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by George Alfred Townsend**

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TIMES \*\*\*

# **THE ENTAILED HAT**

OR

## ***PATTY CANNON'S TIMES***

A Romance

BY **GEORGE ALFRED TOWNSEND**

"GATH"



NEW YORK  
HARPER & BROTHERS, FRANKLIN SQUARE  
1884

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TO  
**JUDGE GEORGE P. FISHER**  
OF DELAWARE  
AND  
**HON. JOHN A. J. CRESWELL**  
OF MARYLAND  
**LOVERS OF OLD TIMES**  
**WELCOMERS OF THE NEW ERA**

"Friends! trust not the heart of that man for whom Old Clothes are not  
venerable."—CARLYLE: *Sartor Resartus*

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**INTRODUCTION.**

Once the author awoke to a painful reflection that he knew no place well, though his occupation had taken him to many, and that, after twenty-five years of describing localities and society, he would be identified with none.

"Where shall I begin to rove within confines?" he asked, feeling the vacant spaces in his nature: the want of all those birds, forest trees, household habits, weeds, instincts of the brooks, and tints and tones of the local species which lie in some neighborhood's compass, and complete the pastoral mind.

Numerous districts rose up and contended together, each attractive from some striking scene, or bold contrast, or lovely face; and wiser policy might have led his inclinations to one of these, redundant, perhaps, in wealth or literary appreciation; yet the heart began to turn, as in first love, or vagrancy almost as sweet, to the little, lowly region where his short childhood was lived, and where the unknown generations of his people darkened the sand—the peninsula between the Chesapeake and the Delaware.

Far down this peninsula lies the old town of Snow Hill, on the border of Virginia; there the pilgrim entered the court-house, and asked to see an early book of wills, and in it he turned to the name of a maternal ancestor, of whom grand tales had been told him by an aged relative. His breath was almost taken by finding the following provisions, dated February 12, 1800:

"I give and bequeath to my son, Ralph Milbourn, MY BEST HAT, TO HIM AND HIS ASSIGNEES FOREVER, and no more of my estate.

"I give to Thomas Milbourn my small iron kettle, my brandy still, all my hand-irons, my pot-rack, and fifteen pounds bond that he gave to my daughter, Grace Milbourn."

The next day a doctor took the author on his rounds through "the Forest," as a neighboring tract was almost too invidiously called, and through a deserted iron-furnace; village almost of the date of these wills.

Everywhere he went the Entailed Hat seemed, to the stranger in the land of his forefathers, to appear in the vistas, as if some odd, reverend, avoided being was wearing it down the defiles of time. Now like Hester Prynne wearing her Scarlet Letter, and now like Gaston in his Iron Mask, this being took both sexes and different characters, as the author weighed the probabilities of its existence. At last he began to know it, and started to portray it in a little tale.

The story broke from its confines as his own family generation had broken from that forest, and sought a larger hemisphere; yet, wherever the mystic Hat proceeded, his truant fancy had also been led by his mother's hand.

Often had she told him of old Patty Cannon and her kidnapper's den, and her death in the jail of his native town. He found the legend of that dreaded woman had strengthened instead of having faded with time, and her haunts preserved, and eye-witnesses of her deeds to be still living.

Hence, this romance has much local truth in it, and is not only the narration of an episode, but the story of a large region comprehending three state jurisdictions, and also of that period when modern life arose upon the ruins of old colonial caste.

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# CONTENTS.

## INTRODUCTION.

- Chapter I.—TWO HAT WEARERS  
Chapter II.—JUDGE AND DAUGHTER  
Chapter III.—THE FORESTERS  
Chapter IV.—DISCOVERY OF THE HEIRLOOM  
Chapter V.—THE BOG-ORE TRACT  
Chapter VI.—THE CUSTISES RUINED  
Chapter VII.—JACK-O'-LANTERN IRON  
Chapter VIII.—THE HAT FINDS A RACK  
Chapter IX.—HA! HA! THE WOOING ON'T  
Chapter X.—MASTER IN THE KITCHEN  
Chapter XI.—DYING PRIDE  
Chapter XII.—PRINCESS ANNE FOLKS  
Chapter XIII.—SHADOW OF THE TILE  
Chapter XIV.—MESHACH'S HOME  
Chapter XV.—THE KIDNAPPER  
Chapter XVI.—BELL-CROWN MAN  
Chapter XVII.—SABBATH AND CANOE  
Chapter XVIII.—UNDER AN OLD BONNET  
Chapter XIX.—THE DUSKY LEVELS  
Chapter XX.—CASTE WITHOUT TONE  
Chapter XXI.—LONG SEPARATIONS  
Chapter XXII.—NANTICOKE PEOPLE  
Chapter XXIII.—TWIFORD'S ISLAND  
Chapter XXIV.—OLD CHIMNEYS  
Chapter XXV.—PATTY CANNON'S  
Chapter XXVI.—VAN DORN  
Chapter XXVII.—CANNON'S FERRY  
Chapter XXVIII.—PACIFICATION  
Chapter XXIX.—BEGINNING OF THE RAID  
Chapter XXX.—AFRICA  
Chapter XXXI.—PEACH BLUSH  
Chapter XXXII.—GARTER-SNAKES  
Chapter XXXIII.—HONEYMOON  
Chapter XXXIV.—THE ORDEAL  
Chapter XXXV.—COWGILL HOUSE  
Chapter XXXVI.—TWO WHIGS  
Chapter XXXVII.—SPIRIT OF THE PAST  
Chapter XXXVIII.—VIRGIE'S FLIGHT  
Chapter XXXIX.—VIRGIE'S FLIGHT—*Continued*  
Chapter XL.—HULDA BELEAGUERED  
Chapter XLI.—AUNT PATTY'S LAST TRICK  
Chapter XLII.—BEAKS  
Chapter XLIII.—PLEASURE DRAINED  
Chapter XLIV.—THE DEATH OF PATTY CANNON  
Chapter XLV.—THE JUDGE REMARRIED  
Chapter XLVI.—THE CURSE OF THE HAT  
Chapter XLVII.—FAILURE AND RESTITUTION
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A picture of Joe Johnson's Kidnapper's Tavern, as it stood in the year 1883, is given on the title-page.

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## CHAPTER I.

### TWO HAT WEARERS.

Princess Anne, as its royal name implies, is an old seat of justice, and gentle-minded town on the Eastern Shore. The ancient county of Somerset having been divided many years before the revolutionary war, and its courts separated, the original court-house faded from the world, and the forest pines have concealed its site. Two new towns arose, and flourish yet, around the original records gathered into their plain brick offices, and he would be a forgetful visitor in Princess Anne who would not say it had the better society. He would get assurances of this from "the best people" living there; and yet more solemn assurances from the two venerable churches, Presbyterian and Episcopalian, whose grave-stones, upright or recumbent, or in family rows, say, in epitaphs Latinized, poetical, or pious, "*We belonged to the society of Princess Anne.*" That, at least, is the impression left on the visitor as he wanders amid their myrtle and creeper, or receives, on the wide, loamy streets, the bows of the lawyers and their clients.

There were but two eccentric men living in Princess Anne in the early half of our century, and both of them were identified by their hats.

The first was Jack Wonnell, a poor fellow of some remote origin who had once attended an auction, and bought a quarter gross of beaver hats. Although that happened years before our story opens, and the fashions had changed, Jack produced a new hat from the stock no oftener than when he had well worn its predecessor, and, at the rate of two hats a year, was very slowly extinguishing the store. Like most people who frequent auctions, he was not provident, except in hats, and presented a startling appearance in his patched and shrunken raiment when he mounted a bright, new tile, and took to the sidewalk. His name had become, in all grades of society, "Bell-crown."

The other eccentric citizen was the subject of a real mystery, and even more burlesque. He wore a hat, apparently more than a century old, of a tall, steeple crown, and stiff, wavy brim, and nearly twice as high as the cylinders or high hats of these days. It had been rubbed and recovered and cleaned and straightened, until its grotesque appearance was infinitely increased. If the wearer had walked out of the court of King James I. directly into our times and presence, he could not have produced a more singular effect. He did not wear this hat on every occasion, nor every day, but always on Sabbaths and holidays, on funeral or corporate celebrations, on certain English church days, and whenever he wore the remainder of his extra suit, which was likewise of the genteel-shabby kind, and terminated by greenish gaiters, nearly the counterpart, in color, of the hat. To daily business he wore a cheap, common broadbrim, but sometimes, for several days, on freak or unknown method, he wore this steeple hat, and strangers in the place generally got an opportunity to see it.

Meshach Milburn, or "Steeple-top," was a penurious, grasping, hardly social man of neighborhood origin, but of a family generally unsuccessful and undistinguished, which had been said to be dying out for so many years that it seemed to be always a remnant, yet never quite gone. He alone of the Milburns had lifted himself out of the forest region of Somerset, and settled in the town, and, by silence, frugality, hard bargaining, and, finally, by money-lending, had become a person of unknown means—himself almost unknown. He was, ostensibly, a merchant or storekeeper, and did deal in various kinds of things, keeping no clerk or attendant but a negro named Samson, who knew as little about his mind and affections as the rest of the town. Samson's business was to clean and produce the mysterious hat, which he knew to be required every time he saw his master shave.

As soon as the lather-cup and hone were agitated, Samson, without inquiry, went into a big green chest in the bedroom over the old wooden store, and drew out of a leather hat-box the steeple-crown, where Meshach Milburn himself always sacredly replaced it. Then "Samson Hat," as the boys called him, exercised his brush vigorously, and put the queer old head-gear in as formal shape as possible, and he silently attended to its rehabilitation through the medium of the village hatter, never leaving the shop until the tile had been repaired, and suffering none whatever to handle it except the mechanic. In addition to this, Samson cooked his master's food, and performed rough work around the store, but had no other known qualification for a confidential servant except his bodily power.

He was now old, probably sixty, but still a most formidable pugilist; and he had caught, running afoot, the last wild deer in the county. Though not a drinking man Samson Hat never let a year pass without having a personal battle with some young, willing, and powerful negro. His physical and mental system seemed to require some such periodical indulgence, and he measured every negro who came to town solely in the light of his prowess. At the appearance of some Herculean or clean-chested athlete, Samson's eye would kindle, his smile start up, and his friendly salutation would be: "You're a *good* man! 'Most as good as me!" He was never whipped, rumor said, but by an inoffensive black class-leader whom he challenged and compelled to fight.

"Befo' God, man, I never see you befo'! I'se jined de church! I kint fight! I never didn't do it!"

"Can't help it, brother!" answered Samson. "You're too *good* a man to go froo Somerset County. Square off or you'll ketch it!"

"Den if I must I must! de Lord forgive me!" and after a tremendous battle the class-leader came off nearly conqueror.

Whenever Samson indulged his gladiatorial propensities he disappeared into the forest whence he came, and being a free man of mental independence equal to his nerve, he merely waited in his lonely cabin until Meshach Milburn sent him word to return. Then silently the old negro resumed his place, looked contrition, took the few bitter, overbearing words of his master silently, and brushed the ancient hat.

Meshach kept him respectably dressed, but paid him no wages; the negro had what he wanted, but wanted little; on more than one occasion the court had imposed penalties on Samson's breaches of the peace, and he lay in jail, unsollicitous and proud, until Meshach Milburn paid the fine, which he did grudgingly; for money was Meshach's sole pursuit, and he spent nothing upon himself.

Without a vice, it appeared that Meshach Milburn had not an emotion, hardly a virtue. He had neither pity nor curiosity, visitors nor friends, professions nor apologies. Two or three times he had been summoned on a jury, when he put on his best suit and his steeple-crown, and formally went through his task. He attended the Episcopal worship every Sunday and great holiday, wearing inevitably the ancient tile, which often of itself drew audience more than the sermon. He gave a very small sum of money and took a cheap pew, and read from his prayer-book many admonitions he did not follow.

He was not litigious, but there was no evading the perfectness of his contracts. His searching and large hazel eyes, almost proud and quite unkindly, and his Indian-like hair, were the leading elements of a face not large, but appearing so, as if the buried will of some long frivolous family had been restored and concentrated in this man and had given a bilious power to his brows and jaws and glances.

His eccentricity had no apparent harmony with anything else nor any especial sensibility about it. The boys hooted his hat, and the little girls often joined in, crying "Steeple-top! He's got it on! Meshach's loose!" But he paid no attention to anybody, until once, at court time, some carousing fellows hired Jack Wonnell to walk up to Meshach Milburn and ask to swap a new bell-crown for the old decrepit steeple-top. Looking at Wonnell sternly in the face, Meshach hissed, "You miserable vagrant! Nature meant you to go bareheaded. Beware when you speak to me again!"

"I was afraid of him," said Jack Wonnell, afterwards. "He seemed to have a loaded pistol in each eye."

No other incident, beyond indiscriminate ridicule, was recorded of this hat, except once, when a group of little children in front of Judge Custis's house began to whisper and titter, and one, bolder than the rest, the Judge's daughter, gravely walked up to the unsocial man; it was the first of May, and he was in his best suit:

"Sir," she said, "may I put a rose in your old hat?"

The harsh man looked down at the little queenly child, standing straight and slender, with an expression on her face of composure and courtesy. Then he looked up and over the Judge's residence to see if any mischievous or presuming person had prompted this act. No one was in sight, and the other children had run away.

"Why do you offer me a flower?" he said, but with no tenderness.

"Because I thought such a very old hat might improve with a rose."

He hesitated a minute. The little girl, as if well-born, received his strong stare steadily. He took off the venerable old head-gear, and put it in the pretty maid's hand. She fixed a white rose to it, and then he placed the hat and rose again on his head and took a small piece of gold from his pocket.

"Will you take this?"

"My father will not let me, sir!"

Meshach Milburn replaced the coin and said nothing else, but walked down the streets, amid more than the usual simpering, and the weather-beaten door of the little rickety storehouse closed behind him.

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## CHAPTER II.

### JUDGE AND DAUGHTER.

Judge Custis was the most important man in the county. He belonged to the oldest colonial family of distinction, the Custises of Northampton, whose fortune, beginning with King Charles II. and his tavern credits in Rotterdam, ended in endowing Colonel George Washington with a widow's mite. The Judge at Princess Anne was the most handsome man, the father of the finest family of sons and daughters, the best in estate, most various in knowledge, and the most convivial of

Custises.

In that region of the Eastern Shore there is so little diversity of productions, the ocean and the loam alone contributing to man, that Judge Custis had an exaggerated reputation as a mineralogist.

He had begun to manufacture iron out of the bog ores found in the swamps and hummocks of a neighboring district, and, with the tastes of a landholding and slaveholding family, had erected around his furnace a considerable town, his own residence as proprietor conspicuous in the midst. There he spent a large part of the time, and not always in the company of his family, entertaining friends from the distant cities, enjoying the luxuries of terrapin, duck, and wines, and, as rumor said in the forest, all the pleasures of a Russian or German nobleman on a secluded estate.

He could lie down on the ground with the barefooted foresters, equal and familiar with them, and carry off their suffrages for the State Senate or the Assembly. In Princess Anne he was more discriminating, rising in that society to his family stature, and surrounded by alliances which demanded what is called "bearing." In short, he was the head of the community, and his wealth, originally considerable, had been augmented by marriage, while his credit extended to Philadelphia and Baltimore.

Not long after the occurrence of his young daughter, Vesta, placing the rose in Meshach Milburn's mysterious hat, Judge Custis said to his lady at the breakfast-table:

"That man has been allowed to shut himself in, like a dog, too long. He owes something to this community. I'll go down to his kennel, under pretence of wanting a loan—and I do need some money for the furnace!"

He took his cane after breakfast and passed out of his large mansion, and down the sidewalk of the level street. There were, as usually, some negroes around Milburn's small, weather-stained store, and Samson Hat, among them, shook hands with the Judge, not a particle disturbed at the latter's condescension.

"Judge," said Samson, looking that large, portly gentleman over, "you'se a *good* man yet. But de flesh is a little soft in yo' muscle, Judge."

"Ah! Samson," answered Custis, "there's one old fellow that is wrastling you."

"Time?" said the negro; "we can't fight him, sho! Dat's a fack! But I'm good as any man in Somerset now."

"Except my daughter's boy, the class-leader from Talbot."

"Is dat boy in yo' family," exclaimed Samson, kindling up. "I'll walk dar if he'll give me another throw."

The Judge passed into the wide-open door of Meshach Milburn's store. A few negroes and poor whites were at the counter, and Meshach was measuring whiskey out to them by the cheap dram in exchange for coonskins and eggs. He looked up, just a trifle surprised at the principal man's advent, and merely said, without nodding:

"Morning!"

Judge Custis never flinched from anybody, but his intelligence recognized in Meshach's eyes a kind of nature he had not yet met, though he was of universal acquaintance. It was not hostility, nor welcome, nor indifference. It was not exactly spirit. As nearly as the Judge could formulate it, the expression was habitual self-reliance, and if not habitual suspicion, the feeling most near it, which comes from conscious unpopularity.

"Mr. Milburn," said Judge Custis, "when you are at leisure let me have a few words with you."

The storekeeper turned to the poor folks in his little area and remarked to them bluntly:

"You can come back in ten minutes."

They all went out without further command. Milburn closed the door. The Judge moved a chair and sat down.

"Milburn," he said, dropping the formal "mister," "they tell me you lend money, and that you charge well for it. I am a borrower sometimes, and I believe in keeping interest at home in our own community. Will you discount my note at legal interest?"

"Never," replied Meshach.

"Then," said the Judge, smiling, "you'll put me to some inconvenience."

"That's more than legal interest," answered Milburn, sturdily. "You'll pay the legal interest where you go, and the inconvenience of going will cost something too. If you add your expenses as liberally as you incur them when you go to Baltimore, to legal interest, you are always paying a good shave."

"Where you have risks," suggested the Judge, "there is some reason for a heavy discount, but my property will enrich this county and all the land you hold mortgages on."

"Bog ore!" muttered the money-lender. "I never lent money on that kind of risk. I must read upon it! They say manufacturing requires mechanical talent. How much do you want?"

"Three thousand."

"Secured upon the furnace?"

"Yes."

Meshach computed on a piece of paper, and the Judge, with easy curiosity, studied his singular face and figure.

He was rather short and chunky, not weighing more than one hundred and thirty pounds, with long, fine fingers of such tracery and separate action that every finger seemed to have a mind and function of its own. Looking at his hands only, one would have said: "There is here a pianist, a penman, a woman of definite skill, or a man of peculiar delicacy." All the fingers were well produced, as if the hand instead of the face was meant to be the mind's exponent and reveal its portrait there.

Yet the face of Meshach Milburn, if more repellent, was uncommon.

The effects of one long diet and one climate, invariable, from generation to generation, and both low and uninigorating, had brought to nearly aboriginal form and lines his cheek-bones, hair, and resinous brown eyes. From the cheek-bones up he looked like an Indian, and expressed a stolid power and swarthy. Below, there dropped a large face, in proportion, with nothing noticeable about it except the nose, which was so straight, prominent, and complete, and its nostrils so sensitive, that only the nose upon his face seemed to be good company for his hands. When he confronted one, with his head thrown back a little, his brown eyes staring inquiry, and his nose almost sentient, the effect was that of a hostile savage just burst from the woods.

That was his condition indeed.

"Look at him in the eyes," said the town-bred, "he's all forester!"

"But look at his hand," added some few observant ones.

Ah! who had ever shaken that hand?

It was now extended to the Judge and he took from its womanly fingers the terms of the loan. Judge Custis was surprised at the moderation of Meshach, and he looked up cheerfully into that ever sentinel face on which might have been printed "*qui vive?*"

"It's not the goodness of the security," said Meshach, "I make it low to you, socially!"

The Custis pride started with a flush to the Judge's eyes, to have this ostracised and hooted Shylock intimate that their relations could be more than a prince's to a pawnbroker. But the Judge was a politician, with an adaptable mind and address.

"Speaking of social things, Milburn," he said, carelessly, "our town is not so large that we don't all see each other sometimes. Why do you wear that forlorn, unsightly hat?"

"Why do you wear the name *Custis*?"

"Oh, I inherited that!"

"And I inherited my hat."

There was a pause for a minute, but before the Judge could tell whether it was an angry or an awkward pause, the storekeeper said:

"Judge Custis, I concede that you are the best bred man in Princess Anne. Where did you get authority to question another person about any decent article of his attire?"

"I stand corrected, Milburn," said the Judge. "Good feeling for you more than curiosity made me suggest it. And I may also remark to you, sir, that when you lend me money you will always do it commercially and not *socially*."

"Very well," remarked Meshach Milburn, "and if I ever enter your door, I will then take off my hat."

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The next morning Meshach Milburn surprised Samson Hat by saying: "Boy, when you have another fight and make yourself a barbarian again, remember to bring back, from Nassawongo furnace, about a peck of the bog ores!"

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The years moved on without much change in Princess Anne. The little Manokin river brought up oysters from the bay, and carried off the corn and produce. The great brick academy at neighboring "Lower Trappe" boarded and educated the brightest youths of the best families on the Peninsula; and these perceived, as the annual summers brought their fulness, what portion of

their beauty remained with Vesta Custis. She was like Helen of Troy, a subject of homage and dispute in childhood, and became a woman, in men's consideration, almost imperceptibly. Sent to Baltimore to be educated, her return was followed by suitors—not youthful admirers only, but mature ones—and the young men of the Peninsula remarked with chagrin: "None of us have a chance! Some great city nabob will get her."

But the academy boys and visitors, and the townspeople, had one common opportunity to see her and to hear her—when she sang, every Sabbath and church day, in the Episcopal church.

Her voice was the natural expression of her beauty—sweet, powerful, free, and easily trained. A divine bird seemed hidden in the old church when this noble yet tender voice broke forth; but they who turned to see the singer who had made such Paradise, looked almost on Eve herself.

She was rather slight, tall, and growing fuller slowly every year, like one in whom growth was early, yet long, and who would wholly mature not until near middle life. Her head, however, was perfection, even in girlhood, not less by its proportions than its carriage: her graceful figure bore it like the slender setting, holding up the first splendor of the peach; a head of vital and spiritual beauty, where purity and luxuriance, woman and mind, dwelt in harmony and joy. As she seemed ever to be ripening, so she seemed never to have been a child, but, with faculties and sense clear and unintimidated, she was never wanting in modesty, nor accused of want of self-possession. Judge Custis made her his reliance and pride; she never reproved his errors, nor treated them familiarly, but settled the household by a consent which all paid to her character alone. More than once she had appeared at the furnace mansion when the Judge's long absence had awakened some jealousy or distrust:

"Father, please go home with me! I want you to drive me back."

The easy, self-indulgent Judge would look a slight protest, but at the soft, spirited command; "Come, sir! you can't stay here any more," dismissed his companions, and took his place at the head of Princess Anne society.

Vesta was almost a brunette, with the rich colors of her type—eyebrows like the raven's wing, ripe, red lips, and hair whose darkness and length, released from the crown into which she wound it, might have spun her garments. Her eyes were of a steel-blue, in which the lights had the effect of black. She was dark with sky breaking through, like the rich dusk and twilights over the Chesapeake.

People wondered that, with such beauty, ease, and accomplishments she was not proud; but her pride was too ethereal to be seen. It was not the vain consciousness of gifts and endowments, but the serene sense of worthiness, of unimpaired health, honor, and descent, which made her kind and thoughtful to a degree only less than piety. Grateful for her social rank and parentage, she adorned but did not forget them. The suitors who came for her were weighed in this scale of perfect desert—to be sons of such parents and associates of her married sisters and sisters-in-law. Not one had survived the test, yet none knew where he failed.

"Vesta is too good for any of them," exclaimed the Judge, on more than one occasion. "When I get the furnace in such shape that it will run itself I will take my daughter to Europe and give her a musical education."

In truth, the Judge had expectations of his daughter; for the reputation he had attained as a manufacturer was not without its drawbacks. He maintained two establishments; he supported a large body of laborers and dependents, some of whom he had brought from distant places under contract; the experiment in which he had embarked was still an experiment, and he was subject to the knowledge and judgment of his manager, being himself rather the patron than the manufacturer at the works. Many days, when he was supposed to be testing the percentage and mixture of his ores, he was gunning off on the ocean bars, crabbing on Whollop's Beach, or hunting up questionable company among the forest girls, or around the oystermen's or wrecker's cabins. He had plenty of property and family endorsers, however, and seldom failed to have a satisfactory interview with Meshach Milburn, who was now assisting him, at least once a quarter, to keep both principal and interest at home.

The Judge had grown thicker with Meshach, but the storekeeper merely listened and assented, and took no pains to incur another criticism on his motives. Meshach wore his great hat, as ever, to church and on festive days, and it was still derided, and held to be the town wonder. Vesta Custis often saw the odd little man come into church while she was singing, and she fancied that his large, coarse ears were turned to receive the music she was making, and she faintly remembered that once she had held in her hands that wonderful hat with its copper buckle in the band, and stiff, wide brim, flowing in a wave. More than that she knew nothing, except that the wearer was an humble-born, grasping creature—a forester without social propensities, or, indeed, any human attachments. The negro who abode under his roof was beloved, compared to the sordid master, and all testimony concurred that Meshach Milburn deserved neither commiseration, friendship, nor recognition. Her father, however, indulgent in all things, said the money-lender had a good mind, and was no serf.

Milburn had ceased to deal with negroes or dispense drams. His wealth was now known to be more than considerable. He had ceased, also, to lend money on the surrounding farms, and rumors came across the bay that he was a holder of stocks and mortgages on the Western Shore, and in Baltimore and Pennsylvania. The little town of Princess Anne was full of speculations about him, and even his age was uncertain; Jack Wonnell had measured it by hats. Said Jack:



"I bought my bell-crowns the year ole Milburn's daddy and mammy died. They died of the bilious out yer in Nassawongo, within a few days of each other. Now, I wear two bell-crowns a year. I come out every Fourth of July and Christmas. 'Tother day I counted what was left, and I reckoned that Meshach couldn't be forty-five at the wust."

Vesta Custis was only twenty years old when the townfolk thought she must be twenty-five, so long had she been the beauty of Somerset. Her mother had always looked with apprehension on the possible time when her daughter would marry and leave her; for Judge Custis had long ceased to have the full confidence of his lady, whose fortune he had embarked without return on ventures still in doubt, and he always waived the subject when it was broached, or remarked that no loss was possible in his hands while Mrs. Custis lived.

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## CHAPTER III.

### THE FORESTERS.

One Saturday afternoon in October Meshach Milburn drew out his razor, cup, and hone, and prepared to shave, albeit his beard was never more than harmless down. By a sort of capillary attraction Samson Hat divined his purpose, and, opening the big green chest, brought out the mysterious hat.

"Put it down!" commanded the money-lender. "Go out and hire me a carriage with two horses—*two* horses, do you mind!"

Samson dropped the hat in wonderment.

"Make yourself decent," added Meshach; "I want you to drive. Go with me, and keep with me: do you understand?"

"Yes, marster."

When the negro departed, Meshach himself took up the tall, green, buckled hat, with the stiff, broad, piratical brim. He looked it over long and hard.

"Vanity, vanity!" he murmured, "vanity and habit! I dare not disown thee now, because they give thee ridicule, and without thee they would give me nothing but hate!"

The people around the tavern and court-house saw, with surprise too great for jeering, the note-shaver go past in a carriage, driven by his negro, and with two horses! Jack Wonnell took off his shining beaver to cheer. As the phenomenal team receded, the old cry ran, however, down the stilly street: "Steeple-top! He's got it on! Meshach's loose!"

The carriage proceeded out the forest road, and soon entered upon the sandy, pine-slashed region called Hard-scrabble, or Hardship.

Here the roads were sandy as the hummocks and hills in the rear of a sea beach, and the low, lean pines covered the swells and ridges, while in occasional level basins, where the stiff clay was exposed, some forester's unpainted hut sat black and smoking on the slope, without a window-pane, an ornament, or anything to relieve life from its monotony and isolation.

But where the rills ran off to the continuous swamps the leafage started up in splendid versatility. The maple stood revealed in all its fair, light harmonies. The magnolia drooped its ivory tassels, and scented the forest with perfume. The kalmia and the alder gave undergrowth and brilliancy to the foliage. Hoary and green with precipitate old age, the cypress-trees stood in moisture, and drooped their venerable beards from angular branches, the bald cypress overhanging its evergreen kinsman, and looking down upon the swamp-woods in autumn, like some hermit artist on the rich pigments on his palette.

But nothing looked so noble as the sweet gum, which rose like a giant plume of yellow and orange, a chief in joyous finery, where the cypress was only a faded philosopher.

Beside such a tall gum-tree Samson Hat reined in, where a well-spring shone at the bottom of a hollow cypress. He borrowed a bucket from the hut across the road, and watered the horses.

"Marster," ventured the negro, "dey say your gran'daddy sot dis spring."

"Yes," said Milburn, "and built the cabin. Yonder he lies, on the knoll by that stump, up in the field: he and more of our wasted race."

"And yon woman is a Milburn," added the negro, socially. "I know her by de hands."

The barefoot woman living in the cabin—one room and a loft, and the floor but a few inches above the ground—cried out, impudently:

"If I could have two horses I'd buy a better hat!"

Milburn did not answer, but marked the poor, small corn ears ungathered on the fodderless stalks, the shrubs of peach-trees, of which the largest grew on his ancestors' graves, the little

cart for one horse or ox, which was at once family carriage and farm wagon, and the few pigs and chickens of stunted breeds around the woman's feet.

"Drive on, boy," he exclaimed; "the worst of all is that these people are happy!"

"Dat's a fack, marster," laughed Samson Hat. "Dey wouldn't speak to you in Princess Anne. Dey think everybody's proud and rich dar."

"Here the sea once dashed its billows on a bar," said Meshach Milburn, reflectively. "That geology book relates it! From the North the hummocks recede in waves, where successive beaches were formed as the sea slowly retreated. Hardly deeper than a human grave they strike water, below the sand and gravel. Below the water they drink is nothing but black mud, made of coarse, decayed grass. No lime is in the soil. Not a mineral exists in all this low, wave-made peninsula, where my people were shipwrecked—except the wonderful bog ores."

The negro's genial, wondering nature broke out with comfortable assurance.

"Dat must be in de Bible," he said. "Marster, de Milburns been heah so long, dey must hab got shipwrecked wid ole Noah!"

"All families are shipwrecked," absently replied Meshach, "who cast their lot upon an unrewarding land, and growing poorer, darker, down, from generation to generation, can never leave it, and, at last, can never desire to go."

"Marster, dar is one got to go some ob dese days. It's me—pore ole Samson!"

"Ha! has some one set you on to demand your wages?"

"No, marster, I am old. It's you dat I'm troubled about! Dar's none to mend for you, cook for you, cure yo' sickness, or lay you in de grave."

No more was said until they passed the settled part of the forest and entered one of the many straight aisles of sky and sand among the pines, which had been opened on the great furnace tract of Judge Custis. He had here several thousand acres, and for miles the roadways were cleft towards the horizon. The moon rose behind them as they entered the furnace village, and they saw the lights twinkle through the open doors of many cottages and the furnace flames dart over the forbidding mill-pond, where in the depths grew the iron ore, like a vegetable creation, and above the surface, on splayed and conical mud-washed roots, the hundreds of strong cypresses towered from the water. Between the steep banks of dark-colored pines, taller than the forest growth, this furnace lake lay black and white and burning red as the shadows, or moonrise, or flames struck upon it, and the stained water foamed through the breast or dam where the ancient road crossed between pines, cypresses and gum-trees of commanding stature.

Tawny, slimy, chilly, and solemn, the pond repeated the forms of the groves it submerged; the shaggy shadows added depth and dread to the effect; some strange birds hooted as they dipped their wings in the surface, and, flying upward, seemed also sinking down. As Meshach felt the chill of that pond he drew down his hat and buttoned up his coat.

"The earliest fools who turned up the bog ores for wealth," he said, "released the miasmas which slew all the people roundabout. They killed all my family, but set me free."

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## CHAPTER IV.

### DISCOVERY OF THE HEIRLOOM.

Judge Custis was in his bedroom, in the second story of the large, inn-like mansion at the middle of the village, and he was just recovering from the effects of a long wassail. In his peculiar nervous condition he started at the sound of wheels, and, drawing his curtains, looked out upon the long shadow of an advancing figure crowned with a steeple hat.

This human shadow strengthened and faded in the alternating light, until it was defined against his storehouse, his warehouse, his cabins, and the plain, and it seemed also against the wall of dense forest pines. Then footsteps ascended the stairs. His door opened and Meshach Milburn, with his holiday hat on his head, stood on the threshold; his eyes vigilant and bold as ever, and all his Indian nature to the front.

"My God, Milburn!" exclaimed the Judge, "odd as it is to see you here, I am relieved. Old Nick, I thought, was coming."

"Shall I come in?" asked Milburn.

"Yes; I'm sleeping off a little care and business. Let your man stay outside on the porch. Draw up a chair. It's money, I suppose, that brings you here?"

The money-lender carefully put his formidable hat upon a table, took a distant chair, pushed his gaitered feet out in front, and laid a large wallet or pocket-book on his lap. Then, addressing his whole attention to the host, he appeared never to wink while he remained.

"Judge Custis," he said, straightforwardly, "the first time you came to borrow money from me, you said that Nassawongo furnace would enrich this county and raise the value of my land."

"Yes, Milburn. It was a slow enterprise, but it's coming all right. I shipped a thousand tons last year."

"Judge Custis," continued the money-lender, "I told you, when you made the first loan, that I would investigate this ore. I did so years ago. Specimens were sent by me to Baltimore and tested there. Not content with that, I have studied the manufacture of iron for myself—the society of Princess Anne not grudging me plenty of solitude!—and I know that every ton of iron you make costs more than you get for it. The bog ore is easy to smelt; but it is corrupted by phosphate of iron and is barely marketable."

The Judge was sitting with eyes wide open, and paler than before.

"You have found that out?" he whispered. "I did not know it myself until within this year—so help me God!"

"I knew it before I made you the second loan."

"Why did you not tell me?"

"Because you forbade our relations to be anything but commercial. I was not bound to betray my knowledge."

"Why did you, then, from a commercial view, lend me large sums of money again and again?"

"Because," said the money-lender, coolly, "you had other security. You have a daughter!"

Judge Custis broke from the bed-covers and rushed upon Meshach Milburn.

"Heathen and devil!" he shouted, taking the money-lender by the throat, "do you dare to mention her as part of your mortgage?"

They struggled together until a powerful pair of hands pinioned the Judge, and bore him back to his bed. Samson Hat was the man.

"Judge!" he exclaimed, gentle, but firm, "you is a *good* man, but not as good as me. Cool off, Judge!"

"I expected this scene," said Meshach Milburn. "It could not have been avoided. I was bound in conscience and in common-sense to make you the only proposition which could save you from ruin. For, Judge Custis, you are a ruined man!"

Overcome with excitement and suspended stimulation, the old Judge fell back on his pillow and began to sob.

"Give him brandy," said Meshach Milburn, "here is the bottle! He needs it now."

The wretched gentleman eagerly drank the proffered draught from the negro's hands. His fury did not revive, and he covered his face with his palms and moaned piteously.

"Judge Custis," remarked Meshach Milburn, "if the apparent social distance between us could be lessened by any argument, I might make one. For the difference is in appearance only. The healthy flesh which gives you and yours stature and beauty is a matter of food alone. My stock has survived five generations of such diet as has bent the spines of the forest pigs and stunted the oxen. Money and family joy will give me children comely again. My life has been hard but pure."

The old Judge felt the last unconscious reflection.

"Yes," he uttered, solemnly, "no doubt Heaven marked me for some such degradation as this, when I yielded to low propensities, and sought my pleasure and companions in the huts of the forest!"

"You claim descent from the Stuart Restoration: I know the tale. A creditor of the two exiled royal brothers for sundry tavern loans and tipples drew for his obligation an office in far-off Virginia. Seizures, confiscations, the slave-trade, marriages—in short, the long game of advantage—built up the fortunes of the Custises, until they expired in a certain Judge, whose notes of hand a hard man, forest-born, held over the Judge's head on what seemed hard conditions, but conditions in which was every quality of mercy, except consideration for your pride."

The Judge made a laugh like a howl.

"*Mercy?*" he exclaimed, "you do not know what it is! To ensnare my innocent daughter in the damned meshes of your principal and interest! Call it malignity—the visitation of your unsocial wrath on man and an angel; but not mercy!"

"Then we will call it compensation," continued Meshach Milburn: "for twenty years I have denied myself everything; you denied yourself nothing. Your substance is wasted; renew it from the abundance of my thrift. It was not with an evil design that I made myself your creditor, although, as the years have rolled onward and solitude chilled my heart, that has always pined for human friendship, I could not but see the kindling glory of your daughter's beauty. Like the schoolboys,

the married husbands—yes, like the slaves—I had to admire her. Then, unknowing how deeply you were involved, I found offered to me for sale the paper you had negotiated in Baltimore—paper, Judge Custis, dishonorably negotiated!"

The money-lender rose and walked to the sad man's bed, and held the hand, full of these notes, boldly over him.

"It was despair, Milburn!" moaned the Judge.

"And so was my resolution. Said I: 'This lofty gentleman would cheat me, his neighbor, who have suffered all the contumely of this *good society*, and on starveling opportunity have slowly recovered independence. Now he shall take my place in the forest, or I will wear my hat at the head of his family table.'"

"A dreadful revenge!" whispered Custis, with a shudder. "Such a hat is worse than a cloven foot. In God's name! whence came that ominous hat?"

Milburn took up the hat and held it before the lamplight, so that its shadow stood gigantic against the wall.

"Who would think," he said, sarcastically, "that a mere head-covering, elegant in its day, could make more hostility than an idle head? I will tell you the silly secret of it. When I came from the obscurity of the forest, sensitive, and anxious to make my way, and slowly gathered capital and knowledge, a person in New York directed a letter of inquiry to me. It told how a certain Milburn, a Puritan or English Commonwealth man, had risen to great distinction in that province, and had revolutionized its government and suffered the penalty of high-treason."

"True enough," said Judge Custis, pouring a second glass of brandy; "Milburn and Leisler were executed in New York during the lifetime of the first Custis. They anticipated the expulsion of James II., and were entrapped by their provincial enemies and made political martyrs."

"The inquirer," said Meshach, "who had obtained my address in the course of business, related, that after Milburn's death his brethren and their families had sailed to the Chesapeake, where the Protestants had successfully revolutionized for King William, and, making choice of poor lands, they had become obscure. He asked me if the court-house records made any registry of their wills."

"Of course you found them?"

"Yes. It was a revelation to me, and gave me the honorable sense of some origin and quality. I traced myself back to the earliest folios, at the close of the seventeenth century."

"Any property, Milburn?" asked the Judge, voluptuous and reanimated again.

"My great-grandfather had left his son nothing but a Hat."

"Not uncommon!" exclaimed Judge Custis. "Our early wills contain little but legacies of wearing apparel, household articles, bedding, pots and kettles, and the elements of civilization."

"The will on record said: '*I give to my eldest son, Meshach Milburn, my best Hat, and no more of my estate.*'"

"Ha, ha, ha!" laughed the Judge, loudly. "Genteel to the last! A hat of fashion, no doubt, made in London; quite too ceremonious and topgallant for these colonies. He left it to his eldest son, *en-tiled*, we may say. Ho! ho!"

"When my indignation was over, I took the same view you do, Judge Custis, that it was a bequest of dignity, not of burlesque; and I made some inquiries for that best Hat. It was a legend among my forest kin, had been seen by very old people, was celebrated in its day, and worn by my grandfather thankfully. He left it to my father, still a hat of reputation—"

"Still *en-tiled* to the oldest son! Ha, ha! Milburn."

"My father sold the hat to Charles Wilson Peale, who was native to our peninsula, and knew the ancient things existing here that would help him to form Peale's Museum during the last century. I found the hat in that museum, covering the mock-figure of Guy Fawkes!"

"Conspirator's hat; bravo!" exclaimed the Judge.

"It had been used for the heads of George Calvert and Shakespeare, but in time of religious excitements was proclaimed to be the true hat of Guy Fawkes. I reclaimed it, and brought it to Princess Anne, and in a vain moment put it on my head and walked into the street. It was assailed with halloos and ribaldry."

"It was another Shirt of Nessus, Milburn; it poisoned your life, eh?"

"Perhaps so," replied Milburn, with intensity. "They say what is one man's drink is another man's poison. You will accept that hat on the head of your son-in-law, or no more *drink* out of the Custis property!"

## CHAPTER V.

### THE BOG-ORE TRACT.

Resolution of character and executive power had been trifled away by Judge Custis. The trader had concluded their interview with a decision and fierceness that left paralysis upon the gentleman's mind. He saw, in sad fancy, the execution served upon his furniture, the amazement of his wife, the pallor of his daughter, the indignation of his sons. He also shrank before the impending failure of his furnace and abandonment of the bog-ore tract, on which he had raised so much state and local fame; people would say: "Custis was a fool, and deceived himself, while old Steeple-top Milburn played upon the Custises' vanity, and turned them into the street."

"No doubt," thought the Judge, "that fellow, Milburn, can get anything when he gets my house. The poor folks' vote he may command, because he is of their class. He is a lender to many of the rich. Who could have suspected his intelligence? His address, too? He handled me as if I were a forester and he a judge. A very, very remarkable man!" finished Judge Custis, taking the last of the brandy.

He was interrupted by the entrance of Samson Hat.

"Where's your master, boy?" asked the Judge.

"He's gone up to de ole house, Judge, where his daddy and mammy died. It's de place where I hides after my fights."

"May the ague strike him there! Let the bilious sweat from the mill-pond be strong to-night, that, like Judas of old, his bowels may drop out! But, no," continued the irresolute man, "I have no right to hate him."

"Judge," softly said the old negro, "my marster is a sick man. He ain't happy like you an' me. He's 'bitious. He's lonely. Dat's enough to spile angels. But a gooder man I never knowed, 'cept in de onpious sperrit. He's proud as Lucifer. He's full of hate at Princess Anne and all de people. Your darter may git a better man, not a pyorer one."

"Purity goes a very little way," exclaimed the Judge, "on the male side of marriage contracts. It's always assumed, and never expected. You need not remember, Samson, that I expressed any anger at your master!"

"My whole heart, judge, is to see him happy. Hard as he is, dat man has power to make him loved. Your darter might go farder and fare wuss! I wish her no harm, God knows!"

The negro said an humble good-night, and the Judge lay down upon his bed to think of the dread alternatives of the coming week; but, voluptuous even in despair, he slept before he had come to any conclusion.

Samson Hat walked up the side of the mill-pond on a sandy road, divided from the water by a dense growth of pines. The bullfrogs and insects serenaded the forest; the furnace chimney smoked lurid on the midnight. At the distance of half a mile or more an old cabin, in decay, stood in a sandy field near the road; it had no door in the hollow doorway, no sash in the one gaping window; the step was broken leading to the sill, and some of the weather-boarding had rotted from the skeleton. The old end-chimney bore it toughly up, however, and the low brick props under the corners stood plumb. Within lay a single room with open beams, a sort of cupboard stairway projecting over the fireplace, and another door and window were in the rear. Before this fireplace sat Meshach Milburn on an old chair, fairly revealed by the light of some of the burning weather-boarding he had thrown upon the hearth. On the hearth was a little heap of the bog iron ore and a bottle.

"Come in, Samson!" he called. "Don't think me turned drunkard because I am taking this whiskey. I drink it to keep out the malaria, and partly as a communion cup; for to-night the barefooted ghosts who have drooped and withered here are with me in spirit."

"Dey was all good Milburns who lived heah, marster," said the negro. "Dey had hard times, but did no sin. Dey shook wid chills and fevers, not wid conscience."

"I shall shake with neither," said the money-lender. "Go up into the loft, and sleep till you are called. I want the horses early for Princess Anne!"

The negro obeyed without remark, and disappeared behind the cupboard-like door. Milburn sat before the fire, and looked into it long, while a procession of thoughts and phantoms passed before it.

He saw a poor family of independent Puritans setting sail at different dates from English seaports. Some were indentured servants, hoping for a career; others were avoiding the civil wars; others were small political malefactors, noisy against the oppressions of their hero, Cromwell, and conspirators against his power; and, thrown by him in English jails, were only delivered to be sold into slavery, driven through the streets of market-towns, placed on troop ships between the decks, among the horses, and set up at auction in Barbadoes, like the blacks; whence they in time continued onward westward. One, the fortunate possessor of some competence, sailed his own ship across the Atlantic, and delivered up to Massachusetts her

governor and gentry. Another, incapable of being suppressed, though a servant, seized the destinies of an aristocratic colony, and held them for a while, until accumulating enemies bore him down, and wedlock and the gibbet followed close together. Poverty would not relinquish its gripe upon the race; they struggled up like clods upon the ploughshare, and fell back again into the furrow.

As Meshach Milburn thought of these things he took up a portion of the bog ore from the hearth.

"Here is iron," he said, thoughtfully, "true iron, which makes the blood red, moulds into infinite forms, nails houses together, binds wheels, and casts into cannon and ball. But this iron ran into a bog, formed low combinations, and had no other mould than twigs and leaves afforded. Its volcanic origin was forgotten when it ran with sand and gravel away from the mountain vein and upland ore along the low, alluvial bar, till, like an oyster, the iron is dredged from the stagnant pool, impure, inefficacious, corrupted. So is it with man, whose magnetic spirit follows the dull declivity to the barren sandbars of the world, and lodges there. I am of the bog ores; but that exists which will flux with me, clean me of rust, and transmit my better quality to posterity. O, youth, beauty, and station—lovely Vesta! for thee I will be iron!"

Milburn looked around the single room inquiringly. He placed his finger upon the crevices in the weather-boarding; he opened the little closet below the stairs, and a weasel dashed out and shot through the door; he ascended the steep, short stairs, and with a torch examined the black shingles, but nothing was there except a litter of young owls, whose parents had gone poaching. Then, returning, he searched on every open beam and rotting board, as if for writing.

"They could not write!" he thought. "Nothing is left to me, not even a sign, down a century and a half, to tell that I had parents!"

As he spoke he felt an object move behind him, and, looking back, the shadow of the Entailed Hat was dancing on the wall. As he threw his head back, so did it; as he retired from it, the hat enlarged, until the little room could hardly hold its shadow. Retiring again, he lifted it from his head with bitter courtesy, and the shadow did the same. The man and the shadow looked each at a peaked hat and stroked it.

"This is everything," exclaimed Milburn. "The hundred humble heads are at rest in the sand; one grave-stone would mock them all. But once the family brain expanded to a hat, and that survived the race. I am the Quaker who respects his hat, the Cardinal who is crowned with it; yes, and the dunce who must wear it in his corner!"

Then the picture of his parents arose upon his sight: a cheerful father, with two or three old slaves, ploughing in the deep sand, to drop some shrivelled grains of corn, or tinkering a disordered mill-wheel that moved a blacksmith's saw. Ever full of confidence in nothing which could increase, credulous and sanguine, tender and laborious, Milburn's sire nursed his forest patches as if they were presently to be rich plantations, and was ever "pricing" negroes, mules, tools, and implements, in expectation of buying them. Nothing could diminish his confidence but disease and old age. He heard of the great "improvement" on the Furnace tract, and took his obedient wife and brood there. As the laborers pulled out the tussocks and roots, encrusted with iron, from the swamp and creek, fever and ague came forth and smote them both.

How wretched that scene when, almost too haggard to move, father and mother, in this one bare room where Meshach sat, groaning amid their many offspring, saw death with weakness creep upon each other—death without priest or doctor, without residue or cleanliness—the death the million die in lowly huts, yet, oh, how hard!

"Haste, sonny, *good* boy," the frightened father had said, knowing not how ill he was, in his dependence on his wife; "take the horse, and ride into Snow Hill for the doctor. Poor mother is dreadful sick!"

Then, leaping upon the lean old horse, bare-backed and with a rope bridle, Meshach had pushed through the deep sand, bareheaded and barefooted, and almost crazy with excitement, until he entered the shining streets of the sandhilled town, and sensitively rushed into the doctor's office, crying, "Daddy and mammy is sick, at the Furnace!" and told his name, and wheeled, and fled.

But, as the boy rode home, more slowly, past the river full of splutter-docks, the yellow masts of vessels rising above the woods, the flat fields of corn everywhere bounded by forest, and the small white houses of the better farmers, and at last entered the murmurous, complaining woods, he saw but one thing—his mother.

Was she to disappear from the lonely clearing, and leave only the hut and its orphans? she, who kept heaven here below, and was the saints, the arts, the all-sufficient for her child? With her there could be no poverty; without her riches would be only more sand. With a little molasses she made Christmas kingly with a cake. She could name a little chicken "Meshach," and every egg it laid was a new toy. A mocking-bird caught in the swamp became one of the family by her kindness; would it ever sing again? The religion they knew was all of her. The poor slaves saw no difference in mistresses while she was theirs. In sickness she was in her sphere—health itself had come. And once, the tenderest thing in life, when his father and she had quarrelled, and the light of love being out made the darkness of poverty for the only time visible, Meshach saw her weeping, and he could not comfort her.

Then, blinded by tears, he lashed his nag along, and entered the low door. She was dead!

"Sonny, mammy's gone!" the wretched father groaned; the little children, huddling about the form, lifted their wail; the mocking-bird could find no note for this, and was hushed.

Milburn arose; the fire was low. He walked to the door, and there was a sign of day; the all-surrounding woods of pine were still dark, but on the sandy road and hummock-field some light was shining, like hopefulness against hope; the farm was ploughed no more; the ungrateful centuries were left behind and abandoned, like old wilderness battle-fields, so sterile that their great events remain ever unvisited.

"Ho! Samson, boy! It is time!"

"Yes, marster!" answered the negro in the loft.

As the negro gathered himself up and passed down the stairs, he saw Meshach Milburn before the fire, stirring the coals. Passing out, Samson stood a moment at the gate, and lounged up the road, not to lose his master. As he stood there, flames burst out of the old hut and glistened on the evergreen forest, lighting the tops of the mossy cypresses in the mill-pond, and revealing the forms of the sandy fields. Before he could start back Samson saw his master's figure go round and round the house, lighting the weather-boarding from place to place with a torch; and then the low figure, capped with the long hat, came up the road as if at mighty strides, so lengthened by the fire.

"No need of alarm, boy!" exclaimed the filial incendiary. "Henceforth my only ancestral hall is *here!*"

He held the ancient tile up in the light of the blaze.

"Ah, marster!" said the negro, "yo' hat will never give comfort like a home, fine as de hat may be, mean as de roof! De hat will never hold two heads, and dat makes happiness."

"The hat, at least," answered Milburn, bitterly, "will cover me where I go. Such rotted roofs as that was make captives of bright souls."

They looked on the fire in silence a few minutes.

"You have burnt me out, boss," said old Samson, finally. "I ain't got no place to go an' hide when I fights, now. It makes me feel solemn."

"Peace!" replied Meshach Milburn. "Now for the horses and Princess Anne!"

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## CHAPTER VI.

### THE CUSTISES RUINED.

Vesta Custis, dressing in her chamber, heard early wheels upon the morning air, and looking through the blinds saw a double team coming up the road from Hardship.

"Mother," she said, "is that father coming, yonder? No, it is not his driver."

"Why, Vesta!" exclaimed Mrs. Custis, "that is old Milburn's man."

"Samson Hat? so it is. What is he doing with two horses?"

Here Vesta laughed aloud, and began to skip about in her long, slender, worked slippers, whose insteps would spare a mouse darting under.

"Mamma, it is Milburn himself, in a hack and span. See there; the steeple-top hat, copper buckle and all! Isn't he too funny for anything! But, dear me! he is staring right up at this window. Let us duck!"

Vesta's long, ivory-grained arms, divided from her beautiful shoulders only by a spray of lace, pulled her mother down.

"Don't be afraid, dear! he can see nothing but the blinds. Perhaps he is looking for the Judge."

Vesta rose again in her white morning-gown, like a stag rising from a snow-drift. A long, trembling movement, the result of tittering, passed down the graceful column of her back.

"He sits there like an Indian riding past in a show, mamma! Did you ever see such a hat?"

"I think it must be buggy by this time," said the mother; and both of them shook with laughter again. "Unless," added Mrs. Custis, "the bugs are starved out."

"Poor, lonely creature," said Vesta, "he can only wear such a hat from want of understanding."

"His *understanding* is good enough, dear. He has the green gaiters on."

They laughed again, and Vesta's hair, shaken down by her merriment, fell nearly to her slipper, like the skin of some coal-black beast, that had sprung down a poplar's trunk.

"Ah! well," exclaimed Vesta, as her maid entered and proceeded to wind up this satin cordage on

her crown, "what men are in their minds, can woman know? Old ladies, not unfrequently, wear their old coal-scuttle bonnets long past the fashion, but it is from want. This man is his own master and not poor. His companion is a negro, and his taste a mouldy hat, old as America. How happy are we that it is not necessary to pry into such minds! A little refinement is the next blessing to religion."

"Your father's mind is a puzzle, too, Vesta. He has everything which these foresters lack,—education, society, standing, and comforts. But he returns to the forest, like an opossum, the moment your eye is off him. He can't be traced up like this man, by his hat. I think it's a shame on you, particularly. If he don't come home this day, I shall send for my brother and force an account of my property from Judge Custis!"

The wife sat down and began to cry.

"I'll take the carriage after breakfast, mamma, and seek him at the Furnace or wherever he may be. Those bog ores have given him a great deal of trouble."

"I wish I had never heard of bog ore," exclaimed Mrs. Custis. "When the money was in bank, there was no ore about it. He goes to the forest looking like a magistrate and a gentleman; he always comes back looking like a bog-trotter and a drunkard. There must be *women* in it!"

Here, in an impulse of weak rage, the poor lady got up and walked to her mirror and looked at her face. Apparently satisfied that such charms were trampled on, she dried her tears altogether, and resumed:

"Ginny, go out of the room! (to the neat mulatto lass). Vesta, my dear daughter, I would not cast a stain upon you for the world; but flesh and blood *will* cry out. If your father don't do better I will separate from him, and leave Princess Anne!"

"Why, *mother!*"

The daughter's bright eyes were large and startled now, and their steel-blue tint grew plainer under her rich black eyebrows.

"I will do it, if I die, unless he reforms!"

"Why, mother!"

Vesta stood with her lips parted, and her beautiful teeth just lacing the coral of the lip. She could say no more for a long moment. Rising as she spoke, with her head thrown back, and her mould the fuller and a pallor in her cheeks, she looked the Eve first hearing the Creator's rebuke.

"A separation in this family?" whispered Vesta. "It would scandalize all Maryland. It would break my heart."

"Darling daughter, my heart must be considered sometimes. I was something before I was a Custis. I am a woman, too."

Vesta, still pale, crossed to her mother's side and kissed her.

"Don't, don't, mamma, ever harbor a thought like that again. You, who have been so brave and patient longer than I have lived!"

"Ah, Vesta, it is the length of injury that wears us out! What if something should happen to us? None are so unfit to bear poverty as we."

"We cannot be poor," said the daughter, soothingly. "Don't you remember, mother, where it says: 'As thy day, so shall thy strength be'?"

"My child," Mrs. Custis replied, "your day is young. Life looks hopeful to you. I am growing old, and where is the arm on which I should be leaning? What are we but two women left? There is another passage on which I often think when we sit so often alone: 'Two women shall be grinding at the mill: the one shall be taken and the other left!' Is that you, or is it I? Listen, my child! it is time that you should feel the melancholy truth! Your father's habits have mastered him. He is beyond reclamation!"

Vesta was kneeling, and she slowly raised her head and looked at her mother, with her nostrils dilated. Mrs. Custis felt uneasy before the aroused mind of her child.

"Don't look at me so, Vesta," the poor lady pleaded. "I thought you ought to know it."

"How dare you say that of my father? Of Judge Custis?"

As they were in this suspense of feeling, wheels were heard. The daughter went to the window and looked down, and then returned to her mother's ear.

"Hush, mother, it is papa. Now, wash your eyes at the toilet. Let us meet him cheerfully. Never say again that he is beyond reclamation, while we can try!"

A kiss smoothed Mrs. Custis's countenance. Vesta was dressed for breakfast in a few moments, and descended to the library and was received in her father's arms. He held her there a long while, and held her close, and by little fits renewed his embrace, but she felt that his breath was feverish and his arms trembled. Looking up at him she saw, indeed, that he was flushed, yet



haggard and careworn.

"Vessy," he spoke with a feeble attempt to smile, "I want a glass of brandy. Mine gave out at the Furnace, and the morning ride has weakened me. Where is the key?"

She looked at him with a half-glance, so that he might not suspect, as if to measure his need of stimulant. Then, without a word, she led the way to the dining-room and unlocked the liquor closet, and turned her back lest he might not drink his need from sensitiveness.

"Naughty man," said Vesta, standing off and looking at him when he was done. "I was going down for you to the Furnace after breakfast. We will have no more of this truantry. Mamma and I have set our feet down! You must come back from the Furnace every night, and go again in the morning, like other business men. Be very kind to mamma this morning, sir! She feels your neglect."

Vesta had already rung for the Judge's valet, who now appeared, drew off his boots, supplied his slippers and dressing-gown, and led the way to his bath. In a quarter of an hour he reappeared, looking better, and he irresolutely turned again towards the dining-room, smiling suggestively at Vesta.

"Not that way," spoke she. "Here is mamma, and we are ready for prayers. Here is the place in the Bible."

They all went to the family room, where the dressing-maids of Vesta and her mother were waiting for the usual morning prayers. Vesta placed the open Bible on her father's knee, and he began absently and stumbingly to read. It was in the book of Samuel, and seemed to be some old Jewish mythology. He suddenly came to a verse which arrested his sensibilities by its pathos:

"And David sent messengers to Ish-bosheth, Saul's son, saying, Deliver me my wife Michal.... And Ish-bosheth sent, and took her from her husband, even from Phaltiel, the son of Laish. And her husband went with her along weeping behind her.... Then said Abner unto him: Go, return. And he returned."

Judge Custis saw at once the picture this compact history aroused. The inexorable David, perhaps, had married another's love. Occasion had arisen to embitter her kin, and they took her back and gave her in happiness to her pining lover. But, again, the man of correct habits triumphed over the sons of the king, and despatched Abner to tear his wife from her true husband's arms. Poor Phaltiel followed her weeping, until ordered to go back—and back he went, forever desolate.

The scene recalled the brutal demand of his creditor upon his child. The Judge's eyes silently o'erflowed, and he could not see.

Vesta had watched him closely, as her silent magistracy detected a great anxiety or illness in her father. Lest her mother might also notice it, she interposed in the lesson, as was her habit, by reading the Episcopal form of prayer, in which they all bent their heads. Once or twice, as she went on, she detected a suppressed sob, especially at the paragraph: "Thou who knowest the weakness and corruption of our nature, and the manifold temptations which we daily meet with, we humbly beseech thee to have compassion on our infirmities and to give us the constant assistance of thy Holy Spirit, that we may be effectually restrained from sin and excited to our duty!"

They went to the breakfast-table, and the Judge's countenance was down. He bit off some toast and filled his mouth with tea, but could not swallow. A hand softly touched his elbow, and, looking there, he saw a wine-glass full of brandy softly glide to the spot. As he looked up and saw the rich, yearning face of his dark-eyed daughter tenderly consulting his weakness, his heart burst forth; he leaned his head upon the table and cried, between drink and grief:

"Darling, we are ruined!"

Mrs. Custis at once arose, and looked frightenedly at the Judge. Vesta as quickly turned to the servants and motioned them to go.

"No, let them hear it!" raved Judge Custis, perceiving the motion. "They are interested, like us. They must be sold, too. Faithful servants! Perhaps it may warn them to escape in time!"

The servants, bred like ladies, quietly left the room.

Mrs. Custis, growing paler, exclaimed:

"Daniel Custis, have you lost everything in that furnace?"

"Everything!"

"And my money, too?"

"Yes."

"Merciful God!"

Before the weak lady could fall Vesta's arm was around her, and her finger on the table-bell. Servants entered and Mrs. Custis was carried out, her daughter following.

When Vesta returned her father was walking up and down the floor with his long silk handkerchief in both hands, weeping bitterly, and speaking broken syllables. She looked at him a moment with all the might of a daughter, first called on to act alone in a great crisis. The feeling she was wont to hold towards him, of perfect pride, had received a blow in her mother's expression: "Your father's habits have mastered him beyond reclamation."

Could this be true; that he, the grand, the kind, the gentleman, was beneath the diver's reach, the plummet's sounding, where light could not pierce, nor Hope overtake? *Her* father, the first gentleman in Somerset, a drunkard, going ever downward towards the gutter, and no ray of heaven to beam upon his grave!

She saw his danger now: it was written on his face, where the image of God shone dim that had once been crowned there. Hair thinner, and very gray; the rich, dark eyes intimidated, as if manly confidence was gone; the skin no more the pure scroll of regular life written in the healthy fluid of the heart, but faded, yet spotted with alcohol; on the nose and lips signs of coarser sensuality; the large skeleton bent and the nervous temperament shattered. This father had been until this moment Vesta's angel. Now, there might not be an angel in the universe to fly to his rescue. Deep, dreadful humility descended into the daughter's spirit.

"God forgive me!" she thought, "how blind and how proud and sinful I have been!"

She walked over to her father tenderly and kissed him, and then, drawing his weaker inclination by hers, brought him to a sofa, placed a pillow for him, and made him stretch his once proud form there. Procuring a bowl of water, she washed his face free of tears with a napkin, and bathed it in cologne. The voluptuous nature of the Judge yielded to the perfume and the easy position, and he sobbed himself to sleep like an exhausted child.

Sitting by the sleeping bankrupt, watching his breast rise and fall, and hearing his coarse snoring, as if fiends within were snarling in rivalry for the possession of him, Vesta felt that the life which was unconscious there was the fountain of her own, and, loving no man else, she felt her heart like a goldfish of that fountain, go around and around it throbbingly.

Then first arose the wish, often in woman's life repeated, to have been born a man and know how to help her father. That suggested that she had brothers who ought to be summoned, and confer with their father; but now it occurred to her that every one of them had leaned upon him; and, though conscious that it was wicked, Vesta felt her pride rise against the thought that any being outside of that house, even a brother, should know of its disgrace.

What could she do? She thought of all her jewels, her riding mare, her watch, her father's own gifts, and then the thought perished that these could help him.

Could she not earn something by her voice, which had sung to such praises? Alas! that voice had lost the ingredient of hope, and she feared to unclothe her lips lest it might come forth in agony, crying, "God, have mercy!"

"I have nothing," said Vesta to herself; "except love for these two martyrs, my father and mother. No, nothing can be done until he awakens and tells me the worst. Meantime it would be wicked for me to increase the agitation already here, and where I must be the comforter."

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## CHAPTER VII.

