, guilt eyes innocence with a frown, ignorance despises wisdom; but love is the talisman before which all barriers fall. In the course of a month the quiet old man and the handsome boy in No. 15 had passed through the successive stages of suspicion, curiosity and acquiescence to a point where the woman across the hall ventured to "borry a skillet off the purty b'y wid de big, black eyes."

This individual reported astonishing sights seen through the half open door: a geranium with red flowers, a tall white lily, a canary trilling in a gilded cage, snowy muslin curtains over shining sashes. Other and bolder visitors began to knock at the door of No. 15. Little Paulina Schmidt—crippled by falling through the fire-escape at the age of three—begged a couple of clothespins one day and came away with a picture book and an orange. After this event there was danger of a siege; the entire juvenile population of the tenement, amounting to some seventy boys and girls of varying nationalities began to hang about the staircase leading to No. 15. There were babies of course, but they didn't count, for they came as the invariable attachments to small, anxious-faced little girls who never seemed able to drop their burdens for an instant.

It presently became known that the roof of this particular tenement was open to the children. The like had never been heard of in Mulberry Street. After some cautious investigations by suspicious mothers the roof was voted a good thing. There was a high parapet on all sides, sheltered nooks for small babies, sand-piles, games, swings, picture-books and very

often mysterious heaps of apples and oranges, presided over by two smiling Salvation Army lasses, who also preserved order in marvelous fashion.

The boy from No. 15 was frequently to be seen there, playing quietly with the younger children. The old man too in his faded and shabby coat sometimes talked with the mothers of the babies. He even "minded" little Sally Baxter, while her mother went out to do her marketing with some small change borrowed of the aforementioned shabby old man.

When the warm spring days began to come, boxes of rich earth appeared—one for each child and labeled with the name of the owner. These boxes soon became the centres of a joyous activity; seeds were furnished by the Salvation Army lasses, who by this time had become justly popular in the house. These accomplished young women supervised the efforts of the youthful gardeners with their accustomed tact; the enthusiasm was unbounded, and the appearance of the first green shoot in Timmy Haskin's box was greeted by a shout that could be heard in the street.

The quiet old man and the black-eyed boy disappeared from No. 15 about this time. It was noised abroad, however, that the Salvation Army lasses would occupy their rooms. This intelligence was received with general satisfaction; these young persons could and would scrub floors, nurse sick women and babies, cook nourishing food, lend small sums of money, obtain tickets for sea and country excursions, mediate successfully between the inexorable agent and the distracted tenant, while conducting other industries too numerous to mention. In the stifling heats of July

they were replaced by two others as smiling and indefatigable.

Meanwhile Moses Armitage and his ward were pursuing their studies in sociology in other quarters. They moved often in these days, alternating weeks in some shut-in city court with short ocean voyages, or a sojourn in some cool mountain aerie. Wherever they lived in the city slums they were followed by stout cheerful women who devoted themselves to the interests of the women and children.

Messrs. Trent and Smalley frowned perplexedly over the demands of the now insatiable Moses Armitage. "He's making up for lost time, I should say," remarked Mr. Smalley after forwarding an unusually large check.

"The boy's growing up," replied Mr. Trent composedly. "Good thing, their leasing the Van Spuyten place."

"Humph!" growled his partner. "Do you know what they've done with it? Hicks is just back. I sent him down to see. They have filled the old historic mansion of the Van Spuytens with sick children from the New York slums. The Lorimer place near Boston—they leased that, you remember, in June—they've filled with sick children from the Boston slums! That's where the money is going!"

Mr. Trent threw back his head and laughed. "Our excellent client has never inquired very strictly into all the investments of the Armitage estate—eh?"

"No, the old fool! he couldn't touch them if he did!"

"There's a young fool coming on," observed his partner dryly; "and he'll know in good time that

something like half of the Armitage money is invested in those same slums—and a mighty good investment it is. Twenty per cent. on the original sum expended, and piling up higher every year!”

But the old fool—as Mr. Smalley uncivilly termed Moses Armitage—did find out the truth of the matter and in the following way. An interesting case had just been brought to his attention by a certain zealous agent in his employ; it was that of an English woman, widowed of course, who lived with her four children in two rooms at the top of a North End tenement. The story was perfectly commonplace. This particular widow, like thousands of her kind, had been engaged in an unsuccessful attempt to keep the wolf from the door with a needle. The tiny weapon had fallen from her fingers during a fit of sickness; the wolf had entered and was proceeding to devour.

Moses Armitage climbed the dark staircases of the tenement on an August day when the temperature stood 98° outside; inside, and under the low sloping roof of the attic room where the wolf had entered it might have been 120°. The widow sat propped up in a broken rocking-chair before her machine; one of her little girls was laboriously operating the treadle, anxiously obeying the motions of her mother's livid lips.

“When I am well,” she said, in answer to a question from the tall old man who stood in her presence with bared head—“I make overalls;— Yes, I suppose the man who gives me work is what they call a sweater. He pays me sixty cents a dozen pairs. If I work hard I can make five dozen pairs a week. Last week I only made three dozen; this week, I

don't know what I shall do. I cannot make my feet go. I cannot see very well. The agent was here this morning for the rent. I have nothing. To-morrow we are to be put out."

The woman gasped out these short sentences with a curious indifference as if paralyzed by her misery.

"Who is the agent?" demanded her visitor. The woman told him.

To relieve the immediate necessities of this case was an easy matter. Nevertheless the old man's heart was heavy as he made his way through the reeking halls and stairways to the street. It occurred to him dully that this building was more vile, more hopeless than many of its class. He resolved to find out the owner and beg him to do something to make the place habitable. Death was busy here in these dog days. The dingy white streamer, mutely telling of a child more fortunate than its wretched fellows was in evidence at one of the closed doors; the smothered sound of a woman's sobs reached him as he strode past. The task of ameliorating the ceaseless and horrible suffering to be found in every large city of America began to appear to him like the labors of Sisyphus. The roots of this gigantic evil of greed cropped out here in the sweating system, there in saloon and brothel, and yonder in the crushing competition of trade. How was one man to ~~see~~ his way through this impenetrable thicket of the world's miseries? he asked himself. The words of that One who spake as never man spake answered him out of the silence.

"My father worketh hitherto and I work." Truly if one but wrought in the power of that understanding all things were not only possible but assured.

From the agent who collected the rents of that tall, evil-smelling tenement he learned that the building belonged to the Armitage estate. "Fix it up?" quoth the agent. "No; I have my orders from way back. Besides the folks like it just as it is. They wouldn't keep it clean if it was fixed."

After this interview Moses Armitage made haste to acquaint himself with the list of securities in which the Armitage money was invested. "You will not, you are of course aware, be able to make use of more than the heir's allotted income in any case," Mr. Trent informed him politely. "As for repairing or rebuilding the tenements, we must tell you that it would not pay. This class of buildings forms an excellent investment—excellent, if properly managed. Our late esteemed client found them so; but his policy was to spend as little money on them as possible. We have endeavored to carry on the business of the estate according to his wishes, which is of course entirely right and proper."

Mr. Smailey joined in the conversation at this point. "It has been found impossible, my dear Mr. Armitage, to unite philanthropy with business," he said impressively. "And however worthy your aims, I must say to you that your course in regard to the education and upbringing of the late Mr. Armitage's grandson is open to considerable censure. May I ask if you regard it as wise or even kind, in the ordinary sense of the word, to subject so young a person to the contaminating influence of such places as, I understand, you have chosen of late as residences? Have you any right to give this young person's character such a peculiar bias that he will be positively unable to take his proper

place in the world hereafter? I put these plain questions to you, Mr. Armitage, in the most friendly spirit. You are an old man now, and I hope I may add without offense, that you have always been regarded as a man of the most peculiar views."

Moses Armitage glowered at his mentor from under his bushy brows. "Are you a member of the church of Christ, sir?" he demanded at length.

"A member of the church?" echoed Mr. Smalley; "Why certainly, my dear sir, I have belonged to the Presbyterian denomination for many years."

"Presbyterian be—hanged!" quoth the guardian of Immanuel Rossi. "Read the sermon on the mount!" With that he took his leave, and did not again darken the doors of his lawyer's office.

Notwithstanding the fervid protest of Messrs. Trent and Smalley the Armitage tenements were repaired, and as great a number of ameliorating adjuncts introduced as the income of the heir warranted. In order that the amount used for this purpose might be as large as possible, and also because Moses Armitage had been somewhat smitten in conscience by certain words of the lawyer, the two shortly disappeared from their city haunts, and on a certain warm day in the latter half of September found themselves once more ankle deep in the dusty blossoms of the mayweed before the little, half-forgotten house on the back hill-road.

The smiling valley, wrapped from the world's tumult by fold on fold of vaporous blue hills, stretched east and west beneath them. The crickets chirped pleasantly in the kindly light of the afternoon, the bees hummed about the weather-beaten hives.

"I am glad to be at home," sighed Moses Armitage. And Immanuel gazing up into the deeply-lined face—which was not so ruddy as in days past, nodded his dark head soberly. "I am glad too," he said.

CHAPTER XVIII

Alone in the World

LIFE in the house on the back hill-road went on after the old fashion. "I must rest awhile from the world and from people," said Moses Armitage. In pursuance of this end he relapsed for a time into his hermit ways, spending hours alone on the hills.

"If you have a problem to work out, my lad," he said to Immanuel, "carry it if you can into the country under the open sky. The soul more easily clears a breathing-space about it there than in the smothering world-fog. One needs elbow room and the sight of the Infinite overhead to realize that one is free from all man-made laws and conventions. There is but one law—thank God—which touches your life and mine, and that is the law of love."

By which it may be inferred that Moses Armitage had succeeded in finally ridding his mind of the ideas which the sagacious Mr. Trent had so laboriously attempted to implant. Subsequent attempts to mould the destiny of the Armitage heir which were made by this and other well-meaning gentlemen met with similar results. They were compelled to witness his education carried on after a fashion which they were pleased to term "suicidal." They watched his career in a certain university of note with a curiosity which slowly merged into unqualified contempt for the sole

survivor of the Armitage name. Immanuel Rossi was not installed in luxurious quarters; he was not furnished with unlimited spending money and a tacit permission to sow large crops of wild oats. Moses Armitage held with regard to wild oats that obsolete doctrine which has yet to be disproved, and which is embodied in the words of an ancient book: "Be not deceived, God is not mocked. Whatsoever a man soweth that shall he also reap."

The young heir to ill-gotten millions was modestly housed, soberly clothed and encouraged by frequent visits from his watchful guardian to hard study, not only of books but of men, not only of words but of thoughts, not only of things but of the eternal realities which lie back of things, and whose roots strike deep into eternity.

Vacations were spent in sociological researches along the old lines. The slums were still visited regularly. The two had made friends with publicans and sinners and the friendship was not broken as the years advanced. More than ever was the wise old man—termed also "that senile old fool"—convinced of this, that if a man would realize the highest ideal of humanity there is but one way—the way Christ Jesus, who came not to be ministered unto, but to minister.

During all of this period the little house on the back hill-road remained the Mecca to which the two came back at frequent intervals. While there they were simply "Ol' Mose Armitage an' the Winch boy 'at he 'dopted."

The country folk, who still stopped to water their horses at the trough by the red barn, guessed "'at Ol' Mose didn't git much prop'ty after all." There was



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certainly no sign of affluence visible about the place. A new roof there was, for the old one had become a leaky sieve, and a "hired man" who showed an astonishing knowledge of cooking and an equally astonishing ignorance of "chores." Aside from these slight indications of a competency, the simplicity of the life there remained unchanged. The tall clock still ticked from its corner in the living room, the sunshine fell an unbroken flood across the painted floor; the little round table became alternately a dining table and a study table as the hands moved on the white face of the clock. The honey was as fragrant as of old and the brown bread just as sweet to the un-cloyed appetites which came to it fresh from field and wood.

It was on the little farm that Immanuel Rossi developed a pair of shoulders, a depth of lung and a sheath of muscle which won him divers cups and medals in the "Varsity" field. He learned to plow and to cultivate, to sow and to reap, and on more than one occasion received flattering offers from neighboring farmers to "hire" for the summer months.

It was a request of this sort from a certain astute individual who had stopped to water his horse at the trough, that sent Immanuel Rossi to his guardian with a clouded brow. "What am I to do, anyway, uncle?" he asked, fixing his eyes anxiously on the placid face of the old man. "I must have a vocation of some sort, I suppose. I—I am different from the other fellows somehow," he added after a pause. "All of them have known from the first. There is Lorimer, he is to be a lawyer, Brenton a doctor; and so with all the others."

Moses Armitage looked at the young man with honest pride and joy shining in his blue eyes. Here was one who had never done anything to hurt either his soul or his body, he thought, as his glance wandered happily over the dark handsome head, the well-knit athletic figure, the clean-cut noble features. "Immanuel!" he said. "Immanuel!" Something unusual in his tone and look brought the young man to his side, an anxious question in his eyes.

"Immanuel," repeated Moses Armitage almost in a whisper; then he added, "God with us—yes, that is what it means, and that is what I want you to be to the world—a savior after the pattern of the man, Jesus, who gave himself and all his powers to the redemption of the lost."

"Yes, uncle," said the young man simply, "I shall always try to do that; but ought I not to have a profession—a business; one must be a producer of some sort." He stopped short and hesitated, then added with a half embarrassed laugh, "Si' Collins stopped me as I was coming up to the house. 'See yere, young man,' he drawled, 'ain't yer a-goin' to git down to work purty soon; thar ain't anythin' round yere to keep a feller like you a-goin' as you'd ought-to. You'd better come an' cut hay fur me nex' week; I'll give ye a dollar an' a half a day an' yer board.'"

Moses Armitage laughed. "Collins has a sapient eye for brawn and muscle, lad," he said, laying his hand fondly on the muscular brown one that lay on the other's knee. Young Rossi dropped his eyes to this caressing hand, then started and raised them questioningly to his guardian's face.

"Yes," said Moses Armitage quietly, "my hands

tell the story without words. I am an old, old man, my child; my days on earth are almost told. No—do not look at me like that; you will not be left desolate. You know by this time as well as I can tell you that your friend and guide is always with you. Then too, there are possibilities——” The old man’s head had sunken upon his breast; his eyes were fixed dreamily upon the wide prospect of the sunlit valley, flecked with drifting cloud-shadows. “I have come to see,” he continued in a low voice, “that the veil is very thin—nay, there is no veil; we are spirit—living the spirit life now as truly as we ever shall, and they are spirit—sent forth to minister. As we reach up through the silence we touch them in the thought world—we can hear their voices.”

He stopped short and recalled himself to the present with a visible effort. “But it was not of this that I wished to speak. The time is come when you must choose your course; but I have no fears for you; the pilot has been long at the helm.”

Then he told him all. The talk between them lasted far into the night, and when it was ended Moses Armitage kissed and blessed his adopted son, kissed and blessed him after the manner of the patriarchs of old. And when all was said he laid him down in his bed, the young man assisting him tenderly. “I am tired,” he said, and slept almost on the instant like a little child.

In the morning Immanuel, coming into his room in the rosy dawn, found the old man still asleep, a smile of unspeakable content on his features. As he bent over him he perceived that there was indeed no veil between the longed-for dead and that loving spirit.

Moses Armitage had entered into "the rest that remaineth."

The young man met his sorrow alone in the little house, as Moses Armitage had met his. But solitude and tender thoughts of the past could not hold him long; he must stoop his young shoulders to the huge burden of wealth which awaited them. Messrs. Trent and Smalley found little to criticise in the conduct of the heir to the Armitage millions during the long wearisome days when the necessary steps were being taken to establish him in his possessions. His questions were few and to the point; his comments brief.

At the conclusion of this period Mr. Smalley took it upon himself to administer some paternal advice on the management of affairs. "You understand, of course, my dear Mr. Rossi, that we are always at your service in every possible way. We have facilities, possibly of use to you, for the securing of a proper establishment. You will, we trust, wish to mingle with your equals in a manner—ah—as you have not been able to do heretofore, with a view—er—well, to put it briefly, you will of course wish to marry in due time. And—I hope you will pardon an old man for speaking quite plainly and bluntly; your late guardian was a man of peculiar views—very peculiar, but his opinions are not necessarily binding upon you. For example these eccentric ideas of his about the tenement properties,—very singular—very singular indeed. Both Mr. Trent and myself have regretted that you have been compelled to forego so many of the proper pleasures of youth on account of all this—well I may say this straight-laced and ——"

"You will pardon me, Mr. Smalley," said Immanuel

coldly, "if I decline to discuss my uncle's character with you."

"Oh, ah—pardon me; of course—perfectly proper in view of recent bereavement, I'm sure," began the lawyer fussily. "But am I to understand that you have become so imbued with your—ah—estimable guardian's views that you——" Mr. Smalley paused to cough interrogatively; but as his client preserved a frigid silence, he went on. "That—er—well, to be brief, may I ask what are your views regarding the—tenements—say?"

"I shall tear them down at once," said young Rossi briefly.

"What!" exclaimed Mr. Smalley. "But yes, yes,—you may be right! The frontage on Hester Street has become valuable for business purposes. You will put up office-buildings in their places—eh?"

"I shall build decent houses for the poor in the room of every one of the indecent rookeries that stand as my property," said the young man conclusively.

"But, my dear sir, I beg you to consider, just briefly, before you take this—ah—very disastrous step. You are probably not aware of the facts in the case; but I can make it clear to you in just one minute."

Mr. Smalley's pencil was exceedingly busy for several minutes; he then submitted to his client's attention a number of groups of neat figures. "Now this will just serve to give you a little insight into the matter of tenement investments," he said earnestly. "The income from the Hester Street houses as they stand, in spite of the depletion caused by late repairs and improvements, is twenty-two per cent. on the

original investment; *twenty-two per cent.*—do you quite understand me? You will readily see that no class of investments compares with it; it is a veritable gold mine! But to tear them down! Only consider the poor friendless families you would render homeless; where can they go?"

Immanuel Rossi smiled.

"And then, too," continued Mr. Smalley rapidly, "I can prove to you in ten minutes that the interest on the reinvestment which you propose would be but five per cent.—very possibly not over four, if you insist upon this—yes, I will say it, this exceedingly foolish and ill-advised step!"

"Government bonds yield but three and a half," observed the young man rising. "We will talk this over some other time, if you like, Mr. Smalley," he added kindly, as he noted the trembling of the old lawyer's fingers. "I shall do nothing unbusinesslike, you may depend upon it."

And with this scant comfort his legal adviser was forced to be content.

Busy months followed this conversation, in the course of which the heir to the Armitage millions discovered that the path of the rich man does not lie in green pastures nor by the side of still waters. He carried his point, however, in spite of the skilful opposition of his lawyers.

Before the first year had passed Mr. Smalley informed his partner that he would now wash his hands of the whole business. This was, of course, a mere figure of speech, as he manifested no intention of relinquishing his very lucrative post as legal adviser to the estate. "Old man Armitage wasn't a circumstance

to this obstinate boy," said Mr. Smalley plaintively. "When I remember how I advised the grandfather of this misguided young man with regard to tenement investments, and how eagerly he received my suggestions—why it was I who purchased those valuable blocks in Boston, acting as my esteemed client's agent. It was I who secured options on all the north and east side properties in this city which have since proved such a mine of wealth. And now ——"

Mr. Smalley's narrow lids reddened; he seemed actually on the verge of tears. It was Mr. Trent who suggested optimistically that it would take a long time to make a hole in such a huge property; and that after all it was only a matter of reinvestment at a lower rate per cent.

"But he might become one of the richest men in America—and that means the richest in the world," cried Mr. Smalley passionately. "Why, I spoke to him yesterday about a proposed combine which would inevitably double the property within five years; and what do you suppose he said?"

Mr. Trent shrugged his shoulders and smiled.

"If I didn't know better I should say that the fellow must be lacking in an ordinary amount of intellect," pursued Mr. Smalley gloomily. "He actually said, 'I don't wish to be richer, I intend to be poorer—much poorer in five years!' Now what do you think of that?"

Mr. Trent shrugged and smiled again. "Not perhaps very surprising in so young a person," he said guardedly. "He has not—we must remember—seen much of the world as yet. I believe the two of them lived once a month or so in the Van Spuyten house on

Fifth Avenue. But they didn't even catch a glimpse of society at that time. It has occurred to me that as our esteemed client is a very personable young man, possibly ——"

"Ah, I see what you mean!" interrupted Mr. Smalley excitedly. "Yes—yes, that's the idea! But I don't know how to bring it about; these cliff-dwellers guard their approaches pretty carefully." Mr. Smalley rubbed his hands and smiled complacently at his witty allusion to the impregnable heights of society. "I'm getting pretty well up the hill myself," he continued, "but we're outclassed when it comes to young Rossi. Now what I would like and what would be advantageous to certain law firm I have in mind, would be to see that he marry into one of these exclusive old families. To win such a wife as Miss Livingstone, for example, he wouldn't care about being 'much poorer in five years'—eh?"

"Much richer would be about the way of it, I imagine," observed Mr. Trent with a sagacious smile. Then he pursed up his lips. "I think we could get hold of young Livingstone by means of that Pan American Rapid Transit matter," he said in a lowered tone. "He's likely to get a pretty hard squeeze unless somebody gives him a lift."

Mr. Smalley nodded his gray head vigorously. "We'll do it," he said briefly.

CHAPTER XIX

The Kingdoms of the World

IMMANUEL ROSSI certainly could not have told how it came about; but in the course of a month he found himself in a new world, a world of luxurious houses, of brilliant assemblies, of clever men, of lovely women. This singular young man could have counted upon the fingers of one hand the women whom he had known in the course of his life, beginning with the dimly remembered features of Elizabeth Winch.

The new order of things had commenced with what seemed a casual introduction in the office of Trent and Smalley to a certain agreeable young man named Livingstone who at once claimed Rossi as an old acquaintance.

"It was at Cambridge, don't you know?" said this young gentleman by way of explanation; and he recalled a half-forgotten class reception at which young Rossi had figured modestly. "But of course I didn't know then," was his somewhat infelicitous addendum.

"Know what?" asked Immanuel Rossi with simplicity.

"Why—er, that you were one of us—a New Yorker, I mean," said the other with caution inspired by a warning twitch of Mr. Smalley's grizzled eyebrows.

"I am not a New Yorker," said young Rossi, smiling pleasantly; "but I'm glad to meet you." He made some inquiries concerning one of his college professors, which led quite naturally to an invitation on the part of the other to lunch at the club.

An invitation to dine *en famille* with this quondam college acquaintance followed in the course of a few days, and a month after that young Rossi's modest mantelpiece held as many billets of invitation as that of any reigning belle. He was "in society," and the marvel of it all was that he didn't know it. The opening of that ponderous door had been so noiseless that this favored squire was actually unaware that it had opened—or indeed that it existed at all!

He thought Livingstone, his new acquaintance, was uncommonly kind, and that Livingstone's friends were uncommonly kind also. They were. This simple-minded young person was quite right in his opinion on this point.

That he was already a marriageable *parti* of rare eligibility, looked fondly and hopefully upon by the mothers of the charmingly pretty and clever young women he was constantly meeting, he did not know. Of the fact that a number of his millions were tentatively invested in a Newport villa, in a Fifth Avenue palace and in jewels, horses and carriages galore, he was also unaware. An army of workmen were by this time engaged in building a huge fireproof tenement block on Hester Street planned on the latest lines of philanthropic research and including every possible attraction to impecunious tenants of every nationality.

It came about quite naturally in the course of time that while his mornings were given to the hopeful

study of new plans, or to the private secretary whom he had been forced to call to his assistance in the disposal of the thousand and one claims of the world at large which poured in upon him by every mail, his afternoons and evenings were passed with his new friends. Messrs. Trent and Smalley beamed with quiet satisfaction in these days. Young Rossl was at a loss to understand the sudden change in their demeanor. He concluded in his innocence that these worthy Christian gentlemen had been converted to his view by the tangible success of his new ventures.

"It is quite certain that the rentals will return fully six per cent. on the investment," he said hopefully to his legal advisers. "I have made up my mind to invest not only the bulk of my money but all net profits in buying up and rebuilding bad tenement properties." He further confided to Mr. Smalley his grand ambition, which embraced the actual doing away with the slums in every great city of America. "I cannot hope to accomplish this great task by myself," he added modestly; "but of late I have thought—I believe that I can interest other capitalists in the work."

Mr. Smalley smiled and adjusted his finger-tips after his old judicial fashion. "You will, I do not doubt, succeed in interesting large amounts of capital in your project," he said enigmatically. He did not see fit to inform his client that plans were already on foot to run up a row of "skin tenements," brave with brown stone trimmings and glittering brass work, just across the street from the costly Armitage building. "Let him try his experiment," quoth the sapient Mr. Smalley, in the privacy of his sanctum. "Our philanthropic young friend will find that the laboring classes

prefer the old style of living, and his big 'model tenement' will soon be the laughing stock of the city. It may be money; well spent in the end."

Miss Margaret Livingstone was very much interested in Immanuel Rossi's plans to ameliorate the condition of the toiling millions. She assured him of this on more than one occasion. Miss Livingstone was a flawless product of American civilization. She was handsome of course, with that clear-cut, finished type of beauty which associates itself particularly with faultless Parisian gowns and equally faultless manners. It was impossible to imagine Margaret Livingstone's brilliant eyes as filled with tears; it seemed equally impossible that emotion of any sort could unbecomingly ruffle the perfect poise of her personality.

"I have just finished reading the cleverest, most dreadful story of life in the London slums," said the young woman; this when Immanuel Rossi was taking her out to dinner one night. "The book is named—very smartly I think, after that old English ballad, 'Sally in our alley.' I quite had the shivers after reading it. Have you seen it?"

Mr. Rossi said that he had not. He added that he had himself seen enough of life in the slums to give him perpetual shivers if nothing could be done to help.

Margaret Livingstone lifted her clear, gray eyes to the handsome dark face upon which rested a transient cloud, the result of his own words. "You think all this is wrong," she said with a wave of her graceful hand toward the softly lighted, flower-decked table they were approaching. "Yes, I know you do; I have heard all about your devotion to the wretchedly poor;

Mr. Trent knows papa very well indeed." Miss Livingstone paused while the two seated themselves at table.

"I wonder if you have thought," she went on, laying her white fingers on the knot of violets which nestled in her corsage, "what the result would be if we who can afford these so-called luxuries—flowers, costly gowns, laces, jewels and all the thousand and one extravagances, if you will, that go to make life beautiful and harmonious—if we should give it all up; would not a wail of distress rise from the vast army of florists, merchants, jewelers and the vaster multitude which stand back of them with pick, shovel and machinery?"

Immanuel Rossi gazed in silence at the beautiful face of the speaker; he was thinking that it was strange that she should have hit squarely upon the question which had been vexing him that very day.

Miss Livingstone flushed prettily under the prolonged scrutiny of the brown eyes. "I suppose we are all selfish good-for-nothings," she murmured; "but do not look at me so severely, please!" She dropped her own eyes till the long curling lashes rested upon the soft oval of her cheek.

"I don't mind telling you, Mr. Rossi," she went on in a low voice, "that I am awfully unhappy thinking about it all sometimes. Yesterday I saw such a wretched, white-faced woman carrying a huge bundle; she was waiting at the crossing where Winters had pulled up almost at the curb to avoid a tangle of cars and trucks. I could have touched the poor creature with my hand as I sat there. I'll tell you what I did, though I know it was very foolish, but I just couldn't

help it; I took off my violets and gave them to her. I suppose a five dollar bill would have been more to the purpose; but I think I couldn't have offered her money."

The young man's sensitive face flushed with pleasure. "I think it was a beautiful thing to do," he said, bending toward her. "It is love that they want—love and sympathy. If you ——" He stopped short, becoming suddenly conscious of the interested eyes of Miss Livingstone's mother who sat opposite. Just what those watchful eyes conveyed in the lightning flash of a guarded glance he could not have told, but it sufficed to check the impulsive words that lingered on his lips.

Margaret Livingstone both saw and understood. She shrugged her white shoulders with a little thrill of displeasure. "I saw the outside of one of your wonderful new tenements yesterday," she said, after a pause. "I am going to ask you to take me over the place some day. I'm something of an architect myself, you know."

"No, I did not know; tell me about it."

"All the girls in our particular coterie selected a profession one day last winter—we don't want to be frivolous. Maud Ascott is a lace-maker, she has learned to do exquisite work; Sally Merrill over there is at the head of our sewing guild; she knows how to cut and fit aprons and gowns as well as a seamstress. I hate to sew and that, so—don't laugh, please; papa and Robert aren't done making sport of me yet—I said I would be an architect. I have found it perfectly fascinating. I am going to build a cottage at Long Point this summer. Of course I don't expect that any one

will ever trust me with anything important; but I can play at being useful."

The shade of sadness in the exquisitely modulated tones of the speaker was not lost on the impressionable young man at her side. "I want you to see my tenements," he said eagerly. "You will perhaps be able to suggest something that hasn't been thought of for the comfort of the women and children."

"But this—this building of yours—is nearly finished, is it not?" asked Miss Livingstone nonchalantly. "That is the way with you men, you pretend to ask our advice, then, for such excellent reasons, you are unable to follow it."

"But I am going to build others," he said quickly; "this is only the beginning of my work. I assure you that any suggestions will be eagerly accepted."

An inscrutable expression, half satisfaction, half vexation, dawned in the listener's gray eyes. "Thank you," she said simply.

She was wondering if she really wished to attempt the management of this very singular young man. He was undeniably handsome, of a courtly manner, and enormously rich. Yes, there could be no possible doubt on that most important point. But —

Immanuel, misunderstanding her silence, made haste to add, "If you will tell me what day you would like to see the building, I will arrange the matter to your liking."

"Thank you very much," said Miss Livingstone sweetly. "I shall be sure to remind you of your promise."

When the first warm days of early summer brought about the accustomed exodus of fashionable society

from the city, young Rossi found himself thinking one day with singular intentness of the empty house on the back hill-road. As he stared absently out of the window at the sombre front of the brownstone dwelling opposite, his inner vision opened to the prospect of the wide blue valley, of the still purity of the lonely pine woods, of the gush and sparkle of the untiring spring by the old red barn. Bird voices—the far yearning cry of the meadow-lark, the delicious gurgle of the bluebird, the ecstatic love song of flitting bobolinks sounded in his dreaming ears.

“The wild roses will just be coming into bloom,” he told himself. “And the bees will need somebody to hive the new swarms.” A homesick longing for a sight of the kind, wise face of his guardian came strongly upon him. With the longing mingled a sudden doubt of his present course. He remembered with shame that of late he had failed to keep the old-time tryst with his invisible Master. Often he had overslept after an evening with his new-found friends; there was need of haste in the shortened mornings. So many letters, so many men, with “important business” written all over their unsmiling faces, awaited him. How could one find a “silent hour” in the midst of unending tumult? he asked himself with an impatient shake of his broad shoulders. “I will get away from it all,” he decided; “and see if I can get my bearings a little more clearly. Bronson can look after things in town for a time.” He arose with a sigh of relief and was on the point of communicating his intention to his secretary, when Mr. Robert Livingstone was announced.

“A beastly warm, muggy morning,” drawled that

young gentleman, wiping his heated brow. "This heat and humidity combined is something insupportable, isn't it? I say, you aren't looking very fit, my dear young friend; and that leads me quite naturally to the second point in my discourse, so old Simpkins would put it. Sis' and the mater have departed for Newport this morning, and your humble servant sets sail on The Gull at tide-water this afternoon. You are going with me. Not a word to the contrary, if you please. Your beloved tenants must be pretty well settled by this time after all the concessions you've made; and I perceive that your philanthropic nag needs a cool stable if you don't want him to drop in his tracks before he has crossed the line. Come, it's too deuced hot for eloquence; you'll have to turn the hose on me if I get much more fervid in my hospitality!"

"I am going up the country for awhile," said young Rossi, with unsmiling gravity.

"What country?"

"Up north," replied the other evasively, as he studied the toe of his boot. "I have a little place up there; a—farm, I thought ——"

"Good Lord! man, don't tell me that you're going into fancy farming on top of all the rest!" groaned Livingstone, comic despair pictured on his round, good-natured face. "We'll have you on the town yet, see if we don't. By the way, Sis' intrusted me with a communication for your hand; I had nearly forgotten it, just as she predicted."

Immanuel's face flushed eagerly as he opened the envelope with a muttered apology, whereat his observant visitor hid a smile in the depths of his pocket-handkerchief.

The words of the communication in question were brief but cogent. "Dear Mr. Rossi (he read) have just heard of the most wonderful idea for a tenement block. You doubtless know something of Sir Joseph Barron, the distinguished architect who planned the famous Victoria Square in Liverpool. He is stopping at a neighbor's for a few days. I hope you will let Robert persuade you to join him this afternoon, that you may have an opportunity of meeting Sir Joseph, and listening to his most interesting plans, which I unfortunately am too stupid to fully appreciate. Mother joins with me in the hope that you will come. Sincerely, Margaret Livingstone."

"Well," said Robert Livingstone lazily; "did the enclosed contain a clincher?"

"I will go with you," cried young Rossi, with an enthusiasm which caused the other to wonder at his simplicity.

CHAPTER XX

Two Voices

DURING his drive to the dock that afternoon, Immanuel Rossi found himself very much occupied with a spirited discussion which he seemed compelled to carry on with some unseen but persistent being, who strongly disapproved of his decision. Young Rossi did not stop to question himself as to the nature of the intelligence which thus interested itself in his personal affairs. Who of us does? Call it what we will—conscience, intuition, the subliminal self, or one from out the “cloud of witnesses” who loves us—we have all heard the voices. This particular debate if reported would run something as follows:

“Why did you not stand by your determination to go to the farm?”

“Why should I go to the farm; there is nothing for me to do there.”

“Yes, there is something there for you to do. You are on the wrong road. You must get back to your Master.”

“But I am going to Newport especially to see Sir Joseph Barron; I wish to consult him about the Pearl Street building.”

“You are going to Newport to see Miss Margaret Livingstone.”

"Well, what if I am; she is very much interested in my work."