### JACK-O'-LANTERN IRON.

Mrs. Custis was in no situation to give annoyance for that day, as a sick-headache seized her and she kept her room. Infirm of will, purely social in her marriage relations, and never aiming higher than respectability, she missed the coarse mark of her husband who, with all his moral defections, probably was her moral equal, his vital standard higher, his tone a genial hypocrisy, and at bottom he was a democrat.

Mrs. Custis had no insight nor variability of charity; her mind, bounded by the municipal republic of Baltimore, which esteems itself the world, particularly among its mercantile aristocracy, who live like the old Venetian nobility among their flat lagoons, and do commerce chiefly with the Turk in the more torrid and instinctive Indies and South. Amiable, social, afraid of new ideas, frugal of money; if hospitable at the table, with a certain spiritedness that is seldom intellectual, but a beauty that powerfully attracts, till, by the limited sympathies beneath it, the husband from the outer world discerns how hopelessly slavery and caste sink into an old shipping society, the Baltimore that ruled the Chesapeake had no more perfected product than Mrs. Custis.

Her modesty and virtue were as natural as her prejudices; she believed that marriage was the close of female ambition, and marrying her children was the only innovation to be permitted. Certain accomplishments she thought due to woman, but none of them must become masculine in prosecution; a professional woman she shrank from as from an infidel or an abolitionist; reading was meritorious up to an orthodox point, but a passion for new books was dangerous, probably irreligious. To lose one's money was a crime; to lose another's money the unforgiven sin, because that was Baltimore public opinion, which she thought was the only opinion entitled

to consideration. The old Scotch and Irish merchants there had made it the law that enterprise was only excusable by success, and that success only branded an innovator. A good standard of society, therefore, had barely permitted Judge Custis to take up the bog-ore manufacture, and, failing in it, his wife thought he was no better than a Jacobin.

On the Eastern Shore, where society was formed before Glasgow and Belfast had colonized upon the Chesapeake with their precise formulas of life, a gentler benevolence rose and descended upon the ground every day, like the evaporations of those prolific seas which manure the thin soil unfaillingly. Religion and benevolence were depositions rather than dogmas there; moderate poverty was the not unwelcome expectation, wealth a subject of apprehensive scruples, kindness the law, pride the exception, and grinding avarice, like Meshach Milburn's, was the mark of the devil entering into the neighbor and the fellow-man.

Judge Custis was representative of his neighbors except in his Virginia voluptuousness; his neighbors were neither pruders nor hypocrites, and he respected them more than the arrogant race in the old land of Accomac and in the Virginia peninsulas, whose traits he had almost lost. Sometimes it seemed to him that the last of the cavalier stock was his daughter, Vesta. From him it had nearly departed, and his sense of moral shortcomings expanded his heart and made him tenderly pious to his kind, if not to God. He admired new-comers, new business modes, and Northern intruders and ideas, feeling that perhaps the last evidence of his aristocracy from nature was a chivalric resignation. The pine-trees were saying to him: "Ye shall go like the Indians, but be not inhospitable to your successors, and leave them your benediction, that the great bay and its rivers may be splendid with ships and men, though ye are perished forever." A perception of the energy of his countrymen, and a pride in it, without any mean reservation, though it might involve his personal humiliation, was Judge Custis's only remaining claim to heaven's magnanimity. Still, rich in human nature, he was beloved by his daughter with all her soul.

He awoke long after noon, in body refreshed, and a glass of milk and a plover broiled on toast were ready for him to eat, with some sprigs of new celery from the garden to feed his nerves. He made this small meal silently, and Vesta said, as the tray was removed:

"Now, papa, before we leave this room, you are to tell me the whole injury you have suffered, and what all of us can do to assist you; for if you had succeeded the reward would have been ours, and we must divide the pains of your misfortune with you without any regret. Courage, papa! and let me understand it."

The Judge feebly looked at Vesta, then searched his mind with his eyes downcast, and finally spoke:

"My child, I am the victim of good intentions and self-enjoyment. I am less than a scoundrel and worse than a fool. I am a fraud, and you must be made to see it, for I fear you have been proud of me."

"Oh, father, I have!" said Vesta, with an instant's convulsion. "You were my God."

"Let us throw away idolatry, my darling. It is the first of all the sins. How loud speaks the first commandment to us this moment: 'Thou shalt have no other gods before me'?"

"I have broken it," sobbed Vesta, "I loved you more than my Creator."

"Vesta," spoke the Judge, "you are the only thing of value in all my house. The work of nature in you is all that survives the long edifice of our pride. The treasure of your beauty and love still makes me rich to thieves, who lie in ambush all around us. We are in danger, we are pursued. O God! pity, pity the pure in heart!"

As the Judge, under his strong earnestness, so rare in him of late, threw wide his arms, and raised his brow in agony, Vesta felt her idolatry come back. He was so grand, standing there in his unaffected pain and helplessness, that he seemed to her some manly Prometheus, who had worked with fire and iron, to the exasperation of the jealous gods. Admiration dried her tears, and she forgot her father's references to herself.

"What is iron?" she asked. "Tell me why you wanted to make iron! If I can enter into your mind and sympathize with the hopes you have had, it will lift my soul from the ground. Papa, I should have asked for this lesson long ago."

The Judge strode up and down till she repeated the question, and had brought him to his seat. He collected his thoughts, and resumed his worldly tone as he proceeded, with his old cavalier volatility, to tell the tale of iron.

"I have duplicated loans," he said at last, "on the same properties, incurring, I fear, a stigma upon my family and character; as well as the ruin of our fortune."

Vesta arose with pale lips and a sinking heart.

"Oh, father," she whispered, in a frightened tone, "who knows this terrible secret!"

"Only one man," said the Judge, cowering down to the carpet, with his courage and volatility immediately gone, "old Meshach Milburn knows it all! He has purchased the duplicate notes of protest, and holds them with his own. He has me in his power, and hates me. He will expose me, unless I submit to an awful condition."

"What is it, father?"

The Judge looked up in terror, and, meeting Vesta's pale but steady gaze, hid his face and groaned:

"Oh! it is too disgraceful to tell. It will break your mother's heart."

"Tell me at once!" exclaimed Vesta, in a low and hollow tone. "What further disgrace can this monster inflict upon us than to expose our dishonor? Can he kill us more than that?"

"I know not how to tell you, Vessy. Spare me, my darling! My face I hide for shame."

There was a pause, while Vesta, with her mind expanded to touch every point of suggestion, stood looking down at her father, yet hardly seeing him. He did not move.

Vesta stooped and raised her father's face to find some solution of his mysterious evasion. He shut his eyes as if she burned him with her wondering look.

"Papa, look at me this instant! You shall not be a coward to me."

He broke from her hands and retreated to a window, looking at her, but with a timorous countenance.

"I wish you to go this moment and find your creditor, Mr. Milburn, and bring him to me. You must obey me, sir!"

The father raised his hands as if to protest, but before he could speak a shadow fell upon the window, and the figure of a small, swarthy man covered with a steeple-crowned hat advanced up the front steps.

"Saviour, have mercy!" murmured Judge Custis, "the wolf is at the door."

Vesta took her father in her arms, and kissed him once assuringly.

"Papa, go send a servant to open the door. Have Mr. Milburn shown into this room to await me. Do you go and engage my mother affectionately, and both of you remain in your chamber till I am ready to call you."

The proximity of the dreadful creditor had almost paralyzed Judge Custis, and he glided out like a ghost.

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## CHAPTER VIII.

### THE HAT FINDS A RACK.

Meshach Milburn had locked the store after writing some letters, and had taken the broad street for Judge Custis's gate. The news of his disappearance towards the Furnace, with an extravagant livery team, had spread among all the circle around the principal tavern, and they were discussing the motive and probabilities of the act, with that deep inner ignorance so characteristic of an instinctive society. Old Jimmy Phœbus, a huge man, with a broad face and small forehead, was called upon for his view.

"It's nothin' but a splurge," said Jimmy; "sooner or later everybody splurges—shows off! Meshach's jest spilin' with money and he must have a splurge—two hosses and a nigger. If it ain't a splurge I can't tell what ails him to save my life."

A general chorus went up of "Dogged if I kin tell to save my life!"

Levin Dennis, the terrapin-buyer, made a wild guess, as follows:

"Meshach, I reckon, is a goin' into the hoss business. He's a ben in everything else, and has tuk to hosses. If it tain't hosses, I can't tell to save my life!"

All the lesser intellects of the party executed a low chuckle, spun around half-way on their boot-heels and back again, and muttered: "Not to save my life!"

Jack Wonnell, wearing one of the new bell-crowns, and barefooted, and looking like a vagrant who had tried on a militia grenadier's imposing bearskin hat, let off this irrelevant *addendum*:

"Ole Milbun's gwyn to see a gal. Fust time a man changes his regler course wilently, it's a gal. I went into my bell-crowns to git a gal. Milbun's gwyn get a gal out yonda in forest. If that ain't it, can't tell to save m' life!"

The smaller fry, not being trained to suggestion, grinned, held their mouths agape, executed the revolution upon; one heel, and echoed: "Dogged ef a kin tell t' *save m' life!*"

"He's a comin', boys, whooep!" exclaimed Jimmy Phœbus. "Now we'll all take off our hats an' do it polite, for, by smoke! thar's goin' to be hokey-pokey of some kind or nuther in Prencess Anne!"

The smallish man in the Guy Fawkes hat and the old, ultra-genteel, greenish gaiters, walked

towards them with his resinous bold eyes to the front, his nose informing him of what was in the air like any silken terrier's, and yet with a pallor of the skin as of a sick person's, and less than his daily expression of hostility to Princess Anne.

"He's got the ager," remarked Levin Dennis, "them's the shakes, comin' on him by to-morrey, ef I know tarrapin bubbles!"

The latter end only of the nearest approach to profanity current in that land was again heard, fluttering around: "to *save* my life!"

Jimmy Phœbus had the name of being descended from a Greek pirate, or patriot, who had settled on the Eastern Shore, and Phœbus looked it yet, with his rich brown complexion, broad head, and Mediterranean eyes. "Good-afternoon, Mr. Milburn!" spoke Jimmy, loud and careless.

"Good-afternoon, Mr. Phœbus. Gentlemen, good-afternoon!"

As he responded, with a voice hardly genial but placating, Milburn lifted his ancient and formidable hat, and in an instant seemed to come a century nearer to his neighbors. His stature was reduced, his unsociableness seemed modified; he now looked to be a smallish, friendless person, as if some ownerless dog had darted through the street, and heard a kind chirp at the tavern door, where his reception had been stoned. His voice, with a little tremor in it, emboldened Levin Dennis also to speak:

"Look out for fevernager this month, Mr. Milburn!"

Meshach bowed his head, gliding along as if bashfully anxious to pass.

"Nice weather for drivin'!" added Jack Wonnell, having also taken off his own tile of frivolity, to feel the effect; but this remark was regarded by the group as too forward, and a low chorus ran round of "Jack Wonnell can't help bein' a fool to save his life!"

Milburn said to himself, passing on: "Are those voices kinder than usually, or am I more timid? What is it in the air that makes everything so acute, and my cheeks to tingle? Am I sick, or is it Love?"

The word frightened him, and the sand under his feet seemed to crack; a woodpecker in an old tree tapped as if it was the tree's old heart quickened by something; the houses all around looked like live objects, with their windows fixed upon his walk, like married folks' eyes. As he came in sight of Judge Custis's residence, so expressive of old respect and long intentions, the money-lender almost stopped, so mild and peacefully it looked at him—so undisturbed, while he was palpitating.

"Why this pain?" thought Milburn. "Am I afraid? That house is mine. Do I fear to enter my own? And yet it does not fear me. It has been there so long that it has no fears, and every window in it faces benignant to my coming. The three gables survey yonder forest landscape like three old magistrates on the bench, administering justice to a county where never till now was there a ravisher!"

The thought produced a moment's intellectual pride in him, like lawless power's uneasy paroxysm. "It is the Forest these gentles have to fear to-day!" he thought, resentfully, then stopped, with another image his word aroused:

"What has that forest ever felt of injury or hate, with every cabin-door unlatched, no robber feared by any there, the blossoms on the negro's peachtree, the ripe persimmons on the roadside, plenteous to every forester's child, and humility and affection making all richer, without a dollar in the world, than I, the richest upstart of the forest, compelled to buy affection, like an indifferent slave!"

A large dog at Custis's home, seeing him walk so slowly, came down the path to the gate, also walking slow, and showed neither animosity nor interest, except mechanically to walk behind him towards the door.

"The dog knows me," thought the quickened heart of Meshach, "from life-long seeing of me, but never wagged his tail at me in all that time. Could I acquire the heart even of this dog, though I might buy him? My debtor's step would still be most welcome to him, and he would eat my food in strangeness and fear."

Milburn walked up the steps, and sounded the substantial brass knocker. It struck four times, loud and deep, and the stillness that followed was louder yet, like the unknown thing, after sentence has been passed. He seemed to be there a very long time with his heart quite vacant, as if the debtor's knocker had scared every chatterer out of it, and yet his temples and ears were ringing. He was thinking of sounding the knocker again, when a lady's servant, partly white, rolled back the bolt, and bowed to his question whether the Judge was in.

He entered the broad hall of that distinguished residence, and taking the Entailed Hat from his head, hung it up at last, where better head-coverings had been wont to keep equal society, on a carved mahogany rack of colonial times. The venerable object, once there, gave a common look to everything, as Meshach thought, and deepened his personal sense of unworthiness. He tried to feel angry, but apprehension was too strong for passion even to be simulated.

"O, discriminating God!" he felt, within, "is it not enough to create us so unequal that we must

also cringe in spirit, and acknowledge it! I expected to feel triumphant when I lodged my despised hat in this man's house, but I feel meaner than before."

The room, whose door was opened by the lady's maid, was the library, containing three cumbersome cases of books, and several portraits in oil, with deep, gilded frames, a map of Virginia and its northeastern environs, including all the peninsula south of the Choptank river and Cape Henlopen; and near the door was a tall clock, that a giant might stand in, solemnly cogging and waving time, and giving the monotony of everlasting evening to the place, which was increased by the flickering fire of wood on the tall brass fire-irons, before which some high-backed, wide, comfortable leather chairs were drawn, all worn to luxurious attitudes, as if each had been the skin of Judge Custis and his companions, recently evacuated.

A woman's rocking-chair was disposed among them, as though every other chair deferred to it. This was the first article to arrest Milburn's attention, so different, so suggestive, almost a thing of superstition, poised, like a woman's instinct and will, upon nothing firm, yet, like the sphere it moved upon, traversing a greater arc than a giant's seat would fill. Purity and conquest, power and welcome, seemed to abide within it, like the empty throne in Parliament.

Milburn, being left alone, touched the fairy rocker with his foot. It started so easily and so gracefully, that, when it died away, he pressed his lips to the top of it, nearest where her neck would be, and whispered aloud, with feeling, "God knows that kiss, at least, was pure!"

He looked at the portraits, and, though they were not inscribed, he guessed at them all, right or wrong, from the insight of local lore or envious interpretation.

"Yon saucy, greedy, superserviceable rogue," thought Meshach, "with wine and beef in his cheeks, and silver and harlotry in his eye, was the Irish tavern-keeper of Rotterdam, who kept a heavy score against the banished princes whom Cromwell's name ever made to swear and shiver, and they paid him in a distant office in Accomac, where they might never see him and his bills again, and there they let him steal most of the revenue, and, of course, his loyalty was in proportion to his booty. Many a time, no doubt, he was procurer for both royal brothers, Charles and James, making his tavern their stew, with Betty Killigrew, or Lucy Walters, or Katy Peg, or even Anne Hyde, the mother of a queen—of her who was the Princess Anne, godmother of our worshipful town here. I have not read in vain," concluded Meshach, "because my noble townsmen drove me to my cell!"

The next portrait was clothed in military uniform, with a higher type of manhood, shrewd and vigilant, but magisterial. "That should be Major-general John Custis," thought Milburn, looking at it, "son of John the tapster, and a marrying, shifty fellow, who first began greatness as a salt-boiler on these ocean islands, till his father's friend, Charles II., in a merry mood, made Henry Bennet, the king's bastard son's father-in-law, Earl of Arlington and lessee of Virginia. All the province for forty shillings a year rent! Those were pure, economical times, indeed, around the court. So salt-boiler John flunkeyed to Arlington's overseers, named his farm 'Arlington,' hunted and informed upon the followers of the Puritan rebel Bacon, then turned and fawned upon King William, too. His grandchildren, all well provided for, spread around this bay. So much for politics in a merchant's hands!"

The tone of Meshach's comment had somewhat raised his courage, and a sense of pleasurable interest in the warm room and genial surroundings led him to pass the time, which was of considerable length, quite contentedly, till Judge Custis was ready.

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Meanwhile, the steeple-top hat was giving some silent astonishment to the house-servants, assembled to gaze upon it from the foot of the hall. The neat chamber-servant, Virgie, had carried the wondrous information to the colonnade that the dreadful creditor had come, and Roxy, the table waiter, had carried it from the colonnade to the kitchen, where the common calamity immediately produced a revolution against good manners.

"Hab he got dat debbil hat on he head, chile?" inquired Aunt Hominy, laying down the club with which she was beating biscuit-dough on the block.

"Yes, aunty, he's left it on the hat-rack. I'm afraid to go past it to the do'."

Aunt Hominy threw the club on the blistered bulk of dough, and retreated towards the big black fireplace, with a face expressive of so much fright and cunning humor together that it seemed about to turn white, but only got as far as a pucker and twitches.

"De Lord a massy!" exclaimed Aunt Hominy, "chillen, le's burn dat hat in de fire! Maybe it'll liff de trouble off o' dis yer house. We got de hat jess wha' we want it, chillen. Roxy, gal, you go fotch it to Aunt Hominy!"

The girl started as if she had been asked to take up a snake: "'Deed, Aunt Hominy, I wouldn't touch it to save my life. Nobody but ole Samson ever did that!"

"Go' long, gal!" cried Aunt Hominy, "didn't Miss Vessy hole dat ar' hat one time, an' pin a white rose in it? Didn't he, dat drefful Meshach Milburn, offer Miss Vessy a gole dollar, an' she wouldn't have none of his gole? Dat she did! Virgie, you go git dat hat, chile! Poke it off de rack wid my pot-hook heah. 'Twon't hurt you, gal! I'll sprinkle ye fust wid camomile an' witch-hazel dat I keep

up on de chimney-jamb."

Aunt Hominy turned towards the broadly notched chimney sides, where fifty articles of negro pharmacy were kept—bunches of herbs, dried peppers, bladders of seeds, and bottles of every mystic potency.

"Aunty," answered Virgie, "if I wasn't afraid of that Bad Man, I would be afraid to move that hat, because Miss Vessy would be mortified. Think of her seeing me treating a visitor's things like that. Why, I'd rather be sold!"

"Dat hat," persisted Aunt Hominy, "is de ruin ob dis family. Dat hat, gals, de debbil giv' ole Meshach, an' made him wear it fo' de gift ob gittin' all de gole in Somerset County. Don't I know when he wore it fust? Dat was when he begun to git all de gole. Fo' dat he had been po' as a lizzer, sellin' to niggers, cookin' fo' heseff, an' no' count, nohow. He sot up in de loft of his ole sto' readin' de Bible upside down to git de debbil's frenship. De debbil come in one night, and says to ole Meshach: 'Yer's my hat! Go, take it, honey, and measure land wid it, and all de land you measure is yo's, honey!' An' Meshach's measured mos' all dis county in. Judge Custis's land is de last."

The relation affected both girls considerably, and the group of little colored boys and girls still more, who came up almost chilled with terror, to listen; but it produced the greatest effect on Aunt Hominy herself, whose imagination, widened in the effort, excited all her own fears, and gave irresistible vividness to her legend.

"How can his hat measure people's lands in, Aunty?" asked Virgie, drawing Roxy to her by the waist for their mutual protection.

"Why, chile, he measures land in by de great long shadows dat debbil's hat throws. Meshach, he sots his eyes on a good farm. Says he, 'I'll measure dat in!' So he gits out dar some sun-up or sundown, when de sun jest sots a'mos' on de groun, an' ebery tree an' fence-pos' and standin' thing goes away over de land, frowin' long crooked shadows. Dat's de time Meshach stans up, wid dat hat de debbil gib him to make him longer, jest a layin' on de fields like de shadow of a big church-steeple. He walks along de road befo' de farm, and wherever dat hat makes a mark on de ground all between it an' where he walks is ole Meshach's land. Dat's what he calls his mortgage!"

The children had their mouths wide open; the maids heard with faith only less than fear.

"But, Aunt Hominy," spoke Roxy, "he never measured in Judge Custis's house, and all of us in it, that is to be sold."

"Didn't I see him a doin' of it?" whispered Aunt Hominy, stooping as if to creep, in the contraction of her own fears, and looking up into their faces with her fists clinched. "He's a ben comin' along de fence on de darkest, cloudiest nights dis long a time, like a man dat was goin' to rob something, and peepin' up at Miss Vessy's window. He took de dark nights, when de streets of Prencess Anne was clar ob folks, an' de dogs was in deir cribs, an' nuffin' goin' aroun' but him an' wind an' cold an' rain. One night, while he was watchin' Miss Vessy's window like a black crow, from de shadow of de tree, I was a-watchin' of him from de kitchen window. De moon, dat had been all hid, come right from behin' de rain-clouds all at once, gals, an' scared him like. De moon was low on de woods, chillen, an' as ole Meshach turned an' walked away, his debbil's shadow swept dis house in. He measured it in dat night. It's ben his ever since."

"Well," exclaimed Roxy, after a pause, "I know I wouldn't take hold of that hat now."

"I am almost afraid to look at it," said Virgie, "but if Miss Vessy told me to go bring it to her, I would do it."

"Le's us all go together," ventured Aunt Hominy, "and take a peep at it. Maybe it won't hurt us, if we all go."

Aware that Judge Custis and his wife were not near, the little circle of servants—Aunt Hominy, Virgie, Roxy, and the four children, from five to fourteen years of age—filed softly from the kitchen through the covered colonnade, and thence along the back passage to the end of the hall, where they made a group, gazing with believing wonder at the King James tile.

\* \* \* Vesta Custis, having changed her morning robe for a walking-suit, and slightly rearranged her toilet, and knelt speechless awhile to receive the unknown will of Heaven, came down the stairs at last, in time to catch a glimpse of half-a-dozen servants staring at a strange old hat on the hall rack. They hastily fled at her appearance, but the idea of the hat was also conveyed to her own fancy by their unwonted behavior. She looked up an instant at the queer, faded article hanging among its betters, and with a reminiscence of childhood, and of having held it in her hand, there descended along the intervening years upon the association, the odor of a rose and the impression of a pair of bold, startled eyes gazing into hers. She opened the library door, and the same eyes were looking up from her father's easy-chair.

"Mr. Milburn, I believe?" said Vesta, walking to the visitor, and extending her hand with native sweetness.

He arose and bowed, and hardly saw the hand in the earnest look he gave her, as if she had surprised him, and he did not know how to express his bashfulness. She did not withdraw the

hand till he took it, and then he did not let it go. His strong, rather than bold, look, continuing, she dropped her eyes to the hand that mildly held her own, and then she observed, all calm as she was, that his hand was a gentleman's, its fingers long and almost delicate, the texture white, the palm warm, and, as it seemed to her, of something like a brotherly pressure, respectful and gentle too.

As he did not speak immediately, Vesta returned to his face, far less inviting, but peculiar—the black hair straight, the cheek-bones high, no real beard upon him anywhere, the shape of the face broad and powerful, and the chops long, while the yellowish-brown eyes, wide open and intense, answered to the open, almost observant nostrils at the end of his straight, fine nose. His complexion was dark and forester-like, seeming to show a poor, unnutritious diet. He was hardly taller than Vesta. His teeth were good, and the mouth rather small. She thought he was uncertain what to say, or confused in his mind, though no sign of fear was visible. Vesta came to his rescue, withdrawing her hand naturally.

"I have seen you many times, Mr. Milburn, but never here, I think."

"No, miss, I have never been here." He hesitated. "Nor anywhere in Princess Anne. You are the first lady here to speak to me."

His words, but not his tone, intimated an inferiority or a slight. The voice was a little stiff, appearing to be at want for some corresponding inflection, like a man who had learned a language without having had the use of it.

"Will you sit, Mr. Milburn? You owe this visit so long that you will not be in haste to-day. I hope you have not felt that we were inhospitable. But little towns often encourage narrow circles, and make people more selfish than they intend."

"You could never be selfish, miss," said Milburn, without any of the suavity of a compliment, still carrying that wild, regarding gaze, like the eyes of a startled ox.

Vesta faintly colored at the liberty he took. It was slightly embarrassing to her, too, to meet that uninterpretable look of inquiry and homage; but she felt her necessity as well as her good-breeding, and made allowance for her visitor's want of sophistication. He was like an Indian before a mirror, in a stolid excitement of apprehension and delight. The most beautiful thing he ever saw was within the compass of his full sight at last, and whether to detain it by force or persuasion he did not know.

Her dark hair, silky as the cleanest tassels of the corn, fell as naturally upon her perfect head as her teeth, white as the milky corn-rows, moved in the May cherries of her lips. The delicate arches of her brows, shaded by blackbirds' wings, enriched the clear sky of her harmonious eyes, where mercy and nobility kept company, as in heaven.

"How could you know I was unselfish, Mr. Milburn?"

"Because I have heard you sing."

"Oh, yes! You hear me in our church, I remember."

"I have heard you every Sunday that you sung there for years," said Meshach, with hardly a change of expression.

"Are you fond of music, Mr. Milburn?"

"Yes, I like all I have ever heard—birds and you."

"I will sing for you, then," said Vesta, taking the relief the talk directed her to. A piano was in another room, but, to avoid changing the scene, as well as to use a simpler accompaniment for an ignorant man's ears, she brought her guitar, and, placing it in her lap, struck the strings and the key, without waiting, to these tender words:

"Oh, for some sadly dying note,  
Upon this silent hour to float,  
Where, from the bustling world remote,  
The lyre might wake its melody!  
One feeble strain is all can swell.  
From mine almost deserted shell,  
In mournful accents yet to tell  
That slumbers not its minstrelsy.

"There is an hour of deep repose,  
That yet upon my heart shall close,  
When all that nature dreads and knows  
Shall burst upon me wondrously;  
Oh, may I then awake, forever,  
My harp to rapture's high endeavor;  
And, as from earth's vain scene I sever,  
Be lost in Immortality."

Vesta ceased a few minutes, and, her visitor saying nothing, she remarked, with emotion.



"Those lines were written at my grandfather's house, in Accomac County, by a young clergyman from New York, who was grandfather's rector, Rev. James Eastburn. He was only twenty-two years old when he died, at sea, of consumption. His is the only poetry I have ever heard of, Mr. Milburn, written in our beautiful old country here."

"I wondered if I should ever hear you sing for me," spoke Milburn, after hesitation. "Now it is realized, I feel sceptical about it. You are there, Miss Custis, are you not?"

Vesta was puzzled. Under other circumstances she would have been amused, since her humor could flow freely as her music. It faintly seemed to her that the little odd man might be cracked in the head.

"Yes, indeed, Mr. Milburn. If it were a dream, I should have no expression all this day but song. I think I never felt so sad to sing as just now. Father is ill. Mamma is ill. I have become the business agent of the family, and have heard within this hour that papa is deeply involved. You are his creditor, are you not?"

Meshach Milburn bowed.

"What is the sum of papa's notes and mortgages? Is it more than he can pay by the sacrifice of everything?"

"Yes. He has nothing to sell at forced sale which will bring anything, but the household servants here; these maids in the family are marketable immediately. You would not like to sell them?"

"Sell Virgie! She was brought up with me; what right have I to sell her any more than she has to sell me?"

"None," said Milburn, bluntly, "but there is law for it."

"To sell Roxy, too, and old Aunt Hominy, and the young children! how could I ever pray again if they were sold? Oh! Mr. Milburn, where was your heart, to let papa waste his plentiful substance in such a hopeless experiment? If my singing in the church has given you happiness, why could it not move you to mercy? Think of the despair of this family, my father's helpless generosity, my mother's marriage settlement gone, too, and every other son and daughter parted from them!"

"I never encouraged one moment Judge Custis's expenditure," said Meshach, "though I lent him money. The first time he came to me to borrow, my mind was in a liberal disposition, for you had just entered it with your innocent attentions. I supposed he wanted a temporary accommodation, and I gave it to him at the lowest rate one Christian would charge another."

"You say that I influenced you to lend my father money? Why, sir, I was a child. He has been borrowing from you since my earliest recollections."

The creditor took from his breast-pocket a large leather wallet, and, arising, laid its contents on the table. He opened a piece of folded paper, and drew from it two objects; one a lock of blue-black hair like his own, and the other a pressed and faded rose.

"This flower," said Milburn, with reverence, "Judge Custis's daughter fastened in my derided hat. I kept it till it was dead, and laid it away with my mother's hair, the two religious objects of my life. That faded rose made me your father's creditor, Miss Custis."

Vesta took the rose, and looked at him with surprise and inquiry.

"Oh, why did not this flower speak for us?" she said; "to open your lips after that, to save my father? Then you informed yourself, and knew that he was hurrying to destruction, but still you gave him money at higher interest."

Milburn looked at her with diminished courage, but sincerity, and answered: "Your voice sang between us, Miss Custis, every time he came. I did not admit to myself what it was, but the feeling that I was being drawn near you still opened my purse to your father, till he has drained me of the profits of years, which I gave him with a lavish fatality, though grasping every cent from every source but that. I did know, then, he could not probably repay me, but every Sabbath at the church you sang, and that seemed some compensation. I was bewitched; indistinct visions of gratitude and recognition from you filled the preaching with concourses of angels, all bearing your image, and hovering above me. The price I paid for that unuttered and ever-repelled hope has been princely, but never grudged, and it has been pure, I believe, or Heaven would have punished me. The more I ruined myself for your father, the more successful my ventures were in all other places; if you were my temptation, it had the favor or forgiveness of the God in whose temple it was born."

Vesta arose also, with a frightened spirit.

"Do I understand you?" she said, with her rich gray eyes wide open under their startled lashes. "My father has spoken of a degrading condition? Is it to love you?"

For the first time Meshach Milburn dropped his eyes.

"I never supposed it possible for you to love me," he said, bitterly. "I thought God might permit me some day to love you."

"Do you know what love is?" asked Vesta, with astonishment.

"No."

"How came you, then, to be interpreting my good acts so basely, carrying even my childhood about in your evil imagination, and cursing my father's sorrow with the threat of his daughter's slavery?"

Milburn heard with perfect humility these hard imputations.

"You have not loved, I think, Miss Custis?" he said, with a slight flush. "I have believed you never did."

He raised his eyes again to her face.

"I loved my father above everything," faltered Vesta. "I saw no man, besides, admiring my father."

"Then I displaced no man's right, coveting your image. Sometimes it seemed you were being kept free so long to reward my silent worship. I do not know what love is, but I know the gifts of God, as they bloom in nature, repel no man's devotion. The flowers, the birds, and the forest, delighted my childhood; my youth was spent in the study of myself and man; at last a beautiful child appeared to me, spoke her way to my soul, and it could never expel her glorious presence. All things became subordinate to her, even avarice and success. She kept me a Christian, or I should have become utterly selfish; she kept me humble, for what was my wealth when I could not enter her father's house! I am here by a destiny now; the power that called you to this room, so unexpectedly to me, has borne us onward to the secret I dreaded to speak to you. Dare I go further?"

She was trying to keep down her insulted feelings, and not say something that should forever exasperate her father's creditor, but the possibility of marrying him was too tremendous to reply.

"This moment is a great one," continued Milburn, firmly, "for I feel that it is to terminate my visions of happiness, and of kindness as well. You have expressed yourself so indignantly, that I see no thought of me has ever lodged in your mind. Why should it have ever done so? Though I almost dreamed it had, because you filled my life so many years with your rich image, I thought you might have felt me, like an apparition, stealing around this dwelling often in the dark and rain, content with the ray of light your window threw upon the deserted street. Now I see that I was a weak dunce, whose passion nature lent no nerve of hers to convey even to your notice. Better for me that I had hugged the debasing reality of my gold, and lost my eyes to everything but its comfort!"

He looked towards the door. Vesta sat down in the fairy rocker, and detained him.

"You have told me the feeling you think you had, Mr. Milburn. Poor as we Custises are now, it will not do to be proud. How did you ever think that feeling could be returned by me? My youth, my connections, everything, would forbid me, without haughtiness, to see a suitor in you. Then, you took no means to turn my attention towards you. You could have been neighborly, had you desired. You did not even wear the commonest emblems of a lover—"

She paused. Milburn said to himself:

"Ah! that accursed Hat."

The interruption ruffled his temper:

"I have had reasons, also proud, Miss Custis, to be consistent with my perpetual self here. I will put the substantial merits of my case to you, since I see that I am not likely to make myself otherwise attractive. This house is already mine. The law will, in a few weeks, put me in possession of your father's entire property. I shall change outward circumstances with him in Princess Anne. He is too old to adopt my sacrifices, and recover his situation; he may find some shifting refuge with his sons and daughters, but, even if his spirit could brook that dependence, it would be very unnecessary, when, by marrying his creditor, you can retain everything he now has to make his family respectable. I offer you his estate as your marriage portion!"

He took up from the table the notes her father had negotiated, and laid them in her lap.

Vesta sat rocking slowly, and deeply agitated. She had in her mouth the comfort and honor of her parents, which she could confer in a single word. It was a responsibility so mighty that it made her tremble.

"Oh! what shall I say?" she thought. "It will be a sin to say 'Yes.' To say 'No' would be a crime."

"You shall retain every feature of your home—your servants, your mother, and her undiminished portion; your liberty in the fullest sense. I will contribute to send your father to the legislature or to congress, to sustain his pride, and keep him well occupied. The Furnace he may appear to have sold to me, and I will accept the unpopularity of closing it. I ask only to serve you, and inhabit your daily life, like one of these negroes you are kind to, and if I am ever harsh to you, Miss Vesta, I swear to surrender you to your family, and depart forever."

Vesta shook her head.

"There is no separation but one," she said, "when Heaven has been called down to the marriage solemnity. It is before that act that we must consider everything. How could I make you happy?"

My own happiness I will dismiss. Yours must then comprehend mine. Kindness might make me grateful, but gratitude will not satisfy your love."

"Yes," exclaimed Milburn, chasing up his advantage with tremulous ardor; "the long famine of my heart will be thankful for a dry crust and a cup of ice. Here at the fireside let me sit and warm, and hear the rustle of your dress, and grow in heavenly sensibility. You will redeem a savage, you will save a soul!"

"It is not the price I must pay to do this, I would have you consider, sir," Vesta replied, with her attention somewhat arrested by his intensity; "it is the price you are paying—your self-respect, perhaps—by the terms on which you obtain me. It may never be known out of this family that I married you for the sake of my father and mother. But how am I to prevent you from remembering it, especially when you say that I am the sum of your purest wishes? If your interest would consume after you obtained me, we might, at least, be indifferent; but if it grew into real love, would you not often accuse yourself?"

Meshach Milburn sat down, cast his large brown eyes upon the floor, and listened in painful reflection.

"You cannot conceive I have had any real love for you?" he exclaimed, dubiously.

"You have seen me, and desired me for your wife; that is all," said Vesta, "that I can imagine. Lawless power could do that anywhere. To be an obedient wife is the lot of woman; but love, such as you have some glimmering of, is a mystic instinct so mutual, so gladdening, yet so free, that the captivity you set me in to make me sing to you will divide us like the wires of a cage."

"There is no bird I ever caught," said Meshach Milburn, "that did not learn to trust me. Your comparison does not, therefore, discourage me. And you have already sung for me, the saddest day of your life!"

A slight touch of nature in this revelation of her strange suitor called Vesta's attention to the study of him again. With her intelligence and sense of higher worth coming to her rescue, she thought: "Let me see all that is of this Tartar, for, perhaps, there may be another way to his mercy."

As she recovered composure, however, she grew more beautiful in his sight, her dark, peerless charms filling the room, her kindling eyes conveying love, her skin like the wild plum's, and her raven brows and crown of luxuriant hair rising upon a queenly presence worthy of an empress's throne. Such beauty almost made Milburn afraid, but the energies of his character were all concentrated to secure it.

"Who *are* you?" she asked, with a calm, searching look, cast from her highest self-respect and alert intelligence. "Have you any relations or connections fit to bring here—to this house, to me?"

"Not one that I know," said the forester. "I am nothing but myself, and what you will make of me."

"Where were you born and reared?"

"The house does not stand which witnessed that misery," spoke Milburn, with a flush of obdurate pride; "it was burned last night, not far from the furnace which swallowed your father's substance."

"Why, I would be afraid of you, Mr. Milburn, if your errand here was not so practical. Omens and wonders surround you. Birds forget their natural life for you. Iron ceases to be occult when you take it up. Your birthplace in this world disappears by fire the night before you foreclose a mortgage upon a gentleman's daughter. Is all this sorcery inseparable from that necromancer's Hat you wear in Princess Anne?"

She had touched the sensitive topic by a skilful approach, yet he changed color, as if the allusion piqued him.

"Nature never rebuked my hat, Miss Vesta, and you are so like nature, it will not occupy your thoughts. I recollect the day you decorated my old hat; said I: 'perhaps this vagrant head-covering, after all its injuries and wanderings, may some day find a peg beneath my own roof, and the kind welcome of a lady like that little miss.' That was several years ago, and to-day, for the first time, my hat is on the rack of your hall. The long wish of the heart is not often denied. We are not responsible for it. The only conspiracy I have plotted here, was that I did not oppose most natural occurrences, all drawing towards this scene. My magic was hope and humility. I dared to wear my ancestor's hat in the face of a contemptuous and impertinent provincial public, and it gave me the pride to persevere till I should bring it home to honors and to noble shelter. If you despise my hat, you will despise me."

"Oh, no; Mr. Milburn! I try never to despise anything. If you wore your family hat from some filial respect, it was, in part, piety. But was that, indeed, your motive in being so eccentric?"

Milburn felt uneasy again. He hesitated, and said:

"In perfect truth, I fear not. There may have been something of revenge in my mind. I had been grossly insulted."

"Is it not something of that revenge which instigates you here—even in this profession of love?" exclaimed Vesta, judicially.

Meshach looked up, and the shadows cleared from his face.

"I can answer that truthfully, lady. Towards you, not an indignant thought has ever harbored in my brain. It has been the opposite: protection, worship, tender sensibility."

"Has that exceptional charity extended to my father?"

"No."

Vesta would have been exasperated, but for his candor.

"My father never insulted you, sir?"

"No, he patronized me. He meant no harm, but that old hat has worn a deep place in my brain through carrying it so long, and it is a subject that galls me to mention it. Yet, I must be consistent with my only eccentricity. Wherever I may go, there goes my hat; it makes my identity, my inflexibility; it achieves my promise to myself, that men shall respect my hat before I die."

"Pardon me," said Vesta, not uninterested in his character, "I can understand an eccentricity founded on family respect. We were Virginians, and that is next to religion there. The negroes of our family share it with us. You had a family, then?"

Milburn shook his head.

"No; not a family in the sense you mean. Generations of obscurity, a parentage only virtuous; no tombstone anywhere, no crest nor motto, not even a self-deluding lie of some former gentility, shaped from hand to hand till it commits a larceny on history, and is brazen on a carriage panel! We were foresters. We came forth and existed and perished, like the families of ants upon the ant-hills of sand. We migrated no more than the woodpeckers in your sycamore trees, and made no sound in events more than their insectivorous tapping. Out yonder beyond Dividing Creek, in the thickets of small oak and low pines, many a little farm, scratched from the devouring forest, speckling the plains and wastes with huts and with little barns of logs, once bore the name of Milburn through all the localities of the Pocomoke to and beyond the great Cypress Swamp. They are dying, but never dead. The few who live expect no recognition from me, and, happy in their poverty, envy me nothing I have accumulated. My name has grown hard to them, my hat is the subject of their superstitions, my ambition and success have lost me their sympathy without giving me any other social compensation. You behold a desperate man, a merciless creditor, a tussock of ore from the bogs of Nassawongo, yet one whose only crimes have been to adore you, and to wear his forefathers' hat."

"Is this pride, then, wholly insulted sensibility, Mr. Milburn?"

"I cannot say, Miss Custis. You may smile, but I think it is aristocracy."

"I think so, too," exclaimed Vesta reflectively; "you are a proud man. My father, who has had reason to be proud, is less an aristocrat, sir, than you."

Milburn's flush came and stayed a considerable while. He was not displeased at Vesta's compliment, though it bore the nature of an accusation.

"You are aristocratic," explained Vesta, "because you adopted the obsolete hat of your people. Whatever vanity led you to do it, it was the satisfaction of some origin, I think."

She checked herself, seeing that she was entering into his affairs with too much freedom.

"I suppose that somewhere, some time," spoke the strange visitor, "some person of my race has been influential and prosperous. Indeed, I have been told so. He was elevated to both the magistracy and the scaffold, but my hat had even an older origin."

"Tell me about that ancestor," said Vesta, the heartache from his greater errand instigating her to defer it, while she was yet barely conscious that the man was original, if not interesting.

He told a singular tale, tracing his hat to Raleigh's times and through Sir Henry Vane to America, till it became the property of Jacob Milborne, the popular martyr who was executed in New York, and his brethren driven into Maryland, bringing with them the harmless hat as their only patrimony.<sup>[1]</sup>

Before he began, Milburn drew up his compact little figure and opened the door to the hall. The wind or air from some of the large, cold apartments of the long house, coming in by some crack or open sash, gave almost a shriek, and scattered the fire in the chimney.

Vesta felt her blood chill a moment as her visitor re-entered with the antediluvian hat, and placed it upon the table beneath the lamp.

It had that look of gentility victorious over decay, which suggested the mummy of some Pharaoh, brought into a drawing-room on a learned society's night. Vesta repressed a smile, rising through her pain, at the gravity of the forester guest, who was about to demonstrate his aristocracy through this old hat. It seemed to her, also, that the portraits of the Custises, on the wall, carried indignant noses in the air at their apparently conscious knowledge of the presence of some unburied pretender, as if, in Westminster Abbey, the effigies of the Norman kings had slightly aroused to feel Oliver Cromwell lying among them in state.

The hat, Vesta perceived, was Flemish, such as was popular in England while the Netherlands was her ally against the house of Spain, and, stripped of its ornaments, was lengthened into the hat of the Puritans.

Vesta attempted to exert her liberality and perceive some beauty in this hat, but the utmost she could admit was the tyranny of fashion over the mind—it seemed, over the soul itself, for this old hat, inoffensive as it was, weighed down her spirits like a diving-bell.

The man, without his hat, had somewhat redeemed himself from low conversation and ideas, but now, that he brought this hat in and associated his person with it, she shrank from him as if he had been a triple-hatted Jew, peddling around the premises.

The obnoxious hat also exercised some exciting influence over Meshach Milburn, if his changed manner could be ascribed to that article, for he resumed his strong, wild-man's stare, deepened and lowered his voice, and without waiting for any query or expression of his listener, told the tale.

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## CHAPTER IX.

### HA! HA! THE WOOING ON'T.

It was twilight when Meshach Milburn closed his story, and silence and pallid eve drew together in the Custis sitting-room, resembling the two people there, thinking on matrimony, the one grave as conscious serpenthood could make him, the other fluttering like the charmed bird. Vesta spoke first:

"How intense must be your head to create so many objects around it within the world of a hat! You have only brought the story down a little way towards our times."

"I began the tale of Raleigh out of proportion," said Milburn, "and it grew upon the same scale, like the passion I conceived for you so intensely at the outset, that in the climax of this night I am scarcely begun."

"Yet, like Raleigh, I see the scaffold," said Vesta, with an attempt at humor that for the first time broke her down, and she raised her hands to her face to hush the burst of anguish. It would not be repressed, and one low cry, deep with the sense of desertion and captivity, sounded through the deepening room and smote Milburn's innermost heart. He obeyed an impulse he had not felt since his mother died, starting towards Vesta and throwing his arms around her, and drawing her to his breast.

"Honey, honey," he whispered, kissing her like a child, "don't cry now, honey. It will break my heart."

The act of nature seldom is misinterpreted; Vesta, having labored so long alone with this obdurate man, her young faculties of the head strained by the first encounter beyond her strength, accepted the friendship of his sympathy and contrition, as if he had been her father. In a few moments the paroxysm of grief was past, and she disengaged his arms.

"You are not merciless," said Vesta. "Tell me what I must do! You have broken my father down and he cannot come to my help. Take pity on my inequality and advise me!"

"Alas! child," said Milburn, "my advice must be in my own interest, though I wish I could find your confidence. I am a poor creature, and do not know how. It is you who must encourage the faith I feel starting somewhere in this room, like a chimney swallow that would fain fly out. Chirrup, chirrup to it, and it may come!"

Standing a moment, trying to collect her thoughts and wholly failing, Vesta accepted the confidence he held out to her with open arms. Blushing as she had never blushed in her life, though he could not know it in the evening dark, she walked to him and kissed him once.

"Will that encourage you to advise me like a friend?" she said.

"Alas! no," sighed Milburn fervently, "it makes me the more your unjust lover. I cannot advise you away from me. Oh, let me plead for myself. I love you!"

"Then what shall I do," exclaimed Vesta, in low tones, "if you are unable to rise to the height of my friend, and my father is your slave? Do you think God can bless your prosperity, when you are so hard with your debtor? On me the full sacrifice falls, though I never was in your debt consciously, and I have never to my remembrance wished injury to any one."

"Would you accept your father's independence at the expense of the most despised man in Princess Anne?" Milburn spoke without changing his kind tone. "Would you let me give him the fruit of many years of hard toil and careful saving, in order that I shall be disappointed in the only motive of assisting him—the honorable wooing of his daughter?"

She felt her pride rising.

"Your father's debts to me are tens of thousands of dollars," continued Milburn. "Do you ask me

to present that sum to you, and retire to my loneliness out of this bright light of home and family, warmth and music, that you have made? That is the test you put my love to: banishment from you. Will you ask it?"

"I have not asked for your money, sir," said Vesta. "Yet I have heard of Love doing as much as that, relieving the anguish of its object, and finding sufficient joy in the self-denying deed."

"I do not think you personally know of any such case, though you may have read it in a novel or tract. Men have died, and left a fortune they could no longer keep, to some cherished lady; or they have made a considerable sacrifice for a beautiful and noble woman; but where did you ever hear, Miss Vesta, of a famished lover, surrendering every endowment that might win the peerless one, to be himself returned to his sorrow, tortured still by love, and by his neighbors ridiculed? What would Princess Anne say of me? That I had been made a fool of, and hurl new epithets after my hat?"

Vesta searched her mind, thinking she must alight upon some such example there, but none suited the case. Meshach took advantage of her silence:

"The gifts of a lover are everywhere steps to love, as I have understood. He makes his impression with them; they are expected. Nothing creates happiness like a gift, and it is an old saying that blessings await him who gives, and also her who takes, and that to seek and ask and knock are praiseworthy."

"Oh," said Vesta, "but to be *bought*, Mr. Milburn? To be weighed against a father's debts—is it not degrading?"

"Not where such respect and cherishing as mine will be. Rather exalt yourself as more valuable to a miser than his whole lendings, and greater than all your father's losses as an equivalent, and even then putting your husband in debt, being so much richer than his account."

"Where will be my share of love in this world, married so?" asked Vesta. "To love is the globe itself to a woman, her youth the mere atmosphere thereof, her widowhood the perfume of that extinguished star; and all my mind has been alert to discover the image I shall serve, the bright youth ready for me, looking on one after another to see if it might be he, and suddenly you hold between me and my faith a paper with my father's obligations, and say: 'Here is your fate; this is your whole romance; you are foreclosed upon!' How are you to take a withered heart like that and find glad companionship in it? No, you will be disappointed. It will recoil upon me that I sold myself."

"The image you waited for may have come," said Milburn undauntedly, "even in me; for love often springs from an ambush, nor can you prepare the heart for it like a field. I recollect a fable I read of a god loving a woman, and he burst upon her in a shower of gold; and what was that but a rich man's wooing? We get gold to equalize nobility in women; beauty is luxurious, and demands adornment and a rich setting; the richest man in Princess Anne is not good enough for you, and the mere boys your mind has been filled with are more unworthy of being your husband than the humble creditor of your father. Such a creation as Miss Vesta required a special sacrifice and success in the character of her husband. The annual life of this peninsula could not match you, and a monster had to be raised to carry you away."

"You are not exactly a monster," Vesta remarked, with natural compassion, "and you compliment me so warmly that it relieves the strain of this encounter a little. Do not draw a woman's attention to your defects, as she might otherwise be charmed by your voice."

"That also is a part of my sacrifice," said Meshach, "like the money which I have accumulated. Without a teacher, but love and hope, I have educated myself to be fit to talk to you. It is all crude now, like a crow that I have taught to speak, but encouragement will make me confident and saucy, and you will forget my sable raiment—even my hat."

A chilliness seemed to attend this conclusion, and Vesta touched her bell. Virgie, entering, took her mistress's instructions: "Bring a tray and tea, and lights, and place Mr. Milburn's hat upon the rack!"

The girl glanced at the antique hat with a timid light in her eye, but her mistress's head was turned as if to intimate that she must take it, though it might be red-hot. Virgie obeyed, and soon brought in the tea.

"It is good tea," spoke Milburn, drinking not from the cup, but the saucer, while Vesta observed him oddly, "and it is chill this evening. Let me start your fire!"

He shivered a little as he stood up and walked across the room, and poking the charred logs into a flame; and, setting on more wood, he made the walls spring into yellow flashes, between which Vesta saw her forefathers dart cold glances at her, in their gilt frames—yet how helpless they were, with all their respectability, to take her body or her father's honor out of pawn!—and she felt for the first time the hollowness of family power, except in the ever-preserved mail of a solvent posterity. She also made a long, careful survey of her suitor, to see if there was any apology for him as a husband.

His figure was short, but with strength and elasticity in it; better clothes might fit him daintily, and Vesta re-dressed him in fancy with lavender kids upon his small hands, a ring upon his long little finger, a carnelian seal and a ribbon at his fob-pocket, and ruffles in his shirt-bosom. In

place of his dull cloth suit, she would give him a buff vest and pearl buttons with eyelet rings, and white gaiters instead of those shabby green things over his feet, and put upon his head a neat silk hat with narrow brim to raise his height slenderly, and let a coat of olive or dark-blue, and trousers of the same color, relieve his ornaments. Thus transformed, Vesta could conceive a peculiar yet a passable man, whom a lady might grow considerate towards by much praying and striving, and she wondered, now, how this man had managed to soothe her already to that degree that she had voluntarily kissed him. She would be afraid to do it again, but it was as clearly on record as that she had once put a flower in his hat; and Vesta said to herself:

"He has power of some kind! That story, little as I heard of it, was told with an opinionated confidence I wish my poor father had something of. Could I ever be happy with this man, by study and piety? God might open the way, but it seems closed to me now."

"The night wears on, Miss Custis," spoke Meshach. "Its rewards are already great to me. When may I return?"

"I think we must determine what to do this night, Mr. Milburn," Vesta said, with rising determination. "Not one point nearer have we come to any solution of this obligation of my father. We have considered it up to this time as my obligation, and that may have unduly encouraged you. Sir, I can work for my living."

"You *work*?" repeated Milburn.

"Why not? I love my father. As other women who are left poor work for their children or a sick husband, why should not I for him! Poverty has no terrors but—but the loss of pride."

"You hazard that, whatever happens," said her suitor, "but you will not lose it by evading the lesser evil for the greater. I have heard of women who fled to poverty from dissatisfaction with a husband, but pride survived and made poverty dreadful. Pride in either case increased the discontent. You should take the step which will let pride be absorbed in duty, if not in love."

"Duty?" thought Vesta. "That is a reposeful word, better than Love. Mr. Milburn," she said aloud, "how is it my duty to do what you ask?"

"I think I perceive that you have a loyal heart, a conscientiousness that deceit cannot even approach. Something has already made you slow to marriage, else, with your wonders, I would not have had the chance to be now rejected by you. Marriage has become too formidable, perhaps, to you, by the purity of your heart, the more so because you looked upon it to be your destiny. It *is* your fate, but you contend against it. Look upon it, then, as a duty, such as you expect in others—in your slave maid, for instance."

"Alas!" Vesta said, "she may marry freely. I am the slave."

"No, Miss Vesta, she has been free, but, sold among strangers with your father's effects, will feel so perishing for sympathy and protection that love, in whatever ugly form it comes, will be God's blessing to her poor heart. What you repel in the revulsion of fortune—the yoke of a husband—millions of women have bent to as if it was the very rainbow of promise set in heaven."

"How do you know so much of women's trials, Mr. Milburn? Have you had sisters, or other ladies to woo?"

"I have seen human nature in my little shop, not, like your rare nature, refined by happy fortune and descent, but of moderate kind, and struggling downward like a wounded eagle. They have come to me at first for cheaper articles of necessity or smaller portions than other stores would sell, looking on me with contempt. At last they have sacrificed their last slave, their last pair of shoes, and, when it was too late, their false pride has surrendered to shelter under a negro's hut, or dance barefooted in my store for a cup of whiskey."

"Sir," exclaimed Vesta indignantly, rising from her rocker, "do you set this warning for me?"

As she rose Meshach Milburn thought his wealth was merely pebbles and shells to her perfection, now animated with a queen's spirit.

"Miss Vesta," he said, "pardon me, but I have just issued from many generations of forest poverty, and knowing how hard it is to break that thralldom, I would stop you from taking the first step towards it. The bloom upon your cheek, the mould you are the product of without flaw, the chaste lady's tastes and thoughts, and inborn strength and joy, are the work of God's favor to your family for generations. That favor he continues in laying those family burdens on another's shoulders, to spare you the toil and care, anxiety and slow decay, that this violent change of circumstances means. It would be a sin to relapse from this perfection to that penury."

"I cannot see that honorable poverty would make me less a woman," exclaimed Vesta.

"You do not dread poverty because you do not know it," Milburn continued. "It grows in this region like the old field-pines and little oaks over a neglected farm. Once there was a court-house settlement on Dividing Creek, where justice, eloquence, talent, wit, and heroism made the social centre of two counties, but they moved the court-house and the forest speedily choked the spot. Now not an echo lingers of that former glory. You can save your house from being swallowed up in the forest."

"By marrying the forest hero?" Vesta said, though she immediately regretted it.

"Yes," Milburn uttered stubbornly, after a pause. "I have met the house of Custis half-way. I am coming out of the woods as they are going in, unless the sacrifice be mutual."

"Let us not be personal," Vesta pleaded, with her grace of sorrow; "I feel that you are a kind man, at least to me, but a poor girl must make a struggle for herself."

She saw the tears stand instantly in his eyes, and pressed her advantage:

"Your tears are like the springs we find here, so close under the flinty sand that nobody would suspect them, but I have seen them trickle out. Tell me, now, if I would not be happier to take up the burden of my father and mother, and let us diminish and be frugal, instead of cowardly flying into the protection of our creditor, by a union which the world, at least, would pronounce mercenary. My father might come up again, in some way."

"No, Miss Vesta. Your father can hold no property while any portion of his debts remains unpaid. The easier way is to show the world that our union is not mercenary, by trying to love each other. Throughout the earth marriage is the reparation of ruined families—the short path, and the most natural one, too. Ruth was poor kin, but she turned from the harvest stubble that made her beautiful feet bleed, to crawl to the feet of old Boaz and find wifely rest, and her wisdom of choice we sing in the psalms of King David, and hear in the proverbs of King Solomon, sons of her sons."

"I am not thinking of myself, God knows!" said Vesta. "Gladly could I teach a little school, or be a governess somewhere, or, like our connection, the mother of Washington, ride afield in my sun-bonnet and straw hat and oversee the laborers."

"That never made General Washington, Miss Vesta. It was marriage that lent him to the world; first, his half-brother's marriage with the Fairfaxes; next, his own with Custis's rich widow. Had they been looking for natural parts only, some Daniel Morgan or Ethan Allen would have been Washington's commander."

"Why do you draw me to you by awakening the motive of my self-love?" asked Vesta. "That is not the way to preserve my heart as you would have it."

"In every way I can draw you to me," spoke Milburn, again trembling with earnestness, "I feel desperate to try. If it is wrong, it arises from my sense of self-preservation. Without you I am a dismal failure, and my labor in life is thrown away."

"Do you really believe you love me? Is it not ambition of some kind; perhaps a social ambition?"

"To marry a Custis?" Milburn exclaimed. "No, it is to marry *you*. I would rather you were not a Custis."

"Ah! I see, sir;" Vesta's face flushed with some admiration for the man; "you think your family name is quite as good. So you ought to do. Then you love me from a passion?"

"Partly that," answered Milburn. "I love you from my whole temperament, whatever it is; from the glow of youth and the reflection of manhood, from appreciation of you, and from worship, also; from the eye and the mind. I love you in the vision of domestic settlement, in the companionship of thought, in the partition of my ambition, in my instinct for cultivation. I love you, too, with the ardor of a lover, stronger than all, because I must possess you to possess myself; because you kindle flame in me, and my humanity of pity is trampled down by my humanity of desire; I cannot hear your appeal to escape! I am deaf to sentiments of honor and courtesy, if they let you slip me! Give yourself to me, and these better angels may prevail, being perhaps accessory to the mighty instinct I obey at the command of the Creator!"

As he proceeded, Vesta saw shine in Meshach Milburn's face the very ecstasy of love. His dark, resinous eyes were like forest ponds flashing at night under the torches of negro 'coon-hunters. His long lady's hands trembled as he stretched them towards her to clasp her, and she saw upon his brow and in his open nostril and firm mouth the presence of a will that seldom fails, when exerted mightily, to reduce a woman's, and make her recognize her lord.

Yet, with this strong excitement of mental and animal love, which generally animates man to eloquence, if not to beauty, a weary something, nearly like pain, marked the bold intruder, and a quiver, not like will and courage, went through his frame. It was this which touched Vesta with the sense that perhaps she was not the only sufferer there, and pity, which saves many a lover when his merits could not win, brought the Judge's daughter to an impulsive determination.

"Mr. Milburn," she said at last, pressing her hands to her head, "this day's trials have been too much for my brain. Never, in all my life together, have I had realities like these to contend with. I am worn out. Nay, sir, do not touch me now!" He had tried to repeat his sympathetic overture, and pet her in his arms. "Let us end this conflict at once. You say you will marry me; when?"

"It is yours to say when, Miss Custis. I am ready any day."

"And you will give me every note and obligation of my father, so that my mother's portion shall be returned to her in full, and this house, servants, and demesnes be mine in my own right?"

"Yes," said Milburn; "I have such confidence in your truth and virtue that you shall keep these papers from this moment until the marriage-day."

"It will not be long, then," Vesta said, looking at Milburn with a will and authority fully equal to



his own. "Will you take me to-night?"

"To-night?" he repeated. "Not to-night, surely?"

"To-night, or probably never."

He drew nearer, so as to look into her countenance by the strong firelight. Calm courage, that would die, like Joan of Arc in the flames, met his inquiry.

"Yes," said Milburn, "at your command I will take you to-night, though it is a surprise to me."

He flinched a little, nevertheless, his conscience being uneasy, and the same trembling Vesta had already observed went through his frame again.

"What will the world say to your marriage after a single day's acquaintance with me?"

"Nothing," Vesta answered, "except that I am your wife. That will, at least, silence advice and prevent intrusion. If I delay, these forebodings may prevail, if not with me, with my family, some of whom are to be feared."

He seemed to have no curiosity on that subject, only saying:

"It is you, dear child, I am thinking of—whether this haste will not be repented, or become a subject of reproach to yourself. To me it cannot be, having no world, no tribe—only myself and you!"

Vesta came forward and lifted his hand, which was cold.

"I believe that you love me," she said. "I believe this hand has the lines of a gentleman. Now, I will trust to you a family confidence. The troubles of this house are like a fire which there is no other way of treating than to put it out at once. My father will not be disturbed, beyond his secret pain, at the step I am to take, for he appreciates your talents and success. It is for him I shall take this step, if I take it at all, and I have yet an hour to reflect. But my mother will be resentful, and her brothers and kindred in Baltimore will express a savage rage, in the first place, at my father's losing her portion; next to that, and I hope less bitterly, they will resent my marriage to you. Exposed to their interference, I might be restrained from going to my father's assistance; they might even force me away, and break our family up, leaving father alone to encounter his miseries."

"I see," said Milburn; "you would give me the legal right to meet your mother's excited people."

"Not that merely," Vesta said; "I would put it out of her power and theirs to prevent the sacrifice I meditate making. My father's immediate dread is my mother's upbraiding—that he has risked and lost her money. It has sent her to bed already, sick and almost violent. I might as well save the poor gentleman his whole distress, if I am to save him a part."

"Brave girl!" exclaimed Meshach Milburn, in admiration. "It is true, then, that blood will tell. You intend to give your mother the money which has been lost, and silence her complaint before she makes it?"

"Just that, Mr. Milburn, and to say, 'It is my husband's gift, and a peace-offering from us all.'"

"Is it not your intention, honey," asked the creditor, "to take Mrs. Custis into your confidence before this marriage?"

She looked at him with the entreaty of one in doubt, who would be resolved. "Advise me," she said. "I want to do the best for all, and spare all bitter words, which rankle so long. Is it necessary to tell my mother?"

"No. You are a free woman. I know your age—though I shall forget it by and by." This first gleam of humor rather became his strange face. "If you tell your father, it is enough."

"I hope I am doing right," Vesta said, "and now I shall take my hour to my soul and my Saviour. Sir, do you ever pray?"

Milburn recoiled a little.

"I do not pray like you," he replied; "my prayers are dry things. I do say a little rhyme over that my mother taught me in the forest."

"Try to pray for me to do right," said Vesta, "that I may not make this sacrifice, and leave a wounded conscience. And now, sir, farewell. At nine o'clock go to our church and wait. If I resolve to come, there you will find the rector, and all the arrangements made. If I do not come, I think you will see me no more."

"Oh, beautiful spirit," exclaimed her lover, "oppress me not with that fear!"

"If another way is made plain to me," Vesta said, "I shall go that way. If my duty leads me to you again, you will be my master. Sir, though your errand here was a severe one, I thank you for your sincerity and the kind consideration you seem to have had for me so long. Farewell."

"Angel! Vesta! Honey!" Milburn cried, "may I kiss you?"

"Not now," she answered, cold as superiority, and interposing her hand.

The door stood wide open, and the slave-girl, Virgie, in it, holding the Entailed Hat. Milburn, with a shudder, took it, and covered himself, and departed.

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## CHAPTER X.

### MASTER IN THE KITCHEN.

The kitchen had been a scene of anything but culinary peace and savor during the long visit of the owner of the hat.

Aunt Hominy and the little darkeys had made three stolen visits to the hall to peep at the dreadful thing hanging there, as if it were a trap of some kind, liable to drop a spring and catch somebody, or to explode like a mortar or torpedo. As hour after hour wore on, and Miss Vesta did not reappear, and finally rang her bell for tea, Aunt Hominy was beside herself with superstition.

"Honey," she exclaimed to Virgie, "jess you take in dis yer dried lizzer an' dis cammermile, an' drap de lizzer in dat ole hat, an' sprinkle de flo' whar ole Meshach sots wi' de cammermile, an' say 'Shoo!' Maybe it'll spile his measurin' of Miss Vessy in."

"No, aunty, if old Meshach measured *me* in, I wouldn't make the family ashamed before him. Miss Vessy is powerful wise, and maybe she'll get the better of that wicked hat."

"Yes," said Roxy, "she's good, Aunt Hominy, an' says her prayers every night and mornin'. I've heard tell that witches can't hear the Lord's name, and stay, nohow. Maybe Miss Vessy'll say in Meshach's old hat: 'Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, bless the bed that I lie on.' That'll make the old devil jess fly up an' away."

"No, gals," insisted Aunt Hominy, "cammermile is all dat'll keep him from a-measurin' of us in. Don't ole Meshach go to church, too, and hab a prayer-book an'—listen dar, honey! ef she ain't a singin' to him!"

As Virgie answered the bell, Aunt Hominy took down her cherished camomile and sprinkled the little children, and gave them each a glass of sassafras beer to bless their insides.

"Lord a bless 'em!" exclaimed the old lady, "ef de slave-buyer comes, Aunt Hominy'll take 'em to de woods an' jess git los', an' live on teaberries, slippery-ellum, haws, an' chincapins. We don't gwyn stay an' let ole Meshach starve us like a lizzer."

"Aunt Hominy," said Roxy, "maybe, old lady, ef you bake a nice loaf of Federal bread, or a game-pie, or a persimmon custard, an' send it to ole Meshach, he won't sell us to the slave-buyers. He never gets nothing good to eat, an' don't know what it is. A little taste of it'll make him want mo'."

"Roxy, gal," said Aunt Hominy, "I'd jess like to make a dumplin'-bag out o' dat steeple-hat he got. When I skinned de dumplin' de hat would be bad spiled, chillen, an' den de Judge would git his lan' back dat Meshach's measured in. For de Judge would say, 'Meshach, ye hain't measured me fair. Wha's yer yard-stick, ole debbil?' Den Meshach he say, 'De hat I tuk it in wid, done gone burnt by dat ole Hominy, makin' of her puddin's.' 'Den,' says de Judge, 'ye ain't measured me squar. I won't play. Take it all back!' Chillen, we must git dat ar ole hat, or de slave-buyers done take us all."

They started to take another peep of cupidity and awe at the storied hat, when Virgie emerged from the parlor door with the dreaded article in her hand, and, hanging it on the peg, came with superstitious fear and relief into the colonnade. Aunt Hominy hurried her to the kitchen, strewed her with herb-dust, waved a rattle of snake's teeth in a pig's weazen over her head, and ended by pushing a sweet piece of preserved watermelon-rind down her throat.

"Did it hurt ye, honey?" inquired Aunt Hominy, with her eyes full of excitement, referring to the hat.

"Deed I don't know, aunty," Virgie answered; "all I saw was Miss Vessy, looking away from me, as if she might be going to be ashamed of me, an' I picked the thing up an' took it to the rack; an' all I know is, it smelled old, like some of the old-clothes chests up in the garret, when we lift the lid and peep in, an' it seems as if they were dead people's clothes."

The little negroes, Ned, Vince, and Phillis, heard this with shining eyes, and dived their heads under Aunt Hominy's skirts and apron, while the old woman exclaimed:

"De Lord a massy!" and began to blow what she called "pow-pow" on the girl's profaned fingers.

"I don't believe it's anything, aunty, but an ugly, old, nasty, dead folks' hat," exclaimed Virgie. "He just wears it to plague people. He was drinking tea just like Miss Vessy, but I thought his teeth chattered a little, as if he had smelt of the old hat, and it give him a chill."

"Where did he get the hat, Aunt Hominy?" Roxy asked. "Did he dig it up somewhere?"

The question seemed to spur the cook's easy invention, and, after a cunning yet credulous look up and down the large kitchen, where the pale light at the windows was invisible in the stronger fire beneath the great stack chimney, Aunt Hominy whispered:

"He dug dat hat up in ole Rehoboff ruined churchyard. He foun' it in de grave."

"But you said this afternoon, aunty, that the Bad Man gave it to him."

"De debbil met him right dar," insisted Aunt Hominy, "in dat ole obergrown churchyard, whar de hymns ob God used to be raised befo' de debbil got it. He says to Meshach: 'I make you de sexton hyar. Go git de spade out yonder, whar de dead-house used to be, an' dig among de graves under de myrtle-vines, an' fin' my hat. As long as ye keep de Lord an' de singin' away from dis yer big forsaken church, you may keep dat hat to measure in eberybody's lan'.' So nobody kin sing or pray in dat church. Nobody but Meshach Milburn ever prays dar. He goes dar sometimes wid his Christmas-giff on he head, an' prays to de debbil."

Thus does an unwonted fashion arouse unwonted visions, as if it brought to the present day the phantoms which were laid at rest with itself, and they walked into simple minds, and produced superstition there.

Aunt Hominy never was stimulated to inventions of this kind, but she immediately absorbed them, and they became religious beliefs with her. Her manner, highly animated by her terror and belief, produced more and more superstition in the minds of the girls and children, and the conversation fell off,—the little negroes wandering hither and thither, unable to sleep, yet unable to attract sufficient attention from any one, till Judge Custis, who had been waiting for hours for his creditor to go, slipped down the back stairs in his old slippers, and came to the kitchen among the colored people for company's sake.

His fine presence, and familiar, if superior, address, put a new complexion at once on the African end of the house.

He picked up all the children by twos or threes, woolled them, chased them, tossed them, and drove the lurid images of Aunt Hominy's mind out of their spirits, and then caught the two young girls, and set Roxy on his shoulder, and caught Virgie by the waist, and finally piled them on Aunt Hominy, who ran behind her biscuit-block, and he bunched all the children upon the party.

"De Lord a massy, Judge!" exclaimed Aunt Hominy, delighted, and showing her white teeth, whichever side she revealed. "Go 'long, Judge, Missy Custis ketch you! Miss Vessy's a-comin', befo' de Lawd!"

The children were screaming, getting into the riot more, while pretending to try to get out, invading the Judge's back, and rubbing their clean wool into his whiskers, and the two neat servants, brought up like white children in his family, were not unaccustomed to either jovial handling or petting from their master, which he commonly concluded by a present of some kind.

"Old woman," said the Judge to Aunt Hominy, "can you give me a bit of broiled something for my stomach? I want to eat it right here."

"Ha! yah! Don't got nothin' but a young chicken, marster! Mebbe I kin git ye a squab outen de pigeon-house in de gable-yend."

"That's it, Hominy!" exclaimed Judge Custis; "a tender squab, a little toast in cream, a glass of morning milk, and a bunch of fresh celery, will just raise my pulse, and put courage into me. Get it, my faithful old girl; it's the last I may ask of you, for old Samson Hat is going to own you next."

"Me? No, sah! I'll run away from Prencess Anne fust. De man dat cleans ole Meshach Milburn's debbil hat sha'n't nebber hab me."

"Well, it'll be one of you. If you don't take Samson, Roxy must, or Virgie. The old fellow will be very influential with our new master, and, Hominy, we're all depending on you to make him so comfortable that he will just keep the family together."

Sobriety came in on this attempted witticism, and the old cook saw a film grow into the Judge's smiling eyes.

"Old marster!" she exclaimed, raising her hands, "you's jess a-sottin' dar, an' breakin' your poor heart. Don't I know when you is a-makin' believe? Mebbe dis night is de las' we'll ever see you in your own warm, nice kitchen, an' never mo', dear ole marster, kin Hominy brile you a bird or season de soup you like. Bless God, dis time we'll git de squab an' de celery an' de toast, befo' ole Meshach Milburn measures all we got in!"

While the children crawled around the Judge's knees, setting up a dismal wail to see him sob, the two neat house girls, forgetting every contingency to themselves, sobbed also, like his own daughters, to see him unmanned; but Aunt Hominy only felt desperately energetic at the chance to cook the last supper of the Custis household.

She lighted a brand of pine in the fire, and started one of the stable boys up a ladder by its light to ransack the pigeon-cote, and in a very little while both a chicken and a bird were broiled and set upon the kitchen-table upon a spotless cloth, and the plume of lily-white celery, and the smoking toast in velvet cream, warmed the Judge's nostrils, and dried his tears.

Roxy stood behind him to wait upon his wishes; Virgie subdued every expression of grief, and comforted the children, and poor Aunt Hominy, with silent tears streaming down her cheeks to see him eat and suffer, kept up a clatter of epicurean talk, lest he might turn and see her miserable. As he finished his meal, and took out his gold tooth-pick, and felt a comfortable joy of

such misery and sympathy, Vesta opened the door, and said:

"Papa!"

"My child?"

"Let me speak with you."

Judge Custis rose, and raised his hands to Aunt Hominy in speechless recognition of her service; but not till the door closed behind him did the old cook's cry burst through her quivering lips:

"Oh! chillen, chillen, he'll never eat no mo' like dat again. Ole Meshach's measured him in!"

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## CHAPTER XI.

### DYING PRIDE.

At the termination of Milburn's long visit, Vesta had gone to her own room, and read her passage in the Bible, and said her prayer, and tried to think, but the day's application had been too great to leave her mind its morning energy, when health, which is so much of decision, was elastic in her veins and brain.

She began to see her duty loom up like a prodigious thing on one side, crowding every other consideration out of the way but one—her modesty; and threatening that, which, like a little mouse, ran around and around her mind, timorous, but helpless, and without a hole of escape.

She would cease to be a maid within the circuit of the clock, or forsake her family, and drive that great bloodhound of duty over the threshold of her ruined home.

In the one case lay outward devastation—the red eyes of parents and servants who had not slept all night, and looked at her as their obdurate hostage, and the prying constables lodged upon the premises to see that nothing was smuggled out, the ring of the auctioneer's bell, and the fingering of boors and old gossips over the cherished things of the family, even to her heirlooms, jewelry, and hosiery; the vast old house a hollow barn when these were done, and she and her mother visitors at the jail where her poor father looked through the bars, and bent his head in shame!

Then the servants, one after another, mounted upon the court-house block, the old gray servitors mocked, the little children parted, like calves by the butcher, and the young girls feeling the desperate apprehensions of abuse and violation, that were the other alternative to herself, with whom purity was like the whiteness of the lily, prized more than its beauty of form or its perfume.

She glanced in her mirror by the light that flamed in her brazen grate, and saw the blushes climb like flying virgins at the sack of towns, up the white ramparts of her neck and temples.

The form which had altered so little from childhood, supple and straight, and moulded to perfection, was to fall like the young hickory-tree in the August hurricane, twisted from its native grove. The breath of the man she was to yield her life to, irresistible and hot as that storm, she had felt already, when he held her for a moment in his arms in the transport of passion, and heard his fearless avowal of desire.

To marry any man now seemed hard; to marry this one was inexpressible shame, and at the thought of it she could not shed a tear, such paralysis came over her. She had read of the recent Greek revolution, where elegant ladies of Scio, and other isles of the Ægean Sea, educated in the best seminaries of Europe, had been sold by thousands as common slaves in the markets of Constantinople, and carried to their estates by brutal Turks, with all the gloating anticipation of lust and tyranny.

On this vivid episode started a procession of all the ages of women who had been the sport of conquest since their common mother, Eve, lost Paradise by her simplicity: the Jewish maidens carried to Babylon, the Gothic virgins dragged at the horse-tails of the Moors, the daughters of Palestine and Byzantium consigned to Arab sensualists, and made to follow their nomadic tents, and the almond-eyed damsels of China surrendered by their parents to the wild Kalmucks, to be beaten and starved on every cold plain of Asia, till life was laid down with neither hope nor fear.

"I am happier than millions of my sex," Vesta said; "my captor does not despise me, at least. Perhaps he will treat me kinder than I think, and give me time to draw towards him without this deadly pain and shame."

Then she almost repented of her hasty decision to marry this night, instead of after longer acquaintance, which Mr. Milburn, no doubt, would have granted, and his words were remembered with accusation: "What will the world say to your marriage after a single day's acquaintance with me?" "Will this haste not be repented, or become a subject of reproach to you?" Was it too late to recall her words, and ask for delay?

"No," thought Vesta, "I am to keep, at least, my mind maiden and chaste, instead of playing the unstable coquette with that. I will not let him begin to think me weak and changeful already."

To see if there was the least glimmer of relief from this marriage Vesta crossed to her mother's room, and found Mrs. Custis with her head wrapped in handkerchiefs steeped in cologne, and a vial of laudanum in her hand, and in a condition bordering on hysteria.

"Mamma," said poor Vesta, "are you in pain?"

"Oh!" screamed Mrs. Custis, "I am just dying here of cruelty and brutality. Your father is a villain. I'll have that rascal, Milburn, killed. Go get me ink and paper, daughter, and sit here and write me a letter to my brother, Allan McLane, in Baltimore. He shall settle with Judge Custis for this robbery, and take you and me back to Baltimore, leaving your father to go to the almshouse or the jail, I don't care which."

"Mother," exclaimed Vesta, "what a sin! to abuse poor father now in all his trouble!"

"Trouble!" echoed Mrs. Custis, mockingly, "what trouble has he had, I would like to know? Living in the woods like a Turk among his barefooted forest concubines! Spending my money, raked and scraped by my poor father in the sugar importation, to make puddle iron out of the swamp, and be considered a smart man! The family is broken up. We are paupers, and now 'it is save yourself.' I'll take care of you if I can, but your father may starve for any aid I will give him."

"Then he shall have the only aid in my power, mother," said Vesta, decisively.

"Your aid!" Mrs. Custis exclaimed. "What have you got? Your jewels, I suppose? How long will they keep him? You had better keep your jewels, girl, for your wedding, and have it come quickly, for marriage is now your only salvation."

"My last jewel shall go, then," Vesta said, with a pale resolution that darted through her veins like ice.

"Save your jewels," Mrs. Custis continued, "and choose a husband before this thing is noised abroad! You have a good large list to select from. There is your cousin, Chase McLane, crazy for you, and with an estate in Kent. There is that young fool Carroll, with thousands of acres on the western shore, and the widower Hynson of King George, Virginia, with eighty slaves and his stables full of race-horses. You can marry any of these Dennis boys, or take Captain Ringgold of Frederick, who lives in elegance at West Point, or be mistress of Tench Purvience's mansion on Monument Square in Baltimore. All you have to do is to write a letter, saying: 'I expect you,' or, what is better, take to-morrow's steamer for Baltimore and use your Uncle Allan's house and become engaged and married there."

"Mamma," Vesta spoke without rebuke, only with a sad, confirmed feeling of her destiny, "I could be capable of deceiving any of those gentlemen if I could so heartlessly leave my father."

"Deceiving!" Mrs. Custis remarked, filling her palm and brow with the cologne. "What is man's whole work with a woman but deceit? To court her for her money, to kiss her into taking her money out of good mortgages and putting it into bog iron ore? To tell her when past middle life that she has nothing to live upon, except the charity of the public, or her reluctant friends. All this for an experiment! The Custis family are all knaves or fools. Your father is a monster."

Vesta went to her mother's side and bathed her forehead.

"Dear mamma," she said, "let you and I do something for ourselves, while papa looks around and finds something to do. We can rent a house in Princess Anne and open a seminary. I can teach French and music, you can be the matron and do the correspondence and business, and if papa is at a loss for larger occupation he can lecture on history and science. Our friends will send their children to us, and we shall never be separated. I will give up the thought of marriage and live for you two."

Mrs. Custis made a gesture of impatience.

"And be an old maid!" she blurted. "That is insufferable. What are all these accomplishments and charms for but a husband, and what is he for but to provide bread and clothes. Don't be as crazy as your unprincipled father! Try no experiments! Drop philanthropy! Money is the foundation of all respectability."

Vesta thought to herself: "Can that be so? Does it not, then, justify the man who solicits me in his means of getting money? Mother"—Vesta spoke—"you would have me marry, then?"

"There is no would about it," answered Mrs. Custis. "You *must* marry!"

"Marry immediately?"

"Yes, the sooner the better, to a rich man. Have you picked out one?"

"Give me your blessing, and I will try," Vesta said; "I think I know such a one."

Mrs. Custis kissed her daughter, and moaned about her poor head and lost marriage portion, and Vesta set out to look for her father.

She found him as described, in the luxury of tears and squab, as comfortable among his negro servants as in the state legislature or at the head of society, and they wrapped up in his condescension and misfortunes.

As Vesta saw the curious scene of such patriarchal democracy in the old kitchen, she wondered if

that voluptuous endowment of her father was not the happy provision to make marriage unions tolerable, and social revulsions philosophical. Something of regret that she had not more of the animal faintly grew upon her sad smile when she considered that wherever her father went he made welcome and warmth, as she already felt at the picture of him, after parting with her apathetic mother.

"Roxy," said Vesta, as she left the kitchen, "do you go up to my mother and stay with her all this night. Make your spread there beside her bed. Virgie, put on your hood and carry a letter for me, —I will write it in the library."

She sat before her father, he too undecided to speak, and seeing by her fixed expression that it was no time for loquacity. She sealed the letter with wax, and, Virgie coming in, her father heard the direction she gave with curiosity greater than his embarrassment:

"Take this to Rev. William Tilghman. Give it to him only, and see that he reads it, Virgie, before you leave him. If he asks you any questions, tell him please to do precisely what this note says, and, as he is my friend, not to disappoint me."

The girl's steps were hardly out of hearing when Vesta opened the drawer of the library-table and took out a package of papers tied with a string. She unloosed it, and her father recognized from where he sat his notes of hand and mortgages.

"Gracious God, my darling!" exclaimed Judge Custis, "how came you by those papers?"

"They are to be mine to-night, father—in one hour. The moment they become mine they will be yours."

"Why, Vessy," said the Judge, "if they are yours even to keep a minute, the shortest way with them is up the chimney!"

He made a stride forward to take them from her hand. She laid them in her lap and looked at him so calmly that he stopped.

"You may burn the house, papa," she said, "it is still your own. But these papers you could only burn by a crime. It would be cheating an honorable man."

"Honorable! Who?" the Judge exclaimed.

"He who is to be my husband."

"You marry Meshach Milburn!" shouted the Judge, "O curse of God!—not him?"

"Yes, this night," answered Vesta; "I respect him. I hold these obligations by his trust in me. They are my engagement ring."

Judge Custis raised a loud howl like a man into whom a nail is driven, and fell at his daughter's feet and clasped her knees.

"This is to torture me," he cried; "he has not dared to ask you, Vesta?"

"Yes, and my word is passed, father. Shall that word, the word of a Custis, be less than a Milburn's faith. By the love he bore me, Mr. Milburn gave me these debts for my dower—a rare faith in one so prudent. If I do not marry him, they will be given back to him this night."

"Then give them back, my child, and save your soul and your purity, lest I live to be cursed with the sight of my noble daughter's shame? This marriage will be unholy, and the censure to follow it will be the bankruptcy of more than our estate—of our simple fame and old family respect. We have friends left who would help us. If you marry Milburn, they will all despise and repudiate us."

"I do not believe it," said Vesta. "The sense and courage of that gentleman—he is a gentleman, for I have seen him, and a gentleman of many gifts—will compel respect even where false pride and family pretension appear to put him down. Who that underrates him will make any considerable sacrifice to assist us? Your sons,—will they do it? Then by what right do they decide my marriage choice? No, father, I only do my part to support our house in its extremity, as these gentlemen and others have done before."

She pointed to the old portraits of Custises on the wall. If any of them looked dissatisfied, he met a countenance haughty as his own.

"Vesta," her father called, "you know you do not love this man?"

Looking back a minute at the longing in his face, which now wore the solicitude of personal affection, she melted under it.

"No, father," she said, with a burst of tears. "I love you."

She threw her arms around him and kissed him long and fondly, both weeping together. He went into a fit of grief that admitted of no conversation till it was partly spent, and at last lay with his gray hairs folded to her heaving bosom, where the compensation of his love made her sacrifice more precious.

"I feel that I am doing right, father," she said tenderly "Till now I have had my doubts. No other young heart is wronged by my taking this step; I have never been engaged, and it now seems

providential, as I could not then have gone to your assistance without injuring myself and another; and your debts are too great for any but this man to settle them. Your life has been one long sacrifice for me, and not a cloud has darkened above me till this day, giving me the first shower of sorrow, which I trust will refresh my soul, and make its humility grow. Oh, father, it would rejoice me so much if you could respond to my sacrifice with a better life!"

"God help me, I will!" he sobbed.

"That is very comforting to me. I will not enumerate your omissions, dear father, but if this important step in my life does not arrest some sad tendencies I see in you, the disappointment may break me down. Intemperance in you—a judge, a gentleman, a husband, and a father—is a deformity worse than Mr. Milburn's honest, unfashionable hat. Do you not feel happier that my husband is not to be a drunkard?"

"He has not that vice, thank God!" admitted the Judge.

"Be his better example, father, for I hope to see you influence him to be kind to me, and the sight of you walking downward in his view will degrade me more than bearing his name or sharing his eccentricities. Oh, if you love me, let not your dear soul slide out of the knowledge of God!"

"Pray for me, dear child! My feet are slippery and my knees are weak."

"Begin from this moment to lean on Heaven," said Vesta. "It is better than this world's consideration. Oh, what would strengthen me now but God's approval, though I go into a captivity I dreamed not of. Even there I can take my harp beneath the willows, like them in Babylon, and praise my Maker."

She sat at her piano and sang the hymn the young consumptive, Rev. Mr. Eastburn, composed in her grandmother's house, taking it from the Episcopal collection:

"O holy, holy, holy Lord!  
Bright in Thy deeds and in Thy name,  
Forever be Thy name adored,  
Thy glories let the world proclaim!

"O Jesus, Lamb once crucified  
To take our load of sins away,  
Thine be the hymn that rolls its tide  
Along the realms of upper day!

"O Holy Spirit from above,  
In streams of light and glory given,  
Thou source of ecstasy and love,  
Thy praises ring through earth and heaven!"

As her voice in almost supernatural clearness and sweetness filled the two large rooms, and died away in melody, she rose and kissed her father again, and said, "Courage, love! we shall be happy still."

A knock at the door and there entered the young clergyman she had sent for, a sandy-haired, large-blue-eyed, boyish person, with a fair skin easily freckled, and a look of youthful chivalry under his sincere Christian humility.

"Good-evening, William," Vesta spoke; "I did not expect to see you till we reached the church. But sit, and I will answer your questions. Father, you are to go with me to the church—you and Virgie. Mr. Tilghman is to marry us."

"Now, Vesta," spoke the young man, as her father left the room, "whom are you going to marry, cousin, in such haste as this?"

"Did you have the church made ready, William, as I requested?"

"I did. The sexton is there now, lighting the fire."

"I thought you were loyal as ever, William, and depended upon you. Thanks, dear friend! I am to marry Mr. Meshach Milburn at nine o'clock."

A cloud came over the young man's serene face, though his features retained their habitual sweetness.

"I can marry you, cousin, even to Meshach Milburn," he said, "if that is your wish. Why do you marry him?"

"It is not loyal in you to ask, William, but I will give you this answer: he has asked me. He is also devoted and rich. To avoid excitement, possibly some opposition, though it would be vain, we are to be married without further notice, and papa is to give me away."

Silent for a moment, the young rector exclaimed:

"Cousin Vesta, have I lived to see you a mercenary woman? Has this man's asserted wealth found you cold enough to want it, when love has been so generously offered you by almost every young man of station in this region, and from abroad—even by me?" he said, after a pause. "The scar is

on my heart yet, cousin. No, I will not believe such a thing of you. There is a reason back of the fact."

"William, if you respected me as you once said you ever would, like your sister, you would not add this night the weight of your doubt to my other burdens, but take my hand with all the strength of yours, and lift me onward."

"I will," said the rector, swallowing a dry spot in his throat. "Though it was a bitter time I had when you refused me, cousin, the pain led me to my vows at the altar where I minister, and I have had the assistance of your beautiful music there, like the angel I seem to have seen reserved for me, in place of you, sitting at your side. And I know that this marriage is, on your part, pure as my sister's. No further will I inquire—what penalty you are paying for another, what mystery I cannot pierce."

He raised his hands above her head: "The peace of God that passeth understanding, abide with you, dear sister, forever!"

He went out with his eyes filled with tears, but hers were full of heavenly light, feeling his benediction to be righteous.

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## CHAPTER XII.

### PRINCESS ANNE FOLKS.

The Washington Tavern, or, rather, the brick sidewalk which came up to its doors, and was the lounging-place for all the grown loiterers in Princess Anne, had been in the greatest activity all that Saturday afternoon, since it was reported by Jack Wonnell, who set himself to be a spy on Meshach's errand, that the steeple-hat had disappeared in the broad mansion of Judge Daniel Custis.

Jack Wonnell had a worn bell-crown on his head, exposed to all kinds of weather, as he was in the habit of fishing in these beaver-hats, and never owned an umbrella in his life. He lived near Meshach, in the old part of Princess Anne, near the bridge, and was the subject of the money-lender's scorn and contempt, as tending to make a mutual eccentricity ridiculous. Milburn had been willing to be hated for his hat, but Jack Wonnell made all unseasonable hats laughable, the more so that he was nearly as old a wearer of his bell-crowns as Milburn of the steeple-top. Although he had no such reasons of reverence and stern consistency as his rich neighbor, he seemed to have, in his own mind, and in plain people's, a better defence for violating the standard taste of dress.

The people said that Jack Wonnell, being a poor man, could not buy all the fashions, and was merely wearing out a bargain; that he knew he was ridiculous, and set no such conceit on his absurdity as that grim Milburn; and they rather enjoyed his playing the Dromio to that Antipholus, and turning into farce the comedy of Meshach's error.

Jack Wonnell had partly embraced his bargain by the example of Meshach. A frivolous, unambitious, childish fellow, amusing people, obliging people, running errands, driving stage, gardening, fishing, playing with the lads, courting poor white bound girls, incontinent, inoffensive, he had been impelled to bid off his lot of old hats by Jimmy Phœbus saying:

"Jack, dirt cheap! Last you all your life! Better hats than old Meshach Milburn's. You'll drive his'n out of town."

To his infinite amusement and dignity, his appearance in the bell-crown hats attracted the severe regard of Milburn, and set the little town on a grin. The joke went on till Jimmy Phœbus, Judge Custis, and some others prompted Jack Wonnell, with the promise of a gallon of whiskey, to ask Meshach to trade the steeple-top for the bell-crown. The intense look of outrage and hate, with the accompanying menace his townsman returned, really frightened Jack, and he had prudently avoided Milburn ever since, while keeping as close a watch upon his movements and whereabouts as upon some incited bull-dog, liable to appear anywhere.

In this way Jack Wonnell had followed Meshach to the court-house corner, where stood Judge Custis's brick bank—which, of late, had done little discounting—and, from the open space between it and the court-house in its rear, he peeped after Milburn up the main cross street, called Prince William Street, which stopped right at Judge Custis's gate. There, in the quiet of early afternoon, he heard the knocker sound, saw the door open, and beheld the Entailed Hat disappear in the great doorway. Then, scarcely believing himself, Wonnell ran back to the tavern, and exclaimed:

"May I be struck stone dead ef ole Meshach ain't gwyn in to the Jedge's!"

"You're a liar!" said Jimmy Phœbus, promptly, catching Jack by the back of the neck, and pushing his bell-crown down till it mashed over his nose and eyes, "What do you mean by tellin' a splurge like that?"

"I seen him, Jimmy," was the bell-crowned hero's smothered cry; "if I didn't, hope I may die!"



"What did he go there for?"

"I can't tell, Jimmy, to save my life!"

"Whoo-oo-p!" cried Phœbus, waving his old straw hat, itself nearly out of season. "If this is a lie, Jack Wonnell, I'll make you eat a raw fish. Levin"—to Levin Dennis—"you slip up by Custis's, and see if ole Meshach hain't passed around the fence, or dropped along Church Street and hid in the graveyard, where he sometimes goes. I'll stay yer, and make Jack Wonnell account for sech lyin'!"

Levin Dennis, a boyish, curly-haired, graceful-going orphan, walked up the cross street, passing Church lane and the Back alley, and slowly turned the long front of Teackle Hall, and went out the parallel street towards the lower bridge on the Deil's Island road, till he could turn and see the three great-chimneyed buildings of Teackle Hall lifting their gables and lightning-rods to his sight in their reverse, the partly stripped trees allowing that manorial pile to stand forth in much of its length and imposing proportions. Lest he might not be suspected of curiosity, Levin continued on to the bridge at Manokin landing, and counted the geese come out of a lawn on a willowy cape there, and take to water like a fleet of white schooners. He ascended the rise beyond the bridge, and looked over to see if Meshach might have taken a walk down the road. Then returning, he swept the back view of Princess Anne, from the low bluff of cedars on another inhabited cape on the right, which bordered the Manokin marshes, to the vale of the little river at the left, as it descended between Meshach's storehouse and the ancient Presbyterian church of the Head of Manokin, seated among its gravestones between its hitching-stalls and its respectable parsonage manse. Nothing was visible of the owner of the distinguishing hat.

So Levin Dennis returned more slowly around the north wing of Teackle Hall, looking at every window, as if Meshach might be there; but nothing did he see except the dog, which, to Levin's eye, appeared uneasy, and ran out of the gate to make friends with him.

"So, Turk!" Dennis muttered, patting the dog's head, "no wonder you're scared, boy, to see old Meshach Milburn come in."

Teackle Hall, according to rumor, was built at the close of the revolutionary war by an uncle, or grand-uncle, of Judge Custis, who came from Virginia, somewhere between Accomac and Northampton counties, and went into shipbuilding on the Manokin, adding some privateering and banking, too, and once, going abroad, he brought back from some ducal residence the plan of Teackle Hall, as Judge Custis found it on his coming into the property.

It was nearly two hundred feet in length, and would have made three respectable churches, standing in line, with their sharp gables to the front, the bold wings connected with the bolder centre by habitable curtains or colonnades, in which panels of slate or grained stone made an attic story above the lines of windows, and lintels and sills of the same stone, with high keystones, capped every window in the many-sided surface of the whole stately block, all built of brick brought over in vessels from the western shore, or possibly from the North, or Europe, and painted a gray stone color.

Its central gable had deep carved eaves, and a pediment-base to shed rain, and a large circular window in that pediment. The two mighty chimneys of that centre were parallel with the ridge of the roof, and rose nearly from the middle of the two opposite slopes, bespeaking four great fireplaces below, and a flat, low-galleried observatory upon the roof gave views of portions of the bay on clear days.

The wings of Teackle Hall had similar, but lower, chimneys, astraddle of their roofs, and forest trees—oak, gum, holly, and pine, with a great willow, and some tawny cedars, and bushes of rose and lilac—dotted the grassy lawn. The Virginia creeper and wild ivy climbed here and there to the upper windows, and a tall, broad, panelled doorway, opening on a low, open portico platform with steps, seemed to say to visitors: "Men of port and consideration come in this way, but inferiors enter by some of the smaller doors!"

Levin Dennis, who had never sounded that knocker, though he had often taken his terrapins to the kitchen, stared in concern at the door where it was reported Meshach Milburn had gone in, and would hardly have been surprised if that intruder had now appeared at one of the three deep windows over the door with a firebrand in his hand.

Levin muttered to himself: "Rich folks, I reckon, must make a trade. Maybe it's hosses—maybe not. I know it ain't hats."

He then turned down to the Episcopal Church, only a square from Teackle Hall, and on a street between it and the main street, though in a retired situation, its front turned from the town, and looking over the fields and farms, like a good pastor who is warming at the fire with his hands behind him.

A single-storied, long, low edifice of British bricks, with its semicircular choir next the street, and, adjoining the choir, a spire of more modern brickwork built up to an open bell cupola, and open ribbed dome, also of brick, tipped with a gilded cross, the ivy was greenly matted all round the choir, and ran along the side of the church, where Levin Dennis walked under four tall, round-topped windows of stained and wired glass, till he came to the end gable or front of the church, standing in unworldly contemplation of the graveyard and the back fields.

There, since the Stamp Act Congress, or when Princess Anne was not half a century old, the old church had taken its stand, backed up to the town, recluse from its gossip. Between its tall round

doors, with little window-panes like spectacles let into their panels, the ivy vine arose in form like the print of The Crucified, reaching out its stems and tendrils wide of the one glorified window in the gable, in whose red dyes glimmered the triumph of a bloody countenance. The mossy walls, often scraped, the mossified pavement, the greenish tombs of marble under the maples and firs, showed the effect of shade, solitude, and humidity upon all things of brick in this climate, where wood was already rising into favor as building material, but to the detraction of picturesqueness and all the appearance of antiquity.

No sign of the unpopular townsman was to be seen anywhere, but, as Levin Dennis peeked around the foliage in the yard he beheld a man he had never observed before, and of a tall, bearded, suspicious, and ruffianly exterior, lying flat on the top of a memorial vault, with his head and feet half concealed in some cedar brambles.

"Hallo!" Dennis shouted.

"What do you hallo for?" spoke the man; "don't you never come to a churchyard to git yer sins forgive?"

"No," said the terrapin-finder, "not till I knows I has some sins."

"What air you prowlin' about the church then fur, anyhow?" demanded the stranger, standing up in his boots, into which his trousers were tucked; and he stood such a straight, long-limbed, lithe giant of a man that Levin saw he could never run away, even if the intruder meant to chew him up right there.

"I ain't a prowlin', friend," answered Levin Dennis. "I was jess a lookin'."

"Lookin' fur what, fur which, fur who?" said the man, taking a step towards Dennis, who felt himself to be no bigger than one of the other's long, ditch-leaping, good-for-wading legs.

"Why, I was jess a follerin' a man—that is, friend, not 'zackly a man, but a hat."

"A hat?" The man walked up to Dennis this time, and stood over him like a pine-tree over a sucker. "Yer's yer hat," pulling an old straw article, over-worn, from Dennis's head. "No wind's a blowin' to blow hats into graveyards. Or did you set yer hat under a hen in yere, by a stiffy?"

Dennis looked up, laughing, though not all at ease, but his amiable want of either intelligence or fear, which belong near together, made his most natural reply to the pertinacious intruder a disarming grin.

"No, man," Dennis said, "it was a hat on a man's head—ole Meshach Milburn's steeple-top. I was a follerin' of him."

"Stow your wid!" the man clapped the hat back on Levin's head. "You're a poor hobb, anyhow. Is thair any niggers to sell hereby?"

"Oh, that's your trade, nigger buyin'? Well, there's mighty few niggers to sell in Prencess Anne. Unless"—here a flash of intelligence shone in Levin's eyes—"unless that's what's took ole Meshach Milburn to Jedge Custis's. He goes nowhar unless there's trouble or money for *him*."

"And where is Jedge Custis's, you rum chub?"

"Yander!" pointing to Teackle Hall.

"Ha! that is a Judge's? And niggers? Broke, too! Well, it's no hank for a napper bloke. So bingavast! Git! Whar's the tavern?"

"I'm a-goin' right thair," answered Levin, much relieved. "You must be a Yankee, or some other furriner, sir."

"No, hobb! I'm workin' my lay back to Delaware from Norfolk, by pungy to Somers's cove. Show me to the tavern and I'll sluice your gob. I'll treat you to swig."

At the prospect of a drink, of which he was too fond, Levin led the way to the Washington Tavern, where there was a material addition to the attendance since Jimmy Phœbus had called to every passer-by that Meshach Milburn, on the testimony of Jack Wonnell, had actually been and gone and disappeared in Judge Custis's doorway, and nearly a dozen townsfolks were now discussing the why and wherefore, when, suddenly, Levin Dennis came out of Church Street with a man over six feet high, of a prodigious pair of legs, and arms nearly as long, with a cold, challenging, yet restless pair of blue eyes, and with reddish-brown beard and hair, coarse and stringy. The free negro, Samson Hat, being a little way off, was observed to cast a beaming glance of admiration at the athletic proportions of the stranger, who looked as if he might shoulder an ox, or outrun a horse.

"Hallo!" exclaimed Jimmy Phœbus, looking the stranger over boldly, yet with indifference, at last. "You're cuttin' a splurge, Levin, too. Where's Meshach?"

"Can't see no sign of him, Jimmy. Guess Jack Wonnell hit it, an' he's gone in the Jedge's. Mebbe he's buyin' of Jedge Custis's niggers. That's this gentleman's business."

Jimmy Phœbus, himself no slight specimen of a man, gave another glance at the stranger from the black cherries of his eyes, and, apparently no better satisfied with the inspection, made no sign of acquaintance.

"Whoever ain't too nice to drink with a nigger buyer," said the man, independently, "can come in and set up his drink, with my redge, for I'm rhino-fat and just rotten with flush."

There was a pause for somebody to take the initiative, but Jimmy Phœbus, turning his big, broad Greekish face and small forehead on the stranger, remarked:

"I never tuk a drink with a nigger buyer yit, and, by smoke! I reckon I'm too old to begin."

The man stopped and measured Jimmy up in his eye.

"Humph!" he said with a sneer, "you look to be a little more than half nigger yourself. If I was dead broke I'd run you to market an' git my price for you."

"No doubt of it whatever, as fur as you're concerned," said Jimmy, unexcited, while the man pushed Levin Dennis in towards the bar.

Either the new movement of Meshach Milburn, or the example of the strange man, set Princess Anne in a tipsy condition that day. The stranger was full of money, and treating indiscriminately, and the pavement before the hotel was continually beset with the loiterers, and the bar took money and spread mischief. So when, an hour after dark, the unpopular townsman, avoiding the crowd, passed by on the opposite side of the street, nearest his own lodging, one of the loudest and most unanimous yells he had ever heard in his experience, rang out from the Washington Tavern.

"Steeple-top! Steeple-top! Old Meshach's loose. Whoo-o-op!"

"Laugh on!" thought Meshach, "till now I never knew the meaning of 'let them laugh who win.'"

He felt confirmed in his idea to be married in the Raleigh tile, and when he saw Samson Hat, Milburn said: "Boy, brush all my clothing well. Then go back to the livery stable, and order a buggy to be ready for you at ten o'clock. At that hour set out for Berlin; and bring back Rhody Holland with you in the morning."

"It's more dan thirty mile, marster, an' a sandy road."

"No matter. Take it slow. I will write you a letter to carry. Samson, I am going to be married to-night to the rose of Princess Anne."

"Dar's on'y one," said Samson. "Not Miss Vesty Custis?"

"Yes, Samson. Princess Anne may now have something to howl at. The poor girl may be lonesome, as, no doubt, she will be dropped everywhere on my account, and not a soul can I think of, to be my young lady's maid, unless it is Rhody."

"Yes, Marster, wid all your money you're pore in friends; in women-friends you is starved."

"You may go with me to the church," said Meshach, "I suppose you want to see me married."

"Yes, sir. Dat I do! Wouldn't miss dat fo' my Christmas gift. I 'spect dat gal Virgie will come wid Miss Vesty to de cer'mony, marster."

"Perhaps so. You are not thinking of love, too, Samson?"

"Well, don't know, marster. Virgie's a fine gal, sho' I am a little old, Marster Milburn, but I'll have to look out for myseff, I 'spec, now you done burnt down my spreen' place. Dar's a wife comin' in yar now. So if you don't speak a good word fur me wid some o' Miss Vesty's gals, I'm aboot done."

"Well, boy," Meshach said, "you have got the same chance I had: the upper hand. I owe you a nice little sum in wages, and you may be able to buy one of the Custis housemaids, and set her free, and marry her, or, be her owner. You are a free man."

Samson shook his head gravely.

"Dat won't do among niggers," he said. "Niggers never kin play de upper hand in love, like white people. Dey has to do it by love itseff: by kindness, marster."

Before nine o'clock Milburn and his negro left the old store by the town bridge, and passing by the river lane called Front Street, into Church Street, walked back of the hotel, avoiding its triflers, and reached the church in a few minutes unobserved. The long windows shed some light, however, but as it was Saturday night, this was attributed, by the few who noticed it, to preparations for the next Sabbath morning. Before setting out, Samson Hat, observing his employer to shake a trifle, asked him if a dram of whiskey would not be proper.

"No, boy; this is a wedding without wine. I shall need all my wits to find my manners."

He entered the church, and found it warmed, and the minister already present in his surplice, kneeling alone at the altar. Mr. Tilghman arose, with his youthful face very pale, and tears upon his cheeks, and seeing his neglected parishioner and the serving-man, came down the aisle.

"Mr. Milburn," he said, extending his hand, "I hope to congratulate, after this ceremony, a Christian-hearted bridegroom, and one who will take the rare charge which has fallen to him, in tender keeping. My endeavor shall be to love you, sir, if you will let me! Miss Vesta is the priestess of Princess Anne, and if you take her from our sight and hearing, even God's ministrations in this church will seem hollow, I fear."

"To me they would," said Milburn, "though from no disrespect to our pastor."

"You have been a faithful parishioner," resumed Tilghman, "during my brief labor here, as in my boyhood, when I little dreamed I should fill that desk. You know, perhaps, that it was from the hopeless love of my cousin Custis, I fled to God for consolation, and he made me his humble minister."

"I have heard so," said Milburn; "or, rather, I have seen so."

"Pardon my mentioning a subject so irrelevant to you, sir, but, though I have surrendered every vain emotion for my cousin, her happiness is a part of my religion, and this sudden conclusion of her marriage, about which I have asked only one question, has urged me to throw myself upon your sympathy."

"What do you ask, William Tilghman? No matter—your request is granted."

"How have I won your favor?" the young rector asked, somewhat surprised.

Milburn mechanically picked his hat from a pew, and held it a little way up.

"You were the only boy in this village who never cried after this hat."

"Then it was probably overlooked by me. I was like the other boys, mischievous, before my spirits had been depressed by unhappy love, and I did not know I was any exception to their habits."

"It was grateful to see that exception," said Milburn; "hooted people make fine distinctions."

"Oh, Mr. Milburn, forgive the boys! They are made for laughter, and little causes excite it, like dogs to bark, from health and exercise—scarcely more than that. The request I make is to let me be your friend, because I have been your wife's! Frankness becomes my calling, and I think you need friendly, cordial surroundings to bring out your usefulness, and give you the freedom that will take constraint out of your family life, and, without diminishing your good sensibilities, dispel any morbid ones. This will open a way for Vesta to see her domestic career, which, otherwise, might become so rapidly contracted as to disappoint you both. You have seen her the idol of her wide circle, free as a bird, indulged by her kind, and by Providence also, till joy and grace, beauty and health, faith and hope live abundant in her, and you are the beneficiary of it all. Her society hereafter you must control. May I become your friend, and let my love for your wife recommend me to your confidence, as you to mine and to my prayers?"

"Have I another friend already?" exclaimed Milburn, his voice quivering. "What wealth she brings me never known before! William, you will be ever welcome to me."

They clasped hands upon it, and old Samson Hat, sitting back, was heard to chuckle aloud such a warming laugh, that Meshach's response to it, in a sudden pallid shivering, seemed slightly out of keeping. He was recalled, however, by the entrance of Judge Custis with his daughter, and her maid, Virgie.

Vesta was very pale, but neither shrinking nor negative. On the contrary, she supported her father rather than received his support, and Milburn saw the Judge's worn, helpless face, with the pride faded from it, and pity for his daughter absorbing every other feeling of depression.

He wore his best cloth suit, with the coat tails falling to his knees behind, the body cut square to the hips, and the collar raised high upon his stock of white enamelled English leather. His low-buttoned vest exposed his shirt-buttons of crystal and gilt, and a ruffle, ironed by Roxy's slender hands with nimble touches, parted down the middle like sea foam on shell, and similar ruffles at the wrists were clasped by chain buttons of pearl and silver. His vest was of figured Marseilles stuff, and gaiters of the same material partly covered his shoes; and his heavy seal, with his coat of arms upon it, fell from a pale ribbon at his fob. Debtor though he was, and answering at the bar of the church to a heavy personal and family judgment, his large and flowing lines of body, deeply cut chin, full eyes, and natural height and grace of stature made him a marked and noble presence anywhere.

Vesta Custis, dropping off a mantle of blue velvet at a touch of her maid, stood in a party dress of white silk, the neck, shoulders, and arms bare; and, as she halted a minute in the aisle, Virgie struck the cloth sandals from her mistress's white slippers of silk, and, removing her hood of home-embroidered cloth, a veil of white fell to her train. The dingy light from the lamps of whale-oil gathered, like poor folks' children's marvelling eyes, around the pair of diamonds in her delicately moulded, but alert and generous ears. Her fine gold watch-chain, twice dependent from her neck, disappeared in the snowy mould of her bosom, on whose heaving drift swam a magnolia-bud and blossom, each with a leaf. Her father's picture, in a careful miniature set in pearls, lay higher on her breast, fastened by a pearl necklace. Her hands were covered with white gloves, and her arms were without ornament. Her hair, dropping in dark ringlets around her forehead and temples, was combed upward farther back, and then gathered around a pearl comb in high braids, and the plentiful loops drooped to her shoulder.

Milburn glanced at the treasures of her peerless bodily charms, never till now revealed to his sight, and their splendor almost made him afraid.

Never had he been at a theatre, a ball, or anywhere from which he could have foreseen a swan-like neck and bosom sculptured like these, and arms as white as the limbs of the silver-maple, and warmed with bridal-life and modesty.

Her lips, parted and red, her great rich eyes a goddess might have commanded through, with their eyebrows of raven-black, like entrances to the caves of the Cumæan sibyl, her small head borne as easily upon her neck as a dove upon a sprig—all flashed upon Milburn's thrilled yet flinching soul, as the revelation of a divinity.

As she stepped forward he spoke to her with that bold instinct or ecstasy she had observed when she first addressed him in her father's house, ten hours before.

"You have dressed yourself for me?" he said.

"Sir, such as I could command upon this necessity I thought to do you honor with."

"For *me*, to look so beautiful! what can I say? You are very lovely!"

"It is gracious of you to praise me. Shall we wait, or are you ready?"

He gave her his hand, unable to speak again, and she was calm enough to notice that his hand was now hot, as if he had fever. Her father, at her side, reached out also, and took the bridegroom's other hand:

"Milburn," he said, huskily, "this is no work of mine. My daughter has my consent only because it is her will."

"The nobler to me for that," Milburn spoke, with his countenance strangely flushed. "What shall we do, my lady?"

"Give me your arm; not that one. This is right. Have you brought a ring, sir?"

"Yes." He drew from his vest pocket a little, lean gold ring, worth hardly half a dollar.

"It was my poor mother's," he said.

Without another word she walked forward, her arm drawing him on, Virgie following, and her father bringing up the rear. Samson Hat, feeling uneasy at being awarded no part in the ceremony, slipped up the aisle as far as the big, stiff-aproned stove in the middle of the church, behind which he ducked his body, but kept his head and faculties in the centre of the events.

Mr. Tilghman had preceded them in his surplice, and taking his place at the altar, with his countenance pale as death, he read the exordium in an altered voice: "Dearly beloved, we are gathered together here, and in the face of this company, to join together this man and this woman in holy matrimony."

"What 'company' is here?" thought Vesta. "Not alone these poor negroes and my father; no, I feel behind me, looking on, the generations of our pride and helpless ease, the worthy younger suitors I have been too exacting and particular to see the consideration and merits of, the golden hours I might have improved my mind in, with brilliant opportunities I was not jealous of, and which will be mine no more, because I had not trimmed my virgin lamp; and so I slept away my girlhood, till now I awaken at the cry, 'The bridegroom cometh,' and I behold! Yes, I have been a foolish virgin, and am surprised when my fate is here! Perhaps my guardian angel also stands behind me, the cross advanced that I must take, my crown concealed; but somewhere, midway of this journey of life, she may give it to me, and say, 'Well done!'"

"This 'company,'" thought Milburn, with swimming head, "gathered to see me marry! what company? I seem to feel, besides these negroes, my sole spectators, the populous forest peering on, the barefoot generations, the illiterate broods, the instinctive parents, the sandy graves. They give forth my lost tribe, and all cry at me, 'Go, leave us, proud one! despiser, go!' Yet there is one I see, pure as my bride, white as my captive's bosom, her soul all in her believing eyes, and saying, 'Oh, my son, it is a woman like me that has come into your life, and her heart is very tender, and, by your mother's dying love! be kind to the poor stranger you have bought.'"

He answered, "I will!" aloud, and it seemed almost a miraculous coincidence that it was a response to the minister's question, till he heard the corresponding inquiry put to his bride in the clergyman's low, but gentlest, tones:

"Wilt thou obey him, and serve him, love, honor, and keep him, in sickness and in health; and forsaking all others, keep thee only unto him, so long as ye both shall live?"

"I will!" spoke the Judge's daughter, clear as music, and the Judge drew a long, deep sigh, saturated with tears, as if from the deepest wells of grief.

He could not distinctly answer, as he joined her hand to the minister's. The minister lost his office and speech for a moment, joining her hand to the bridegroom's. The slave-girl burst into a wail she could not control, and only Vesta stood calm as her bridegroom, putting her cool, moist hand in his palm of fire, and waited to repeat the Church's deliberate language.

When both had made this solemn promise, she reached for the little ring, and gave it to her old lover, the minister, and Virgie loosed her glove. Mr. Tilghman, his tears silently falling upon his book, passed the ring to Meshach, and saw its tiny circle hoop her white finger round, no bigger than a straw, yet formidable as the martyr's chain. His prayers were said with deep feeling, and he pronounced them man and wife. Then, shaking Meshach's hand, he said, with his boyish countenance bright as faith could make it:

"My friend, may I take my kiss?"

Meshach nodded his head, but his face was like a ball of fire, and he hardly knew what was asked. Mr. Tilghman kissed Vesta, saying,

"Cousin, your husband is my friend, and love and friendship both surround you now. May your happiness be, like your goodness, securest when you surmount difficulties, like those birds that cannot float at perfect grace till they have struggled above the clouds."

"May I kiss you now?" Milburn said, gazing with a wild look upon her rich eyes.

As she obediently raised her lips, a strange, warm, husky breath, not natural nor even passionate, came from his nostrils. The Judge, looking at this—no pleasing scene to him, the fairest Custis in two hundred years being devoured before his sight—exclaimed within his soul,

"Is Meshach drinking? His eyes look fiery."

So, after kissing his daughter also, and saying, "May God reward you with triumphs and compensation beyond our fears!" the Judge said:

"Milburn, I suppose, in the sudden conclusion of this union, you have made no arrangements as to where you will go; so come, of course, to Teackle Hall, and make it your home."

"Is that your wish, my dear one?"

Vesta replied, "Yes. But it is yours to choose, sir."

"You have some business with your father for an hour," Milburn said; "meantime, I require something at my warehouse, and, as it is yet early in the night, may I leave you a little while?"

She bowed her head again, and, while they proceeded towards the church-door, lingering there, Samson took the opportunity to seize both of Virgie's hands.

"Virgie," he exclaimed, "is all dat kissin a gwyin on an' we black folks git none of it? Come hyeah, purty gal, an' kiss yer ole gran'fadder!"

Virgie consented without resistance, till Samson continued, "Oh, what peach an' honey, Virgie! Gi me anoder one! I say, Virgie, sence my marster an' your mistis have done gone an' leff us two orphans, sposen we git Mr. Tilghman to pernounce us man an' wife, too?" Then Virgie drew away.

"Samson Hat," she said, "what's that you are talking about? You ought to be ashamed of yourself. You are old enough to be my father!"

"'Deed I ain't, my love. I'm good as four o' dese new kine o' Somoset County beaux. I'm a free man. Maybe I'll sot you free too, Virgie—me an' my marster yonder. He says we better git married. 'Deed he does."

"You are just an impertinent old negro," the girl replied. "Do you suppose any well-raised girl would have a man who got rich by cleaning the Bad Man's hat? You're nothing but the devil's serving-man, sir."

"Look out dat debbil don't ketch you, den," said Samson. "You pore, foolish, believin' chile! Look out dem purty black eyes don't cry for ole Samson yit. He's done bound to marry some spring chicken, ole Samson is, an' I reckon you'll brile de tenderest, Virgie."

Virgie, indignant, but fluttered at her first real proposal, and from one of the richest men of her color in Princess Anne, hastened to tie on her young mistress's walking-shoes, and, as they all stepped from the happy old church, where Vesta's voice had so often pierced, in her flights of harmony, to a bliss that seemed to carry her soul, like a lark, to heaven's gate, that

"singing, still dost soar, and, soaring, ever singest,"

she saw fall upon the pavement of the churchyard the long, preposterous, moon-thrown hat of the bridegroom.

"Oh, what will he do with that hat, now that he has married me?" Vesta thought. "Will he continue to afflict me with it?"

Her heart sank down, so that she felt relieved when he kissed her again at the church-gate, and saying, "I will come soon, darling," went, with his man, into Princess Anne.

"Is your buggy ready harnessed, Samson?" his master asked, when they turned the court-house corner.

"Yes, marster."

At this moment a large crowd of men, comprising all the idle population in town, as well as many Saturday-night bacchanalians from the country and coasts, some standing before the tavern, others on the opposite sidewalks or gathered on the court-house corner, seeing the hatted figure of Meshach rise against the moonlight, raised the scattering cry, finally deepening into a yell, of:

"Man with the hat loose! Steeple-top! Three cheers for old Meshach's hat!"

With a minute's irresolution, as if hesitating to go through the crowd, Milburn turned into the main street, crossed it, and continued down the opposite sidewalk, on the same side with his

domicile, the jeers and jests still continuing.

"Dar's rum a workin' in dis town all arternoon, marster," his faithful negro said, "eber sence dat long man come in from de churchyard wid Levin Dennis. Look out, marster!"

He had scarcely spoken, when three men were seen to bar the way, two of them drunk, the third ugly with drink, emerging from a groggery that stood across the street from the tavern, where further beverage had been denied them. The first was Jack Wonnell. He hiccupped, cried "Steeple-top!" and slunk behind a mulberry-tree. The second man was Levin Dennis, hardly able to stand, and he sat down on the groggery step, smiling up idiotically.

The third man, rising like a giant out of his boots, with his arms swaying like loose grapevines, and his bearded face streaked with tobacco drippings, looking insolence and contempt, brought the flat of one hand fairly down on the crown of Milburn's surprising tile, with the words:

"Halloo! Yer's Goosecap! Hocus that cady, Old Gripefist!"

The hat, age being against it, wilted down on Meshach's eyes, and the heedless stroke, unconsciously powerful, staggered him.

Samson, who had drunk in the giant's qualifications with an instant's admiration, immediately drew off, seeing his master insulted, and struck the tall stranger a blow with his fist. The man reeled, rallied, and sought to grapple with Samson. That skilful pugilist bent his knees, slid his shoulders back, and, avoiding the clutch, raised, and threw his trunk forward, with the blow studied well, and planted his knuckles in the white man's eyes. The tall ruffian went down as from a bolt of lightning.

Milburn saw all this happen in a minute of time, and his eye, looking for something to defend himself, dropped on the brick pier under the groggery steps, where Levin Dennis sat, stupefied by the scene. A brick in the pier was loose, and Milburn stepped towards it. In this small interval the hardy stranger had recovered himself and staggered to his feet, and had drawn a dirk-knife.

"The ruffian oly you!" he bellowed. "Knocked down! by a nigger, too! Hell have you, then!"

As he darted forward, he described a rapid circle backward and downward with the knife, aiming to turn it through Samson's bowels, which he would have done—that valorous servant being without defence, and not so much as a pebble of stone lying on the bare plain of the soil to give him aid—had not Meshach, wresting the loose brick from the pier, aimed it at the corresponding exposed portion of the assassin's body, and struck him full in the pit of the stomach. The man's eyes rolled, and he fell, like one stone-dead, his dirk sticking in the sidewalk.

"Let him lie there," said Meshach, contemptuously. "No danger of such a dog dying! If there is time he shall mend in the jail. Take to your buggy, boy, and keep out of the way."

The negro needed no warning, as the impiety of striking a white man was forbidden in a larger book than the Bible—the book of ignorance. He disappeared through the houses and was a mile out of Princess Anne, driving fast, before the new man had raised his head from the ground.

"Where is the nigger?" he gasped, his paleface painted by his bloodshot eyes. "What kind of coves are you to let a black bloke fight a white man? I'll cut his heart out before I tip the town."

He looked around on the crew which had crossed over from the tavern; Meshach had vanished in his store at the descent of the road. Jimmy Phœbus was the only one to speak.

"Nigger buyer," he said, "if you are around this town from now till midnight, or after midnight to-morrer, Sunday night, ole Meshach Milburn will have you in that air jail till Spring. By smoke! he'll find out yer aunty's cedents, whair you goin, whair you been, what's yer splurge, an all yer hokey pokey. You've struck the Ark of the Lord this time—ole Milburn's Entailed Hat! Take my advice an' travel!"

The man washed his face at the tavern pump, turned the bank corner, and disappeared in the night towards Teackle Hall.

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## CHAPTER XIII.

### SHADOW OF THE TILE.

As Vesta and her father stepped over the sill of Teackle Hall, it seemed very dear, yet somewhat dread to them, being reclaimed again, but at the penalty of a new member of the family and he an intruder. To the library Vesta and her father went, and he threw some wood upon the low fire, and lighted the lamp and candles; then turning, he took his daughter in his arms and sobbed bitterly, repeating over the words: "What shall I do! O what shall I do!" She also yielded to the luxury of grief, but was speechless till he said:

"My darling, I have dreamed of your wedding-day many a time, but it was not like this. Music and joy, free-heartedness, a handsome, youthful bridegroom, our whole connection gathered here from the army and navy, from South, West, and North, and all happy except poor Daniel Custis,

about to lose his child!"

"Your child is not to go," Vesta whispered; "is not that a comfort?"

"I do not know. Is it my pure, poor child? Had I seen you waste with consumption, day by day, like a dying lilac-tree, with its clusters fewer every year till it deadened to the root, I could have wept in heavenly sympathy, and learned from you the way I have not walked. But, in your flower to be a forester's plucking, stripped from my stem and trodden in the sand, your pride reduced, your tastes unheeded, your heart dragged into the wigwam of a savage and made to consult his maudlin will— Oh, what shall I do!"

"I do not fear my husband like that," Vesta said, opening his arms. "My mind, I think, he will rather raise to serious things, for which I have some desire, though, I fear, no talent. Papa, something tells me that this old life we have led, easy and happy, comfortable and independent, is passing away. Our family race must learn the new lessons of the age if we would not see it retired and obscure. Is that not so?"

"I fear it is God's truth, my darling. The life we have led is only a remnant of colonial, or, rather, of provincial dignity, to which the nature of this republican government is hostile. Tobacco, which was once our money, is disappearing from this shore, and wheat and corn we cannot grow like the rich young West, which is pouring them out through the canal the late Governor Clinton lived to open. Money is becoming a thing and not merely a name, and it captures every other thing—land, distinction, talent, family, even beauty and purity. The man you married understands the art of money and we do not."

"Then are we not impostors, papa, if we assume to be so much better than our real superiors? Surely we must persevere in those things the age demands, and excel in them, to sustain our pride."

"Yes, if the breed is gamecock it will accept any challenge, not only war and politics, but mechanics, shop-keeping, cattle-herding, anything!"

"Papa, if you can see these things that are to be, so clearly, why can you not take the wise steps to plant your family on the safe side?"

"Ah! we Virginians were always the best statesmen, but we died poor. Having no manual craft, slight bookkeeping, and unlimited capacity for office, we foresaw everything but the humiliation of ourselves, and that we hardly admitted when it had come, so much were we flattered by our philosophic intellects. Our newest amusement is to expound the constitution to them who are doing too well under it, although our fathers, who made it, like Jefferson and Madison, died only yesterday, overwhelmed with debts, and poor Mr. Monroe is run away to New York, they say, to dodge the Virginia bailiffs."

"Well, papa, I have saved you from that fear. Here are your notes to Mr. Milburn and others. Sit down and look them over carefully and see if they are all here!"

He took them up, with volatile relief laughing on his yet tear-marked face, and said:

"We'll burn them, Vessy."

"Nay, sir, not till you have seen them all. A single note missing would give you the same perplexity, and there is no daughter left to settle it."

He looked at her with a smile, yet annoyance.

"You are not going to make a Meshach Milburn of me?"

"Stop, sir!" Vesta said. "You might do worse than learn from my husband."

Something strange in her expression baffled the Judge.

"Ha!" he interjected, "have I a rival already, daughter? Is his conquest as complete as that?"

"I promised to honor him a few moments ago, and I believe I can, papa. All that you tell me adds to my respect for a man who seems to be only what he is."

"Perhaps you can love him, too?" the Judge said, watching her with an apprehension a little like wonder, a little like jealousy.

"Oh, I wish I could, papa! That also I promised to do, and I will try. But my work will all be a failure if you do not become reconciled to Mr. Milburn. It was for you I married him, and to save your name, your peace, your independence, and the upbraiding we expected from mamma at the loss of her dower. He is now your son-in-law, still in the prime of life, with the business training you lament that you do not possess. Begin this moment, papa, and learn his habits. Count and identify those notes!"

Judge Custis looked them over separately, ran the number of notes he had given over in his mind, and said:

"Yes, he has made fair restitution. There are none missing."

"Restitution implies that he has robbed you, papa. A just man did not speak there! Every penny in those debts is stamped with Mr. Milburn's injuries and coined by his sacrifices. Have you spent



his money remembering that?"

"No, my child, I suppose not."

"Give me the notes, papa."

She took them and sat thinking a few moments silently.

"If I were a man, papa," she said at length, "I would try to learn business sense. It must be so respectable to live with one's mind able to help one's security and one's friends, and prepare for age or sickness while strong and healthy. Now, I think I will not let you burn these notes till you have paid the price of them! Please write a transfer of this house, servants, and your manor to me, Vesta—yes, Vesta Milburn!"

She blushed as she spoke for the first time her new-worn name.

"Alas!" sighed her father, "Vesta Custis no more. I begin to feel it. Well, Mrs. Milburn—I will give you the title—for what must I make over these old properties to you?"

"In consideration of my repayment of the sum of my mother's estate to you for her, for which you have given her no security whatever. It is not provided for by these notes. I have only Mr. Meshach Milburn's promise that he will pay her this money, risked and lost by you, father, I fear very heedlessly. Is it restitution, also, for Mr. Milburn to strip himself to pay your debts to mother?"

"No," said the Judge, guiltily, "that he pays on account of his passion for you. He may cheat you there."