"She is very handsome; but what has she done for the poor?"

"I—don't know exactly; she gave her violets to that poor woman, for one thing."

"Yes, and stopped at the next florist's for a fresher bunch."

"I don't believe it; but if she did she helped the florist that much."

"You are seeing things through the wrong pair of eyes. Stop and telephone young Livingstone that you cannot go with him."

"No, I will not. I am going."

This seemed to close the matter; and the young man feeling vaguely sore and discomfited presently joined his friend with an eagerness which was again the occasion of a quiet stare and a suppressed smile of amusement. "Sis' has bagged her game all right, I reckon," was Livingstone's mental comment on the unwonted tone and manner of his guest.

There was enough of excitement in the process of going on board and the subsequent getting under way to silence unpleasant voices. Immanuel Rossi leaned back in his cushioned chair on the white deck of the yacht with a sigh of relief. Indeed he presently found himself wondering how he could have conceived of such folly as a sojourn in the lonely little hut on the back hill-road. He definitely labeled it "hut," smiling with kindly tolerance at its unpainted, weather-beaten walls, its unpruned lilacs and its environing tangle of mayweed, as he drew in deep breaths of the salt air, and bared his hot forehead to the keen wind which was

tossing up a bevy of sparkling white-caps on the blue waters of the Sound.

"You look like another man already," observed his host genially, as he dropped into a chair at his side. "There's nothing like sea air for sweeping the cobwebs from a man's brain."

Rossi agreed with him unqualifiedly. He even added to the statement by declaring that sea air was vastly better than country air.

"Well, I don't know about that," said Livingstone lazily; "I'm awfully fond of the country myself. We must have you up in the Berkshires with us this fall; it's simply immense in October." After a pause, he added with studied indifference, "Did you tell me your place was up that way?"

"No," said the other stiffly. "But—I may buy a place there before long." He said this with a curiously defiant air.

"I don't see why you should not, old man," smiled Livingstone. "I'll show you a snug little cottage at Newport that's in the market just now for a song, if you're interested in real estate."

"I am interested in real estate," said young Rossi determinedly. After a little he burst out, "Where did you get this boat, Livingstone? It's a perfect beauty; I think, I believe——"

"It is one of old Herreshoff's build," replied his host, concealing his astonishment under an excessive devotion to his cigarette. "If I were you though, I believe I'd have a steam yacht; they are more useful. If you want to take a run to the other side for example, you can go in your own boat. I haven't any use for the liners; one might as well be on a Brooklyn ferry—"

there's no privacy. The Jacksons invited Sis' to go abroad with them this summer; but she had vowed she would never sail again on a liner. It's so beastly common, don't you know."

Immanuel Rossi was deep in another discussion with that troublesome voice. He silenced it this time by saying, "But I tell you I can do both; I have enough. There's one big block finished and another one going up. I've spent money like water; and there's no satisfying the people; they want the earth. But I'll go on with it; I mean to."

Aloud he remarked on the fact that five of his tenants had left that morning to go into the fair but specious apartments just across the street from his mammoth and expensive building. "I've already made the rents so low that they return but three and a half per cent.," he said with some show of irritation; "to say nothing of a band concert in the central court every week, a swimming bath, a banking and loan office, and any number of other things; I've spared nothing."

Livingstone laughed outright at the expression on his guest's dark face. "You're learning your little'a-b abs' all right," he said easily. "I could have told you all this and more six months ago; but I saw you didn't want to hear, so I let you alone. You ought to talk with Green—Whitey Green we call him; you've met him at the club—. Well, Whitey got it into his fat head one day that he'd be a philanthropist; he vowed it was a dashed shame to grind the face of the poor under the iron heel of capital, and all that sort of thing. He gleaned his ideas from the yellow dailies with a lot of other rot about the awful wicked doings of the

multi-millionaire. Now Whitey's defunct papa owned a couple of blocks of the rankest tenements you ever laid your eyes on. They actually smelled to heaven; I went over them one day with Whitey, and saw some rummy sights, I can tell you. Our kind young friend went to work with all the enthusiasm of his years; pulled down the old barracks and in so doing let loose on a suffering community something like thirty billions of cockroaches and an equal number of other unnamable bugs—I saw them myself walking mournfully up Broadway looking for quarters." Livingstone paused to light another cigarette, and Immanuel filled in the silence with an uneasy laugh.

"The Green tenements were simply immense when they were finished," continued Livingstone with a grim smile; "there were stationary tubs, sanitary plumbing, bath-rooms, and all the modern improvements. Whitey was charmed; he couldn't talk about anything else, and nearly bored his unfortunate family into untimely graves. At the club we finally got to the point of breaking into a groan at the word sanitary from Whitey's mouth. It was all finished in course of time, and the toiling masses took possession, bag, baggage and bedbugs; Whitey said he thought his tenants ought to be grateful to him for his forethought and interest in them. You can bet they were. In less than three months he was taking out the remnants of his improvements. His intelligent tenants had found the superfluous woodwork first-class material for kindling; pipes and faucets were proved to possess a spot-cash value at the junk shop; the stationary tubs and baths were excellently adapted for general garbage receptacles. Oh, it was a three-ring

circus to see poor Whitey in those sad days! We had respect for his grief though, and didn't lacerate his wounded sensibilities by unkind recriminations. But if you want to know just the sum total of tenement-house depravity, draw Whitey Green into a conversation on the subject."

Immanuel Rossi was staring fixedly at the green shore; he did not reply.

Livingstone eyed his troubled face curiously. "Of course Whitey was guilty of one big blunder which you haven't made," he observed at length. "He reckoned on the gratitude and intelligence of his tenants a trifle too confidently, and didn't have a competent janitor in charge. I'm told your system is perfect."

"It's a terrible question though," said Immanuel, half to himself. He scowled as he said it and shrugged his shoulders with a slight shiver.

"Come inside awhile, old fellow, and we'll have a mouthful to eat," cried his host, springing to his feet. "It's a question which you and I are not called upon to settle at the present moment, thank heaven!"

Margaret Livingstone, charming as a wood-nymph in an expensively simple gown of white relieved with touches of pale green, was the first to greet the young men on their arrival. Her slim hand, cool and soft like a flower, lingered for just an instant on Immanuel's while she murmured, "Behold a penitent! M. Rossi; I have such a disappointment in store for you that I hardly know how to tell it."

Young Rossi looked down into the gray eyes uplifted to his and said so nearly what any other of the gilded youth of her acquaintance might have said, that

the young lady was almost shaken from her admirable poise for an instant. "I am at this moment far out of the reach of any disappointment whatever, Miss Livingstone."

She noticed that his dress was beyond criticism, and that his manner was quietly masterful.

"It's awfully good of you to say that, Mr. Rossi," she said with a little laugh. "But when I tell you that Sir Joseph Barron was recalled to England by an urgent telegram this very day, why——" The brilliant eyes were shadowed with wistfulness. "Of course," she went on, with a little impulsive gesture like that of a troubled child, "I should never have thought of asking you to waste your precious time on us; I thought—I believed that you would be glad to meet so eminent an authority on the tenement question as Sir Joseph."

The young man smiled down at her. "What will you think of me if I tell you that I am content to forget the tenements for awhile?" he asked in a low voice. "There are other things—a man must live his own life."

He said the last words in the defiant tone which Livingstone had remarked on board the Gull.

"Do give the poor fellow a rest on the slums, Sis'," advised that young gentleman fraternally. "I know you're considerable of a crank on the subject; but one can't eat, drink, and sleep tenements every day in the year, don't you know. Short periods of relaxation are necessary to health and spirits." He winked openly at his sister at the conclusion of this speech, with a laugh which to Immanuel seemed apropos of nothing.

"How foolish you are, dear Robert," cooed Miss

Livingstone. "I know I am tiresome about my poor people sometimes, but Mr. Rossi is very kind and sympathetic."

"Mr. Rossi wants to go over the Mills-Satterlee place to-morrow," said Livingstone, "so don't distract his mind from a gilt-edged real estate investment with any pathetic yarns about consumptive sewing-girls."

"Are you really going to buy that place, Mr. Rossi?" she asked, with a surprise which was no less charming because entirely unaffected. "It is quite the prettiest cottage in Newport, I think."

She blushed becomingly after this little burst of enthusiasm, and withdrew to a position behind mamma's chair, which was now occupied by that most gracious of *grande dames*.

No guarded or questioning glances from the maternal eyes disturbed Immanuel Rossi on this occasion. He was made to feel in a thousand delicate ways that he was at home. And to be at home in a Newport cottage is a pleasant experience.

Young Rossi found it increasingly so as the days flew by. He looked over the Mills-Satterlee property, and after an unpleasant little confab with that teasing voice, which clamored loudly against his decision, wrote to his lawyers instructing them to purchase the place for him. Mr. Smalley replied by return of post, congratulating his client on seizing so favorable an opportunity of securing a valuable investment. He added that all realty was temporarily depressed, and named a most desirable city residence upon which he strongly advised him to secure an option without delay.

Young Rossi read this letter on the shaded breeze-

swept veranda of the Livingstone cottage one morning; then he put it in his pocket and strolled across the lawn to the spot where Margaret Livingstone in pink and white gingham and a fetching garden hat was clipping the half blown roses from a hedge of hybrid perpetuals. Her basket was heaped with the flowers, and her face, as glowing and pure in tint as the roses, was lifted to his with a bright smile of welcome as he approached.

"Mayn't I hold the basket?" he asked; "or shall I cut the roses?"

"I have enough, I think," replied the young lady. "I am going to arrange them in the summer-house; you shall come and help, if you like."

An array of bowls and vases filled with water awaited them in the little octagonal rustic building, which commanded a charming view of the sea through its vine-wreathed windows, thrown wide this morning to admit the fresh ocean breeze.

"I have bought the Mills-Satterlee cottage," said the young man without preamble—this when the two were seated at the table.

"I must congratulate you," replied Miss Livingstone, selecting with care three or four magnificent crimson roses and placing them in a slender cut-glass vase.

"That is, I have told my lawyers to secure it for me," explained young Rossi. "They are obstinate fellows sometimes—lawyers, I mean. I've had lots of fights with mine already."

Miss Livingstone smiled by way of reply; she was fully aware of the subject of the disputes in question.

"It was over the tenements," he went on, watching

the slim taper fingers as deliciously white and pink as the buds they were coaxing into a nest of cool green leaves. "I've a lot of tenements, you know; and some of them are shameful dens; uncle fixed them up as much as he could, but they're slums yet!"

"Do the buildings make the slums; or do the people who live in them?" asked Miss Livingstone, raising her eyebrows. "It seems to me that it is almost as impossible to make those places permanently better as it would be to introduce a new style of sanitary den for wild beasts. Every individual exudes his own environment, you know, just as the little woolly caterpillar on the leaf does.—That's Emerson of course; I'm not clever enough to have said it. But we are what we make ourselves, are we not?"

Immanuel, looking earnestly at the flower-like face opposite him, was at once led to think with a curious thrill of the fair white soul within the angelic mould.

"We certainly are," he said musingly. "'As a man thinketh in his heart so is he.'"

Something in the familiar words brought so sudden a cloud over the expressive face of the speaker, that Margaret Livingstone went on with a little tremor in her voice. "Must we, because other people are reaping horrible crops of crime and suffering—from their own sowing, mind—must we refuse the rich harvest of our own wiser choices?"

If the fair Margaret had spent some irksome hours in studying these ecclesiastical phrases which came so trippingly from her well-cut lips, Immanuel Rossi was not the less impressed by them. "How clearly you put it!" he cried admiringly. "You must have thought deeply on these subjects."

Miss Livingstone's curling lashes drooped. "We women have so little share in the world's work," she murmured, and raised her white lids to display a sparkling tear in each gray eye. "We can only think and—suffer!"

Immanuel Rossi leaned across the rose-strewn table, his dark face alight with unmistakable motion. "Miss Livingstone," he began, "I——"

"Hello! Here you are at last," exclaimed a drawling voice at the window, and Robert Livingstone's sleek head was thrust through the breezy opening. "I've a telegram for you, Rossi; been looking the place over to find you."

Immanuel read the message without ceremony. "I'm sorry," he said, rising, "more sorry than I can tell you, but I must go in to the city at once."

"No bad news, I hope," said Livingstone civilly.

"No—and yes," said the other. "My secretary wishes to see me at once about some matters I left in his hands."

"How tiresome!" cried Miss Livingstone, a trifle sharply. Then she turned to her guest with a slow, sweet smile. "But you will return?"

"I shall return—certainly; that is, if you wish to have me. I fear I've made an unconscionably long visit already." The young man's manner was somewhat perturbed, and he spoke the words almost mechanically.

"I fancy you would rather have had me make my appearance armed with a landing-net than with that telegram—eh, Sis'?" laughed Livingstone in his sister's ear, as their guest hurried away across the lawn.

"Don't be any more vulgar than you can help, Robert," said the young lady coldly.

"Of course you are not, strictly speaking, a bud any longer, with six seasons to your account; but luckily our singular young friend yonder is not aware of the fact."

"Robert, I just *hate* you sometimes!" cried Miss Livingstone, with an unbecoming flush of anger.

"Tut—tut! my child, you mustn't forget your rôle so easily," drawled Livingstone. "She's a female philanthropist just at present, that's what little Margaret is; and she is filled to running over with the sweetest sympathy and affection for all mankind. Surely her erring brother ought to come in for a share of it."

Miss Livingstone's sole answer consisted in a vanishing switch of pink and white drapery as she darted up-stairs and into her own room.

CHAPTER XXI

Called Back

WHEN Immanuel Rossi reached New York at the close of a sweltering June day he betook himself at once to the most expensive hotel he knew and proceeded to dress and dine with deliberation. Afterward he dispatched a messenger with a summons to his private secretary, Richard Bronson.

That young gentleman was shortly ushered into the presence of his employer. "You sent for me, sir?" he said with an air of surprise.

"Of course; I wished to ask an explanation of this singular telegram of yours," replied Immanuel curtly. The mystified and troubled gaze of the other impressed him most disagreeably. It was almost insolent, he told himself.

"Why, you said ——" stammered the private secretary, with an uncomfortable access of color. "You told me that you wished to be summoned at once should anything of moment arise in connection with any of the tenements. I am sorry if it inconvenienced you, sir; but ——"

"Why did you not write?" demanded the other.

"You—you mentioned telegraphing, I believe, sir," said young Bronson. "I ——"

"What is it all about anyway?" broke in Immanuel. He was angry; and what was worse he was angry at

himself for being angry. Why had he not remained in Newport and demanded an explanation by wire. This stammering, blushing young fellow was not fit to be his deputy. He had taken him from the Young Men's Christian Association, on the recommendation of Phipps, the secretary. Phipps was well enough in his place, but he, Immanuel, had begun to see things from a different standpoint.

"From whose standpoint do you look?" suddenly demanded that teasing *voice* again. It had been silent for days, but now it spoke with a louder, more insistent note than ever.

Young Bronson was talking now, eagerly, rapidly. Immanuel forced himself to listen. "It is the block on Baxter Street. I could not write all; and I thought you would wish to see—to understand. There are thirteen hundred tenants, you remember; yesterday Biggs—Dr. Biggs of the State board of health called to see you. He says it ought to come down at once. It has become thoroughly infected with tuberculosis."

"With tuberculosis?" repeated Immanuel dully. "But how am I going to help it? It is the people; they are filthy. It is they who infect the buildings. Besides I cannot afford to build another block this year."

"From whose standpoint are you looking?" again demanded that inexorable voice.

"Two weeks died there last week," went on the secretary in a low voice. "Many of the children have tuberculous swellings in their throats. There have been more than two hundred fatal cases in that block alone in four years."

"I will consult my lawyers with regard to the matter," said Immanuel coldly. "There is other property——" He stopped short; what business was it of Bronson's? "You may go now," he concluded sharply. "And stay, do not telegraph me hereafter when you can as well write. I shall probably return to Newport to-morrow."

"But Dr. Biggs wished particularly to see you, sir," ventured young Bronson, fixing his aggrieved and astonished eyes on his employer's hardening face. "He was so pleased with the Hester Street building. He has a very practical suggestion to——"

"But I have already told you that I return to Newport to-morrow, my good fellow," said Immanuel, endeavoring to conceal his sudden dislike for this very *gauche* young man who ventured to show his disapproval so openly. "You may tell Dr. Biggs that I will attend to the Baxter Street block at my earliest convenience. There might be some whitewashing done there—— Yes, you may order it done at once."

"There was another matter, sir."

"It will have to wait, I fancy; I have an engagement this evening. You are always at liberty, remember, to turn over puzzling cases to Mr. Smalley; he will look to them."

He watched the door close on the retreating form of Bronson with a sigh of relief. "What a tiresome chap he is," he said aloud. "I must get rid of him at once."

"There are some other things to be gotten rid of first," remarked *the voice*. The young millionaire twisted uneasily in his chair. "I might as well have it out first as last," he said angrily. "I will not be tormented this way always!"

"No, you will not," agreed *the voice* solemnly.

"What then?"

"What then?" echoed *the voice*.

"I shall do as other people do, enjoy myself and spend my money as I like. What business is it of mine that these wretched creatures are reaping the consequences of their own wickedness?"

"Be not deceived, God is not mocked; whatsoever a man soweth that shall he also reap," quoted *the voice*.

"That is just what I was saying," cried Immanuel triumphantly; "let them take their medicine."

The voice was silent. Immanuel smiled. Then he leaned forward in his chair. It was as though a curtain had been suddenly rolled up before his eyes—the Godlike eyes of the soul, which see past, present and future. This was past—long past. The scene was a low-ceiled room, sparsely furnished but clean. A young woman stood by the door, her head bent as though she was listening intently for some distant sound. She was beautiful, but her face wore a piteous look of mingled hope and despair; but hope was dying and despair terribly alive. She started back with a faint cry at sound of a step outside the broken door.

"It's only me, me dear; no, there ain't no letter, but maybe it'll come in the morn." The speaker, a big-boned Irish woman, was patting the sobbing figure of the younger woman on the shoulder.

When had he heard those voices? How was it that he recognized with a sickening shock the exquisite, woebegone face of the young woman? "My God!" he groaned, "it is my mother! I—I had forgotten!"

"It is well to remember," said *the voice*.

He saw the same figure again, but dimly through the swirling flakes of a cruel storm. On and on he followed it, through the storm and the night. He saw it fall and rise again, and fall. It was creeping now like some wounded animal. There was a door. It yielded to the feeble touch. And now Immanuel Rossi knew the place well enough.

"It is Winches' barn," he whispered. Elizabeth's kindly face looked out of the darkness; her eyes beamed upon him as in the old days. "'Manuel," she said tremulously, "I'm yer mother as fur's lovin' you's concerned; but you've got another mother 'at loves you jest as much as I do, an' more; she's wth you all the while, times 'at I can't be."

"Are they not all ministering spirits sent forth to minister?" asked *the voice*.

Immanuel hid his face in his hands; but the eyes of his soul still saw, and the ears of his soul heard. He saw himself sitting alone on the haymow, the dusty sunshine shedding a halo of golden light about the lonely little figure. Once more he listened to The Presence which abides in every human soul, unchanged and unchanging from infancy to old age—the great *I Am*.

He seemed now to hear the words of the Book, read in a voice which had lately passed into the silence. "What agreement hath the temple of God with idols? Ye are the temple of the living God; for God hath said, I will dwell in them, and will walk in them, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean

thing, and I will receive you, and will be a father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty."

It was not yet daylight when young Richard Bronson was awakened from an uneasy dream to find his employer standing at his bedside. He rubbed his eyes with a fresh access of amazement when he perceived that Immanuel still wore the evening clothes in which he had last seen him.

"Has—has anything happened?" he inquired anxiously.

"Yes," said Immanuel; "something has happened. I was out of the way when you saw me last night; I have gotten back by the grace of God. On the table outside you will find an order for Thomson. The Baxter Street block must be vacated and pulled down at once. Thomson will see to it. I am going away; my address is with the order."

He had disappeared before the mists of sleep were fairly scattered from young Bronson's eyes.

At noon that same day a dusty traveler paused beside the gurgling drip and sparkle of the moss-grown trough on the back hill-road. He drank deeply and cooled his face and hands in the delicious water—looking away over the smiling valley, and up to the wooded crests beyond. "I will stay here," he said, "and let God's millions work in that accursed city."

There was plenty of hard work to be done on the neglected little farm. Immanuel dug, cut weeds, repaired fences and cleaned rusted farm implements in a kind of dogged fury. It appeared to him that the hard-wrung drops of perspiration were in a measure cleans-

ing; that through them he might in some way attain peace.

After a time a violet-tinted note bearing the Newport postmark reached him in his solitude; he did not trust himself to read it, but buried it unopened at the foot of a giant oak. Nevertheless he answered it.

"I must tell you," he wrote, "that I have been carried far away from your world by a power that I would not resist, if I could."

Margaret Livingstone knitted her perfect brows over this strange communication for some moments. Then she carried it to her mother.

"He has probably lost his money," said that lady astutely. "Papa says that he has withdrawn his offer for the Mills-Satterlee cottage."

Miss Livingstone shrugged her handsome shoulders. "Only fancy!" she cried, "I might have accepted him!"

"You would have broken the engagement of course," said mamma. "But," she added piously, "I am truly thankful that no such entanglement occurred."

And so the matter was dropped until Mr. Livingstone, senior, chanced to mention at dinner one night, the fact that young Rossi was fast becoming the talk of the town.

"What has he been doing, pray?" inquired his wife, with a veiled glance at her daughter.

"Making a big fool of himself, Trent tells me," replied Mr. Livingstone curtly. "The fellow won't have a cent in ten years if he goes on as he has begun. He's buying block after block of the best tenement property in the city at ruinous prices and replacing them with costly buildings that won't bring in three per cent.!"

"He's a beastly crank," remarked young Livingstone conclusively. Then he fixed his sister with a basilisk gaze. "Little Margaret doesn't seem quite as much interested in the toiling masses as she did earlier in the season."

"It is possible that I discovered the facts in the case before you did, my very wise brother," answered the young lady returning the look with interest.

"We couldn't have thought of such a thing under the circumstances!" twittered Mrs. Livingstone in her comfortable staccato. "I must say to you, Robert," she continued majestically, "that I wish you to be more careful in future as to whom you introduce into the family circle. I am told on very good authority that this young person was of no family whatever, and that his mother was actually buried as a pauper!"

Young Livingstone shrugged his shoulders. "That's all true enough," he said; "old Pickle Armitage cut his daughter off without a cent because she married a clerk or something of the kind. But I'm surprised to hear you say anything about that, honored mamma."

"Robert!" thundered his father.

"Humph!" ejaculated that young gentleman disrespectfully, "who cares if dear defunct grandpapa was a butcher? He's buried handsomely. It would have been highly suitable for Sis' here to have wedded beef to pickles; they always go well together!" Having delivered himself of this telling shot in full hearing of the butler, he strolled away, regardless of the voiceless indignation of his injured family.

CHAPTER XXII

A Lucrative Situation

"**W**HAT you need, pa, is a good, strong, young fellow to jes' take a holt right along; ain't that so, Em'line? I tell pa they ain't none of us as young as we wuz once, but the work hes to go on jest the same." Mrs. Scott pushed away her coffee cup with decision, and adjusted her spectacles.

"I guess that's so, pa," assented Emeline, smilingly. The years had wrought little change in her broad good-natured face, but her substantial figure had gained in girth as had the fruit trees and maples in the front yard. "an' me's a-goin' to p'serve cherries to-day, air. 'y?" she added irrelevantly.

The slim woman seated near the window did not lift her eyes from the page she was eagerly reading. All three of the others turned to look at her, a fond smile upon their faces. She was a sufficiently pleasing picture in her pale blue gown, the broad light from the unshaded window bringing out marvelous tints of pearl and rose and gold as it rested on her bowed head.

"Hildy's company, Em'line," said Mrs. Scott indulgently. "I don't guess she wants to stain her hands all up with cherry juice, do you, Hildy?"

"I'll help as soon as I get through with this story," murmured the girl, shrugging her shoulders. "I like to pick cherries."

"I guess there's somebody a livin' in ol' Mose Armitage's house," remarked Emeline, gathering up a handful of cups and carrying them across the room. "I saw the door was standin' open yesterday."

"It's the young feller—I allers forgit his name," explained Mr. Scott, as he busily packed tobacco in his corn-cob pipe. "I seen him as I come from the post-office las' night. 'What you doin' nowadays?' I says to him. He ain't no great shakes of a farmer, I reckon, any more'n ol' Mose was. 'I'm tryin' to git the farm in some kin' of shape,' he says. 'Well,' I says, 'I guess ye'll find it pretty hard sleddin' for a spell. The land ain't been cultivated to speak of for nigh onto forty years.' He looked at me so kind of flabbergasted 'at I like to ha' laughed in his face. 'I guess I kin git my livin' off it,' he says."

"Why don't you ask him to help you out with the hayin', pa?" asked Mrs. Scott. "He's a big strong-lookin' chap. Land, it 'ud be a real kindness!" she added; "you could teach him how to farm in no time. I don't s'pose he knows wheat f'om barley!"

Mr. Scott puffed meditatively at his pipe. "I guess I'll go out t' the barn," he ejaculated, after a long pause.

An hour later he might have been seen making his way 'cross lots toward the Armitage farm. A blue-shirted figure rising and falling with some sort of laborious motion betrayed the whereabouts of the young hermit.

"Gosh-te-whack!" muttered the farmer. "If the young fool ain't a-spadin' his four acre lot!"

"You seem to be tol'able busy this mornin'," he remarked with cheerful diversion, as he came to a standstill beside the rail fence which divided the two farms.

"i like to see folks industrious myself," he went on, "but I mus' say I hate to see 'em a-wastin' time. Why don't ye plough, man? You won't git no crops here till kingdom come at this rate."

Immanuel looked up and nodded without speaking. He was fighting a fierce devil of discontent with the first weapon that had come to hand.

"I've been a thinkin' 'bout your case, young feller," pursued Mr. Scott with dignity; "an' I've talked it over with my wife. I ain't so young as I was once, an' I ain't had much luck with hired men lately. I'm too blamed pertic'lar Mis' Scott says. What do you say now to kinder joinin' forces, you an' me; I to supply the brains, so to say, an' you to supply the muscle. You ain't got no stock, I notice, an' prob'ly no money to buy it with; an' of course ploughin's out of the question without horses. I've got horses, an' I've got ploughs an' harrers, *an'* knowledge; that, I take it, is what you're a lackin' wo'st of all."

He paused and looked keenly at the young man's flushed face. "Don't say 'no,' till you've thought it over," he added. "I'm an honest man, an' I ain't a plannin' to take undoo advantage of ye. We'll cultivate the two farms equal, an' divide the crops acre for acre. As fur livin' you c'n eat to our house; there's plenty of room thar and plenty of victuals; it don't strike me as bein' sensible fur you to be livin' alone the way you've set out to do. 'Course you'll be gettin' married arter a spell, but whilst you're a lookin' 'round fur a likely gal as 'ull cook yer victuals tasty and slick up yer house, you might's well keep up yer sperits with some of ma's cookin'."

"You are very good to have thought of me at all,"

said Immanuel, with a grateful look into the old farmer's kindly, rugged face. "I—I will think the matter over, and let you know at once."

"Take yer time—take yer time, young man; *my* crops is pretty well under way. You'll have to put this 'ere lot into turnips, I reckon, an' leave the rest in grass till fall. But there ain't any better corn land anywheres 'an the slope of that hill yonder. I tol' your uncle so more'n once; but the ol' gent'man was kind of cranky 'bout farmin', an' bound to have his own way. Wall, guess I'll say good-day; you know whar to fin' me."

Immanuel Rossi stood still and watched the slouched figure of the farmer as it strode away across the fields, his cheerful whistle floating back on the morning breeze. Then he looked down at the patch of roughly dug earth at his feet and laughed aloud. "I'm not much of a man on the back hill-road," he said to himself. Then his thoughts wandered to a certain lawyer's office, and Mr. Smalley's dry, sarcastic tones sounded in his ears. "Your knowledge of finance, Mr. Rossi, might be increased to your great advantage." Now Margaret Livingstone's gray eyes looked at him with sweet, questioning gravity. "Do the buildings make the slums, Mr. Rossi, or do the people who live in them?" He had not answered her; he could not.

"I might begin with farming," he said aloud. "It is well to know something for certain—if it is nothing more than how best to dig a turnip patch."

The next day he visited the city. "Is there anything I can do to further this work?" he asked the architects who were laboring on the plans for his new blocks.

"We should be glad to have your approval of the

changes we have indicated," replied these gentlemen.

"Is there anything more?" he asked again at the expiration of an hour spent in looking over the plans.

"Hum—ah, no. In fact the work will go on very well without your presence. If you should wish to be absent for a year or more we think you would find everything to your mind on your return. Our international reputation is at stake in this matter, Mr. Rossi; you may depend upon us implicitly."

He went out after a while and stood at a distance watching the demolition of the terrible old Baxter Street block which had numbered its victims by hundreds. "The money is working," he thought with some bitterness; "but the man is not wanted."

That evening Mr. Si' Scott, smoking his pipe on the front porch of his comfortable farmhouse, received a visitor. "Ben thinkin' it over—eh?" he inquired with a chuckle. "An' how goes that 'ere turnip patch of yours; got yer seed in yet?"

"I am anxious to work," replied Immanuel gravely. "I have therefore decided to accept your offer for the present."

"That's where you're smart!" ejaculated the old farmer. "You'll do well to stick to it. This 'ere rollin' stone business ain't good for young folks, an' that's what the matter! Ain't that so, Hildy? Hildy, here's Mr. — What'd you say yer name was? Blamed if it don't go in one ear an' out the other ev'ry time. Immanuel Rossi—heh? Suppose I make it 'Manuel fur short; that'll come handy in the pertater field, I reckon."

The young girl bowed coldly in acknowledgment of

this curious introduction. She was dressed in a pink muslin gown, and her pale gold hair rose in a fluffy aureole above her white forehead to meet a coquettish bow of pink ribbon. She seated herself at some distance from the two men and fell diligently to work on a strip of intricate lace crocheting.

"I don't s'pose you remember us folks," her grandfather was saying, with the obvious purpose of putting an embarrassed guest at his ease. "Mother an' Em'line was talkin' it over this mornin'; I'd clean forgot it myself. I tell ye it ta' the women-folks to remember! You was a little s' higher 'an my knee, ma says; an' Hildy her 'an't more'n five. She'd run away in the strawb'ry medder yonder, an' Em'line found her a-settin' thar an' eatin' your berries as cool's a cucumber. 'I'm a-goin' to keep him to play with, gran'ma,' she says. Do ye remember that, Hildy? My, if she wa'n't a little skeesicks! Kep' her gran'ma a-trottin' lively! I don't guess you rec'lect, do ye, young man?"

Immanuel glanced at the girl, who lifted her blue eyes with a little frown of annoyance. "What stories you do tell about me, gran'pa," she said daintily. "I'm sure I don't remember anything of the kind."

"You'd have to have a bigger head 'an you've got to remember a quarter o' your didoes, girl," chuckled Mr. Scott, fixing his eyes expectantly on Immanuel.

"I remember it very well indeed," he said, falling in with the old man's humor. "I had run away, and was making for the top of the big hill there; luckily for me, Miss Hilda succeeded in convincing me that there was nothing worth going for. She also furnished up my manners a little, otherwise I fear I

should have failed to say 'yes'm' and 'no'm' at the proper intervals."

The girl regarded him with a shadowy smile. "I think I do remember," she said slowly. "You ran away again, and I cried." A faint color crept into the fair cheeks as she drooped her head over her work.

"Our Hildy's here on a visit," went on the old man garrulously. "She's been livin' to hum sence her pa married again. She's a great scholar, Hildy is; her pa's give her plenty of schoolin'—more'n enough, I tell him. Readin', writin', an' 'rith'm'tic's a-plenty for women-folks. Let 'em spen' the balance of their time in larnin' how to mak' the men-folks comf'table, I say!"

Immanuel interrupted this copious flow of opinion by asking to look over the farm. He had already been visited by vague misgivings as to the wisdom of his course; that these misgivings had their rise in the girl's blue eyes, he did not guess. It occurred to him, however, that life was after all curiously alike, whether lived in a Newport villa or a back-country farm. Absorbed in these meditations he scarcely heard his new mentor's exposition on the relative merits of timothy hay and red clover for winter fodder, though he returned affirmative answers whenever a pause and upward inflection seemed to demand.

"Gosh-te-whack, man! You don't mean that, I guess!" cried his host.

"Mean what?—I beg your pardon; I fear I did not follow you."

"You seem to have some book-larnin' I take notice," said the old man crustily; "but book-larnin' ain't everythin', an' it ain't no airthly good to ye ef you let

yer wits go wool-gatherin' all the while. I kin' of mistrusted you wa'n't lis'nin' so I asked ye if ye thought it was a good idee to let the stock into the vegetable garden of a mornin', an' you says 'yes.'" Mr. Scott paused to let this telling shot sink home, then he said pleasantly, "Wall, young folks will be young folks, an' I guess it's better so; but ef I was you I wouldn't let Hildy's pink cheeks distract yer mind f'om more useful things. She's a mighty uppish little piece, Hildy is."

Immanuel assured his employer gravely that he would remember his warning; he also intimated that he understood the delicate hint conveyed in his concluding words.

"Sho!" cried Mr. Scott, with some embarrassment, "I ain't proud, an' I don't want you should think so fur a minute! They ain't no better man on God's airth 'an a good, honest farmer, an' I know it! But a man's got to know his biz' mighty well to take care of any woman—an' don't you forgit it. An' thinks's I Hildy wouldn't care no more'n a kitten unwindin' a ball of yarn; but it wouldn't be so 'greeable for you to git the mitten come fall. Hildy's pa thinks she's the hull thing f'om a to izzard. He calc'lates she'll marry his partner's son. He's in the tin-roofin' business, my son-in-law is; he ain't much use fur a man that works with his han's."

The young man made no reply; he was again reflecting on the solidarity of human opinion.

"I'll give ye plenty to think 'bout," Mr. Scott was saying briskly. "Hayin' 'ull begin to-morrer mornin' at five-thirty sharp."

Immanuel wrestled long with the veiled angel of his future that night. Before he slept he had settled cer-

tain matters with himself once and for all. "I will earn my living as a man among men," he said. "The money which killed my mother shall bind up as many wounds as may be."

The little farm, he remembered, was his honestly. It would serve as a halting place for the nonce while he was deciding on the day's march. This month and the next he would study farming; after that—well, there was the law, medicine, theology. He strove to imagine himself engaged in any one of these callings, but without success. He determined at last to let the slow current of the days bring him to some haven of decision. To the yellow-haired girl who had once wept childish tears over his absence, he gave not a single thought.

Hilda Wilde on the contrary had already spent several very agreeable hours in weaving a harmless web of fancy about the stranger. This young person had passed the twenty years of her life amid the more or less humdrum surroundings of her native town. To her stepmother she owed the doubtful habit of irradiating the dull round of village duties and amusements with the transient lustre of romance.

"I'm a great reader," the second Mrs. Wilde was in the habit of affirming complacently. "Give me a good book, an apple and a rocking-chair, and I don't care whether school keeps or not!"

This lady lived strictly up to her convictions; she rocked in a cushioned chair and devoured apples and cheaply-bound novels, over which she laughed and cried, through the greater part of ten years. At the end of this period she passed through an experience of her own which laid her beside her predecessor.

Her stepdaughter, Hilda, now graduated from the village academy found herself practically her own mistress, and heir to a vast collection of story-books, a taste for which she very speedily acquired. The sight of his pretty young daughter in tears over a yellow-backed novel in the very chair wherein his late wife had rocked and read her days away, roused John Wilde to a vague indignation. He was aware that the sight had stirred his choler to the depths; he did not care to investigate the cause of his emotion too closely. It might prove disrespectful to the memory of the dear departed. Being a man of action he contented himself with commanding the girl to make ready at once for a visit to the country. But paper-bound romances travel cheaply, and the shaded porch on the back hill-road was a delightful place to read.

With a fancy thus educated it was little wonder that Hilda Wilde should find Immanuel Rossi's dark face and tall athletic figure an object of interest. "He looks exactly like that lovely Sir Reginald Minton in the 'Revenge of the Duchess,'" she told herself. "And I am sure he does not speak like a common farmer."

She regarded her reflection in the truthful mirror with pleasurable interest; an oval face delicately colored, red lips parting to reveal a row of small white teeth, a fluff of yellow waving hair; blue eyes darkly shaded. These charms, she decided, compared very well indeed with those of her favorite heroine. Of the sleeping woman's soul that lay behind all this shifting, dazzling play of color she was as profoundly ignorant as is a playful tigress cub of the meaning of the curved and shining talons, lengthening day by day within its soft baby paws. An instinct which she

neither questioned nor resisted presided over her morning toilet, and brought her to the breakfast table at dawn with a face like Hebe's.

"Law, Hildy, whatever brought you out of your bed this early?" demanded her grandmother. "You ain't used to eatin' at sun-up."

"I like to get up early sometimes," replied Hilda; she looked around the room with an inquiring expression, which presently gave way to a decided pout.

"We're a-goin' to begin op'rations on the ten acre lot this mornin'," her grandfather was saying. "Say, ma, it's a goin' to be all-fired hot to-day, an' that young feller, 'Manuel, ain't used to workin' as I'll put him through; guess you'd better send down a jug o' molasses water long 'bout ten o'clock. Em'line can fetch it."

"I've got to churn this mornin', pa," objected Emeline mildly. She glanced doubtfully at Hilda as she spoke. To her surprise that young person offered her services with alacrity.

"You'll fetch the molasses-jug—eh!" cried Mr. Scott, with a wink at his wife. "Jest hear that, ma! An' wa'n't it only las' week 'at you couldn't feed the pigs to save yer life."

Hilda thrust out a saucy lip at her grandfather. "Feeding pigs is different," she said.

"Now, Hildy, don't you be a-settin' your cap at that young feller," said the old man, wagging his forefinger oracularly. "I've warned him agin you."

"You've done what!" cried the girl, blushing angrily.

"Why, pa," ejaculated Mrs. Scott reprovingly, "I wonder at ye!"

"Wall," grumbled Mr. Scott, "he's as poor as a church mouse fur one thing, an' don' know nothin' 'bout farmin' fur another. I want Hildy should leave him be, that's all."

"I declare to goodness, pa, you've got about as much sense as mos' men-folks!" murmured Mrs. Scott in an indignant undertone, as the girl left the room. "An' that ain't 'nough to put on the pint of a cambric needle! You've jes' gone an' put the notion into her head now. Land, I remember once when we was all children pa and ma was goin' to spen' the day at the county fair. It was, 'don't do this,' an' 'don't do that,' an' 'be sure you remember the other,' till I was mos' crazy. I was the oldest. The las' thing jes' as they was drivin' out the yard, ma, she turns 'round an' hollers out, 'Myry, Mvry, don't let the children put beans up their noses!' They was all standin' there an' listenin'. Hadn't one of 'em ever 'maged sech a thing; but I declare to goodness if both the boys didn't try it that very afternoón whilst I was feedin' the chickens! We had the doctor a-working over 'em most o' the next day. It was a lesson to *me*, I remember. Idees is like seed; ef you don't want 'em to grow, don't plant 'em."

"Oh, bother!" quoth Mr. Scott disrespectfully. "I guess I'll go out t' the barn."

CHAPTER XXIII

Under the Hickories

IT seemed to Immanuel Rossi that he had never tasted a more delicious draught than the mixture of molasses, home-made vinegar and spring water which a very demure little maid poured for him out of the old stone jar. She looked the picture of coolness herself as she stood in the shadow of the hickories. Her blue and white dress took to itself translucent shadows against the background of green grass, her face in all its delicious tints of pearl and rose glowed flower-like under the broad white hat.

If one has learned to be a lover of fresh young blossoms, of white drifting clouds, of dancing depths of blue water, of slim, graceful shapes of young tree-bodies, of the evanescent, innocent beauty of kittens, lambs and children one can hardly look upon a fascinating embodiment of these varied charms without some pleasurable emotion. And if that practiced observer of nature's lovely ways be a man—and young—his heart is likely to give an extra beat or two when he beholds such a specimen of nature's handiwork as the shade of the hickories enfolded.

Hilda's brown curling lashes made the prettiest shadowy half moon on her flushed cheek that can possibly be imagined; her little pearly ears peeped out from an ambush of shining airy rings of the most ex-



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quisite shifting color. Immanuel Rossi's brown eyes took in these details with the same pleasure he would have experienced had the berries been four instead of twenty. At least he would have said so if cross-questioned on the subject.

"This is the strawberry meadow where I found you that day," said Hilda, dimpling. "It was down by the brook yonder."

She had put her Aunt Emeline through an exhaustive examination on the subject the evening before; and it had struck her as being every whit as delightfully romantic as the first meeting of Lady Mary Fitzwilliam and Lord Derwent in "The Gipsy's Warning" which she was at present perusing.

"It was over by that big stone," she continued. "I saw you sitting there and waded right through the brook with my new shoes."

"I was looking at the valley," said Immanuel, "and listening to the meadow larks; I remember thinking that your voice sounded like a bird's when you asked me for my berries."

"I fear I was very selfish," cooed Hilda sweetly; "for I ate them all."

She raised her blue eyes to his as she said this, with such an amazing depth of soul looking out from under the long curving lashes, that Immanuel Rossi was surely not to blame for instantly concluding that the dread sin of selfishness had never clouded this white life.

It is somehow exceeding difficult for the average male human to discern the true excellence and worth so often hid beneath an ugly exterior. Had Hilda Wilde been possessed of small squinting orbs of

vision, shaded by scant stubbed lashes, those eyes might have mirrored forth never so heroic a soul and it is safe to say that neither Immanuel Rossi nor any other man would have discovered it.

"You were surely not so selfish as I," he said gravely; "I had run away without a thought of the misery I was causing."

"You are thinking of poor Mrs. Winch," murmured the girl. "Aunt Emeline says she will never forget her face the day she stopped at the farm. She had found your hat by the roadside, and thought you were dead." Hilda repented the last words as she saw the cloud which swept over her listener's face. The tall stooped form of her grandfather was coming toward them across the field. "Grandmother told me to ask you to be sure to come to dinner to-day," she said hastily. This remark drew the brown eyes once more to her face.

"I am going to make the cherry pudding myself. I can make such delicious ones!" Her dimpling face betrayed such a pretty girlish pride in the womanly accomplishment; the pink deepened so bewitchingly in the soft cheeks like the unfolding of a mysterious rose of life, that Immanuel found himself smiling down at the pretty cup-bearer.

"I shall certainly come," he said, and turned rather shamefacedly to meet the quizzical look of the old farmer.

"Gittin' cooled off?" inquired Mr. Scott. Then without waiting for a reply, "I'll take a cup of your hayin'-drink, Hildy, then you can run along an' help yer gran'ma."

A slim, blue and white figure flitting through

patches of shade and sunshine and disappearing at last behind a clump of blossoming locusts could have had no possible connection with the "long, long thoughts" which Immanuel Rossi was indulging in the hay-field. It certainly occurred to him as he laid the long fragrant swathes beneath the July sun that there was no reason why he should not find happiness as did other men. He remembered with satisfaction that Hilda's blue eyes had seen in him only the owner of a few barren acres on the back hill-road. To work as a man, to love as a man, to live as a man, and not as that monstrosity called a millionaire, appeared to this very singular young person as supremely desirable.

It was perhaps because of these thoughts that the plain dinner, served in the farm kitchen, had so exquisite a savor.

"Hildy made the puddin', gran'pa," said Mrs. Scott, beaming with hospitable satisfaction as she cut her guest a generous slice.

"My—my! Hildy must have quit her readin' for quite a spell this mornin'," chuckled the old man. "What with fetchin' the jug to the medder an' all."

"Do you like to read, Miss Hilda?" asked Immanuel, regarding the girl with a new interest.

"Yes," she murmured, dropping her long lashes.

"Our Hildy's a great hand for story-books," observed Mr. Scott, passing his plate for a second slice of the pudding. "What was that las' one—'The Phantom Weddin', wa'n't it? Say, that's a great book; I read pretty nigh a chapter of it myself. I guess Hildy 'ud lend it to you, if you like story-books, 'Manuel. Wouldn't ye, Hildy?"

The girl flushed uneasily under Immanuel's inquiring eyes. "I don't think it is so very good," she murmured faintly. "But of course I am willing to ——"

"I have a great many books at my house," said young Rossi gravely; "perhaps there is something on my shelves better worth the reading than the book you speak of. I will bring you one to-morrow, if you like."

"Shol I'd clean furgot 'bout Ol' Mose's books," said Mr. Scott. "He was allers settin' 'round over a book. I s'pose you've got 'em all; but I wouldn't advise ye to waste yer time on 'em, 'Manuel. Books ain't any good 'xcept to pass away the time when ye can't do anythin' else. The weeds don't let up growin' day ner night; they git the start of ye quicker 'an greased lightnin'."

Hilda was loitering in the shade of the hickories that afternoon when Immanuel passed out of the ten-acre meadow with his scythe on his shoulder.

"I didn't thank you for offering to bring me a book, Mr. Rossi," she said with a pretty air of timidity. "There aren't many books at gran'pa's, and I do like to read."

"I will bring you something, certainly," said Immanuel. "What shall it be? biography, travel, poetry or—I am afraid there aren't many story-books. You like stories, don't you?"

Hilda had not listened to the lectures of the high school principal for nothing. She stole a shy glance at the strong, thoughtful face bent toward her. "One shouldn't read stories too often," she said primly. "You may bring me—bring me something you think I would like."

Oh, artful Hilda! This young man then, weary with a long day's toil in the hay-field, must stand before his uncle's bookcase thinking what you would like. He must learn to weigh things in this new balance, and his lesson shall begin with the books on the worm-eaten shelves of the shabby, old house.

The next day Miss Hilda graciously offered to assist her Aunt Emeline in the gathering of the currants. Mrs. Scott had already appeared, armed with a six-quart tin pail. "Now, gran'ma, dear," cooed the girl, "it's too hot out here for you; isn't it, Aunt Emeline? I can pick ever so fast, and we'll be through in no time!"

"Well, I don't know," began the old lady doubtfully; "I would like to mend father's overalls."

"I guess you might as well go on," said her daughter mildly; "me an' Hildy c'n ten' to the currants. Hilda's gettin' real helpful lately."

Miss Scott presently found herself working alone, while Hilda, comfortably ensconced in the shade of a big gooseberry bush, concentrated a fire of questions upon her worthy relative's somewhat wandering faculties.

"Don't you think he's handsome, Aunt Em'line?"

"Who you talkin' 'bout, Hildy?" inquired Emeline, glancing doubtfully at the graceful figure in its attitude of indolent ease.

"Why, I mean Mr. Rossi; he isn't a bit like a common farmer, do you think so?"

"I don't know," said Emeline mildly; "I never thought nothin' 'bout it."

"He talks exactly like our minister's brotner, Lemuel Barclay; he visited in our place last summer.

He'd just graduated from college, and he was awfully smart. Say, Aunt Em'line, where did Mr. Rossi go to school?"

"I don't know, child, he never lived 'round here much. We never knew what they was doin'."

"Where did he live the rest of the time?"

"In the city mebbe," said Emeline. "They did used to say his uncle had money left him, but I guess that was a story. When you goin' to pick currants, Hildy?"

"In just a minute. Do you suppose he's been to college?"

"Why, land! how should I know? I'll ask him if you want I should."

"No, don't do that; I don't believe he'd like that. I can find out some day. But don't you think it's funny that he should work for gran'pa just like a hired man?"

"Land, no! Everybody does that by spells; the ain't nothin' to do on his own place but plough. Pa's goin' to take a holt there after a spell an' get things to goin'."

"Did you ever go inside his house?"

"Why, no; come to think I never have. Ol' Mose Armitage was kin' of queer 'bout most everythin'. He never neighbored with anybody much. I remember mother went to his wife's fun'ral; but that was years ago."

"I wish I could see it," said Hilda plaintively.

"See what? Fur the land's sake, Hildy, I do wisht you'd go to work at these currants! I guess I'll have to call mother."

"No, don't; I'm going to help in just a minute.

Wouldn't it be fun, Aunt Em'line, for you and me to go over there after supper! I want to take that book back that he brought me; I don't like it a bit."

"Why, I don't know," hesitated the older woman; "I guess there ain't much to see."

"Well, we can take a walk up the road after supper anyway. You'll go with me, won't you, Aunt Em'?"

"I guess so, if the currants is picked; I've got to make my jell this aft'noon, to-morrow's bakin' day."

Hilda sprang up and her slim fingers were busy among the bushes for awhile.

"Aunt Em'line," she murmured faintly, at the expiration of perhaps five minutes; "do you mind if I go in now? It makes my head ache to stoop over."

"I guess the sun's too hot fur you, deary," said the other tenderly. "Go in an' rest, Aunt Em' c'n pick 'em all right."

At sunset that night as Immanuel rested on the porch of his lonely little house he heard the sound of voices wafted toward him on the evening breeze. There was a snatch of song, sung in a light, clear soprano, then a trill of laughter sweet as the song of a homing bird. He leaned forward and peered through the barrier of dusty lilac leaves. There were two figures coming up the road, the sunset light at their backs; one was broad and ungainly, gowned in lilac calico and topped by a flapping sunbonnet; the other slim and graceful, the long, level rays of light kindling an aureole of glory about her uncovered head. He sprang from his chair and went out to meet the two women.

"Isn't it a lovely evening, Miss Scott?" he began, addressing the sunbonnet with due respect.

"Yes, I guess so," replied the lady with mild quer-

ulousness. "I've been makin' jell 'most all day, an' I'm tired 'nough to set still; but Hildy here was d'termined on——"

"It was so beautiful out of doors that I couldn't stay in," cried the girl, with a warning squeeze of the fat arm linked within her own.

"What you a-pinchin' me for?" murmured Emeline crossly. "I was jest sayin' that you was set on——"

"Won't you come in and rest awhile, Miss Scott?" asked Immanuel hospitably. "It is quite a walk from the farm."

"I don't know as we'd ought to; I ain't 'tended to the milk yet, but I s'pose Hildy ——"

"Of course we'll go in, Aunt Em'," said the girl, with a mischievous laugh. "We want to see Mr. Rossi's housekeeping."

"Oh, as to that, Miss Hilda," said Immanuel, "I fear you'll be shocked at the disorder. I am not a practised hermit as yet."

Hilda's bright eyes wandered curiously over the quaint interior of the old room, where Moses Armitage's benign presence seemed yet to linger. "Why, it's—it's real pretty," she said at last. "If there were ruffled muslin curtains at the windows, and——" She stopped short with a vivid blush. "I brought back the book," she concluded.

"And did you enjoy it?" asked her host somewhat perfunctorily. He was absorbed in the picture the girl made as she sat by the empty hearth in a high-backed chair. He wondered vaguely what Moses Armitage would have thought of this young rosy creature.

Hilda flashed a displeased look at her questioner. "What if I did not like it?" she asked.

"Why then I must try again; or stay, you shall choose for yourself."

To select a book from a crowded shelf is a most becoming task for a pretty woman. It brings into play such charming attitudes of a slim virginal shape; little rounded wrists and slender fingers gleam white against the sombre-backed books; blue eyes upturned in earnest thought shine jewel-like. One must be assisted too in the choice. Insensibly Immanuel's dark head bent closer to Hilda's golden one; his voice fell into an intimate murmur as he showed her his own old favorites, read to the tune of pattering summer showers, or the wailing of winter winds.

Miss Emeline Scott's faded eyes rested kindly upon the pair. Her feet were aching cruelly; she dreaded the long walk home. "I guess we'd better be goin' along, deary," she remonstrated mildly; "mother, she'll be wonderin' where we be."

"In just a minute, aunty," said Hilda, without turning her head. "This was the one you liked so much—'The King of the Golden River'? Yes, I am sure I should like it too. It is a fairy story, is it not?"

"It is a wonder tale—yes," said Immanuel. "But it is a parable also. I shall be curious to know what you think of it. I was always ready to go on my knees to Ruskin to write more stories after I had finished it."

Hilda had some vaguely disagreeable associations with the name of the author. She fancied it might be connected with the tiresome study of "literature," in which—thank heaven—she had "passed" long ago.

Her blue eyes told nothing of all this, however. "I've always been so fond of Ruskin," was what she said with enthusiasm. Then fearing lest this unguarded remark might lead to embarrassing consequences in a further conversation, she turned to her aunt with a pretty little air of obedience. "Now, aunty dear, we'll go; I'm so glad you're rested!"

CHAPTER XXIV

Summer

DURING the long, sweet days of midsummer Nature worked steadily on towards the perfecting of all things visible. There was also forethought for other years. Myriads of creatures lived and loved that in days to come there might be other myriads to carry on the vast cycle of existence. Life unending, undying, manifested itself anew in countless grass blades, in innumerable leaves; every blade and every leaf the home of a higher creation that knew itself only as Love swayed it.

Immanuel understood nothing of the force which had laid hold upon him. He only knew that the problems and questions which had tortured him in the past seemed to have withdrawn themselves into infinite distances. The blue-rimmed valley was filled with a joyous tranquillity. It would perhaps always be summer; he would always work with his hands, his mind at peace with all the world. That he should have given his millions to the service of the toiling wretches in the foul city yonder appeared to him the veriest commonplace. What was money? Could money buy a single hour of this deep-bosomed summer?

Hilda Wilde was very far from being a finished coquette—save in imagination. Neither did she in the least resemble the supernaturally lovely heroine of

modern fiction, she who is wont to unite under an exterior of dazzling beauty all the loftiest qualities of human kind. Our poor Hilda was simply a very foolish and ignorant little maid whose conquests had been easily won among the apple-cheeked schoolboys of her native village.

It could not be truthfully affirmed that the young farmer who labored in her grandfather's fields filled out in any particular the extraordinary outline which Miss Hilda had sketched from a composite likeness of the various heroes of romance. He had no "style," she decided; and his serious ways puzzled her. But the relative value of lovers must be reckoned like all else fleeting and uncertain under the sun. One man in the hand, so to speak, is worth two in the bush. Immanuel Rossi could be set down under the first category; he therefore took precedence for the moment of a tolerably long list of youths who had for a longer or shorter period occupied the narrow niche of Hilda's maiden fancy.

In voluminous letters addressed to her "most intimate friend," Miss Wilde alluded to the young man as "perfectly fascinating." "I am sure there is some *deep mystery* about him," she declared—not in the least believing that there was. "He is certainly *very* good-looking, Amelia; his eyes are brown and they look *right through* one, and they are *so* expressive and melancholy. Do you remember the description of Ethelbert Montmorency in that sweet story, 'The Fatal Ring'?" His eyes are *exactly* like *Ethelbert's*. He is ever so much taller than Jack Snider, and has *such broad shoulders*. Grandfather says he is the strongest man he ever had on the farm! I think I hear you say,

'A common hired man!' But he is *nothing* of the kind, my dear; he is *very well educated* and has positively read *everything*. He owns a large farm next to grandfather's, and the *sweetest* little house. With ruffled muslin curtains at the windows and a few sofa pillows and embroidered things it would look *perfectly dear!* Of course I am not thinking of him in that *serious* way! But I am sure I should *die* in this stupid place if there was not *some one* to help pass the time. Papa says I am not to come home *till September!*"

Some wiseacre has said that in spite of old-time notions to the contrary it is not sovereign man who picks and chooses what it pleases him to cull in "the rosebud garden of girls." That sweet, blushing, young thing, who scarce dares to raise her eyes to yours, my masculine friend, may, or may not, have elected you to be the companion of her future. If she has, you might as well surrender at discretion; the dénouement is inevitable. You will perchance fancy yourself deliberating—deciding—within the defenses of your own impregnable heart, but in reality your foolish barriers are as gossamer before the shy glances of those innocent eyes. It is she who calmly decides whether or no she wishes to pour your coffee through an indefinite number of summers and winters. Her decision moreover will be influenced by trifles light as air. More than once has a man's future happiness trembled in the balance because his hair was cut too short by a reckless barber—thus unduly exposing a pair of ears a thought too big or too red. The fashion or color of a waistcoat has been known to blight a budding affection. Buttoned shoes have changed a family history—when the lady preferred laced ones. And a case is actually

recorded in feminine annals of a luckless individual who unwittingly dashed the cup of matrimonial bliss from his thirsting lips by thoughtlessly assuming a straw hat with a Prince Albert coat; and of yet another swain who was summarily dismissed because he neglected to remove his spoon from his cup amid the joyous agitation of an afternoon tea with the beloved object of his affections.

Truly one of the most curious spectacles in the world is the progress of what is termed an ordinary, everyday love affair. And perhaps because of its delicious folly it is the one of all others of which the world never grows tired.

Hilda Wilde was, as has been freely conceded, both foolish and ignorant; but her folly was so sweetly veiled, her ignorance so cunningly hid beneath a dazzling play of dimples and sparkling eyes, that a wiser man than Immanuel Rossi might have been excused for mistaking both for the loveliest childlike innocence. And what is more fascinating than the attitude of such a child at the feet of wisdom—especially when wisdom is incarnate in a young man in his twenties, and the child is just emerging from her teens. Immanuel Rossi presently found himself very delightfully occupied with the task of imparting a love of classic literature to a mind thirsting for information. The books on the dusty shelves of the little unpainted house found their leaves twirled rapidly over by the daintiest of fingers; while the brightest of eyes skimmed light as swallows over pages wrought out in painful solitude by the mighty minds of the ages.

“But I understand it all so much better when you read it to me,” cooed artful Hilda.

And so it came about that the two might often be found ensconced in some shady nook, young Rossi reading aloud from the pages of his favorite books. Just how much of the wit and wisdom of the sages found its way into the pretty drooped head of the listener it is hard to say. During these hours she certainly had time and opportunity to study the reader, and in the pursuit of this branch of knowledge she showed surprising aptitude.

"Your uncle was a very wise man wasn't—was he not?" she asked one day. (Hilda always avoided abbreviations when she talked with persons whom she wished to impress with her elegance and culture. She had noted and admired this peculiarity in certain distinguished heroines who invariably married the hero in a blaze of glory.)

"Yes; he was—a very wise man," replied Immanuel sighing. "I hardly know how to live without him. He was the only father I ever knew."

Hilda knew something of the strange story of Immanuel's childhood; but although she was intensely curious on the subject, she never quite dared question the young man concerning it. This feeling of awe and hesitancy which invariably crept over her in his presence she found fascinating to a surprising degree. She stared at his dark face now with wide eyes, her rosy mouth half open as though a question had halted in mid air.

Immanuel glanced up and caught this puzzled, questioning expression on the girlish face. "You are wondering at me," he said, with a short laugh. "You wonder why I stay here and waste my time."

Miss Hilda was not of the opinion that time spent in

her company was wasted, and she managed to convey her idea in no uncertain terms, yet with a degree of childlike naïveté which brought a smile to the grave face at her side.

"I was not wondering why you were here," she added; "why should you not be here? But I should like to know——" She stopped short and gazed shyly at him from under her long lashes. "Of course it does not matter to me," she concluded with a bright blush.

She looked pure and sweet as a young angel in her pale rose-colored gown over which the shifting leaf-shadows wrought graceful patterns, her round arms and shoulders gleaming white through the diaphanous folds of muslin. Immanuel's brown eyes dwelt thoughtfully on the warm loveliness of the downcast face.

"I wish I could believe that my life was of any interest to you," he said in a low voice. Then he sprang to his feet with a little exclamation of dismay. Silas Scott's shrewd face, puckered into a thousand troubled wrinkles, was at that moment protruded from a nearby window.

"You'd kinder furgot 'bout that 'are fodder, hadn't ye, 'Manuel?" drawled the old man. "I'd clean furgot it myself, havin' dropped off into a leetle nap in my cheer. I'll be out to th' barn in less 'an no time, if you're ready to 'tend to it."

Half an hour later Mr. Scott turned up a bushel measure on the barn floor and seated himself upon it with an air of leisurely determination. "I'd like to hev a word or two with ye, 'Manuel, afore we go on with the chores," he remarked, fixing his small twinkling

eyes upon the young man with some sternness.

"D'ye remember what I tol' ye 'bout my gran'darter when we fust struck up a bargain betwixt us?" he asked after a pregnant pause. "I see 'at you'd either furgot it, or set it to one side, an', thinks's I, I'll go to headquarters an' fin' out."

"I love your granddaughter, and I intend to marry her if she will have me," said Immanuel briefly and without prefacing stammer or blush. This determination had sprung up and reached full maturity within the last half hour; but he did not question it. He turned his glowing face full upon his inquisitor. "I intend to marry her," he repeated.

"Hold on, young man!" ejaculated Mr. Scott, reaching out for an oat straw which he proceeded to masticate with deliberate relish. "Ye don't want to take the bit in yer teeth an' go ahead too pesky fast. That's the way men as well as hosses come to grief. S'pose she'll hev ye, what then?"

"I shall take care of her."

"You will, will ye? An' how'll ye go at it? You've got a purty poor farm an' a house that's fair to middlin', but ye ain't no reel notion of farmin'. I don't advise ye to perceed, young feller. I know Hildy; she ain't good fur shucks when it comes to work. These 'ere rose blows 'at my wife sets so much store by is good 'nough to put in a chiny vase. But come winter they don't stan' by ye like a pertater. Hildy's somethin' like one of them pink blows; she ain't fur you."

Immanuel hesitated. "I have some means beside the farm," he said at last. "But ——"

"I guess you ain't no millionaire, my young friend," drawled the old man ironically. "You wouldn't be earnin' your keep on Si' Scott's farm if you was."

"That's not the question, sir," said Immanuel, stung to sudden wrath. "The question is whether or no I can take care of a wife; and it occurs to me that you are not the proper person with whom to settle the matter." He turned on his heel and left the barn.

Mr. Scott stared after him, shaking his head dubiously. "That young feller ain't cut out fur a farmer," he said ruefully; "he's too durned hasty. Now I was 'lottin' to let him down easy at the last, an' tell him 'at mebbe I could help him out with some stock. But I'm blamed if I don't tell mother to send Hildy lum to her pa; I da'sn't take no responsibility in the matter."

Immanuel had gone straight in search of Hilda, his mind a ferment of hope and fear. "Hilda," he said abruptly, "will you walk with me as far as the hickories?"

The girl looked up. She was an arrant coward, and something in the young man's masterful air filled her with vague alarms. "You—you are angry with me?" she whispered.

"No—no, Hilda, I am not angry with you; come, I must talk with you."

That night before she slept Miss Wilde indited a voluminous epistle to her dearest Amelia, in which she informed that young lady that she was too excited to go to bed. "Only think, Amelia, *he has proposed!* I was never so *surprised* in my life—yes, and *frightened* too. He was almost *fierce* about it; I can't think *why*. And what did *I* say? you ask. Really, my dear girl, I don't believe I said very much. I didn't say that I

would marry him. In fact, now that I think about it, he did not ask me in so many words, but *of course* he meant that. He wanted to know if I could *love* him—if I *would* love him. He didn't seem to care about *anything* else. I really believe I do; he is *so fascinating*. I told him I did anyway, and he was perfectly satisfied. Oh, Amelia, only *think* what Jack Snider would say if he knew; wouldn't he be *just crazy*?"

At breakfast the next morning there was ominous silence. Mrs. Scott's shrewd eyes dwelt anxiously on the girl, who dimpled and smiled and blushed with conscious triumph.

"I've had a letter from your pa, Hildy," observed the old lady, following her grandchild onto the porch at the conclusion of the meal.

"Have you?" said the girl indifferently.

"He says he thinks it's 'bout time fur you to be comin' home. He's lonesome, your pa is."

Hilda shrugged her shoulders. "He was anxious enough to have me go away," she said coldly. "'Melia Hurd says he's been calling on her stepmother lately. Wouldn't it be a joke for 'Melia and me to have the same stepmother?"

"I hate to have you go," faltered Mrs. Scott. "We shall miss you terribly, dearie, we always do."

"I don't want to go."

"But if your pa wants you should, Hildy——"

"I don't care what he wants. It's too hot 'o go home now. Why, he said I might stay till fall!"

"There ain't no use in mincin' matters that a-way, mother," observed Mr. Scott, advancing with an air of weighty authority. "Hildy, I ain't pleased to hev you in 'Manuel's company so stiddy. 'Manuel's a real

nice young man, but I don't think you're cut out for a farmer's wife, an' that's the long an' the short of it."

"Why, pa!" remonstrated Mrs. Scott; "how do you know he's said anythin' to Hildy? Perhaps she ain't thought of such a thing."

The girl turned her face away; her mouth was set in obstinate lines.

"Hes he said anythin' to ye, girl?" demanded Mr. Scott.

Hilda jerked her elbows petulantly. "I sh'd think it was *my* affair anyway," she whimpered. "If I want to marry him I shall, so there!"

"Well, you'll go hum to your pa, an' let him say what you'll do," grumbled her grandfather. "Though I mistrust 'at mebbe we're lockin' the barn door after the calf's stolen."

CHAPTER XXV

A Glittering Temptation

TO Hilda's surprise and discomfiture Immanuel was found to agree entirely with the views of Mr. Scott. "It will be far better for you to go home at once," he said decidedly; "I ought not to have spoken until I had seen your father. But I could not wait to find out whether you loved me, Hilda—my little Hilda!" The last words were uttered with an ardor that caused the girl to look up with the loveliest blush and smile.

"But you want me to go home," she said plaintively; "I don't want to go home."

"It is only for a little while," said Immanuel, taking one of the plump white hands in his. "I shall ask your father to give you to me very soon." After a pause he asked with an anxious tremor in his voice: "Will you be satisfied to live in the little house, dear? Do you think—could you be happy with me there?"

Hilda looked at him meditatively from under her curling lashes. "I shall have ruffled muslin curtains at the windows," she said positively. "Oh, yes, it will be quite pretty;" she drew a deep breath. "If it could only be painted on the outside—and I am sure it would be nicer with a carpet on the sitting-room floor; don't you think so—Immanuel?" She pronounced his name for the first time with the sweetest maidenly hesitation.

"It shall be just as you like, dearest," cried Immanuel. "The little house shall be painted, papered, refurnished——" he stopped short; the girl was gazing at him with wide, serious eyes.

"But that would cost a great deal of money, and you—you are quite——" she hesitated, the rose brightening in her soft cheeks.

"But you love me, Hilda—dearest Hilda, even if I am quite—quite poor!" murmured Immanuel; there was deep exultation in his voice—his eyes as they rested on the girl were filled with tears. "I shall never forget, dear, that you were ready to be happy with me in a poor little house, on a lonely country road. I have not deserved such happiness!"

Hilda moved her shoulders ever so little. "But can you really have the house fixed as you said?" she asked in a bright, hard voice. "It would certainly be pleasanter."

Immanuel was too deep in his dream to notice either the shrug or the tone. "I have money enough to give you a comfortable home, dear Hilda," he answered gently. "Then I shall work—yes, I shall work hard for you."

Hilda was regarding him intently; she was filled with curiosity, and longed to ask a hundred questions, but that strange hesitancy stilled her tongue. She wondered at herself a little because of it. "I don't see why I shouldn't know all about him *now*," she said to herself. If she had been told at that moment that she did not in the least degree understand the soul that gazed at her so yearningly from out her lover's brown eyes, she would have resented the idea as absurd. She was listening to him as he explained his plans of seeing her

father; her attitude, as she sat with drooping lids and sweetly pensive air of compliance betraying nothing of the thoughts within. A single word in a carelessly dropped phrase caught her wondering attention. "The city?" she echoed, her blue eyes lighting up with surprise. "Did you say you were going to the city: oh, I wish I could go!"

"Yes, I must go for a little while," said Immanuel frowning. "But it will not be for long; October, I hope, will see us at home." He uttered the last word with rapture.

"I wish I could go to the city," repeated Hilda.