"I do not believe it, because he has been faithful to me so many years before I knew he loved me. A man who keeps himself pure for a woman he has no vows to, will pay her father's debts of honor when he has promised."

Judge Custis found the issue quite too warm for his convenience, and blushing as much as Vesta, he sat down and drew up a conveyance of his property to Vesta Milburn, in her own right, and in consideration of twenty-five thousand dollars, paid to Mrs. Lucy Custis on account of judgment confessed to her by Daniel Custis.

"There, my dear," he said, passing it over, "what do you want with it? Are you not sure of a home here as long as you live, even with me as the proprietor?"

"No. The tragedy nearly finished here may be repeated, papa, and all of us be homeless if you can go in debt again. I shall not do that—not even for my husband, and here will stand Teackle Hall to protect you all from the cold if bad times ever come again."

"You have paid a greater price for it, my child, than it is worth, and you are entitled to it."

"Besides, dear father, if Mr. Milburn needs any reminder of his promise to repay mamma's dowry, this will give it. He intended his gift to be my marriage dower, and were I to convey it to you I should first ask his consent; not in law, perhaps, but in delicacy."

"Oh, yes," the Judge said carelessly, "I am glad you have such good reasons. Yet, my beautiful, my last child,—pride of my race! I hate to see you so ready for this business—this calculation and foresight. It is not like the Custises. I fear this man, Milburn, in a single day has thrown his net around your nature, and annexed you to his sordid existence. At this moment the redeeming thing about you is that you cannot love him."

"Dear father, thoughts like that beset me, too—the pride of aristocracy, the remembrance of what has been; but I want to be honest and not to cheat my heart or any person. We have fallen from our height; he has raised himself from his condition; and there is no deception in my conduct. He knows I do not love him. Instead of standing upon an obdurate heart, I pray God to melt my nature and mould it to his affection!"

Regarding her a moment with increasing interest, Judge Custis came forward and kissed her forehead.

"Amen, then!" he said. "May you love your husband! I will do all I can to love him, too."

"That is spoken like a true man," Vesta said. "And now, father, good-night! Be ready here for Mr. Milburn's arrival. Ring for a decanter and some cake. It will not hurt you, after your fast, to drink a glass of sherry with the bridegroom."

He kissed her and felt her trembling in his arms. As she started to go, she returned and clung to him again. Her face was pale with fear.

"Oh, dreadful God!" he muttered, "to visit my many sins upon this spotless angel! Where shall I fly?"

A step was upon the porch, and Vesta flashed up the stairway.

Judge Custis went to his door apprehensive and in tears. A strange man stood there, with his eye bruised and blood dripping down to his coarse, rope-like beard. He was in liquor, but so pale that it was apparent by the starlight.

"Good-evening," said the man; "you don't know me, Judge Custis? No matter, I'm Joe Johnson."

The Judge, whose tears had taken him far from things of trivial memory, looked at the man and repeated "*Joe* Johnson. Not Joe Johnson of Dorchester?"

"Yes, Judge, Joe Johnson, the slave-dealer. I've bought many a nigger from a Custis when it was impolite to sell 'em, Judge, so they let me run' em off, and cussed me for it to the public. An' that's made me onpopular, Judge Custis, and that's my fix to-night."

"You have been fighting, Johnson, I think," said the Judge, with suppressed dislike.

"I've been knocked down by a nigger," said the man, with a glare of ferocity, removing his hand from the wounded eye, as if it inflamed his recollection of the blow to see the drops of blood drip from his beard to the porch. "This town is too nice to abide a dealer in the constitutional article, and so they set on me, when I was a little jingle-brained with lush, an' while the nigger klemmed me in the peep, a little white villain with a steeple bonnet hit me in the bread-bag with a stone. I've come yer, Judge, to lie up in the kitchen, an' sleep warm over Sunday, for the cops threaten to take me, if they catch me before midnight."

"I suppose you know, Johnson, that I am a magistrate, and the proper harborage I give to breakers of the peace is the jail."

"I'm not afraid of that limbo, Judge Custis, when I come to you. Old Patty Cannon has done you many a good turn with Joe Johnson's gang about election times in the upper destreeks of Somerset. Patty always said Judge Custis was a game gentleman that returned a favor."

The Judge's countenance, an instant blank, lighted up with all a vote-getter's smile, and he said:

"Joe, you're a terrible fellow, but dear old Aunt Patty did always take my part! I suspect, Joe, that you have run afoul of Samson, the hired man of Meshach Milburn, who is a boxer, though I wonder that he could get away with your youth and size. Of course, I won't let you come to harm. You haven't been playing your tricks on anybody's negroes, Joe?"

"No, upon my word, Judge! You see, I took a load of Egypt down the Nanticoke to Norfolk, and shipped 'em to Orleens. Says I: 'I'll go back Eastern Shore way, and see if there's any niggers to git.' So I tramped it from Somers's Cove to Princess Anne, an' sluiced my gob at Kingston and the Trappe till I felt noddy with the booze, and lay down in the churchyard to snooze it off. Bein' awaked before my nod was out, I felt evil an' chiveyish, and the tavern blokes, an' the nigger, an' the feller with the steeple shap, all clected me at once."

"Well, Joe, for Aunt Patty's sake, I'll take care of you. Go to the kitchen door, and I'll step through the house and tell our Aunt Hominy to give you supper and breakfast, and a place to get some sleep. But you must keep out of the way, and slip off quietly on Sunday, for we have had a wedding in the family to-day, Joe, and though I cannot understand your peculiar slang, I suspect the bridegroom to be the man who knocked the breath out of you with the stone."

The stranger lifted his hand from his bloody eye again, and counted the red drops splashing down from his beard. Judge Custis marked his scowl.

"Tut, tut!" said the Judge, "you will never get your revenge out of that man. He is too strong. I don't wonder that he disabled you, and don't you ever get into his clutches, Joe; for if he knows you are here, I shall be forced to send you to jail this very night. Keep out of the hands of Meshach Milburn! He has knocked the breath out of you, Mr. Johnson, but there are some whose hearts he has twisted out of their bodies."

"I'll meet him somewhere," Joe Johnson muttered, "but not in Princess Anne;" and he pulled down his slouched hat to cover his eyes, and stalked away to find the kitchen.

"Oh, what a day can bring forth," Judge Custis thought, raising his hands to the October stars: "Meshach of the ominous hat the host in my parlor: Joe Johnson, the son-in-law of Patty Cannon, the guest of my kitchen!"

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## CHAPTER XIV.

### MESHACH'S HOME.

Vesta had slept she hardly knew how long, but it was day, and slowly her eyes turned towards the remainder of her bed to see if it was occupied.

The bridegroom was not there.

She reached her foot into her slipper at the bedside, and at one swift step passed before her mirror, whispering:

"I have dreamed it all!"

The fresh, flushing skin, and radiant contrasts of hair and eyes seemed so welcome to her in their perfect assurance of health, that she whispered again:

"Have I dreamed it? He is not here. Oh, am I free?"

Then a feeling of reproof came to her as the minutest memory of that wonderful yesterday rose to her mind, and the vow she had made to honor and obey seemed to have been too easily repented. She looked upon her hand, and the little, thin, pathetic thread of gold reaffirmed her memory of the wedding-ring, and at the next suggestion a blush coursed through her being like a redbird in the apple-blossoms: perhaps he had stolen from her chamber stealthily as he came, while she, drowned in deep slumber, wotted not.

A glance into the mirror again revealed those blushes repeating each other, like the Aurora in the northern dawn, till, with a searching consciousness, and her voice raised above the whisper, she said,

"Be still, silly *girl!*"

Opening the door, she found Virgie lying on the rug without, warmly wrapped in her mistress's blanket-shawl, but wide awake.

"Virgie, no one has passed?" asked Vesta.

"No, Miss Vessy. Nobody could have stepped over me, for my mind has been too awake, if I did sleep a little. Maybe *he* ain't a-coming, Miss Vessy. Maybe he's ashamed!"

"Hush, Virgie," Vesta said, "you are speaking of your master."

Throwing her morning-robe around her shoulders, the maiden bride tripped noiselessly to her mother's apartment; the door was open, the night taper floating in its vase, and Mrs. Custis lay asleep with her bank-book under her pillow.

"Shall I awake her?" Vesta thought. "Yes, if I do not need her experience, I do want her confidence, and not to give her mine would seem deceit now."

Vesta kissed her mother softly, and placed her cheek beside that lady's thin, respectable profile as she awoke, and said:

"Daughter, mercy! why, what has become of you? It seems to me I have seen nobody for days, and I wanted to express my indignation even in my dreams. Where have you been?"

"Oh, mamma," Vesta said, taking Mrs. Custis's head in her arms, "I have been finding your lost fortune, which troubled us all so much. It is to be given back to you, dearest—my husband has promised to do so."

"Your husband? Whom have you selected, that he is so free with his money? How could you hear from Baltimore so soon? Now, don't tell me a parcel of stuff, thinking to comfort me. Your father is a villain, and my connections shall know it."

Mrs. Custis drew her bank-book from under her head, and began to cry, as she took a single look at its former total.

"Darling mamma," Vesta said, "seeing you so miserable yesterday on account of papa's failure, and your portion gone with it, I accepted an offer of marriage, and have a rich man's promise that, first of all, your part shall be paid to you. This house, and our manor, and everything as it is—the servants, the stable, and the movables—belong to me, in my own name, paid for in papa's notes, and by him transferred to me to be our home forever, so that a revulsion like yesterday may not again cross the sill of our door. Does not that deserve a kiss, mamma?"

"I don't believe a word of it," said Mrs. Custis. "This is another trick to deceive me. I don't accuse you of it, Vesta, but you are the victim of somebody and your father. Now, who can this man be, so free with his ready money? It's not the style in Baltimore to promise so liberally as all that. Have you accepted young Carroll?"

"No, nor thought of him, mamma."

"Then it must be that widower fool, Hynson, ready to sell his negroes for a second wife like you."

"He has neither been here in body or mind," Vesta said; "never in my mind."

"That would be a marriage to make a talk: it wouldn't be like you to bestow so much beauty on a widower. I think there is a certain vulgarity about an elegant girl marrying a widower. She is so refined, and he is generally so sleek and sensual. Did you hear from Charles McLane?"

"Nothing, mamma; let me ease your mind by telling you that my husband lives here in Princess Anne. He was father's creditor, Mr. Meshach Milburn. He has loved me unknown for years. I saw a way to stop all scandal and recrimination by marrying him at once, that the society we know would have but one, and not two, subjects of curiosity. Papa saw me married last night to Mr. Milburn, and I bear his name this Sabbath day."

"His wife? Meshach Milburn? The vulgarian in the play-actor's hat? That man! Daughter, you play with my poor head. It is going again. Oh-h-h!"

"Mother, it is true. I am Mrs. Milburn. My husband is your benefactor."

It was unnecessary to say more, for Mrs. Custis had really fainted.

"Poor mother!" thought Vesta, "I am confirmed in my fear that, if she had been told of my purpose, she would have opposed it bitterly."

Roxy was summoned to assist Vesta, and after Mrs. Custis had become conscious, and sighed and cried hysterically, her daughter, sitting in her lady's rocker, spoke out plainly:

"Mother, I appreciate your disappointment in my marriage, though I should be the one to make complaint and receive sympathy, instead of discouragement; but I do not desire it; indeed, I will not permit any person to disparage my husband, or draw odious comparisons between my poverty and his exertions. If there are in my body, or my society, any merits to please a man, they have fallen to him under the law of Providence, that he that hath shall receive. I pity your illness, dear mamma, but I fear Mr. Milburn is ill, too, for he has not been here all night, though he left me at the church-gate."

"I hope the viper is dead!" Mrs. Custis said, with great clearness, and energized it by sitting up in bed. Roxy left the room.

"I hope he has been murdered," said Mrs. Custis, "and that the murderer will never be discovered. If there is any spirit of the McLanes left in my brothers and nephews, they will wipe out, in blood, the insult of this marriage between my daughter and the man who set a trap upon the honor of a respectable family."

Vesta arose with a pale, troubled face, yet with some of her mother's prejudice flashing back.

"He can defend himself, mamma. I shall go to seek him now, since he is so much hated for me."

She returned to her room, and put on a walking-suit, and made her toilet. In the library Vesta found her father dozing in a large chair, with his feet upon a leather sofa, and a silk handkerchief drawn across his crown, under which were the dry beds of tears that had coursed down his cheeks. She saw, with a touch of joy, that the sherry in the decanter was untouched, and the two glasses were still clean: he had not relapsed into his habits, even while making an all-night vigil to wait for the unwelcome son-in-law. He started as she entered, and then stared at her between his dazed wits and a mute inquiry that she could understand.

"He has not come, papa. And mamma—oh! she is severe."

Vesta, trembling at the throat a moment, rushed into her father's wide-open arms, and buried the sob in his breast.

"Poor soul! Poor lamb! Poor thing!" he said, over and over, while his temper slowly rose, that seldom rose of recent years, since pleasure and carelessness had taken its masculine sting away, but Vesta felt his tones change while he petted her, and at last heard him say, hoarsely:

"By God!"

"Sh—h!" she whispered, raising her hand to his mouth.

"I will kill somebody," he went on, finishing his sentence, and as she drew away he strode across the room and back again, a noble exhibition of passion that had a noble origin, in fatherly pity.

"Don't lose your true pride, papa, after you have persevered so long," Vesta said. "It is Sunday. Do you think he will come? What can have happened?"

"He will either come or fight me," Judge Custis remarked. "I have tried to be a peaceable man and Christian magistrate, albeit a poor hypocrite in some, things, but I am pushed too far. My wife's smallness is worse than insanity and wickedness put together. Between her and this money-broking fiend, and my neglected child entrapped into such a marriage, by God! I will clean my old duelling arms, and appeal to injustice itself to set me even."

If he had been fine-looking in his sincere grief, he was thrice more attractive in his sincere high spirit. Vesta, admiring him in spite of her cares, did not like to see him in this unnatural recklessness.

"Dear father," she said, soothingly, "you have no cause of quarrel."

"I have every cause," he cried; "the proposal to marry you was an insult, for which I should have challenged him, and shot him if he declined. Now he has married you and absconded, using you and the Custis honor with contempt. In my day I was the best shot in Eastern Virginia. I can kill a man in this cause as easily as I have broken either of a man's arms, at choice, in my courting days. Public opinion will clear me under this provocation, and I can acquit my own conscience, abhorrent as duelling is to me. My sons-in-law would leap to take the quarrel up, and rid the world of Meshach Milburn."

"That is mamma's idea, to kill the debtor who has been specially kind to her. She says she will send for Uncle Allan McLane, and is more unreasonable than ever. Papa, your feelings are unjust. Something we do not know of has happened to Mr. Milburn. He was not himself all the while at the church. Now that I recollect, he was not ardent for the marriage to be so soon. It was I who hastened the hour. Let us be right in everything, having progressed so far with the recovery of our fortunes, and let us await the fulfilment of events hopefully."

"Milburn was drunk at the ceremony, I saw that," Judge Custis said, "but it was no excuse. In fact, what good can come of this violent alliance? It seems to me that we have leaped from the

frying-pan into the fire. I feel ugly, my daughter, and there is no concealing it."

"Then you are in the mood to talk to mother this morning," Vesta said, "while you have some unusual will and spirit. This resentful sullenness she is showing I fear more than your passing emotion, papa. Be firm, yet kind, with her, and I will go to find my husband. Yes, that is my place. He may be more justly complaining of my absence now, than we of his neglect."

"You don't mean that you are going to visit him at his den?"

"I shall go there first. It would have been my home last night if he had required it. To tell the truth," Vesta said, blushing, "the poor man was so kind to me yesterday, in spite of his object, and so quaint, and, as it seemed, dependent on me, that my charity is enlisted for him, and I could almost have married him from pity."

The Judge's temper fell a little in the study of his daughter's blushing.

"Wonderful! wonderful!" he thought to himself; "that poor corn-bred fellow has already made more impression on this girl's pride than a hundred cavalier gallants. Truly, we are a republic, Vesta," he continued aloud, "and you lay down the Custis character as easily as our old connection, Lord Fairfax, accepted the democracy of his hired surveyor, Mr. Washington, before he died."

"I laid down the Custis name yesterday," Vesta said, "though not their better character, I hope. Papa, there is only one law of marriage; it is where the wife follows the husband."

She looked a little archly at him, wiping her eyes of recent tears, and though she may not have meant it, he was reminded of his own fear of his wife.

Aunt Hominy now came in, having been told by Virgie to prepare coffee, and she followed Roxy, who brought it into the library. The old cook had a strange look, as of one who had been up all night at a fire, or a "protracted meeting," and she poked her head in as if afraid to come farther, till Vesta went out and kissed her kindly.

"Poor Aunt Hominy! did you think I was sold, or abused, because I had been married? Dear old aunty, I shall never leave you!"

Aunt Hominy had a countenance of profound, almost vacant, melancholy, mixed with a fear that, the Judge remarked, "he had seen on the faces of niggers that had stolen something."

"Miss Vessy," she stammered, at last, "is you measured in by ole Meshach? Is he got you, honey? Dat he has, chile! He's gwyn to bury you under dat pizen hat. Po' little girl! Po' Miss Vessy!"

"Oh, Aunt Hominy," Vesta said, "he will be a kind master in spite of his queer hat, and take good care of you and all the children; for he is my husband, and will love you all for me."

A dumb, terrified look adhered to the old black woman's face.

"No, he won't be kind to nobody," she gasped. "You has gwyn been lost, Miss Vessy. You is measured in. De good Lord try an' bress you! Hominy ain't measured in yit. Hominy's kivered herseff wid cammermile, an' drunk biled lizzer tea. Hominy's gone an' got Quaker."

"What's *Quaker*, Aunt Hominy?"

"Quaker," the old woman repeated, backing out and looking down, "Quaker's what keeps him from a measurin' of me in!"

Then, as Vesta drew on her bonnet and shawl, having taken her coffee and toast, the old servant, gliding back in the depths of Teackle Hall, raised a wild African croon, as over the dead, giving her voice a musical inflection like the jingle of Juba rhyme:

"Good-bye, Miss Vessy! Good-bye, Aunt Hominy's baby! Good-bye, dear young missis! Good-bye, my darlin' chile, furever, furever, an' O furever, little Vessy Custis, O chile, farewell!"

The tears raining upon her cheeks, her wild, wringing hands and upflung arms and shape convulsed, Vesta remembered long, and thought, as she left Teackle Hall with Virgie, that some African superstition had, by the aid of dreams, drawn into a passing excitement the faithful servant's brain.

At the corner of old Front Street, and extending almost out upon the little Manokin bridge, stood Meshach Milburn's two-story house and store, with a door upon both streets. Though planted low, in a hollow, it stood forward like Milburn's challenging countenance, unsupported by any neighbors.

"Don't it look like a witch's, Missy?" Virgie said, as Vesta took in its not unpicturesque outlines and crude plank carpentry, the weather-rotted roof, the decrepit chimney at the far end, the one garret window in the sharp gable, the scant little windows above stairs, and the doors low to the sand.

"It may have been the pride of the town fifty years ago, Virgie. I have passed it many a day, looking with mischievous curiosity for the steeple-hat, to show that to some city friend, little thinking I must ever enter the house. But hear that wilful bird singing so loud! Where is it?"

"I can't tell to save my life. It ain't in the tree yonder. It's the first bird up this mornin', Miss

Vessy, sho'!"

"Is not that larger door standing ajar, the one with the four panels in it?" Vesta asked. "Yes, it is unfastened and partly open."

The blood left Vesta's heart a moment, as the thought ran through her mind: "He has been watched, followed home, and murdered!"

The idea seemed to explain his absence on his marriage night, and, like a sudden flame first seen upon a burning ship, lighting up the wide ocean with its bright terrors, Vesta saw the infinite relations of such a crime: her almost secret marriage, her custody of her father's notes, the record of them upon her husband's books, his last word at the church gate: "I will come soon, darling," and now, this silent abode, with its door ajar on Sunday dawn, before the town was up—they might bear the suspicion of a dreadful crime by the ruined debtor house of Custis against their friendless creditor.

This thought, personal to her father, was immediately dismissed in the feeling for a possibly murdered husband. If the idea barely touched her sense of self, that her tremendous sacrifice had been arrested by Heaven, and her purity saved between the altar and the nuptials by the bloodshed of her purchaser at the hands of some meaner avenger, though not until she had redeemed her father from Milburn's clutch, this idea never passed beyond the portal of her mind; she repulsed it, entering, and began to think of the easy prey her husband might have been, hated by so many, defended by none, known to be very rich, no loss to the community, as it might think, in its financial ignorance, and his only guard a stalwart negro notorious for fighting.

Believing Milburn to deserve better than his present fame, Vesta advanced towards the door of the old wooden store with a spirit of commiseration and awe, and still the wild bird from somewhere poured out a shriek, a chuckle, a hurrah, enough to turn her blood to ice.

As Vesta pushed open the old, seasoned door it dragged along the floor, and the loose iron bar and padlock, dropping down, made a ring that brought an echo like a tomb's out of the hollow interior.

"Deed, Miss Vessy, I'm 'fraid to go in there," Virgie said.

"You are not to come in till I call you. But hear that bird rioting in song! Does Mr. Milburn keep birds?"

"I can't tell, Miss Vessy. That bird's a Mocker. It must be in there somewhere. Oh, don't go in, Miss Vessy; something will catch you, dear Missy, sho'."

But Vesta was already gone, following the piercing sound of the native bird, that seemed to be in the loft.

She saw a little counter of pine, and a pine desk built into it, and bundles of skins, some cord-wood, a pile of lumber and boxes, a few barrels of oil or spirits, and dust and cobwebs thick on everything; and a little way in from the door the light and darkness made weird effects upon each other, increasing the apparent distances, and changing the forms; and the sun, now risen, made turning cylinders of gold-dust at certain knot-holes in the eastern gable, across whose film she saw two lean mice stand upon the floor unalarmed, and tamely watch her come.

The screaming of the bird was conveyed through the thin floor from above with loud distinctness, and every note of singing things seemed to be imitated by it, from the hawk's gloating cry to the swallow's twittering alarm, with the most rapid versatility, and even hurry, as if the creature was trying over every bird language, with the hope of finding one mankind could understand. It was idle to expect to be heard amid such clamor, and Vesta, having pounded on the floor a few times, made her way to a sort of cupboard, that might turn out to be a stairway, and, sure enough, a door opened on its dark side, and light from above flickered down.

At this moment the bird's notes abruptly ceased, and a voice, unlike anything she had ever heard in her life, yet human, spoke in response to a more natural human voice, both issuing from above.

The second voice seemed to be Milburn's; the first voice was something like it, yet not like anything from the throat of man, and the superstition she had been rebuking in her servant came with a thrilling influence upon her entire nature. She was about to fly, but called out one word as she arrested herself:

"Gentlemen! Gentlemen!"

The loud, unclassifiable voice above immediately answered:

"Gent! Gent-gent-gent-en! t-chee, t-chee! Gents, tss-tss-tss! Ha! ha! Gentlemen!"

"May I come up?" Vesta cried.

"Come, p-chee! Come chee! come tsee! See me! see me! see me! Come p-chee! come see! come see me!"

The last accentuation, in spite of the bird's interference, was sufficiently distinct to amount to an invitation, and with a raising of her eyelids once dependently to heaven, Vesta went up the stairs.

She put her head into a large, long room, which took up the whole contents of the second story,

and was lighted on three sides by the small windows she had seen without. It had no carpet or floor-covering of any kind; the fire was gone out upon the chimney-hearth in the end, and the atmosphere, a little chill, was melting before the sunshine which now streamed in at both sides of the fireplace and clearly revealed every object in the apartment,—some clothes-pegs, a wooden table with a blue plate, a blue cup and saucer and a saucepan upon it, and a coarse knife and fork; a large green chest, and a leather hat-box; an old hair trunk fifty years old, and nearly falling to pieces; black silhouettes, in little round ebony frames, of a woman and a man hung over the mantel, and between them a silhouette of a face she had no difficulty in recognizing to be intended for her own.

Stretched upon a low child's bed, of the sort called trundle-bed in those days, which could be wheeled under the high-legged bed of the parents, lay the bridegroom, in his wedding-dress and gaitered shoes, with his steeple-crowned hat upon the faded calico quilt beside him, and his face as red as burning fever could make it.

Vesta only verified the particulars of the inventory of Milburn's lodge afterwards, her instant attention being drawn to the motionless form of her husband, whose flushed face seemed to indicate a death by strangulation or apoplexy. She went forward and put her hand upon him.

"Mr. Milburn!" she spoke.

"Milburn!" echoed a voice of piercing strength, though ill articulated. She looked around in astonishment, and saw nobody.

"Husband!" Vesta spoke, louder, stooping over him.

"S'band! s'band! See! see!" shouted the wanton voice, almost at her elbow.

Vesta, with one hand on the helpless man's brow, turned again, almost indignantly, for the tone seemed to address some sense of neglect or shame in her, which she had not been guilty of. Still, nothing was to be seen.

At the far corner of the room was a step-ladder leading to a hole in the loft above; but this was not the place of the interruption, for she heard the voice now come as from the chimney at the opposite end of the room, nearer the bed, and accompanied with a fluttering and scratching, as if some spirit of evil, with the talons of a rat or a bat, was trying to break in where the prostrate man lay on the bed of oblivion.

"Meshach! Meshach!" rang the half-human cry, "Hoo! hoo! Vesty! Vesty! Sweet! sweet! sweet! Ha, ha! See me! See me! Meshach, he! Vesty, she! She! she! she! Hoot! hoot! ha!"

Rapidly changing her view, with her ears no less than her heart tingling at the use of her own name, Vesta saw on the dusty wooden mantel a common bird of a gray color, with dashes of brown and black upon his wings, and a whitish breast, and he was greatly agitated, as if he meant to fly upon her or upon some other intruder she could not see.

His eyes, of black pupils upon yellowish eyeballs, sparkled with nervous activity. He flung himself into the air above her head, uttering sounds of such mellow richness and such infinite fecundity of modulation, that the old hovel almost burst with intoxicated song, combining gladness, welcome, fear, defiance, superstition, horror, and epithalamium all together, like Orpheus gone mad, and losing the continuity of his golden notes.

The bird's upper bill was beaked like a hawk's, his lower was sharp as a lance, and between them issued that infuriated melody and cadence and epithet that old Patrick Henry's spirit might have migrated into from his grave in the Virginia woods. He suddenly flung himself from his vortex of song upon the bed of the sick man, with a twitching hop and rapid opening and shutting of the tail, like the fan of a disturbed beauty, and thence perched upon Milburn's peaked hat, and with a convulsive struggle of his throat and body, as if he were in superhuman labor, brought out, distinct as man could speak, the words,

"'Sband! 'sband! Vesty! Vesty! Sweet! sweet! Come see! come see!"

Vesta, by a quick, expert movement, grasped the bird, and smoothed it against her bosom, and soothed its excitement.

She had heard verified what Audubon avowed, and had but recently published in the beautiful edition of his works her father was a subscriber to, that some said the American mocking-bird could imitate the human voice, though the naturalist remarked that he himself had never heard the bird do it.

The present verification, Vesta thought, of the mocking-bird's supremest power, might have issued from its excitement at the silent and helpless condition of its master—that master who had told Vesta that no bird in the woods ever resisted his seductions and mystic influence.

"If that be true," Vesta said to herself, "there is no danger of this vociferous pet making his escape if I put him out of the window till I can see if his master speaks or lives."

So she raised the window, and flung the mocking-bird up into the air, and it came down and dropped into the old willow-tree beneath, and there set up a concert the Sabbath morning might have been proud of, when, in the corn-fields, the free-footed Saviour went plucking the milky ears. Vesta could but stop a minute and listen.

The liquid notes chased each other around in circles of dizzy harmony, as if angels were at hide-and-seek on the blue branches of the air, eluding each other in pure-heartedness, chasing each other with eager love, sighing praise and happiness as their supernal hearts emitted music in the glow of ecstasy, and carrying upward the loveliest emotions of the earth in yearning sympathy for nature. No language, now, that Vesta could identify, was woven into that maze of morning song, which challenged, with its fulness and golden weight, the floods of sunshine, matching light with sound, spontaneous both, and rivals for the favors of the soft atmosphere. Singing with all its heart, outdoing all it knew, forgetting imitation in wild improvisation, watching her window as it danced upon the twigs and fluttered into the air, conscious of her listening as it purled and warbled towards her, and sounded every pipe and trumpet, virginal and clarion, hautboy and castanet, in the orchestra of its rustic bosom, the mocking-bird's ode seemed almost supernatural this morn to Vesta, and she thought to herself:

"Oh, what wedding music in the cathedral at Baltimore could equal that? and this poor man receives it for his epithalamium, without cost, as truly as if nature were greeting my coming to him in the old poet's spirit:

"Now all is done; bring home the bride againe;  
Bring home the triumph of our victory;  
Bring home with you the glory of her gaine,  
With joyance bring her and with jollity:  
Sing, ye sweet angels, Alleluia sing,  
That all the woods may answer, and your echo ring."

Relieved from the agitation of the mocking-bird, Vesta now gave her whole attention to her husband; and the high heat of his brain and circulation, and his muttering, like delirium, seemed to indicate that he had an intense attack of intermittent fever. She heard the words several times repeated by him: "I will come soon, darling!" and the simplicity of his devotion to her, unloved as he was, had such flavor of pathos in it that the tears started to Vesta's eyes.

"Poor soul!" she said, "it will be long before I can love him. *There*, his hunger must be enduring. But my duty is not the less clear to stay by his side and nurse him, as his wife."

At this conclusion she looked Milburn over carefully, to see if any wound or sign of violence, whether by accident or an enemy, appeared upon him, and finding none, and he all the time wandering in his sleep, she climbed the ladder and peeped into the garret, to see if his servant might be there. Samson's bed, as she supposed it was, had not been disturbed, and so, descending, she raised the window over the larger door she had entered by, and beckoned Virgie to come up.

"Take this tin cup," she said to the quadroon, "and go to the spring, near here, and bring it to me full of water."

Then, as the girl tripped away, Vesta found a piece of paper, and wrote her father a note, telling him to come to her; and to the girl, when she returned, her mistress said:

"I want you to get a roll of new rag-carpet at Teackle Hall, and have it brought here, to spread upon this floor. Send me, too, a pair of our brass andirons, and pack in a basket some glass, table-ware, and linen. Tell papa to bring one of his own night-shirts, and to take down my picture in the sewing-room, and wrap it up, and have it sent. I must have mamma's medicine-box and a wheelbarrow of ice; and let Hominy make some strong tea and hot-water toast. Virgie, do not forget that this sick gentleman is my husband, and a part of our own family!"

"The girl's face preserved its respect with difficulty as she heard the last part of the sentence, but she replied to What she understood to be a warning by saying:

"Miss Vessy, I never tell anybody tales."

"No, dear, you do not. I only feared you might forget the very different view we must take of Mr. Milburn from his former life here."

Being again left alone, Vesta took the tin cup of spring-water, and, raising the disturbed man's head, she gave him a drink, and, as he opened his eyes to see whom it was, she heard him say, with an articulate sigh:

"Heaven."

With the remainder of the water and her handkerchief she washed his hot skin and kept it moist, and fitful murmurs, as "Darling!" "Angel!" "Beautiful lady!" came from his roving brain as perception and poison contended for his mind. The inborn sense in woman of happiness after doing good offices and being appreciated was attended with a certain intellectual elation, and even amusement, at having witnessed what was altogether new to her,—the life of the meaner class of white people. She looked at the dexterous silhouette of herself, cut, probably, from memory, long ago, by the man, no doubt, who never knew her until yesterday, and, guessing the companion profiles to be his mother and father, she exclaimed, mentally:

"I cannot see anything insincere about this man's statement to me. Here are all the proofs of his deep attachment to me long before he forced my name upon papa with such apparent insolence. If papa could see these proofs with a woman's interest, he would have a full apology in them. Here, too, is the bird that sings my name. What strength of prepossession the master must have



had to make the feathered pupil repeat the sound of 'Vesta,' and call me 'sweet!' What resources, too, without the use of money or social aids! He knows the story of our English beginning, while we make it an idle boast; but to him Cromwell and Milton, Raleigh and Vane, are men of to-day. Ah!" Vesta thought, "I think I see now one of those Puritans in my husband, of whom I have heard as sprinkled through Virginia. We are the Cavaliers. There is the Roundhead, even to the King James hat."

As she was led onward in these probabilities, Vesta took up the demure old Hat and looked it over without any superstition, and reflected:

"Do we not exaggerate trifles? Why should this man be so derided because he covers his head with an old hat? What of it? Suppose it shows some vanity or eccentricity, why is there more merit in covering that up than in expressing it in the dress? The styles we wear to-day are the derision even of the current journals, and what will be thought of them fifty years hence, when the fashion magazines show me as I look,—the envy of my moment, the fright of my grandchildren?"

With rising color, she put the hat in the leather hat-box, and shut it up.

Judge Custis made his way up the dark stairs in a little while, and, as soon as he looked at Milburn, exclaimed,

"Curses come home to roost! It was only night before last that I said, in the presence of Meshach's negro, 'May the ague strike him and the bilious sweat from Nassawongo mill-pond!' He slept by it that night, while I was tossing in misery. The next night it was his turn. Daughter, he has the bilious intermittent fever, the legacy of all his fathers. He exposed himself, I suppose, extraordinarily that night, and I hear that he burned the old cabin in the morning. Now he will burn, in memory of it, for the next ten weeks; for he has, I suspect, from the time of day the burning and delirium came, what is called the double quotidian type of the fever, with two attacks in the twenty-four hours."

"Poor man!" exclaimed Vesta.

"Now I can account for his appearance at the marriage ceremony last night. The fever was on him, but he went through it by hard grit, and, probably, returning here to get some relief, he just fell over on that bed, and his head left him for some hours. The paroxysm goes away during sleep, and returns in the morning; so, before he could get abroad to-day, even if he could walk, to report himself at Teackle Hall, another fever came, and a furious one, too, and he will have good luck to survive forty days of fever, with probably eighty sweats in that time."

"He must be doctored at once, papa."

"Well, I am good enough doctor for the bilious fever. He wants plenty of cold lemonade, cold sponging, and ice to suck when the fever is on him. When the chills intervene he wants blanketing, hot bottles at his feet, and hot tea, or something stronger. In the rest between the attacks of fever and chill, he wants calomel and Peruvian bark, and if these delirious spells go on, he may want both bleeding and opium."

"Here are some of the things he immediately needs, then," Vesta said, as a tall white man she had never seen before came up the stairs with Virgie, bringing some Susquehanna ice in a blanket, and a roll of carpet, and other articles she had sent for. The man's face wore a large bruise that heightened his savage appearance.

"Judge," exclaimed the stranger, "I'm doin' a little work to pay fur my board. Who's your whiffler? He'll know me when he sees me next time."

Following the stranger's eyes, Vesta and her father saw Meshach Milburn, half raised up from the low trundle-bed, staring at Joe Johnson as if trying to get at him. His lips moved, he partly articulated:

"Catch the—scoundre—*him!*"

"Joe," said the Judge, "slip away! He recognizes you as the assailant yesterday. Don't hesitate: see how he glares at you!"

"Oh, it's the billy-noodle with the steeple nab-cheat, him that settled me with the brick," said the stranger, in a low voice. "So I have piped him. Ah! that's plummy!"

As the tall man started to go Milburn's countenance relaxed, he wandered again in his head, and fell back upon the bed.

"I told you he was a hard hater, Mr. Johnson," the Judge remarked.

"Them shakes is the equivvy for the bruise he give me,—that is, till we both heal up. He's painted the ensigns of all nations on my stummick, Judge. But a blow is cured by a blow!"

With a look of admiring computation upon the girl Virgie, Joe Johnson drew his long figure down the stairs, like a pole.

"What a brutal giant," Vesta said; "and how came he to be doing our errands?"

"Why, Aunt Hominy hadn't nobody to bring the wheelbarrow load, and this man said he'd come,

and he would come, Miss Vesty, so I couldn't say anything."

"He's a man of a good deal of influence," said the Judge, uneasily, "in the upper part of our county, and in Delaware. Last night, after the wedding, he slapped Meshach's hat, and old Samson knocked him down for it, and he would have killed Samson, I hear, but for your bridegroom, who felled him with a timely brick. It's a hard team to pass on a narrow road,—Meshach and Samson; hey, Virgie?"

"I'm glad old Samson beat him, anyway," the pretty quadron said, showing her white teeth.

"Oh, what troubles will not that hat bring upon us!" Vesta thought; and then spoke: "If Mr. Milburn was strong, I think he would hardly let that man get out of the county before night."

"Well, daughter, what are you going to do with these articles he has brought?"

"They are to make this room comfortable. See, he has my picture here, cut by his own hands: I want to put a better one before him: help me hang it, papa!"

In a few minutes the bright oil portrait, but recently painted by Mr. Rembrandt Peale, was taking the sunlight upon its warm brunette cheeks, in full sight of the bridegroom, and the thick rag carpet warmed the floor, and Virgie had made a second errand to Teackle Hall, and brought back the lady's rocking-chair that Milburn so much affected, and toilet articles, and some dark cloth to hide the bare boards in places, and the old loft soon wore a reasonable appearance of habitable life. Virgie made up the fire, and the brass andirons took the cheerful flame upon them, while Vesta sweetened the lemonade after her father had cut and squeezed the lemons, and added some magnesia to make the drink foam.

"Really," said Judge Custis, "this miserable den takes the rudimentary form of a home. I suppose there are now more comforts in his sight than Meshach's whole race ever collected. What is your next move, Vesta?"

"To stay right here, darling papa, till it is safe and convenient to carry Mr. Milburn home."

"Oh, folly! it will excite scandal, and be repulsive to my feelings. This loft over a former groggery is no place for you: the news will spread from Chincoteague to Arlington. Every Custis that lives will censure me and outlaw you."

"I think you had best see Mr. Tilghman before the service, papa, and have the marriage announced from the desk this morning: that will settle the excitement before night. As for staying here, my home, you know, is where he needs me. At his will I should have to stay here altogether. But I wish to do this, dear father. It is of the greatest necessity to my nature to improve my intercourse with my husband while he is sick, that the hasty marriage we made may still have its period of acquaintance and good understanding. I want to sound the possibilities of my happiness. He will be less my master now than in his strength and possession. Perhaps—" Vesta's voice fell, and she turned to gaze upon the bridegroom, whose fever still consumed his wits—"perhaps I can influence his dress,—his appearance."

"You mean the steeple top!" Judge Custis exclaimed, petulantly.

At the loud sound of this familiar word, the feverish man's ears were pierced as through some ever-open ventricle, like an old wound.

"Steeple-top! Who cried 'steeple-top'?" he muttered. "Oh, can't you see I'm married. *She* hears it. Oh, spare and pity her!"

He wandered into the miasmatic world again, leaving them all touched, yet oppressed.

"How the very flint-stone will wear away before the water-drop," Judge Custis finally said; "his obdurate heart has been bruised by that nickname. In public he never appeared to flinch before it; but you see it inflicted a never-healing wound. Who has not his vulture?"

"And how unjust to pursue this man with such frivolous inhospitality so many years," Vesta exclaimed, her splendid eyes flashing. "No account has been made of his private reasons, his family piety, or his stern taste, perhaps; for he must have a reason for his wardrobe, that being, it would seem, the only thing there can be no independence about. Did you hear, papa, his feeling for me but this moment? Strangely enough, my own mind was thinking of that hat. It seems to be bigger than the very steeples of the churches: it rises between the people and worship, yes, between us and Charity, and Faith,—I had almost said Hope, too."

"The colored people all say that hat he has to wear, because the devil makes him," the trim, fawn-footed Virgie said; "Aunt Hominy says the Bad Man wouldn't let him make no mo' money if he didn't go to church in that hat. Some of the white people says so, too."

"You don't believe such foolish tales as that, Virgie?" Vesta asked.

"Deed, I don't believe anything you say is a story, Miss Vessy. Hominy believes it. She's 'most scared out of her life about Mr. Milburn coming to the house, an' she's got all the little ones a' most crazy with fear."

"Poor, dark, ignorant soul!" Vesta said; "she is, however, more excusable than these grown men, whose prejudices against an article of dress are as heathen in character as her fetish superstition."

"If he is a good man to you, Miss Vessy," the slave girl said, "I'll think the Bad Man hasn't got anything to do with him. If he treats you bad, I'll think the Bad Man has."

"Sometimes I feel as if men ought to have been left wild, like the animals," the Judge said, rinsing out Milburn's mouth with a piece of ice, "for the obstacles to liberty raised by fashion and civilization are Asiatic in their despotism. Think of the taxes we pay to fashion when we refused less to kings. Think of the aristocracy based upon dress, after we have formally extirpated it by statute! Think of the influence the boot-makers and mantua-makers of Europe, proceeding from the courts we have renounced, exert upon our Presidents and Senators, and, through the women of this country, upon all the men in the land! A million women who do not know that there are two houses of Congress, know just what bonnet the Duchess d'Angoulême is wearing, and how Charles X. in Paris ties his cravat. So the devil always gets a worm in every apple. The French Revolution abolished feudality, titles, great landed property, and only omitted to abolish fashion, and that worm—a silkworm it is—is devastating republican government everywhere, using the women to infect us."

"Yet, in the nature of woman," said Vesta, "is the love of dress as strongly as the love of woman is in man. Some righteous purpose is in it, papa,—to ornament ourselves like the birds, and let art be born."

"God knows his own mysteries," Judge Custis said. "But Vesta, go home with me to your own comfortable home, and let Virgie stay here to keep watch."

"Master, I'm afraid to stay here," the girl exclaimed, sidling towards her young mistress.

"Then I will stay, and be nurse," the Judge said. "Fear not! I will give him only wholesome medicine, whatever poison he has given me and mine. You stay in Teackle Hall, my precious child! Indeed, I must command it."

Vesta smiled sadly and pointed to her husband.

"He commands me now, papa. You were too indulgent a master, and spoiled me. No, Virgie and I will both remain, and you conciliate mamma. All is going well. Really, I am happy and grateful to my Heavenly Father that he is smoothing the way so gently, that I thought would be so hard."

"Oh, the conditions of this disease are repulsive, my child. You are a lady."

"No, I am a woman," said Vesta; "that man and I must see one or the other die. You do not know how easy it is for a woman to nurse a man. Though love might make the task more grateful, yet gratitude will do much to sweeten it. He has loved me and taken the shadow from your old age for me. Shall I leave him here to feel that I despise him? No."

She kissed her father, and gave him his cane.

"Come back this afternoon, my love," she said to him.

"Nothing on earth is like you!" exclaimed the old man. "I fear you are not mine."

"Yes," Vesta said, "you are full of good, wherever you may have strayed."

As the sound of his feet passed from the doorway below, the sick man, with a sigh as from burning fire, opened his eyes and looked around. They fell upon her picture.

"What is that?" he murmured; "I dreamed nothing like that, just now."

"It is my picture. I am here," Vesta said, bending over him. "Don't you know me?"

"Who are you, dear lady?" he breathed, with fever-weakened eye-sockets, and mind struggling up to his distended orbs, "do I know you?"

"Yes, I am Vesta—Vesta Custis, I was. I am your wife."

His eyes opened wide, as if hearing some wonderful news.

"Wife? what is that? My wife? No."

"Yes, I am Vesta Milburn, your wife."

He seemed to remember, and, with compassion for him, she stooped and kissed him.

"God bless you!" he sighed, and passed away into the Upas shades again.

At that minute the mocking-bird flew in the open window and fluttered above the lowly bed, and perched upon the headboard and began to sing:

"Sband! 'sband! see! see! Vesty, sweet! Vesty, sweet! Ha, ha! hurrah!"

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## CHAPTER XV.

### THE KIDNAPPER.

It seemed to Judge Daniel Custis as he walked abroad into the Sunday sunshine, that he had never seen a more perfect day. The leaves were turning on the great sycamore-trees, and the maples along the rise in the road wore their most delicate garments of nankeen, while some young hickories, loaded with nuts, and a high gum-tree, splendid in finery, beckoned him out their way, across the Manokin bridge to the opposite hill, where the Presbyterian church overlooked the town.

The Judge, whose eyes were filled with happy tears, partly at the real relief to his circumstances accomplished by Vesta's great sacrifice, and partly by the scene just closed, of her natural honor and fidelity to the man who had forced her wedding vows from her, took the northern course and crossed the little bridge, and as he went up the hill the environs of the town and the town itself spread out behind him in the stillness of the Sabbath, and the quails and fall birds piped and cackled low in the corn and the grain stubble. Some wild-geese in the south flew over the low gray woods towards the bay; a pack of hounds somewhere bayed like distant music; he heard the turkeys gobble, at one of the adjacent farms on the swells in the marshy landscape, where abundance, not otherwise denoted, showed in the fat poultry that roosted in the trees like living fruit and spoke apoplectically.

While he drank in the wine of autumn on the air, that had a bare taste of frost, like the first acid in the sweet cider, he saw a carriage or two come over the level roads towards Princess Anne, and the church-bell told their errand as it dropped into the serenity its fruity twang, like a pippin rolling from the bough. So easily, so musically, so regularly it rang, like the voice of something pure, that was steady even in its joys, that the Judge took off his broad white fur hat, as if to a lady, and listened with something between courtesy and piety.

As the bell continued other carriages came towards town, and some passed him, their inmates all bowing, and often stealing a look back to see Judge Custis again, the first man in the county.

They looked upon an humbled heart, a gladdened soul, which the sharp hand of affliction had made to bleed, while an unforeseen Providence in his darling child had kissed the wound to sleep and sucked the poison from it.

Raising his brow towards the bright blue sky, as if he could not raise it high enough to feel more of that heavenly rest encinctured there, the Judge sighed forth a happy wish, like the kiss of love after a quarrel, when doubt is all dispelled or wrong forgiven:

"O make me as a little child! Wash out my stains! Lead me in the path my child has walked, or I shall never see her in the life to come!"

His lips trembled and his breast heaved convulsively. In that idea of being unfit to enter where his child would go, in the more abundant life beyond the present, he received a distinct sermon from the long-empty pulpit of nature and conscience, and revelations from within clearer than Holy Scriptures; for he felt the justice of the final separation of the impure from the pure, and the faith of perseverance in good to draw onward towards holiness itself, and perseverance in sensuality and selfishness to detain the spirit in its husk of swine. His agony increased.

"Where shall I drift if I go on," he said, "playing the sleek magistrate and family head, and loving to slip away in the dark, like negroes hunting coons by night? What is escaping discovery to the increasing degradation of my own sanctuary, my created spirit? Can I find the way I have wandered down and retrace my steps? There is but little of life left me to do it in, but by God's help I will try! Yes, this golden Sabbath I will do something to begin. What shall it be?"

He put on his hat, and said to himself: "I will go to the Methodist meeting-house: they work directly upon the conscience, deepen the sense of sin, and preach a quick cleansing as by light shining in. There I may grovel in the sight of men and women and arise redeemed. But, no. It is the Sabbath my daughter's marriage is to be announced in our own church, and it would be cowardly, not to say unseemly, to fly from one worship to another now. If I go to church this morning it must be to our own. Is there any excuse but cowardice for not going?"

He looked into his debtor nature, to see what he owed to anybody, that might be owned and settled this day.

Slowly and almost to his dislike there arose an obligation to his wife—the obligation of love he was defrauding her of, if, indeed, he loved her at all with the ardor of old times.

She had fretted his passion away in little sticklings for little proprieties, and narrowing understanding, and subservience to effeminate social traditions. She jarred upon the health of his intellect with her unsympathetic refinements and pitiful uncharities, and fear of all catholicity. She was gentility itself, without the spark of nature, and believing that she inhabited the castle towers of exclusiveness and social righteousness, she had made his home the donjon-keep of his knighthood, at once the loftiest domestic apartment and the prison.

Nevertheless, she was his wife, and something of her nature must be in Vesta, though the Judge had not found it. He reflected that his waywardness might have sharpened her peculiarities and spread the distance between their minds, till, deprived of a husband's guidance, her fluttered woman's nature had quit the pasturage of the fields and air, and perched upon her nest and vegetated there.

"I have gone away from her," he said, "and complain that she has not grown. I have myself abounded in village dignity and pretension, and set her the example of respecting nothing else. I

have been a fraud, and wonder that she is not wordly-wise."

He found his infirm will very obdurate against making love to his wife again, but the request he had just made of Heaven, to lead him into the right steps, prevailed upon him to make his worship at home this morning.

"Yes," he said, "I will start right. She is sick and alone, and Vesta taken from her. I will send a note to the rector to announce the marriage, as Vesta requested, and do my worship at Teackle Hall this day."

The Manokin, spreading wider as it flowed farther from the town, and widening from a brook to a creek, till it moistened fringes of marsh and cut low bluffs into the fields, never seemed to invite him so much to wander along its sluices as this morn.

"If my wife would only walk with me into the country," he said, restlessly, "how more companionable we would have been to each other! But she cannot walk at all; all masculine intercourse ceased between us years ago, and the dull, small range of household talk, and the dynastic gossip of the good families, wear down my spirits. But I have been a truant husband, and my tongue is parched by dusty roving in prodigal ways. Let me woo her again with all my might!"

He walked through Princess Anne, worship now having commenced in all the churches, and saw nobody upon the street except a divided group before the tavern. There he heard Jimmy Phœbus speak to Levin Dennis sharply:

"Levin, what you doin' with that nigger buyer? Ain't you got no Dennis pride left in you?"

The Judge saw that Joe Johnson, safe from civil process on Sunday, even if his enemy had not been helpless in bed, was washing Levin Dennis's brandy-sickened head under the street pump, plying the pump-handle and shampooing him with alternate hands.

"Jimmy," answered Levin, when he was free from the spout, "this gentleman's give me a job. I'm goin' to take him out for tarrapin on the Sound. He's goin' to pay me for it."

"Tarrapin-catchin' on a Sunday ain't no respectable job for a Dennis, nohow," cried Jimmy Phœbus, bluntly; "an' doin' it with a nigger buyer is a fine splurge fur you, by smoke! I can't see where your pride is, Levin, to save my life."

Jack Wonnell, wearing a bell-crown, looked on with timid enjoyment of this plain talk, opening his mouth to grin, shutting it to shudder.

The big stranger, dropping Levin Dennis, strode in his long jack-boots, in which his coarse trousers were stuffed, right to the front of Jimmy Phœbus, and glared at him through his inflamed and unsightly eye. Jimmy met his scowl with a mildness almost amounting to contempt.

"Hark ye!" spoke the stranger, "you have been a picking a quarrel with me all yisterday, an' to-day air a beginnin' of it agin. Do you want to fight?"

"No," said Jimmy, whittling a stick; "I ain't fond of fighting, and I never do it of a Sunday. I wouldn't be guilty of fightin' you, by smoke!"

"I have tuk a bigger nug than you and nicked his kicks into the bottom of his gizzard till his liver-lights fell into my mauleys. So it's nish or knife betwixt us, my bene cove!"

He put his hand upon his hip, where he carried a sheath-knife.

"Raise that hand," said Jimmy Phœbus, with a quick pass of his whittling knife to the giant's throat. "Raise it or, by smoke! yer goes yer jugler."

As Phœbus spoke he lifted one foot, of a prodigious size, as deftly as an elephant hoisting his trunk, and kicked the man's hand from the hip pocket without moving either his own body or countenance. It was done so automatically that the other turned fiercely to see who kicked him, and his sheath-knife, partly raised, was flung by the force of the kick several yards away.

"Pick up his knife, Levin," Jimmy said, "or he'll hurt hissself with it."

At this moment Judge Custis came up and pushed the two powerful men apart.

"Fighting on Sunday in our public street," he exclaimed; "Phœbus, I wouldn't have thought it of you!"

"This yer bully, Judge," Jimmy said coolly, "started to take Prencess Anne the fust day, an' ole Meshach's Samson knocked him a sprawlin', an' Meshach hissself finished him. To-day he starts in to lead off yon poor imbecile, Levin Dennis, and, as I expresses my opinion of it, he draws his knife on me; so I takes my foot, Judge, that you have seen me untie a knot with, and I spiles his wrist with it. Take care of his knife, Levin,—he's a pore creetur without it."

"We'll have this out, nope for nope, or may I take the morning-drop!" growled the strange man.

"That kind of language ain't understood in honest company," Jimmy Phœbus said; "I s'pose it's thieves' lingo, used among your friends, or, maybe, big words you bully strangers with, when you want to cut a splurge. Now, as you've been licked by a nigger and kicked by a white man, maybe you can understand my language! Hark you, too, nigger buyer! Do you know where I saw you

first?"

For the first time a flash of fire came from the pungy captain's black cherries of eyes, and his huge broad face of swarthy color expressed its full Oriental character:

"The last time I saw you, Joe Johnson, was not a-lurking in Judge Custis's kitchen fur no good, nor a-insultin' of the Judge's t'other visitor, Milburn of the steeple-top: it was a-huggin' the whippin'-post on the public green of Georgetown, State of Delaware, an' the sheriff a-layin' of it over your back; an' after he sot you up in the pillory I took the rottenest egg I could git, an' I bust it right on the eye where that nigger bruised you yisterday!"

The oppressive silence, as Joe Johnson slunk back, desperate with rage, yet unable to deny, was broken by Jack Wonnell's unthinking interjection:

"Whoop, Jimmy! Hooraw for Prencess Anne!"

"An' why did I git that egg an' make you smell it, Joe Johnson? Because, by smoke! you was a stinkin' kidnapper, robbing of the pore free niggers of their liberty, knowin' that they didn't carry no arms and couldn't make no good defense! That's your trade, an' it's the meanest an' most cowardly in the world. It's doin' what the Algerynes does in fair fighting. You're a fine American citizen, ain't you? I know your gang, and a bloody one it is, but you can't look a white man in the eye, because you're a thief and a coward!"

The Hellenic nature of the bay captain had never displayed itself to the Judge with this fulness, and he felt some natural admiration as he took Phœbus by the arm.

"Well, well!" said the Judge, "let him go now, Phœbus! Mr. Johnson, don't let me see you in Princess Anne again to-day. Continue your journey and disturb us no more, or I shall put criminal process upon you, and you see we have stout constables in Somerset."

As he led Phœbus around the corner of the bank, the Judge said:

"James, my wife is so sick that I must keep house with her this morning, and I want a little note left at the church for Mr. Tilghman. Will you take it?"

"Why, with pleasure, Judge," the nonchalant villager replied. "I don't look very handsome in the 'piscopal church, but I'll do a' arrand."

As the Judge wrote the note with his gold pencil on a leaf of his memorandum book, he said:

"James, did you identify that man yesterday?"

"Yes, I knowed him as soon as he come to the tavern. This mornin', seein' of him around town, I was afear'd Samson Hat would stumble on him, and the nigger buyer would kill him for yisterday's blow. Thinks I: 'Samson is too white a nigger to be killed that way, by smoke!' but the prejudice agin a nigger hittin' a white man is sich in this state that Joe Johnson, bloody as he is, would never have stretched hemp for Samson Hat; so I picked a quarrel with the nigger buyer to take the fight out of him before Samson should come. He won't fight nobody now in this town. *His* hokey-pokey is done *yer*."

"You took a great risk, Phœbus. He is such an evil fellow in his resentments, that I let him hide and eat in my quarters for fear of some ill requital if I refused. That gang of Patty Cannon's is the curse of the Eastern Shore."

"And if you'll pardon a younger and a porer man, Judge, it's jest sich gentlemen as you that lets it go on. You politicians give them people 'munity, an' let 'em alone because they fight fur you in 'lection times an' air popular with foresters an' pore trash, because they persecutes niggers an' treats to liquor. You know the laws is agin their actions on both sides of the Delaware line, but in Maryland they're a dead letter."

"You speak plain truth, James Phœbus, brave as your conduct. But the poor men must make a sentiment against these kidnappers, because among the ignorant poor they find their defenders and equals."

"Judge," the pungy captain said, "they'se a-makin' a pangymonum of all the destreak about Patty Cannon's. By smoke! it's a shame to liberty. In open day they lead free niggers, men, wimmin, an' little children, too, to be sold, who's free as my mommy and your daughter."

Judge Custis thought painfully of the scant freedom his daughter now enjoyed. Jimmy Phœbus continued:

"Now yer, we're raising hokey-pokey about the Algerynes and the Trypollytins capturin' of a few Christian people an' sellin' of 'em to Turkey, an' about the Turkey people makin' slaves of the Christian Greek folks. Henry Clay is cuttin' a big splurge about it. Money is bein' raised all over the country to send it to 'em. Commodo' Decatur was a big man for a-breakin' of it up. By smoke! they're sellin' more free people to death and hell along Mason and Dixon's line, than up the whole buzzum of the Mediterranean Sea."

The brown-skinned speaker was more excited now than he had been during all the collision with Joe Johnson.

"Indeed, Phœbus, they have kidnapped several thousand people, the Philadelphia abolitionists

say, but the reports must be exaggerated. The demand for negroes is so great, since the cotton-gin and the foreign markets have made cotton a great staple, and the direct importation of slaves from Africa has been stopped, that there is a great run for border-state negroes, and free colored people seldom are righted when they have been pulled across the line."

"They never are righted, Judge Custis! I'm ashamed of my native state. Only a few years ago, when I was a boy, people around yer was a-freein' of their niggers, and it was understood that slavery would a-die out, an' everybody said, 'Let the evil thing go.' But niggers began to go up high; they got to be wuth eight hunderd dollars whair they wasn't wuth two hunderd; and all the politicians begun to say: 'Niggers is not fit to be free. Niggers is the bulrush, or the bulwork, or bull-something of our nation.' And then kidnapping of free niggers started, and the next thing they'll kidnap free American citizens!"

"Tut! tut! James! it will never go that far."

"Won't it? What did Joe Johnson say to me last night before the Washington Tavern? He said: 'I've sold whiter niggers than you, myself. I kin run you to market an' git my price for you!'"

The bay sailor took off his hat.

"Look at me!" he continued; "by smoke! look on my brown skin and black eyes an' coal black hair. Whair did they come from? They come from Greece, whair Leonidas an' Marky Bozarris and all them fellers came from: that's what my daddy said. He know'd better than me. I'm nothin' but a pore Eastern Shore man sailing my little vessel, but I'm a free-born man, and I tell you, Judge, it's a dangerous time when nothing but his shade of color protects a free man."

"James Phœbus," the Judge said, gravely, "I hope you believe me when I say that I think all these things outrages, and they grow out of the greater outrage of slavery itself. We are being governed by new states, hatched in the Southwest from the alligator eggs of old slavery, that had grown into political and moral disrepute with us in Maryland and Virginia."

"There's no nigger in me," Phœbus said, putting on his hat, "but I have taken these hints about my looking like a nigger to heart, and I'll take a nigger's part when he is imposed on, as if he was some of the body and blood of my Lord Jesus. Now you hear it!"

"And brave enough you are to mean it, my honest fellow. So do my errand, and good-morning, James."

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## CHAPTER XVI.

### BELL-CROWN MAN.

As the Judge and Phœbus had turned the corner of the bank Samson Hat appeared, driving down Princess Anne's broad main street a young white girl.

"There's the nigger that set my peep in limbo," muttered the negro dealer, "but even he shall go past to-day. This accursed town is packed agin me."

He took a long look at Samson, however, who mildly returned it in the most respectful manner, as if he had never seen the strange gentleman before. "And now, my pals," Joe Johnson said, turning to Levin Dennis and Jack Wonnell, "we will all three go down to the bay and I'll pervide the lush, and pay the soap while you ketch the tarrapin, an' let me sleep my nazy off."

"I'll go an' no mistake!" cried Jack Wonnell, who had been taking a drink of pump-water out of his bell-crown. "So will you, Levin."

Levin Dennis hesitated; "I want to tell my mother first," he said, "maybe she won't like me fur to go of a Sunday. She'll send Jimmy Phœbus after me."

Joe Johnson took a bag of gold from inside his waist-band, hanging by a loop there, and held up a piece of five before the boy's bright eyes:

"Yer, kid! That's yourn if you don't have no mother about it. Pike away with me, pig widgeon, an' find your boat, and I pay you this pash at sundown."

Levin's credulous eyes shone, and with one reluctant look towards his mother's cottage he led the way into the country.

Little was said as they walked an hour or more towards the west, the stranger apparently brooding upon his indignities, and twice passing around the jug of brandy which Jack Wonnell was made to carry, and before noon they came to a considerable creek, out in which was anchored a small vessel bearing on her stern in illiterate, often inverted, letters the name: *Ellenora Dennis*.

"What's that glib on yonder?" asked Johnson, pointing to the letters.

"That's his mother's name, boss," Jack Wonnell said, hitching at the stranger's breeches, "she's a widder, an' purty as a peach."

"Ain't you got no daddy, pore pap-lap?" Johnson asked coarsely.

"He's gone sence I was a baby," Levin answered; "he went on Judge Custis's uncle's privateer that never was heard of no mo'. We don't know if the British tuk him an' hanged him, or if the *Idy* sunk somewhair an' drowned him, or if she's a-sailin' away off. I has to take care of mother."

"Humph!" growled Joe Johnson; "son of a gander and a gilflirt: purty kid, too—got the ole families into him. No better loll for me!"

Drawing a punt concealed under some marsh brush, young Levin pushed off to his vessel, made her tidy by a few changes, pulled up the jib, and brought her in to the bank.

"Mr. Johnson, I never ketched tarrapin of a Sunday befo', but I reckon tain't no harm."

"Harm? what's that?" Joe Johnson sneered. "Hark ye, boy, no funking with me now! When I begin with a kinchin cove I starts squar. If ye think it's wicked to ketch tarrapin, why, I want 'em caught. If you *don't* keer, you kin jest stick up yer sail an' pint for Deil's Island, an' we'll make it a woyige!"

Not quite clear as to his instructions, Levin took the tiller, and Jack Wonnell superserviceably got the terrapin tongs, and stood in the bow while the cat-boat skimmed down Monie Creek before a good breeze and a lee tide. The chain dredge for terrapin was thrown over the side, but the boat made too much sail for Wonnell to take more than one or two tardy animals with his tongs, as they hovered around the transparent bottoms making ready for their winter descent into the mud.

"Take up your dredge," Johnson commanded in a few minutes. "It makes us go slow."

Jack Wonnell obediently made a few turns on the windlass, and as the bag came up, two terrapin of the then common diamond-back variety rolled on the deck, and a skilpot.

"That's enough tarrapins," Johnson said, "unless you're afraid it's doin' wrong, Levin. Say, spooney! is it wicked now?"

The boy laughed, a little pale of face, and Johnson closed his remark with:

"Nawthin' ain't wicked! Sunday is dustman's day to be broke by heroes. D'ye s'pose yer daddy on the privateer wouldn't lick the British of a Sunday? The way to git rich, sonny, is to break all the commandments at the post, an' pick 'em up agin at the score!"