"What do you wish to see in the city, little one?"

"Oh, the stores and the houses and the people—the beautifully dressed ladies. I wish——" there was a suspicion of a pout on the rosy lips, as the girl stopped short, eying the grave face bent over her. "You are not pleased because I wish to go to the city!" she cried. "I have never been, though papa has promised me over and over again. There are so many things to see. I do want to go!"

Immanuel's face brightened into a smile. "You shall go to the city with me, Hilda," he said. "You are right; there are many things to see—things beautiful and things terrible. You shall help me to make the terrible things beautiful, dearest—dearest!" He bent nearer and she lifted her ripe lips to his like a child.

"What do you mean?" she murmured, twisting her white fingers; "what shall I help you to do?"

"That is a long story," he said smiling. "My wife shall hear it." He lifted the little hand to his lips.

"Thank God for your love!" he murmured, and drew her to his heart in the first long embrace.

Hilda Wilde went home to her father's house the next day, and young Rossi betook himself to the city, where as it may be imagined a mass of accumulated business awaited his attention. He devoted himself to his task with a light heart which betrayed itself in tokens many.

"You are looking exceedingly well, my dear Mr. Rossi," observed Mr. Smalley, with almost paternal interest. "I am told that you passed some weeks in Newport early in the season. We—ah, regret that you did not see fit to establish yourself there. But perhaps——" Mr. Smalley paused and coughed behind his hand. It hardly seemed possible to him that his client could have met with a refusal at the hands of Miss Livingstone; yet she was a high-bred girl, and young Rossi was, after all, *nouveau riche*, and quite possibly stubborn and maladroit in his love-making as in his investments.

"I am going to be married," said the young man bluntly.

"Ah, indeed! Well, well!" cried the lawyer. "I congratulate you, I do indeed, my dear sir! But your announcement is—er—not wholly unexpected. I may say that your choice has fallen upon a young lady of the most unexceptional connections. You could not, in short, have done better. I am delighted!"

"You do not know the young lady I hope to make my wife," said Immanuel coolly. "I agree with you entirely though; I am to be congratulated; I could not have done better."

"May I ask—is it permissible to enquire, who the

fortunate young woman is?" asked Mr. Smalley with some perturbation. "I beg your pardon, I am sure. There were rumors, you know."

"I am to marry Miss Hilda Wilde in the autumn," said Immanuel, fixing his eyes on the old lawyer's dismayed face. "She is a poor girl; she believes I am a poor farmer. I do not intend to undeceive her for the present."

"Ah, indeed, very romantic and interesting, I am sure," said Mr. Smalley with laborious politeness. "The young lady is to be congratulated,—er, yes, certainly. And what, may I ask, are your plans for the future? You will hardly continue your present style of living after your marriage—eh? There is that Fifth Avenue property still to be had, I am told, and at a very reasonable figure."

"I propose to repair and refurnish my uncle's farmhouse; we shall live there."

"Hum—ah; and will the young lady be satisfied with your plans for her future, do you think?"

"She loves me," said Immanuel simply.

The lawyer shrugged his shoulders. "Ah, well, you will of course do as you choose," he said dryly. "You may however think differently later on. The young lady herself may have views of life which—er—may tend to modify—yes, to—ah—modify your somewhat extreme ideas."

"You do not know her, sir," said Immanuel with some heat.

"I have not the pleasure to be sure," admitted Mr. Smalley, civilly. "But if I might be allowed I would say that——" He stopped short and tightened his thin lips. He was about to suggest from the depths of

his own experience that possibly his client might chance upon unexplored territory in his wife's character in the course of his matrimonial journeyings; but he refrained. "He'll find it out soon enough, poor devil," he told himself, after the young gentleman had taken his leave. Then for some unexplained reason he laughed aloud in the silence of his private office. It was an odd sound; it actually caused the clerk just outside the door to drop his pen and listen open-mouthed for the space of two minutes.

Miss Wilde passed some very enjoyable days after her return to the paternal roof. For one thing there were numerous confidential conversations with Miss Amelia Hurd, in the course of which Hilda displayed an astonishing knowledge of Immanuel Rossi's character. "He is the most serious person in the world, 'Melia," she said impressively; "he looks at everything in a different way from any one else. Sometimes I think it is just the least bit tiresome; or it would be if he was not so handsome and so perfectly fascinating."

Miss Hurd was a tall, ungainly young woman, with thin hair of no particular color, a rough skin and pale greenish eyes. She regarded Hilda with a feeling which was somewhat uncertainly compounded of envy and warm admiration. Having no lovers of her own, she had attached herself with ardor to the heart fortunes of her friend, and alternately thrilled and chilled at the capricious will of the beauty, like the mercury in the tube of a thermometer. "My, I wish I could see him!" she murmured. "Haven't you got his photo, Hil'?"

"No, I haven't," said Hilda, with a yawn. "I guess

I can endure it, though, till I see him." She looked down reflectively at her small hands. "I wonder if he'll buy me an engagement ring?"

"Of course he will!" cried Miss Hurd. "I do hope it'll be a di'mon'. W'ldn't that be elegant? But perhaps he can't afford it; di'mon's are awfully expensive."

"I don't believe he'll ever think of such a thing," said Hilda, pouting. "He doesn't seem to notice clothes—or anything like that. All he cares about is just books, and—well, yes, I guess he does care *some* about *me*!"

"Plenty of other folks do too," said Miss Hurd, nodding and blinking mysteriously. "I saw Jack Snider yesterday, and I told him you'd come home. He —"

"Oh, 'Melia," interrupted Hilda, with an anxious pucker of her white forehead, "I do hope you didn't say anything to Jack about *him*. I don't want anybody to know—not anybody!"

"Why not?" inquired Miss Hurd, with a jerk of her angular elbows. "You can't have all the men to yourself, miss. But I didn't tell him, poor fellow. Say, he's handsome enough for me! I don't believe that Immanuel What's-his-name can hold a candle to Jack!"

"I don't know," said Hilda reflectively. "He—he's *different*. What did Jack say?"

"He's coming to see you. And oh, Hil', what *do* you think; his uncle's took him into the business and he's making lots of money."

Hilda's blue eyes rested quietly upon her crocheting; she paused to count ten stitches; then she said with

a curl of her red lips, "How do you happen to know so much about Jack Snider's affairs, 'Mella?"

"He told me," replied that young woman, biting her nails, with an envious glance at the white fingers which were flying in and out of the blue wool. "He'll tell you about it, fast enough; he's crazy after you, Hil'."

Hilda sighed gently; her face with its soft babyish curves of pink and white looked sweet and pensive as some youthful Madonna's. "I suppose he is," she said plaintively.

The same evening Miss Wilde entertained Mr. Snider in the parlor of the paternal residence after the approved fashion of the countryside; that is to say, the door into the sitting-room where her father was dozing over his weekly paper was tightly closed, and the dun-colored window shades were closely drawn. The two young people sat on opposite sides of the room; Hilda as usual drooping her pretty face over some intricate embroidery, the young man sitting bolt upright, apparently absorbed in painful consciousness of his abnormally high shirt-collar, above which his solemn round face appeared like the knob of a cane.

Mr. Snider possessed very black hair plastered down in oily curves on either side of a bulging forehead; his black eyes and his black mustache pleasantly diversifying a countenance otherwise monotonously red and white. He gazed at his hostess with obvious anxiety. "I s'pose you had an awful good time up to your uncle's," he observed at length, clearing his throat and throwing one leg over the other in a futile attempt to appear at elegant ease.

"Yes, indeed," cooed Hilda, turning her pretty head

so as to bring into view a smartly tied bow of blue ribbon. "It was real lonesome up there," she added, with a reminiscent smile.

"Was it?" said Mr. Snider joyously. "Well, you're home now anyway. I guess we'll be having some pretty gay times here this fall,"—after a pause during which his black eyes rested uninterruptedly on the blue bow against the yellow hair, "picnics an' things, an' ridin' maybe. I've got a horse."

"Have you?" said Hilda dimpling. "How nice; I love to ride."

"Will you—that is, would you ride with me?" stammered the young fellow, blushing violently. "I've got a side-bar buggy with green cushions; it's a peach, I c'n tell you!"

"I don't know as I shall be here all the fall," said Hilda meditatively. The pink deepened deliciously in her round cheeks. "Maybe I'll be going away again in—in October."

"Did 'Melie Hurd tell you i'd gone into business with Uncle John?"—after a long silence in which he shifted uneasily in his chair.

"Yes," said Hilda, smiling with a pretty show of friendly interest. "How very nice for you, Jack." She pronounced the last word with just the sweetest little air of reserve.

"Oh, Hilda," breathed the young man, "I want to tell you; I'm making most a thousand dollars a year, an' Uncle John's awful good to me; he says if I should want to build a new house this fall he'd give me a nice lot off his side-yard. There ain't a prettier place in town."

Hilda looked up, her blue eyes full of interest.

"Are you going to build a new house?" she asked.
"How lovely!"

"I—I'm never going to build it, Hilda, unless you'll promise to live in it with me when it's done. Say, you don't know how awfully sweet you are, Hilda! I—I love you so I can't tell you!"

Hilda made no reply. She was thinking of the shabby little house on the back hill-road. Even with ruffled muslin curtains and a coat of new paint it would hardly compare with a new house on the main street of the village.

"If you'll only consent, I'll be so awfully happy," Mr. Snider was saying anxiously. "You shall have your say just how the house is to be—bay windows, don't you know, and everything, Colonial or Queen Anne or any way at all; I don't care as long as you're pleased, Hilda!"

The young man's words fairly tumbled over one another; he had risen from his chair and was stooping over the little figure in the rocking-chair. "Hilda," he whispered imploringly, "won't you say yes?"

"Please sit down, Jack," said the girl composedly. "I can't think when you worry me so." Her calm, bright eyes rested curiously on the flushed countenance above the high collar. It was certainly "different" from the grave face, alight with incomprehensible emotion, which had bent toward her for the last time under the shade of the hickories on the back hill-road. She had received a letter from Immanuel in the evening mail; it was in her pocket at this very moment. She had found it like the writer's conversation just the least bit tiresome.

"Aren't you going to answer me, Hilda?"

"I can't—to-night," she said rather crossly. "I—I must think. It is such a serious thing to get married, Jack," she added, with sweet seriousness.

The young fellow stared at her in an agony of adoration. "You—you are so lovely!" he blurted out at last.

Hilda shrugged her shoulders. The letter in her pocket contained similar statements. She had found indeed so singular a unanimity of opinion on this point that it no longer carried very much weight. It had become, so to speak, axiomatic, and therefore more or less wearisome when repeated too often; though of course as a fact to be reckoned with it entered largely into the problem of life as now presented to her attention. "I think you had better go now," she said gently; "this has been so unexpected."

"Oh, Hilda, you have always known me, and that I cared for nobody but you! Couldn't you ——"

"Not to-night, I must have time to think it over."

"Well, I want to tell you one thing, Hilda,—though of course it won't make any difference in what you think of me. But your father might like me better even if you didn't care. Uncle John has nobody but me since Aunt Sarah died, and he is going to leave me all his money. I guess it's as much as ten thousand dollars."

"Ten thousand dollars!" repeated Hilda, opening her blue eyes to their widest. "Why, you'll be rich, Jack!"

"I'll be poorer 'an Job's turkey if I don't get you," affirmed Mr. Snider with a beseeching look. "I don't care a bit for money except to buy pretty things for

you." His voice fell to a whisper. "Say, I've been saving up ever so long to buy you a ring, Hilda; I was most sure you'd say yes. If you won't get mad I'll show it to you."

The girl broke into a little unsteady laugh. "Why, Jack, how perfectly absurd you are!" she exclaimed in a somewhat high-pitched voice. "You ought not to take things for granted like that! I never encouraged you a single bit, I'm sure. I'm not mad though, why should I be? Let me see the ring."

Mr. Snider produced a blue satin case from his waistcoat pocket and proffered it with a furious blush. "I wisht you'd let me fit it on your dear little finger, Hilda," he whispered huskily.

"It's a diamond!" exclaimed the girl. "Why, Jack Snider, what a beauty! Where did you get it?"

"I was down to Noo York whilst you was gone; I got it there. Do you like it? Will you wear it? Don't you like me just a little, dear?"

Hilda was turning the glittering thing from side to side; she seemed fascinated with the scarlet and azure fires that shot out from the small white stone in its rather showy setting. "And to think you bought it for me! It must have cost a lot of money, Jack."

"I paid a hundred dollars for it," said Mr. Snider proudly. "But that's only a patch on what I'll do fur you if you'll only have me, Hilda!"

The girl thrust the ring into its satin nest with trembling fingers. "I—I—can't tell you to-night, Jack," she said piteously. "I—I am not—I must think, and—please go away now!"

CHAPTER XXVI

She Stoops to Conquer

THE girl had a conscience after all, though it was a tiny undeveloped spark. She was very, *very* unhappy (she assured herself) after Mr. Snider had taken his leave. She was aware in a dim, uncertain way that the impending decision involved issues which loomed vast and unsubstantial before her frightened eyes. "Dear—dear," she sighed, twisting her white forehead into unbecoming wrinkles, "I wish I knew what to do." After awhile it occurred to her that she might call the divine assistance into her counsels. To this end she pulled out her dusty little Bible and opened it with trembling fingers. "I'll just read the first verse I see," she said, "and take it for a sign. 'Melia says that's the way she always does when she can't think what to do.'"

She read and wondered, "And they put the two wreathen chains of gold in the two rings on the ends of the breast-plate." "Two chains of gold," she said aloud, "and two rings!"

She marked the verse and the chapter with red ink for further reference, her mind dwelling confusedly on the two rings. They might easily signify an engagement ring and a wedding ring—on the two ends of the breastplate. She wondered what a breastplate was. 'Melia would know. After all the matter re-

solved itself into a series of simple questions. Which man was the handsomest, and which the most agreeable? After a short period of reflection she told herself that this was perhaps immaterial. Immanuel was "fascinating" and Jack was "nice." She would allow this to pass. She had already decided that a new house—Queen Anne with a steep red roof, or Colonial with yellow and white paint—would be vastly preferable as a place of residence to the shabby little cottage on the back hill-road. "It would be awfully lonely there in winter," she thought with a shiver. Her grandfather had said she was not cut out for a farmer's wife. She was sure she was not. She simply could not imagine herself straining milk, washing pans or making butter. She wondered if Immanuel would expect her to do these things.

She grew somewhat sleepy at this stage in her reflections. It was all very, *very* tiresome. She would go to bed, and perhaps in the morning she would be able to decide just what was best.

There are visionary individuals who declare that while our bodies lie wrapped in unconsciousness our sleepless spirits wander free, and that these wanderings conform themselves to the last conscious reflections of the regnant mind before it lays down its sceptre for the night. Be that as it may the whole matter appeared absurdly easy to Hilda when her blue, fringed eyes flew open the next morning. She presented a ravishing picture as she lay on her white pillows, one white arm thrown up over her curly head, her lips faintly smiling, the curves of her fresh tinted cheeks as exquisitely perfect as those of a half-opened rose.

"I shall marry Jack," she said aloud.

Immanuel must be informed of her decision. This would be a somewhat unpleasant duty, though Hilda regarded the breaking of an engagement as very simple—indeed she looked upon it as quite a matter of course. "I shall be happier with Jack," she said to herself comfortably. "Besides, everybody breaks engagements,—that is everybody who is pretty and has plenty of lovers. Amelia Hurd would not dare. If she should succeed in getting one man she would be lucky." These reflections passed in a casual current while the young lady was laying out divers sheets of tinted paper on which to inscribe the inexorable decrees of fate. Pale violet, she decided, with violet ink, was best suited to the subject matter in hand.

"Poor fellow," she sighed, "I am really awfully sorry for him. But I know I shall be happier with Jack. Jack isn't a bit tiresome, and I'm not afraid of him. I know exactly how to manage Jack."

It took a long time to write the letter; a number of crumpled sheets of violet paper found their way in small pieces to the waste-basket before the square envelope was finally sealed and directed.

No young lady, acquainted with the rules of polite correspondence, will suppose that in this epistle Hilda Wilde was guilty of unmaidenly frankness. Oh, no, she regretted (sweetly) that she was so young. When one was so young it was difficult to know one's own mind. She had supposed that she loved Immanuel; but since she had come home she had thought *long* and *seriously*. She wondered how she could have made such a mistake as to suppose that she could be happy in the country. Grandpapa had warned her,

and so had dear grandmama and Aunt Emeline. Why had she not suffered herself to be guided by those older and wiser than herself? She was sure she did not know, but it was probably due to her dislike of causing pain to others. ("When I saw how you loved me I could not bear to disappoint you.") She hoped that he would forgive her and think kindly of her. She would always remember him, *et cetera, et cetera*. She signed herself, "Your broken-hearted Hilda." This hyphenated adjective might console the unfortunate lover, the girl reflected vaguely, and drew a sigh of relief as she laid a blotter on the last word.

On a sheet of cheerful pink paper she then inscribed a few words which would, she knew, bring Mr. Snider to her side with joyful alacrity. These two fateful missives then traveled in company to the village post-office, clasped in the daintiest of little white hands. The little hand dropped them softly into the post-box, where they lay, the pink envelope and the violet, undisturbed for several hours.

Hilda was setting the last unhurried stitches in a bunch of blue forget-me-nots which adorned her latest "centrepiece," when Miss Amelia Hurd broke suddenly upon the quiet of her maiden meditations. Miss Hurd was flushed and breathless—which was exceedingly unbecoming, thought Hilda disapprovingly. She wondered how she should feel if she had to survey such a purplish rose as Amelia's every morning in her mirror. The reflection brought a pitying smile to her lips. "Do take a fan, 'Melia dear," she said kindly, "you look so warm."

"I hurried," gasped Miss Hurd, laying her bony hand on her angular breast. "I was so excited!

Read *that*, Hilda Wilde, and then tell me if you aren't the luckiest girl alive! I thought I should die when I found it! It came wrapped round a jar of butter."

"It" was a piece of soiled and crumpled newspaper; dainty Hilda touched it gingerly. "What in the world is it?" she asked composedly. "Dear me, how excited you get, Melia; I never allow myself to——"

"Read it!" reiterated Miss Hurd, almost fiercely.

Thus urged, Hilda's blue eyes began to travel down the page; her friend watched her face with sparkling eyes.

"My, wasn't I struck all of a heap when I saw his name!" exclaimed Miss Hurd; "I was just going to stuff that paper into the kitchen stove, when the word Rossi caught my eye. Then I looked for the headlines, and there it was, 'Remarkable Caprices of a Multi-millionaire!' You could have knocked me down with a feather! Isn't it rich, Hil'?"

Hilda's composed face had been undergoing an astonishing transformation, while Miss Hurd was pouring out these disjointed sentences. Her blue eyes, wide with a sort of still terror, were fixed upon the page; her cheeks had faded rapidly from pink to white, and from white to a curious bluish tint.

"Why, Hilda Wilde, what's the matter? Aren't you pleased? I do believe you're going to faint. It was too sudden; I'll just run and get the camphor bottle. Lean on me, do, that's a dear! To think of my being the most intimate friend of a millionairess! You'll be going to New York, and ——"

"Let me alone; let me alone, 'Melia,'" gasped Hilda, pushing her friend away with a vigor which caused

that young woman to stare with fresh amazement. "You stay here! Don't you follow me! I've got to go! Oh, what shall I do!"

Miss Hurd turned to the window just in time to see a flying cloud of pink drapery hurl itself out of the front gate. "Well, upon my word, I believe that girl has gone stark crazy. Did you ever!"

She turned with a foolish smile and picked up the piece of newspaper which had caused so strange an ebullition of energy in the tranquil Hilda. "It's him sure," she affirmed ungrammatically, as her eyes devoured the close print. "Romantic history of a Dives, born a pauper—adopted by uncle—educated at Cambridge—passed quiet life unaware of his good fortune—astonishes New York with revolutionary plan to abolish slums—said to be summering in Sullivan County near a village called Tacitus Four-Corners."

"Of course it's him!" she repeated. Her eyes dwelt lingeringly on the final words of the paragraph. "In person Mr. Rossi is a magnificent specimen of American manhood; his dark complexion and eyes reveal the Italian strain in his make up, while his tall, athletic figure gives evidence that in his case the best blood of three nations has united—the late Mr. Armitage being, we believe, of English birth."

Hilda Wilde was making her way to the post-office as fast as her trembling limbs would carry her. She had but one thought, and that was undoubtedly a very foolish one. "If I can only get those letters!" The girl presented so pitiable an appearance as she showed her ashen face at the little square window of the office that the old postmaster took off his glasses and wiped

them before he answered the question she could hardly bring herself to utter.

"I declare I hardly know ye, Hildy," he said kindly; "you ain't lookin' very well. Nothin' out of the way, I hope, to your house?"

Hilda pulled herself together with a heroic effort. "No," she said, moistening her dry lips. "But I should like to know if the mail has gone out yet."

"No, not yit; I jes' got it into the bag. Job's comin' now to git it. Why? you got a letter you want to git off in a hurry? I don't mind openin' it fur ye, seein' it's you."

"Will you open it? Oh, Mr. Winters, how kind you are! Please do!"

"Wall, han' over your letter, missy, an' we'll see. I'll bet it's to one o' them beaux o' yourn; you guess he can't wait till nex' mail—eh?"

"No, it isn't that; it's only a letter—two letters—I put in the box this morning; I've changed my mind about something and I want to get them back. I *must* get them back!"

The postmaster paused with his hand on the lock. He shook his head slowly and screwed up his tobacco-stained lips. "I'm sorry I can't 'commodate ye," he said with professional dignity; "but we can't tamper with the U. S. mails on no 'count."

"But it's only my two letters," pleaded Hilda tremulously. "One is in a pink envelope and one in a blue; I could get them in just a minute. It wouldn't do any harm." Her color had come back now, and her eyes were never more dangerous in their soft brightness.

But Mr. Caleb Winters was, as he would himself have put it, too old a bird to be caught with chaff.

He looked composedly at the sparkling, tearful little face and again shook his head. "Guess you'll hev to write by the evenin' mail an' tell 'em as how you've changed your mind," he remarked with aggravating cheerfulness. "Bless yer heart, they won't mind!"

"But they will! I can't do that; I *must* have those letters. Do you hear, Mr. Winters; I've just *got* to have them!"

The postmaster was displeased. He had daughters of his own; it occurred to him that he would shake the eye-teeth outen Sally if she talked to him that-a-way.

"Here, Job," he said shortly, "git erlong with this 'ere mail, and don' let the grass grow under your feet neither." With that he turned his broad back upon the suppliant, who had again grown pale, and began fumbling with a pile of newspapers in the back of the office.

"Ain't you goin' to let her have 'em, pa?" whispered Job, a big-boned, hulking fellow of twenty.

"No, son, I ain't, an' I guess ye mus' be cracked to ask. What, tamper with the U. S. mails to please a chit of a gal. I'll bet I know which side my bread's buttered on fur a spell yit. More'n likely it's some doggoned trick of Dave Wilde's to git the office fur himself!"

Job turned away and shouldered the bag, but his eyes rested pityingly on Hilda's quivering face as he passed out.

In an instant she was by his side. "Couldn't *you* do it?" she breathed, as they turned the corner.

"Couldn't I do what?" asked Job.

"Open the bag and let me get my letters."

"I wisht I could, Hildy; I—I'd love to do somethin' fur you." The big fellow stared down at the lovely upturned eyes with the most poignant regret depicted on his coarse-featured face. "But I guess pa 'ud kill me if I did. 'Sides I ain't got the keys."

Hilda was silent for a moment; she was thinking fast.

"Couldn't you—couldn't you get the keys?"

"I've had 'em in my han' more'n once," admitted Job; "but pa, he's got 'em in his pants pocket now. I don't see how I ——"

"You could hide the bag," whispered Hilda, "and get them afterward, couldn't you?"

"Golly, but you're a hummer!" ejaculated the young man. "What's in them letters that makes you so hot to git 'em?"

"They—they're business letters," said Hilda, blushing. "It will break my heart if I can't get them. Oh, Job, you have no idea how dreadful it will be! I'll give you most anything—yes, my gold watch I got last Christmas, I will; if you'll only ——"

"I don't want yer watch, ner—ner nothin' like that; but I'll tell ye somethin' I would like."

"What is it?"

"You're so turrible high an' mighty, Hildy; I ain't never got a word with you hardly," said the young fellow in an aggrieved voice. "When we was playin' snap an' ketch 'em once a long time ago; don't you remember? you wouldn't let me kiss you when I ketched you. Now, ef you—ef you ——"

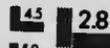
"Well, what?"

"Ef you'll let me kiss you—none o' your cheek kisses—but right smack on your mouth, I'll git them keys, and give you them letters."



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"How will you do it?"

"Never you mind; no letters, no pay; is it a go?"

Hilda looked down upon the ground; a burning wave of color spread itself over all her fair face and white neck. "I'll give you ten dollars and my gold bracelet," she murmured, "if you ——"

"No-sir-ee! I'll do as I said er I won't do nothin'. Do you want them letters?"

"Yes—oh, yes!"

"Will you pay fur 'em as I said?"

"Yes," said Hilda, in a low, shamed voice, "I will."

CHAPTER XXVII

For Better or for Worse

THAT same evening as Miss Amelia Hurd was washing up the tea dishes in her stepmother's kitchen, a slim figure in a pink gown appeared in the open door. "Law, Hilda, is that you?" cried the young woman, a tinge of embarrassment in her tones. "Won't you sit down in the parlor; I'll be through in a minute." Unconsciously she had begun to swing a new censer before her favorite shrine.

Hilda frowned. "Why should I go in the parlor," she said crossly. "I want to tell you something, 'Melia; then I'm going straight home and to bed; I'm tired to death."

A recent interview with Mr. Job Winters, while it had relieved her most poignant anxieties had not improved her temper. She felt sore and humiliated from head to foot, though the pink envelope as well as the blue with their fateful contents had been scattered to the winds of heaven an hour since in pieces no bigger than a five-cent piece. She had paid Mr. Winters the stipulated price; whereupon the youth had promptly proposed marriage, urging as a glittering inducement the fact that he had committed a penal offense in her behalf, for which one kiss seemed a totally inadequate compensation. "I shall tell pa, an' he'll han' me over to the constable," whined Mr. Winters. "Then you'll

be subpoenaed fur a witness; an' I guess the jedge c'd make ye tell 'bout them letters fas' 'nough!"

"That is all perfectly absurd, Job Winters," Hilda had said coolly; "you'll do nothing of the kind. If you did I should say you were telling lies; you couldn't prove a single thing." With that she had terminated the interview, leaving the unfortunate Job to fabricate as many tales as he might find convenient and necessary to explain the unlawful detention of the mail.

Nevertheless the day's doings had shaken her small soul in a most unpleasant way, agitation of any sort being as repugnant to Hilda as cold water to a cat. Hence the unwonted dissonance in her soft voice as she addressed Miss Hurd. "I wish you'd come here and listen," she said imperiously.

Miss Hurd wiped her hands on her checkered apron, and approached the door with a fatuous smile. "My! ain't it too romantic for anything!" she gurgled. "It reminds me of that story 'bout ——"

"Do be quiet, 'Melia, and listen to what I say. I don't want you should mention this thing to a single soul; do you hear?"

"I can't see why you're so awful private 'bout everything," began Miss Hurd, tossing her head. "I sh'd think you'd be so proud, you'd ——"

"Do you want me to invite you to visit me after I'm married, 'Melia?"

"'Course I do; I sh'd think you'd want to anyhow; hav'n't I always ——"

"You'll never step your foot inside my house as long as you live, if you don't do as I say!"

"I haven't told."

"Very well, don't tell. I won't have my affairs in everybody's mouth."

"What under the sun was the matter with you this afternoon, Hil'?" asked Miss Hurd, with a conciliating smile. "You scared me most to death, you acted so queer. Aren't you glad I found that paper?"

"Yes, oh, yes!" breathed Hilda fervently. "I—I was so surprised I hardly knew what I was doing. But it's all right now; and I'll—yes; I'll do something handsome for you some day, 'Melia." Her usual manner had returned, and her violet eyes as they rested on her friend were sleepily soft and sweet as usual.

"I s'pose you'll have di'mon's an' pearls an' carriages, an' everything elegant," sighed the other enviously. "My, it does beat all what luck you always have, Hil'!"

Hilda moved her plump shoulders gently. It appeared to her that as Providence had begun by endowing her with transcendent and all conquering beauty, the rest should be, as it were, thrown in. She had therefore accepted her prospective grandeur with the same calmness with which she had eaten her breakfast. "I suppose he wished to keep it a secret from me on purpose," she said meditatively. "After we're married he'll probably take me to an elegant house, and tell me everything."

"It's just too awfully romantic for anything!" exclaimed Miss Hurd; "and to think I found it out the way I did!"

"That is the reason that I want nobody to know," pursued Hilda sweetly. "I shouldn't like to spoil his plans."

"Aren't you going to tell him that you've found out?"

"No, indeed I'm not; but I'm glad I know."

"You'r the queerest girl!" murmured Miss Hurd.

This secret fund of information was very supporting to Hilda during the somewhat trying days that followed. It gave a sweet dignity and aloofness to her mien in the final unpleasant interview with Mr. Snider, in which she informed that young gentleman that she had thought *long* and *seriously* over the matter, with the result that she could never be his.

When the unhappy youth begged to know whether there was "another"—this being the usual procedure, though for what reason it is hard to guess—she said gently but firmly that there was. She added, that she had learned to know her own heart, and while that heart was overflowing with the warmest sisterly affection for Mr. Snider, she could never (as stated before) be his in any nearer relation.

A high shirt-collar sometimes serves a useful purpose in life's crises. One who affects it can, for example, safely go to sleep in church without fear of betraying somnolence by a humiliating nod. On this occasion Mr. Snider's head would doubtless have fallen despondently upon his breast could it have done so; but owing to the spiritual as well as material support afforded by the unyielding walls of his collar he went away with an erect front, and proposed to Miss Amelia Hurd that same evening.

It must be stated in justice to Hilda that she was perfectly sincere in every word she had uttered in the above interview. Who can deny that the emotion of love, as we are acquainted with it on the terrestrial plane, is unavoidably alloyed with baser stuff, and

this for the very useful and legitimate purpose of increasing its durability. One cannot permanently reside in an environment composed exclusively of sentiment—at least in this world. Such housekeeping may be practicable in some rarified future condition; but here and now houses and money and clothes seem to enter as a definite factor into our most sentimental calculations—if not before marriage then the more insistently and disagreeably after.

Hilda was now agreeably sure in her own mind that she loved Immanuel with ardor and devotion; and those of us who live in glass houses should not throw stones. Her maiden heart beat with just as sweet an agitation as yours, Madam and the Misses Grundy, ever did on a like occasion as she perused the daily letters she had once found "tiresome." She now read in these glowing words of affection, if not all that the writer intended, much that he did not intend which was vastly more entertaining.

Her own epistles, sent as regularly, breathed with a faint odor of violets, depths of maidenly sweetness, which Immanuel Rossi had only guessed at heretofore. These letters of Hilda's did not err in being vulgarly affectionate, it must be understood. Nothing is more ill-advised than for a woman to spread her heart upon paper for the eyes of any man. The lords of creation quite naturally prefer to keep the ardent love-making to themselves; they should invariably be allowed to do so. That curious little volume, "The Love Letters of an English Woman" might be profitably introduced as a text-book into our young ladies' seminaries. By means of it students could be easily instructed as to what *not* to put into a love-letter. The awful warn-

ing of its closing chapters would not, I am confident, be lost upon any intelligent young woman.

No, Hilda's letters were a model of prudent reserve; they hinted at much; they said nothing in particular; which was quite as it should have been. These dainty pink, pale blue and cream white bits of paper served as the most effectual fans in the world to keep Immanuel Rossi's infatuation at the white heat of enthusiasm, and they brought him at length to the little village whose postmark they bore—if not on the wings of love, on the fastest train available.

When Hilda set her eyes on the man whom she had come very easily to regard as a "magnificent specimen of American manhood," tears of real joy filled her blue eyes; she nestled naturally and sweetly against his broad shoulder, and felt as happy as a girl can be expected to feel under such blissful circumstances. This particular "caprice of a multi-millionaire" was, she felt, altogether as it should be. And when, later in the day, her lover somewhat shamefacedly produced a tiny case from his waistcoat pocket, and fitted a sparkling diamond on her white finger, why her cup of joy fairly brimmed over. She said nothing, however, which was again quite as it should have been, for it gave Immanuel Rossi the opportunity to say a great deal.

"I fear you will think me very extravagant, dear," he whispered.—And indeed the jewel was not strictly in keeping with the rôle upon which he had fixed. "I saw it one day in a shop window, and it reminded me of you, sweet; it was so pure and sparkling."

Hilda smiled shyly. "I hope you will always love

me as much as you do now," she said with a pretty wistfulness.

"How can I help but love you more and more, dearest," he answered fervently. Then he began to tell her at length of the changes and improvements he had been making in the little house on the back hill-road. He wound up by asking if they could not be married immediately. "I have so much to show my wife, and so much to tell her that the time seems long."

Hilda's eyes under her long curled lashes seemed on the instant to reflect the fire that shot from her diamond. Yet she answered with the sweetest propriety that it must be just as papa said.

Papa had been disagreeable and crusty in the beginning; indeed he had positively rebuffed the idea of Hilda's marriage quite sharply, when the young lady had herself broached the matter before her lover's arrival.

"I've heard all I want to about this young man from your grandfather," he said with unpleasant emphasis. "He tells me his farm is run down to nothing, and that the fellow knows next to nothing about managing it. It won't do."

"But it will do, papa," said Hilda, with quiet positiveness; "Mr. Rossi is quite able to take care of me, I am sure."

Mr. Rossi himself in a private interview with Mr. Wilde evidently convinced that gentleman of his ability to make good Hilda's confidence in him. The girl observed a puzzled look in the paternal eyes as they rested upon her some hours later. "You are a lucky girl, Hil'," he had briefly said; "you've played your cards darned well."