"That's the way, sho' as you're born. Whoop! Johnson, you got it right!" chuckled Jack Wonnell, not clear as to what was said.

Levin Dennis felt a little shudder pass through him, but he gave the stranger the helm, and by Wonnell's aid raised the main-sheet, and the light boat went winging across Monie Bay, starting the water-fowl as it tacked through them.

"Here's another swig all round," Joe Johnson exclaimed, "and then I'll go below to lollop an hour, for I'm bloody lush."

Levin drank again, and it took the shuddering instinct out of him, and Joe Johnson cried, as he disappeared into the little cabin:

"Ree-collect! You pint her for Deil's Island thoroughfare, and wake me, pals, at the old camp-ground, fur to dine."

The two Princess Anne neighbors felt relieved of the long man's company, and Jack Wonnell lay on his back astern and grinned at Levin as if there was a great unknown joke or coincidence between them, finally whispering:

"Where does he git all his gold?"

Levin shook his head:

"Can't tell, Jack, to save my life. Nigger tradin', I reckon. It must be payin' business, Jack."

"Best business in the world. Wish I had a little of his money, Levin. Hu-ue-oo!" giving a low shout, "then wouldn't I git my gal!"

"Who's yo' gal, Jack, for this winter?"

"You won't tell nobody, Levin?"

"No, hope I may die!"

Jack put his bell-crown up to the side of his mouth, executed another grin, winked one eye knowingly, and whispered:

"Purty yaller Roxy, Jedge Custis's gal."

"She won't have nothin' to do with you, Jack; she's too well raised."

"She ain't had yit, Levin, but I'm follerin' of her aroun'. There ain't no white gal in Princess Anne purty as them two house gals of Jedge Custis's."



"Well, what kin you do with a nigger, Jack? You never kin marry her."

"Maybe I kin buy her, Levin."

"She ain't fur sale, Jack. Jedge Custis never sells no niggers. You can't buy a nigger to save your life. When some of Jedge Custis's niggers in Accomac run away he wouldn't let people hunt for 'em."

Jack Wonnell put his bell-crown to the side of his mouth again, grinned hideously, and whispered:

"Kin you keep a secret?"

Levin nodded, yes.

"Hope a may die?"

"Hope I may die, Jack."

"Jedge Custis is gwyn to be sold out by Meshach Milburn."

"What a lie, Jack!"

Levin let the tiller half go, and the *Ellenora Dennis* swung round and flapped her sails as if such news had driven all the wind out of them.

"Jack," Levin exclaimed, "Jimmy Phœbus says you've turned out a reg'lar liar. Now I believe it, too."

"Hope I may die!" Jack Wonnell protested, "I never does lie: it's too hard to find lies for things when people comes an' tells you, or you kin see fur yourseff. Jimmy called me a liar fur sayin' Meshach Milburn was gone into the Jedge's front do', but we saw him come out of it, didn't we?"

"Yes, that was so; but this yer one is an awful lie."

"Well, Levin, purty yaller Roxy, she told me, an' she's too purty to tell lies. I loves that gal like peach-an'-honey, Levin, an' I don't keer whether she's white or no. She's mos' as white as me, an' a good deal better."

"So you do talk to Roxy some?"

"Levin, I'll tell you all about it, an' you won't tell nobody. Well, I picks magnoleys an' wild roses an' sich purty things fur Roxy to give her missis, an' Roxy gives me cake, an' chicken, an' coffee at the back door, knowin' I ain't got much to buy 'em with. Lord bless her! she don't half know I don't think as much of them cakes an' snacks an' warm rich coffee, as I do of her purty eyes. She's a white angel with a little coffee in her blood, but it's ole Government Javey an' more than half cream!"

Here Levin laughed loudly, and said that Jack must have learned that out of a book.

"Oh," said Jack, shutting one eye hard and joining in the grin, "sence I ben in love I kin say lots o' smart things like that. I have seen purty little Roxy grow up from a chile, an' as she begin to round up and git tall, says I: 'Nigger or no nigger, she's angel!' The white gals they all throwed off on me, caze I wasn't earnin' nothin', an' I sot my eyes on Roxy Custis an' I says: 'What kin I do fur to make her shine to me?' So I kept a-follerin' of her everywhere, an' I see her one day comin' along the road a-pickin' of the wild blossoms an' with her han' full of 'em, an' I says: 'Roxy, what you doin' of with them flowers?' 'They're fur my missis, Miss Vesty,' says she; 'she lives on wild flowers, an' they're all I has to give her, an' I want her to love me as much as Virgie.' You see Levin, the t'other gal, Virgie, waits on Miss Custis, an' Roxy she was a little jealous. Then I says: 'Roxy, I kin git you flowers for your missis. I know whair the magnoleys is bloomin' the whitest an' a-scentin' the whole day long.' 'Do you?' says she, 'Oh, Mr. Wonnell, I would like to have a bunch of magnoleys to put on Miss Vesty's toilet every day.' 'I'll git 'em fur you, Roxy,' says I, 'becaze I allus thought you was a little beauty.' Says she: 'I'd give most anything to surprise Miss Vesty with flowers every day,—rale wild ones!' 'Then,' says I, 'Roxy, I'll git 'em fur you for a kiss!' An' she most a-blushed blood-red an' ran away."

"That's what I told you, Jack, she's raised too well to be talkin' to white fellers."

"Nobody's raised too well," rejoined Jack Wonnell, "to be deaf to love and kindness. Says I to myself: 'Jack, you skeert that gal. Now say nothin' mo' about the kiss, an' go git her the flowers every day, an' she'll think mo' of you!' So away I went to King's Creek an' pulled the magnoleys, an' I come to the do' an' asked ole Hominy to bring down Roxy for a minute. Roxy she come, an' was gwyn to run away till she saw my flowers, an' she stopped a minute an' says I: 'I jest got 'em for you, Roxy, becaze I see you when you was a little chile.' She tuk 'em an' says: 'It was very kind of you, sir,' an' kercheyed an' melted away. Next day I was thar agin, Levin, an' I says, to make it seem like a trade: 'Roxy, kin ye give me a cup of coffee?' 'Law, yes!' she says, forgittin' her blushin' right away. So I kept shady on love an' put it on the groun's of coffee, an', Levin, I everlastin'ly fotched the wild flowers till that gal got to be a-lookin' fur me at the do' every day, an' I'd hide an' see her come to the window an' peep fur me. One day she says, as I was drinkin' of the coffee: 'Mr. Wonnell, what do you put yourself at sech pains fur to 'blige a pore slave girl that ain't but half white?' I thought a minute, so as to say something that wouldn't skeer her off, an' I says: 'Roxy, it's becaze I'm sech a pore, worthless feller that the white gals won't look at me!' The tears come right to her eyes, an' she says: 'Mr. Wonnell, if I was white I would look at

you.' 'I believe you would,' says I, 'becaze you've got a white heart, Roxy.'

"Jack, you're a dog-gone smart lover," said Levin. "I didn't think you had no kind of sense."

"Love-makin' is the best sense of all," said Jack, "it's that sense that keeps the woods a-full of music, where the birds an' bees is twitterin' and hummin' an' a-matin'. Love is the last sense to come, after you can see, an' hear, an' feel, an' they're give to people to find out something purty to love. Love was the whole day's work in the garding of Eden befo' man got too industrious, an' it's all the work I do, an' I hope I do it well."

"Now what did Roxy tell you about Meshach Milburn and Judge Custis?"

"You see, Levin, as I kept up the flower-givin', I could see a little love start up in purty Roxy, but she didn't understand it, an' I was as keerful not to skeer it as if it had been a snow-bird hoppin' to a crumb of bread. She would talk to me about her little troubles, an' I listened keerful as her mammy, becaze little things is what wimmin lives on, an' a lady's man is only a feller patient with their little talk. The more I listened the more she liked to tell me, an' I saw that Roxy was a-thinkin' a great deal of me, Levin, without she or me lettin' of it on.

"This mornin' she came to the door with her eyes jest wiped from a-cryin'. Says I, 'Roxy, little dear, what ails you?' 'Oh, nothin',' says she, 'I can't tell you if thair is.' 'Here's your wild flowers for Miss Vesty,' says I, 'beautiful to see!' 'Oh,' says Roxy, 'Miss Vesty won't need 'em now.' Says I: 'Roxy, air you goin' to have all that trouble on your mind an' not let me carry some of it?' 'Oh, my friend,' she says, 'I must tell you, fur you have been so kind to me: don't whisper it! But my master is in debt to Meshach Milburn, an' *he's* married Miss Vesty, an' we think we're all gwyn to be sold or made to live with that man that wears the bad man's hat.' Says I: 'Roxy, darling, maybe I kin buy you.' 'Oh, I wish you was my master,' Roxy said. An' jest at that minute, love bein' oncommon strong over me this mornin', I took the first kiss from Roxy's mouth, an' she didn't say nothin' agin it."

Here Jack Wonnell kissed the atmosphere several times with deep unction, and ended by a low whoop and whistle, and looked at Levin Dennis with one eye shut, as if to get Levin's opinion of all this.

"Well," Levin said, "I never ain't been in love yet. I 'spect I ought to be. But mother is all I kin take keer of, and, pore soul! she's in so much trouble over me that she can't love nobody else. I git drunk, an' go off sailin' so long, an' spend my money so keerless, that if the Lord didn't look out for her maybe she'd starve."

"Yes, Levin, you likes brandy as much as I likes the gals. You go off for tarrapin, an' taters, an' oysters, an' peddles 'em aroun' Prencess Anne, an' then somebody pulls you in the grog-shops an' away goes your money, an' your mother ain't got no tea and coffee."

"Jack," said Levin, abruptly, "do you believe in ghosts?"

"I don't know, Levin. If I saw one maybe I would, but I'm too trashy for ghosts to see me."

"Well, now," Levin said, "there's a ghost, or something, that looks out for mother when I'm drunk or gone, an' it leaves tea and coffee in the window for her."

"Sho'! why, Levin, that's Jimmy Phoebus! He's ben in love with your mother for years an' she won't have him, but he keep's a hangin' on. He's your mother's ghost."

"No, Jack. I thought it was till Jimmy come to me an' asked me who I guessed it was. He was a little jealous, I reckon. I said: 'It's you, of course, Jimmy!' 'No,' says he, 'by smoke! I don't do any hokey-pokey like that. What I give, I go and give with no sneakin' about it or prying into Ellanory's poverty.' He was right down mad, but he couldn't find nothing out. So I think it may be the ghost of father, drowned at sea, bringing tea and coffee, and sometimes a dress, and a pair of shoes, too, to keep mother warm."

Levin Dennis, standing against the tiller, seemed to Jack Wonnell to be fair and spiritual as a woman, as his comely brow and large eyes grew serious with this relation of his father's mysterious fate. His dark auburn hair, in short ringlets parted in the middle, gave his sunburnt countenance a likeness to some of the old gentle families with which he was allied, his father having been a son of younger sons, in a date when primogeniture prevailed in all this bay region; and therefore, possessing nothing, he went into the war against England as a sailor, and his family influence obtained for him command of the new privateer launched on the Manokin, the *Ida*, which set sail with a good crew and superior armament, amid the acclaims of all Somerset, and, sailing past the Capes into the ocean with all her bunting flying, slid down the farther world to everlasting silence and the vapors of mystery.

His widow waited long and patiently with this only boy, Levin, a scarcely lisping child, and stories of every kind were current; that the captain had been captured and hanged by the enemy, and the ship burned or condemned; that he had hoisted the black flag and become a pirate and quit the western world for the East India waters; and finally, that the *Ida* foundered off Guiana and every soul was drowned.

The widow, a beautiful woman, neglected by her husband's connection, who were sullen at the loss of their investment and their expected profits from the vessel, lived in the little house she had owned before her marriage, and sank into the plainer class of people, almost losing her

identity with the ruling families to which her son was kin, but in her humbler class highly respected and solicited in marriage.

She was still young and fair, and Jimmy Phœbus, a hale bachelor, and captain of a trading schooner, had endeavored to marry her for years, and held on to his hope patiently, exercising many kind offices for her, though his means were limited, and he had poor kin looking to him for help. She feared the absent lover might be alive and return to find her another's wife.

So her son, growing up without a father's discipline, and being too respectable, it was supposed, to put to a trade or be indentured, lived by fugitive pursuits on land and water, hauling and peddling vegetables and provisions at times; and now, by the gift of Jimmy Phœbus, he sailed his little sloop or cat-boat chiefly to carry terrapin to Baltimore. Rough sailor acquaintances, exposure, a credulous, easily led nature, and almost total neglect of school at a time when education was a high privilege, had made him wayward and often intemperate, but without developing any selfish or cruel characteristics, and being of an agreeable exterior and affable disposition, he fell a prey to any strangers who might be in town—gunners, negro buyers, idle planters, and spreeing overseers, many of whom hired his company and vessel to take their excursions; and, while loving his mother, and being her only reliance, she saw him slipping further and further into manhood without steadiness or education or fixed principles, or any female influence to draw him to domestic constraints.

His slender, supple figure, and marks of gentility in his limbs, and shapely brow and large, gentle eyes, poorly consorted with ragged clothes, bare feet, and absolute dependence on chance employment, the latter becoming more precarious as his age and stature made more demands for money through his false appetites.

"Jack," said Levin Dennis, "what do you mean by gittin' money to buy Roxy Custis? You never git no money."

"Won't he give it to me? Him?" Jack Wonnell indicated the hatchway down which Joe Johnson had gone. "He's got bags of it."

"Him? Why, Jack, how much money do you s'pose a beautiful servant like Roxy will fetch?"

"Won't that piece *he's* gwyn to give you buy her?"

"Five dollars? Why, you poor fool, she will bring five hundred dollars—maybe thousands. This nigger trader, with all his gold, would be hard pushed, I s'pect, to buy Roxy."

Jack looked downcast, and failed to wink or whistle.

"Gals like her," said Levin, "goes for mistresses to rich men, an' sometimes they eddicates 'em, I've hearn tell, to know music, an' writin', an' grammar, an' them things."

"And a pore man who wouldn't abuse a gal most white like that, but would respect her an' marry her, too, Levin, they makes laws agin him! Maybe I kin steal Roxy?"

Here Jack whistled low, shut one eye with deep knowingness, and grinned behind his bell-crown.

"Oh, you simpleton!" Levin said. "Where could you take her to?"

"Pennsylvania, Cannydy, Turkey, or some of them Abolition states up thar"—Jack Wonnell indicated the North with his finger. "Ain't there no place where a white man kin treat a bright-skinned slave like that as if they both was a Christian?"

"No," answered Levin, "not in this world."

The hero of the bell-crowns was much affected, and Levin thought he really was whimpering, though his vacant grin was a poor frame for grief.

"Jack," said Levin, "if what Roxy Custis told is true, the gal is the slave of your pertickler enemy, Meshach Milburn."

The wearer of the rival species of hat was "badly sobered," as Levin mentally expressed it, at this dismal solution of his gentle dreams of love. He arose and walked to the bow of the boat, and looked down into the flying waves over which the cat-boat skipped, as if he might seek the solution of his own disconnected yet harmless life in the bottom of the sound, among the oyster rocks.

The water was now speckled with canoes and periaugers (pirogues), and little sail-boats coming from Deil's Island preaching, and before them rose out of the bay the low woody islands and capes which, with white straits between, enclose from the long blue nave of the Chesapeake the scalloped aisle called Tangier Sound. Like pigeons and wrens around some cathedral, the wild-fowl flew in these involuted, almost fantastic, architectures of archipelago and peninsula, which, lying flat to the water, yet took ragged perspective there, as if some Gothic builder had laid his foundations, but had not bent the tall pines together, that grew above in palm-like groves, to make the groined roofs and arches of his design.

Here could be seen the ospreys, sailing in graceful pairs above the herrings' or the old wives' shoals, taking with elegance and conscientiousness the daily animal food that even man demands, with all his sentiments and gospels. There the canvas-back duck, in a little flock, broke the Sabbath to dive for the wild celery that grows beneath the sound. In yonder tree the bald

eagle was starting out upon his Algerine work of vehemence and piety, to intercept the hawk and steal his cargo. The wild swan might be those faint, far birds flying so high over Kedge's Straits, in the south, and the black loon, spreading his wings like a demon, disappears close to the cat-boat, and rises no more till memory has forgotten him.

Levin Dennis steered close to a point where he had been wont to scatter food for the black ducks, and draw them to the gunner's ambush. Sheldrakes and goosanders, coots and gulls, whiffers and dippers, made the best of Sunday, and bathed and wrote their winged penmanship on the white sheet of water.

Poor Jack Wonnell returning, with something on his face between a grin and a tear, said:

"Levin, didn't I never harm nobody?"

"Not as I ever heard about, Jack. They say you ain't got no sense, but you never fight nobody. Everybody kin git along with you, Jack!"

"No they can't, Levin. Meshach Milburn hates the ground I tread on. If he know'd I was in love with little Roxy he'd marry her to a nigger."

"What makes him hate you so, Jack?"

"Becaze I wears my bell-crowns, and he wears the steeple-top hat. He thinks I'm a-mockin' of him. Levin, I ain't got no other kind of hat to wear. Meshach Milburn needn't wear that air hat, but if I don't wear a bell-crown I must go bareheaded. I bought that lot of hats with the only dollar or two I ever had, as they say a fool an' his money is soon parted. The boys said they was dirt cheap. Now there wouldn't be nothin' to see wrong in my bell-crowns, ef all the people wasn't pintin' at ole Milburn's Entail Hat, as they call it. Why can't he, rich as a Jew, go buy a new hat, or buy me one? I don't want to mock him. I'm afeard of him! He looks at me with them loaded pistols of eyes an' it mos' makes me cry, becaze I ain't done nothin'. I'm as pore as them trash ducks," pointing to a brace of dippers, which were of no value in the market, "but I ain't got no malice."

"No, Jack. That trader could give you that bag of gold to keep and it would be safe, becaze it wasn't your own."

"I 'spect I will have to go to the pore-house some day, Levin; my ole aunt, who takes keer of me, can't live long, an' I ain't good fur nothin'. I can't git no jobs and I run arrands for everybody fur nothin', but the first money I git I'm gwyn to buy a new hat with. Ever sence I wore these bell-crowns Meshach hates me, an' I hope he's the only man that does hate me, Levin. I don't think Meshach kin be a bad man."

"How kin he be good, Jack?"

"Why, I have seen him in the woods when he didn't see me, calling up the birds. Danged if they didn't come and git on him! Now birds ain't gwyn to hop on a man that's a devil, Levin. Do you believe he deals with the devil?"

"I do," said Levin; "I see sich quare things I believe in most anything quare. These yer tarrapins has got sense, and they're no more like it than a stone. One night when we hadn't nothin' to eat at home, mother and me, an' she was a sittin' there with tears in her eyes wonderin' what we'd do next day, I ree-collected, Levin, that there was four tarrapins down in the cellar,—black tarrapin, that had been put there six months before. I said to mother: 'I 'spect them ole tarrapins is dead an' starved, but I'll go see.'

"I found 'em under the wood-pile, an' they didn't smell nor nothin', so I took 'em all four up to mother an' put 'em on the kitchen table befo' the fire, an' I devilled 'em every way to wake up, an' crawl, and show some signs of life. No, they was stone dead!

"Well, mother,' says I, 'put on your bilin' water an' we'll see if dead tarrapin is fit fur to eat!' She smiled through her cryin', and put the water on, an' when it began to bubble in the pot, I lifted up one of them tarrapins an' dropped him in the bilin' water, an' Jack, I'll be dog-goned if them other three tarrapins didn't run right off the table an' drop on to the flo' an' skeet for that cellar door!

"I caught 'em an' biled 'em, an' as we sat there eatin' stewed tarrapin without no salt, or sherry wine, or coffee, or even corn-bread, we heard somethin' like paper scratchin' on the window, an' mother fell back and clasped her hands, an' said, 'There, do you hear the ghost?'

"I rushed to the door an' hopped into the yard, an' not a livin' creature did I see; but there on the window-shelf was packages of salt, coffee, tea, and flour, and a half a dollar in silver! I run back in the house, white as a ghost myself, an' I cried out, 'Mother, it's father's sperrit come again!'

"She made me git on my knees an' pray with her to give poor father's spirit comfort in his home or in heaven!"

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## CHAPTER XVII.

### SABBATH AND CANOE.

They now approached an island with low bluffs, on which appeared a considerable village, shining whitely amid the straight brown trunks of a grove of pine-trees; but no people seemed moving about it, and they saw but a single vessel at anchor in the thoroughfare or strait they steered into—a canoe, which revealed on her bow, as they rounded to beside her, a word neither Levin nor Jack could read, except by hearsay: *The Methodist*.

"Jack," said Levin, "that was a big pine-tree the parson hewed his canoe outen. She fell like cannon, going off inter the swamp. She's a'most five fathom long, an' a man can lie down acrost her. She's to carry the Methodis' preachers out to the islands."

"Hadn't we better wake *him* up now?" said Jack Wonnell; "I 'spect you want a drink, Levin?"

"Yes; I got a thirst on me like fire," Levin exclaimed. "I could do somethin' wicked now, I 'spect, for a drink of that brandy."

Mooring against the shore, Levin went to his passenger, who was still in deep sleep stretched upon the bare floor of the hold or cabin—a brawny, wiry man, with strong chin and long jaws, and his reddish, dark beard matted with the blood that had spilled from his disfigured eye, and now disguised nearly one half his face, and gave him a wild, bandit look.

"Cap'n! mister! boss! wake up! We have come to Deil's Island."

The long man, lying on his back, seemed unable to turn over upon his side, though he muttered in his stirred sleep such words as Levin could not understand:

"The darbies, Patty! Make haste with them darbies! Put the nippers on her wrists an' twist 'em. Ha! the mort is dying. Well, to the garden with her!"

At this he awoke, and turned his cold, light eyes on Levin, and leaped to his feet.

"Did you hear me?" he cried. "It was only numbs, kid, and jabber of a nazy man. Some day this sleep-talk will grow my neck-weed. Don't mind me, Levin! Come, lush and cock an organ with me, my bene cove!"

"If you mean brandy," Levin said, "I must have some or I'll jump out of my skin. I feel like the man with the poker was a-comin'."

Joe Johnson gave him the jug and held it up, and the boy drank like one desperate.

"How the young jagger lushes his jockey," the tall man muttered. "He's in Job's dock to-day. I'll take no more. A bloody fool I was all yesterday, an' oaring with my picture-frame. What place is this?"

"Deil's Island, sir."

"Ha! so it is. 'Twas Devil's Island once, till the Methodies changed it fur politeness. This is the camp-meetin', then? Yer, Wonnell, take this piece of money, an' go to some house an' fetch us a bite of dinner. We'll wait fur you."

The tall man led the way to the heart of the grove of pines, where the seeming town was found—a deserted religious encampment of durable wooden shells, or huts, in concentric circles of horseshoe shape, and at the open end of the circle was the preaching-stand, a shed elevated above the empty benches and pegs of removed benches, and which had a wide shelf running across the whole front for the preacher's Bible, and to receive his thwacks as he walked up and down his platform.

It looked a little mysterious now, with the many evidences of a large human occupation in the recent summer, to see this naked town and hollow pulpit lying so suggestively under the long moan of the pine-trees, conferring together like dread angels in council, and expressing at every rising breeze their impatience with the sins of men.

At times the great branches paused awhile, scarcely murmuring, as if they were brooding on some question propounded in their council, or listening to human witnesses below; and then they would gravely converse, as the regular zephyrs moved in and out among them, and pause again, as if their decision was almost dreaded by themselves. At intervals, a stern spirit in the pines would rise and thunder and shake the shafts of the trees, and others would answer him, and patience would have a season again. And so, with scarcely ever a silence that remained more than a moment, this council went on all day, continued all night, was resumed as the sun arose to comfort the world again, ceased not when the rainbow hung out its perennial assurance upon the storm, and typified to trembling worshippers the great synod of the Creator, in everlasting session, ready to smite the world with fire, but suspending sentence in the evergreen pity of God.

In one of the deserted shells, or "tents," of pine, with neatly shingled roof, facing the preaching-booth, Joe Johnson and Levin Dennis found benches, and, at the tall man's example, Levin also lighted a pipe, and looked out between the escapes of smoke at Tangier Sound, deserted as this camp-ground on the Sabbath, since the worshippers had reached home from church in their canoes. He thought of his lonely mother in the town of Princess Anne, wondering where he was, and of the Sundays fast speeding by and bringing him to manhood, with no change in their condition for the better, but penury and disappointment, a vague expectation of the dead to return, and deeper intemperance of the dead man's son and widow's only hope. He would have cried out with a sense of misery contagious from the music of those pines above him, perhaps, if

the brandy had not begun to creep along his veins and shine bold in his large, girlish eyes.

"Levin," said Joe Johnson, "don't you like me?"

"Yes, Mr. Johnson, I think I does, 'cept when you use them quare words I can't understan'."

"I'm dead struck with you, Levin," Joe Johnson said. "I want to fix you an' your mother comfortable. You're blood stock, an' ought to be stabled on gold oats."

He drew the canvas bag of eagles and half-eagles out of his trousers, and held its mouth open for Levin to feast his eyes.

"Thar," said he, "I told you, Levin, I was a-goin' to give you one of them purties. I've changed my mind; I'm a-goin' to give you five of 'em!"

"My Lord!" exclaimed Levin; "that's twenty-five dollars, ain't it, sir?"

"Oll korrekt, Levin. Five of them finniiffs makes a quarter of a hundred dollars—more posh, Levin, I 'spect, than ever you see."

"I never had but ten, sir, at a time, an' that I put in this boat, and Jimmy Phœbus put ten to it, an' that paid for her."

"What a stingy pam he was to give you only ten!" Joe Johnson exclaimed, with disgust. "Ain't I a better friend to ye? Yer, take the money *now*!"

He pressed the gold pieces ostentatiously upon the boy, who looked at them with fear, yet fascination.

"What am I to do to earn all this, Mr. Johnson?"

"You comes with me fur a week,—you an' yer boat. I charters you at that figger!"

"But—mother?"

"Well, when we discharge pigwidgeon, your friend with the bell shape—Jack Sheep yer—all you got to do, Levin, is to send the hard cole to your mother by him, sayin', 'Bless you, marm; my wages will excoos my face!'"

"Oh, yes, that will do. Mother will know by the money that I have got a long job, and not be a 'spectin' of me. When do we sail, cap'n?"

"How fur is it to Prencess Anne? What time to-night kin you make it?"

Levin stepped out of the shanty and looked at the wind and water, his pulses all a-flutter between the strong brandy and the wonderful gold in his pocket; and as he watched the veering of the pine-boughs to see which way they moved, their moaning seemed to be the voice of his widowed mother by her kitchen fire that day, saying, "He is in trouble. Where is my son? Why stays he, O my Levin?"

"The tide is on the stand, cap'n, an' will turn in half an hour. It will take us up the Manokin with this wind by dark, ef we can get water enough in the thoroughfare without going around by Little Deil's."

Johnson came out and made the same observations on wind and flood.

"I reckon it's eighteen miles to the head of deep water on Manokin, Levin?"

"Not quite, sir, through the thoroughfare; it's nigh eighteen. We've got four hours and a half of daylight yet."

"Then stand for the head of Manokin an' obey all my orders like a 'listed man, an' I'll git ye and yer mother a plantation, an' stock it with niggers for you. Come, brace up again!"

He offered the brandy-jug, and encouraged the boy to drink heartily, and affected to do the same himself, though it was but a feint.

While they stood in the shelter of the camp cottage going through this pastime, a voice from near at hand resounded through the woods, and made their blood stop to circulate for an instant on the arrested heart.

It was a voice making a prayer at a high pitch, as if intended to cover all the camp-ground and be heard to the outermost bounds. The sincerity of the sound made Levin Dennis feel that the camp might still be inhabited by some spiritual congregation which the eyes of profane visitors could not see—the remainder of the saints, the souls of the converted, or an ethereal host from above the solemn organ of the pines.

The idea had scarcely seized upon him when a fluttering of wings was heard, and on the old camp-ground alighted a flock of white wild-geese.

They balanced their large deacon and elder-like bodies upon the empty seats, and there set up as grave a squawking as if they were singing a hymn, with that indifferent knowledge of harmony possessed by camp-meeting choristers.

The accident of their coming—no unusual thing on these exposed islands—might have made

untroubled people only laugh, but it produced the contrary effect on both our visitors. Levin felt a superstitious fear seize upon him, and, turning to Joe Johnson, he saw that person with a face so pale that it showed his blood-gathered eye yet darker and more hideous, like a brand upon his countenance, gazing upon the late empty preaching-booth.

There Levin, turning his eyes, observed a solitary man kneeling, of a plain appearance and dress, and with locks of womanly hair falling carelessly upon a large and almost noble forehead, his arms raised to heaven and his voice flowing out in a mellow stream of supplication, in the intervals of which the geese could be heard quacking aloud and paddling their wings as they balanced and hopped over the camp-meeting arena.

"Who's he a prayin' to?" Levin asked of Joe Johnson.

"Quemar!" muttered Johnson, as if he were terrified at something; "his potato-trap is swallerin' ghosts! Curse on the swaddler? The kid will whindle directly. Come, boy, come!"

At this, seizing Levin's hand, partly in persuasion, partly as if he wanted the lad's protection, Johnson, fairly trembling, ran for the boat.

Levin was frightened too; the more that he saw the stronger man's fear. As they dashed across the camp-ground the wild-geese took alarm, and, some running, some flying, scudded towards the Sound. A voice from the pulpit cried after the retreating men, but only to increase their fears, and when they leaped on board the *Ellenora*, Joe Johnson was livid with terror. He ran partly down the companion-way and stopped to look back: the wild-geese were now spreading their wings like a fleet of fleecy sails, and fluttering down the sound in gallant convoy.

"What did you run for?" Levin said; "the jug of brandy is left. It was only Parson Thomas!"

"You run first," the man replied, gasping for breath, and a little ashamed. "What did he preach at me fur?"

"That's the parson of the islands," Levin said; "he started Deil's Island camp-meetin' last year, an' his favo-rite preacher dyin' jess as he got it done, ole Pap Thomas, who lives yer, comes out to the preachin'-stand sometimes alone, an' has a cry and a prayer. The geese scared *me*, cap'n."

"Push off!" ordered Joe Johnson; "my teeth are most a-chatterin' with the chill that mace cove give me."

He pulled up the anchor, hoisted the jib, and showed such nervous apprehension that Levin subsided to managing the helm, and steered down the thoroughfare, or strait, which, for some distance, wound around the camp-meeting grove.

"Yer's Jack Wonnell comin' with the jug and the dinner. Sha'n't we wait fur him?"

"He's got the kingdom-come cove with him! No; stop for nothing."

But the boat had to stop, as her keel scraped the mud in the almost dry thoroughfare, and a plain island man of benevolent, nearly credulous, face, hailed them, saying, stutteringly:

"Ne-ne-neighbors, do-don't be sc-scared that a-way. We ain't he-eee-thens yer. Br-br-brother Wonnell's bringin' your taters and pone."

"Come on, an' be damned to you?" Johnson cried to Wonnell. "What do we want with this tolabon sauce?"

"Sw-w-wear not a-a-at all!" cried the parson of the islands. "'Twon't l-l-lift ye over l-l-low tide, brother. Stay an' eat, an' t-t-talk a little with us. Why, I have seen that f-f-face before!"

"Never in a gospel-ken before," the slave-dealer muttered, with an oath.

"B-but it can't be him," spoke the island parson, with solemnity. "Ole Ebenezer Johnson died s-s-several year ago."

"Who was he?" cried the slave-dealer, with a little respectful interest.

"Eben-z-zer Johnson," Parson Thomas replied, with a mild and credulous countenance, "was the wickedest man on the Eastern Sho' for twenty year. P-pardon me, brother, fur a likin' ye to him, but somethin' in ye y-y-yur," passing his hand upon his skull, "p-puts me in mind of him. It was hyur he was shot"—still keeping his hand upon the skull—"through an' through, an' died the death of the sinner. I have p-p-put my f-f-finger through the two holes where the b-bullet come an' went, an' rid this w-world of a d-d-demon!"

The story appeared to have a fascination for the slave-buyer, Levin Dennis thought, and Johnson exclaimed:

"Well, hod, did he ever run afoul of *you*?"

"O y-y-yes," answered the genial island exhorter, with obliging loquacity; "it was tw-w-enty-s-seven year ago that I see ole Eben-nezer Johnson come on the camp-ground of P-p-pungoteague with a mob of p-p-pirates to break up the f-f-fust Methodies camp-meetin' ever held about these sounds. He was en-c-couraged by ole King Custis, f-f-father of our Daniel Custis, of Prencess Anne, who was a b-b-big man fur the Establish Church an' d-dispised the Methodies. It was a cowardly thing to do, but while King C-C-Custis laughed and talked a' durin' of the p-p-preachin',

Eb-b-benezer Johnson started a fight. The preacher c-c-cut his eye and saw who was a w-w-winkin' at the interference. He was a l-l-lion of the L-l-lord, and bore the c-c-commission of Immanuel. He knowed he was outen the s-s-state of Maryland and over in the V-v-vergeenia county of Ac-c-comack, an' that if the l-l-laws was a little more t-t-tolerant sence the Revolutionary war the ar-r-ristocracy there was b-b-bitter as ever towards the people of the Lord. He t-t-turned from his preachin' at last, right on King Custis, an' he pinted his f-finger at him straight. The p-preacher was L-l-lorenzo Dow."

"Wheoo!" Jack Wonnell exclaimed, with a coinciding grin; "I've hearn of him: a Yankee-faced feller, like a woman, with long braids an' curls of hair fallin' around of his breast an' back, and a ole straw hat, rain or shine."

"That was L-l-lorenzo Dow," the parson of the islands said. "He turned on K-k-king Custis and screamed, 'W-who art thou? The L-lord shall smite thee, w-whited sepulchre, and m-mock thee in thy ch-h-children's children, thou A-a-a-hab and thy J-j-jezebel!' It was King Custis's wife he pinted at, too, the greatest lady and heiress in V-v-virgeenia. Sh-h-e f-fainted in f-fear or r-rage to hear the prophecy and insult of her. Then, turning on Eb-b-benezer Johnson, Lorenzo Dow cried out, 'The dogs shall lie buried safer than his bones. Lay hold of him, brethren!' And s-something in Lorenzo Dow's t-trumpet-blast made every M-methodist a giant. They s-swept on Ebenezer Johnson, the bully of thr-ree states, an' beat him to the ground, an' raced his band to their boats, an' then they th-hrew him into a little j-j-jail they had on the camp-ground, f-for safe keeping."

"What did King Custis do then, Pappy Thomas?" asked Levin.

"Why, brethren, what did he do but use his f-f-family influence to g-git out a warrant for the preacher and his m-managers, on the ground of f-false imprisonment and s-slander! Lorenzo Dow got over into Maryland s-safe from the warrant, but our p-presiding elder was p-put in jail till he could p-pay two thousand dollars fine. It almost beggared the poor Methodies of that day to raise so much money, but g-glory be to G-god! we can raise it now any day in the year, and in the next g-generation we can buy our p-persecutors."

"So Ebenezer Johnson, accordin' to the autum bawler's patter, got popped in the mazzard, my brother of the surplice? But he didn't climb no ladder, did he?"

The stuttering host seemed not to comprehend this sneering exclamation, and Levin Dennis said:

"King Custis wasn't killed, was he, Pappy Thomas?"

"It was his children's children his p-p-punishment was promised to," the island parson said, "and to the Lord a thousand y-years are but as d-days."

"The tide is fuller, Levin," Joe Johnson cried, "your keel is clear. Now pint her for Manokin. So bingavast, my benen cove, and may you chant all by yourself when I am gone!"

"God bless the boys!" the islander cried, "an' k-keep them from the f-fire everlasting that is burning in your jug. And s-s-stranger, remember the end of Eb-b-benezer Johnson, an' repent!"

The old man, barefooted, stoop-shouldered, stuttering, yet with a chord of natural rhetoric in his high fiddle-string of a windpipe, stood looking after them till they passed down the thoroughfare under the jib-sail, and Joe Johnson did not say a word till some marsh brush intervned between them, he being apparently under a remnant of that panic which had seized him on the camp-ground.

"That's a good man," Levin Dennis said, giving the tiller to Jack Wonnell and raising the sail; "he preached to the Britishers when they sailed from Tangiers Islands to take Baltimore, and told 'em they would be beat an' their ginerals killed. He's made the oystermen all round yer jine the island churches an' keep Sunday. That stutterin' leaves him when he preaches, and when he leads the shout in meetin' it's piercin' as a horn."

"He's a bloody Romany rogue," Joe Johnson muttered, "to tell me such a tale! But, kirjalis! he cursed not me!"

"What language is that, Mr. Johnson? Is it Dutch or Porteygee?"

"It's what we call the gypsy; some calls it the Quaker. It's convenient, Levin, when you go to Philadelfey, or Washinton, or New York, or some o' them big cities, an' wants to talk to men of enterprise without the quails a-pipin' of you. Some day I'll larn it to you if you're a good boy."

They now sailed out of the thoroughfare into the broad mouth of the Manokin, where a calm fell upon air and water for a little while, and they could hear smothered music, as of drum-fish beneath the water, beating, "thum! thum!" and crabs and alewives rose to the surface around them, chased by the tailor-fish. The cat-boat drifted into the mouth of a creek where rock and perch were running on the top of the water, and with the tongs Jack Wonnell raised half a bushel of oysters in a few dips, and opened them for the party. Along the shores wild haws and wild plums still adhered to the bushes, and the stiff-branched persimmon-trees bore thousands of their tomato-like fruit. The partridges were chirping in the corn, the crow blackbirds held a funeral feast around the fodder, some old-time bayside mansions stretched their long sides and speckled negro quarters along the inlets, half hidden by the nut-trees, and in the air soared the turkey-buzzard, like a voluptuary politician, taking beauty from nothing but his lofty station.

"The ole Eastern Sho'," Jack Wonnell said, with his animated vacancy, "is jess stuffed with good



things, Cap'n Johnsin. You kin fall ovaboard most anywhair an' git a full meal. You kin catch a bucket of crabs with a piece of a candle befo' breakfast, an' shoot a wild-duck mos' with your eyes shet."

"This country's good for nothin'," Joe Johnson said. "Floredey is the land! Wot kin a nigger earn for yer? Corn, taters, melons: faugh! Tobacco is a givin' out, cotton won't live yer. But Floredey is the hell-dorader of the yearth."

"What's the hell-dorader?" asked Levin.

"That's Spanish or Porteygee for cheap niggers an' cotton," cried the trader. "Cotton's the bird!"

"I thought cotton was a wool," Levin said.

"No, boy, cotton is a plant, growin' like a raspberry on a bush, havin' pushed the blossoms off an' burst the pods below 'em, an' thar it is fur niggers to pick it. Thar's a Yankee in Georgey made a cotton-gin to gin it clean, an' now all the world wants some of it."

"Some of the gin?" asked the irrelevant Wonnell.

"No, some of the cotton, Doctor Green! They can't git enough of it. Eurip is crazy about it, but there ain't niggers enough to pick it all. So I'm in the nigger trade an' tryin' to be useful to my country, an' wot does I git fur it? I git looked down on, an' a nigger's pertected fur a-topperin' of me! But never mind, I'll be a big skull yet, an' keep my kerrige—in Floredey."

"What's Floredey good fur?" Levin asked.

"It's full of nigger Injins, Simminoles, every one of 'em goin' to be caught an' branded, an' put at cotton an' tobakker plantin', an' hog an' cow herdin'. More niggers will be run in from Cubey, an' all the free niggers in Delaware and up North will be sold, an' you an' me, Levin, is gwyn to own a drove of 'em an' have a orchard of oranges an' a thousand acres of cotton in bloom. We'll hold our heads up. Your mother shall be switched to a nabob. My wife will be a shakester in diamonds. We'll dispise Cambridge an' Princess Anne, an' there sha'n't be a free nigger left on the face of the earth. We'll swig to it!"

The sick-headed yet fancy-ridden Levin drank again, and listened to the dealer's marvellous tales of golden fruit on coasts of indigo, and palms that sheltered parrots calling to the wild deer. Jack Wonnell took the helm when Levin lay down to sleep in the little cabin, still lulled by tales of wealth and lawless daring, and there he slept the deep sleep of the castaway, when the vessel grounded at dusk, in the sound of evening church-bells, at Princess Anne.

"Let him sleep," Joe Johnson spoke; "yer, Wonnell, I give you tray of his strangers to take to his mommy," handing out three gold pieces. "Don't you forgit it! Yer's a syebuck fur you," giving Jack a sixpence. "You an' me will part company at Prencess Anne."

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## CHAPTER XVIII.

### UNDER AN OLD BONNET.

Vesta had been sitting half an hour beside her unconscious husband, listening to his broken speech, and thinking upon the rapidity of events once started on their course, like eaglets scarcely taught to fly before they attack and kill, when the sound of carriage-wheels, arrested at the door, called her to the window, and Tom, the mocking-bird, which had been comparatively quiet since he found his master snugly cared for, now began to hop about, fly in the air, and sing again:

"Sweet—sweet—sweetie! come see! come see!"

Vesta saw Meshach's wiry, deliberate colored man step down and turn the horses' heads, and there dropped from the carriage, without using the carriage-step, at a leap and a skip, a young female object whose head was invisible in an enormous coal-scuttle bonnet of figured blue chintz. However quick she executed the leap, Vesta observed that the arrival had forgotten to put on her stockings.

Before Vesta could turn from the window this singular object had darted up the dark stairs of the old storehouse and thrown herself on the delirious man's bed:

"Uncle, Uncle Meshach! air you dead, uncle? Wake up and kiss your Rhudy!"

She had kissed her uncle plentifully while awaiting the same of him, and the attack a little excited him, without recalling his mind to any sustained remembrance, though Vesta heard the words "dear child," before he turned his head and chased the wild poppies again. Then the young female, ejaculating,

"Lord sakes! Uncle don't know his Rhudy!" pulled her black apron over her head and had a silent cry—a little convulsion of the neck and not an audible sigh besides.

"She weeps with some refinement," Vesta thought; and also observed that the visitor was a tall,

long-fingered, rather slightly girl of, probably, seventeen, with clothing the mantuamaker was guiltless of, and a hoop bonnet, such as old people continued to make in remembrance of the high-decked vessels which had brought the last styles to them when their ancestors emigrated with their all, and forever, from a land of *modes*. The bonnet was a remarkable object to Vesta, though she had seen some such at a distance, coining in upon the heads of the forest people to the Methodist church. It resembled the high-pooed ship of Columbus, which he had built so high on purpose, the girls at the seminary said, so as to have the advantage of spying the New World first; but it also resembled the long, hollow, bow-shaped Conestoga wagons of which Vesta had seen so many going past her boarding-school at Ellicott's Mills before the late new railroad had quite reached there. As she had often peered into those vast, blue-bodied wagons to see what creatures might be passengers in their depths, so she took the first opportunity of the blue scuttle being jolted up by the mourner to discern the face within.

It was a pretty face, with a pair of feeling and also mischievous brown eyes, set in the attitude of wonder the moment they observed another woman in the room. The skin was pale, the mouth generous, the nose long, like Milburn's, but not so emphatic, and the neck, brow, and form of the face longish, and with something fine amid the wild, cow-like stare she fixed on Vesta, exclaiming, in a whisper,

"Lord sakes! a lady's yer!"

Then she threw her apron over the Conestoga bonnet again, and held it up there with her long fingers, and long, plump, weather-stained wrists.

Vesta looked on with the first symptoms of amusement she had felt since the morning she and her mother laughed at the steeple-crown hat, as they looked down from the windows of Teackle Hall upon the man already her husband. That morning seemed a year ago; it was but yesterday.

"Old hats and bonnets," Vesta thought, "will be no novelties to me by and by. This family of the Milburns is full of them."

Then, addressing the new arrival, Vesta said,

"This is your uncle, then? Where do you live?"

"I live at Nu *Ark*," answered the miss, taking down the black apron and looking from the depths of the bonnet, like a guinea-pig from his hole.

"If she had said 'the Ark' without the 'New,'" Vesta thought, "it would have seemed natural."

"Your uncle has a high fever," Vesta said, kindly; "he is not in danger, we think. It was right of you to come, however. Now take off your bonnet. What is your name?"

"Rhudy—I'm Rhudy Hullin, ma'am."

"Rhoda—Rhoda Holland, I think you say."

"Yes'm, Rhudy Hullin. I live crost the Pookamuke, on the Oushin side, out thar by Sinepuxin. I don't live in a great big town like Princess Anne; I live in Nu Ark."

At this the girl carefully extricated her head from the Conestoga scuttle, looked all over the bonnet with pride and anxiety, and then carefully laid it on the top of her uncle's hat-box.

"Uncle Meshach give it to me," she said, with a sly inclination towards the sick bed. "Misc Somers made it. Uncle, he bought all the stuff; Misc Somers draw'd it. Did you ever see anything like it?"

"Never," said Vesta.

"Well, some folks out Sinepuxin said it was a sin and a shame—sech extravagins; but Misc Somers she said Uncle Meshach was rich an' hadn't but one Rhudy. It ain't quite as big as Misc Somers's bonnet, but it's draw'd mour."

Here Rhoda gave a repetition of what Vesta had twice before observed—an inaudible snuffle, and, being caught in it, wiped her nose on her apron.

"Take my handkerchief," Vesta said, "you are cold," and passed over her cambric with a lace border.

"What's it fur?" Rhoda asked, looking at it superstitiously. "You don't wipe your nuse on it, do you? Lord sakes! ain't it a piece of your neck fixin'?"

Vesta felt in a good humor to see this weed of nature turn the handkerchief over and hold it by the thumb and finger, as if she might become accountable for anything that might happen to it.

"I got two of these yer," she said; "Misc Somers made 'em outen a frock. They ain't got this starch on 'em; they're great big things. I always forgit 'em. My nuse wipes itself."

"Now come near the fire and warm your feet," said Vesta; "for your ride from the oceanside, this cold morning, through the forests of the Pocomoke, must have chilled you through. Lay off your blanket shawl."

Rhoda laid the huge black and green shawl, that reached to her feet, on the green chest, and smoothed it with evident pride.

"Uncle Meshach bought that in Wilmington," she said; "ain't it beautiful! I never wear it but when I come over yer or go to Snow Hill. Snow Hill's sech a proud place!"

She had a way of laughing, by merely indenting her cheeks, without a sound, just as she expressed the sense of pain; the only difference being in the beaming of her eyes; and Vesta thought it had something contagious in it. She would laugh broadly and in silence, as if she had been put on behavior in church, and there had adopted a grimace to make the other girls laugh and save herself the suspicion.

As she pulled her skirts down to her feet, Vesta's observation was confirmed that Rhoda had no stockings on, and she could not help exclaiming,

"My dear child, what possessed you to ride this October morning only half dressed? You might catch your death."

Rhoda caught her nose on the half snuffle, raised and dimpled her cheeks in a sly laugh, and cried,

"Lord sakes! you mean my legs? Why, I ain't got but two pairs of stockings, an' Misc Somers is a wearin' one of 'em, and the ould pair's in the wash. It's so tejus to knit stockings, and sech fun to go barefoot, that I don't wear 'em unless Misc Somers finds it out. Why, the boys can't see me!"

She grimaced again so naturally and engagingly that Vesta had to laugh quite aloud, and saw meantime that the young woman's oft-cobbled shoes covered a slender foot a lady might have envied.

"Now, Rhoda," Vesta said, almost indignantly, "why did you not ask your wealthy uncle for some good yarn stockings?"

"Him? Why, ma'am, he's got so many pore kin, if he begin to give 'em all stockings, he'd go barefoot himself."

"Has he other nieces like you?"

"No." The girl quietly grimaced, with her brown eyes full of laughter. "There's plenty of others, but none like Rhody; the woods is full of them others."

"So you are the favorite? Now, what was your uncle going to do with all his money?"

"Lord sakes!" Rhoda said; "he was going to marry Miss Vesty with it. That's what Misc Somers said."

The mocking-bird had been striking up once or twice in the conversation, and now pealed his note loud:

"Vesta, she! she! she! she-ee-ee!"

A tingle of that superstition she had felt more than once already, in her brief knowledge of this forest family, went through Vesta's veins and nerves, and she silently remarked,

"How little a young girl knows of men around her—what satyrs are taking her image to their arms! These people knew he loved me, when I knew not that he ever saw me."

She addressed the niece again:

"Rhoda, did your uncle say he loved Miss Vesta?"

"No'm. He never said he luv'd nothing; but I heard Tom, the mocking-bird, shout 'Vesty,' and saw a lady's picture yonder between grandpar and grandmem, and told Misc Somers, and she says, 'Your Uncle Meshach's in luve!' Oh, I was right glad of it, because he was so sad and lonesome!"

The fountain of sympathy burst up again in Vesta's heart, and she felt that there were compensations riches and station knew not of in humble alliances like hers.

"Rhoda," she said, going to the young girl and putting her hand upon her soft brown hair, "you have not noticed the new picture of a lady hanging up here, have you?"

"No'm, not yet. Everything is so quare in this room sence I saw it last, I hain't seen nothin' in it but you. Now I see the carpet, an' the brass andirons, an' the chiney, an'—Lord sakes! is that a picture? Why, I thought it was you."

"It is, Rhoda. I am Vesta; I am your new aunt."

The girl made one of her engaging, dimpled, silent laughs, as if by stealth again, changed it into a silent cry by a revulsion as natural, and rose to her feet and took Vesta in her arms.

"I'm so glad, I will cry a little," Rhoda simpered, her eyes all dewy; "oh, how Misc Somers will say, 'I found it out first!'"

Tom kept up a whistling, self-gratulating little cry, as if he had his own thoughts:

"Sweetie! sweetie! sweet! Vesty, see! see! see!"

Vesta felt a chain of happy thoughts arise in her mind, which she expressed as frankly as the girl of forest product had spoken, that she might not retard the welcome of these homely friendships:

"Yes, Rhoda, I am thankful to find a social life open to me where there seemed no way, and brooks and playmates where everything looked dry. You come here like a sunbeam, God bless you! I can hear you talk, and teach you what little I know, and we will relieve each other, watching him."

She felt a slight modification of her joy at this reminder, but the bird seemed to teach her patience, as he suggested, hopping and flying in the air,

"Come see! come see! come see!"

"Yes," thought Vesta, "*come and see!* It is good counsel. I begin to feel the breaking of a new sense,—curiosity about the poor and lowly. My education seems to have closed my observation on people of my own race, who daily trode almost upon my skirts, and whom I never saw—whom it was considered respectable not to see—while even my colored servants enjoyed my whole confidence because they were my slaves. Yet, in misfortune, to these plain white people I must have dropped; and then Roxy and Virgie, sold to some temporary rich man, would have been above me, slaves as they would continue! How false, how fatal, both slavery and proud riches to the republicans we pretend to be! Compelled 'to see' at last, I shall not close my eyes nor harden my heart."

The maid from Newark had meantime quietly inspected the rag carpet, the cloth hangings, the fairy rocker, and all the acquisitions of her uncle's abode, and Vesta again observed that she was of slender and willowy shape and motion, unaffected in anything, not forward nor excited, and with the shrewd look so near ready wit that she could make Vesta laugh almost at will. Vesta showed her how to administer cool drink and the sponging to the sufferer, and he saw them together with a look of inquiry which the febrile action soon drove away.

"Are your parents living, Rhoda?"

"No'm; they're both dead. My mother was Uncle Meshach's sister, and she married a rich man, who biled salt and had vessels an' kept tavern. Father Hullin died of the pilmonary; mar died next. Misc Somers brought me up whar the tavern used to be. It ain't a stand no more. Uncle Meshach owns it."

"Is it a nice place?"

"Now it ain't as nice as it use to be, Aunt Vesty"—the girl glided easily over what Vesta thought might be a hard word—"sence the shews don't stop thar no mour."

"The shoes? What is that?"

"The wax figgers and glass-blowers, and the strongis' man in the world. Did you ever see him?"

Vesta said, "No, dear."

"I saw him," Rhoda said, with a compression of her mouth and a gleam of her eyes. "He bruke a stone with his fist and Misc Somers kep the stone, and what do you think it was?"

"Marble?"

"No'm; chork! He jest washed the chork over with a little shell or varnish or something, and, of course, it bruke right easy; so he wasn't the strongest man in the world at all, and if Misc Somers ever see him, she'll tell him so."

"Is it a little or a large house, Rhoda?"

"Oh, it's a magnificins house, twice as big as this, with the roof bent like an elefin's back, an' three windows in it—rale dormant windows, that looks like three eyes outen a crab, and a gabil end three rows of windows high, and four high chimneys. The rope-walker said it was fit to be a rueyal palace. Then thar's the kitchen an' colonnade built on to it. It's the biggest house, I reckon, about Sinepuxin. That rope-walker's a mountin-bank."

"A mountain bank? You mean a mountebank—an impostor?"

"Yes'm,"—the mouth shut and the eyes flashed again. "He allowed he'd break the rupe after he'd walked on it, and he said it wasn't stretched tight enough, and went along a feeling of it; and Misc Somers found out every time he teched of it he put on some bluestone water or somethin' else to rot it, so, of course, he bruke it easy. But Misc Somers's going to tell him, if he comes agin, he's a mountin-bank. Lord sakes! she ain't afraid."

"So, since it has ceased to be a tavern, dear, you see no more jugglers?"

"The last shew there," Rhoda said, "was the canninbils and the missionary. The missionary had converted of 'em, and they didn't eat no more; but he tuld how they used to eat people; and they stouled a pony outen the stables an' run to the Cypress swamp, and thar they turned out to be some shingle sawyers he'd just a stained up. Misc Somers is a-waitin' for him. Lord sakes! she don't keer."

"And so you were an orphan, brought up at the old roadside stage-house at Newark? And who is Mrs. Somers?"

"Misc Somers, she's a ole aunt of Par Hullin. She an' me live together sence par and mar died of the pilmonary. Oh, I have a passel of beaus that takes me over to the Oushin on Sinepuxin beach,

outen the way of the skeeters, an' thar we wades and sails, and biles salt and roasts mammynoes. Aunt Vesty, I can cut out most any girl from her beau; but, Lord sakes! I ain't found no man I love yet."

"I'm glad of that," said Vesta, "because you will then be satisfied with Princess Anne. They say your uncle will be sick here several weeks, and we can help each other to make him well. Now he is waking."

Milburn opened his eyes and sighed, and saw them together, and Rhoda held back considerably while the young wife approached the bed. He looked at her with a bewildered doubt.

"I thought they said you had gone forever," he murmured.

"No, I am come forever, or until you wish me gone."

"I told them so," he sighed; "I said, 'She has high principle, though she can't love me.'"

"Uncle Meshach, give Auntie time!" cried Rhoda, with a quick divination of something unsettled or misunderstood. "Don't you know your Rhudy? Even I was afraid of you till I was tuke sick and you thought it was the pilmonary and nursed me."

"You have a good niece," Vesta said, as her husband kissed the stranger; "and we shall love each other, I hope, and improve each other."

"Yes, that will be noble," he replied. "Teach her something; I have never had the time. Oh, I am very ill; at a time like this, too!"

"Be composed, Mr. Milburn," the bride said; "it is only Nature taking the time you would not give her, and which she means for us to improve our almost violent acquaintance. I shall be very happy sitting here, and wish you would let your niece be with me; I desire it."

He tried to smile, though the strong sweat succeeding the fever broke upon him from his hands to his face.

"She is yours," he said; "the best of my poor kin. Do not despise us!"

Vesta drew her arm around Rhoda and kissed her, that he might see it.

"What goodness!" he sighed, and the opening of his pores, as it let the fever escape, gave him a feeling of drowsy relief which Vesta understood.

"Now let us turn the covers under the edges, Rhoda," she said, "and put your blanket-shawl over him, and he will get some natural sleep."

He turned once, as if to see if she was there, and closed his eyes peacefully as a child.

"Now, Rhoda," said Vesta, in a few minutes, "I hear papa's carriage at the door, and, while he comes up, I shall ride back to see my mother and get a few things at home."

"Who is your poppy, Aunt Vesty?"

"Don't you know him?—Judge Custis, who lives in Princess Anne."

"Jedge Custis! Why, Lord sakes! he ain't your par, is he? Aunt Vesty, he's one of my old beaus."

The Judge brought with him Reverend William Tilghman, and Vesta, as she was retiring, introduced Rhoda to both of them:

"This is Miss Rhoda—Mr. Milburn's niece."

Judge Custis, a trifle blushing, took both of Rhoda's hands:

"Ha, my pretty partner and dancing pupil! How are our friends at St. Martin's Bay and Sinepuxent? Many a sail and clam-bake we have had, Rhoda."

"You're a deceiver," Rhoda cried, with a dimpling somewhere between glee and accusation. "I'm goin' to plosecute you, Jedge, fur not tellin' of me you was a married man. My heart's bruke."

"Who could remember what he was, Rhoda, sitting all that evening beside you at—where was it?"

"The Blohemian glass-blowers," Rhoda cried; "the only ones that ever visited the Western Himisfure. Jedge," with sudden impetuosity, "that little one, with the copper rings in his years, wasn't a Blohemian at all. He lived up at Cape Hinlupen, an' Misc Somers see him thar when she was a buyin' of herring thar. She's goin' to tell him, when she catches him at Nu-ark."

The young rector observed the flash of those bright eyes following the pleasing dimples, and the slips of orthography seemed to him never less culpable coming from such lips and teeth.

"William," said Vesta, "come around this afternoon, and let us have our usual Sunday reading-circle. Mr. Milburn will be awake and appreciate it, as he is one of your most regular parishioners. Rhoda, you can read?"

"Oh, yes'm. Misc Somers, she's a good reader. She reads the Old Testamins. The names thar is mos' too long for me, but I reads the Psalms an' the Ploverbs right well."

"Very well, then, we will read verse about, so that Mr. Milburn can hear both our voices and his

favorite minister's, too. You'll come, papa?"

"Yes, if I can. We have had a love-feast at Teackle Hall this morning, and your sister from Talbot is down, but I think I can get off."

"Lord sakes!" Rhoda said, looking at Mr. Tilghman candidly; "you ain't a minister now? Not a minister of the Gospel?"

"Unworthily so, Miss Rhoda."

"Well, I don't see how you was old enough to be convicted and learn it all, unless you was a speretual merikle. Misc Somers see one of 'em at Jinkotig. They called him the enfant phrenomeny. He exhorted at five year old, and at seven give his experyins."

"Rare, Miss Rhoda," the rector said, hardly able to keep his reverence in amusement at her impetuosity.

"Oh, he made a wild excitemins, Aunt Vesty. The women give each other their babies to hold while they tuk turns a-shouting. 'Yer, Becky, hold my baby while I shout!' says one. 'Now, Nancy, hold mine while I shout!' To see that little boy up thar tellin' of his experyins was meriklus, an' made an excitemins like the high tides on Jinkotig that drowns' em out. But, Aunt Vesty, that little phrenomeny was a dwarf, twenty year old, an' Misc Somers found it out and told about it."

"I'll be bound Mrs. Somers knows!" exclaimed the Judge.

"That she do," continued Rhoda, earnestly, with a slight snuffle of a well-modelled nose and a dimpling that argued to Vesta something to come. "Misc Somers says you held one of them babies, Jedge, to let its mother shout, and pretended to be under a conviction; an' that you backslid right thar and was a-whisperin' to the other mother. Lord sakes! Misc Somers finds it all out."

"Well," said the Judge, finding the laugh against him, "I never did better electioneering than that day. By holding that baby five minutes I made a vote, and the mother will hold it twenty years before she will make a vote."

"Misc Somers says, Jedge, you hold the women longer than thar babies; but I told her you was in sech conviction you didn't know one from the other. 'Oh,' she says, 'he's sly and safe when he gits over yer on the Worcester side.' Misc Somers, she's dreadful plain."

William Tilghman, during the continuation of this colloquy, looked with interest on the two young ladies: Vesta, the elder by two or three years, and richly endowed with the lights of both beauty and accomplishments; the maid from the ocean side, plainer, and with no ornament within or without; but he could foresee, under Vesta's fostering, a graceful woman, with coquetry and fascination not wholly latent there; and, as his eyes met Rhoda's, he interpreted the look that at a certain time of life almost every maiden casts on meeting a young man—"Is he single?" She shot this look so archly, yet so strong, that the arrow wounded him a very little as it glanced off. He smiled, but the consciousness was restored a moment that he was a young man still, as well as a priest. Love, which had closed a door like the portal of a tomb against him, began to come forth like a glow-worm and wink its lamp athwart the dark.

"She must come to Sunday-school," he thought, "if she stays in Princess Anne. We will polish her."

The mocking-bird, not being satisfied with any lull in the conversation, "pearted up," as he saw Vesta withdraw, and cried,

"Sband! 'Sband! Meee—shack! Mee-ee-ee-shack! See me! see me! Gents! gents! gents! genten! Sweet! sweetie! sweetie! Hoo! hoo! See! see! Vesty, she! Ha! ha!"

He flew in the air over his stirring master, as if doubting that all was well since the strange lady, who had been so quiet all the morning, was gone.

"That bird almost speaks," said William Tilghman; "I have spent many an hour teaching them, but never could make one talk like that."

"Maybe you had too much to teach to it," Rhoda Holland said; "it ain't often they can speak, and they mustn't have much company to learn well. Uncle Meshach haint had no company but that bird for years. I reckon the bird got mad and lonesome, and jest hooted words at him."

"What is it saying now?" Tilghman asked. "See! it is almost convulsive in its attempts to say something."

The gray bird, as impressive as a poor poet, seemed nearly in a state of epilepsy to bring up some burden of oppressive sound, and, as they watched it, almost tipsy with the intoxicant of speech, fluttering, driving, and striking in the air, it suddenly brought out a note liquid as gurgling snow from a bird-cote spout:

"L-l-lo-love! love! love! Ha! ha! L-l-love!"

"Well done, old bachelor!" Judge Custis remarked, in spite of his fagged face, for good resolution and yesterday's unbracing had left him somewhat limp and haggard still. "He brings out 'love' as if he had made a vow against it, but the confession had to come. Many a monk would sing the

same if instinct could find a daring word in his chorals. These mockers of Maryland were celebrated in the British magazines a hundred years ago, and I recall some lines about them."

He then recited:

"His breast whose plumes a cheerful white display,  
His quivering wings are dressed in sober gray,  
Sure all the Muses this their bird inspire,  
And he alone is equal to a choir.  
Oh, sweet musician! thou dost far excel  
The soothing song of pleasing Philomel:  
Sweet is her song, but in few notes confined,  
But thine, thou mimic of the feathery kind!  
Runs thro' all notes: thou only know'st them all,  
At once the copy and th' original!"

"That's magnificins!" Rhoda exclaimed, with quiet delight; "who is 'fellow Mil,' Jedge?"

"Oh, that's the British nightingale. These American mocking-birds surpass them as one of our Eastern Shore clippers outsails all the naval powers of Europe."

"I've hearn 'The British Nightingale,'" Rhoda said, with a flash of her eyes; "he was a blind man with green specticklers that sang at Nu-ark, 'ome, sweet 'ome'—that's the way he plonounced it—an' it affected of him so, he had to drink a whole tumbler of water, an' Misc Somers, spying around to see if he was the rale nightingale, she found it was gin in that glass, and told about it."

Rhoda made even the minister laugh, as she indented her cheeks and cast a sheep's glance at him and the Judge. He marvelled that such forest English could be resented so little by his mind, but he thought,

"Never mind, she may have had no more lessons than the bird, whose difficulty is even beautiful. But see! Mr. Milburn is wide awake. My friend, how do you feel?"

"Better, better!" murmured Milburn. "I cannot lie here any more. There is money, *money*, gentlemen, dependent on my getting about."

He started up with the greatest resolution and confidence, and fell upon his head before he had left the coverlets.

"No, no!" said the Judge, as he and Tilghman picked Milburn up and arranged him as before. "Your will is matched this time, my brave son-in-law! You are back in the hut you have consumed, among the fires thereof, and the avenging blast of Nassawongo furnace burns in your veins and cools you in the mill-pond alternately. Lie there and repent for the injury you have done a spotless one!"

If Meshach heard this it was never known, but the unconscious or impulsive utterance strengthened the impression with Tilghman and Rhoda that Vesta's marriage was not altogether voluntary, and produced on both a feeling of deeper sympathy and respect for her.

"Judge," the young minister said, "do good for evil, if evil there has been! I have given him my hand sincerely; perhaps you can relieve his mind of some business care."

"Mr. Milburn," the Judge said, when he saw the resinous eyes roll towards him again out of that swarthy face, now pale with weakness, "I am out of a job now, and can work cheap. Let me do any errand for you."

A look of petulance, followed by one of inquiry, came up from Milburn's eyes, and he pressed his head between his wrists, as if to bring back the blood that might propel his judgment. They heard him mutter,

"No business prudence—yet plausible, persuasive—might do it well."

The Judge spoke now, with some firmness:

"Milburn, there is no use of your rebelling. Here you are and here you will lie till nature does her restoration, assisted by this medicine I have brought you. You must undergo calomel, and this quinine must set on its work of several weeks to break up the regularity of these chills. In the meantime, as your interests are also Vesta's, and Vesta's are mine, let me serve her, if not you."

The positive tone influenced the weakened system of the patient. He looked at all three of the observers, and said to Tilghman, "William, I might send you but for your calling; leave me with the Judge a little while, both you and Rhoda."

Rhoda took the Conestoga bonnet from the top of the Entailed Hat box, and arrayed herself in it, to the rector's exceeding wonder.

"Let's you and me go take a little walk," she said, putting her hand in his arm with a quiet confidence in which was a spark of Meshach's will. "I ain't afraid of Princess Anne people, if they are proud. Mise Somers says King Solomons was no better than a lily outen the pond, and said so himself."

The young man, sincere as his humility was, blushed a little at the idea of walking through his

native town with that bonnet at his side, he being of one of the self-conscious, high-viewing families of the old peninsula—his grand-uncle the staff-officer of Washington, and messenger from Yorktown to Congress with the news, "Cornwallis has fallen;" but it was his chivalric sense, and not his piety, which immediately dispelled the last touch of coxcombry, when he felt that a lady had requested him.

"With happiness, Miss Holland;" and he did not feel one shrinking thought again as he ran the gantlet of the idle fellows of the town, many of them his former vagrant playmates. Rhoda was perfectly happy. He would have taken her to his grandmother's, with whom he kept house, but that aristocratic old dowager might say something, he considered, to destroy Rhoda's confidence in her elegant appearance and easy vocabulary; and they walked past Teackle Hall, where Vesta saw them, and opened the door and made them come in and eat a little. Rhoda at first showed some uneasiness under this great pile of habitation, but Vesta was so natural and gracious that the shyness wore off, and, at a fitting moment, the bride said:

"Rhoda, my dear, there is a bonnet up-stairs I expect to wear this winter, and I want to try it on you, whom I think it will particularly become."

Rhoda's quiet eyes flashed as she saw the new article and heard Vesta praise it, upon her head. The old bonnet had received a cruel blow, in spite of Mrs. Somers.

Tilghman, too, accused himself that he felt a little relieved when he escorted Rhoda back to Meshach's in another bonnet, and Vesta followed, with her great shaggy dog, Turk; she not unconscious—though serene and thoughtfully polite to all she knew—of people peering at her in wonder and excitement from every door and window of the town. The news was working in every household, from the servants in the kitchens to the aged people helped to their food with bib and spoon, that the famed daughter of Daniel Custis was the prize of the junk dealer and usurer in "old town" by the bridge, who had enslaved a wife at last.

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## CHAPTER XIX.

### THE DUSKY LEVELS.

The new son-in-law, left alone with Judge Custis, asked to be propped up in bed, and nothing was visible that would support his pillow but the aged leather hat-box that Custis, with a wry face, brought to do duty.

"My illness is unfortunate," he gasped; "not only to me, but to the new ties I have formed; to the mutual interest my wife and I have in making up your losses on Nassawongo furnace, which we are all the poorer by to that amount; and to a suitor whose cause I have taken up. I have bought an interest in a great lawsuit."

"Then the day of reckoning of your enemies has come, Milburn."

"Not yet," said the sick man, with a proud flash of his eyes, "unless I am no merchant and you are no lawyer, and the first I will not concede."

"Nor I the second," exclaimed the Judge, with some pride and temper.

"You were once a good lawyer, if visionary," resumed the money-lender, with scant ceremony. "Had we been able to respect each other we might have been confederated in things valuable to ourselves and to our time and place. But that is past, and you do not possess my confidence as my legal agent, my attorney. I wish you to get another advocate for me."

"I am willing to be useful, even without your compliments," the Judge said, remembering his Christian resolution. "We will not quarrel, if I can serve you."

"I do not wish to hurt your feelings, but my strength is not great enough for unmeaning flattery. This marriage was so dear to my heart that I have put it before a very large interest about which I have no time to lose, and still am helpless upon this bed. I will trust you to do my errand. Go to that chest, Judge Custis, and you will find a package of papers in the cedar till at the end. Bring them here."

As the Judge opened the old chest a musty smell, as of mummies wrapped in herbs, ascended into his nose, and he saw some faded clothes, as those of poor people deceased, male and female, lying within. The mocking-bird piped a noisy warning as he raised the lid of the till and saw the desired papers among a parcel of spotted and striped bird-eggs:

"Come see! come see! Meshach! he! he! sweet!"

"Now open the window yonder," said Meshach, taking the papers, "and let Tom fly out. He starts my nerves. Wh-oo-t, whi-it, Tom!"

The mocking-bird, spreading its wings and tail, and striking obstinately towards its master a minute, as he whistled, flew out of the window and settled in the old willow below, and had a Sunday-afternoon concert, calling the passing dogs by name, whistling to them, and deceiving cats and chickens with invitations they familiarly heard, to eat, to shoo, to scat, and to roost.



"If he regulates his wife like that bird," the Judge spoke to himself, "she will fly to heaven soon."

Milburn opened the papers, counted them, and handed them to his father-in-law.

"The papers will be plain to you, Judge Custis, after I have made a few words of explanation. You well know that the canal between the Delaware and Chesapeake is finished, and vessels are now passing through it from bay to bay. It is taking one hundred dollars a day tolls, and twenty vessels already go past between sun and sun, though the size of the shipping of the cities it connects has not yet been adapted to its proportions. It has been a cheap and quick work, costing something above two millions of dollars, taking only five years of time; and yet it has begun its mercantile life by a cheat upon a man to whom it is indebted as a promoter and contractor, and to whom I have advanced the means to compel justice and damages."

"Well, well, Milburn; I must pay tribute to your enterprise. The era of these great carrying corporations has barely begun, and you stake your little fortune against one of them that is backed by the great city of Philadelphia!"

"The canal passes through the state of Delaware, in which is three quarters of its little length of only fourteen miles, and there a suit will be free, to some extent, from the corruptions they might exercise in Pennsylvania; and, if successful there, we can more easily attach the tolls of the canal. I have no more faith in the Legislature of Delaware than of any other state; kidnappers sit in its responsible seats, and it licenses lotteries to make prizes of its own honor. But we shall try our case before a simple jury, which will be flax in the hands of one lawyer in that state, if we can secure him; but hitherto he has refused my contractor, and will not take the case."

"Why," said the Judge, "you must mean Clayton, the new senator."

"That is the man," Milburn continued, stopping for strength and breath. "He is finely educated, I hear, at the colleges and law schools, and possesses a remarkable power over the agricultural and mixed races of that small state, whom he thoroughly understands by sympathy and acquaintance. I heard him once in court, at Georgetown, wither and confound the confederated kidnapping influences of the whole peninsula, and, against the will and intention of the jury, prevail upon their fears and sensibilities to find a bold rogue guilty of stealing free men; of color—a rogue who was in this room, unless it is a delusion of my fever, this very day, and with whom I fancied I had been in collision somewhere."

"You only knocked him down with a brick, after Samson had done it with his fist, and then the fellow came to me for shelter, afraid you would pursue him at law, and I suppose he did an errand for my servants to this abode."

The Judge looked around upon the abode as if he had used the most respectable word he could possibly apply to it.

"I will compromise with such scoundrels as that one," Milburn spoke, "only when I am afraid of them. But, to conclude my statement; for reasons of timidity, or doubts of success, or political ambition—something I cannot fathom—Mr. Clayton will not hearken to my debtor, and I have not disclosed my own interest in the suit. He is at home from Washington, and an appointment has been made with him at his office in Dover to-morrow. You see I am unable to keep it, and I have no one else to send, and information reaches me that the canal company, discovering my money in the contractor's bank account, intends to retain Clayton forthwith. If you set out this afternoon, you can reach Laureltown for bedtime. It is at least forty miles thence to Dover, and you might ride it to-morrow by noon, with push, and in that case you have a chance to beat the Philadelphia emissary several hours. I have five thousand dollars at stake already; I believe I shall get damages of forty times five if I can retain that man."

"I am ready to start at once," said the Judge, rising up; "I can read these papers on the way. The saddle was my cradle, and I have a good horse. My valise can follow me on the stage to-morrow."

"Unless you see the best reasons for it, my name is not to be mentioned to any one as a party to this suit; I am not popular with juries."

"Then good-bye, Milburn," said the Judge, but did not extend his hand. "As you treat my daughter, may God treat you!"

"Amen," exclaimed the money-lender, as the Judge's feet passed over the door-sill below, and he sank back to the bed, exhausted again.

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While the proceedings described occupied the white people, the servants, Roxy and Virgie, in their clean Sunday suits, loitered around the bridge behind the store, or strayed a little way up the Manokin brook, hearing the mocking-bird rend his breast in all the ventriloquy of genius.

"Virgie," said Samson Hat, meeting them under the willow-tree, "when I carries you off and marries you, I s'pect you'll be climbin' up in my loft, too, makin' it comf'able fo' me."

"You ought to be ashamed of yourself, you old, black, impertinent servant of darkness!" Virgie said. "Indeed, when I look at a man, he must be almost white—not all white, though, like Roxy's beau."

"Who's he, Roxy?" Samson asked.

Roxie blushed, and said she had no beau, and never wanted one.

"Roxy's beau," says Virgie, "is that poor, helpless Mr. Jack Wonnell. He comes to see her every day. He's devotion itself. Indeed, Samson, if you are going to marry me, and Roxy marry all those bell-crown hats, we shall cure the town of its two greatest afflictions."

"Bad ole hats?" asks Samson.

"Roxy'll burn all the bell-crowns for her beau, and I'll bury the steeple-hat and you that cleans it, and the people will be so glad they'll set me free and I can go North."

"Look out, Virgie; I'll put dat high-crown hat on you like Marster Milburn put de bell on de buzzard. He went up to dat buzzard one day wid a little tea-bell in his hand an' says, 'Buzzard, how do ye like music?' Says de buzzard, tickled wid de compliment, 'I'm so larnid in dat music, I disdains to sing; I criticises de birds dat does.' 'Den,' says Mars Milburn, 'I needn't say to ye, P'ofessor Buzzard, dat dis little bell will be very pleasin' to yo' refine taste.' Wid dat he takes a little piece o' wire an' fastens de tea-bell to de bird's foot an' says, 'Buzzard, let me hear ye play!' De buzzard flew and de bell tinkled, an' all de other buzzards hear some'in' like de cowbell on de dead cow dey picked yisterday, an' dey says, 'Who's dat a flyin' heah? Maybe it's a cow's ghose!' So dey up, all scart, an' cross'd de bay; an' de buzzard wid a bell haint had no company sence, becoz he stole a talent he didn't have, and it made everybody oncomfitable."

"I've heard about Meshach belling a buzzard," said Roxy, "but they say he's got something on his foot, too, like a hoof—a clove foot. Did you ever see it, Samson?"

"He never tuk his foot off," said the negro, warily, "to let me see it. Dat bell on de buzzard, gals, is like white beauty in a colored skin; it draws white men and black men, like quare music in de air, but it makes de pale gal lonesome. She can't marry ary white man; she despises black ones."

The shrewd lover had touched a chord of young pain in the hearts of both those delicate quadroons. Both were so nearly white that the slight corruption increased their beauty, rounded their graceful limbs, plumpened their willowy figures, gave a softness like mild night to their expressive eyes, and blackened the silken tassels of their elegant long hair. No tutor had taught them how to walk,—they who moved on health like skylarks on the air. Faithful, pure-minded, modest, natural, they were still slaves, and their place in matrimony, which nature would have set among the worthiest—superior in love, superior in maternity, superior in length of days and enjoyment—was, by the freak of man's *caste*, as doubtful as the mermaid's.

Roxy was a little the shorter and fuller of shape, the milder and more pathetic; in Virgie the white race had left its leaner lines and greater unrelenting. She said to Samson, with the pique her reflections inspired,

"I never thought the first man to make love to me would be as black as you."

"De white corn years," says Samson, "de rale sugar-corn, de blackbird gits. None of dem white gulls and pigeons gits dat corn. A white feller wouldn't suit you, Virgie."

"Why?" says Roxy, "Virgie was raised among white children; so was I. We didn't know any difference till we grew up."

"Dat was what spiled ye," Samson said; "de colored man is de best husban'. He ain't thinkin' 'bout business while he makin' love, like Marster Milburn. The black man thinks his sweetheart is business enough, long as she likes him. He works fur her, to love her, not to be makin' a fool of her, and put his own head full of hambition, as dey calls it. You couldn't git along wid one o' dem pale, mutterin' white men, Virgie. Now, Roxy's white man, he's most as keerless as a nigger; he kin't do nothin' but make love, nohow. Dat's what she likes him fur."

"He's as kind a hearted man as there is in Princess Anne," Roxy spoke up. "I never thought about him except as a friend. I know I sha'n't look down on him because he likes a yellow girl, for then I would be looking down on myself."

"Virgie," said Samson, "I reckon I'm a little ole, but you kin't fine out whar it is. Ye ought to seen me fetch dat white hickory of a feller in de eye yisterday, and he jest outen his teens. I know it's a kine of impedent to be a courtin' of you, Virgie, dat's purtier dan Miss Vesty herself—"

"Nobody can be as pretty as Miss Vesta," Virgie cried, delighted with the compliment; "she's perfection."

"As I was gwyn to say," dryly added Samson, "I never just knowed what I was a lettin' Marster Milburn keep my wages fur, till he married Miss Vesty, and then I sot my eyes on Miss Vesty's friend an' maid, and I says, 'Gracious goodness! dat's de loveliest gal in de world. I'll git my money and buy her and set her free, and maybe she'll hab me, ole as I am.'"

"She will, too, Samson, if you do that, I believe," Roxy cried; "see how she's a-smiling and coloring about it."

Virgie's throat was sending up its tremors to her long-lashed eyes, and a wild, speculative something throbbled in her slender wrists and beat in the little jacket that was moulded to her swelling form: the first sight of freedom in the wild doe—freedom, and a mate.

"My soul!" Roxy added, "if poor Mr. Wonnell could set me free, I think I might pity him enough to be his wife."

Samson used his opportunity to stretch out his hand and take Virgie's, while she indulged the wild dream.

"Dis han' is too purty," he said, "to be worn by a slave. Let me make it free."

She turned away, but the negro had been a wise lover, and his plea pierced home, and it struck the Caucasian fatherhood of the bright quadroom.

"Freedom is mos' all I got," the negro continued; "it's wuth everything but love, Virgie. Dat you got. Maybe we can swap' em and let me be yo' slave."

"Don't, don't!" pleaded Virgie, pulling her hand very gently. "I'm afeard of you; you clean the Bad Man's hat."

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## CHAPTER XX.

### CASTE WITHOUT TONE.

Judge Custis was well out of town, riding to the north, when the little reading-circle assembled, without his patronage, over the old store, and the young minister directed it. In the warm afternoon the windows were raised till Milburn's chill began to set in again, and they could hear the mocking-bird, in his tree, tantalizing the great shaggy dog Turk by whistling to him,

"Wsht! wsht! Come, sir! come, sir! Sic 'em! sic 'em! wh-i-it! sic 'em, Turk! wsht! wh-i-i-t! Sirrah! Ha! ha!"

Turk would run a little way, run back, see nobody, watch all the windows of the store, and finally he seemed to think the spot was haunted, or unreliable in some way; for he would next run to the open store door, and bark, run back, and, from a distance, watch the hollow dark within, as if a vague enemy lived there, mocking his obedient nature and keeping his mistress captive. Turk was a setter with mastiff mixing, worth a little for the hunt and more for the watch, but as an ornament and friend worth more than all; he was so impartial in his favors as to like Aunt Hominy and Vesta about equally, and often slept in the kitchen before the great chimney fire.

"Do we worry you, Mr. Milburn, by reading here?" Vesta asked.

"No, my darling. It is so kind of you to bring music to my poor loft."

William Tilghman opened his Bible at a place marked by a little ribbon-backed bristol card, inscribed in Vesta's childhood by her learning fingers, "Watch with me." He thought of his cousin, now fluttering between her betrayal to this Pilate and her crucifixion, and caught her eyes looking at the Bible-marker, as if saying to him and to the forest maiden, "Watch with me."

Tilghman started the reading, Vesta followed, and Rhoda had to do her part, also; but she required to labor hard to keep up, as the chapter was in the Acts, descriptive of Paul's voyage towards Rome, and had plenty of hard words and geography in it. At one verse, Rhoda's reading was like this:

"And—when—we—had—sailed—slowl—li—many—days—and—scare—scare—skar —skurse—I declar', Aunt Vesty, this print is blombinable!—scace—Oh, yes, scacely—scarce—were—come—over—against—Ceni—Snide—Snid—Mr. Tilghman, what is this crab-kine of word? Cnidus? Well, I declar'! a dog couldn't spell that; it looks like Snyder spelled by his hired man—against Cnidus—the—wind—not—snuffers—no, snuffering (here Rhoda executed the double snuffle)—yes, didn't I say snuffering? I mean suffering—suffering—us—we—sailed—under—I can't spell that nohow; nobody kin!"

"Sailed under Crete,' dear," assisted Vesta.

"Sailed under—Crety—over—against—Sal—Sal—Salm—oh, yes, psalms! No: Sal Money."

"Salmone," explained the rector, not daring to look up; "we sailed under Crete over against Salmone; and, hardly passing it, came unto a place which is called the Fair Havens, nigh whereunto was the city of Lasea."

"Lord sakes!" exclaimed Rhoda, putting out her crescent foot, on which was Vesta's worked stocking, "did they have Fair Havens in them days? Was it this one over yer on the Wes'n Shu?"

"No," answered Tilghman; "Fair Havens was always a ready name for sailors finding a good port in trouble."

"Thar ain't no good port out thar on the Oushin side now but Monroe's Inlet, outen Jinkotig. The rest of 'em gits filled up, an' kadgin's the on'y way to kadge through of 'em, Misc Somers says."

"She means warping, or pulling over a shoal inlet by a rope to an anchor, as the water lifts the vessel."

"Yes, you know, Mr. Tilghman," Rhoda cried, delighted; "that's kadgin'—pullin' over the bar by the anchor line. You're all agroun', can't git nowhar, air a-bumpin' on the bar, an' the breakers is comin' dreadful in your side: you'll break all up if you stay thar. So you git the little anchor—the little one is better than ary too big a one—an' put it in the yawl an' paddle acrost the bar an' sot her, an' them aboard pulls as the billers lifts ye, and so they keep her headed in, and, kadging, kadging, bumpety-bump, at las' you go clar of the bar an' come home to smooth haven in Sinepuxin."

"Yes, my sisters," appended the young minister, "we need often to kedge home, to warp over the bars of life, and Hope, in ever so little an anchor, helps a little, if we do not lose the line. Little hopes are often better than great ones, for o'er-great hopes swamp little vessels. Even hope must be artfully shaped and skilfully dropped to take hold of the unseen bottoms of opportunity. All of us have entertained burdensome hopes, heavy anchors, and they would not hold us against the breakers; but there may be little hopes, carried in advance of us, that will draw us into pleasant sounds and bays."

"We owe to you, Rhoda, this comforting hope," said Vesta, "and, while you are with us, we shall teach you to read more confidently."

Vesta then sang Charles Wesley's hymn:

"Jesus, in us thyself reveal!  
The winds are hushed, the sea is still,  
If in the ship Thou art.  
Oh, manifest Thy power divine;  
Enter this sinking church of Thine,  
And dwell in every heart."

The sounds of her singing reached the people, rambling curiously around on Sunday afternoon to see the principals in the surprising marriage they had but lately heard of, and, as she ended, Mr. Milburn called her, saying,

"It is time for you to leave me till to-morrow."

"Is that your desire?"

"It is, kind lady. I have a servant-man, Samson, used to all my work, and you can hear of my condition through your slave girls, going and coming. I want you to feel free as ever, though my wife at last. I did not seek you to cloud your morning, but to share your sunshine. Go to Teackle Hall, and there I will come when I am stronger. At no time do I ever wish you to sleep in this old stable."

"May I come and sit with you to-morrow, sir?"

"Oh, do so! I must see you a little day by day."

"May I take Rhoda with me?"

"Yes, if you will do it. She is a poor girl, but that is not her fault."

Vesta bent and touched his forehead with her lips, and, as she drew back, he raised his cold hand and put a piece of paper in hers.

"Present my love to your mother," he said, in a chill; "and return her the losses Judge Custis has named to me as her portion in Nassawongo furnace. The amount is in this check, which I give you, although it is Sunday, because it represents no business among any of us, but an act of peace."

"You are an honorable man," Vesta said; "I have cost you dearly."

"It is the bumping of a few years on the bar," Meshach answered, trying to smile; "be you my anchor out in calm water, and I will try to draw to you some day. It is not the price I pay that troubles me; it is the price you are paying."

"I am deeply interested in you," Vesta said; "if I should say more than that, it would not now be true."

"Thank you for that much," Milburn said; "even your pity is a treasure, and I thank God that I have made so much progress. Before you go, let my bird come in, and then shut the window, to keep the night-hawks and owls from finding him."

He managed, between his rising paroxysms of the chill, to whistle a note or two, and Tom flew in the window and fluttered viciously around his head, as if to be revenged for exile, and then, leaping on the old hat-box, set up a show performance, in which were all the menagerie of town and field, and, stopping a little while to hear the bird sing her name again, Vesta and her friends withdrew.

Mrs. Custis was found in her bedroom, much improved in spirits, but highly nervous.

"Oh, my poor, martyred, murdered idol!" she screamed, as Vesta came in; "are you alive? Is the beast dead? Don't tell me he dares to live."

"Yes, mamma, here are his teeth," Vesta said, when she had kissed her mother warmly. "He has

sent you a check for all your lost money, and his love, and me to live here with you in Teackle Hall. Liberty, restitution, as you name it, and his affection to both of us: is he not a gentleman now?"

Mrs. Custis eagerly took the check.

"Do you believe it is good, precious? Maybe he sent it to deceive me while he could take advantage of your gratitude. Oh, these foresters are devils! I wish I had the money for it."

"It is good for everything he has, mamma. Not to pay it would make him a bankrupt. He gave it to me almost with gallantry. Indeed, he is the most singular man I ever knew."

"That is the case with all pirates," said Mrs. Custis; "something in the female nature attracts us to lawless men, who take what they want—ourselves included. We were, I suppose, originally, just seized and appropriated, and are looking out for the appropriator to this day. But you, Vesta, with the Baltimore blood in you, do not expect to play the Sabine bride tamely like that—to defend your spoiler and reconcile him to your brethren?"

"I was thinking it was the Baltimore blood that made me appreciate Mr. Milburn, mamma. The Custises were not traders."

"Pshaw! the Custises were libertines, unless history belies them; they had else no popularity in the scamp court of Charley-over-the-water. He thought the daughter of any gentleman in his following was made for his mistress, and a large percentage of the said damsels thought he was right."

"Mr. Milburn is no Cavalier, I can see that," Vesta said; "I am attracted to him by elements of such strength and simplicity that I fancy he is a Puritan."

"Puritan fiddlestick!" Mrs. Custis said, putting Milburn's check in her bosom and pinning it in there, and looking vigilantly at the pin afterwards. "Now, my great comfort, my only McLane! do not idealize this forester as of any beginning whatsoever. It is all wrong. Thousands of convicts were exported to Chesapeake Bay from the slums of London, Bristol, Glasgow, and other places, and propagated here like the pokeweed. With instincts of larceny, and, possibly, a little rebellion in it, your man has robbed this house of your person; if he should also take your heart, the shame would be upon us."

"Oh, mother, you are unforgiving!"

"Of course I am; I am Scotch."

"You have not one son-in-law but this who would give you back the large amount your husband has misspent—not one who could do it but at a sacrifice you would not permit. For you and papa, to restore your faith in each other, I married our stranger creditor, forcing him to the altar rather than he me; and he has already proved himself of more delicacy than you, if I am to believe you are in your right mind. No, I am no McLane."

"You are not, if you do not use their Scotch-Irish perseverance to get the better of Meshach Milburn. You have obtained a marriage settlement with him, now have it confirmed, and sue out your divorce before the Legislature! Publicly as you have been profaned, ask the State of Maryland for reparation. The McLanes, the Custises, and all their connections, from the Christine River to the James, will storm Annapolis, make your cause, if necessary, a political issue, and the courts of this county will give you damages out of this beast's unpopular wealth."

Vesta looked at her mother with astonishment.

"What would become of my self-respect, my maiden name, if I made that show of my private griefs, mother?"

"Why, you would be a heroine. Every old lover, of whom there are so many eligible ones, would feel his zeal return. A romance would attend your name wherever the Baltimore newspapers are taken, and you would be as great a heroine as Betty Patterson."

"That disobedient girl?" Vesta, still in astonishment, exclaimed.

"I saw her when the bride of Jerome Bonaparte. She was not half as lovely as you! If Jerome had seen you—you were not born, then, and I was in society—he would never have looked at Betty. But, you see, she forced a settlement out of the Emperor, husbanded the income of it, and she is rich, and freer to-day than if she had become a French Bonaparte."

"Weak as they may be in many things, I am a Custis," Vesta spoke, with pale scorn. "I would not drag my name through the tobacco-stained lobbies of Annapolis to wear the crown of Josephine. The word I gave, in pity of my parents, to the man who is now my husband, to become his wife, I would not take back to my dying day, unless he first denied his word. I believe there is such a thing as honor yet. Mother, you fret my father by such principles."

"They are the principles of your uncle, Allan McLane."

"A man I shrink from," Vesta said, "although he is your brother. His unfeeling respectability, his unchangeableness, his want of every impulse but hate, his appropriation of our family honor, as if he was our lawgiver and high-sheriff, his secretiveness, formal religion, and mysterious prosperity, I do not appreciate, much as I have tried to be charitable to him. I do not like

Baltimore as I do the Eastern Shore; it is fierce, hard, and suspicious."

"You shall not run down Baltimore before me," Mrs. Custis cried, hotly. "It is a paradise to this region; and comparing Meshach Milburn to your uncle is blasphemy."

"I have on my finger, mother, his mother's ring."

"A pretty object it is," said Mrs. Custis, taking a peep at it and another at her check; "it requires a microscope to find it. The next thing you will be walking through Baltimore on your bridal tour, followed by a mob of small boys, to see Meshach's old steeple-top hat. Then I shall feel for you, Vesta."

The cruel blow struck home. Vesta's reception, so unexpected, so acrimonious, affected her with a sense of gross ingratitude, and with a greater disappointment—she had failed to restore joy to her parents by her desperate sacrifice.

She began to feel that she might have done wrong. The broad sight of her act, looking back upon it from this momentary revulsion, seemed a frightful flood, like the mouth of one of the little Eastern Shore rivers that expands to a gulf in the progress of a brook. Last night she saw in an instant the misunderstandings and ruin she could prevent by her ready decision; now she saw the misunderstandings she never could correct, the prejudices stronger than parental sympathy, the wide separation her marriage had effected between two classes of her duty—to think with her husband's affection and her mother's interests at the same time.

It also occurred to her that her father, the darling of her thought, had seemed slow to appreciate her marriage sacrifice, and was testy at her willingness to loosen her heart with her vestal zone towards her husband.

The whole day had passed with such relief, such satisfaction, that she expected to end it in the tranquillity of Teackle Hall, like some young eagle returned to her nest with abundant prey for the old birds there, worn out with storm and time. In place of love and healing nature, Vesta had found worldliness, resentment, intrigue, and aspersion, concluding with a reference to the one object she feared and shrank from—the hat of dark entail, the shadow upon her future life. Her eyes filled up, she lisped aloud,

"I wish I had stayed with my husband!"

"Has he become so necessary to you already?" asked Mrs. Custis.

"He does appreciate my sacrifice," Vesta said, and her low sobs filled the room. In a moment Virgie entered, alert to her playmate's pains, and threw her arms around her mistress and kissed her like a child.

"Oh, missy," she spoke to Mrs. Custis, "to make her cry after what she has done for all of us—to save your home, to save me from being sold!"

No scruples of race made Vesta reject this sympathy, precious to her parched breast despite the quadron taint as the golden sand in the brooks of Africa, giving at once wealth and cooling. The slave girl's long white arms, scarcely less pale than ivory—for she had slipped in at the sign of sorrow, while making her simple toilet—drew Vesta into her lap and laid her head upon the fair maiden shoulder, as if it was a babe's. On such a shoulder, only a shadow darker, Vesta had often lain in infancy, and sucked the milk that was sweet as Eve's—the common fount of white and black—at the breast of Virgie's mother. That faithful nurse was gone; the wild plum-tree grew upon her grave; but Virgie inherited the motherly instinct and added the sisterly sympathy, and her rich hair, half unbound, streamed down on Vesta's temples among the dark ringlets there, while she looked into her own spirit for a word to check those tears, and found it:

"People will say you have been crying, dear missy. The Lord knows you did right. Don't let anybody make you lose your faith till your master, your husband, does wrong to you; he wouldn't like to have you cry."

There was a nervous chord somewhere in the slave's throat that trembled on the key of the heroic, and her nostrils, slightly rounded, her head, free of carriage as the wild colt's, and a light from her soft eyes that seemed to be reflected on their long, silken lashes, bore out a spirit tamed by servitude, which still could kindle to everything that concerned woman in her birthright.

Vesta kissed Virgie, and ceased to sob; she rose and kissed her mother also.

"It was very wrong in me to say what I did not wish to say, about Uncle Allan, mamma. I hope papa was kind to you to-day."

"Dear me!" Mrs. Custis cried; "everything is turned upside down by that bog iron ore. A new element has come into the family to disturb it. Nobody believes anything respectable any more. Your father is an infidel, or a radical, or something perverse; you are defending those wild foresters! What will become of the Christian religion and society and good principles?"

"What did papa say before he left home?"

"He acted in the strangest manner, Vesta. He came right in and kissed me, like a great booby, and sat down and wanted to talk about our courting days. I thought at first he was drunk again, or that the Methodists had got hold of him and fed him on camp-meeting straw. How do you account for it?"

Virgie had slipped out as soon as the talk became confidential.

"He wants to do better, dear mamma. Do respond to his contrition and affection! If we could all humble our hearts, it would be so easy to start life better, and turn this accident to joy and comfort. I have found new engagements and reliefs already. There is a young girl, Mr. Milburn's niece, whom I shall bring home this evening and occupy myself teaching her. She is an orphan, without a mother's knowledge, barely able to read, but pretty and quaint."

"Bring a forester in here?" Mrs. Custis exclaimed, fairly shivering. "What will Allan McLane's daughters say? Your sister from Talbot has been here all this day, and you have scarcely given her an hour. Between this fatal marriage and your neglect, she left, with her husband, positively pale with horror. I do not know what is to follow this marriage. I have posted a letter already to my brother Allan, telling him of your betrayal by your father and this bridegroom. All our connection will be up in arms."

Vesta's heart sank again, but she felt no fears of her husband's ability to meet mere family opposition, secured by law and form in his rights. She only feared hostility might rouse in him severity and defiance which would neutralize her present influence upon him, and change his accommodating, almost gentle, disposition as a husband.

For, blacker than any object in her future path, she saw a little, trivial thing, like a wild boar closing her hitherto adventurous excursion into the forest where her husband grew—the hat that had covered his head!

Her mother's thoughtless mention of that object made it formidable to her fears as some iron mask locked round her husband's countenance, making day hideous and the world a dungeon to all who must walk with him.

She discerned that his combative spirit would start to the defence of his hat if it should become the subject of family rancor, because no man forgives an insult to his personal appearance; and this article of wear had ringed his brain with gangrene, and war made upon it would be met by war, while Vesta had expected to induce forgetfulness of the rusty old tile, to charm away the remembrance of it, and to have it laid forever aside.

"I am not the daughter of Uncle McLane," Vesta protested. "I am, besides, a woman, free of my minority. Mr. Milburn is hardly the man to submit to any trespass. I warn you, mamma, to put my uncle at no disadvantage; for my husband has already beaten papa, and he will smile at your brother when he knows that I do not support any of his pretensions."

"The first thing," answered Mrs. Custis, stubbornly, "is to see that he pays this check. Oh, my dear money!"—she pressed it to her heart—"how delightful it is to see you again. Science, love, glory, ideas: how vulgar they are without money. With this check paid, I think I shall never read a book again; and as for the bog ores, why, I shall scream if there is an iron article in the house. Vesta, this house, I believe, is yours now? I had forgotten. Well, no wonder you defend the man who took your father's roof from over his head and gave it to you!"

"That is unkind, mamma. I value it only as a sure home for you and papa. If I gave it to him it might be in risk again."

"But suppose you continue to defend this monster of a Milburn, he and you may require the whole house. I am too well-bred to be converted to any of his impious ideas. I am a Baltimorean, and stand by my colors."

"Let us speak of that no more," Vesta said, almost in despair, "but talk of dear papa. I know he loves you."

"It is too late," Mrs. Custis remarked, solemnly, with another fondling of her check; "he has neglected me too long. I expect his attention and respect, and that he shall behave himself; but no lovey and no honey for me now. Life has passed the noon and the early afternoon for him and me, and I live to be respectable, to appreciate my security, to keep upstarts at arm's-length, to enjoy my life in its appointed circle, taking care of my income, and never—no, never!—giving any human being the opportunity to make me a beggar again."

"Oh, mamma," Vesta said, "think of Judge Custis! Have you not made home cold to him by this formalism? We must study men, and please them according to their tastes, and therein lies our joy; else we are false to the companionship God gave us to man for. Yield to your husband's boyish-heartedness; fly with him, like the mate by the bird! He has repented; welcome him to your love again, and stay his feet from truant going, or he may dash down the precipice this sorrow has arrested him before, of everlasting dissipation and the death of his noble soul!"

Vesta stood above her mother, deeply moved, deeply earnest. Her mother stole another look at the bank check.

"Well, daughter, I will be humbugged by him if you desire it," she said, but with slight answering emotion. "If I had my life to go over again I would marry a business man, and let the aristocracy go. There is the second knock at the front-door. I believe I will dress myself and go down-stairs too."

There were two ladies in the parlor when Vesta went there—Grandmother Tilghman and the Widow Dennis.

"Good-evening, Vesta," said the old lady, who was stone-blind, but easily knew Vesta's footstep. "William thought you would not go to evening service on account of Mr. Milburn's illness, so I came around to sit till church was over, when he will take me home. But what is that I hear in this parlor, like somebody sniffing?"

"It's me, Aunt Vesty," said the voice of Rhoda Holland from the background.

"This is Mr. Milburn's niece, who has come here to stay with me," Vesta said.

"Ah! then it is no Custis. The last snuffle I heard was at the ball to Lafayette in the spring of 1781. The marquis had marched from Head of Elk to the Bald Friars' ferry up the Susquehanna and inland among the hills to Baltimore, and we gave him a ball which, at his request, was turned into a clothing-party. He snuffed so much that he kept up a snuffle all the evening, like—"

Here Rhoda's snuffle was heard again.

"Yes, that's a good imitation," said Grandmother Tilghman, "but I don't like it."

"Did the ginerall dance at the ball?" asked Rhoda. "What did he do with his swurd? Did he dance with it outen his scibburd?"

"He danced like a gentleman," Mrs. Tilghman replied, as if she would rather not, "and led me out in the first set. You danced with him, Vesta, at the ball in '24, forty-three years afterwards. Does he snuffle yet?"

"I don't recollect, grand-aunt. I was a little girl, and so much flattered that I thought everything he did was perfect."

"Ah me!" exclaimed Mrs. Tilghman, pulling the feather of her turban up, and looking as much like an old belle as possible at eighty years of age; "you danced before Lafayette with my grandson Bill. Bill hardly remembers Lafayette at all, thinking of you that night, so wonderful in your girl's charms. I told him Vesta would never marry him, as he was too plain and poor. But I never thought you would marry that—"

Here Rhoda sniffled warningly.

"Yes," exclaimed the old lady, catching the snuffle; "I never thought you would marry *that!* But Bill is as dear a fool as ever. He says now that Meshach Milburn is a good man, too. I never thought he was above a—"

Rhoda sniffled earnestly.

"Precisely that," exclaimed the old lady; "that was my estimate of the stock. Bill says he is a financial genius. I don't see what is to become of girls in this generation. Here is Ellenora, too good to marry Phœbus, the sailor man, too poor to marry anybody else; now, if Milburn had married her and taken her son Levin into his business, it would have been reasonable; but to take you and pervert your happiness, almost makes me—"

Snuffle from Rhoda.

"Yes," said the old lady, snappishly; "almost! But I never did do it yet."

"Did you ever see Ginerall Washin'ton, mem?" Rhoda asked. "I thought, maybe, you was old enough. Misc Somers, she see him up yer to Kint River a-crossin' to 'Napolis. He was a-swarin' at the cappen of the piriauger and a dammin' of the Eas'n Shu, and he said they wan't no good rudes in Marylan' nohow; that the Wes'n Shu was all red mud, an' the Eas'n Shu yaller mud, an' the bay was jus' pizen. Misc Somers say she don't think it was Ginerall Washin'ton, caze he cuss so. She goin' to find out when she kin git a book an' somebody to read outen it to her, caze she drefle smart."

"Grand-aunt Tilghman," Vesta interposed to the blank silence of the room, "knew General Washington intimately."

"Do tell us!" cried Rhoda. "You kin be a right interestin' ole woman, I reckon, ef you air so quar."

In the midst of a smile, in which the blind old lady herself joined, and Mrs. Custis at the same time entered the room, Mrs. Tilghman spoke as follows:

"I went to visit Cousin Martha Washington several years before the Revolution, at Mount Vernon. I had seen her while she was the widow of Cousin Custis, and we occasionally corresponded. In those days we visited by vessel, so a schooner of Robert Morris's father set me ashore at Mount Vernon. Colonel Washington was then having his first portrait painted by Wilson Peale, and he was forty years old. Peale and Washington used to pitch the bar, play quoits, and fox-hunt, while Cousin Martha, who was only three months younger than the colonel, knitted and cut out sewing for her colored girls, and heard her daughter, Martha Custis, play the harpsichord. Poor Martha had the consumption; she was dark as an Indian; Washington often carried her along the piazza and into the beautiful woodlands near the house; but she died, leaving him all her money—nearly twenty thousand dollars. We Custises rather looked down on Colonel Washington in those days; he was not of the old gentry; his poor mother could barely read and write, and once, when we went to Fredericksburg to see her, she was riding out in the field among her few negroes as her own overseer, wearing an old sun-bonnet, and sunburned like a forester."



"Dear me!" exclaimed Mrs. Custis. "I should think she was a great impediment to Washington."

"I reckon that's the way her son got big," exclaimed Rhoda; "if his mar had laid down in bed all day, he couldn't have killed King George so easy with his swurd."

"I often said to Cousin Martha, 'What did you see in this big horse of a man?' 'Oh,' she replied, 'he's the best overseer in Virginia. He looks after my property as no other man could.'"

"Then," said Mrs. Custis, emphatically, "he was one man out of a thousand."

"That's the kind of man you married, Vesta," spoke up Mrs. Dennis.

"*Her* husband," said Mrs. Custis, "looked after her father's property, I am sure, for he got it all."

"And returned it all," exclaimed Vesta.

Mrs. Custis remarked that Washington certainly was a blue-blooded man.

"Is thar people with blue blood comin' outen of 'em?" asked Rhoda Holland. "Lord sakes! I should think it would make 'em cold."

"I wonder if men are ever great?" asked Vesta; "or whether it is not great occasion and trial that project them. A crisis comes in our lives, and, finding what we can endure, we incur greater risks, and finally delight in such adventure."

"That is the way with my poor boy, Levin," said Mrs. Dennis, quietly, to Vesta. She was a pretty woman, somewhat past thirty, with rosy cheeks, blue eyes, neat but rather poor attire, and a simple, artless manner, and might have passed for the sister of her son.

"Is Levin coming for you to-night?" Vesta asked.

"No," blushed the widow; "James Phœbus will see me home. Levin has gone off in his boat, and I have been worried about him all day. Some time, I am afraid, he will go and never return. Oh, Cousin Vesta, this waiting for a husband neither alive nor dead is very trying."

Overhearing the remark, Mrs. Custis remarked, "Norah, you ought to be ashamed to keep that faithful fellow waiting on you, when you could give yourself a good husband and reward him so easily."

"I think you had better look out for old age," Mrs. Tilghman also said, "while you have youth and good looks to obtain the provision. Oden Dennis is probably dead; if not dead, he does not mean to return, for I can think of no circumstances in this age which would forcibly detain a man from his wife fifteen years. Even if he was in a prison, he would be allowed to write to you. He may not be dead, Norah, but he is not coming back. Get a father for your son; you cannot manage Levin."

"Maybe he has been stoled by Injins," exclaimed Rhoda, with great fervor; "thar was a Injin captive in a shew at Nu-ark, that had been kept nineteen years. He forgot his language, and whooped dreffle. Misc Somers say he was an imploster, an' worked on the Brekwater up to Lewistown. She's always lookin' behind the shew to find out somethin'." (Slight snuffle.)

"Do get that girl a pocket-handkerchief, and show her how to use it," exclaimed Mrs. Tilghman, breaking out. "Ah! girls, I have been a widow thirty years. I never gave up the expectation of marrying again till I lost my eyesight; and even after that, at sixty-five, I had an offer of marriage; but I said to my gallant old beau, 'I will not take a man I cannot compliment by seeing him and admiring him every day. I love you, but my blindness would give you too much pain.' In our quiet towns, all the life worth living is domestic joy. Do not lose it, Ellenora; do not put it off too long!"

"I could love Mr. Phœbus, plain as he is," the widow spoke, "if I could persuade myself that Oden is dead. But that I cannot do. A real person—spirit or man—is watching over me closely. My very shoes I wear to-night came from that mysterious agent. It is not my son; it is not James Phœbus. No other stranger would so secretly assist me. I am bound up in the fear and wonder that it is my husband."

"That does beat conjecture," said old Mrs. Tilghman. "Have you no friend you might suspect?"

"None," the widow answered. "None who have not worn out their means of giving long ago. Can I marry, with this ghostly visitation coming so regularly? Should I not have faith in a husband's living if I receive a wife's care from an unseen hand?"

"Oden Dennis," Mrs. Custis remarked, "was hardly a man to do charity and not be seen. He was rather self-indulgent, demonstrative, and restless. I cannot think of his nocturnal visits in the body. Besides, he would not supply you in that way, Norah, if he meant to come back; and if he cannot himself come to you, neither could he send."

Not altogether relishing Mrs. Tilghman's reproof, Rhoda was again heard from, saying:

"Lord sakes! all the women has to talk about when they is gone is the men. When the men comes, they talks as if they never missed of 'em. Misc Somers, she never had no man, an' she talks mos' about the women that has got one. I think Aunt Vesty has got the best man in Prencess Anne. He's the richest. He's the freest. He never courted no other gal. He ain't got no quar old women runnin' of him down—caze Misc Somers is dreffle afraid of him!" This last remark seemed apologetic and an afterthought.

"I am beginning to think my fortune is better than I deserve," Vesta replied, to soften the application, as wine, tea, and cake were brought in. "Now, dear friends, as I am Mr. Milburn's wife, let us all be Christians this Sunday night, and drink his health and happy recovery, and that he may never repent his marriage."

They drank with some hesitation, except the bride, Rhoda, and Mrs. Dennis. Mrs. Tilghman needed the wine too much to wait long, and Mrs. Custis, finding she was observed, took a sip from her glass also, excusing herself on the ground of a recent headache from drinking heartily.

As the conversation proceeded, now by general participation, again by couples apart, and Vesta found herself more and more a subject of sympathy, with no little curiosity interwoven in it, she also imagined that an undertone of belief was abroad that she had made a mercenary marriage.

Old Mrs. Tilghman—in her prime a most caustic belle, and worldly as three marriages, all shrewdly contracted, could make her—seemed determined to hold that Vesta had rejected her grandson for the money-lender on the consideration of wealth. Vesta's own mother, too, who should have known her well, had twice hinted the same. Even the inoffensive Ellenora had accepted that idea, or another kin to it, and Rhoda Holland had remembered that her uncle was the richest of bridegrooms in Princess Anne. Vesta felt the injustice, but said to herself:

"I must make the sacrifice complete, and incur any harsh judgment it may bear. I see that I shall be driven for sympathy to the last place in the world I anticipated: to my husband's heart. Yes, there is something besides love in marriage: if I cannot love him, he can understand me."

Vesta had come to a place all come to who volunteer an act of great sacrifice—to have it put upon a low motive from the lower plane of sacrifice in many otherwise kind people. We give our money to an institution of charity, and it is said that it was for notoriety, or self-seeking, or at the expense of our kin. We lead a forlorn hope in politics, or some other arena, to establish a cause or assist a principle, with the certain result of defeat, and we are said to be jealous or malignant. Perhaps we make a book to illustrate some old region off the highways of observation, drawn to it by kindred strings or early patterings, and the politician there regards it as an attack, the old family fossil as an intrusion, the very youth as if it were a queer and gratuitous thing from such an outer source. So we wince a little, but feel that it was necessary to be misunderstood to complete the sacrifice.

The feeling of despondency increased after the little company separated, and Vesta went to her room and laid herself upon her still maiden bed. She had said her prayer and asked the approval of God, but her nervous system, under the tension of almost two days' excitement and events such as she had never known, was alert and could not fall to slumber. Old passages of Testament lore haunted her soul, such as: "Thy desire shall be to thy husband, and he shall rule over thee;" "A man shall leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife." She began to see that marriage was not merely the solution of a family trouble, and the giving of her body as a hostage for a pecuniary debt, but that it was a rendition of all her liberty, even the liberty of sympathy and of sorrow, to the man to whom she must cleave.

In marrying him she had left friendship, father and mother, everything, at a greater distance than she ever dreamed; and they resented the desertion to the degree that they now confounded her with her new interest, let go their claim upon her, and could scarce conceive of her except in the dual relation of a woman subject to her husband, and selfish as himself.

"I wonder if he will grow weary of me, too," she thought, with anguish, "after his possession is established and I shall have no other source of confidence? What did I know of this world only yesterday? Then every way seemed clear and open for me, my friends abundant, and love profuse; to-day I am in awful doubts, and yet I must not lose my will and drift with every passing fear and confusion into the fickleness which makes woman contemptible after she has given her hand. I will never give up two persons—my father, and my husband!"

As she turned down the lamp, it being nearly midnight, a short, fierce cry, quickly stifled, as if some wild animal had howled once in nightmare and fallen asleep in his kennel again, seized on her ears and chilled her blood.

Vesta started up in bed and listened. It seemed to her that there were footsteps, but they passed away, and she listened in vain for any other sounds, till sleep fell deep and dreamless upon her, like black Lethe winding through a desert wedding-day.

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## CHAPTER XXI.

### LONG SEPARATIONS.

Vesta was awakened by Roxy, Virgie, and her mother all standing around her bed at once, exclaiming something unintelligible together. It was late morning, the whole family having slept long, after the several experiences of two such days, and the sun was shining through the great trees before Teackle Hall and burnishing the windows, so that Vesta could hardly see.

"The kitchen servants have run away," Mrs. Custis shrieked, on Vesta's request that her mother

only should talk. "Old Hominy is gone, and has taken all her herbs and witcheries with her; and all the young children bred in the kitchen, Ned and Vince, the boys, and little Phillis, the baby, they, too, are gone."

"I heard a strange cry or howl last night, as I dropped to sleep," Vesta exclaimed, rubbing her eyes.

"Dear missy," cried Virgie, falling upon the pillow, "it was your poor dog Turk; his throat has been cut upon the lawn."

"Yes, missy," Roxy blubbered, "poor Turk lies in his blood. There is nobody to get breakfast but Virgie and me. Indeed, we did not know about it."

"That is not very likely," said the suspicious Mrs. Custis.

"I know you did not, girls," Vesta said, "you have too much intelligence and principle, I am sure; nor could Hominy have been so inhuman to my poor dog."

Vesta at once rose up and threw on her morning-gown.

"The first thing to be done is to have breakfast. Roxy, do you go at once to Mr. Milburn's and bring his man Samson here, and awake Miss Holland to take Samson's place by her uncle. Tell Samson to make the fire, and you and he get the breakfast. No person is to speak of this incident of the kitchen servants leaving us on any pretence."

"Won't you give the alarm the first thing?" cried Mrs. Custis, not very well pleased to see Vesta keep her temper. "They may be overtaken before they get far away, daughter. Those four negroes are worth twelve hundred dollars!"

"They are not worth one dollar, mamma, if they have run away from us; because I should never either sell them or keep them again if they had behaved so treacherously."

"I say, sell them and get the money," Mrs. Custis cried; "are they not ours?"

"No, mamma, they are mine. Mr. Milburn and papa are to be consulted before any steps are taken. Papa deeded them to me only last Saturday; why should they have deserted at the moment I had redeemed them? Virgie, can you guess?"

Virgie hesitated, only a moment.

"Miss Vesty, I think I can see what made Hominy go. She was afraid of Meshach Milburn and his queer hat. She believed the devil give it to him. She thought he had bought her by marrying you, and was going to christen her to the Bad Man, or do something dreadful with her and the little children."

"That's it, Miss Vessy," plump little Roxy added. "Hominy loved the little children dearly; she thought they was to become Meshach's, and she must save them."

"Poor, superstitious creature!" Vesta exclaimed.

"More misery brought about by that fool's hat!" cried Mrs. Custis. "If I ever lay hands on it, it shall end in the fire."

"No wonder," Vesta said, "that this poor, ignorant woman should do herself such an injury on account of an article of dress that disturbs liberal and enlightened minds! Now I recollect that Hominy said something about having 'got Quaker.' What did it mean?"

The two slave girls looked at each other significantly, and Virgie answered,

"Don't the Quakers help slaves to get off to a free state? Maybe she meant that."

"Do you suppose the abolitionists would tamper with a poor old woman like that, whose liberty would neither be a credit to them nor a comfort to her? I cannot think so meanly of them," Vesta reflected. "Besides, could she have killed my dog?"

"A gross, ignorant, fetich-worshipping negro would kill a dog, or a child, or anything, when she is possessed with a devil," Mrs. Custis insisted.

"I don't believe she killed Turk," Roxy remarked, as she left the room. "There was a white man in the kitchen last Saturday night: I think he slept there; master gave him leave."

"Yes, missy," Virgie continued, after Roxy had gone to obey her orders; "he was a dreadful man, and looked at me so coarse and familiar that I have dreamed of him since. It was the man Mr. Milburn knocked down for mashing his hat; he was afraid Mr. Milburn would throw him into jail, so he asked master to hide in the kitchen. But Hominy was almost crazy with fear of Mr. Milburn before that."

Vesta held up her beautiful arms with a look of despair.

"What has not that poor old hat brought upon every body?" she cried. "Oh, who dares contest the sunshine with the tailor and hatter? They are the despots that never will abdicate or die."

"The idea of your father letting a tramp like that sleep in the kitchen among the slaves!" cried Mrs. Custis. "What obligation had he incurred there, too, I should like to know? Teackle Hall is

become a cave of owls and foxes; it is time for me to leave it. Here is my husband gone, riding fifty miles for his worst enemy, leaving us without a cook and without a man's assistance to discover where ours is gone. I know what I shall do: I will start this day for Cambridge, to meet my brother, and visit the Goldsboroughs there till some order is brought out of this attempt to plant wheat and tares together."

Vesta stopped a moment and kissed her mother: "That is just the thing, dear mother," she said. "Let me straighten out the difficulties here; go, and come back when all is done, and you can be yourself again."

"I shall do it, Vesta. Brother Allan gets to Cambridge to-morrow afternoon; I will go as far as Salisbury this day, and either meet him on the road to-morrow or find him at Cambridge. Oh, what a house is Teackle Hall—full of male and female foresters, abolitionists, runaways, and radicals! All made crazy by the bog ores and the fool's hat!"

Descending to the yard, Vesta found Turk lying in his blood, his mastiff jaws and shaggy sides clotted red, and, as it seemed, the howl in which he died still lingering in the air. The Virginia spirit rose in Vesta's eyes:

"Whoever killed this dog only wanted the courage to kill men!" she exclaimed. "James Phœbus, look here!"

The pungy captain had been abroad for hours, and the masts of his vessel were just visible across the marshy neck in the rear of Teackle Hall. He touched his hat and came in.

"Early mornin', Miss Vesty! Hallo! Turk dead? By smoke, yer's pangymonum!"

"He's stabbed, Jimmy!" Samson Hat remarked, coming out of the kitchen; "see whar de dagger struck him right over de heart! Dat made him howl and fall dead. His froat was not cut dat sudden; it's gashed as if wid somethin' blunt."

"Right you are, nigger! The throat-cuttin' was a make believe; the stab will tell the tale. But who's this yer, lurkin' aroun' the kitchen do'; if it ain't Jack Wonnell, I hope I may die! Sic!"

With this, active as the dog had been but yesterday, Jimmy rushed on Jack Wonnell, chased him to the fence, and brought him back by the neck. Wonnell wore a bell-crown, and his hand was full of fall blossoms. As Wonnell observed the dead dog, pretty little Roxy came out of the kitchen, and stood blushing, yet frightened, to see him.

"What yo' doin' with them rosy-posies?" Jimmy demanded. "Who're they fur? What air you sneakin' aroun' Teackle Hall fur so bright of a mornin', lazy as I know you is, Jack Wonnell?"

"They are flowers he brings every morning for me," Roxy spoke up, coming forward with a pretty simper.

"For you?" exclaimed Vesta. "You are not receiving the attentions of white men, Roxy?"

"He offered, himself, to get flowers for me, so I might give you as pretty ones as Virgie, missy. I let him bring them. He's a poor, kind man."

"I jess got 'em, Jimmy," interjected Jack Wonnell, with his peculiar wink and leer, "caze Roxy's the belle of Prencess Anne, and I'm the bell-crown. She's my little queen, and I ain't ashamed of her."

"Courtin' niggers, air you!" Jimmy exclaimed, collaring Jack again. "Now whar did you go all day Sunday with Levin Dennis and the nigger buyer? What hokey-pokey wair you up to?"

"Mr. Wonnell," Roxy had the presence of mind to say, "take care you tell the truth, for my sake! Aunt Hominy is gone, with all the kitchen children, and Mr. Phœbus suspects you!"

"Great lightnin' bugs!" Jimmy Phœbus cried. "The niggers stole, an' the dog dead, too?"

"I 'spect Judge Custis sold 'em, Jimmy," Jack Wonnell pleaded, twisting out of the bay captain's hands. "He's gwyn to be sold out by Meshach Milburn. Maybe he jess sold 'em and skipped."

"Where is Judge Custis, Miss Vesty?" Phœbus asked.

"He has gone to Delaware, to be absent several days."

"Is what this bell-crowned fool says, true, Miss Vesty?"

"No. There was some fear among the kitchen servants of being sold; there was no such necessity when they ran away, as it had been settled."

"It is unfortunate that your father is gone. He has been seen with a negro trader. That trader and he disappear the same evening. The trader lives about Delaware, too, Miss Vesty."

Vesta's countenance fell, as she thought of the suspicion that might attach to her father. The great old trees around Teackle Hall seemed moaning together in the air, as if to say, "Ancestors, this is strange to hear!"

"Who told you, Jack Wonnell," spoke the bay sailor, "that Judge Custis was to be sold out?"

"I won't tell you, Jimmy."

"I told him," Roxy cried, after an instant's hesitation, while Jimmy Phœbus was grinding the stiff

bell-crown hat down on Wonnell's suffocating muzzle. "I did think we was all going to be sold, and had nobody to pity me but that poor white man, and I told him as a friend."

"And I never told anybody in the world but Levin Dennis yisterday," Jack cried out, when he was able to get his breath.

"Whar did you go, Jack, wid the long man and Levin all day yisterday?" Samson asked.

"Yes, whar was you?" Jimmy Phœbus shouted, with one of his Greek paroxysms of temper on, as his dark skin and black-cherry eyes flamed volcanic. "Whar did you leave Ellenora's boy and that infernal soul-buyer? Speak, or I'll throttle you like this dog!"

"You let him alone, sir!" little Roxy cried, hotly, "he won't deceive anybody; he's going to tell all he knows."

"Let go, Jimmy," Samson said; "don't you see Miss Vesty heah?"

"Don't scare the man, Mr. Phœbus," Vesta added; "but I command him to tell all that he knows, or papa shall commit him to jail."

Jack Wonnell, taking his place some steps away from Phœbus, and wiping his eyes on his sleeve, whimpering a few minutes, to Roxy's great agitation, finally told his tale.

"I'm sorry, Jimmy, you accused me before this beautiful lady an' my purty leetle Roxy—bless her soul!—of stealing Jedge Custis's niggers. Thair's on'y one I ever looked sheep's eyes at, an' she's a-standin' here, listenin' to every true word I says. I'm pore trash, an' I reckon the jail's as good as the pore-house for me, ef they want to send me thair, fur it's in town, and Roxy kin come an' look through the bars at me every day."

Roxy was so much affected that she threw her apron up to her face, and Vesta and Phœbus had to smile, while Samson Hat, looking indulgently on, exclaimed,

"Dar's love all froo de woods. Doves an' crows can't help it. It's deeper down dan feeders an' claws."

"That nigger trader," continued Jack Wonnell, bell-crown in hand, "hired me an' Levin to take him a tarrapinin'. He had a bag of gold that big"—measuring with his hand in the crown of the hat—"an' he give Levin some of it, an' I took it to Levin's mother las' night, an' told her Levin wouldn't be back fur a week, maybe. I thought Mr. Johnson was gwyn to give me some gold too, so I could buy Roxy, but yer's all he give me. Everybody disappints me, Jimmy!"

Jack Wonnell showed an old silver fi'penny bit, and his countenance was so lugubrious that the sailor exclaimed,

"Jack, he paid you too well for all the sense you got. Now, whar has Levin gone with the *Ellenora Dennis*?"

"I don't know, Jimmy. He made Levin sail her up to the landin' down yer below town, whair Levin's father, Cap'n Dennis, launched the *Idy* fifteen year ago. I left Levin thar, and he said, 'Jack, I'm goin' off with the nigger trader to git some of his money fur mother!'"

"Poor miserable boy!" Phœbus exclaimed; "he's led off easy as his pore daddy. The man he's gone with, Miss Vesty, is black as hell. Joe Johnson is known to every thief on the bay, every gypsy on the shore. He steals free niggers when he can't buy slave ones, outen Delaware state. He sometimes runs away Maryland slaves to oblige their hypocritical masters that can't sell 'em publicly, an' Johnson and the bereaved owner divides the price. Go in the house, yaller gal!" Jimmy Phœbus turned to Roxy, who obeyed instantly. "Jack Wonnell, you go too; I'm done with you!" (Jack slipped around the house and made his peace with Roxy before he started.) "You needn't to go, Samson; I know you're true as steel!"

"I must go an' git de breakfast, Jimmy," the negro said, going in.

"Now, Miss Vesty"—Phœbus turned to the mistress of Teackle Hall—"Joe Johnson has got old Hominy and the little niggers, by smoke! That part of this hokey pokey is purty sure! Did he steal them an' decoy them, or wair they sold to him by Judge Custis or by Meshach Milburn?"

"By neither, I will risk my life. Mr. Milburn was taken to his bed Saturday evening, and on Sunday father went to Delaware on legal business for my husband."

"That is Meshach Milburn, I hear," the bay sailor remarked, with a penetrating look. "Shall I go and see him on this nigger business?"

"No," Vesta replied; "he is too sick, and it is a delicate subject to name to him. My girls, Virgie and Roxy, think old Hominy ran away from a superstitious fear she had of Mr. Milburn, who had become the master of Teackle Hall by marriage."

"Yes, by smoke! every nigger in town, big and little, is afraid of Milburn's hat."

"He has no ownership in those servants, nor has my father now. I will tell you, James—relying on your prudence—that Hominy belonged to me, and so did those three children, having passed from my father to my husband and thence to me and back to my father, and from him to me again in the very hour of my marriage. I fear they have been persuaded away, to be abused and sold out of Maryland."

Jimmy Phœbus looked up at the sighing trees and over the wide façade of Teackle Hall, and exclaimed "by smoke!" several times before he made his conclusions.

"Miss Vesty," he said, finally, "send for your father to come home immediately. People will not understand how Joe Johnson, outlaw as he is, dared to rob a Maryland judge of his house servants, Johnson himself bein' a Marylander, unless they had some understanding. Your sudden marriage, an' your pappy's embarrassments, will be put together, by smoke! an' thar is some blunt enough to say that when Jedge Custis is hard up, he'll git money anyhow!"