At which Hilda smiled in her own charmingly non-committal way. "I can't think what you mean, dear papa," she said sweetly. "But I'm glad you're not going to break my heart."

And so it came to pass that on a cool bright day in early autumn Immanuel Rossi was journeying with the most charming bride that could have been found anywhere in the world. The young man felt blissfully sure of this, as his eyes rested proudly on the sweet flower-like face beneath the modest hat which exactly matched the severely simple traveling gown. Hilda had not made an exhaustive study of her favorite magazine for nothing. Indeed she had corresponded with the editor of the fashion column some weeks before her marriage, and knew with comfortable certainty that she was now attired in a manner "suitable for a girl in moderate circumstances, who was about to marry a very rich man."

Not being of a gushingly confidential nature, Hilda had not so much as mentioned these minor matters to her fortunate bridegroom; hence he beheld only the perfect result of a somewhat tortuous process. That truly invaluable innate sense of the eternal fitness of things yclept tact, which is as much a birthright as the color of one's eyes, had served the young woman admirably on previous occasions; it came to her rescue once more, when Immanuel murmured in her ear that they were going at once to their own little home on the back hill-road. She had hoped—indeed, she had confidently expected, that this wedding journey of theirs would end in New York, or at the least in Newport or Europe. Hilda's fashionable geography was of the vaguest; but dreams of magnificence had

haunted her waking as well as sleeping hours ever since that fateful scrap of paper had fallen in her way.

Now a little chill of fear paled her cheeks as she listened to the short, disjointed sentences which fell from the lips of the man at her side. Suppose it was all a mistake; newspapers, she had heard, did not invariably tell the truth. She felt a sudden suspicion of Amella Hurd. What if it was a deep-laid plan to get Jack away from her! These unpleasant reflections brought so charming an expression of regret into the depths of her violet eyes, that Immanuel checked himself in the midst of an enthusiastic eulogy of their future to say to Jerry, "But I shall not be selfish, dear; you shall go home whenever you wish. You are such a little home-lover, I know, but I hope it will not be hard to be happy in a certain farmhouse."

"Shall we—shall we always live in that house?" asked Hilda tremulously.

"'Always' is a long word, dear," said Immanuel, with a searching look into the exquisite drooping face. "I cannot tell."

He was silent for a long time after this, and Hilda in a noiseless tumult of hope and fear looked quietly out of the window.

Each wondered secretly what the other was thinking about. This marriage is a curious spectacle—to put it mildly. A man and a woman mutually vow to love and cherish an unseen, unknowable being; represented often unfairly enough by the symbol we call body. Little by little, bit by bit, the invisible man comes to see dimly the actual woman at his side who has rashly sworn to be his until death do them part. And so altruism finds itself linked to egotism; love to

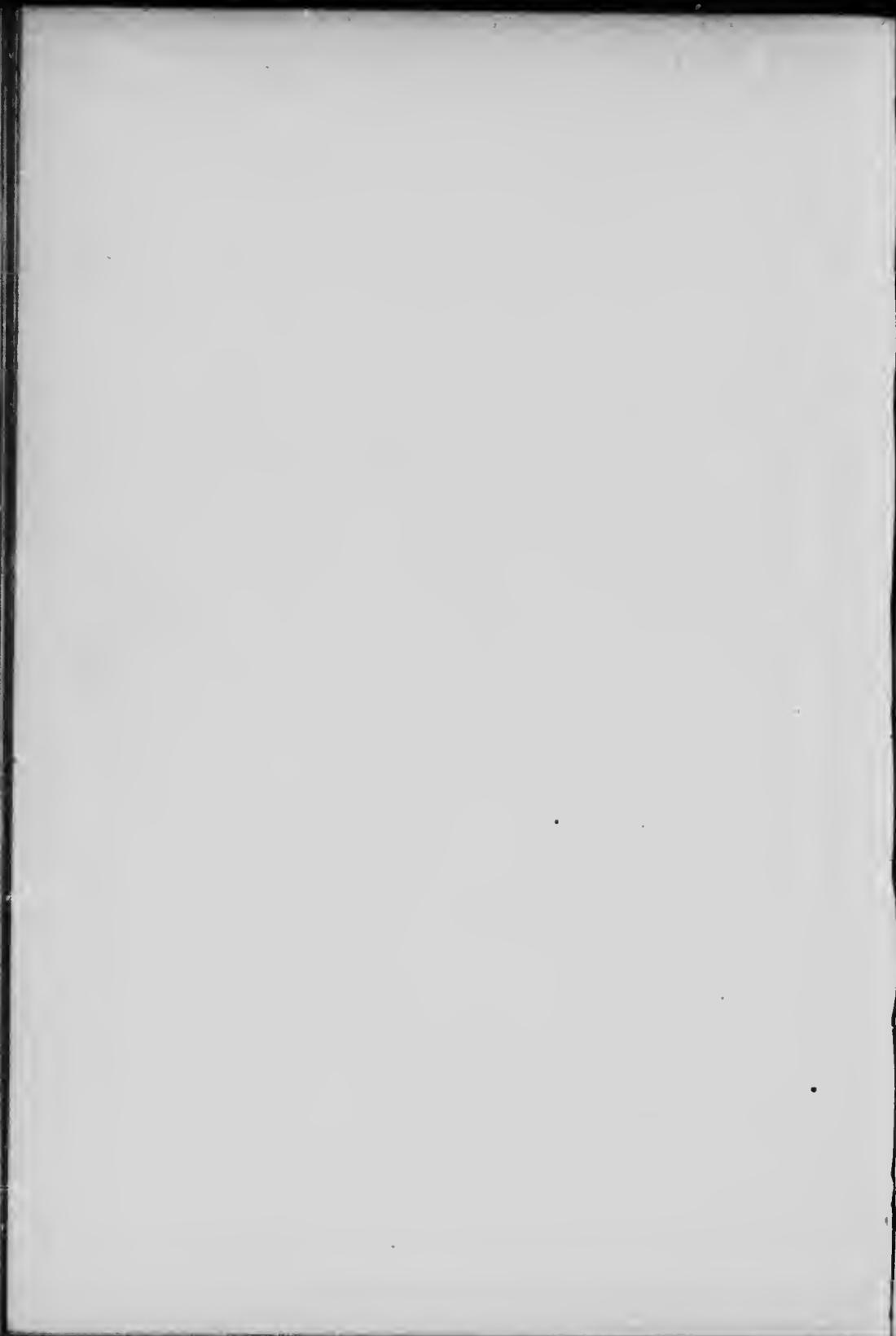
selfishness; wisdom to ignorance. So does God who is the Beginning and the End—the All and in All—continually mingle in this earth-crucible the gold, silver and precious stones with the wood, hay and stubble.

They were set down that evening at sunset—these two who were strangers but who believed themselves to be united in life's tenderest tie—before the old house on the back hill-road. It was no longer a shabby, pathetic old house; even Hilda was roused from the apathy of her fear and disappointment to a momentary pleasure as she beheld the astonishing changes that had taken place both inside and out. The enviroing mayweed had given place to stretches of velvet turf; the straggling lilacs were pruned; the modest walls shone with a new coat of paint; bay windows jutted out here and there. Within, fresh paint, paper and some tasteful pieces of furniture had wrought wonders in the old-fashioned rooms. It was sweet and comfortable and homelike enough to have pleased a more fastidious woman than Hilda. "After all," she thought, "it must be true; it cost a great deal of money to do even this; and it is certainly a romantic idea to spend our honeymoon here." Her pretty head straightened itself like a drooping flower refreshed by the rain; her blue eyes shone with joy.

"Do you like it, dear?" asked Immanuel anxiously.

"I think it is lovely," answered Hilda honestly.

PART III
The Conqueror



CHAPTER XXVIII

His Other Self

IMMANUEL ROSSI made no haste to acquaint his wife with what he was pleased to term the sordid circumstance of his wealth. What had money to do with these delicious hours, which could surely never be repeated whatever else of bliss the future undoubtedly held? And Hilda conducted herself with the most admirable self-restraint; her anxieties and doubts were as sweetly hid as ever her ignorance of classic lore had been in the earlier days of their acquaintance. Besides, what woman of twenty can be wholly insensible to the rapturous adoration of a handsome man in the first glow of his married happiness? It was very interesting to be adored, more interesting even than she had imagined. But —

This "but" spoiled even her pleasure in the ruffled muslin curtains—which this singular young husband of hers had not forgotten, and cast its shadow over every appointment of a really dainty nest of a home. To be sure she laughed indulgently at certain masculine blunders, and wondered in private at certain masculine extravagances.

A ponderous chest of silver bearing the cards of Messrs. Trent and Smalley, with their respective wives, arrived at the beginning of the second week of their housekeeping. Hilda examined the shining rows

upon rows of spoons and forks with a heightened color. "When shall we ever use all these beautiful things, Immanuel?" she asked, looking up to meet her husband's watchful eyes.

"I am sure I don't know, little wife," he answered with a smile; "we might invite the haymakers in to dinner some day, and dazzle them with our magnificence."

"You don't mean that," said Hilda, with a toss of her pretty head. "But tell me who are Mr. and Mrs. Trent and Mr. and Mrs. Smalley?"

"Trent and Smalley are my lawyers, dear."

"Lawyers?" repeated Hilda, with a rising inflection of astonishment.

"I have never told you, sweetheart, because it has really nothing to do with our happiness; but I had a tiresome lot of money left me long ago. Mr. Smalley and Mr. Trent look after it for me." He said this in the quietest, most matter-of-fact way in the world. Indeed he could not easily have comprehended Hilda's mind had he been on a sudden gifted with the doubtful privilege of looking into its hidden depths.

There was nothing there after all but what the world at large would have called a very natural and laudable ambition; even that was not visible in the lovely eyes uplifted to his face, nor yet in the unwonted flutter of that perfectly modeled bosom. Her voice was calm and unshaken as she said slowly, "I do not understand—please tell me about it."

"Thank God you loved me for myself, dear," he murmured, kissing the white forehead. "You thought me a poor farmer. And that is truly what I am at present; but I shall be more—I can be more."

"But the money!" said Hilda, in a tone of sharp anxiety; "have you lost it?"

He looked at her with such surprise almost merging into pained doubt, that she called up a ghost of a smile. "You—you are so queer," she said in a low strained voice. "I—I wish ——"

"What is it that you wish, dear?"

"I know so little about you," she complained, thrusting out her ripe lips like a child on the verge of sobs; "you have never told me the first thing about yourself. I do not even know you!"

He threw back his head and burst into relieved laughter. "I am not much given to talking," he confessed; "Uncle Moses was silent as a hermit for the most part, and I early learned to hold my tongue: 'tis a habit hard to break. But you are right, dear, I have told you too little about myself."

"You were born near here—at the Four Corners, Aunt Emeline says," observed Hilda, impatient at the revery into which he seemed about to fall with his last words. "And you lived with the Winches—quite poor people; I have seen their house."

Immanuel's face saddened. "I do not think enough of those days," he said slowly. "Elizabeth Winch was a good woman—my mother, the only mother I ever knew. She died for me as truly as any martyr."

"How did they find out about you?" asked Hilda hurriedly. "How did they find out that your mother was really ——"

"Have you heard the story?" he asked.

"Very little of it," stammered Hilda, overcome with a curious embarrassment. "She—she died."

"She was killed—murdered," he said with deliberate emphasis.

"Oh, I never heard that!" cried Hilda, her eyes wide with horror. "Who did it?"

"My grandfather."

"Your grandfather? But she died in the Winches' barn; there was an inquest. No one ever knew."

"It was all found out afterward," said Immanuel bitterly. "My mother was a petted, indulged child; she loved and married my father who was a poor man. My grandfather thrust her out into the world, and she died, murdered by his pride, by his love of money. That accursed money came to me; the world calls me a rich man. But I am a child of poverty—a child of the tenements. I must atone!"

"I am so glad she was not really murdered," said Hilda, with a long sigh of relief. "That would have been too dreadful!" Her eyes were sparkling with suppressed delight; but her face was quite properly sober, drawn into mock doleful curves to match the sadness of that other face so near her own.

"You must understand me, dear," he said, a thrill of anxiety in his voice, "this money that has come to me is not my own."

"Not your own!" cried Hilda, aghast. "Whose is it then?"

"I hold it in trust for those to whom it belongs," said her husband. He leaned forward and took one of the little white hands in both his own. "I am so glad you loved me—here in this beautiful country," he went on softly. "It is only love that has made us husband and wife; it is only love that can keep us happy. That is why I never told you about the

money. Do you not understand?" The anxiety had deepened almost to entreaty. He waited a moment, but Hilda sat silent with dropped eyes. "I cannot tell you all; you must see for yourself. You will understand—you will help me."

Hilda looked up. There was a steely glitter in the depths of her violet eyes. "I wish you would speak so that I can understand you," she said coldly. "I dare say I am very stupid, but I confess that it puzzles me when you tell me in one breath that you have had a great deal of money left you by your grandfather, and in the next that it is not your own."

"Hilda, can you go to New York with me this afternoon?"

She sprang to her feet with a little cry of joyful surprise. "Will you take me to New York? Oh, Immanuel, how good you are!"

He looked down at the dimpling face with a sigh; then he stooped and kissed the low, white forehead under its cloud of yellow hair. A miserable little teasing doubt was beginning to whisper in his ear. He rebuked it sharply. "You are nothing but a child, Hilda," he said wistfully, and kissed her again, this time on her lips. "Do you love me, dear?"

"Of course I love you, foolish boy!" said Mrs. Hilda, with pretty dignity. She drew herself out of his arms, and patted her tumbled hair with two white hands. "Shall I pack all my dresses?" she asked.

They had had a long delightful day of sightseeing together and Hilda was blissfully sleepy and content, ready to be caressed and to purr like a kitten. She glanced about the somewhat gaudily furnished room in

the unfashionable hotel where they were stopping and sighed happily. "I have had such a good time to-day," she said. "I just love New York! I wish we might live here all the time instead of in that stupid country. Only think what it will be next winter, with the drifts piled high and the most dismal winds howling down the chimney—ugh!" She shivered daintily and nestled against her husband's broad shoulder. "You could live here—or wherever you liked, couldn't you?" She looked up into his face with the sweetest coaxing smile. "I am sure we should like it ever so much better. I like to see everything—there is so much. And I am sure I am just as—yes, why shouldn't I say it? I am every bit as pretty as some of those elegant ladies we saw driving in the park this afternoon."

"You are far prettier than any of them," he said with strong conviction. "You are ——" But why record all that he said. Few honeymoon speeches will bear reporting verbatim.

Hilda blushed and sighed and dimpled with all her most bewitching variations as he wound up a fervent dissertation upon her charms, with every word of which she perfectly agreed. "Don't you think we would be much happier here?" she repeated.

"No, dear, I am sure we should not be happier. I have lived in New York, and I know."

"But you haven't lived here with me."

"No, sweetheart, and I don't intend to."

Hilda raised her brows ever so little; she said nothing. Her friend, Miss Hurd, had she been present, could have told Immanuel what that pretty little reflective air signified. "When Hil' looks like that," she was wont to remark sagely, "you might as well give up.

She doesn't say much; but she'll have her own way in the end, by hook or by crook."

On this occasion she tried "hook," baited seductively with a gentle little kiss, dropped soft as the petal of a rose-leaf on Immanuel's brown hand. "You said I could help you with your work; did you mean farm work, dear? I can't make butter, you know, and I hate to wash pans." This was little better than hypocrisy; for a stout kitchen-maid had been a part of the furnishing of the farmhouse. It answered the purpose admirably.

"That is precisely what I brought you to New York for, Hilda," he said seriously. "I wish to show you what I am doing with my money, and what I intend to do."

Hilda's face brightened. "I shall love to do that," she said.

"To-morrow morning," he went on, "we shall begin. You will see some painful sights, dear, and some ugly ones; but you must not mind that. If only we can redeem the ugliness and soothe the pain."

Hilda was full of curiosity. "I can't think what you mean, Immanuel," she said eagerly. "Do tell me, please!"

"Thank God you do not," he returned, and led her to the window. "Do you see those tall buildings yonder?"

"Yes," she said wonderingly.

"What would you say if I told you that in every one of them were crowded as many people as live in your home village? What would you say if I told you that these people were packed into small, dark, unventilated rooms—sometimes a whole family in a

room not as large as this, where they must eat, sleep, and work?"

"But why do they do it?" asked Hilda, elevating her eyebrows. "I don't think it is at all nice; I wouldn't live that way."

"They must. There is no other way—no other place. See here, Hilda, I found that my grandfather owned dozens of these buildings—some of the very worst ones. I would not tell you even if I could how horrible the conditions were. I must rebuild every one of them. I have rebuilt some of them. All the money and all that I can do personally is too little to make good the frightful injustice of the past."

"But it wasn't your fault," she cried, tossing her head.

"No, but it will be my fault if I let it go on—if I do nothing to make it right. I *must* make it right!"

Hilda was silent for a moment. "I think it is very nice of you," she said prettily.

"Do you, darling? I am so glad!" The joyful relief in his tone was so marked that Hilda looked up.

"You were afraid I would not think so," she murmured.

"No—no, dear," he said hurriedly. "I was sure you would help me. Ah, little wife, we shall be able to bring happiness into so many lives!"

Hilda turned her head with a seductive little pucker in her white forehead. "Do you mind telling me how much money you have?" she said coolly.

He hesitated for a moment, then named a sum that caused her to draw a quick breath of awe and amazement. "Why, Immanuel!" she cried, and stared at him with wide, uncomprehending eyes.

"It is a great power—a great responsibility," he said gravely.

There was another question trembling on the red lips. "Must you—shall you, use all of this money for these—beggars?"

The last word stung him like the blow of a whip. "They are not beggars," he cried, a note of anger in his deep voice. "My father died in a tenement house; my mother lived there. They were not beggars; my father was looking for work the day before he died. You do not understand, Hilda, and after all, why should you understand. You shall see for yourself!"

He did not intend to uncover the foulest spots of the city's shame and misery before the innocent eyes of his young wife. "If she but sees the women and children," he said to himself; "it will be enough." They were breakfasting the next morning when the subject was again broached between them.

"Do you want to make me perfectly happy to-day, dear?" cooed Hilda. She looked bewitching in all the fresh loveliness of the new day.

Immanuel's brown eyes lingered like a caress on the flower-like face. "Of course I do," he said smiling. "What shall it be?"

"I am almost afraid to ask," she confessed, lowering her long lashes. "You quite frighten me sometimes; you are so——"

"Am I such a brute as that? When did I frighten you, dear?"

"I have always been a little bit afraid of you," she murmured. "I am more afraid than ever now."

"Why?" His voice was urgent, almost com-

manding. "You must tell me why you are afraid of me, Hilda."

"That is too long a story," she said, dimpling and flushing under his gaze. "Perhaps I shall get over it some day." She sipped her coffee daintily, while he looked at her in dismayed silence.

"I suppose I am a clumsy fellow," he said, drawing his black brows together in an effort to recall the past. "To tell you the truth, Hilda, I wasn't properly brought up in one direction. I don't know anything about women—I never knew any." His eyes as they rested upon her face were so honestly appealing that she broke into a light laugh of amusement and triumph.

"I'm not so terrified as usual just at this minute," she said gaily; "and I will take advantage of the fact to tell you that I am simply dying to go to the opera."

"Is that all?" he said. "Why didn't you say so at once? Am I such an ogre that my wife is afraid to ask for an opera ticket? Of course you shall go!" He ran his eye rapidly over the columns of the newspaper that lay beside his plate. "There isn't much that is worth hearing now," he said. "Trovatore—Aida; I haven't heard everything myself. Uncle did not care much for playhouses for me, though he was passionately fond of music."

"But I have never seen any opera," said Hilda plaintively. "I often feel so ignorant—and indeed I am ignorant and uncultured. I wonder that you could ever have cared for a raw country girl like me, Immanuel," she looked so sweetly humble as she said this that he was tempted to heaven knows what in the way of rash vows.

What he did say with all his honest soul in his brown eyes satisfied her for the moment. "You are all that I wish you to be, Hilda." After a pause he added with a smile, "Shall it be *Trovatore*, then?"

"Yes, please, and thank you very much," said Hilda gently.

"And you will go with me to see some of my tenements this morning?" he asked, laying down the paper.

"Of course," she assented, raising her eyebrows ever so little; "I haven't forgotten why you brought me to New York. It wasn't to amuse *me*; it was just to see those tenements."

He moved uneasily in his chair. "I had hoped—I supposed that you would care," he said in a low voice.

CHAPTER XXIX

Tenements and Tears

THEY were climbing a dark staircase in a Newberry Street tenement block. "Where are we going?" whispered Hilda, nervously. "How close it is here; I'm afraid it will make me faint!"

"We shall be up in a minute, dear," he answered reassuringly. "I want you to see Mrs. Mulholland and her children."

"Who is Mrs. Mulholland?"

"One of my tenants. I am going to ask her to move; in fact they must all move; this old barrack is coming down next week."

"It's a dreadful place," she panted, "perfectly dreadful!"

"Isn't it?" he assented. "I am ashamed to call it mine. After we have seen this I will show you a house I am not ashamed of."

He was knocking at a low-browed door on a narrow, ill-lighted corridor as he said this. The whirring beat of a sewing-machine driven at a furious rate of speed stopped for an instant, and a shrill voice bade them enter.

Hilda gathered up her fresh skirts daintily and grew a little pale as her husband opened the door and motioned her forward. It was a tiny room with one window, before which, bent almost double under the

low sloping ceiling, sat a white-faced girl sewing on a lapful of some bluish material. The sewing-machine aforementioned stood in the middle of the floor, with its operator in a broken-backed chair. She was a tall, angular woman, dressed in a ragged calico wrapper, bound about the waist with a bit of twine. Three or four small children in various states of dirt and squalor squatted on the naked floor. All were working busily; one sewing on buttons, another overcasting seams of the same stuff which was piled about the girl by the window. There was a tiny cook-stove in one corner, Hilda noticed, and a bed, dingy and tumbled. A bit of cheese and a broken loaf lay on the table.

"Good-morning, Mrs. Mulholland," said Immanuel, shaking hands with the woman. "I want to introduce you to my wife."

The woman stared with lack-lustre eyes at the slim figure in the doorway. "Won't you come in?" she said civilly. She rose as she spoke and set out the one chair.

Hilda shook her head and glanced appealingly at her husband.

"My wife has never been in the city before," he said easily; "she finds your stairs hard to climb."

"They are hard, God knows," said the woman; "but I guess there's stairs 'most everywhere. I don't care nothin' 'bout 'em as long's I kin git plenty of work."

"What are you doing now?" asked Immanuel, eyeing the blue stuff with a frown.

"Postal-uniform parts," said the woman wearily. "We get nine and a half cents a pair for em. I ain't

anything to complain of, sir. We've been doin' splendid since you was so good to us. Lizzy there's workin' to home now; an' we've always plenty to eat, ain't we, children?"

The children nodded; their gray, pinched faces taking on the semblance of a smile. One of them pointed to the table with pride; they had had enough and to spare.

The woman wiped her eyes. "I don't know where we'd be now if it wasn't for *you*, sir," she went on. "An' the children was to the country two weeks in August. It done 'em so much good; I hardly knew Gerty when she come home."

"I am going to ask you to move, Mrs. Mulholland," said Immanuel. "This house must come down next week."

"Come down! Oh, Lord save us, what for? Just as we're fixed so nice an' comf'able."

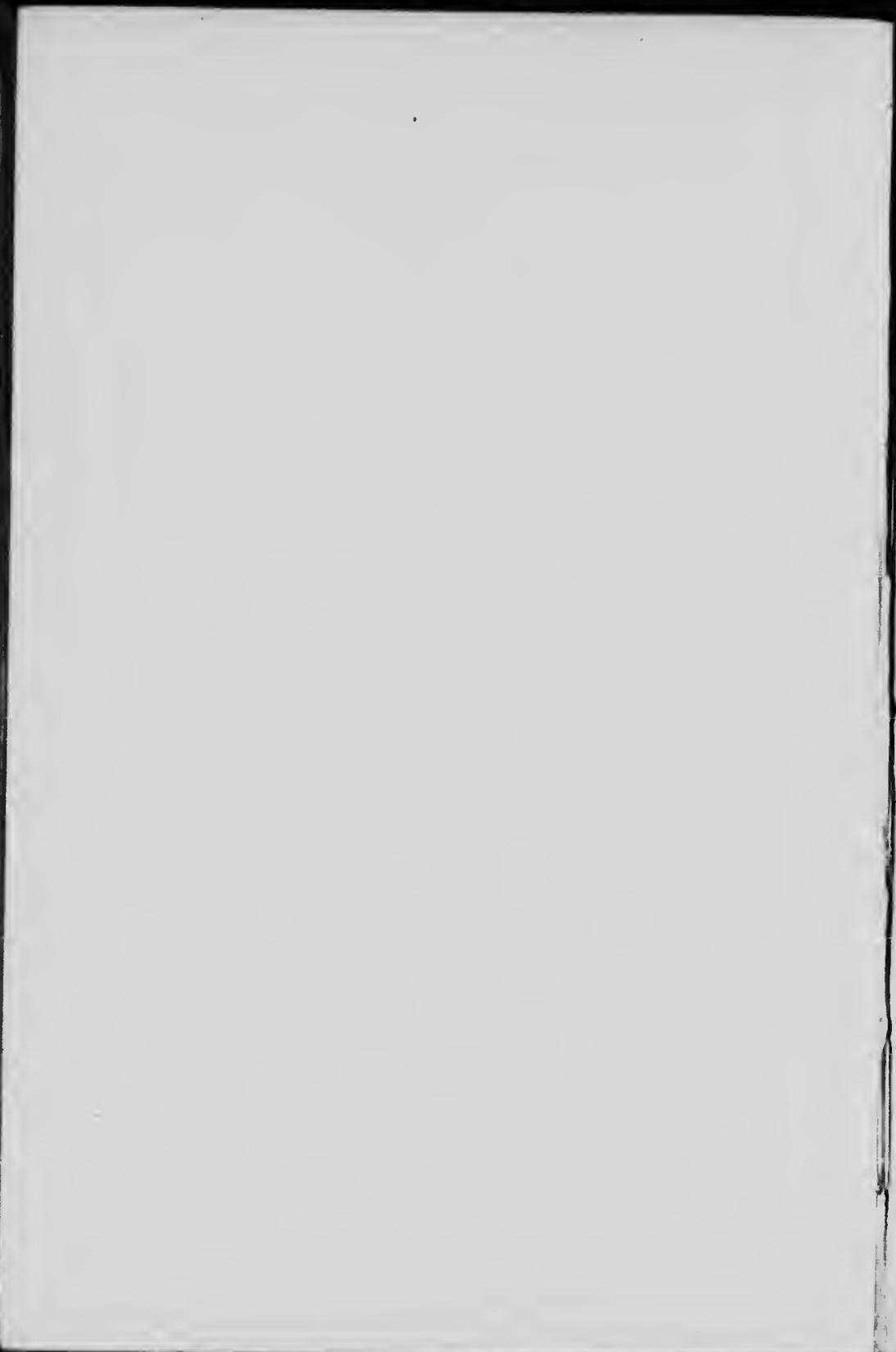
"You shall go into one of my new houses, my good woman. I will see that you are moved. You will be far more comfortable there than you are here. Will you not enjoy three rooms and a closet; with water in your kitchen and — But you shall see for yourself, you and Lizzy."

The woman shook her head. "We couldn't never pay fur three rooms," she said hopelessly. "I ain't makin' but six pairs a day; I can't do no more; an' the children eat an awful lot."

His eyes moistened. "The rent will be no higher," he said gently. "I am sorry but you will have to go. I will pay you and the other or lost time, and Brown will move you. Don't be afraid, Mrs. Mulholland, I mean to help you all I can."



THE WOMAN STARED WITH LACK-LUSTRE EYES AT
THE SLIM FIGURE IN THE DOORWAY



"I know right well you do, sir," cried the woman. "There ain't many like you, Mr. Rossi. I'll do just as you say, an' may heaven bless you an' this sweet young lady!" She turned to Hilda, who was tapping her foot impatiently on the dirty floor. "This ain't no place fur the likes of her," she added in a whisper. "Lord! if my Lizzy was like her!"

They stopped at three or four other doors as they went down. In one room a young Italian woman was mourning the death of her first-born. She took no notice of their presence, but wailed and rocked herself to and fro in tearless anguish. Hilda drew away from the little coffin with a shiver. "Don't ask me to stay here," she whispered sharply; "I can't bear it!"

Immanuel stooped over the young mother and whispered something in her own tongue. She looked up, her great eyes fixed and staring, then burst into tumultuous sobbing.

"She will be better now," he said to the swarthy woman in a gaudy neckerchief and earrings who sat at the mourner's side. "Give her this," and he slipped a folded bill into the hard palm.

"What did you say to her?" asked Hilda curiously, as they emerged into the street. "How thankful I am to be out of that dreadful place!" she exclaimed, without waiting for an answer. "Must I see any more? My head aches dreadfully from the disgusting smells—ugh!"

"What if you were forced to live there always?" he asked quietly.

"I just wouldn't!" she cried. "I am not that sort of a person; respectable people never live like that!" A frowsy woman with her bonnet askew brushed

against the crisp skirts as they turned the corner. Hilda shuddered. "I don't think this is a nice place for me to be in," she said fretfully; "I shall just ruin my new dress!"

He looked down at her in silent dismay. "Never mind the gown," he said at last; "you shall buy a new one. But I must show you — I am so anxious that you should understand, Hilda!"

The note of mingled anxiety and entreaty in his voice brought a smile to her lips. "What if I don't choose to understand?" she said within herself. Aloud she repeated her request to return to the hotel. "You can tell me about it all just as well, can't you, dear?" she cooed. "I never could endure the sight of such wretchedness. I am so tender-hearted; it always makes me unhappy for hours afterward!"

"But to help the unhappiness of others," he urged, "is the only real happiness; and how can we help it if we don't know it is there?"

Hilda shrugged her shoulders. "It may do for some people with strong nerves," she said positively; "but it will not do for me. I just can't endure dirt and smells; it makes me ill!"

"That is exactly the point," he said eagerly. "It makes them ill. Didn't you see the girl's face, and the children, how gray and pinched they were?"

"Yes, but how are you really going to help them? You will move them into a cleaner place, I dare say; but the woman will have to work just the same. You couldn't help that. I know I am very stupid, but it seems to me that ignorant people will have to do what they can, and take what they can get for their work."

"You are not stupid at all, my dear," he said, look-

ing down at her with some amazement. He had expected—he hardly knew what—from his wife, sympathy, certainly, eager compliance with his plans, a soft womanly compassion for these suffering toilers. But this shrewd probing to the root of social conditions seemed singularly inappropriate as associated with long-lashed violet eyes and soft rose-tinted cheeks.

He drew away from his wife a little, the better to look at her in this new light. "It is a question which involves the very foundations of business and social relations," he said slowly. "It is all wrong at present. That woman is working for a sweater at starvation wages. She has a right to fair wages for her work and a decent home to live in."

"There must be thousands like her," she said coldly.

"Yes, thousands upon thousands. And some, as the poor thing said, even worse off than she. I found her paying an exorbitant rent for that wretched attic, her children slowly starving to death; the girl, Lizzy, in a sweat-shop. I did what I could."

"What did you do?"

"I reduced the rent to begin with; gave them food, —oh, it was nothing! But there are so many—so many!"

"Do you intend to spend all your money in this way?"

"Yes."

"Will it do any good in the end?"

"I cannot tell. I only know what I must do."

There was silence between the two after this till they reached their hotel. Immanuel was bitterly disappointed, though he could have scarcely told why. Hilda was thinking. Her air-castle lay in ruins about

her; but a substantial foundation was already laid for a structure of quite another sort.

"You must think me very foolish, dear Immanuel," she said to him after luncheon; "but please remember that I never visited a city slum before. I was so shaken by it that I am not quite myself yet."

His eyes brightened as they rested upon her. She was lying back in the depths of a wicker chair, her fair hands folded in her lap. Something in her attitude reminded him of the day when she had appeared to him in the guise of a pure young angel freshly descended from the blue. "I ought to have told you about it," he said penitently. "I suppose I can hardly imagine how such sights would appear to eyes accustomed only to comfortable village life. I am inured to it by actual experience." Then he told her of his guardian's experiment, and of his own subsequent residence in the real slums.

"And did you really live in one of those elegant houses we saw yesterday?" she asked eagerly. "I wish I could see it!"

"You did see it," he answered, smiling at her pretty enthusiasm. "Do you remember calling my attention to a lady and two little girls coming down the steps to their carriage?"

"Was it that house? Oh, Immanuel!"

"The money required to keep that house up for one year would save a thousand children from starvation," he answered deliberately.

"Do you think it is wrong to love beautiful houses and pretty things?" she asked tremulously.

His stern young face softened as he saw the color rise in her cheeks. After all she was only going over

the same ground where he had himself almost been beaten. For an instant he allowed himself to picture her in surroundings such as he could give her. She was young and very beautiful; she would shine like a star, he told himself, in one of the palaces yonder. Then he drew a deep breath. But it was all a mistake: "Life—*life* consisteth not in the abundance of *things* which a man hath." He repeated the words aloud—almost timidly. They had never talked much of their religion—these two. She had told him with a pretty, serious air that she was a member of the church, and he had forbore to question her. The sanctuary of that maiden heart had seemed to him too sacred—too holy to invade. "I know that we are one at heart," he added after a long pause. "We cannot arrange our lives after the world pattern—we who are followers of Him who came not to be ministered unto, but to minister."

Hilda was silent. She was hoping that Immanuel was not going to be disagreeably religious. She had joined the church at the age of fifteen, more to rid herself of the distasteful homilies of her Sunday-school teacher and pastor than for any other reason. She believed vaguely but comfortably that this act entitled her to admission to a dubious "heaven," where people wore white dresses all the time, and played unremittingly on golden harps. The question of salvation having been settled thus easily, she did not often trouble herself about what she termed "such matters." "Goody-goody people always make me awfully cross," she was accustomed to declare with a charming smile. "I fairly shiver and turn green when people begin to quote Scripture at me and that sort of

thing." Remarks of the kind were frequently addressed to an audience of her youthful admirers, and were regarded as exquisitely witty, judging from the applause and laughter with which they were invariably received.