The charge, made with an honest man's want of skill, battered down all explanations.

"I confess it," said Vesta. "Papa's going away on a Sunday, and these people disappearing on Sunday night, might excite idle comment. It might be said that he endeavored to sell some of his property before his creditor could seize it."

"I have seen you about yer since you was a baby, Vesty, an' Ellenora says you're better game an' heart than these 'ristocrats, fur who I never keered! That's why I take the liberty of calling you Vesty. Now, let me tell you about your niggers. If they was a-gwyn to freedom in a white man's keer, I wouldn't stop 'em to be cap'n of a man-of-war. But Joe Johnson, supposin' that he's got of 'em, is a demon. Do you see the stab on that dog? well, it's done with one of the bagnet pistols them kidnappers carries—hoss pistols, with a spring dagger on the muzzle; and, when they come to close quarters, they stab with 'em. Johnson killed your dog; I know his marks. He sails this whole bay, and maybe he's run them niggers to Washin'ton, or to Norfolk, an' sold 'em south. It ain' no use to foller him to either of them places, if he has, with the wind an' start he's got, and your pappy's influence lost to us by his absence. But thar is one chance to overhaul the thief."

"What is that, James?" said Vesta, earnestly. "I do want to save those poor people from the abuse of a man who could kill my poor, fond dog."

"Joe Johnson keeps a hell-trap—a reg'lar Pangymonum, up near the head of Nanticoke River. It's the headquarters of his band, and a black band they air. He has had good wind"—the pungy captain looked up and noted the breeze—"to get him out of Manokin last night, and into the Sound; but he must beat up the Nanticoke all day, and we kin head him off by land, if that's his destination, before he gits to Vienna, an' make him show his cargo. Then, with a messenger to follow Jedge Custis an' turn him back, we can swear these niggers on Johnson—and, you see, we can't make no such oath till we git the evidence—an' then, by smoke! we'll bring ole Hominy an' the pore chillen back to Teackle Hall."

"Here is one you love to serve, James," said Vesta, as the Widow Dennis came in the gate.

"I came to meet you at the landing, James," said the blue-eyed, sweet-voiced widow, with the timid step and ready blush. "Levin is gone for a week with a negro trader; he sends me so much money, I fear he is under an unusual temptation, and Wonnell says the trader is giving him liquor. What shall I do?"

"Make me his father, Ellenory, and that'll give me an interest over him, and you will command me. You want a first mate in your crew. Levin kin make a fool of me if I go chase him now, and I can't measure money with a nigger trader, by smoke!"

"Oh! James," the widow spoke, "you know my heart would be yours if I could control it. When my way is clear you will have but to ask. Do go and find Levin!"

"Norah, we suspect the same trader of having taken off Hominy, our cook, and the kitchen children, in Levin's boat."

The widow listened to Vesta, and burst into tears. "He will be accessory to the crime," she sobbed. "Oh, this is what I have ever feared. James Phœbus, you have always had the best influence over Levin. If you love me, arrest him before the law takes cognizance of this wild deed. Where has he gone?"

Virgie appeared upon the lawn to say that Mrs. Custis wanted to know who should drive her as far as Salisbury, where she could get a slave of her son-in-law to continue on with her to Cambridge.

"I have been thinking all the morning where I can find a reliable man to go and bring back papa," Vesta answered; "there are a few slaves at the Furnace, but time is precious."

"Here is Samson," Virgie said, "and he has got a mule he rides all over the county. Let him go."

"Go whar, my love?" asked Samson.

"To Dover, in Delaware," Vesta answered. "You can ride to Laurel by dark, Samson, and get to Dover to-morrow afternoon."

"And I can ride with him as far as Salisbury," Jimmy Phœbus said, "and get out to the Nanticoke some way; fur I see Ellenora will cry till I go."

"You can do better than that, James," Vesta said, rapidly thinking. "Samson can take you to Spring Hill Church or Barren Creek Springs, by a little deviation, and at the Springs you will be only three miles from the Nanticoke. Even mamma might go on with the carriage to-night as far as the Springs, or to Vienna."

"If two of them are going," Virgie exclaimed, "one can drive Missy Custis and the other ride the mule."

Samson shook his head.

"Dey say a free nigger man gits cotched up in dat ar Delawaw state. Merrylin's good enough fur me. I likes de Merrylin light gals de best," looking at Virgie.

"Go now, Samson, to oblige Miss Vesty," Virgie said, "and I'll try to love you a little, black and bad as you are."

"I'se afraid of Delawaw state," Samson repeated, laughing slowly. "Joe Johnson, dat I put dat head on, will git me whar he lives if I go dar, mebbe."

"No," Phœbus put in, "I'll be a lookin' after him on the banks of the Nanticoke, Samson, while you keep right in the high-road from Laurel to Georgetown, and on to Dover. Joe Johnson's been whipped at the post, and banished from Delaware for life, and dussn't go thar no more."

"If you go, Samson," little Roxy put in, having reappeared, "Virgie'll feel complimented. Anything that obliges Miss Vesty counts with Virgie."

"If you are a free man," Virgie herself exclaimed, her slight, nervous, willowy figure expanding, "are you afraid to go into a freer state than Maryland? If I was free I would want to go to the freest state of all. Behave like a free man, Samson Hat, or what is freedom worth to you?"

"It's wuth so much, pretty gal, dat I don't want to be a-losin' of it, mind, I tell you, 'sept to my wife when she'll hab me."

Samson watched the quadroon's delicate, high-bred features, her skin almost paler than her young mistress's, her figure like the clove's after a hard winter—the more active that a little meagre—her head small, and its tresses soft as the crow blackbird's plumage, and the loyalty that lay in her large eyes, like strong passion, for her mistress, was turned to pride, and nearly scorn, when they listened to him.

"A slave, Miss Vesty says"—Virgie spoke with almost fierceness—"is not one that's owned, half as much as one that sells himself—to hard drink, or to selfishness, or to fear. You're not a free man, Samson, if you're afraid, and are like these low slave negroes who dare nothing if they can only get a little low pleasure. All that can make a black man white, in my eyes, is a white man's enterprise."

Vesta felt, as she often had done, the capable soul of her servant, and did not resent her spirit as unbecoming a slave, but rather felt responsive chords in her own nature, as if, indeed, Virgie was the more imperious of the two. Coming now into full womanhood, her race elements finding their composition, her character unrestrained by any one in Teackle Hall, Virgie was her young mistress's shield-bearer, like David to the princely Jonathan.

"Why, Virgie," Samson answered, with humility, "I never meant not to go, lady gal, after marster's wife asked me, I only wanted you to beg me hard, an' mebbe I'd git a kiss befo' I started."

"Wait till you come back, and see if you do your errand well," Virgie spoke again. "I shall not kiss you now."

"I will," cried little Roxy, to the amusement of them all, giving Samson a hearty smack from her little pouting mouth; "and now you've got it, think it's Virgie's kiss, and get your breakfast and start!"

As they went to their abodes to make ready, Jimmy Phœbus found Jack Wonnell playing marbles with the boys at the court-house corner.

"Jack," he said, "I'm a-going to find Levin an' that nigger trader. I may git in a peck of trouble up yonder on the Nanticoke. Tell all the pungy men whair I'm a-goin', an' what fur."

"Can't I do somethin' fur you, Jimmy? Can't I give you one o' my bell-crowns; thair's a-plenty of 'em left."

"Take my advice, Jack, an' tie a stone to all them hats and sink' em in the Manokin. Ole Meshach's hat has made more hokey-pokey than the Bank of Somerset. Pore an' foolish as you air, maybe your ole bell-crowns will ruin you."

The road to Salisbury—laid out in 1667, when "Cecil, Lord of Maryland and Avalon," erected a county "in honor of our dear sister, the Lady Mary Somerset"—followed the beaver-dams across the little river-heads, and pierced the flat pine-woods and open farms, and passed through two little hamlets, before our travellers saw the broad mill-ponds and poplar and mulberry lined streets of the most active town—albeit without a court-house—in the lower peninsula. Jimmy Phœbus, driving the two horses and the family carriage, and Samson, following on his mule, descended into the hollow of Salisbury at the dinner-hour, and stopped at the hotel. The snore of grist-mills, the rasp of mill-saws, the flow of pine-colored breast-water into the gorge of the village, the forest cypress-trees impudently intruding into the obliquely-radiating streets, and humidity of ivy and creeper over many of the old, gable-chimneyed houses, the long lumber-yards reflected in the swampy harbor among the canoes, pungies, and sharpies moored there, the small houses sidewise to the sandy streets, the larger ones rising up the sandy hills, the old box-bush in

the silvery gardens, the bridges close together, and the smell of tar and sawdust pleasantly inhaled upon the lungs, made a combination like a caravan around some pool in the Desert of the Nile.

"If there is any chance to catch my negroes," Mrs. Custis said, "I will go right on after dinner. Samson, send Dave, my daughter's boy, to me immediately; he is working in this hotel."

Samson found Dave to be none other than the black class-leader he had failed to overcome at the beginning of our narrative, but changes were visible in that individual Samson had not expected. From having a clean, godly, modest countenance, becoming his professions, Dave now wore a sour, evil look; his eyes were blood-shot, and his straight, manly shoulders and chest, which had once exacted Samson's admiration and envy, were stooped to conform with a cough he ever and anon made from deep in his frame.

"Dave," said Samson, "your missis's modder wants you, boy, to drive her to Vienny. What ails you, Dave, sence I larned you to box?"

"Is you de man?" Dave exclaimed, hoarsely; "den may de Lord forgive you, fur *I* never kin. Dat lickin' I mos' give you, made me a po', wicked, backslidin' fool."

"Why, Dave, I jess saw you was a *good* man; I didn't mean you no harm, boy."

"You ruined me, free nigger," repeated the huge slave, with a scowl, partly of revenge and partly remorse. "You set up my conceit dat I could box. I had never struck a chile till dat day; after dat I went aroun' pickin' quarrels wid bigger niggers, an' low white men backed me to fight. I was turned out o' my church; I turned my back on de Lord; whiskey tuk hold o' me, Samson. De debbil has entered into Class-leader Dave."

"Oh, brudder, wake up an' do better. Yer, I give you a dollar, an' want to be your friend, Davy, boy."

"I'll git drink wid it," Dave muttered, going; and, as he passed out of the stable-door he looked back at Samson fiercely, and exclaimed, "May Satan burn your body as he will burn my soul. I hate you, man, long as you live!"

Jimmy Phœbus remarked, a few moments afterwards, that Dave, dividing a pint of spirits with a lean little mulatto boy, put a piece of money in the boy's hands, who then rode rapidly out of the tavern-yard upon a fleet Chincoteague pony.

At two o'clock they again set forward, the man Dave driving the carriage and Jimmy Phœbus sitting beside him, while Samson easily kept alongside upon his old roan mule, the road becoming more sandy as they ascended the plateau between the Wicomico and Nanticoke, and the carriage drawing hard.

"If it is too late to keep on beyond Vienna to-night," said Mrs. Custis, "I will stop there with my friends, the Turpins, and start again, after coffee, in the morning, and reach Cambridge for breakfast."

"I will turn off at Spring Hill," Samson spoke, "and I kin feed my mule at sundown in Laurel an' go to sleep."

In an hour they came in sight of old Spring Hill church, a venerable relic of the colonial Established Church, at the sources of a creek called Rewastico; and before they crossed the creek the driver, Dave, called "Ho, ho!" in such an unnecessarily loud voice that Mrs. Custis reproved him sharply. Dave jumped down from the seat and appeared to be examining some part of the breeching, though Samson assured him that it was all right. As Dave finished his examination, he raised both hands above his head twice, and stretched to the height of his figure as he stood on the brow of a little hill.

"Missy Custis," he apologized, as he turned back, "I is tired mighty bad dis a'ternoon. Dat stable keeps me up half de night."

"Liquor tires you more, David," Mrs. Custis spoke, sharply; "and that tavern is no place to hire you to with your appetite for drink, as I shall tell your master."

At this moment Jimmy Phœbus observed the lean little mulatto boy who had left the hotel come up out of the swampy place in the road and exchange a look of intelligence with Dave as he rode past on the pony.

"Boy," cried Samson, "is dat de road to Laurel?"

The boy made no answer, but, looking back once, timidly, ground his heels into the pony's flank and darted into the brush towards Salisbury.

"Samson," spoke Dave, "you see dat ole woman in de cart yonder?"—he pointed to a figure ascending the rise in the ground beyond the brook—"I know her, an' she's gwyn right to Laurel. She lives dar. It's ten miles from dis yer turn-off, an' she knows all dese yer woods-roads."

"Good-bye, den, an' may you find Aunt Hominy an' de little chillen, Jimmy, an' bring dem all home to Prencess Anne from dat ar Joe Johnson!" cried Samson, and trotted his mule through the swamp and away. Jimmy Phœbus saw him overtake the old woman in the cart and begin to speak with her as the scrubby woods swallowed them in.



"What's dat he said about Joe Johnson?" observed Dave, after a bad spell of coughing, as they cleared the old church and entered the sandy pine-woods.

Mrs. Custis spoke up more promptly than Jimmy Phœbus desired, and told the negro about the escape of Hominy and the children, and the hope of Mr. Phœbus to head the party off as they ascended the Nanticoke towards the Delaware state-line.

"You don't want to git among Joe Johnson's men, boss?" said the red-eyed negro; "dey bosses all dis country heah, on boff sides o' de state-line. All dat ain't in wid dem is afraid o' dem."

"How fur is it from this road to Delaware, Dave?" asked Phœbus.

"We're right off de corner-stone o' Delawaw state dis very minute. It's hardly a mile from whar we air. De corner's squar as de stone dat sots on it, an' is cut wid a pictur o' de king's crown."

"Mason and Dixon's line they call it," interpreted Mrs. Custis.

"Do you know Joe Johnson, Dave?"

"Yes, Marster Phœbus, you bet I does. He's at Salisbury, he's at Vienna, he's up yer to Crotcher's Ferry, he's all ober de country, but he don't go to Delawaw any more in de daylight. He was whipped dar, an' banished from de state on pain o' de gallows. But he lives jess on dis side o' de Delawaw line, so dey can't git him in Delawaw. He calls his place Johnson's Cross-roads: ole Patty Cannon lives dar, too. She's afraid to stay in Delawaw now."

"Why, what is the occupation of those terrible people at present?" asked Mrs. Custis.

No answer was made for a minute, and then Dave said, in a low, frightened voice, as he stole a glance at both of his companions out of his fiery, scarred eyes:

"Kidnappin', I 'spect."

"It's everything that makes Pangymonum," Jimmy Phœbus explained; "that old woman, Patty Cannon, has spent the whole of a wicked life, by smoke!—or ever sence she came to Delaware from Cannady, as the bride of pore Alonzo Cannon—a-makin' robbers an' bloodhounds out of the young men she could git hold of. Some of 'em she sets to robbin' the mails, some to makin' an' passin' of counterfeit money, but most of 'em she sets at stealin' free niggers outen the State of Delaware; and, when it's safe, they steal slaves too. She fust made a tool of Ebenezer Johnson, the pirate of Broad Creek, an' he died in his tracks a-fightin fur her. Then she took hold of his sons, Joe Johnson an' young Ebenezer, an' made 'em both outlaws an' kidnappers, an' Joe she married to her daughter, when Bruington, her first son-in-law, had been hanged. When Samson Hat, who is the whitest nigger I ever found, knocked Joe Johnson down in Princess Anne, the night before last, he struck the worst man in our peninsula."

Dave listened to this recital with such a deep interest that his breath, strong with apple whiskey, came short and hot, and his hands trembled as he guided the horses. At the last words, he exclaimed:

"Samson knocked Joe Johnson down? Den de debbil has got him, and means to pay him back!"

"What's that?" cried Jimmy Phœbus.

The sweat stood on the big slave's forehead, as if his imagination was terribly possessed, but before he could explain Mrs. Custis interrupted:

"I think it was said that old Patty Cannon corrupted Jake Purnell, who cut his throat at Snow Hill five years ago. He was a free negro who engaged slaves to steal other slaves and bring them to him, and he delivered them up to the white kidnappers for money; and nobody could account for his prosperity till a negro who had been beaten to death was found in the Pocomoke River, and three slaves who had been seen in his company were arrested for the murder. They confessed that they had stolen the dead negro and he had escaped from them, and was so beaten with clubs, to make him tractable, that when they gave him to Purnell his life was all gone. Then he was thrown in the river, but his body came up after sinking, and the confession of the wretched tools explained to the slave-owners where all their missing negroes had gone. They marched and surrounded Purnell's hut, and he was discovered burrowed beneath it. They brought the dogs, and fire to drive him out, and as he came out he cut his throat with desperate slashes from ear to ear."

During this narrative the man Dave had listened with rising nervous excitement, rolling his eyes as if in strong inward torment, till the concluding words inspired such terror in him that he dropped the reins, threw back his head, and shouted, with large beads of sweat all round his brow:

"Mercy! mercy! Have mercy! Save me, oh, my Lord!"

"He's got a fit, I reckon," cried Jimmy Phœbus, promptly grasping the reins as the horses started at the cry, and with his leg pinning Dave to the carriage-seat. At that moment the road descended into the hollow of Barren Creek, and, leaping down at the old Mineral Springs Hotel, a health resort of those days, Phœbus humanely procured water and freshened up the gasping negro's face.

"I declare, I am almost afraid to trust myself to this man," Mrs. Custis observed, with more

distaste than trepidation.

"Every nigger in this region," exclaimed Jimmy Phœbus, "thinks Pangymonum's comin' down at the dreaded name of Patty Cannon; an' this nigger's gone most to ruin, any way."

"Oh, marster," exclaimed the slave, recovering his speech and glaring wildly around, "I hain't been always the pore sinner rum an' fightin' has made of me. I served the Lord all my youth; I praised his name an' kept the road to heaven; an' thinkin' of the shipwreck I'se made of a good conscience, an' hearin' missis tell of the end of Jake Purnell, it made me yell to de good Lord for mercy, mercy, oh, my soul!"

His frightful agitation increased, and Jimmy Phœbus soothed him, good-naturedly saying:

"Mrs. Custis, I reckon you'd better let him come in the tavern and take a little sperits; it'll strengthen his nerves an' make him drive better."

As they drank at the old summer-resort bar, at that time in the height of its celebrity, and the only *spa* on the peninsula, south of the Brandywine Springs, Phœbus spoke low to the negro:

"Dave, somethin' not squar and fair is a-workin' yer, by smoke! I've got my eye on you, nigger, an' sure as hokey-pokey thair it'll stay. You know my arrand yer, Dave: to save a pore, ignorant, deluded black woman from Joe Johnson's band. Now, you've been a-cryin' 'Mercy!' I want you to show mercy by a-tellin' of me whar I'm to overtake an' sarch Levin Dennis's cat-boat if it comes up the Nanticoke to-night with them people and Joe Johnson aboard!"

Having swallowed his liquor greedily, the colored man replied, with his former lowering countenance and evasive eyes:

"You can't do nothin' as low down de river as Vienny, 'case de Nanticoke is too wide dar, and if you cross it at Vienny ferry, den you got de Norfwest Fork between you and Johnson's Cross-roads, wid one ferry over dat, at Crotcher's, an' Joe Johnson owns all dat place. But you kin keep up dis side o' de Nanticoke, Marster Phœbus, de same distance as from yer to Vienny, to de pint whar de Norfwest Fork come in. Sometimes Joe Johnson sails up dat big fork to get to his cross-roads. In gineral he keeps straight up de oder fork to Betty Twiford's wharf, right on de boundary line."

"How far is that?"

"It's five miles from yer to Vienny, and five miles from yer to a landin' opposite de Norfwest Fork. Four miles funder on you're at Sharptown, an' dar you can see Betty Twiford's house on de bank two miles acrost de Nanticoke."

"Nine miles, then, to Sharptown! He's had the tide agin him since he entered the Nanticoke, and it's not turned yit. By smoke! I'll look for a conveyance!"

"You can ride with me to the first landing," spoke up a noble-looking man, whip in hand; "and after delaying a little there, I shall go on the Sharptown ferry and cross the river."

Phœbus accepted the invitation immediately, and cautioning Mrs. Custis to speak with less freedom in that part of the country, he bade her adieu, and took the vacant seat in the stranger's buggy.

When Mrs. Custis came to Vienna ferry, and the horses and carriage went on board the scow to be rowed to the little, old, shipping settlement of that name, the negro Dave, standing at the horses' heads, exchanged a few sentences with the ferry-keeper.

"Dave," called Mrs. Custis, a little later on, "you have no love, I see, for old Samson."

"He made a boxer outen me an' a bad man, missis."

"Do you know the man he works for—Meshach Milburn?"

"No, missis. I never see him."

"He wears a peculiar hat—nothing like gentlemen's hats nowadays: it is a hat out of a thousand."

"I never did see it, missis."

"You cannot mistake it for any other hat in the world. Now, Samson is the only servant and watchman at Mr. Milburn's store, and he attends to that disgraceful hat. If you can ever get it from him, Dave, and destroy it, you will be doing a useful act, and I will reward you well."

The moody negro looked up from his remorseful, brutalized orbs, and said:

"Steal it?"

"Oh, no, I do not advise a theft, David—though such a wretched hat can have no legal value. It is an affliction to my daughter and Judge Custis and all of us, and you might find some way to destroy it—that is all."

"I'll git it some day," the negro muttered; and drove into the old tobacco-port of Vienna.

## CHAPTER XXII.

### NANTICOKE PEOPLE.

A map would be out of place in a story, yet there are probably some who perceive that this is a story with a reality; and if such will take any atlas and open it at the "Middle States" of the American republic, they will see that the little State of Delaware is fitted as nicely into a square niche of Maryland as if it were a lamp, or piece of statuary, standing on a mantelpiece. It stands there on a mantelshelf about forty miles wide, and rises to more than three times that height, making a perfectly straight north and south line at right angles with its base. Thus mortised into Maryland, its ragged eastern line is formed of the Atlantic Ocean and the broad Delaware Bay.

The only considerable river within this narrow strip or *Hermes* of a state is the Nanticoke, which, like a crack in the wall,—and the same blow fractured the image on the mantel,—flows with breadth and tidal ebb and flow from the Chesapeake Bay through the Eastern Shore of Maryland into Delaware, and is there formed of two tidal sources, the one to the north continuing to be called the Nanticoke, and that to the south—nearly as imposing a stream—named Broad Creek.

Nature, therefore, as if anticipating some foolish political boundaries on the part of man, prepared one drain and channel of ingress at the southwestern corner of Delaware to the splendid bay of Virginia.

Around that corner of the little Delaware commonwealth, in a flat, poor, sandy, pine-grown soil, Jimmy Phœbus rode by the stranger in the afternoon of October, with the sun, an hour high in the west, shining upon his dark, Greekish cheeks and neck, and he hearing the fall birds whistle and cackle in the mellowing stubble and golden thickets.

The meadow-lark, the boy's delight, was picking seed, gravel, and insects' eggs in the fields—large and partridge-like, with breast washed yellow from the bill to the very knees, except at the throat, where hangs a brilliant reticule of blackish brown; his head and back are of hawkish colors—umber, brown, and gray—and in his carriage is something of the gamecock. He flies high, sometimes alone, sometimes in the flock, and is our winter visitor, loving the old fields improvidence has abandoned, and uttering, as he feeds, the loud sounds of challenge, as if to cry, "Abandoned by man; pre-empted by me!"

Jimmy Phœbus also heard the bold, bantering woodpecker, with his red head, whose schoolmaster is the squirrel, and whose tactics of keeping a tree between him and his enemy the Indian fighters adopted. He mimics the tree-frog's cry, and migrates after October, like other voluptuaries, who must have the round year warm, and fruit and eggs always in market. Dressed in his speckled black swallow-tail coat, with his long pen in his mouth and his shirt-bosom faultlessly white, the woodpecker works like some Balzac in his garret, making the tree-top lively as he spars with his fellow-Bohemians; and being sure himself of a tree, and clinging to it with both tail and talons, he esteems everything else that lives upon it to be an insect at which he may run his bill or spit his tongue—that tongue which is rooted in the brain itself.

In the hollow golden bowl of echoing evening the sailor noted, too, the flicker, in golden pencilled wings and back of speckled umber and mottled white breast, with coal-black collar and neck and head of cinnamon. His golden tail droops far below his perch, and, running downward along the tree-trunk, it flashes in the air like a sceptre over the wood-lice he devours with his pickaxe bill. "Go to the ant, thou sluggard!" was an instigation to murder in the flicker, who loves young ants as much as wild-cherries or Indian corn, and is capable of taking any such satire seriously upon things to eat. Not so elfin and devilish as the small black woodpecker, he is full of bolder play.

The redbird, like the unclaimed blood of Abel, flew to the little trees that grew low, as if to cover Abel's altar; the jack-snipe chirped in the swampy spots, like a divinity student, on his clean, long legs, probing with his bill and critical eye the Scriptures of the fields; the quail piped like an old bachelor with family cares at last, as he led his mate where the wild seeds were best; and through the air darted voices of birds forsaken or on doctor's errands, crying "Phœbe? Phœbe?" or "Killed he! killed he!"

"Are you a dealer?" asked the gentleman of Jimmy Phœbus.

"Just a little that way," said Jimmy, warily, "when I kin git somethin' cheap."

The stranger had a pair of keen, dancing eyes, and a long, eloquent, silver-gray face that might have suited a great general, so fine was its command, and yet too narrowly dancing in the eyes, like spiders in a well, disturbing the mirror there.

"Ha!" chuckled the man, as if his eyes had chuckled, so poorly did that sound represent his lordly stature and look of high spirit—"ha! that's what brings them all to my neighbor Johnson: a fair quotient!"

"Quotient?" repeated Jimmy.

"Johnson's a great factor hereabout," continued the military-looking man, bending his handsome eyes on the bay captain, as if there was a business secret between them, and peering at once mischievously and nobly; "he makes the quotient to suit. He leaves the suttles large and never stints the cloff."

"He don't narry a feller down to the cloth he's got, sir?" assented Jimmy, dubiously.

"Why should he? His equation is simple: I suppose you know what it is."

"Not ezactly," answered Phœbus, pricking up his ears to learn.

"Well, it is force and class sympathy against a dead quantity: laws which have no consignees, cattle which have no lawyer and no tongue, rights which have lapsed by their assertion being suspended, till demand and supply, like a pair of bulldogs, tear what is left to pieces. Armed with his *ca. sa.*, my neighbor Johnson offsets everybody's *fi. fa.*, serves his writ the first, and makes to gentlemen like you a satisfactory quotient. But he cuts no capers with Isaac and Jacob Cannon!"

"I expect now that you are Jacob Cannon?" remarked the tawny sailor, not having understood a word of what preceded. "If that's the case, I'm glad to know your name, and thank you for givin' me this lift."

By a bare nod, just intelligible, Mr. Cannon signified that the guess would do; and still meditating aloud in his small, grand way, continued:

"We let neighbor Johnson and his somewhat peculiar mother-in-law make such commerce as suits him, provided he studies to give us no inconvenience. That is his equation; with his quotient we have no concern other than our slight interest in his wastage, as when Madame Cannon rides down to change a bill and leaves an order for supplies—rum, chiefly, I believe. Gentlemen like you come into this country to deal, replevin, or what not, and we say to you all, 'Don't tread on us—that is all.' We shall not look into your parcels, nor lie awake of nights to hear alarms; but harm Isaac and Jacob Cannon one ha'pence and *levari facias, fi. fa.!*"

"And fee-fo-fum," ejaculated Jimmy, cheerfully; "I've hearn it before."

Looking again with some curiosity at his companion, Phœbus saw that he was not beyond fifty years of age, of a spare, lofty figure—at least six feet four high—sitting straight and graceful as an Indian, his clothes well-tailored, his countenance and features both stern and refined; every feature perfected, and all keen without being hard or angular—and yet Jimmy did not like him. There seemed to have been made a commodore or a general—some one designed for deeds of chivalry and great philanthropy; and yet around and between the dancing eyes spider lines were drawn, as if the fine high brain of Jacob Cannon had put aside matters that matched it and meddled with nothing that ascended higher above the world than the long white bridge of his nose. His sentiments apparently fell no further towards his heart than that; his brain belonged to the bridge of his nose.

"Another Meshach Milburn, by smoke!" concluded Jimmy.

After a little pause Phœbus inquired into the character of the people in this apparently new region of country.

"The quotient of much misplanting and lawyering is the lands on the Nanticoke," spoke the gray-nosed Apollo; "the piece of country directly before us, in the rear of my neighbor Johnson's cross-roads, was an old Indian reservation for seventy years, and so were three thousand acres to our right, on Broad Creek. The Indian is a bad factor to civilize his white neighbors; he does not know the luxury of the law, that grand contrivance to make the equation between the business man and the herd. Ha, ha!"

Mr. Cannon chuckled as if he, at least, appreciated the law, and turned the fine horsy bridge of his nose, all gray with dancing eyelight, enjoyingly upon Mr. Phœbus.

"The Indians were long imposed upon, and when they went away, at the brink of the Revolutionary War, they left a demoralized white race; and others who moved in upon the deserted lands of the Nanticokes were, if possible, more Indian than the Indians. This peninsula never produced a great Indian, but when Ebenezer Johnson settled on Broad Creek it possessed a greater savage than Tecumseh. He took what he wanted and appealed to nature, like the Indian. He stole nothing; he merely took it. He served, with anything convenient, from his fists to a blunderbuss, his *fi. fa.* and his *ca. sa.* upon wondering but submissive mankind. Need I say that this was before the perfect day of Isaac and Jacob Cannon?"

"They would have socked it to him, I reckon," Jimmy exclaimed, consonantly.

Mr. Jacob Cannon gave a tender smile, such as the gray horse emits at the prospect of oats, and continued:

"Such was the multiplicand to make the future race. Here, too, raged the boundary-line debate between Penns and Calverts, with occasional raids and broken heads, and a noble suit in chancery of fifty years, till no man's title was known, and, instead of improving their lands, our voluptuous predecessors improved chiefly their opportunities. You cut sundry cords of wood and hauled it to the landing, and Ebenezer Johnson coolly scowed it over to his paradise at the mouth of Broad Creek. You had a little parcel of negroes, but the British war-ships, in two successive wars, lay in the river mouth and beckoned them off. Having no interest in any certain property, the foresters of the Nanticoke would rather trade with the enemy than fight for foolish ideas; and so this region was more than half Tory, and is still half passive, the other half predatory. To neither half of such a quotient belongs the house of Isaac and Jacob Cannon!"

His nostrils swelled a trifle with military spirit, and he raised the bridge of his nose delicately,

turning to observe his instinctive companion.

"If it's any harm I won't ask it," the easy-going mariner spoke, "but air you two Cannons ary kin to ole Patty Cannon?"

Mr. Cannon smiled.

"In Adam all sinned—there we may have been connected," he said. "The question you ask may one day be actionable, sir. The Cannons are a numerous people in our region, of fair substance, such as we have, but they showed nothing to vary the equation of subsistence here till there arose the mother of Isaac and Jacob Cannon. She was a remarkable woman; unassisted, she procured the charter for Cannon's Ferry, and made the port settlement of that name by the importance her ferry acquired; and when she died there were found in her house nine hundred dollars in silver—for she never would take any paper money—the earnings of that sequestered ferry, to start her sons on their career. She knew the peculiar character of some of her neighbors—how lightly *meum* and *tuum* sat upon their fears or consciences—but she kept no guard except her own good gray eyes and dauntless heart over that accumulating pile of little sixpences, for there was but one spirit as bold as she in all this region of the world—"

"And that, I reckon," observed Jimmy Phœbus, "was ole Patty Cannon herself."

Mr. Jacob Cannon slightly bowed his head, and spoke aloud from an inner communion:

"Forgive me, mother, that I make the comparison! Thy frugal oil, that burned with pure and lonely widow's flame at Cannon's Ferry window, the traveller hailed with comfort in his heart, and blessed the enterprise. But to compound the equation another unknown quantity of female force arose beside my mother's lamp. A certain young Cannon, distantly of our stock, must needs go see the world, and he returned with a fair demon of a bride, and settled, too, at Cannon's Ferry. He lived to see the wondrous serpent he had warmed in his arms, and died, they say, of the sting. But she lived on, and, shrinking back into the woods to a little farm my mother's sons rented to her, she lighted there a Jack-o'-the-lantern many a traveller has pursued who never returned to tell. With Ebenezer Johnson's progeny and her own siren sisters, who followed Madame Cannon to the Nanticoke, the nucleus of a settlement began, and has existed for twenty years, that only the Almighty's *venire facias* can explore."<sup>[2]</sup>

"That's my arrand, Jacob Cannon," quietly remarked Jimmy Phœbus. "I'm a pore man from Prencess Anne. If you took me for a nigger-dealer you did me as pore a compliment as when I asked if you was Patty Cannon's kin. But I have got just one gal to love and just one life to lose, an' if God takes me thar, I'm a-goin' to Johnson's Cross-roads."

Mr. Jacob Cannon turned and examined his companion with some twinkling care, but showed no personal concern.

"Every man must be his own security, my dark-skinned friend, till he can find a bailman. That place I never take—neither the debtor's nor the security. The firm of Isaac and Jacob Cannon allows no trespass, and further concern themselves not. But we are at the Nanticoke."

"I'm obliged to you for the lift, Mr. Jacob Cannon," said Jimmy, springing down, "and hope you may never find it inconvenient to have let such a pack of wolves use your neighborhood to trespass on human natur."

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## CHAPTER XXIII.

### TWIFORD'S ISLAND.

Some piles of wood and an old wharf were at the river-side, and a little scow, half filled with water, and with only a broken piece of paddle in it, was the only boat the pungy captain could find. The merchant's buggy was soon out of sight, and the wide, gray Nanticoke, several hundred yards wide, and made wider by a broad river that flowed into it through low bluffs and levels immediately opposite, was receiving the strong shadows of approaching night, and the tide was running up it violent and deep.

Long lines of melancholy woods shut both these rivers in; an osprey suddenly struck the surface of the water, like a drowning man, and rose as if it had escaped from some demon in the flood; the silence following his plunge was deeper than ever, till a goatsucker, noiselessly making his zigzag chase, cried, as if out of eternal gloom, his solemn command to "*Whip poor Will*." Those notes repeated—as by some slave ordering his brother to be lashed or one sympathetic soul in perdition made the time-caller to another's misery—floated on the evening light as if the oars of Charon echoed on the Styx, and broken hearts were crossing over.

Alone, unintimidated, but not altogether comfortable, Jimmy Phœbus proceeded to bail out the old scow, and wished he had accepted one of Jack Wonnell's hats to do the task, and, when he had finished it, the stars and clouds were manœuvring around each other in the sky, with the clouds the more aggressive, and finally some drops of rain punctured the long, bare muscles of the inflowing tide, making a reticule of little pittings, like a net of beads on drifting women's tresses. As night advanced, a puffing something ascended the broad, black aisle of this forest

river, and slowly the Norfolk steamboat rumbled past, with passengers for the Philadelphia stage. Then silence drew a sheet of fog around herself and passed into a cold torpor of repose, affected only by the waves that licked the shores with intermittent thirst.

The waterman, regretting a little that he had not taken his stand at Vienna, where human assistance might have been procured, and thinking that the poison airs might also afflict him with Meshach Milburn's complaints, fought sleep away till midnight, straining his eyes and ears ever and anon for signs of some sail; but nothing drew near, and he had insensibly closed his lids and might have soon been in deep sleep, but that he suddenly heard, between his dreams and this world, something like a little baby moaning in the night.

He sat up in the damp scow, where he had been lying, and listened with all his senses wide open, and once again the cry was wafted upon the river zephyrs, and before it died away the sailor's paddle was in the water, and his frail, awkward vessel was darting across the tide.

He saw, in the black night, what none but a sailor's eyes would have seen, a thing not visible, but divined, coming along on the bosom of the river; and his ears saw it the clearer as that little cry continued—now stopped, now stifled, now rising, now nearly piercing; and then there was a growl, momentary and loud, and a rattle as of feet over wood, and a stroke or thud, or heavy concussion, and then a white thing rose up against the universal ink and rushed on the little scow, sucking water as it came—the cat-boat under full sail.

Phœbus had paddled for the opposite shore of the river to prevent the object of his quest escaping up the Northwest Fork, yet to be in its path if it beat up the main fork, and, by a piece of instinctive calculation, he had run nearly under the cat-boat bows.

"Ahoy, there!" cried Jimmy, standing up in his tipsy little skiff; "ahoy the *Ellenory Dennis!* I'm a-comin' aboard."

And with this, the paddle still in his hand, and his knees and feet nearly sentient in their providence of uses, the sailor threw himself upon the low gunwale, and let it glide through his palms till he could see the man at the helm.

There was no light to be called so, but the helmsman was yet perceived by the sailor's experienced eyes, and he grappled the gunwale firmer, and, preparing to swing himself on board, shouted hoarsely,

"You Levin Dennis, I see you, by smoke! You know Jimmy Phœbus is your friend, an' come out of this Pangymonum an' stop a-breakin' of your mother's heart! Oh, I see you, my son!"

If he did see Levin Dennis, Levin did not see Jimmy Phœbus, nor apparently hear him, but stood motionless at the helm as a frozen man, looking straight on in the night. The rigging made a little flapping, the rudder creaked on its hooks, but every human sound was still as the grave now, and the boy at the helm seemed petrified and deaf and blind.

The pungy captain's temper rose, his superstition not being equal to that of most people, and he cried again,

"You're a disgrace to the woman that bore you. Hell's a-waitin' for your pore tender body an' soul. Heave ahoy an' let drop that gaff, an' take me aboard, Levin!"

Still silent and passive as a stone, the youthful figure at the helm did not seem to breathe, and the cat-boat cut the water like a fish-hawk.

A flash of bright fire lighted up the vessel's side, a loud pistol-shot rang out, and the sailor's hands loosened from the gunwale and clutched at the air, and he felt the black night fall on him as if he had pulled down its ebony columns upon his head.

He knew no more for hours, till he felt himself lying in cold water and saw the gray morning coming through tree-boughs over his head. He had a thirsty feeling and pain somewhere, and for a few minutes did not move, but lay there on his shoulder, holding to something and guessing what it might be, and where he might be making his bed in this chilly autumn dawn.

His hand was clutching the a-stern plank of the old scow, and was so stiff he could not for some time open it. The scow was aground upon a marshy shore, in which some large trees grew, and were the fringes of a woods that deepened farther back.

"By smoke!" muttered Jimmy, "if yer ain't hokey-pokey. But I reckon I ain't dead, nohow."

With this he lifted the other hand, that had been stretched beneath his head, and was also numb with cramp and cold, and it was full of blood.

"Well," said Jimmy, "that feller did hit me; but, if he'll lend me his pistol, I'll fire a straighter slug than his'n. I wonder where it is."

Feeling around his head, the captain came to a raw spot, the touch of which gave him acute pain, and made the blood flow freshly as he withdrew his hand, and he could just speak the words, "Water, or I'll—" when he swooned away.

The sun was up and shining cheerily in the tree-tops as Phœbus, who was its name-bearer, recovered his senses again, and he bathed his face, still lying down, and tore a piece of his raiment off for a bandage, and, by the mirror of a still, green pool of water, examined his wound,

which was in the fleshy part of his cheek—a little groove or gutter, now choked with almost dried blood, where the ball had ploughed a line. It had probably struck a bone, but had not broken it, and this had stunned him.

"I was so ugly before that Ellenory wouldn't more than half look at me," Jimmy mused, "an' now, I 'spect, she'll never kiss that air cheek."

He then bandaged his cheek roughly, sitting up, and took a survey of the scenery.

The river was here a full quarter of a mile wide, on the opposite shore bluff, and in places bold, but, on the side where Phœbus had drifted with the tide, clutching his old scow with mortal grip, there extended a point of level woods and marsh or "cripple," as if by the action of some back-water, and this low ground appeared to have a considerable area, and was nowhere tilled or fenced, or gave any signs of being visited.

But the opposite or northern shore was quite otherwise; there the river had a wide bend or hollow to receive two considerable creeks, and changed its course almost abruptly from west to southwest, giving a grand view of its wide bosom for the distance of more than two miles into Maryland; and the prospect was closed in that direction by a whitish-looking something, like lime or shell piles, standing against the background of pale blue woods and bluffs.

Right opposite the spot where Phœbus had been stranded, a cleared farm came out to the Nanticoke, affording a front of only a single field, on the crest of a considerable sand-bluff—elevations looking magnified here, where nature is so level; and at one end of this field, which was planted in corn that was now clinging dry to the naked stalks, an old lane descended to a shell-paved wharf of a stumpy, square form; and almost at the other, or western, end of the clearing stood a respectable farm-house of considerable age, with a hipped roof and three queer dormer windows slipping down the steeper half below, and two chimneys, not built outside of the house, as was the general fashion, but naturally rising out of the old English-brick gables. All between the gables was built of wood; a porch of one story occupied nearly half the centre of that side of the house facing the river; and to the right, against the house and behind it, were kitchen, smoke-house, corn-cribs, and other low tenements, in picturesque medley; while to the left crouched an old, low building on the water's edge, looking like a brandy-still or a small warehouse. The road from the wharf and lane passed along a beach, and partly through the river water, to enter a gate between this shed and the dwelling; and from the garden or lawn, on the bluff before the latter, arose two tall and elegant trees, a honey-locust and a stalwart mulberry.

"Now, I never been by this place before," Jimmy Phœbus muttered, "but, by smoke! yon house looks to me like Betty Twiford's wharf, an', to save my life, I can't help thinkin' yon white spots down this side of the river air Sharptown. If that's the case, which state am I in?"

He rose to his feet, bailed the scow, which was nearly full of water, and began to paddle along the shore, and, seeing something white, he landed and parted the bushes, and found it to be a stone of a bluish marble, bearing on one side the letter M, and on the other the letter P, and a royal crown was also carved upon it.

"Yer's one o' Lord Baltimore's boundary stones," Phœbus exclaimed. "Now see the rascality o' them kidnapers! Yon house, I know, is Twiford's, because it's a'most on the state-line, but, I'm ashamed to say, it's a leetle in Maryland. And that lane, coming down to the wharf, is my way to Joe Johnson's Pangymonum at his cross-roads."

A sound, as of some one singing, seemed to come from the woods near by, and Phœbus, listening, concluded that it was farther along the water, so he paddled softly forward till a small cove or pool led up into the swamp, and its shores nowhere offered a dry landing; yet there were recent foot-marks deeply trodden in the bog, and disclosed up the slope into the woods, and from their direction seemed to come the mysterious chanting.

"My head's bloody and I'm wet as a musk-rat, so I reckon I ain't afraid of gittin' a little muddy," and with this the navigator stepped from the scow in swamp nearly to his middle, and pulled himself up the slope by main strength.

"I believe my soul this yer is a island," Jimmy remarked; "a island surrounded with mud, that's wuss to git to than a water island."

The tall trees increased in size as he went on and entered a noble grove of pines, through whose roar, like an organ accompanied by a human voice, the singing was heard nearer and nearer, and, following the track of previous feet, which had almost made a path, Phœbus came to a space where an axe had laid the smaller bushes low around a large loblolly pine that spread its branches like a roof only a few feet from the ground; and there, fastened by a chain to the trunk, which allowed her to go around and around the tree, and tread a nearly bare place in the pine droppings or "shats," sat a black woman, singing in a long, weary, throat-sore wail. Jimmy listened to a few lines:

"Deep-en de woun' dy han's have made  
In dis weak, helpless soul,  
Till mercy wid its mighty aid  
De-scen to make me whole;  
Yes, Lord!  
De-scen to make me whole."

A little negro child, perhaps three years old, was lying asleep on the ground at the woman's feet, in an old tattered gray blanket that might have been discarded from a stable. Near the child was a wooden box, in which were a coarse loaf of corn-bread and some strips of bacon, and a wooden trough, hollowed out of a log, contained water. The woman's face was scratched and bruised, and, as she came to some dental sounds in her chant, her teeth were revealed, with several freshly missing in front, and her lips were swollen and the gums blistered and raw.

She glanced up as Phœbus came in sight, looked at him a minute in blank curiosity, as if she did not know what kind of animal he was, and then continued her song, wearily, as if she had been singing it for days, and her mind had gone into it and was out of her control. As she moved her feet from time to time, the chain rattled upon her ankles.

"Well," said Jimmy, "if this ain't Pangymonum, I reckon I'll find it at Johnson's Cross-roads! Git up thar, gal, an' let me see what ails you."

The woman rose mechanically, still singing in the shrill, cracked, weary drone, and, as she rose, the baby awoke and began to cry, and she stooped and took it up, and, patting it with her hands, sang on, as if she would fall asleep singing, but could not.

The chain, strong and rusty, had been very recently welded to her feet by a blacksmith; the fresh rivet attested that, and there were also pieces of charcoal in the pine strewings, as if fire had been brought there for smith's uses. Jimmy Phœbus took hold of the chain and examined it link by link till it depended from a powerful staple driven to the heart of the pine-tree; though rusty, it was perfect in every part, and the condition of the staple showed that it was permanently retained in its position, as if to secure various and successive persons, while the staple itself had been driven above the reach of the hands, as by a man standing on some platform or on another's shoulders.

Phœbus took the chain in his short, powerful arms, and, giving a little run from the root of the tree, threw all the strength of his compact, heavy body into a jerk, and let his weight fall upon it, but did not produce the slightest impression.

"There's jess two people can unfasten this chain," exclaimed Jimmy, blowing hard and kneading his palms, after two such exertions, "one of em's a blacksmith and t'other's a woodchopper. Gal, how did you git yer?"

The woman, a young and once comely person of about twenty-eight years of age, sang on a moment as if she did not understand the question, till Phœbus repeated it with a kinder tone:

"Pore, abused creatur, tell me as your friend! I ain't none of these kidnappers. Git your pore, scattered wits together an' tell a friend of all women an' little childern how he kin help you, fur time's worth a dollar a second, an' bloody vultures are nigh by. Speak, Mary!"

The universal name seemed timely to this woman; she stopped her chanting and burst into tears.

"My husband brought me here," she said, between her long sobs. "He sold me. I give him everything I had and loved him, too, and he sold me—me and my baby."

"I reckon you don't belong fur down this way, Mary? You don't talk like it."

"No, sir; I belong to Philadelphia. I was a free woman and a widow; my husband left me a little money and a little house and this child; another man come and courted me, a han'some mulatto man, almost as white as you. He told me he had a farm in Delaware, and wanted me to be his wife; he promised me so much and was so anxious about it, that I listened to him. Oh, he was a beautiful talker, and I was lonesome and wanted love. I let him sell my house and give him the money, and started a week ago to come to my new home. Oh, he did deceive me so; he said he loved me dearly."

She began to cry again, and her mind seemed to wander, for the next sentence was disconnected. Jimmy took the baby in his arms and kissed it without any scruples, and the child's large, black eyes looked into his as if he might be its own father, while he dandled it tenderly.

"The foxes has come an' barked at me two nights," said the woman; "they wanted the bacon, I 'spect. The water-snakes has crawled around here in the daytime, and the buzzards flew right down before me and looked up, as if they thought I ought to be dead. But I wasn't afraid: that man I give my love to was so much worse than them, that I just sung and let them look at me."

"You say he sold you, Mary?"

The woman rubbed her weary eyes and slowly recollected where she had left off.

"We moved our things on a vessel to Delaware, and come up a creek to a little town in the marshes, and there we started for my husband's farm. He said we had come to it in the night. I couldn't tell, but I saw a house in the woods, and was so tired I went to sleep with my baby there, and in the night I found men in the room, and one of them, a white man, was tying my feet."

A crow cawed with a sound of awe in the pine tops, and squirrels were running tamely all round about as she hesitated.

"I thought then of the kidnappers of Delaware, for I had heard about them, and I jumped out of bed and fought for my life. They knocked me down and the rope around my feet tripped me up; but I fought with my teeth after my hands was tied, too, and I bit that white man's knees, and



then he picked up a fire-shovel, or something of iron, and knocked my teeth out. My last hope was almost gone when I saw my husband coming in, and I cried to him, 'Save me! save me, darling!' He had a rope in his hand, and, before I could understand it, he had slipped it over my neck and choked me."

"Your own husband? I can't believe it, to save my life!"

"I didn't believe it, neither, till I heard him say, when they loosened the slipknot that had strangled me—the voice was his I had trusted so much; I never could forget it!—'Eben,' he said, 'I've took down every mole and spot on her body and can swear to 'em, for I've learned 'em by heart, and you won't have no trouble a-sellin' her, as she can't testify."

"The imp of Pangymonum!" Jimmy cried. "He had married you to note down your marks, and by 'em swear you to be a slave!"

"The white man tried to sell me to a farmer, and then I told what I had heard them say. He believed me, and told them the mayor of Philadelphia had a reward out for them, for kidnappin' free people, already. Then they talked together—a little scared they was—and tied me again, and brought me on a cart through the woods to the river and fetched me here, and chained me, and told me if I ever said I was free, to another man, they meant to sell my baby and to drown me in the river."

She finished with a chilly tremor and a low wail like an infant, but the sailor passed her baby into her arms to engage her, and said:

"The Lord is still a-countin' of his sparrows, or I wouldn't have been on this arrand, by smoke! To drift yer, hangin' senseless to that ole scow, must have been to save you, Mary. This is a island where they chains up property, I reckon, that is bein' follered up too close. Time's very precious, Mary, but I've got a sailor's knife yer, an' I'll stay to cut the staple out o' this ole pine if they come an' kill me. You take an' wash my face off outen that water-trough while I bite a bit of the bacon."

He took the child again and amused it while the woman carefully cleaned his wound and rebandaged it so that he could breathe and see and eat, though the cotton folds wrapped in much of his face like a mask. He then examined the chain again, especially where it was rivetted at the feet, and lifted a large iron ball weighing several pounds, which was also affixed to her ankle, so that she could not climb the tree. Her ankle he found blistered by the red-hot rivet being smithed so barbarously close to the flesh.

"Don't leave me, oh! don't leave me here to die," the woman pleaded, as he started into the woods.

"I'll stay by you an' we'll die together, if we must; but it's not my idee to die at all, Mary. I'm goin' to bring that air scow ashore while I cut a hickory, if I can find one, to break this yer chain."

Plunging again into the mud nearly to his waist, Phœbus pulled the scow up into the woods, and had barely concealed himself when he saw come out of the creek below Twiford's house a cat-boat like the *Ellenora Dennis*, and stand towards the island in the cripple.

"The tide's agin' em, an' they must make a tack to get yer," Jimmy muttered; "but I'm afraid this knife will have to go to the heart of some son of Pangymonum in ten minutes, or Ellenory Dennis never agin be pestered by her ugly lover."

He was seized with a certain frenzy of strength and discernment at the danger he was in, and, as he carried the scow onward and across the woodland island, heavy as it was, he also noted a single small hickory tree on that farther margin, and threw himself against it and bent it down, and plunged his knife into the straining fibres so that it crackled and splintered in his hand. He leaped to the tree and scaled it as he had often climbed a mast, and he thrust the sapling under the staple, trimming the point down with the knife as he clutched the tree by his knees, and then, catching the young hickory like a lever, he dropped down the pine trunk and got his shoulder under the sapling and brought the weight of his body desperately against it. The staple bent upward in the tree, but did not loosen.

At that instant the scraping of a boat upon the mud was heard, and the black woman fell upon her knees.

"Pray, but do it soft," Jimmy whispered; "an' not a cry from the child, or there'll be a murder!"

He had rapidly trimmed the hickory stem of its branches while he spoke, so that it could penetrate the arborage of the tree from above, and climbing higher, like a cat, he worked the point of the lever downwards into the now crooked staple, and threw himself out of the tree against the sapling, which bent like a bow nearly double, but would not break, and, as the staple yielded and flew out, the chain and the deliverer fell together on the soft pine litter.

"Hark!" exclaimed a voice through the woods.

"What was it?" asked another voice.

"Come!" Phœbus murmured, and gathered together the woman, the child, and the chain and ball, and stepped, long and silent as a rabbit's leaps, through the awe-hushed pines, carrying the whole burden on his shoulders.

He sat them in the scow, which sank to the edges, and, covered by a protruding point of woods,

pushed off into the deep river, yet guiding the frail vessel in to the sides of the stream, away from the influence of the out-running tide. As the scow turned the first crease or elbow in the river, it began to sink.

"If you make a sound you are a slave fur life," whispered the waterman, as he slipped overboard and began to swim, with his hand upon the stern. As he did this, straining every muscle of his countenance to keep afloat, the wound in his cheek began to bleed again, and he felt his strength going. Down, down he began to settle, till the water reached his nostrils, and the woman heard him sigh as he was sinking:

"I'd do it—an' die—agin—fur—Ellenory. God bless her!"

The scow, now full of water, turned upside down, and threw mother and child into the stream, and the child was gone beneath the surface before the woman could catch herself upon a sunken branch of an imbedded tree; and, as she gasped there, the body of the pungy captain swept past her and she caught him by the hair, and he clutched her with the drowning instinct, and down they went together, like husband and wife, in nature's contempt of distinctions between living worms.

They went down to the very bottom, but not to drown; for the old tree, having fallen where it grew in other years, was sustained upon its limbs, and made an invisible yet sure pathway to the shore. The long chain and the iron ball fettered to the colored woman's foot, however, deprived her for a few moments of all power to step along the slippery, submerged trunk, and, with her soul full of agony for her child, which she no longer saw, she was about to let go of her deliverer's body and throw herself also into the river, to die with them, when the old scow, having emptied itself of the water, reappeared at the surface and struck the woman a buoyant blow that altered the course of her thought.

"Pore, brave man," the woman gasped. "He's got a wife, maybe. He said, 'God bless her,' an' he give his life for a poor creature like me. God has took my baby. I can't do nothing for it now, but maybe I can save this man's life before I die."

Indifferent to her personal fate, she drew intelligence from her spirit of sacrifice, which is the only thing better than learning. She pushed the scow down and under Phœbus with her remaining hand, till it relieved her of a portion of the weight of his body, and rose up, half-bearing the bronze-faced sailor's form, and animating her generous purpose with the honest and happy smile he wore upon his face, even in the vestibule of the eternal palace. Then, gathering the long meshes of the iron chain up from its termination at her feet, she threw the longer portion of it into the scow, so that it no longer became entangled in the cross-branches and knots below, and she could lift also the iron ball sufficiently to glide her feet along the tree.

With pain and difficulty, lessened by self-forgetfulness, she pushed the scow and the body to the foot of the tree, and, feeling around its old roots for further support, the red-eyed terrapins arose and swam around her, disturbed in their possessions; but she feared no reptiles any more, since Death, the mighty crocodile, had eaten the babe that she had nursed but this morning.

She had intelligent remembrance enough to think of all the precautions her deliverer had taken, and, when she had dragged his body on the shore into the dense, scrubby woods, she also drew out the little scow and heaped some dead brush upon it, and had scarcely concealed herself when she heard voices from the river, and the report of a sail swung around upon its boom, and of feet upon a deck. The voices said:

"If she's got off to Delaware, Joe Johnson won't have long to stay on his visit; for all the beaks will gather fur him an' be started by John M. Clayton."

"I'm sorry fur Joe," answered another voice; "he hoped to make one more big scoop this trip, an' quit the Corners fur good."

"Let us sail by ole Ebenezer Johnson's roost at Broad Creek mouth, an' peep up both forks of the river," said the other voice, receding; "it's only a mile and a half. If we discover nothin', we'll run down the river and inquire at the landings as fur as Vienny."

The colored woman now worked with all her strength to revive the insensible sailor, rolling him, rubbing his body till her elbows seemed almost to be dropping off, and then rubbing his great, broad breast with her head and face and neck. She breathed into his mouth the breath heaven vouchsafed to Hagar as bountifully as to Sarah, and, wringing out portions of her garments and hanging them at sunny exposures to dry, she substituted them, in her exhausted intervals, for the wet clothing of the man; and as she worked, with a hollow, desolate heart, she sobbed:

"Lord, gi' me this man's life! O Lord, that took my chile, I will have this life back!"

Crying and weeping, fainting and laboring, the moments, it seemed the very hours, ran by and still he did not waken; and still, with all that noble strength that makes the fields of white men grow and blossom under the negro's unthanked toil, the widow and childless one fought on for this cold lump of brother nature.

He warmed, he breathed, he groaned, he spoke!

His voice was like a happy sigh, as of one disturbed near the end of a comforting morning nap in summer:

"You thar, Mary?"

He stared around with difficulty, his wounded face now clotted and stained with blood, and his eyes next looked an inquiry so kind and apprehensive that she answered it, to save him breath:

"Baby's drowned. God does best!"

He reached his hand to hers—she was almost naked to the waist, having sacrificed all she had, the greatest of which was modesty, to bring back that life in him which came naked and unashamed into the world—and he put his little strength into the grasp.

"Mary," he exhaled, "why didn't you ketch the baby and leave me go?"

"Oh, dearly as I loved it," the woman answered, "I'm glad you come up under my hands instead. You can do good: you're a white man. Baby would have only been a poor slave, or a free negro nobody would care for."

"I mean to do good, if the Lord lets me," sighed the sailor; "I mean to go and die agin for human natur at Johnson's Cross-roads."

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## CHAPTER XXIV.

### OLD CHIMNEYS.

The day was far advanced when Jimmy Phœbus was strong enough to rise and walk, and leave the refuge in the woods. He advised the colored woman to crawl through the pine-trees along the margin, while he paddled in the old scow in the shadow of the forest, which now lay strong upon the river's breast.

At the distance of about a mile, Broad Creek, like a tributary river, flowed into the Nanticoke from the east, fully a quarter of a mile wide, and half a mile up this stream an old, low, extended, weather-blackened house faced the river, and seemed to grin out of its broken ribs and hollow window-sockets like a traitor's skull discolored upon a gibbet. It was falling to pieces, and along its roof-ridge a line of crows balanced and croaked, as if they had fine stories to tell and weird opinions to pass upon the former inhabitants of the tenement.

"There, I have hearn tell," said Jimmy, as he drew in to the bank, and took the woman into the scow and began to tow her along the beach, wading in the water, "*there*, I have hearn tell, lived the pirate of Broad Creek, ole Ebenezer Johnson, who was shot soon after the war of '12 at Twiford's house down yonder."

"For kidnapping free people?" asked the woman, without interest, the question coming from her desolate heart.

"In them days they didn't kidnap much; it was jest a-beginnin'. The war of '12 busted everything on the bay, burned half a dozen towns, kept the white men layin' out an' watchin', and made loafers of half of 'em, an' brought bad volunteers an' militia yer to trifle with the porer gals, an' some of them strangers stuck yer after the war was done. I don't know whar ole Ebenezer come from; some says this, an' some that. All we know is, that he an' the Hanlen gals, one of 'em Patty Cannon, was the head devils in an' after the war."

"It's a bad-lookin' ole house, sir. See, yonder's a coon runnin' out of the door. Oh! I hear my child cryin' everywhere I look."

"The British begun to run the black people off in the war. The black people wanted to go to 'em. The British filled the islands in Tangier yer with nigger camps; they was a goin' to take this whole peninsuly, an' collect an' drill a nigger army on it to put down Amerikey. When the war was done, the British sailed away from Chesapeake Bay with thousands of them colored folks, an' then the people yer begun to hate the free niggers."

"For lovin' liberty?" the woman sighed, looking at the ball, which had galled her ankle bloody.

"They hated free niggers as if they was all Tories an' didn't love Amerikey. So, seein' the free niggers hadn't no friends, these Johnsons an' Patty Cannon begun to steal 'em, by smoke! There was only a million niggers in the whole country; Louisiana was a-roarin' for 'em; every nigger was wuth twenty horses or thirty yokes of oxen, or two good farms around yer, an' these kidnappers made money like smoke, bought the lawyers, went into polytics, an' got sech a high hand that they tried a murderin' of the nigger traders from Georgey an' down thar, comin' yer full of gold to buy free people. That give 'em a back-set, an' they hung some of Patty's band—some at Georgetown, some at Cambridge."

"If my baby's made white in heaven, I'm afraid I won't know him," the woman said, nodding, and wandering in her mind.

"At last the Delawareans marched on Johnson's Cross-roads an' cleaned his Pangymonum thar out, an' guarded him, and sixteen pore niggers in chains he'd kidnapped, to Georgetown jail. Young John M. Clayton was paid by the Phildelfy Quakers to git him convicted. Johnson was

strong in the county—we're in it now, Sussex—an' if Clayton hadn't skeered the jury almost to death, it would have disagreed. He held 'em over bilin' hell, an' dipped 'em thar till the courtroom was like a Methodis' revival meetin', with half that jury cryin' 'Save me, save me, Lord!' while some of 'em had Joe Johnson's money in their pockets. Joe was licked at the post, banished from the state, an' so skeered that he laid low awhile, goin' off somewhar—to Missouri, or Floridey, or Allybamy. But Patty Cannon never flinched; she trained the young boys around yer to be her sleuth-hounds an' go stealin' for her; an', till she dies, it's safer to be a chicken than a free nigger. They stole you, pore creatur' from Phildelfy, an' they steal 'em in Jersey and away into North Carliney; fur Joe Johnson's a smart feller fur enterprise, and Patty Cannon's deep as death an' the grave."

Phœbus looked at the woman sitting in the scow, and he saw that she was fast asleep; his tale having no power to startle her senses, now worn-out by every infliction.

"I must git that ball an' chain off," the sailor said; "but iron, in these ole sandy parts, is scarce as gold."

He lifted her out of the scow and laid her in the shade, and began to explore the old house. To his joy, he found the iron crane still hanging in the chimney, and signs of recent fire.

"These yer ole cranes was valleyble once," Jimmy said, "an' in the wills they left 'em to their children like farms, an' lawsuits was had over the bilin' pots an' the biggest kittles. It broke a woman's heart to git a little kittle left her, an' the big-kittled gal was jest pestered with beaux. But, by smoke! we're a-makin' iron now in Amerikey! Kittles is cheap, and that's why this crane is left by robbers an' gypsies after they used it."

He twisted the crane out of the bricks on which it was hinged, and some of the mantel jamb fell down.

"Hallo!" cried Jimmy, "what's this a rollin' yer? A shillin', by George! I say, by George, this time caze ole George the Third's picter's on it. Maybe thar's more of 'em."

He pulled a few bricks out of the jamb, and raked the hollow space inside with his hand, and brought forth a steel purse of English manufacture, filled with shillings at one end, and fifteen golden guineas at the other; they rolled out through the decayed filigree, rusted, probably, by the rain percolating through the chimney, and the purse crumbled to iron-mould in his hand.

"The Lord is my shepherd," said the sailor, reverently; "'I shall not want. He leadeth me by the still waters.' How beautiful Ellenory says it. Look thar at the waters of the Nanticoke, beautiful as silver. Lord, make 'em pure waters an' free, to every pore creatur!"