She sat quite still now, her eyes downcast. After a little the corners of her mouth twitched; in another instant two big tears chased each other swiftly down her pink cheeks; then a diminutive handkerchief was called into action, and the blond head went down on to the arm of her chair.

"Why, darling—darling! What is the matter? What have I said to grieve you?" He took the little sobbing figure in his arms, and soothed her against his breast, as tenderly as her mother might have done. It occurred to him that this exquisite, fragile creature had no mother; that she was as much alone in the world as he was himself. He rebuked himself sharply for his obtuseness, his hardness of heart. What after all were any number of seamstresses or slum children to him, compared with this one woman whom he had vowed to love, to cherish and console above all others. He had never before seen Hilda in tears, and the sight moved him profoundly. How was he to guess that the shallow current of those tears was as easily turned on as a faucet. She had wept when she wanted a new gown, and papa had come down handsomely with the requisite cash. She had wept when her lessons were difficult, and the most obdurate of teachers had quickly smoothed out all the tangles. It was a most useful accomplishment; Hilda had practiced it from her childhood up, and might have been termed a past master in the art.

She allowed herself to be soothed after awhile, and looking up from her shelter into the anxious face bent over her permitted him to see how pretty she was. Some people's eyes grow unbecomingly swollen and red during such exercise of the emotions, but not Hilda's. The tears sparkled in the blue eyes and amid the long lashes like dewdrops. The pink cheeks were like rain-drenched rose petals. Immerse he kissed them remorsefully. "Dearest," he murmured. "Dearest!"

"Am I really the dearest?" asked Hilda, in a tremulous little voice which matched the dewdrops and rose petals to perfection.

"Why of course you are, dear, dear little wife; who else could there be! You are all that I have that is dearest and sweetest in this big lonesome world!"

"I thought perhaps you cared more for Mrs.—Mrs. Mul-holland!" Recurring sobs shook the low voice, which nevertheless ended in a triumphant little laugh. "But you don't, and I am so glad! I am just a foolish little thing, dear; I simply can't pretend to be wise and good. I am just—Hilda!"

CHAPTER XXX

Hilda Makes a New Friend

LET no one make the mistake of supposing that Hilda Rossi was guilty of deliberate hypocrisy. This wonderful, terrible human nature of ours—the Ego which has emerged from unknown depths through slow, dim ages of evolution holds within itself the coldness of the rock, the immobile selfishness of the vegetable, the pitiless greed and cunning of the beast enfolded sheathlike about that unchanging spark of the divine which abides in every soul—the true and only source of its being. Thus it is that the world is made up of unfinished Christs in all stages of their development. Let but the God-flame penetrate into the darkened consciousness, then is accomplished the divine at-one-ment; then does the soul return to the Father from whence it came; then is the vast cycle of the ages completed—the coming forth and the going back merged in the changeless poise of the Eternal. We know this, that we shall be like Him; and to this end does the Master-workman work in and through all, filling all things with His fulness.

Hilda was selfish as a seedling oak—or a baby—with whom selfishness is at once the law of being and of preservation. The Flame burned as yet in the sealed crypt of her unguessed self. Her mind was tranquil; her health perfect, her cunning quite unperceived by herself, so much a part of that self did it seem. The

altruistic idea had not yet presented itself to her consciousness in any compelling form. To deny self—to overcome, these were meaningless sounds in her ears. She was not a hypocrite; she was perfectly sincere and true to herself as she knew that self.

And because one does not easily perceive in another that which has ceased to exist in one's self, Immanuel, who had climbed to a higher plane, and in whom love ruled, saw in his young wife the ideal woman. The vague soreness and disappointment which settled down upon him like a cloud as he left her that afternoon he attributed to his own lack of perception. "I have expected too much of her," he said to himself, "I must be patient."

Hilda was glad to be left alone; she was feeling pleasantly languid after the exertions and emotions of the morning. She therefore settled herself by the window determined to enjoy uninterruptedly the pageant of the city street, which impressed her as being delightfully exciting. As her eyes followed the unending stream of busses, cars, carriages, and people, she smiled with unmeaning triumph. "I just wish Amelia Hurd could see me now," she said to herself, and twisted the diamond on her finger so that patches of brilliant color played upon her gown. "Wouldn't she be jealous, though!"

A carriage was drawing up before the entrance below; she leaned forward to stare at its occupant, a stout, richly-dressed lady, as she stepped slowly out. "My!" she murmured, "wouldn't it be lovely to have a carriage like that, and go everywhere I liked, to the stores, and the theatre, and ——" She paused in the current of her meditations to wonder where people

who had carriages did go, anyway. Her knowledge of fashionable life was extremely limited, consisting mainly of vague but magnificent visions of trailing gowns, blazing jewels, and an unlimited variety of good things to eat. Hilda was something of a gourmand in an inexperienced way; she was eating bonbons now out of a pasteboard box with childish relish.

A knock at the door brought first a surprised stare, then a stereotyped "Come in!" in a high girlish treble. The knock was repeated, and with a little exclamation of vexation she crossed the room and opened the door. A servant stood without holding a salver, which in its turn held a small square of white pasteboard.

"Shall I show the lady up, ma'am?"

Hilda glanced uncertainly toward the mirror. "Yes, of course," she said in a slightlyughty condescension. "Show her up at once.

"Mrs. Caleb Smalley," she read, "why, it must be that lawyer's wife. I wonder if I ought to say anything about the silver." Her fingers trembled with agitation as she fastened up a stray lock of yellow hair and pulled the ribbons higher about her white throat. She decided in the interval that elapsed before a second knock announced her visitor, that as this person was the wife of a man in her husband's employ, a toplofty demeanor would be both elegant and suitable. But her resolution was somewhat dashed by the imposing individual who rustled forward with outstretched hand.

Mrs. Caleb Smalley was tall and portly; she was attired with the magnificence which became the wife of one of New York's leading lawyers. Huge diamonds

flashed from her large pink ears; plumes waved in stately luxuriance above her rotund countenance; satin, velvet, lace, fur and cloth bled in a bewildering costume, which effectually swept the last trace of arrogance from the blue eyes of her hostess.

"I came at *once*, my dear," exclaimed the lady, with ingratiating emphasis and profuse smiles; "the very *moment* I heard you were here. *Why* did you not let us know at once?"

Hilda stammered out a few words to the effect that they had come quite unexpectedly. She felt unpleasantly young and ignorant. What was worse, the gown of which she had felt so sure, had become on the instant "countrified," than which there was no more damning adjective in Hilda's vocabulary.

"When Mr. Smalley sent me word not an hour since that you were here, and probably at home," continued Mrs. Smalley, "I lost not an instant, but ordered the carriage *at once*. I said to myself, 'I know dear Mrs. Rossi will pardon me if I come *sans ceremonie*.' We have so hoped that your husband would bring you up to town. Of course the country is charming in the summer time—perfectly charming, I love the country! but for winter you know, there is really no place on earth like New York. *We* prefer it to Paris, London or any of the foreign capitals!" The lady paused to flash a particularly gracious smile at the young woman opposite, whom she had already classified as a hopelessly timid and awkward country beauty, with neither birth nor breeding.

Subtly aware of her visitor's conclusions and filled with helpless wrath thereat, Hilda straightened her small head defiantly. "My husband prefers the coun-

try," she said with a curl of her ripe lips. "Of course, we could live *anywhere* we chose."

"Of course you could, my dear!" echoed her visitor, swiftly modifying at least one of her previous impressions. "There is no earthly reason why you shouldn't have houses in a dozen places. You must pardon me if I talk like a mother to you, my dear; of course we have known all about Mr. Rossi's affairs so long, and I assure you that Mr. Smalley loves him like a father—just like a father!"

"You are very good, I am sure," said Hilda prettily. She had begun to feel the ground under her feet once more, and was proportionately herself again.

"Mr. Smalley has been trying for a long time to persuade Mr. Rossi to invest more largely in city real estate," pursued Mrs. Smalley, with another of her expansive smiles, accompanied by arching brows and nodding plumes. "We should *so love* to have you near *us!* There is a perfect love of a house for sale now, not three blocks from us, in the most fashionable quarter. It is really a providential opportunity!"

"I should like to live in New York," said Hilda, her blue eyes sparkling with new interest. "I should be perfectly happy here, I know, but —"

"Then why do you say 'but,' my dear?" demanded the other, with a playful little gesture, expressive of the fondest intimacy. "I am sure Mr. Rossi must be already completely at the beck and call of that dainty little white hand. Besides, it would be so much better for *him*; so many of his interests are here."

Hilda blushed with pleasure. She was beginning to think this magnificently dressed lady very agreeable indeed. "I only meant that we have just had our

house fixed, and ——” She stopped short and blushed again, this time with mortification, as though the shrewd eyes behind the gold-rimmed glasses were looking directly at their humble housekeeping. She thought with a thrill of anger that Immanuel should not have taken her to such a house.

“That does not signify, I am sure,” Mrs. Smalley was saying smoothly. “It is a small estate, is it not?”

“No,” said Hilda carelessly, “it is a large place; but I don’t care much for the neighborhood. It is rather lonely, I mean,” she concluded, again fixing envious eyes upon the appointments of her visitor’s toilet.

The other graciously permitted this for an instant; then she arose with a grand rustle of concealed magnificence, which depressed poor Hilda more than what she saw. “I should be *so* pleased if you would drive with me awhile this afternoon,” she said exuding, as it were, kindness with the odor of violets. “*Have* you any other engagement?”

“Let me see,” said Hilda, wrinkling her pretty forehead affectedly. “Mr. Rossi and I are going to the opera this evening; but—no, I believe I have no other engagement for this afternoon.”

“Then put on your hat at once, my love; we will have such a nice visit in the open air.”

Under the brilliantly clear light of the afternoon sky Hilda’s fresh young loveliness impressed the older woman anew. It would really make quite a sensation, she told herself; and immediately began to consider this beauty in the light of a substantial round in the social ladder she was laboriously engaged in climbing. This exquisitely beautiful Mrs. Rossi could be

quickly run through the social mould; she would come out—Mrs. Smalley easily foresaw it—a finished society woman. The rest was easy, and the glory would be hers. She initiated the educational process with her next remark. "You and your husband will dine with us *en famille* to-morrow evening, I hope."

Hilda wondered a little over the French words; but answered cautiously that she would be most happy if her husband had made no other plans. "Perhaps he intends for us to go home," she added, with a doubtful glance at the benign curves of Mrs. Smalley's high-colored visage.

"Not *to-morrow!*" cried that lady. "Why, we haven't seen anything of you yet! Oh, these men! my dear, you will have to take a few lessons of an experienced matron like myself in the art of getting your own way. I shouldn't say this," she added, "if it were not far better for them—the men, I mean. Left to themselves they sometimes have such strange notions. Now, dear Mr. Rossi was brought up exclusively by a man—his uncle; I dare say you have heard all about him?"

Hilda admitted that she knew very little about Mr. Moses Armitage. Her bright eyes were fastened on the face of her hostess with an eagerness which did not escape that vigilant lady.

"You won't think me unpardonably rude, I trust, if I say to you quite in confidence, my dear, that Mr. Armitage was a man of the most unfortunately erratic turn of mind. It was *most* unfortunate for poor, dear Mr. Rossi! My husband has told me over and over again, that never in the whole course of his legal practice has he met with a person so—so misguided.

Poor Mr. Rossi was devoted to him, and I presume, never suspected with what injustice he was treated. Mr. Armitage was his sole guardian, you know, and he actually denied the child all the advantages due to his position as heir of the immense Armitage estate. Why, the poor boy never knew that he was anything but a penniless orphan until he was almost of age! They lived in tenement houses, and ——"

"He told me about that," murmured Hilda.

"And what *did* you think of it, my dear?"

"I thought it was ridiculous," said Hilda decidedly.

"My *dear!* I am *so* relieved to hear you say that!" exclaimed Mrs. Smalley, pressing the other's hand fondly in both her own. "I have told you that Mr. Smalley is devoted to your husband—that he loves him like a father. He has been *so distressed* to see Mr. Armitage's unfortunate influence actually blighting what would otherwise be a most brilliant career. But you can save him. I see that you will."

Hilda was somewhat puzzled; but she felt an agreeable sympathy with her half fledged ambitions, which prompted her to say, "I don't think I quite understand. What is it that I must save him from, Mrs. Smalley?"

"Hasn't he told you about his tenements? Poor, dear man, he has such a sweet nature, and of course is the more easily led away by his sympathies." Mrs. Smalley heaved a deep sigh and arched her brows pityingly.

"I spent the morning in a tenement house—if that is what you call it," replied Hilda, "the most dreadful place, full of dirty children and crying women, and smells! Ugh! it made me quite ill!"

"Of course it did! I could see at a glance, my love, that you are so exquisitely organized that you could not endure anything of the kind. That is just the way with *me*. I really cannot *bear* the sight of suffering! I always tell my husband to keep any horrors out of *my* way. If one could help it; but of course *that* is utterly impossible. There are these dreadfully poor people of the masses, and there always will be. I hold that it is my Christian duty to keep myself bright and cheerful that I may act the part of wife and mother as I should. I must really remonstrate with Mr. Rossi seriously. To expose a young wife to such an unpleasant experience! Really he ought to know better." Mrs. Smalley's feelings were so excessively warm and motherly at this point that she became almost hysterical.

"I don't think I shall go again," said Hilda, comfortably; "I don't like tenements."

"I should hope not, poor dear," sighed Mrs. Smalley. "You would like them less than ever, I fancy, if you realized what the fatal craze on the part of the late Mr. Armitage was likely to lead to."

"What will it lead to?" said Hilda, full of vague alarms.

"In the first place it will lead to a sadly narrow, restricted career for you. You will forgive me if I take a great liberty and tell you just what is in my heart, will you, dear?"

"Yes, certainly," murmured Hilda uneasily. She felt instinctively that her husband would disapprove of the conversation; yet she longed to understand the situation from a different standpoint from her own. She was shrewd enough to guess that the excessive

interest and affection shown by this comparative stranger must be unreal; but she nevertheless resolved to take advantage of it for the moment.

"You are just made for a full, generous, delightful life," pursued Mrs. Smalley, gushingly. "Has any one ever told you that you are a perfectly exquisite little beauty? But I dare say your husband has eyes for that much; only he must not be selfish and keep you all to himself. You were never made for the country; no indeed, my dear!"

Hilda blushed charmingly and displayed her eyelashes. "I don't like the country," she said simply.

"Then that is the very best of reasons why you should not stay there. But I started to tell you about the tenements; and I do feel that I am very bold indeed; I fear Mr. Rossi would never forgive me."

"I shall not tell him," said Hilda calmly.

"Oh, you *naughty* girl! don't you know young wives are supposed to tell their husbands everything? Perhaps we learn better after a while; but that's the way we all have to begin. Well, as I was saying, my love, these tenements are going to eat up your husband's fortune in no time." She had not been saying anything of the sort, and she was wholly unprepared for the astonishing effect of these words upon Hilda.

The rosy face blanched; the violet eyes darkened with terror. "Eat up all his fortune!" she echoed, in a low, strained voice, "what—what do you mean?"

"Why, it's perfectly plain, isn't it? though I'm not much of a business woman. If Mr. Rossi insists upon giving up his really paying investments and putting all his money in these absurd 'model tenements,' with every sort of expensive luxury and convenience for

debased creatures who neither require nor understand such things—it can't be very long before ——”

“Is he—is he doing this?”

“Of course he is; hasn't he told you? He doesn't intend to use his money for anything else; he has told Mr. Smalley so. And the property has been going down frightfully ever since he came into it. Of course it will take a long time to really spend it all, for even these tenements are immensely valuable, but they don't bring in a tithe of the income that the old ones do. And the old ones are plenty good enough for the people who live in them. If you saw one this morning, you know that much yourself.”

“I shouldn't like to live in one,” said Hilda, with surprising candor.

“Certainly not; neither should I. But the people who do live in them are perfectly contented. They don't want anything better. There is no sense in comparing people of the lower classes with you and me; and that is just the mistake your good husband is making. He imagines himself in their place—as if he could be there! Their standards are entirely different from ours, and their surroundings are exactly what they choose and make for themselves. One might as well undertake to make a pig comfortable and contented in my drawing-room, because indeed I should not enjoy a sty.” Mrs. Smalley was the able president of a woman's club, and upon this occasion she called into play some of her much lauded forensic ability. “I have looked into this subject deeply, my dear,” she added impressively, “and I assure you that your husband is arraying himself single-handed against the most intelligent and conservative classes in a body!”

The carriage was rolling swiftly through a smoothly paved avenue as they talked, and now its mistress seemed suddenly to awake to her surroundings. "Stop here for a moment, Smith," she said, addressing her coachman.

Then turning to Hilda, "Just look at this house, my dear Mrs. Rossi, and tell me if you like it. I think it is just what you want."

Hilda drew a quick breath of awe and longing. She mentally contrasted the ornate pile of granite with the humble little house on the back hill-road. "Wouldn't it cost a great deal of money to keep it up?" she asked, her husband's words about a thousand starving children recurring unpleasantly to her mind.

"Certainly not more than you can well afford," smiled Mrs. Smalley. "Have you the remotest idea of what your husband's income is, my love?"

"He told me how much he inherited from his grandfather," said Hilda, looking down, "but——"

Mrs. Smalley gazed at the fair flushed face with real pity. "Never mind, dear, we have talked business quite long enough," she said briskly, and turned the conversation into a sprightly monologue concerning New York society, to which Hilda listened in a tumult of pleasure and envy, not unmingled with fear.

She felt as she joined Immanuel at dinner an hour later, that she had been both deceived and misused. Her rights, as she termed them, had begun to assume certain definite proportions, as arrayed against a series of chimerical notions, from which it was her actual duty to set her husband free.

CHAPTER XXXI

A Dose of Bitter Herbs

A WEEK later young Mrs. Rossi again sat idly looking out of the window. The prospect which its clear panes commanded was a wide one, including a charming vista of blue hills and smiling stretches of valley, with the white spire of the church at Tacitus Four-Corners piercing a cloudy group of trees. Nearer at hand the bright afternoon sunshine rested pleasantly on close-cut slopes of velvet turf, gay with flower-borders. Inside, a yellow canary trilled overhead, a clear fire purred in the old fireplace; great bunches of golden-rod and autumn leaves lighted up the friendly faces of the books. It was in short a charmingly comfortable room, with a delightful outlook, yet the little mistress of it looked sadly unhappy; her slender figure was relaxed and nerveless, her red lips drooped dolefully, occasionally she wiped away a big tear which forced its way from under her long lashes.

"I just hate this place!" she said aloud, and flung her damp handkerchief at the joyous canary with an irritable, "I wish you'd keep still!"

A stooped figure advancing slowly down the road next attracted the frowning blue eyes. "Dear me, that's grandma; I wonder what she wants?"

Grandma had only come to make an afternoon call. She carried in her aged bosom a feminine longing to hear all about Hilda's visit to New York. "Why

ain't you been to see us, Hildy?" she asked with mild reproach in her kind eyes. "Me an' Em'line was expectin' you 'most all the forenoon. Em'line, she's pretty near laid up with neuralgy in her knee. I sez to her, I guess I'll try an' git over to Hildy's this afternoon, I sez, an' see if she's sick. I thought mebbe you'd be all tuckered out with trav'lin' an' sight-seein', an' I guess you be, ain't you, deary?"

"No, I'm not a bit tired," said Hilda shortly. Then a childish temptation to air her grievances overcame her reticence. "I didn't want to come back."

"Didn't want to come back!" echoed the old lady. "Why, what on airth 'ud you be doin' way off there? Your home's here, child, an' home's the best place for a married woman."

"I could have a home there," said Hilda, tossing her small head. "I don't like the country one bit. It's too lonesome here; I just hate it!"

"Fur the land's sake!" cried her grandmother; "if you ain't the most ungrateful girl I ever see! To think of the way 'Manuel worked to fix this place up. An' it's jest as han'some as a pictur' every room in it. I sh'd think you'd have more consideration fur your husban'; he likes the country an' so you'd ought to."

"I like the city and *he* ought to!" retorted Hilda with spirit. "I don't believe in giving in to a man all the while. If you begin that way there's just no end to it. I haven't been used to living in such a lonesome place, and I just won't stay here this winter!"

Mrs. Scott's shrewd eyes dwelt for some moments on her granddaughter before she replied. "You ain't changed a mite sence you 'vas little, Hildy," she said at last, with considerable acerbity of tone. "It was

always, 'I won't do this because I don't like to'; or 'I will do the other because I like to.' I'd ha' spanked that will an' won't out of you if I'd ha' had my way, an' it 'ud ha' been a blessin' to everybody if I had. I used to tell your pa so time an' again!"

Hilda tossed her yellow head with an arrogant curl of her red lips. "Papa knew better than to punish me," she cried, with a disagreeable little laugh. "I could always twist papa around my little finger!"

"Don't you go to tryin' to twist 'Manuel 'round your finger, Hildy," said Mrs. Scott, earnestly. "There won't nothin' but misery come out of it. It's good Bible doctrine 'at the husban's the head of the wife; he'd ought to be too!"

"Why, Grandma Scott, you know perfectly well that you've always had your way. Grandpa doesn't dare say his soul is his own unless he's out to the barn!" The blue eyes sparkled with malicious mischief, and the pink cheeks dimpled with a teasing smile.

"I've been 'bleeged to be firm 'bout some things," admitted Mrs. Scott with dignity. "But I've always treated your gran'father's opinions with respect."

"You've respectfully and firmly laid them to one side," laughed Hilda. "But I don't blame you; and you mus'n't blame me if I want to do the same thing. Immanuel's awfully rich, grandma, and there isn't a bit of sense in our living here if I don't want to."

"Awfully rich!" repeated Mrs. Scott; "who said so?"

"He told me so himself. But he's spending everything on a lot of horrid, ungrateful creatures in New York who don't care a bit about him. It's perfectly

dreadful, and I mean to put a stop to it. It's my duty!"

"Where is 'Manuel?" asked Mrs. Scott, surveying the flushed face before her with some anxiety. "I b'lieve a good hot dose of boneset tea 'ud do you good," she added, reflectively.

"For heaven's sake don't mention it, grandma!" cried Hilda, with a gesture of loathing. "Of course you don't understand; I'm sure I didn't. Immanuel took me to the city on purpose to explain the matter. I suppose he thought I'd be perfectly delighted; but I know better. I'm not so stupid as he thinks."

"Did you say 'Manuel was out to the barn?" inquired the old lady mildly. "I'd kind of like to see him before I go."

"Yes, and tell him I'm feverish and need boneset or thoroughwort or some other loathsome mess. I don't know where he is; I guess he's gone to the post-office. But truly, grandma, I'm not a bit sick; I'm just mad!"

"Well, that's bein' sick enough fur boneset!" said Mrs. Scott with spirit. "I've give it to you more'n once when you was little, an' it took the spunk right out of ye!"

Hilda laughed in spite of herself. "Really, you're too funny, grandma," she said with a touch of patronizing indulgence. "I should think it would take the spunk, as you call it, out of almost any one the way you fix it. But I'm sure you'd agree with me if you knew all that I do." Thereupon she set forth at length her visit to New York, including her interview with Mrs. Smalley, the greater part of whose remarks she quoted with astonishing accuracy.

"That woman's a busy-body," quoth Mrs. Scott,

sententiously. "She's got an ax to grind, I'll warrant ye! Don't you pay no 'tentlon to what she said."

"Why, grandma, she was perfectly lovely! You ought to have seen her dress, ail lined with siik and ——"

"Fine feathers don't make fine blrds," said the old lady, shaking her head. "She was tryln' to set you agalnst your husban', an' that's what no lady'lli ever do, whether her dress ls lined with siik or caliker. Now, Hiidy, I'd advise ye to put this hull thing outen your head. You've got as nice a home here as any woman need ask for, an' as good a husban'. As fur as I kin make out from what you say, 'Manuel's got the right of it. He ain't a mite selfish."

"I caii It disgustingly selfish to think more of those horrid slum people than he does of mei" pouted Hilda.

"He don't think more of 'em, an' you know he don't," said Mrs. Scott, earnestly. "He jest worships the ground you walk on, Hiidy; but you don't want to cut up so 'at he'lli be sick of you. An' i'll tell you another thing, you want to remember 'at you thought he was jest a poor farmer with nothin' but this little place to his name, when he was courtin' you. He never let on to one of us 'bout his money. He's done everythin' he promised to by ye, an' a lot more. You want to remember that, Hiidy."

"I'd never have married him in the world, if i'd known," said Hilda, sulkily.

"if you'd known what—fur the land's sake?" exclaimed the old lady wrathfully. "i declare to goodness, Hildy, you don't deserve nothin' in the world so much as a good hard settin' down to bring ye to

yer senses. An' ef you was five 'stead of twenty you'd git it too this minit!"

"I don't think it's at all nice of you to talk to me that way," said Hilda, rising with a great display of matronly dignity. "Oh, here's Immanuel; I'm so glad!"

She kissed her husband with unwonted warmth, and his eyes brightened happily as they rested for a moment on the charming face. "I'm glad you've come to see this little wife of mine, grandma," he said cheerfully. "I tried to persuade her to drive with me this glorious afternoon, but she said 'no' very decidedly. Perhaps she guessed some welcome visitor was at hand."

Hilda was busy with her embroidery now; she looked up to smile with a dazzling display of white teeth and dimples. "Grandma has been scolding me," she said sweetly.

"No, I have n't," promptly denied the old lady. "I found her cryin' and sulkin' when I came in," she went on, turning to Immanuel, with the brisk air of a good disciplinarian, "and I jes' giv' her a piece of my mind, that's all."

The young man turned a distressed and inquiring gaze upon his wife. "Crying?" he said, "why were you crying, dear?"

Her lips trembled a little like a child's on the verge of sobs. "I don't want to talk about it now," she said.

"Hump! I guess I'll be going," observed Mrs. Scott, rising with an openly sarcastic sniff. "If you ain't onhitched, 'Manuel, I'll ask you to drive me home. I've stayed longer 'an I meant to."

Once seated comfortably in the carriage the excel-

lent matron turned her shrewd eyes upon the grave, troubled face at her side. "I've known Hildy sence she was a baby," she began, "an' while of course me an' her gran'pa think the world an' all of the child—as is no more'n natural, seein' she's our only gran'child, I ain't blinded to her faults. She's awful set on havin' her own way, Hildy is, an' it don't make no manner of difference whether it's a good way or not, she jest sticks to it through thick an' thin. Her pa allers spiled her when she was to home; an' his second wife didn't have any more gover'ment 'an a tow string. When she was with us she minded *me*, you'd better believe; but I didn't have her constant enough to make any impression. She's pretty well spiled, Hildy is. You'll hev to be firm with her."

Immanuel drew his brows together with a displeased frown. "I have no idea of establishing a reign of law in my house," he said coldly. "My wife is certainly entitled to her opinions."

"Of course you can't see things as I do," retorted Mrs. Scott. "An' I don't know as I want you should. I guess I'll hold my tongue in futur', but there's plenty of folks as ull advise ye worse, an' her too. That Mis' Smalley she saw down there set as many foolish notions to hatchin' in her head, as I'd put eggs under my ol' gray hen."

Immanuel looked puzzled and inquiring, but he said nothing; and presently set his grandmother-in-law safely down at her own door.

"So he's awful rich, is he?" soliloquized the old lady grimly, as she watched him drive away. "Well, money's a good thing, but he'll be 'bleeged to live and larn, I reckon, same as the rest of us hev to." With

which epigrammatic statement she walked into the house with an energetic step.

Immanuel carefully avoided any reference to this conversation, but he was more anxiously devoted to his young wife than ever. A new piano was sent from the city, and because Hilda's musical knowledge and skill were of the slightest, a marvelous device for reproducing the great music of the centuries accompanied it. There were new books too, and the latest magazines. Hilda once expressed a desire to ride, and a gentle pony took up his residence in the old red barn. But the listless face of the recipient of all these gifts reproached the giver ceaselessly. She said little; she sewed vast quantities of embroidery silk into endless bits of linen cloth.

"Would you not like to ask some visitors to spend a month with us, dear?" he asked her one day after he had watched the needle with its trail of pink flash in and out for half a hundred times.

"I don't think so," she said, without lifting her eyes. "I don't see what we could do to entertain them in this dull place."

"There are plenty of people not far away," he said hesitatingly. "Why should we not make the acquaintance of our neighbors?"

"I do not care to know the people here," she replied chillingly. "But of course I must do what you say."

He sighed and resumed his solitary reading. "There is such a capital bit here, Hilda; shall I read it to you?" he said after a little.

"If you like,"—indifferently. But she did not once smile at the inimitable humor of Holmes. After read-

ing a few pages he laid down the book abruptly and left the room. The blue eyes followed him with a curious unrelentingness. There was a silent war of wills going on between these two, and Hilda was perfectly well aware of it.

As for Immanuel, he was not far from being entirely miserable. He went wearily over the whole matter with himself for the hundredth time. "I have been selfish," he told himself at last. "I have deceived myself and wronged her. I ought not to have expected her to be happy here with me alone."

This singular young man was just as far as ever from understanding the situation from Hilda's point of view, as was evinced by a letter which he presently wrote to his lawyers. "We have decided to come to town for the winter. Look up for me a house of moderate cost in one of the suburban districts," was the substance of it.

"Will you drive with me to the village, dearest," he asked, bending over the small figure in the big chair.

"No, I think not, it is too windy to drive to-day," she replied with a resigned sigh.

He had intended to tell her at once of his resolve, but her manner chilled him. "Very well," he said, in a tone of forced cheerfulness, and busied himself with the fire till it crackled merrily up the chimney.

Left to herself Hilda shed a few vague tears. She wished she had gone to the village. "Anything is better than this dreary house!" she muttered, and settled down to a comfortable fit of sulks, during which she held herself up before her mental vision as a wonderfully patient but much abused woman.

"Perhaps I shall be sick and die after awhile," she said aloud; "I guess he would be sorry then!" She even allowed herself to depict a lovely snow-white figure, cold and dead, over which her hard-hearted husband was shedding remorseful tears. This picture was so excessively pathetic that Hilda wept over it convulsively.

Self-pity is the most ignoble of all the emotions; but how was our poor Hilda to know this? She pitied herself and cried until the natural reaction set in; this led her up-stairs and into her prettiest gown.

"I wish somebody would come now!" she said aloud, as she surveyed her reflection in the mirror.

CHAPTER XXXII

'Rastus Winch Performs His Vow

THE fulfilment of the wish followed close upon its utterance. Hilda had scarce finished putting the last dainty touches to her toilet, when the maid announced a visitor. "An' if you don't mind, Mis' Rossi, I'll be goin' to the farm now afther more cream. There ain't none fur the tay."

Hilda nodded her assent to this proposal. "Who is down there, Norah?" she inquired.

"Just an old, farmer-lookin' man, ma'am," replied the girl. "He axed was Mr. Rossi to home, an' I says, 'no, sir.' 'Then I'll see his woman,' he says, 'an' me business is keen,' or words like thim. I showed him to the settin' room."

Hilda frowned. "How tiresome!" she exclaimed sharply, and swept down the narrow stairs, entering the room, where her visitor waited, with the air of a duchess.

He was a tall, stoop-shouldered man, with straggling hair and whiskers of dingy gray; this much Hilda observed at a glance. He had not removed his hat, she further remarked with a displeased stare. Beneath its dusty brim a pair of small savage eyes looked out with a curious sparkle. For the rest, the stranger was shabbily dressed, and carried in one hand a heavy whip. A shiver of repulsion passed through Hilda's slight figure; she drew back and laid her hand upon

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the door. "You—you asked to see me," she began in a low voice. "Mr. Rossi is not at home, and I——"

The man burst into a short, rasping laugh. "I ain't so awful sorry on that 'count," he said; "I kinder reckoned I'd fin' him gone. You're his wife, I per-soom?"

"I am Mrs. Rossi—yes, certainly; won't you tell me your business, if you please?" Hilda was not unaccustomed to dealing with the farming population. It occurred to her that this singular individual was perhaps an embarrassed purveyor of dairy products, or possibly a sewing-machine agent. After a second glance at the lowering face of her visitor, she decided that she would dismiss him without delay.

"I don't care to buy anything to-day, thank you," she said, drawing herself up decidedly, "I am very much engaged just now; I will ask the maid to show you——" She stopped short, remembering with a second disagreeable shiver that she had permitted the girl to leave the house.

"Wall now, I guess ye don't want ter git red o' me so quick; I've waited fur quite a spell to see ye," said the man advancing two or three steps. "An' I swar ye're wuth seein'; I guess ye're quite a leetle han'somer 'an my wife 'Liz'beth wuz. No, you ain't a-goin' to leave me jest yit; I ain't got through with ye, not by no means!"

Hilda drew back, pale with fright, as the man with a sudden movement interposed his hulking figure between her and the door. "Ye'll do me the extry favor to stan' right whar ye be, tell I git through a talkin' to ye, Mis' Rossi. My, ain't it a holy mericle though, to think I've got 'Manuel's wife whar he got mine oncel!

He jest killed her, 'Manuel did, an' I ain't the forgittin' kind. They reckoned they'd got me all paid up an' settled with; but 'Rastus Winch ain't so easy-goin' as all that. I swore 'at I'd git even with that little skunk of a beggar 'at took my wife away f'om me, an' say! I'm a-goin' to do it now!"

Hilda was almost helpless with fear; her blue eyes shone like stars in her white face. "'Rastus Winch!" she faltered, catching at a straw of hope, "are you 'Rastus Winch?"

"Yes, I be. I see you've heerd of me. That fine husband of yourn 'ud be lyin' in a pauper's grave if it hadn't ha' been fur me. I brung him up an' done fur him, an' what did I git fur it? The mean little rooster run away, an' my wife, 'Liz'beth, she took to her bed an' died along of him; that was the way of it. Yes— an' I ain't never forgot it—not fur a minit. I sez to him last time I seen him, I'll git even with ye, I sez."

It was evident to the trembling woman who faced him that the man was either drunk or crazy. Did he mean to murder her? She strove to quiet the tremor in her voice as she said, "Won't you—won't you please sit down, Mr. Winch? I've always wanted to see you and thank you for your kindness to Mr. Rossi."

"You lie!" roared Winch, the great veins starting out upon his forehead. "Why didn't ye come an' see me, then? I heerd 'at you wuz here an' thinks s'l, mebbe he'll hev the decency to fetch me over a couple of hundreds fur my ol' age. If he had, why, I dunno but I'd ha' let him off. But now I swan I'm a-goin' to give you the tarnalest lickin' you ever had. I owe *him* one f'om way back, but I guess it'll smart 'nough if you

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git it 'stead o' him." He advanced threateningly, brandishing the whip.

Hilda sprang back behind the shelter of a table. "Wait!" she cried breathlessly. "Let me tell you! He wanted me to go and see you. We were going—we were going to-day—yes, really! I—I have something, something beautiful for you.—Just see this!" She essayed with trembling fingers to unfasten the brooch at her throat.

"Ye little, lyin', white-faced, meechin' critter you! you'd ought to git yer neck broke!" snarled the man with venomous emphasis. He raised the whip; it descended, shattering a fragile china inkstand; the ink spread over the dainty appointments of the table and dripped slowly on to the carpet. Hilda was stirred out of her frozen terror to sudden wrath by the sight.

"You—you horrid old man!" she cried. "Just see what you've done to my new carpet!"

"Oh, that's the way the wind sets?" sneered Winch with an ugly laugh. "I've got plenty of time, an' I guess afore I polish you off I'll tech up some of this 'ere prep'ty of 'Manuel's 'at I see lyin' round permisc'ous like."

Hilda was sure now that he was crazy as she watched the heavy whip descend again and again, smashing, defacing article after article all over the pretty room. She grew cold and faint at the thought of that terrible whip crashing down upon her head and shoulders. The thought suggested a fresh reprieve. "You've spoiled everything in this room," she cried; "but don't you dare to touch my china dishes!"

The destroyer had paused to stare about him with

vacant eyes. "Your chiny dishes!" he yelled. "I don't ask no better fun!"

Hilda watched his shambling figure as he lounged slowly across the room. "Chiny dishes," he was muttering. "I'll fix 'em!" He burst into a loud laugh as he flung open a door into the dining-room, where a sideboard sparkling with glass and silver met his gaze. "You stan' right whar you be till I git through out here," he growled, turning to Hilda, who still covered behind the table. "I'll ten' to your case pretty quick now!" Then the lust of destruction laid hold on him.

Amid the crash of glass and china and the splintering shock of breaking furniture she gained the stair and fled unperceived to her own room, where she locked herself in, pulling a heavy bureau across the door by way of further defense. "What shall I do!" she wailed. "Oh, Immanuel—Immanuel!"

The faint rattle of wheels caught her ears as she stood looking distractedly about her. After a moment's hesitation she crept out of the open window and stood erect on the roof of the veranda.

History is said to repeat itself now and again. As Hilda strained eyes and ears for a recurrence of the sound a long, narrow wagon hove into view from behind a clump of trees. The driver of the slow-stepping white horse sat stiffly erect in the driver's place; occasionally he cast a guarded glance at the shrouded shape which constituted his load.

"Won't you stop, please!" cried the girl, waving a handkerchief scarce whiter than her face, as the wagon crawled slowly past the gate. She repeated her cry again and again with shrill emphasis; to her immense

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relief the man at length lifted his head, and with a startled exclamation pulled up his horse.

Hilda watched him eagerly as he walked up the graveled path. "Excuse me, miss," he said, staring up at the young woman; "did you call me?"

"Yes," said Hilda, breathlessly. "I am all alone, and there is a man down there spoiling all my things. I want you to make him go away."

"Why—why—why! What did I understan' you to say? A man spoilin' your things—what man?"

"He says his name is Winch," said Hilda. "He is drunk or crazy, I know. Can't you make him go away?"

"Very singular case, I'm sure," returned the man, lifting his eyebrows. "I am the coroner of this 'ere deestric'—name Dundor—also undertaker. I was just engaged in takin' an extry fine, a-number-one casket over to Turner's Crossroads. Winch, you say? Not 'Rastus Winch of the Corners, I trust. What d' I understan' you to say your name was?"

"My name is Rossi," said Hilda. "Oh, never mind anything else you have to do; my husband can pay you. Don't leave me alone—please!"

Mr. Dundor shook his head and pursed up his lips tentatively. "Rossi, yes—yes! 'Manuel Rossi, to be sure! I was told he had come back to these parts to reside. I didn't have the pleasure of buryin' his late uncle; but I ain't one of the kind to harbor resentment. I don't know as you're aware that in his young days your husban' was, so to speak, the prop'ty of 'Rastus Winch. He never got over partin' with him, 'Rastus didn't. I buried his wife for him—a savin', industrious, hard-workin' woman. 'Rastus always kind of charged

her up to 'Manuel, so to speak. After her decease he took to the inebriatin' cup, I'm sorry to say. Hard cider, you know. They tell me he put in fourteen barrels last fall. Hard cider ain't good for the temper at any time, and for a singular man like 'Rastus ——" He advanced on tiptoe to the window and cautiously peeped in.

"Can you see him?" inquired Hiida, anxiously.

"Why, yes," replied Mr. Dundor, backing away with an air of apprehension. "I did see him; he appears to be lookin' for something—or somebody. It is our b'reaved frien', 'Rastus Winch, I regret to say, an' I should hazard the opinion that he is under the infloouce of the inebriatin' cup. Sad case—very! Perhaps if you was to come down, Mrs. Rossi, you might reason with him, an' persuade him to ——"

"No, indeed! I'll never come down while he's there! You must make him go away!"

Mr. Dundor looked thoughtfully at his beast, which stood drooping its lean head dispiritedly toward the muddy road. "I guess it would 'bout square the account," he muttered to himself. With that he started toward the gate.

"Don't leave me!" pleaded Hilda from above. "I'm afraid he's coming up—oh!" she finished with a little shriek at the sound of a heavy crash below.

"I'll git him out all right," said Mr. Dundor, reassuringly. "I'm goin' to try a little strategy on 'Rastus. You'll see!"

A brown horse attached to a light wagon stood near the fence, daintily nibbling the lilac bushes with long outstretched neck. Mr. Dundor fussily guided this animal into the road, then givin' him a slash with

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his whip, which sent him shambling down the hill, he returned to the house, his flabby face purple with the exertion. "'Rastus," he called, pounding lustily on the broken window sash with h's whip handle, "I say, 'Rastus! Guess you'd better come out an' look arter your prop'ty. I see your hoss an' wagon is runnin' away toward the Corners!"

A big tawsled head appeared in answer to this summons, and later Winch hurled himself from the wide-open door. He stopped an instant to stare after the rattling vehicle—for the horse had gathered in the lust of freedom as he went, and was running as fast as his ancient legs would carry him. Swept along by the suddenly diverted torrent of his wrath, the old man set off at a brisk pace after the runaway, shouting, "Whoa, thar, you 'tarnal critter, whoa!"

Mr. Dunder had climbed into his own vehicle by this time. He turned his solemn eyes upward to where Hilda still crouched upon the veranda roof.

"He won't come back," he said in a tone of satisfaction; "he'll be too busy a-lickin' of his hoss when he ketches him!" As he drove away, he glanced guardedly at the shrouded shape behind. "Accounts is squared betwixt her an' me," he muttered; "an old debt, but well paid; b'sides she didn't fin' no fault—roony an' stylish."

The languid current of his thoughts was broken by the approach of a phaeton driven at a brisk pace by a handsome young man whose dark eyes rested upon him with a glimmer of recognition.

"How de do, Mr. Rossi," shouted Dunder, pulling up his willing animal. "Say! I guess you're wanted to home! I jest succeeded in gettin' our friend 'Rastus

Winch out o' your residence where he was cuttin' a pretty broad swath a-smashin' furnitur' an' dishes. Your wife hollered to me to come in an' help. She was scared 'mos' to death, I guess."

The bronzed face of the listener had blanched to a curious dusky pallor during these utterances. He touched his horse sharply with the whip and plunged ahead without a word of acknowledgment or thanks.

"Say, I like that!" exclaimed the undertaker. "I s'pose I could send in a little bill fur professional—I mean for services; but I won't. We'll call it square betwixt his ma an' me."

CHAPTER XXXIII

Hilda Wins

THERE was no need of perfunctory tears on this occasion—if Hilda had ever indulged in such! The limpid drops gushed in unrestrained torrents from the sweet blue eyes, drenching the velvety cheeks, which now resembled drowned white roses. The wrecked house told its own story, and the disjointed little sentences which fell from Hilda's trembling lips told the rest.

Immanuel said little, but he wrapped the slight figure close in his arms, his heart beating loud, passionate throbs in the exquisite little ear which lay against it.

"I can't—can't bear to—to stay here any longer!" she sobbed. "I—I could never be—happy here again! Mayn't—we go away—please?"

He stooped to kiss the white forehead under its fluff of yellow hair. "Will you forgive me, Hilda?" he begged. "*Can* you forgive me?" His voice was broken with something like a sob. The vision of the fair shoulders and dimpled arms of his young wife scored with the red scars of that merciless whip filled him with a mixture of pain and fury.

Hilda lifted her eyes to his quivering face with a flash of comprehension. "He might have killed me!" she murmured. "You might have found me lying dead—right there!" She pointed dramatically to the

ruins of the pretty room and buried her face against the loud-beating heart.

"Oh, Hilda!" he groaned. "I ought not to have left you here! We ought not to have stayed. You never liked it. You poor, poor girl—what a selfish brute I have been! And to think what might have happened! I——" He stopped short and two big hot tears splashed on her white hand.

There is something terrible in the hard-wrung tears of a strong man. Hilda was silent for a moment with something like awe. Then the clamorous self within urged that this was the long-sought opportunity for conquest. "You will take me away, dear?" she said plaintively, yielding her pliant body to his remorseful embraces. "You will not ask me to stay here. I could not forget that—that terrible face!"

"Anywhere that you like, Hilda!" he cried, reckless of the future. "I have made a foolish blunder which might have had terrible consequences. You shall choose our home, dear."

She looked at him intently, light and color dawning in eyes and cheeks. "Do you really mean it?" she murmured.

He hesitated for an instant. "You will remember my life-work, Hilda," he said almost beseechingly.

She shrugged her shoulders with a charming little pout. "You ought to be where the work is," she said boldly. "How do you know whether the men you hire are doing as you would like? We will go to New York."

A man is in a hard case when his wife—to whom he has vowed lifelong love and devotion—and his most cherished ideal pull him in opposite directions.

The problem has been met and solved in as many ways as there are men to face it. In the conversation that followed Immanuel Rossi once more attempted to draw the woman of his choice into comprehension of, and sympathy with his plans. "It is true," he said, "that if we choose to spend this money which has come to me upon ourselves we may live in a palace—in a dozen palaces; we may shine with jewels, and devour the living of a thousand of our fellow-beings."

"How disagreeably you put it," she cried. "If we use our own as we like, how do we wrong any one else?"

"But, dearest," he urged, "I have told you already that this money has been taken from the poor in a score of ways—all of them dishonest as I count honesty, and I must give it back. Once for all, Hilda, I will tell you that I believe no man has a right to snatch for himself what belongs to his brothers. There ought to be no millionaires and no paupers in this age of the world's enlightenment."

Fine scorn crept into the blue eyes. "You are no better than an anarchist then!" she said, her lips curling in a malicious little smile. "Shall we march, then, and carry a red flag, and let our hair grow long?" Then reading her blunder in his amazed eyes, she threw her arms about his neck and burst into fresh sobs. "I hardly know what I am saying," she faltered, "I am not—able to talk any more."

Whereat he inwardly cursed himself for a selfish brute, and devoted himself afresh to the task of soothing her.

Of course they went to New York, where in a long conversation with her new friend and adviser, Mrs.

Smalley, Hilda disclosed a momentous secret, which she had not as yet seen fit to mention to her husband.

"My dear!" cried Mrs. Smalley with uplifted hands and round eyes of sympathy. "And to think of your being exposed to that frightful ordeal! Oh, I *do* hope that there will be no permanent bad effects from it—that you will——"

"I shan't care a bit about it," interrupted Hilda comfortably; "If I can live in that lovely house and have what I want."

"Well, if you don't have your way *now*, it will be a perfect shame; and with Mr. Rossi's income! Just wait, my dear, I'll manage it. You must see my physician at once!"

That eminent medical man (after a preliminary conversation with Mrs. Smalley) delivered himself of the following weighty opinion in a conference with the young husband. "Your wife, my dear Mr. Rossi, is suffering from the deplorable effects of the terrible shock to her nervous system which she recently experienced. And while I find her to be possessed of an admirable organism—really admirable, I should advise that under the circumstances you do not thwart her in any of the little desires and wishes which she may express, and which are very natural to ladies in her—ah—condition."

When the young man betrayed by his surprised questions his ignorance of the situation, the medical man proceeded to make matters plain to him, repeating with emphasis his advice as to the necessity of yielding "any little prejudices" to the wishes of the patient. "Arguments or questions pertaining to finance had best be avoided altogether for awhile,"

smiled the man of science. "We must yield our little preferences to the ladies at such times when it is possible, for the benefit of future generations if for nothing more."

The astute Mrs. Smalley in a flutter of maternal solicitude skilfully deepened the impression. "You *can't* be hard-hearted enough to deny the dear child anything *now!*" she said, wiping her eyes with an elaborately embroidered handkerchief. "It might result in her *death*, poor dear!"

Immanuel was stupefied; he gazed mechanically at the motions of Mrs. Smalley's large white hands, which glittered with a plenitude of precious stones.

"She is just the sweetest, most exquisitely organized creature in the world," cooed that excellent matron. "It is so hard for a man to understand a woman; they are so differently constituted. Dear Hilda—I may call her Hilda, may I not?—has set her sweet heart on living in the Vanderdecken house; such an elegant place, and not far from us. You really must not say no."

Young Rossi said nothing at all for the space of five minutes. His mind was working confusedly on the problem which faced him. A vision of wan young mothers in stifling tenement houses, of puny babes fighting for life in the fetid air of courts and alleys far removed from the stately Vanderdecken mansion rose before him. He spoke now, very quietly, but with a tremor in his voice which did not escape the vigilant Mrs. Smalley. "I love my wife," he said. And after a pause he repeated the words in a firmer voice. "I love my wife; but I think she can be comfortable and

safe—yes, and happy, in a modest house such as I can afford.”

“*Afford!*” almost screamed Mrs. Smalley, with a hysterical laugh.

“Yes, *afford*,” repeated Immanuel Rossi. “Understand me, if you please; I know I could buy the Vanderdecken house with the income of a single month. But I cannot afford to feast in a palace while thousands of my brothers are starving in foul dens not fit for a decent animal.”

“And you will allow your hobby to ride Juggernaut-like over the bodies of your wife and child?” demanded Mrs. Smalley, in her most impressive forensic manner. “Do I understand that you refuse to grant the innocent desire of one whom you have vowed to love and cherish above *all* others?”

It is not strange perhaps that the man arose at this juncture and abruptly left the lady who had spoken these trenchant words. Mrs. Smalley did not seem at all offended by the circumstance. She merely smiled and nodded knowingly to herself. “He’ll come to time!” she said aloud.

By what adroit combination of tears and swoons and sweet sad glances and cold silences and cooing pleadings Hilda made good this idiomatic statement is not recorded. But it is sufficiently well known, being indeed a matter of legal documents and civic records, that on a certain day of November, Immanuel Rossi became owner of the long untenanted palace on Fifth Avenue, built by one Goelet de Peyster Vanderdecken, who had immediately thereafter blown out his brains on board his yacht, for reasons mentioned in select circles with lowered eyelids.

A triumph of modern architectural art was the Rossi mansion, and when its young mistress (in her own carriage, drawn by her own horses, presided over by two solemn-faced men in claret-colored liveries) drew up before its portal on a certain bleak evening in early December, her delicate face glowed bright as the costly flowers that greeted her from every nook and corner of the stately, luxurious rooms. "Oh, Immanuel," she sighed, "how good you are!"

The young man at her side, who had somehow grown strangely old and sad of face in the past weeks, smiled down at her without replying. Indeed a row of decorous servants, headed by a stately individual who was introduced to the future mistress as Mrs. Brown, the housekeeper, awaited, English fashion, the inspection of the violet eyes.

It was amazing to witness the composure and *savoir faire* of the country-bred girl in the midst of all this magnificence. If not to the manner born she was certainly to the manner destined, as Mrs. Smalley averred, in a conversation with one of the *grande dames* of the second rank, with whom she chanced to be intimate.

That lady shrugged her shoulders with a comprehending smile. "We shall watch your career with interest," she said sweetly. "Of course you will do your prettiest to help the little lady up the social ladder, and follow hard after in the rôle of *cicerone*."

"My interest in Mrs. Rossi is that of a mother for her daughter," Mrs. Smalley had replied with hauteur.

CHAPTER XXXIV

Apples of Sodom

THE descent into Avernus—if such it could be termed—was rapid and amazingly easy after this. Hilda's desires grew like mushrooms of an August night. As Mrs. Smalley, the presiding genius of this particular phase of young Mrs. Rossi's career, would have put it, "The dear child *developed* astonishingly fast."

She acquired in the shortest possible space of time a knowledge of all the appurtenances of a woman of fashion. Being clever enough not to trust to her own taste, she soon called to her assistance a swarm of obsequious modistes and milliners who vied with one another in the pleasing task of assisting the beautiful young wife of the eccentric Mr. Rossi in disposing of some of his superfluous dollars.

After the birth of his son Immanuel determined upon a last effort to turn the strong current of that life which was to have flowed softly with his own. He sat one evening at twilight in his wife's room where the two had been looking at the wonderful bit of rose-colored humanity which slumbered peacefully in its nest of lace and flannel. "I should like to call him Moses Armitage," said the young father, venturing to touch with a cautious forefinger one of the tiny pink fists that were thrown up on either side of the downy head.

Hilda called her husband's attention to this attitude, which she assured him was the sign of a very strong child. She had accumulated marvelous stores of maternal knowledge, thought Immanuel, gazing fondly at her beautiful face as she bent over the sleeping child. "Moses Armitage," she repeated thoughtfully. "Moses isn't a pretty name; but Armitage Rossi is really elegant. I don't mind if we name him Moses Armitage, if he is never called Moses. When he is grown he can write it M. Armitage Rossi. That sounds quite *à la mode*, doesn't it?"

"Hilda," he said, laying his hand on hers, "are we going to put our whole lives into the effort to be *à la mode*? Isn't there something better than that for us and for him?"

She looked at him coldly. "I do hope," she said, "that you aren't going to talk to me about poor people and slums and all that; I'm not strong enough to bear it."

He opened his lips to reply; then sighed and glanced once more at the sleeping baby. "We must get the young man into the country air as soon as you are strong enough to travel, Hilda," he said gently. "A quiet place will be best, will it not?"

"I've been tiresomely quiet all winter," she pouted. "I don't want to go back to that frightful little house—if that is what you mean. I just could not live there."

"I didn't mean to ask it," he said in a low voice. "But, oh Hilda, it was only last summer that you were willing to live always in the little house with me—and I a poor farmer with only my two hands to work for you."

Her eyes sparkled with vexation. "I never thought of such a thing!" she exclaimed.

"But you married me," he said haltingly. Then he stopped short and looked fixedly at the beautiful flushed face. "Did you—know?"

Hilda was frightened; her heart beat uncomfortably fast under the searching gaze of the sombre eyes. "How could I have known?" she cried breathlessly. "But you—deceived me. You ought to have told me everything!"

It had not before occurred to him that in concealing his wealth from Hilda, he had in any way wronged her; it had seemed so sweetly justifiable under the circumstances. He looked at her in dismay the while a mocking memory of past dreams flitted across his mind. After a time he answered, clumsily enough, "I wanted you to love me, not my money."

"You were sufficiently just to yourself," she flashed back; "but you evidently had a poor opinion of me and of women in general, that the idea should have occurred to you."

He felt the justice of her words sufficiently to preserve an uncomfortable silence.

"If you had really been the poor farmer you pretended to be," she went on triumphantly, "of course I should have done my duty under those circumstances. But now I feel that I have some rights as well as those wretched tenement people."

His face darkened. "We will not talk of them," he said. "We were mistaken in each other, that is all."

He rose as if to leave the room, but Hilda sprang after him and laid her hand upon his arm. For the

moment—as he seemed to be slipping away from her—she was sure that she loved him very dearly. “Immanuel,” she said pleadingly, “don’t be angry with me!”

Of course, he melted in a moment before the wistful sweetness of the violet eyes. After all she was more sinned against than sinning, he told himself; besides all that, she was his wife and the mother of his son. Before he left the room, he had promised to buy a cottage in Newport, which, the invaluable Mrs. Smalley had assured Hilda, was “the very thing.”

The next morning he made good his promise, and also began an extensive purchase of certain vile tenement houses on the north side of the city, paying an exorbitant price for them with a certain grim pleasure. “I will do what I can,” he said to himself. But he no longer visited his tenants. The miseries of the poor cut him like a knife in these days.

As the months passed he became more unhappy than he chose to confess to himself. The gay company which Hilda soon gathered about her in the showy Newport villa found their host quite “impossible.” He found them equally so. Returning one day from a lonely ramble in the country where he had endeavored to clear his mental skies with but ill success, he found his wife surrounded by a group of fashionably dressed young men, who were making themselves very much at home on his veranda. Hilda’s cheeks were uncomfortably flushed, and she was replying somewhat shrilly to the would-be witty remarks which the young gentlemen bandied back and forth.

To his surprise he beheld his quondam friend, Rob-

ert Livingstone, loiling in a deep chair and apparently overcome by somnoience. The others rallied him on his conditlon. "Look at Bob! he's calmiy taking a nap! Oh, Bobby, you sad dog, to go to sleep when Mrs. Rossi is entertalning us. She won't forgive you in a hurry, wlii you, Mrs. Rossi?"

Hilda's color brightened. "I guess Mr. Livingstone is sieepy," she said coquettishly. "I'm sure I'm not offended! Come and have some ciaret-cup, Mr. Livingstone, doi"

The look with which the young man eyed his hostess, and his iow bow over the whlte hand which presented the cup, roused a sieeping devil in Immanuel's bosom. He walked up the steps siowly, alioing his dsagreeable surprise to become evident in the glance which rested upon the group.

Hiida looking flushed and annoyed haitingly accomplished several introductions. "Mr. Livingstone you know already," she concuded with an uncertaln smiie at her husband.

"Lord, yes; Rossi and I were intimate in our day," said Livingstone, coolly. "Haven't seen much of you iateiy, old man."

"I hope that you will renew your friendship now that we are down here for the summer," put in Hiida, a little too eagerly; "I saw your mother and sister drive past this morning," she added irreievantly.

Immanuel flashed a dsieased look at his wife as he murmured some commonplace in reply to Livingstone's words. The other young men who had been exchanging amused glances now arose and made their adieux. "Disagreeable duffer," said one, a iittle too audibiy, as they walked away.

Hilda bit her lip and tapped her foot nervously, then with what she considered great *savoir faire*, she turned smilingly to Livingstone, who leaned back lazily in his chair eyeing the scene with an air of cynical enjoyment. "I do hope," she said prettily, "that I shall have an opportunity of meeting your sister soon. She has such a sweet face."

"Oh, thanks," drawled Livingstone, "I'm much obliged, I'm sure. She is a deucedly pretty girl, if I do say so."

"And you'll bring her to see me some day?" persisted Hilda.

"Oh, aw—I should be delighted, don't you know," stammered Livingstone, glancing guardedly at the stern dark profile of Immanuel; "but sis' is really buried in engagements, you know, and I can't promise." He arose as he spoke and took his leave with profuse apologies for his unceremonious use of "that awfully comfortable chair."

An unpleasant silence followed his departure. Hilda sulked openly, and Immanuel stared at the drifting sails on the far blue rim of ocean with an impassive face.

"I wish you'd be more social, Immanuel," said the lady at length, speaking with an obvious effort. "You might have asked Mr. Livingstone to dine with us. He belongs to one of the very best families," she added, quoting with conscious pride from Mrs. Smalley's almanac.

He turned his eyes upon her with a mixture of pity and displeasure.

"If you would call on them," she went on impatiently, "I am sure Mrs. Livingstone and her daughter

would come to see me. I met them yesterday on the ocean drive; and you ought to have seen them look at me. Won't you go to-day, dear, just to please me?"

He had done many things to please her, she knew, so she was not prepared for the decided refusal to her request which he worded in no uncertain terms. Poor Hilda, she was already finding her gilded apples bitter to the taste. Her coachman, her liveries, her gowns, her jewels had elicited nothing but an occasional brief stare from the haughty dames whom she longed to know. She was ready to cry with vexation as she glanced sidewise at the moody face of her husband.

He roused himself to say coldly, "When did you make the acquaintance of all those men, Hilda?"

"Why, I knew Mr. Renton in New York; I met him at Mrs. Smalley's; he brought the others. Mr. Livingstone I've known ever so long. I think he is just as nice as he can be. He isn't a bit gloomy and dismal; and he likes me." She added the last words with a defiant lifting of her small head.

He wisely changed the subject. "Where is Armitage, Hilda? I haven't seen him to-day."

"I'm sure I don't know," his wife replied carelessly. "I suppose he is with his nurse somewhere. I don't want him now, anyway; I want to talk to you. Won't you please tell me how we are going to get acquainted with these people? It isn't a bit of use to have this house and all our pretty things if we can't have the friends we want. You used to know them, Mrs. Smalley says so. Don't you *want* me to have as good a time as you did?"

He moved uneasily in his chair. "I gave up society, Hilda, before I knew you," he said at last.

"Gave it up!" she repeated. "But how can you give up people you know? What did you give them up for? You might have known ——" She stopped short with a vivid blush. "Was that when you came up to the farm?" she went on in a lower tone.

He nodded assent.

"But tell me, *why* did you come to the farm?" she persisted. "*Why* did you pretend to be poor, and dig and work like a laborer?"

"I have told you," he said evasively. "I wanted to use my life and my money in another way. You know how."

"Yes, but you could have done both—you were doing both; Mrs. Smalley said so!"

His eyes had assumed a hunted expression during this inquisition. This *alter ego* of his resembled a gnat in her persistency. He wondered vaguely whether all married life would be like this. Must he lay bare the inmost recesses of his soul to the inspection of the coldly critical blue eyes which were bent so pitilessly upon him?

"Hilda," he said in a low voice, "I was trying to avoid temptation; I wanted peace, and I thought I had found it."

"Yes, but what temptation? Was it a girl? Yes, I know it was!" She turned upon him with the air of a half-grown kitten who pounces upon her first prey. "It was some girl!" she repeated. "That Miss Livingstone, I am sure. Did she refuse you?"

He flushed a deep, distressed crimson under this fire of indelicate questions. He begged her with his eyes to desist.

"You might just as well confess," she cried shrilly.

"I could let you know that you were not the only one if I chose!"

"Hilda!" he murmured in a low shamed voice, "I beg of you!"

She had the grace to blush as she lifted her eyes and beheld the beneficent presence of Mrs. Smalley standing on the graveled walk. "I directed the coachman to set me down at the gate," cried that lady effusively. "I thought I would walk across your charming lawn and surprise you! We just arrived this afternoon."

CHAPTER XXXV

Unexpected Guests

WERE it the object of this chronicle to record the experiences of an ambitious woman in her struggles to scale the difficult heights whereon the socially great of the earth have established themselves, it might be shown how Hilda Rossi learned many valuable lessons in the course of her endeavors. One who aspires to be a woman of fashion is inducted perforce into the wholesome art of self-repression—an accomplishment which is closely akin to the more noble virtue, self-denial, that obliteration of the animal-self that the God-self may become manifest.

The God-self in Hilda was as much in the dark as ever; but the animal-self learned gradually to sheath its claws in velvet and to assume the airs of heaven. Under Mrs. Smalley's kind fostering care the beautiful Mrs. Rossi was guided past the fatal rocks which were seen to threaten her frail bark in the last chapter.

"It is always most unwise, my love," said this prudent matron, "to know too many of our young men, amusing and delightful as they are.—At first, I mean. One soon gets the reputation of being—just a little *risque*, don't you know? I could point you out a dozen such women here in Newport. They know positively every one of the men, and entertain them lavishly; but I am sure they would give their eyes just to get a bow from Mrs. Waldorf-Spencer."

"What, that cross-looking old woman you introduced me to this morning!" exclaimed Hilda, unguardedly.

"My dear—you will pardon me, but you really must not say such things! I was *so thankful* to be able to secure the presentation. You must learn to appreciate things as they are. And I don't want you to know any more of these sadly naughty men till you've met their mammas. Then — But you shall see!"

So there were no more jovial groups to be found on the veranda of the Rossi cottage. After a time—a tiresomely long time, Hilda thought—a number of severely correct elderly matrons left cards. The diligent Mrs. Smailey expressed great delight at this circumstance. "Things could not be going better," she declared, with emprossement. Indeed, as a further proof of social success, Hilda perceived one day among her letters—yes, actually, an invitation to a garden party from the eminent Mrs. de Willoughby Smith-Jones. Her face lighted up with such a radiance of smiles and blushes that immanuel laid down his newspaper the better to observe the pleasing phenomena.

"What has made you so happy, Hilda?" he asked.

"We are asked to Mrs. de Willoughby Smith-Jones' for Thursday!" she told him gleefully. "What shall I wear?" She was unfolding another letter as she spoke. It was a voluminous affair, written on pink paper, the lines crossed. As her glance traveled down the first page the smiles vanished, and the bewildering color settled into a steady glow of anger. "Of all the cool impertinence!" she cried, tossing the sheet aside. "What do you think, Amelia Hurd has

just married Jack Snider, and she says they are coming to visit us on their wedding tour. They are coming to-day."

Immanuel lifted his brows with a quizzical stare. "I thought Miss Hurd was your very particular friend," he said.

"Well, she was," admitted Hilda; "but it doesn't follow that I am going to keep up the friendship. I don't want to know her any longer, nor Jack Snider either; he's awfully common and vulgar."

She felt a sincere gratitude welling up in her soul as she made this statement, gazing critically the while at the dark, clear-cut face opposite. "To think that I once actually thought Jack was the nicest!" she mused. These mingled sentiments brought so sweet a smile to her eyes and lips, that Immanuel stooped to kiss his wife in the shadow of the curtain, as they passed out of the breakfast-room. "And to think that such a fastidious little woman should have chosen a poor farmer," he murmured.

"How you do love to talk about that summer," said Hilda, pettishly; "it seems just ages ago to me!"

His face clouded as he glanced from the elaborately attired little figure at his side to the profusion of costly trifles about the room. "After all, we were happier then," he said, appealingly; "and you were just as beautiful in the plain little cotton gown you wore when we sat reading under the hickories, do you remember, dear?"

"I suppose you mean that horrid old pink muslin," said Hilda, tossing her head. "I'm sure I'm ever so much happier now. But look—if that isn't 'Melie and Jack coming up the drive! Oh, what shall I do?"

It was Immanuel who received the obviously embarrassed couple, when they were presently shown into the reception-room. "We didn't really mean to come an' see Hil' till the last minute, did we, Jack?" said the blushing bride, turning for moral support to her husband.

Mr. Snider's high collar was wilted by the heat; his usually red cheeks were purple; his moustache drooped dispiritedly. "I didn't want to come," he mumbled, with an apologetic duck of his head toward his host. "She made me."

"I *promised* Hilda ever so long ago to come and make her a visit," observed Mrs. Snider, nervously hitching her bracelets into view. "Is she here—at home, I mean?"

"Yes, certainly, she will be in at once," said Immanuel, encouragingly. But when after ten minutes of extremely desultory conversation, the lady of the house failed to appear, he excused himself and went in search of her.

She was sitting in her own room, her face set in obstinate lines. "Have they gone?" she asked fretfully. "I've been watching to see them go away."

"Do you mean to say," he inquired with marked displeasure, "that you intended to let them go away without seeing you?"

"But I said I didn't want to know them any longer," she replied, rising nevertheless and going over to the mirror. "I thought Smith could tell them I was out; I told him to. Mrs. Smalley says it is perfectly proper to say you are not at home when you don't wish to receive people, and I don't want to see them one bit."

He muttered something under his breath, as she deliberately rearranged her already perfectly coiffured hair. "Please go down at once," he said, coldly.

Hilda's greetings to her visitors were of the frostiest. Mr. Snider somehow slunk away into his clothes as he gazed furtively at the exquisite little figure. "To think I dared ——" he syllabled to himself. His bride heroically ignoring the chilling responses to her effusive remarks, chatted on ceaselessly. "What a perfectly elegant place you have here," she said, peering curiously out of the long windows; "I shall tell the folks all about it when I get back home."

Hilda rose hesitatingly to this bait. She had already experienced a faint impulse to display the grandeur of her surroundings. "If you could stop to lunch with us," she said with suggestive emphasis, "I shall be very happy to show you the place. We find it very pleasant in a quiet way," she added, airily.

"And that *dear* baby!" cried the bride with a beatific glance. "Certainly we can stay. I thought ——"

But Mr. Snider found his voice at this juncture. "No, we ain't going to stay, 'Melia," he said firmly; "not more'n half an hour or fifteen minutes. We've got an engagement to the hotel an' don't you fureget it! If you an' Hilda want to go over the diggin's, why, I'll set and read the paper till you come back."

His wife opened her mouth to reply, but he silenced her with a violent wink and grimace. It was evident that Mr. Snider intended to be master in his own house.

"I don't know what's got into Jack," observed his bride, as Hilda led her up the wide stair. "I thought

maybe if you didn't have any other company we could stay a week or two; but Jack——"

"Mr. Snider evidently has other ideas for his wedding journey, dear Amelia," said Hilda sweetly. "We must not be too exacting, you know."

"Seems 's 'o you're getting awful ceremonious, Hil'," cried the bride with a slightly hysterical laugh. "You'll be calling me Mis' Snider next!"

Hilda turned a displeased stare upon the flushed face of the speaker. "If you talk so loud," she said, coldly, "the servants will hear you.—There, this is my boudoir."

"My!" exclaimed the visitor, with wide open eyes. "Ain't this perfectly lovely! What's in here?"

"Pardon me," said Hilda, stiffly. "We will not open that door, if you please; my maid is sewing there." Her lips curled scornfully as she surveyed her guest, who with considerable embarrassment was exclaiming over the view from the wide windows.

"It don't seem possible that you're the same little Hilda that used to tell me all her secrets," sighed Mrs. Snider sentimentally. "I've got heaps to tell you; I'm just dying to have a real good visit!"

"I'm not the same," said Hilda, calmly. "Everything is different."

"Do you mean that you don't like me any longer just because you're richer than we are?" Mrs. Snider's eyes flashed ominously as she asked this pertinent question. "I guess you'd better not get me mad," she added spitefully; "I could make your cake dough without half trying. Yes, indeed I could!"

Hilda drew herself up to her full height. She felt that it would be unbecoming to descend to Mrs.

Snider's vulgar level. She therefore ignored the threat conveyed in her last words. "It is not, of course, a matter of money which determines social position," she said with admirable gentleness. "But the trend of life often carries the best of friends in widely diverse directions."

"Well, I must say!" ejaculated the other with a loud sniff; "you've been taking lessons of some Miss Stuck-up an' got her airs down fine. I'll go away now with Jack. He's good enough for me!"

Hilda watched them with a relieved sigh as they walked down the drive. Mr. Snider flourished his cane haughtily, and Mrs. Snider's elbows were vibrating with wrath. A burst of strident laughter trailed back upon the breeze.

"She's angry," murmured the hospitable mistress of the villa; "but I don't care. She can't interfere with me now. I'm thankful to be rid of them; I just couldn't have taken them to Mrs. de Willoughby Smith-Jones' party!"

CHAPTER XXXVI

A Scrap of Paper

BE careful that thou merit not the ill-will of even a dog," runs an ancient aphorism; a nugget of inspired truth which is further incorporated into endless myths and legends. It is the maid who speaks gently to the old witch-woman from whose mouth drop pearls and diamonds; and the poor lad who rescues the fish, the bird and the fly, marries the beautiful princess in a blaze of glory. When dull humanity shall have learned its lesson, it will discover the boomerang nature of rude, passionate and unkind words. It will then begin to comprehend the mysterious underlying law of Love—which indeed is the only law in this world and in all worlds.

Mrs. Snider went away from the presence of her erstwhile friend and crony filled with rage and mortification. "She's a nasty, stuck-up thing; that's what she is!" she cried wrathfully. "I'll never speak to her again as long as I live!"

Mr. Snider was deeply displeased at the turn affairs had taken. He had not at first blush approved of his bride's plan of visiting Newport. He clumsily reminded her of the fact.

"Don't you say 'I told you so,' to me, Jack Snider," retorted the lady with spirit. "You were mighty soft on Hil' yourself once, and you said we might stay two weeks."

Mr. Snider pursed up his lips in prudent silence.

"I guess if I should tell that big, soft husband of hers a thing or two that I know, he'd cut her off a little on her pin money," continued Mrs. Snider.

Mr. Snider lifted his black eyebrows inquiringly.

"You see that Rossi fellow made out he was poor when he was courting Hil' up in the country. She didn't have anything else to take up her time, so she let him make love to her; but when she got home I could see she had two minds to throw him over. She didn't want anybody to know she was engaged, and made me promise, cross my heart, I wouldn't tell."

Mr. Snider's round face assumed a deeper shade of purplish red as he stared at his wife's angry countenance. "Say!" he ejaculated, "did you tell me she was engaged to be married to that fellow when she come home from her gran'father's?"

"Of course she was. She didn't know a word about his money either. I thought I should die the day I found that paper."

"What paper?"

"Why, ain't you got a lot of curiosity, Jack!" Mrs. Snider glanced up into the frowning eyes of her husband with a mixture of coquetry and suspicion on her lean face. "What d' you want to know for?"

"Jest fur fun," dissembled Mr. Snider, biting his cherished mustache.

"'Twas funny, sure!" agreed the lady. "I found a paper wrapped 'round a crock of butter; in it was *this*." She paused to extricate from her traveling bag a scrap of folded newspaper. "I meant to give it to Hil' sometime while we was there; I thought she'd show it to *him*, an' we'd all have lots of fun over it."

"It's about him, ain't it?"

"Yes; an' she was struck all of a heap when she read it. I thought she was going to faint away. Up she jumps and lights out of the door as if she was crazy."

"Where'd she go?"

"Why, down to the post-office to be sure; Cal Winters told me the very next day. She wanted to get two letters out of the mail."

"Did he give 'em to her?"

"No, he told her he wouldn't. But I'll bet she got 'em somehow or other. She always used to get her way in the end."

Mr. Snider was slow but sure in his mental processes. He recalled having come upon Job Winters just as that young person was extracting a mail-bag from under a big elder bush at the roadside. The youth's stammering explanations and entreaties had left a distinct impression on his mind. "Say," he burst out, "was it about the middle of August she done that?"

"Why, yes, it was; it was the seventeenth. I remember because you proposed to me the very next night. I was so surprised; I thought you liked her best, Jack!" The bride squeezed the manly arm linked within her own, and rolled up her greenish orbs sentimentally.

Mr. Snider's muttered reply was so inappropriate and unexpected that the lady was shocked. "Jack," she said severely, "do you realize that you said *mad dog* backward? And you a member in good an' regular stand——"

"I don't care if I did!" snorted the young man. "The little minx! I'd like to——"

His bride stared at him in silent amazement for some minutes. Then a curious mingling of satisfaction and wrath swept across her face. "I understand the whole thing, now," she said composedly. "You proposed to her, an' she threw him over an' accepted you. When she read that paper she changed her mind."

"Little devill" growled Mr. Snider.

"I'm not pretty like Hilda," pursued the lady with astonishing calmness; "but—but—I've always loved you, Jacki"

Mr. Snider read truth in the face that was upturned to his. All at once it appeared beautiful to him. "Melia," he said earnestly, "I'm glad she done it! Mebby I'd been so fooled by her I'd never had my eyes peeled to see you."

It is a pity that Mrs. Snider could not have rested satisfied with the entirely pleasing outcome of this little comedy of errors. Love truly is sweet; but the fatal scrap of newspaper suggested revenge, and revenge is also sweet.

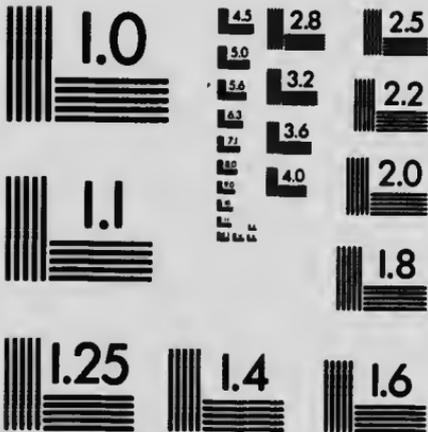
On a bright summer morning some two weeks later, as Immanuel Rossi stooped to look at his little son who was being wheeled about in a perambulator on the lawn, a servant handed him a letter. He thrust it carelessly into his pocket and continued his attentions to the lordly occupant of the fairy vehicle which framed over with costly laces and embroideries. The youngster had gotten to the point of fixing laughing eyes of recognition upon his father, the while he babbled charmingly in the unknown tongue of babyhood.

The white-capped nurse looked on with an indulgent smile for awhile, then, quick to observe tokens



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of approaching petulence in her charge, announced with authority "that it was time for Master Armitage to be takin' his forty winks of sleep."

The youthful father, yielding to the superior wisdom, withdrew to his library. There were papers here to be inspected and a host of letters to be written. The pile of sealed and addressed envelopes suggested the unread missive of the morning. He opened it deliberately; a scrap of newspaper fell out. He glanced it over with some amusement. "Remarkable Caprices of a Multi-Millionaire!" Who could have sent him this absurd account of himself? Why did papers print such inanities? He asked himself these questions while his fingers further explored the envelope.

There was a folded paper within; his eyes seized quickly upon the words which were written there; but his brain at first refused the information thus thrust upon it. He read it a second time; then a third and a fourth.

He did not question the truth of what that small sheet of pinkish paper had told him. He touched it gingerly as it lay before him exhaling a sickly perfume which nauseated him. A hateful thing—a poisonous thing! It made his wife a liar. He leaned back in his chair and gazed at the small deadly object from which emanated with its hateful odor a force which was tearing him like the claws of a tiger.

After a time he folded the thing, and thrust it with the scrap of printed paper into the remotest recess of his desk. Then he arose like one in a dream of anguish, and looked out. The nurse still wheeled the perambulator about the lawn. Being a pious soul she was crooning the words of a hymn.

" Let the world despise and leave me ;
They have left my Savior too.
Human hearts and looks deceive me ;
Thou art not like them untrue ! "

The pessimistic religion of this hymn was not the religion which swayed Immanuel Rossi; he believed first, last and always, in the inherent God-likeness of man; in the world trend toward the divine. Yet in this hour of his soul's humiliation he found comfort in the dolorous words. After a little the better comfort of the "Lo, I am with you always" fell upon him like a benediction. In the sad stillness the old voice—long silent—again spoke to him. "Go back," it said to him, "go back to the way, my child, and all will be well."

Strangely enough, he felt no indignation toward Hilda, but only an aching pity. Should he blame an ignorant child for snatching at a heap of glittering playthings just beyond its reach? As he thought of the small figure it seemed strangely dimmed as with the remoteness of days past. And so, his head bowed upon his breast, he sat thinking the long, long thoughts of youth and sorrow.

It was Hilda who found him there long past the hour for luncheon. "Have you been here all this time?" she demanded, staring at him with wide eyes of astonishment. Then, in a lower voice, "What is it—are you ill?"

He held out his hand to her with so sweet and awful a look in his dark eyes that she drew back involuntarily, putting her hands behind her like a naughty child: "You—you are—ill?" she said uncertainly. "Shall I call some one?"

"No, dear," he said gently; "I am not ill. Come here, Hilda."

She crossed the room and stood by his side, all the old awe of him rushing back upon her as she looked down into his face. A question trembled on her lips, but she dared not utter it.

After all he had nothing to say to her. He sighed deeply once or twice, holding the small hand in both his own. After a long silence she bent over him and kissed him timidly upon the forehead. He started back as if stung.

"Will you sit down, Hilda," he said in a strange, low voice. "I have something to tell you."

She sank into the chair he indicated, her heart beating in her throat. A thousand little lying excuses half formed started up in her mind to defend her, then dropped back again to grow while he spoke. But it was nothing to be afraid of. He was merely telling her that he must go back to the city; his tenants needed attention; new buildings must be erected, something must be done for the women and children in the stifling heat. It was the old story—a tiresome story. She shrugged her shoulders.

"I wanted to tell you that baby ought not to stay in the sea air all the summer and autumn," she began, after his slowly syllabled words had ceased. "The doctor says it would be best to take him to Lenox in September."

He made no answer.

After a short expectant silence she went on, "The Gilbert estate is for sale, I am told. Would not that be a good place for us?"

"No," he answered quietly.

"Why not?" she urged, her eyes filling easily. "Everybody goes to Lenox in the fall. And baby will really need the change—to say nothing of me. You used to care a little about me!"

He gave her a strange look that drove the tears back to their source. "I shall not buy any more houses for the three of us," was all he said; but it silenced her.

She wondered at intervals during the evening after his departure as to what new "croquet" had developed in her husband's brain. It occurred to her to look through his desk for light on the subject. But after a cursory examination of several uninteresting business letters, she abandoned research in that direction. "He is only a little queerer than usual," she told herself.

CHAPTER XXXVII

An Hour of Child-Study

DURING the course of the next five years Hilda Rossi had ample time to discover that it was no idle whim that had changed the current of her husband's life. She was still ignorant of the true cause which carried him daily further and further away from her. He had now an office somewhere in the city. She had never visited the place. That tremendous activities were centered there she learned through the constant comments, complimentary and otherwise, of the press.

Her own life had become a round of social functions which at times failed to interest her. To meet the same people, attired with monotonous splendor, day after day, week after week, and year after year; to hear the same music; to eat the same salads, ices and sweets; to talk the same unending commonplaces—all this palls on the least of human souls after a time. A being endowed with the attributes of its Maker must necessarily expand beyond the bounds of a mere butterfly existence either soon or late.

It had come about that Hilda, having gradually mastered her small sins of omission—which indeed were more numerous than her sins of commission, had at last taken rank as a woman of fashion; one who spoke as one having authority on all questions pertaining to

society. This much having been accomplished she found herself as bitterly dissatisfied as ever, and longing for new worlds to conquer like any Alexander. Then it was that she fell to attending lectures and clubs; developed a mania for rare prints; collected butterflies; allowed her name to be added to endless managerial boards. Later it chanced that she "took up" child-study—a fad of "moment, and straight-way discovered in her young son, Armitage, certain curiously interesting and instructive traits. This brought her a little nearer to the silent man, who seldom talked with her in these days, but sometimes watched her with a strangely sad look in his brown eyes.

More than once she had attempted to break through the wall of mysterious reserve which strengthened with the years. She learned after a time that any token of affection on her part was the signal for a question on his: "What can I do for you, Hilda?" She came at last to hate this question.

The two met one day unexpectedly. Hilda had been reading aloud to her son—it being a part of the specified course in child-study to classify youthful comments on literature. She was questioning him now with more or less skill on what she had been reading—it chanced to be Kingsley's immortal *Water-Babies*. His replies she jotted down with care in a dainty note-book.

"Now, Armitage," she went on, "why was it that Tom never found a water-baby till after he got the lobster out of the pot?"

"You haven't read the story nine times yet, mother," said the little fellow. "It says you must read it nine times before you will find out!"

Hilda gravely set down this answer in her note-book. Then to the child's immense delight she read again the scene where lonely little Tom in his fruitless search for the water-babies finds the stupid lobster in the round cage of green withes.

"I know—I know! without hearing it nine times," cried the lad, his brown eyes shining.

Hilda dropped the book in her lap. "What is it that you know?" she asked.

"I know why Tom found the water-babies after he helped the lobster."

"Well, why was it?"

"It was just the *helping*," said the child, nodding his head wisely. "I guess daddy will find the water-babies pretty soon, because he is always helping everybody."

"Who told you that, my child?"

"Nurse said so. She says daddy is the best man in the whole world. He helped her brother when he had broken his leg and had nine children."

Hilda tapped the book thoughtfully with her pencil. "Do you think I shall find any water-babies, Armitage?" she asked.

The child surveyed her keenly. "Are you going to write it down in the book, mother? or do you want to know?" he demanded.

"I want to know, of course," laughed Hilda.

"Well, then, I don't think you will. You don't help daddy. He feels bad, sometimes."

"Why do you say that, Armitage?" she murmured, and glanced up to see her husband standing in the doorway.

She colored under the look in his eyes till the tears

filled her own. For some unexplained reason she trembled so violently that the pencil dropped from her fingers.

He restored it with a low bow. "You are occupied," he said politely. "I will come some other time."

The boy flung himself upon the retreating figure. "Don't go, daddy!" he begged; "we're reading Water-Babies. You like Water-Babies. Tom has found them at last. I am so glad!"

Immanuel eyed his wife with some astonishment. He had not known her in this rôle of devoted mother. He acknowledged that it became her with a little throb of his heavy heart. "Shall I stay?" he asked her.

"If you like," she said, indifferently, but with a curious tremor in her voice. She was wondering if he had heard the child's verdict and her own question. "You know the story, of course," she said in a low voice, and plunged at once into the reading.

"'Now then,' they cried all at once, 'we must come away home, or the tide will leave us dry. We have mended all the broken seaweed, and put all the rock-pools in order, and planted all the shells again in the sand, and nobody will see where the ugly storm swept in last week.'"

"That is just what you do, daddy," said the child, gravely, as his mother paused to turn the leaf. "You clear away all the ugly houses, and plant the dirty courts with flowers, and make everything pretty and nice. You ought to see how lovely it is, mother; won't you come with us some day?"

The man flushed a little under her inquiring eyes.

"The boy went with me one day to see the new houses by the river," he said. "You need not fear, I took care that there was no contagion."

She remembered that long ago she had once refused to kiss him because he had just come home from "those horrid slums." "I am not afraid," she said hurriedly.

"And will you come with daddy and me to see how pretty it is now? It used to be ugly and dark, and the children were sick and some of them died; and the women didn't care about keeping their rooms clean. Now they are all quite happy. I should like to live there; there are so many little boys to play with. Won't you come, mother?"

There was a breathless silence in the room for the space of a minute. Then Immanuel said quietly, "Mother has too many other things to do, lad; she doesn't care for the new houses by the river."

She opened her lips to reply, but he checked her by rising with a glance at his watch. He stooped to kiss the child, then went away without another word.

"Don't you love daddy?" asked the child, laying his small hand timidly on the skirt of her gown.

"What a question!" cried Hilda with an unsteady laugh. "You must go out now with nurse; see, she is all ready for you."

With a sudden impulse she leaned down to the child and pressed her lips to the rosy cheek where a moment before her husband had left a kiss. "Am I falling hopelessly in love with my husband?" she asked herself half angrily when she had gained the shelter of her own room. For the hundredth time she

mused long over the estrangement which had grown up between them in a single day. Then she called her maid somewhat sharply and made ready to attend a series of receptions.

CHAPTER XXXVIII

Greater Love Hath No Man

IN his almost single-handed combat with the hydra-headed offspring of public indifference and private greed Immanuel Rossi had so far gained but little ground. The monster grew horribly fast, stretching its slimy coils along both rivers, penetrating the business centres, thrusting its ugly head into outlying suburban regions, overrunning the carelessly defended districts of the middle classes, and even leering contemptuously at the sacred precincts of the rich. "You do not heed me," it seemed to say; "but I grow while you sleep, and before many years I shall strangle you in a single night."

It was like trying to beat back the waves of the incoming tide, yet he persisted doggedly. City officials first laughed at him, then cursed him savagely, while they heaped up legal obstacles mountain high in the face of his endeavors to mitigate the nameless horrors which beset the herded poor.

The clergy shook their learned heads over his utterances; they regretted piously that he would not occupy a more conservative platform. When he thundered anathemas against a leading church, which worshipped God magnificently with rolling organ and long-drawn chant, while its revenues were being wrung from horrible tenements not a stone's throw from its

heaven-piercing spire, the church turned its back upon him altogether. It might perhaps have crucified him had that mode of effacement been in vogue. Yet he was not altogether friendless; the owner of millions is perforce respected, and there were those who loved him. The women and children whom he had snatched from the jaws of the monster worshipped him. Some of the men acknowledged that he was doing the best he knew how. They understood better than the women the almost hopeless nature of his task.

His method was simple: he searched for the most congested spots, bought the property where it could be bought, and replaced the filthy old houses with new ones, upon which was expended the best skill procurable. Crowding there must be; the tenement had come to stay; but between the old tenements and the new was all the difference between hell and heaven. Then came the more difficult task of maintaining the unaccustomed level of decency among the common herd which crowded in to take possession.

On the day when he had stumbled upon that innocent little scene in his own nursery he walked away from the palace which he called home, and struck straight into the region of the monster which was nearest. There were certain terrible old houses there which he had been trying to gain possession of for a year past. Their owner was absent on a pleasure trip and declined to part with his treasure, which was indeed bringing him something like forty per cent.

In his visits to this particular plague spot he had found a young man dying with consumption. It was a common enough case; a brick-layer who had moved in from the country with his wife and two children,

in the hope of securing steady employment on some of the big buildings going up in that part of town. Being a good workman he had no difficulty in getting work, and for a time all went swimmingly with the young family. Regular wages meant a sufficiently pleasant spot to live in and plenty to eat. Yet the children grew thin and white on the city milk, and the wife longed for the country garden, as she bought the wilted vegetables from the corner grocery.

Then came swift destruction. A heavy cold—or was it the foul dust from a demolished building?—and the slow-approaching death of tuberculosis laid the sole support of the family low. Once entered upon the old track worn smooth by the feet of countless thousands they had sunken swiftly to the level of the submerged.

As Immanuel Rossi picked his way among overflowing barrels of garbage which with the swarming children filled almost every foot of space, he was thinking of this man. He coupled him in his mind with the complacent theorists who declare that "the condition in which one finds himself is the best possible condition for his individual development." There were times when this would-be savior almost doubted the divine cooperation; this was one of them. As he climbed the stairs in the fetid half darkness to the tune of slamming doors, squeaking pumps, and crying children, he wondered dully if God was present, filling the foul air with His fulness, individualizing Himself in the gaunt forms which hurried to and fro in the filthy corridors; if here the divine energy was at work carrying these wretched beings on in their appointed cycle of endless existence.

The sick man lay gasping on a low cot by the one window, which opened on an air shaft less than three feet square.

"How are you to-day, Mr. Stark?" said Immanuel, advancing with a cheerfulness he did not feel.

"He's easier to-day, thank you, sir," said the woman who sat at his side fanning away the flies with a folded newspaper. "He ate a bit of the fruit and things you sent yesterday." She relapsed into silence with that. What indeed was there to talk about?

"Have you thought over what I proposed yesterday?" asked Immanuel, after a heavy pause.

"He's too sick to move," said the woman with an obstinate tightening of her blue lips; "if you'd come two months ago, sir; but now ——" She stopped short and redoubled her exertions with the newspaper. "I don't want him took to no hospital neither," she added sullenly. "The doctor was for takin' him before; but he don't want to go."

"No, I ain't goin'," gasped the man. "I know these 'ere doctors; all they want is a chance to cut you up when you're dead."

"But if you had more air, you could breathe better," suggested their visitor rather hopelessly.

"I can't breathe what I've got," snapped the sick man.

"We're very thankful to you, sir, for what you've done," began the woman, turning her sunken eyes upon Immanuel. "He's kin' of short, 'cause he feels so bad."

"It ain't that," said the man, raising himself with difficulty. "I've been thinkin' things over sence I lay here, an' I don't b'lieve there's any God anywheres

that loves us like a father same as you was sayin'."

"Oh, Dave," wailed his wife, "don't you say nothin' like that! It 'ud be laid up against you, an' you've always been such a good man you d'serve to go to heaven."

"Heaven!" sneered the man; "*heaven!* don't you talk to me 'bout no heaven, Mary. I wouldn't go thar if I could an' leave you an' the children here!" He made a gesture of indescribable loathing as he glanced about the squalid room. "What I want to ask you, sir," and he turned his bright eyes upon Immanuel, "is why you have more'n you kin spend? Yes, I know who you be; I seen you one day comin' out your house on the av'nool Why ain't I a right to enough to live on? I was willin' to work, ar' I did work as long's I cud hol' my trowel. Why am I here an' you yonder?" He dropped back on his dingy pillow while the woman began to cry dispiritedly.

"Don't you mind what Dave says," she pleaded. "He—he's off his head with the fever an' all. I don't know what we'd a done without you, sir; they was goin' to put us out o' here a Tuesday."

The man on the couch laughed brokenly. "We'd all 'a' been in your high-falutin' heaven, Mary," he gasped. "I'd ha' seen to it; I meant to."

"What—what do you mean, Dave?" whispered his wife, dropping to her knees beside him. "You'd never 'a' hurt the children!"

Immanuel laid his hand upon her shoulder. "I want to talk to him," he said.

She rose obediently, snatching up a half finished garment and falling feverishly to work.

"You asked me some questions just now," went on Immanuel, fixing his sombre eyes on the sick man. "I will answer them as I believe. I have no rights on God's earth that you have not, my brother."

"Then why are you livin' in a palace?" demanded the other. "Why does your wife shine with di'mon's an' ride in a kerridge, while my wife ——" His despairing gesture finished the sentence.

Immanuel made no answer; and silence fell; not the silence that breaks the hosannas of heaven "for the space of half an hour," while angels veil their faces before the ineffable presence; but the silence of the tenement house which only serves to make near and unendurable the thousand fretting sounds of herded humanity.

"You can't answer me!" cried the consumptive hoarsely, raising himself on his elbow and pointing a lean accusing finger at the rich man. "You're off a piece with the rest, though you have spent some of your loose change on us beggars!" The bitterness of his tone was indescribable.

The woman started forward, but stopped short with the words of expostulation half uttered. "Something has happened!" she whispered, and stood listening, her head thrust from the half open door.

A short word reiterated again and again in a chorus of shrill voices reached them as they waited. It was drowned in the thunder of trampling feet which shook the staircases. Screams, yells, cries of pain and fear mingled in the tumult. The woman added a piercing note to the uproar and darted away.

"It's fire," observed the man on the cot composedly. "She's gone to look fur the children." He showed

his yellow teeth in a terrible smile. "Maybe there won't be so much difference betwixt the two of us inside of an hour."

"I must get you out of this," cried Immanuel, stooping to lift him to his feet.

"No, I won't!" screamed the man. "I'll burn here where I've suffered the torments of the damned, an' you—curse you! shall burn with me!"

The man was manifestly mad; fever blazed red in his cheeks; his eyes glittered with murderous hate. Immanuel lifted the gaunt figure as one would lift a child and stepped with his burden into the dark hallway.

A gleam of light guided him to an open door further down the passage. His feet slipped in the contents of an overturned washtub, but blessed air mingled with the choking smoke. A few steps further and he had reached a window; it opened upon a balcony which he took to be a fire-escape. Amid the indescribable litter of rubbish a woman squatted in seeming indifference, three children clinging to her shoulders.

"Why don't you get out of this?" shouted Immanuel in her ear.

She turned with a start and pointed down into the tangle of clothes-lines loaded with fluttering rags which swayed back and forth in the murky air; red tongues of fire were thrusting themselves out of the billowing smoke below. Immanuel fell to pulling boxes and barrels aside with frantic haste in his search for the opening. The consumptive laughed aloud. "This ain't no fire-escape," he whispered; "it's a nice airy balcony; the escapes is at the other end."

Another fight with the smothering smoke, this time with the two smallest children in his arms; the sick man galvanized into sudden life at sight of the flames following close at his heels. Past innumerable doorways where pale gleams of daylight fought with the billowing smoke, past air-shafts which now roared like great chimneys; past the useless pumps. The woman was in the lead now; she knew the place. They came suddenly upon a little group of silent figures crowded about a narrow window. They were waiting their turn for life on the narrow ladder.

A single loud scream arose from without.

Inmanuel forced his way to the window and sprang out. Low-voiced curses and cries of "shame!" followed him. He flung out his hand in a gesture of denial. "I'll save you if I can!" he cried. They stared at him dully and were again silent.

Looking down he beheld the reason for that despairing scream. Furious flames had burst from the windows below; they reached out long scizel^r fingers after the dark fluttering figures on the ladder. The last of these stopped short, wavered for an instant, then without a sound dropped into the reddish smoke that surged up to meet it.

An hour ago he had doubted the presence of the Omnipotent. Now of a sudden he knew himself to be a part of it. He smiled in the face of the fire as he looked about him for some place to bestow the waiting women and children whose great eyes stared at him expectantly.

Crowded edgewise into what had once been an open yard stood a squat building, its roof barely a foot above the iron balcony where he was standing. This build-

ing was as yet untouched by the fire; in the winding alley-way below streams of water as thick as a man's wrist had begun to leap and play like huge serpents; they burrowed into the crashing windows, tearing away great fragments of rotten timbers and brick work which crumbled and fell in hissing showers into the depths below. The firemen were at work, but not one was visible. He shouted again and again; the swish and swirl of the battling waters drowned his voice. The iron balcony was growing hot beneath his feet; the wall to which it was fastened trembled ominously. He measured the space between the spot where he was standing and the roof opposite. He could jump across and save himself. The animal within clamored for this one chance of safety; the God there heard the wail of a frightened child.

With a word to the man Stark who stood beside him, he flung himself outward from the edge of the fire-escape, his feet locked firmly within the rail. His hands caught at—clutched—the edge of the gutter opposite; his body wavered, sank downward, then stiffened into a living bridge between the two buildings.

"Quick now!" she shouted. And one of the women, there were three of them, crawled out upon his tense body, clutching, slipping, shrieking in his bursting ears, but gaining at last the safe level of the roof. Obeying the hoarse shouts of the consumptive she reached for a child which another thrust out as far as she was able on the body of Immanuel.

It was scarce ten minutes before all were over, but it seemed an eternity of agony to the man who hung there. He thought of the Christ on the cross, and his failing muscles grew tense again. "He saved others,"

he muttered, "Himself He could not ——" His straining eyeballs stared into whirling clouds of vapor shot through with unearthly light; wailing voices sounded in his ears, frantic hands clutched at him. He felt his rigid fingers relaxing one by one. He was falling—falling into soundless depths of night and oblivion.

CHAPTER XXXIX

Resurrection

HE opened his eyes upon white walls flooded with the pink light of dawn. Behind him lay the dark reaches of the Valley of the Shadow, through which he had toiled all unknowing. The rosy splendor trembled and wavered as it mounted inch by inch in tiny ripples toward the ceiling. He gazed at it unwinkingly, the dreams of the past night crowding in upon him. Strange dreams they were and terrible, but already so vague and remote, so merged in the drowsy peace of this new awakening that he smiled at the light like a child. The slight rustling of draperies and the sound of a hushed foot on the floor did not rouse him. He was thinking now—with the curious distinctness of a vision—of the resurrection morning. Alone in the rock-cut tomb he lay—the Savior who had given his life for a lost world, swathed hand and foot in odorous linen, immovable, dreaming back into the life more abundant while the pink light of dawn rippled on gray walls. It was the waiting angels who loosed him with loving care—blue-eyed angels with disordered yellow hair, who stooped over him with the sound of a little sob in their throats.

He stared long at this last vision, his eyes clearing at last. "Hilda!" he cried.

"Hush!" she made answer; "you are to swallow this and sleep."

He obeyed, his eyes dwelling confusedly on the round arms and shoulders gleaming white through diaphanous folds of muslin—pink muslin. He remembered now. The wind rustling through the wide branches of the hickories was sweet with the breath of clover blooms; high overhead a thrush sang softly.

Dreams again, cloudy and confused, with brief awakenings when he swallowed obediently what was put to his lips, and all the while he was gazing at the Christ bound hand and foot in His grave clothes—immovable, with angels waiting at His head and feet.

One morning he awoke and the will to move and raise himself came back. The visions had faded, yet he could not lift a finger; he was bound hand and foot like the Christ of his dreams. He groaned aloud and opened his eyes, not upon the pale sweet faces of waiting angels, but upon a bearded man who stood gazing down at him with a pleased expression on his face.

He knew the man and spoke to him. "Why am I here?" he asked. "What has happened?"

"This has happened, Mr. Rossi," said the doctor softly; "you have made a splendid fight for life and you have won."

"But I wish to get up and I cannot move," said Immanuel, searching languidly for a key to the man's words.

"You're right you can't move, that is for a while yet," said the doctor with a joyful chuckle. "By George, man, I thought you'd never care to move again! But don't fret yourself into a fever over it; we'll have some of those bandages off in a few days; meanwhile patience. And here's Mrs. Rossi waiting

to say good-morning; she's worth a whole regiment of nurses!"

It was Hilda who emerged from behind the screen, a great wave of color flooding her pale cheeks. Her eyes filled as she looked down at him, but behind the tears shone a light he had never seen there before. The God-flame burned in the dark no longer; fear and remorse and tears and love had done their work; it was the eternal womanly that shone in the blue eyes, and their light was sweet and satisfying.

A week later when his growing strength had confirmed the doctor's cheerful prophecy, she told him how the firemen had rescued him from his frightful position on the burning building. Blackened and choked with smoke, frightfully burned and bruised, he had lain unrecognized in the hospital ward till the man, Stark, himself dying not far away, had revealed his identity.

"And you," he asked; "were you frightened when I failed to come home?"

She dropped her eyes, a deep shamed crimson stealing over face and neck. "I did not know it till late the next day," she said in a low voice. "There was a dinner at the Bidwells' that night, then a concert. I slept late and was wakened by my maid who told me what had happened. If you had died that night I should have killed myself." She spoke the words quietly and with conviction.

He laid his hand on hers. "You have been with me night and day," he murmured. "You are pale and worn with watching, dear; I saw you as an angel in my dreams."

She drew away from his touch with a strange look.

"Only in dreams could you think of me in that way," she said sadly. "I ruined your life — No, do not speak till I have told you. I must tell you! I married you because you had the money. I wanted a fine house, jewels, dresses and all that money could buy. I have been — Oh, how can I tell you all—but I must tell you. I would have married Jack Snider, but Amelia Hurd brought me a paper. It told all, and I —"

"Stop!" he begged. "I know it."

"You know it?" she whispered. "How—when?"

"She told me—sent me the paper—years ago. I knew you didn't love me. I tried not to force myself upon you. But Hilda, why have you brought me back from death if you do not —" His eyes finished the question.

A faint smile played about her lips. "You'll not dare say that to the doctors, or the nurses," she said looking down. "They wouldn't allow me a bit of credit. And indeed I don't deserve it. I deserve nothing." Two large tears splashed on her folded hands. Tears seemed as near the surface as ever; but they were different tears.

"You haven't answered me yet," he urged. "If I should tell you now that the money was lost and that we must go back to the little house to live, what would you say?"

"I am so glad!" he cried, delight beaming from eyes and lips. "I will go with you; I will work for you, oh, so hard. For I love you, my husband!"

"I did not tell you that I had lost the money, sweetheart," he confessed after a while. "I only said what if I should tell you that the money was gone."

Her face fell. "I wish you were poor," she said passionately.

"I wish ——" She stopped short, her eyes on his. "You wanted me to help you," she murmured humbly, "and I would not. But now—if you can trust me—I am sure that I can be of some use to the poor people."

And he knew that at last he had found his other self, and that from henceforth they two would go forth together to work until the evening.

END