"To who! to who!" screamed a voice out of the hollow chimney.

"Well," answered Jimmy, hardly excited, "I ain't partickler. Ha! I thought I knew you, Barney," he continued, as an owl fluttered out and hopped up a ruined stairway.

"Now, British money ain't coined by Uncle Sam; what is the date? I can make figgers out easy: Eighteen hundred and fifteen! I was about to do Ebenezer Johnson the onjustice of saying that he'd sold his country out to ole Admiral Cockburn, but the war was done when this money was coined. Whose was it?"

He removed more carefully some of the bricks, to put his hand in the hollow depository left there, and, feeling around and higher up, brought out the bronze hilt of a sword, on which was a name.

"Who would have thought this was a house of learnin'?" Jimmy said, dubiously. "I can't read it. By smoke! maybe they've murdered somebody yer. I reckon he was British. Ellenory kin read it, if I live to see her agin."

There was nothing more, and, as he left the rotting old house, a crash and a cloud of smoke rose up behind him, and the chimney fell into the middle of the floor.

With the crane's sharp wrought-iron point and long leverage the pungy captain succeeded, after tedious efforts, in breaking the links of the chain and also in removing the linked cannon-ball from the woman's foot, but he could not remove the iron band and link around her ankle.

"God bless you!" exclaimed the woman. "It's a sin to say so, but I feel as if I could fly since that dreadful weight is off. Oh, I want to fly, for I dreamed of my baby, an' he smiled at me from heaven as if he said, 'I'm happy, mamma!'"

"You don't owe me nothin', Mary. I love a widder, as you air, an' she begged me to come yer. When you git to Prencess Anne, whar I want you to go, find Ellenory Dennis, an' tell her I've seen her boy, an' I'll bring him back if I kin."

"Princess Anne? where is it?"

"It's maybe, forty mile from yer, Mary; half-way between sunrise and sunset."

"Right south, sir?"

"That's it. Now I'll tell you how to git thar. Take this old woods road along Broad Creek and walk to Laurel, five miles; it's a little town on the creek. Keep in under the woods, but don't lose the road, fur every foot of it's dangerous to niggers. You kin git thar, maybe, by dark. I don't know

nobody thar, Mary, an' I can't write, fur I never learned how. But you go right to the house of some preacher of the Gospel, and tell him a lie."

Mary opened her eyes.

"I wouldn't have you tell a lie to anybody but a good man," continued Phœbus, "fur then it's so close to the Lord it won't git fur an' pizen many, as lies always does. You must tell that preacher that you're the runaway slave of Judge Custis of Prencess Anne, an' you're sorry you run away, an' want to go home."

"Oh, sir, you are not like my wicked husband, trying to sell me too?"

"No, Mary, bad as you've been used, faith's your only sure friend. If you was to tell the preacher you had been kidnapped, he'd, maybe, be afraid to help you. They're a timid set down yer on any subject concernin' niggers; these preachers will help save black folks' souls, but never rescue their pore broken bodies. When you tell him you are the slave of a rich man like Judge Custis, he'll jump at the chance to do the Judge a favor, an' tell you that you do right to go back to your master. That's whair he's a liar, Mary—so he'll scratch *your* lie off."

"They'll turn me back at Princess Anne, and wont know me, maybe."

"Not if you do this, Mary. Make them take you to Judge Custis's daughter—the one that's just been married. Tell her you want to speak to her privately. Then tell her the nigger-skinned man—I'm him—that she sent away with her mother, found you whar you was chained in the woods. Take this link of the chain to show her. Tell her you want to be her cook till the one that run away is found."

"I'll do it, sir. I've got no home to go to, now."

"Tell her all you remember. Tell her not to tell Ellenory any of my troubles. Tell her I'm a-startin' for Pangymonum, an', if I die, it's nothin' but a bachelor keepin' his own solitary company. Yer's a gold piece an' three silver pieces I found, Mary, to pay your way. Good-bye."

"Won't you give me your knife?" asked the woman.

"What fur, Mary?"

"To kill myself if they kidnap me again."

"I have nothin' else to fight for my life with," said Phœbus. "No, you must not do that. Keep in the woods to Laurel."

She fell on the ground and kissed his knees, and bathed them with her tears.

"I do have faith, master," she said, "faith enough to be your slave."

"I'd cry a little, too," said Jimmy, twitching his eyes, as the woman disappeared in the forest, "if I knowed how to do it; but, by smoke! the wind on the bay's dried up my tear ponds. I'll bury these curiosities right yer, with this chain and ball, and put some old bricks around' em outen the chimney they come from."

He dug a hole with his knife, carefully cutting out a piece of the sod, and restoring it over the buried articles; and, after notching some trees to mark the place, he pushed in the scow again into Broad Creek, and descended the Nanticoke on the falling tide to Twiford's wharf.

Dragging the scow up the bed of a creek to conceal it, he discovered another boundary stone. A beach led under the cover of a sandy bluff to the river gate of Twiford's comfortable house, and he boldly entered the lane and lawn, saying to himself:

"I reckon a feller can ask to buy one squar meal a day in a free country, fur I'm hungry."

Even in that day the house was probably seventy years old, roofed by an artistic shingler in lines like old lace-work, the short roofs over the three pretty dormers like laced bib-aprons, the window-casements in small checkers of dark glass, the roof capacious as an armadillo's back or land-turtle's; but half of it was almost as straight as the walls, and the small, foreign bricks in the gables, glazed black and dark-red alternately, were laid by conscientious workmen, and bade fair to stand another hundred years, as they smoked their tidy chimney pipes from hearty stomachs of fireplaces below.

Standing beneath the honey-locust tree at the lawn-gate, the sailor beheld an extensive prospect of the river Nanticoke, bending in a beautiful curve, like the rim of a silver salver, towards the south, the blue perspective of the surrounding woods fading into the azure bluffs on the farther shore, where, as he now identified it, the hamlet of Sharptown assumed the mystery and similitude of a city by the enchantment of distance. A large brig was riding up the river under the afternoon breeze, carrying the English flag at her spanker. The wild-fowl, flying in V-formed lines, like Hyads astray, flickered on the salver of the river like house-flies. Some fishermen distantly appeared, human, yet nearly stationary, as if to enliven a dream, and the bees in a row of hives kept murmuring near by, increasing the restful sense in the heart and the ears.

"Why cannot human natur be happy yer, pertickler with its gal—some one like Ellenory?" Phœbus thought; "why must it git cruel an' desperate for money, lookin' out on this dancin' water, an' want to turn this trance into a Pangymonum?"

He crossed the lane to a squatty old structure of brick by the water-side, and peeped in.

"A still, by smoke!" he said. "If it ain't apple brandy may I forgit my compass! No, it's peach brandy. Well, anyway, it's hot enough; an' this, I 'spect, is what started the Pangymonum."

He took a stout drink, and it revived his weakened system, and he bathed his head in its strong alcohol. He then returned to the lawn and walked around the house, peeping into the lower rooms—of which there were two in the main building, the kitchen being an appendage—but saw nobody. The porch in the rear extended the full width of the house, unlike the smaller shed in front, which only covered two doors, standing curiously side by side.

Completely sheltered by the longer porch, Phœbus, looking into a window, there saw a table already set with a clean cloth, and bread and cold chicken, and a pitcher of creamy milk, with a piece of ice floating in it. On either side of a large fireplace at the table-side was a door, one open, and leading by a small winding stair to the floor above. A bed was also in the room, which looked out by one window upon the lawn and the river, and by the other at the farm, the corn-cribs, and the small barns and pound-yard.

With a sailor's quiet, sliding feet, Jimmy walked into the low hall, and a cat-bird, in a cage there, immediately started such a shrill series of cries that his steps were unheard by himself.

"Nobody bein' yer," thought Jimmy, "an' the flies gittin 'at the victuals, I reckon I'll do as I would be done by."

So he began to eat, and soon he heard a female voice, very close by, sound down the stairs, as if reciting to another person.

"Aunt Patty says Aunt Betty's first husband, Captain Twiford, was a sea-captain and a widower, and she was one of the beautiful Hanley girls, brought up by old Ebenezer Johnson at his house across on Broad Creek; and there Captain Twiford courted her, and brought her here to live. He died early—all my aunties' husbands died early—and is buried in the vault out here behind the pound, where you can go in and see him in his shroud, lying by Aunt Betty. Her next husband, John Gillis, left her, and then she lived with William Russell, a negro-trader. Aunt Patty governed all her sisters and the Johnson boys, too. Oh, how I fear her when she looks at me sometimes with her bold, black eyes: I can't help it."

Another voice, not a woman's, yet almost as gentle, now seemed to ask a question; but the cat-bird, behaving like a detective and a tale-bearer, made such a furious screaming at seeing a stranger drinking the milk, that Phœbus could not hear it well. The pleasant female voice spoke again:

"Yes, he was killed in the room under this, before I was born, Aunt Patty says; and sometimes she likes to tell such dark and bloody tales, and laughs with joy to see me frightened at them. Aunt Betty got in debt, and this house and farm were sold under executions and bought by a Maryland man, who stole an opportunity when the men were away, and set his goods in the house and set Aunt Betty's goods outside upon the lawn. It's only a mile, or a little more, from here to Ebenezer Johnson's, and the news of the seizure was sent there."

Jimmy tore off a piece of chicken with his teeth, listening voraciously.

"Did you hear anything?" continued the voice; "I thought I did. The dogs are chained up in the smoke-house, and bad people are often coming here; I will go turn the dogs loose."

"Be dogged if you do!" Jimmy reflected. "That's the meanest cat-bird ever I see, fur now it's shut up a-purpose."

There sounded something familiar to the uninvited guest in the voice which seemed to delay this intention; but the cat-bird, with his unaccommodating mood, broke right in again. Then the female continued:

"While the men—who had come armed, expecting trouble—were removing Aunt Betty's goods out of the room, throwing many of them out of the windows, so as to be themselves in sole possession, a sound was heard in the room below, where your meal is now ready, like a panther skipping and lashing his tail; and, before the men could breathe, old Ebenezer Johnson was up the stairs and laying about him. His eyes were full of murder. One man jumped right through that window and rolled off the porch; another he pitched down the stairs; the third was a boy, Joe King, barely grown—he lives not far from this house now—and Ebenezer Johnson dashed him down the stairs, too, and started after him. All his life the boy had been taught to dread that terrible man, and now he was in his hands, or flying before him; and, as he reeled through the room below, out of the door that opens on the back porch, the boy's eyes, in the agony of the fear of death, beheld a rifle leaning there."

"Mighty good thing if it was thar now!" Jimmy inwardly remarked, finishing the chicken, and still hungry.

"Oh, there *is* a noise somewhere in this house," the voice exclaimed; "I never tell this story but it makes me startled at every sound. The boy, as he whirled past, grasped the long rifle, drew it to his shoulder, and, with a young volunteer's skill—for he had been drilling to fight the British—he put the two balls in that old man's brain. Both balls entered over the left eyebrow, and one passed through the head and was found in the wall; the other never was found.<sup>[3]</sup> The lawless

giant gave a trembling motion through his frame, his eyes glazed, and he sank dead upon the floor without a sound—the wicked had ceased from troubling! Aunt Betty, Aunt Patty, and Aunt Jane, three sisters shaped by him in soul, fell on his body and wept and almost prayed, but it was too late. They buried him near Aunt Betty, in the field behind the pound."

Undertaking to rise from his chair, Jimmy Phœbus made a loud scraping on the floor, and the table-knife fell with a ringing sound.

"Who's there?" cried a voice, and added, "I knew the dogs ought to be loose."

"Who's there?" also asked the other voice, with something very familiar to Phœbus in its sounds.

"E-b-e-n-e-z-e-r John-son!" answered Jimmy, in his deepest bass tones, mentally considering that a ghost might carry more terror than a robber, after that tale.

A little scream followed, and a whispered consultation, and then a girl's bare feet, beautifully moulded, slowly descended the steep stairway, and next a slender, graceful body came into view, and finally a face, delicious as a ripe peach, looked once at the intruder below, and all the pink and bright color faded from it to see, standing there, where Ebenezer Johnson had given up the ghost, a stalwart effigy, bandaged in white all round the head, and over the left eye and cheek, where the dead river-pirate had received his double bullet, the blood was hideously matted and not wholly stanch'd even yet. She sank slowly down upon the steps and saw no more.

"Now, if I don't git out, the dogs will be set loose," muttered Jimmy, as he disappeared up the farm-house lane and put the barn and pound between him and the house; and scarcely had he done so when Levin Dennis appeared coming down the stairs, all unconscious of the apparition, and, finding the beautiful girl insensible, he raised her in his arms and stole a kiss.

Paying for his one act of deceit by losing the principal object of his quest, Jimmy Phœbus stopped a minute by Ebenezer Johnson's grave.

In a level field of deep sand—the soil here being the poorest in the region—and between the cattle-pound and the pines, which were everywhere jealous of their other indigenous brother, the Indian corn, an old family burial-lot lay under some low cedar-trees, with wild berry bushes growing all around. There were several little stones over Twifords that had died early, and a large heap of sand, planted with some flowers, that might have covered a favorite horse, but which Phœbus believed was the resting-place of the river buccaneer; and there was also a vault of brick and plaster, with the little door ajar, where prurient visitors, themselves with Saul's own selfish curiosity to raise the dead, had poked and peeped about until the coffin lids had been drawn back and the dead pair exposed to the dry peninsular air.

The bay captain looked in and beheld his predecessor, Captain Twiford, who also sailed the bay, lying in his shroud—not in full clothing, as men are buried now, for clothing was too valuable in the scanty-peopled country to feed it to the worms. Twiford lay shrivelled up, shroud and flesh making but one skin, the face of a walnut color, the hair complete, the teeth sound, and severe dignity unrelaxed by the exposure he was condemned to for his evil alliance with Betty Hanley.

She also lay exposed, who had lived so shamelessly, respecting not the mould of beauty God had given her, till now men leered to look upon her nearly kiln-dried bosom glued into its winding-sheet, and the glory of her hair, that had been handled by bantering outlaws, and in a rippling wave of unbleached coal covered the grinning coquetry of her skull.

"Them that mocks God shall be mocked of him," said Jimmy Phœbus, closing the door and putting some of the scattered bricks of the vault against it. "Now, I reckon, I kin git to the cross-roads by a leetle after dark."

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## CHAPTER XXV.

### PATTY CANNON'S.

Phœbus passed along the side of a large, black, cypress-shaded mill-pond, and found the boundary stone again, and took the angle from its northern face as a compass-point, and, proceeding in that direction, soon fell in with a sort of blind path hardly feasible for wheels, which ran almost on the line between the states of Maryland and Delaware, passing in sight of several of these old boundary stones. Not a dwelling was visible as he proceeded, not even a clearing, not a stream except one mere gutter in the sand, not a man, hardly an animal or a bird; the monotonous sand-pines, too low to moan, too thick to expand, too dry to give shade, yet grew and grew, like poor folks' sandy-headed children, and kept company only with some scrubby oaks that had strayed that way, till pine-cone and acorn seemed to have bred upon each other, and the wild hogs disdained the progeny.

"Maybe I'll git killed up yer in this Pangymonum," Jimmy reflected; "an' though I 'spose it don't make no difference whair you plant your bones, I don't want to grow up into ole pines. Good, big, preachin' kind of pines, that's a little above the world, an' says 'Holy, rolley, melancho-ly, mind your soul-y'—I could go into their sap and shats fust-rate. But to die yer an' never be found in these desert wastes is pore salvage for a man that's lived among the white sails of the bay, an'

loved a woman elegant as Ellenory."

It was dark, and he could hardly see his way in half an hour. Sometimes a crow would caw, to hear strange sounds go past, like an old watchman's rattle moved one cog. The stars became bright, however, and the moon was new, and when Phœbus came to a large cleared opening in the pines, the lambent heavens broke forth and bathed the sandy fields with silver, and showed a large, high house at the middle of the clearing, with outside chimneys, one thicker than the other, and a porch of two stories facing the east.

Though not a large dwelling, it was large for those days and for that unfrequented region, and its roof seemed to Phœbus remarkably steep and long, and yet, while enclosing so much space, had not a single dormer window in it. The southern gable was turned towards the intruder, and in it were two small windows at the top, crowded between the thick chimney and the roof slope. The two main stories were well lighted, however, and the porch was enclosed at the farther end, making a double outside room there. No sheds, kitchens, or stables were attached to the premises, but an old pole-well, like some catapult, reared its long pole at half an angle between the crotch of another tree. Roads, marked by tall worm fences, crossed at the level vista where this tall house presided, and a quarter of a mile beyond the cross-roads, to the northeast, was another house, much smaller, and hip-gabled, like Twiford's, standing up a lane and surrounded by small stables, cribs, orchard, and garden.

"I never 'spected to come yer," Jimmy Phœbus observed, "but I've hearn tell of this place considabul. The big barn-roofed house is Joe Johnston's tavern for the entertainment of Georgey nigger-traders that comes to git his stolen goods. It's at the cross-roads, three miles from Cannon's Ferry, whar the passengers from below crosses the Nanticoke fur Easton and the north, an' the stages from Cambridge by the King's road meets 'em yonder at the tavern. The tavern stands in Dorchester County, with a tongue of Caroline reaching down in front of it, an' Delaware state hardly twenty yards from the porch. Thar ain't a court-house within twenty miles, nor a town in ten, except Crotcher's Ferry, whar every Sunday mornin' the people goin' to church kin pick up a basketful of ears, eyes, noses, fingers, an' hair bit off a-fightin' on Saturday afternoon. They call the country around Crotcher's, Wire Neck, caze no neck is left thar that kin be twisted off; the country in lower Car'line they calls 'Puckem,' caze the crops is so puckered up. They say Joe's a great man among his neighbors, an' kin go to the Legislater. The t'other house out in the fields is Patty Cannon's own, whar she did all her dev'lishness fur twenty years, till Joe got rich enough to build his palace."

With the rapid execution of a man who only plans with his feet and hands, the bay sailor observed that there was a grove of good high timber—oaks and pines—only a few rods from the cross-roads and to the right, under cover of which he could draw near the tavern. As he proceeded to gain its shade, he heard extraordinary sounds of turbulence from the front of the tavern, the yelling of men, the baying of hounds, oaths and laughter, and, listening as he crossed the intervening space, he fell into a ditch inadvertently, almost at the edge of the timber.

"Hallo!" cried Jimmy, lying quite still to draw his breath, since the ditch was now perfectly dry, "this ditch seems to me to pint right for that tavern."

He therefore crawled along its dry bed till it crossed under a road by a wooden culvert or little bridge of a few planks.

The noise at the tavern was now like a fight, and, as Phœbus continued to crawl forward, he heard twenty voices, crying,

"Gouge him, Owen Daw!" "Hit him agin, Cyrus James!" "Chaw him right up!" "Give' em room, boys!"

Having crawled to what he judged the nearest point of concealed approach, Phœbus lost the moment to take a single glance only, and, drawing his old slouched hat down on his face to hide the bandaging, he muttered, "Now's jess my time," and crept up to the back of the crowd, which was all facing inwards in a circle, and did not perceive him.

A fully grown man, as it seemed, was having a fight with a boy hardly fifteen years old; but the boy was the more reckless and courageous of the two, while the man, with three times the boy's strength, lacked the stomach or confidence to avail himself of it; and, having had the boy down, was now being turned by the latter, amid shouts of "Three to two on Owen Daw!" "Bite his nose off, Owen Daw!" "Five to two that Cyrus James gits gouged by Owen Daw!"

The boy with a Celtic face and supple body was full of zeal to merit favor and inflict injury, and, as the circle of vagrants and outlaws of all ages reeled and swayed to and fro, Phœbus, unobserved by anybody, put his head down among the rest and searched the faces for those of Levin Dennis or Joe Johnson.

Neither was there, and the only face which arrested his attention was a woman's, standing in the door of the enclosed space at the end of the porch, at right angles to the central door of the tavern, and just beside it. The whole building was without paint, and weather-stained, but the room on the porch was manifestly newer, as if it had been an afterthought, and its two windows revealed some of the crude appendages of a liquor bar, as a fire somewhere within flashed up and lighted it.

By this fire the woman's face was also revealed, and she was so much interested in the fight that



she turned all parts of her countenance into the firelight, slapping her hands together, laughing like a man, dropping her oaths at the right places, and crying:

"I bet my money on little Owen Daw! Cy James ain't no good, by God! Yer's whiskey a-plenty for Owen Daw if he gouges him. Give it to him, Owen Daw! Shame on ye, Cy James!"

There was occasional servility and deference to this woman from members of the crowd, however they were absorbed in the fight. She was what is called a "chunky" woman, short and thick, with a rosy skin, low but pleasing forehead, coal-black hair, a rolling way of swaying and moving herself, a pair of large black eyes, at once daring, furtive, and familiar, and a large neck and large breast, uniting the bull-dog and the dam, cruelty and full womanhood.

Behind this woman, whom Phœbus thought to be Patty Cannon herself, the moonlight from the rear came through the door in the older and main building, shining quite through the house, and Phœbus saw that the rear door was also open and was unguarded.

He took the first chance, therefore, of dodging around the corner of the bar, intending to pass around the north gable of the house and dart up the stairs by the unwatched door; but he had barely got out of sight when a loud hurrah burst from the crowd as a feeble voice was heard crying "Enough, enough!" followed by jeers rapidly approaching.

The large outside chimney, where Phœbus now was, had an arched cavity in it large enough to contain a man, being the chimney of two different rooms within, whose smoke, uniting higher up, ascended through one stem. Into this cavity Phœbus dodged, in time to avoid the beaten party to the fight, the grown man, who staggered blindly by towards a well, his face dripping blood, and he was sobbing babyishly; but the concealed sailor heard him say, in a whining tone:

"She set him on me; I'll make her pay for it."

Several of the partisans or tormentors of this craven followed after him, and Jimmy himself fell in at the rear, and, instead of going with the rest towards the well, where the loser was bathing his face, Phœbus softly stepped over the low sill of the back door, the woman's back being turned to him, and, as he had anticipated, a stairway ascended there out of a large room, which answered the purposes of parlor and hall, dining and gambling room, as Jimmy drank in at one glance, from seeing tables, dishes and cards, bottles and whips, arms and saddles. This stairway had no baluster, and was not safe in the dark for strangers to the house.

Satisfying himself by an interior observation, as he had suspected exteriorly, that there was no cellar under Johnson's tavern, the sailor slipped up the stairs, intent to find where Judge Custis's property and Ellenora's wayward son had been concealed. The second story had a hall, which opened only at the front of the house and upon the upper piazza, and four doors upon this hall indicated four bedrooms. One of them was ajar, and, peeping through, Phœbus saw, extended on a bed, oblivious to all the righting and din outside, Joe Johnson the negro-trader, his form revealed by a lamp and the open fire.

An impulse, immediately repressed, came on the sailor to draw his knife and stab Johnson to the heart, as probably the villain who had shot him from the cat-boat. The negro-trader wearily turned his long length in the bed, and Phœbus slipped back along the hall to the only door besides that was not closed fast, leading into the room at the rear southern corner of the house.

This door creaked loudly as it was opened, and a man of a bandit form and dress, who was lying on a pallet within, revealed by the bright moonlight streaming in at two windows, half roused himself as Jimmy crouched at the door, where a partition, as of a very large clothes-press, taking up fully half the room, rose between the intruder and the occupant.

"Who's there?" exclaimed a voice, with a slight lisp in it.

Jimmy discovered that there was a low trap or door near the floor, opening into this remarkable closet, and he slipped inside and drew his knife again. The man was heard moving about the narrow room, and he finally seemed to walk out into the hall and down the stairs.

Feeling around his closet, which was pitch dark, Phœbus found a deep indentation in it, as of a smaller closet, and the sound of crooning voices came from above.

"By smoke!" Jimmy mentally exclaimed, "this big closet is nothin' but a blind fur a stairway in the little closet to climb up to the dungeon under the big roof."

He stole out again and found the moonlight now streaming upon an empty pallet and the burly watchman gone, and streaming, too, upon a larger door in the closet opposite the indentation he had felt, this door secured by a padlock through a staple fastening an iron bar. The key was in the padlock, and Jimmy turned it back, drew off the lock and dropped the bar.

The moment he opened the door an almost insupportable smell came down a shallow hatchway within, up which leaned a rough step-ladder, movable, and of stout construction.

"That smell," said Phœbus, entering, and pulling the door close behind him, "might be wool, or camel, or a moral menagerie from the royal gardings of Europe, but I guess it's Nigger."

He went up the steep steps with some difficulty, as they were made to pass only one person, and at the top he entered a large garret, divided into two by a heavy partition of yellow pine, with a door at the middle of it, and from beyond this partition came the sounds of crooning and babbling

he had heard.

The bright night, shining through a small gable window, revealed this outer half of the garret empty, and not furniture or other appurtenance than the hole in the floor up which he had come, and the door into the place of wailing beyond, which was fastened by a long iron spike dropping into a staple that overshot a heavy wooden bar. As he slipped up the spike and took the bar off, Phœbus heard some person in the room below mutter, and lock the great padlock upon the other door, effectually barring his escape by that egress.

"We must take things as they come," thought Jimmy, grimly, "partickler in Pangymonum, whar I am now."

He also reflected that the arrangements of this kidnappers' pen, simple as they seemed, were quite sufficient. If authority should demand to search the house, the double clothes-press below, with the ladder pulled up into the loft, became a harmless closet hung with wardrobe matters, and the inner closet a storeroom for articles of bulk; and no human being could either go up or come down without passing two inhabited floors and three different doors, besides the door to the slave-pen.

This last door Phœbus now threw open and walked into the pen itself, stooping his head to avoid the low entrance.

For some minutes he could not see the contents at all in the total darkness that prevailed, as there was no window whatever in this pen or den, but he heard various voices, and inhaled the strong, close air of many African breaths exhausting the supply of oxygen, and knew that chains and irons were being moved against the boards of the floor.

"Thair ain't nothin' to do yer," Jimmy remarked, softly, "but jess squat down an' git a-climated, as they say about strangers to our bilious shore, an' git your eyeballs tuned to the dark. But I should say that this was both hokey-pokey an' Pangymonum, by smoke!"

A man in some part of the den was praying in a highly nervous, excited way, slobbering out his agonizing sentences, and dwelling hard upon his more open vowels, and keeping several other inmates in sympathy or equal misery, as they piped in answer to his apostrophes:

"Lawd, de-scen'! De-scen', O my Lawd. I will not let dee go; no, oh my Lawd! Come, save me! Yes, my Lawd! Come walkin' on de waters! Come outen Lazarus's tomb! Come on de chario'f fire! Come in de power! De-scen' now, O my Lawd!"

Phœbus's entrance made no excitement, and he crouched down to await the strengthening of his eyes to see around him. The place appeared to be nearly twenty-five feet square, and was cross-boarded both the gable way and under the sloping roof, whose eaves were planked up a foot or two above the floor; in the middle any man could stand upright and scarcely touch the ridge beam with his hands, but along the sloping sides could barely sit upright.

The man still continuing to express his absolute subjection of spirit in a frenzy of words, and several little children crying and shouting responsively, Phœbus ordered the man to cease, after asking him kindly to do so several times; and the command being disobeyed, he slapped the praying one with his open hand, and the poor wretch rolled over in a kind of feeble fit.

A little child somewhere continuing to cry, Phœbus took it in his arms and held between it and the starlight, at the half-open door, one of the shillings he had obtained from the old cabin on Broad Creek a few hours before. The child, seeing something shine, seized it and held fast, and Phœbus next passed his hand over the face of a sleeping man, who was snoring calmly and strenuously on the floor beside him. He made room for the faint light to shine upon the sleeper's black face, and exclaimed, in a moment:

"If it ain't Samson Hat I hope I may be swallered by a whale!"

Calling his name, "Samson! Samson!" Phœbus observed a most dejected mulatto person, who had been lying back in the shadows, crawl forward, rattling his manacles. This man, when spoken to, replied with such refinement and accuracy, however his face betokened great inward misery, that the sailor took as careful a survey of him as the moonlight permitted, coming in by that one lean attic window. He was a man who had shaved himself only recently, and his dark, curling side-whiskers and clean lips, and the tuft of goatee in the hollow of his chin, and intelligent, high forehead, seemed altogether out of place in this darksome eyrie of the sad and friendless.

"Is he your friend, sir?" asked this man, turning towards Samson. "He must have a good conscience if he is, for he slept soon after he was brought here, and has never uttered a single complaint."

"And you have, I reckon?" said the waterman.

"Oh, yes, sir; I have been treated with such ingratitude. It would break any gentleman's heart to hear my tale. Who is your friend, sir?"

"Samson, wake up, old bruiser!" cried Phœbus, shaking the sleeper soundly; "you didn't give in to one or two, by smoke!"

"Is it you, Jimmy?" the old negro finally said, with a sheepish expression; "why, neighbor, I'm glad to see you, but I'm sorry, too. A black man dey don't want to kill yer, caze dey kin sell him, but a

white man like you dey don't want to keep, and dey dassn't let him go."

"A *white* man here?" exclaimed the superior-looking person; "what can they mean?"

"I'm ironed so heavy, Jimmy," continued Samson, "dat I can't set up much. My han's is tied togedder wid cord, my feet's in an iron clevis, and a ball's chained to de clevis."

"Give me your hands," exclaimed Jimmy; "I'll settle them cords, by smoke!"

In a minute he had severed the cords at the wrist, and the intelligent yellow man pleaded that a similar favor be done for him, to which the sailor acceded ungrudgingly.

"Jimmy," said Samson, "if it's ever known in Prencess Anne—as I 'spect it never will be, fur we're in bad hands, neighbor—dar'll be a laugh instid of a cry, fur ole boxin' Samson, dat was kidnapped an' fetched to jail by a woman!"

"You licked by a woman, Samson?"

"Yes, Jimmy, a woman all by herseff frowed me down, tied my hands an' feet, an' brought me to dis garret. I hain't seen nobody but her an' dese yer people, sence I was tuk."

"Ha!" exclaimed the dejected mulatto, "that's a favorite feat of Patty Cannon. She is the only woman ever seen at a threshing-floor who can stand in a half-bushel measure and lift five bushels of grain at once upon her shoulders, weighing three hundred pounds."

"I ain't half dat," Samson smiled, quietly, "an' she handled me, shore enough. You remember, Jimmy, when I leff you by ole Spring Hill church, to go an' git a woman on a little wagon to show me de way to Laurel?"

"Why, it was only yisterday, Samson!"

"Dat was de woman, Jimmy. She was a chunky, heavy-sot woman, right purty to look at, an' maybe fifty year ole. She was de nicest woman mos' ever I see. She made me git off my mule an' ride in de wagon by her, an' take a drink of her own applejack—she said she 'stilled it on her farm. She said she knowed Judge Custis, an' asked me questions about Prencess Anne, an' wanted me to work fur her some way. We was goin froo a pore, pine country, a heap wuss dan Hardship, whar Marster Milburn come outen, an' hadn't seen nobody on de road till we come to a run she said was named de Tussocky branch, whar she got out of de wagon to water her hoss. At dat place she come up to me an' says, 'Samson, I'll wrastle you!' 'Go long,' says I, 'I kin't wrastle no woman like you.' 'You got to,' she says, swearin' like a man, an' takin' holt of me jess like a man wrastles. I felt ashamed, an' didn't know what to do, and, befo' I could wink, Jimmy, dat woman had give me de trip an' shoved me wid a blow like de kick of an ox, and was a-top of my back wid a knee like iron pinnin' of me down."

"The awful huzzy of Pangymonum!"

"De fust idee I had was dat she was a man dressed up like a woman. I started like lightnin' to jump up, an' my legs caught each oder; she had carried de cord to tie me under her gown, an' clued it aroun' me in a minute. As I run at her an' fell hard, she drew de runnin' knot tight an' danced aroun' me like a fat witch, windin' me all up in de rope. De sweat started from my head, I yelled an' fought an' fell agin, an', as I laid with my tongue out like a calf in de butcher's cart, she whispered to me, 'Maybe you're de las' nigger ole Patty Cannon'll ever tie!'"

"At dat name I jess prayed to de Lord, but it was too late. She put me in de cart an' gagged me so I couldn't say a word, and blood came outen my mouth. I heard her talkin' to people as we passed by a town an' over a bridge. Nobody looked in de cart whar I laid kivered over, till we come to a ferry in de night, an' dar we passed over, and I heard her talkin' to a man on dis side of de ferry. He come to de side of de wagon an' peeped at me, layin' helpless dar, my eyes jess a-prayin' to him—and he had an elegant eye in his head, Jimmy. He says softly to hisself, 'Dis is no consignment, manifes'ly, to Isaac an' Jacob Cannon,' an' he kivered me up again, an' the woman fetched me yer, put on de irons, and shoved me into dis hole in de garret."

"I reckon that was Isaac Cannon, t'other Levite that never sees anything that ain't in his quoshint."

"How's the purty gals, Jimmy? I shall see' em in my dreams, I' spect, if I *am* sold Souf. I ain't got long to stay, nohow, Jimmy, fur I'm mos' sixty. If you ever git out, tell my marster to buy dat gal Virgie, an' make her free. She ain't fit to be a slave."

"Gals has their place," said Phœbus, "but not whair men has to fight for liberty. How many fighting men are we here?"

"I 'spect you's de only one, Jimmy; we's all chained up; dese nigger-dealers is all blacksmifs an' keeps balls, hobbles, gripes, an' clevises, an' loads us wid iron."

"Who is that woman back yonder so square an' still?"

"Why, Jimmy, don't you know Aunt Hominy, Jedge Custis's ole cook? Dey brought her in dis mornin' wi' two little children outen Teackle Hall kitchen; one of dem you give dat silver to—little Ned. Hominy ain't said a word sence she come."

Jimmy Phœbus went back to the corner of the den where the old woman cowered, and called her

name in many different accents and with kind assurances:

"Hominy, ole woman, don't you know Ellenory's Jimmy? Judge Custis is comin' for you, aunty. I'm yer to take you home."

She did not speak at all, and Phœbus lifted her without resistance nearer to the moonlight. Her lips mumbled unintelligibly, her eyes were dull, she did not seem to know them.

Samson crawled forward, and also called her name kindly:

"Aunt Hominy, Miss Vesty's sent fur you. Dis yer is Jimmy Phœbus."

The little boy Ned now spoke up:

"Aunt Hominy ain't spoke sence dat Quaker man killed little Phillis."

"Jimmy," solemnly whispered Samson, "Aunt Hominy's lost her mind."

"Yes," spoke up the dejected and elegant mulatto prisoner, "she's become an idiot. They sometimes take it that way."

Phœbus bent his face close down to the poor old creature's, sitting there in her checkered turban and silver earrings, clean and tidy as servants of the olden time, and he studied her vacant countenance, her tenantless eyes, her lips moving without connection or relevance, and felt that cruelty had inflicted its last miraculous injury—whipped out her mind from its venerable residence, and left her body yet to suffer the pains of life without the understanding of them.

"Oh, shame! shame!" cried the sailor, tears finally falling from his eyes, "to deceive and steal this pore, believin' intellect! To rob the cook of the little tin cup full o' brains she uses to git food fur bad an' fur good folks! Why, the devils in Pangymonum wouldn't treat that a way the kind heart that briled fur 'em."

"De long man said he was Quaker man," exclaimed Vince, the larger boy, "an' he come to take Hominy to de free country. Hominy was sold, she said, an' must go. De long man had a boat—Mars Dennis's boat—an' in de night little Phillis woke up an' cried. Nobody couldn't stop her. De long man picked little Phillis up by de leg an' mashed her skull in agin de flo'. Aunt Hominy ain't never spoke no mo'."

"Did you hear the long man speak after that, Vince?"

"Yes, mars'r. I heerd de long man tell Mars Dennis dat if he didn't steer de boat an' shet his mouf, he'd shoot him. I heerd de pistol go off, but Mars Dennis wasn't killed, fur I saw him steerin' afterwards."

"Thank God!" spoke the sailor, kissing the child. "Ellenory's boy was innocent, by smoke! That nigger-trader shot me an' threatened Levin's life if he listened to me hailing of him. The noise I heard was the murder of the baby, whose cries betrayed the coming of the vessel. Samson, thar's been treachery ever sence we left Salisbury, an' that nigger Dave's a part of it."

"He said he hated me caze I larned him to box. Maybe my fightin's been my punishment, Jimmy, but I never struck a man a foul blow."

"And what was *your* hokey-pokey?" the pungy captain cried to the man who had been making so much religious din. "Did they sell you fur never knowin' whar to stop a good thing?"

The man hoarsely explained, himself interested by the disclosures and fraternity around him:

"I was slave to a local preacher in Delaware, an' de sexton of de church. It was ole Barrett's chapel, up yer between Dover an' Murderkill—de church whar Bishop Coke an' Francis Asbury fust met on de pulpit stairs. My marster an' me was boff members of it, but he loved money bad, an' I was to be free when I got to be twenty-five years ole, accordin' to de will of his Quaker fader, dat left me to him. Las' Sunday night dey had a long class-meetin' dar, an' when nobody was leff in de church but my marster an' me, he says to me, 'Rodney, le's you an' me have one more prayer togedder befo' you put out dat las' lamp. You pray, Rodney!' I knelt an' prayed for marster after I must leave him to be free next year, an', while I was prayin' loud, people crept in de church an' tied me, and marster was gone."

"He sold you fur life to them kidnappers, boy, becaze you was goin' to be free next year. Don't your Bible tell you to watch *an'* pray?"

"Yes, marster."

"Well, then, boys, it's all watch to-night and no more praying," cried Jimmy Phœbus, cheerily. "Here are four men, loving liberty, bound to have it or die. Thar's one of 'em with a knife, an' the first kidnapper that crosses that sill, man or woman—fur we'll trust no more women, Samson—gits the knife to the hilt! The blessed light that shone onto Calvary an' Bunker Hill is a gleamin' on the blade. Work off your irons, if you kin; I'll git you rafters outen this roof to jab with if you can't do no better. Are you all with me?"

"I am, Jimmy," answered Samson, quietly.

"I'll die with ye, too," exclaimed the praying man, with rekindled spirit.

"We will all be murdered, gentlemen," protested the dejected mulatto. "I know these desperate people."

"Then you crawl over in the corner," Phœbus commanded, "and see three men fight fur you. We don't want any fine buck nigger to spile his beauty for us."

The man crawled back into the blackness of the den again, and Phœbus began to search the open half of the garret for implements of war. He found two long pieces of chain, with which determined men might beat out an adversary's brains.

"Now, boys," Jimmy delivered himself, "I hain't lost my head yisterday nor to-day neither, by smoke! I'm goin' to kill the first person that comes yer, an' git the keys of this den from him, an' lock all of you in fast, an' the dead kidnapper, too. Then they won't git at you to ship you off till I kin git to Seaford, over yer in Delaware—it's not more than six mile—whar I know three captains of pungies, and all of 'em's in port thar now—all friends of Jimmy Phœbus, all well armed, and their crews enough to handle Pangymonum!"

A noise was heard at the lock of the lower door, and Phœbus slipped into the enclosed den and took his station just within the door.

"Remember," he whispered, "I open the fight."

The lock snapped at the door below the step-ladder, the bolt fell, and the light of a lamp flashed up the hatchway and upon the naked roof, and through the cracks of the boarded garret pen.

The sailor's knife was in his belt-pouch, where he carried it over the hip. As he leaned down to look through a crack in the low door, he felt a hand from the gloom behind touch him.

Instinctively he felt for his knife, and it was gone.

"Captain," cried the voice of the dejected mulatto, as the door of the pen flew open and the bandit-looking stranger appeared with the lamp, "there's a white man here going to kill you. I've taken his knife from him and saved your life. It's a rebellion, captain!"

"Help! Patty! Joe!" cried the man, with a loud voice, as Jimmy Phœbus threw himself upon him and extinguished the lamp, and the two powerful men rolled on the floor together in a grip of mortal combat.

Phœbus was a man of great power, but his antagonist was strong and slippery, too, and a spirited rough-and-tumble fighter.

The pungy captain was on top, the bandit man locked him fast in his arms and legs, and tried to stab him in the side, as Phœbus felt the handle of a clasp-knife, which seemed slow to obey its spring, strike him repeatedly all round the groin, in strokes that would have killed, inflicted by the blade.

Phœbus attempted to drag the man to the hatchway and force him down it, while the two negro assistants of Phœbus beat down the negro traitor with their chains, and searched him vainly for the knife he had filched.

At last Phœbus prevailed, and his antagonist rolled down the open hatchway, seven feet or more, still keeping his desperate hold on Phœbus, and dragging him along; and both might have cracked their skulls but for a woman just in the act of hurrying up the ladder, against whom their two bodies pitched and were cushioned upon her.

The shock, however, stunned both of them, and when Phœbus recollected himself he was tied hand and foot and lying on the garret floor again, and over him stood Joe Johnson, flourishing a cowhide.

The bandages had again been torn from Phœbus's face, and he was bleeding at the flesh-wound in his cheek, and breathless from his conflict. A woman had dashed a vessel of water into his face, and this had revived him.

The other man, called "captain," had, meantime, by the aid of this woman—the same Phœbus had seen down-stairs—subdued and tied the black insurgents, and both of them were flourishing their whips over the backs and heads of the prisoners, big and little, so that the garret was no slight reflection of the place of eternal torment, as the shadows of the monsters, under the weak light, whipped and danced against the beams and shingles, and shrieks and shouts of "Mercy!" blended in hideous dissonance.

The woman now turned her lamp on the sailor's rough, swarthy, injured countenance, and looked him over out of her dark, bold eyes:

"Joe, this is a nigger, by God!"

Johnson and the captain also examined him carefully, and, uttering an oath, the former kicked the prostrate man with his heavy boot.

"I popped this bloke last night," he said, "and thought the scold's cure had him. He's a sea-crab playin' the setter fur niggers. He sang beef to me in Princess Anne. I told him thar he'd pass for a nigger, Patty, and we'll sell him fur one to Georgey!"

"All's fish that comes to our net, Joe," the woman chuckled; "he'll sell high, too."

"That white man," spoke the voice of Samson, within the pen, his chains rattling, "has hundreds of friends a-lookin' fur him, an' you'll ketch it if you don't let him off."

"What latitat chants there?" Joe Johnson demanded of Patty Cannon.

"That's my nigger, Joe," the woman answered.

"Fetch him to the light."

The captain propped Samson up, and Joe Johnson glared into his face, and then struck him down with the handle of his heavy whip.

"Patty," he growled, "that nigger's sciened; he's the champion scrapper of Somerset. He knocked me down, and I marked him fur it; and now, by God! I'm a-goin' to burn him alive on Twiford's island."

He swore an oath, half blasphemous, half blackguard, and the captain murmured, with a lisp:

"The white man is the only *witness*. Make sure of him!"

Irons were produced, and the captain speedily fastened Phœbus's hands in a clevis, and hobbled his feet, and placed him, without brutality, in the pen, and, further, chained him there to a ring in the joist below. As the door was closed and bolted, a voice from the darkness of the pen cried out:

"Aunt Patty, let me out: I saved the captain's life; I took the white man's knife. I'll serve you faithfully if you only let me go."

"He blowed the gab," said Joe Johnson, "but it won't serve him."

"Zeke," cried the woman, "it's no use. You go to Georgey with the next gang—you an' the white nigger thar."

The man threw himself upon the floor and moaned and prayed, as the lamplight disappeared and the hatchway slid echoingly over the stairs, and the lower bolts were drawn. As he lay there in horror and amid contempt, a voice arrested his ears near by, singing, with musical and easy spirit, so low that it seemed a hymn, from the roads and fields far down beneath:

"Deep-en de woun' dy hands have made  
In dis weak, helpless soul."

The man listened with awe and silence, as if a spirit hummed the tune, and forgot his doom of slavery a moment in the deeper anguish of a treacherous heart that simple hymn bestirred. It was only Jimmy Phœbus, thinking what he could say to punish this double traitor most, who had turned his back upon his race and upon gratitude, and Jimmy had remembered the poor woman chained to the tree on Twiford's island, and her oft-reiterated hymn; and the conclusion was flashed upon his mind that the mulatto wretch who decoyed her away and sold her was none other than his renegade fellow-prisoner, in turn made merchandise of because too dangerous to set at large in the probable hue-and-cry for her.

"Poor Mary!" Phœbus slowly spoke, in his deepest tones, with solemn cadence.

The wretched man listened and trembled.

"Mary's sperrit's callin' 'Zeke!'" Phœbus continued, awful in his inflection.

The miserable procurer's heart stopped at the words, and his eyeballs turned in torment.

"Come, Zeke! poor Mary's a-waitin' for ye!" cried the sailor, suddenly, in a voice of thunder, and as suddenly relapsed into the low singing of the quiet hymn again:

"Deep-en de woun' dy hands have made  
In dis weak, helpless soul,  
Till mercy, wid its mighty aid  
De-scen to make me whole;  
Yes, Lord!  
De-scen to make me whole."

The elegant Iscariot, at the thunder of the invocation, had reached into a place between two of the cypress shingles in the roof, where he had hidden the sailor's knife, the blade being pressed out of sight, and only the handle within his grasp. It had been overlooked in the exciting scenes of the previous few minutes, and now recurred to his mind, as superstitious passions rolled like dreadful meteors across the black and hopeless chasm of his despairing soul.

When the low drone of the hymn he had heard his victim sing to her baby, when her faith in him was pure and childlike, crossed his maddened ears again, he raised one shriek of "Mercy!" to which no answer fell, and drew the blade across his throat and fell dead in the kidnapers' den.

## VAN DORN.

A thin fur of frost was on the level farm-lands, and the saffron and orange leaves were falling almost audibly from the trees, as Levin Dennis awoke on Wednesday, in the long, low house standing back in the fields from Johnson's cross-roads, and drank in the cool, stimulating morn, the sun already having made his first relay, and his postilion horn was blowing from the old tavern that reared its form so broadly and yet so steeply in plain sight.

Levin had been brought up from Twiford's wharf the night before by the pretty maid whom Jimmy Phœbus had so much frightened, and this was his first day of restful feeling, having slept off the liquor fumes of Sunday, the exciting watches of Monday, and the mingled pleasure and pain, illness and interest, love and remorse, of Tuesday.

He had felt already the earliest twinges of youthful fondness for the young girl he had spent the day with at Twiford's, while lying sick there from a disordered stomach and nervous system, and her amiability and charms, more than the temptation of unhallowed money, had changed his purpose to escape at Twiford's and give information of the injury inflicted upon Judge Custis's property.

It hardly seemed real that he had been an accessory to a felony and a witness to a murder—the stealing of a gentleman's domestic slaves and the braining of the smallest and most helpless of them, nearly in his sight; yet so it had happened, and he felt the danger he was in, but hesitated how to act. He had accepted the money of the trader, and passed his mother's noblest friend on the river without recognition, while a dastardly ball had probably ended poor Phœbus's career. To all these deeds he was the only white witness, the only one on whose testimony redress could be meted out.

He felt, therefore, that he was a prisoner, and his life dependent on his cordial relations with the bloody negro-dealer and his band; and Johnson had reiterated his promise that if Levin joined them in equal fraternity he should make money fast and become a plantation proprietor.

This night coming, a raid on free negroes in Delaware was to be made by the band in force, and Levin had been told that he must be one of the kidnappers, and his frank co-operation that night would forever relieve him of any suspicions of defection and bad faith.

"Steal one nigger, Levin," Joe Johnson had said, "and then if ever caught in the hock you never can snickle!"

Levin interpreted this thieves' language to mean that he must do a crime to get the kidnappers' confidence.

The power of this band he had divined a little of when, at points along the river, especially about Vienna, there had been mysterious intercourse between Joe Johnson and people on the shore, carried on in imitations of animal sounds; and the negro ferryman at that old Dorchester village had spoken with Johnson only half an hour before the trader's encounter with Jimmy Phœbus in mid-stream, whereupon the grim passenger had produced his pistol and notified Levin:

"Now, my feller prig, honor's what I expect from you, and, to remind you of it, Levin, I'm a-goin' to pint this barking-iron at your mummer, so that if you patter a cackle, a blue plum will go right down your throat."

He had then tried to evade some one expected on the river, and, in a fit of rage at the awakening and wailing of the child, had hushed it forever, and then had shot Phœbus down.

Poor Hominy had sincerely believed that Johnson's peculiar slang was the language of the good Quakers, followers of Elias Hicks, who sheltered runaway slaves and spoke a "thee" and "thou" and "verily," and that strange misapprehension in her ignorant mind the keen dealer had made use of to decoy her into Levin's vessel and waft her into a distant country.

"We didn't steal her, Levin," Johnson said; "she wanted to mizzle from a good master, an' we jess sells the crooked moke an' makes it squar."

When Aunt Hominy, having under her protecting care the little children, came on board the *Ellenora Dennis* at Manokin Landing, Levin had been asleep, and knew nothing of the theft till it was too late to protest, and Johnson himself had sailed the cat-boat into broad water. Then, bearing through Kedge's Strait, he had cruised up the open bay, out of sight of the Somerset shore, and entered the Nanticoke towards night by way of Harper's Strait, and run up on the night flood; but the instinct of Jimmy Phœbus had cut him off at the forks of the Nanticoke, and propelled another crime to Johnson's old suspected record. He had never been indicted yet for murder, though murder was thought to be none too formidable a crime for him.

There was a zest of adventure in this guilty errand, which, but for its crime, would have pleased Levin moderately well, the roving drop in his blood expanding to this wild association; and he knew but little comparatively of the Delaware kidnappers, reading nothing, and in those days little was printed about Patty Cannon's band except in the distant journals like *Niles's Register* or *Lundy's Genius of Emancipation*. Levin had never sailed up the Nanticoke region before, and its scenery was agreeable to his sight, while his heart was just fluttering in the first flight of sentiment towards the interesting creature he had so unexpectedly and, as he thought, so strangely discovered there.

Arriving at Twiford's in the night, Johnson had sent him to bed there, and pushed on himself with the negro property to Johnson's Cross-roads; and, when he awakened late the next day, Levin had found a beautiful wildflower of a young woman sitting by his pallet, looking into his large soft eyes with her own long-lashed orbs of humid gray, and brushing his dark auburn ringlets with her hand. As he had looked up wonderingly, she had said to him:

"I have never seen a man before with his hair parted in the middle, but I think I have dreamed of one."

"Who air you?" Levin asked.

"Me! Oh, I'm Hulda. I'm Patty Cannon's granddaughter."

"That wicked woman!" Levin exclaimed. "Oh, I can't believe that!"

"Nor can I sometimes, till the sinful truth comes to me from her own bold lips. Oh, sir, I am not as wicked as she!"

"How kin you be wicked at all," Levin asked, "when you look so good? I would trust your face in jail."

"Would you? How happy that makes me, to be trusted by some one! Nobody seems to trust me here. My mother was never kind to me. Captain Van Dorn is kind, but too kind; I shrink from him."

"Where is your mother now?"

"She has gone south with her husband, to live in Florida for all the rest of her life, and we are all going there after father gets one more drove of slaves. You are one of father's men, I suppose?"

"Who is your father?"

"Joe Johnson."

"That man," murmured Levin. "Oh, no, it is too horrible."

"Do not hate me. Be a little kind, if you do, for I have watched you here hours, almost hoping you never might wake up, so beautiful and pure you looked asleep."

"And you—that's the way you look, Huldy. How kin you look so an' be his daughter."

"I am not his child, thank God! He is my stepfather."

"What is your name, then, besides Huldy?"

The girl blushed deeply and hesitated. Her fine gray eyes were turned upon her beautiful bare feet, white as the river that flashed beneath the window.

"Hulda Bruinton," she said, swallowing a sigh.

"Bruinton—where did I hear that name?" Levin asked; "some tale has been told me, I reckon, about him?"

"Yes, everybody knows it," Hulda said, in a voice of pain; "he was hanged for murder at Georgetown when I was a little child."

Levin could not speak for astonishment.

"I might as well tell you," she said, "for others will, if I conceal it. I can hardly remember my father. My mother soon married Joe and neglected me, and Aunt Patty, my grandmother, brought me up. She was kind to me, but, oh, how cruel she can be to others!"

"You talk as if you kin read, Huldy," said Levin, wishing to change so harsh a topic; "kin you?"

"Yes, I can read and write as well as if I had been to school. Some one taught me the letters around the tavern—some of the negro-dealers: I think it was Colonel McLane; and I had a gift for it, I think, because I began to read very soon, and then Aunt Patty made me read books to her—oh, such dreadful books!"

"What wair they, Huldy?"

"The lives of pirates and the trials of murderers—about Murrell's band and the poisonings of Lucretia Chapman, the execution of Thistlewood, and Captain Kidd's voyages; the last I read her was the story of Burke and Hare, who smothered people to death in the Canongate of Edinburgh last year to sell their bodies to the doctors."

"Must you read such things to her?"

"I think that is the only influence I have over her. Sometimes she looks so horribly at me, and mutters such threats, that I fear she is going to kill me, and so I hasten to get her favorite books and read to her the dark crimes of desperate men and women, and she laughs and listens like one hearing pleasant tales. My soul grows sick, but I see she is fascinated, and I read on, trying to close my mind to the cruel narrative."

"Huldy, air you a purty devil drawin' me outen my heart to ruin me?"



"No, no; oh, do not believe that! I suppose all men are cruel, and all I ever knew were negro-traders, or I should believe you too gentle to live by that brutal work. I looked at you lying in this bed, and pity and love came over me to see you, so young and fair, entering upon this life of treachery and sin."

Levin gazed at her intently, and then raised up and looked around him, and peered down through the old dormers into the green yard, and the floody river hastening by with such nobility.

"Air we watched?" he inquired.

"By none in this house. All the men are away, making ready for the hunt to-morrow night. The river is watched, and you would not be let escape very far, but in this house I am your jailer. Joe told me he would sell me if I let you get away."

Levin listened and looked once more ardently and wonderingly at her, and fell upon his knees at her uncovered feet.

"Then, Huldy, hear me, lady with such purty eyes,—I must believe in 'em, wicked as all you look at has been! I never stole anything in my life, nor trampled on a worm if I could git out of his path,—so help me my poor mother's prayers! Huldy, how shall I save myself from these wicked men and the laws I never broke till Sunday? Oh, tell me what to do!"

"Do anything but commit their crimes," she answered. "Promise me you will never do that! Let us begin, and be the friends I wished we might be, before I ever heard you speak. What is your name?"

"Levin—Levin Dennis. My father's lost to me, and mother, too."

"Then Heaven has answered my many prayers, Levin, to give me something to cherish and protect. I am almost a woman: oh, what is my dreadful doom?—to become a woman here among these wolves of men, who meet around my stepfather's tavern to buy the blood and souls of people born free. Joe Johnson sells everything; he has often threatened to sell me to some trader whose bold and wicked eyes stared at me so coarsely, and I have heard them talk of a price, as if I was the merchandise to be transferred—I, in whose veins every drop of blood is a white woman's."?

"I want you to watch over me, Huldy: I'm a poor drunken boy, my boat chartered to Joe Johnson fur a week an' paid fur. Tell me what to do, an' I'll do it."

"First," she said, "you must eat something and drink milk—nothing stronger. Their brandy, which they 'still themselves, sets people on fire. I will set the table for you."

It was after the table had been set that Jimmy Phœbus slipped in and devoured the milk and meat, overhearing the continuance of the conversation just given; and when his awkward motions had disturbed these new young friends, Hulda fainted on the stairs before the apparition Levin did not see, and he snatched the kiss that was like plucking a pale-red blossom from some dragon's garden.

That night two horses without saddles came to bring them both to Johnson's Cross-roads, and Levin awoke at Patty Cannon's old residence on the neighboring farm.

He looked out of the small window in the low roof Upon a little garden, where a short, stout, powerfully made woman, barefooted, was taking up some flowers from their beds to put them into boxes of earth.

"Yer, Huldy," exclaimed this woman, "sot 'em all under the glass kivers, honey, so grandmother will have some flowers for her hat next winter. They wouldn't know ole Patty down at Cannon's Ferry ef she didn't come with flowers in her hat."

A mischievous blue-jay was in a large cherry-tree, apparently domesticated there, and he occupied himself mimicking over the woman's head the alternate cries of a little bird in terror and a hawk's scream of victory.

"Shet up, you thief!" spoke the woman, looking up. "Them blue-jays, gal, the niggers is afeard of, and kills 'em, as Ole Nick's eavesdroppers and tale-carriers. That's why I keeps 'em round me. They's better than a watch-dog to bark at strangers, and, caze they steals all their life, I love' em. Blue-jay, by Ged! is ole Pat Cannon's bird."

"Grandma," Hulda said, "I wish you had a large, elegant garden. You love flowers."

"Purty things I always *would* have," exclaimed the bulldog-bodied woman, with an oath; "bright things I loved when I was a gal, and traded what I had away fur 'em. Direckly I got big, I traded ugly things fur 'em, like niggers. I'd give a shipload of niggers fur an apern full of roses."

"Florida, they say, is beautiful, grandma, and flowers are everywhere there."

"Yes, gal, they says so; but I don't never expect to go thar. Margaretty, your mommy, likes it thar. Delaware's my home; some of 'em hates me yer, and the darned lawyers tries to indict me, but I'll live on the line till they shoves me over it, whar I've been cock of the walk sence I was a gal."

As Hulda, also barefooted, but moulded like the flowers, so that her feet seemed natural as the naked roots, carried the boxes around to the glass beds encircling a chimney—dahlias, autumnal

crocuses or saffrons, tri-colored chrysanthemums or gold-flowers, and the orange-colored marigolds—the elder woman, resting on her hoe, smelled the turpentine of a row of tall sunflowers and twisted one off and put it in her wide-brimmed Leghorn hat.

"When I hornpipe it on the tight rope," Levin heard her chuckle, "one of these yer big flowers must die with me."

She disappeared into the peach orchard, which tinted the garden with its pinkish boughs, and Levin improved the chance to look over the cottage and the landscape.

It was a mere farm, level as a floor, part of a larger clearing in the primeval woods, where only fire or age had preyed since man was come; and, although there seemed more land than belonged to this property, no other house could Levin see over all the prospect except the bold and tarnished form of Johnson's castle, sliding its long porch forward at the base of that tall, blank, inexpressive roof which seemed suspended like the drab curtain of a theatre between the solemn chimney towers; the northern chimney broad and huge, and bottomed on an arch; the southern chimney leaner, but erect as a perpetual sentry on the King's road.

The house where Levin Dennis now looked out was a three-roomed, frame, double cabin, with beds in every room but the kitchen, and the hip-roof gave considerable bed accommodation in the attic besides, the rooms being all small, as was general in that day. Around the house extended a pretty garden, with some cherry and plum trees and wild peach along its boundaries, and the fields around contained many stumps, showing that the clearing had been made not many years before, while here and there some heaps of brush had been allowed to accumulate instead of being burned.

As Levin looked at one of those brush-heaps in a low place, a pair of buzzards slowly and clumsily circled up from it, and, flying low, went round and round as if they might be rearing their young there and hated to go far; and, for long afterwards, Levin saw them hovering high above the spot in parental mindfulness.

He drew his head in the dormer casement, and was making ready to go down to the breakfast he smelled cooking below, when his own name was pronounced in the garden, and he stopped and listened.

"You lie!" exclaimed the old woman's voice. "I'll mash you to the ground!"

"He said so, grandma, indeed he did."

Levin had a peep from the depths of the garret, and he saw that Mrs. Cannon was standing with the hoe she had been using raised over Hulda's head, while a demoniac expression of rage distorted her not unpleasing features.

Levin walked at once to the window and whistled, as if to the bird in the tree. The older woman immediately dropped her hoe, and cried out to Levin:

"Heigh, son! ain't you most a-starved fur yer breakfast? It's all ready fur ye, an' Huldy's waitin' fur ye to come down."

Levin at once went down the short, winding stairs to a table spread in the kitchen end, and the old woman blew a tin horn towards Johnson's Cross-roads, as if summoning other boarders, and then she said to Levin, with a very pleasing countenance:

"Son, these yer no-count people will be askin' you questions to bother you, and I don't want no harm to come to you, Levin; so you tell everybody you see yer that Levin Cannon is your name, and they'll think you's juss one o' my people, and won't ask you no more."

Hulda slightly raised her eyes, which Levin took to mean assent, and he said:

"Cannon's good enough for a body pore as me."

"You're a-goin' with Joe to-night, ain't you?"

"Yes'm, I b'leaves so."

"That's right, cousin. You'll git rich an' keep your chariot, yit. Captain Van Dorn's gwyn to head the party. As Levin Cannon, ole Patty's pore cousin, he'll look out fur you, son. Now have some o' my slappers, an' jowl with eggs, an' the best coffee from Cannon's Ferry. Huldy, gal, help yer Cousin Levin! He won't be your sweetheart ef you don't feed him good."

The breakfast was brought in by a white man with a face scratched and bitten, and one eye full of congested blood.

"Cy," Patty Cannon cried, "them slappers, I 'spect, you had hard work to turn with that red eye Owen Daw give you."

"I'll brown both sides of him yit, when I git the griddle ready for him," the man exclaimed, half snivelling.

"Before you raise gizzard enough for that, little Owen'll peck outen yer eyes, Cy, like a crow; he's game enough to tackle the gallows. You may git even with him thar, Cy."

The man turned his cowardly, serving countenance on Levin inquisitively, and looked sullen and

ashamed at Hulda, who observed:

"Cyrus, you are not fit for the rude boys around father's tavern, who always impose on you. Please don't go there again."

"Where else kin he go?" inquired Patty Cannon, severely; "thar ain't no church left nigh yer, sence Chapel Branch went to rot for want of parsons' pay. Let him go to the tavern and learn to fight like a man, an' if the boys licks him, let him kill some of 'em. Then Joe and the Captain kin make somethin' of Cy James, an' people around yer'll respect him. Why, Captain, honey, ain't ye hungry?"

This was addressed to a man with several bruises on his forehead, and an enormous flaxen mustache, as soft in texture as a child's hair—a man wearing delicate boots with high Flemish leggings, that curled over and showed full women's hose of red, over which were buckled trousers of buff corduroy, covering his thighs only, and fastened above his hips by a belt of hide. His shirt was of blue figured stuff, and his loose, unbuttoned coat was a kind of sailor's jacket of tarnished black velvet. He hung a broad slouched hat of a yellowish-drab color, soft, like all his clothing, upon a peg in the wall, and bowed to Hulda first with a smile of welcome, to Madame Cannon cavalierly, and to Levin with a graceful reserve that attracted the boy's attention from the notorious woman at the head of the table, and held him interested during all the meal.

"Pretty Hulda, I salute you! Patty, *buenos dias!* I hope I see you well, friend!"—the last to Levin.

As he took up his knife and fork Levin observed a ring, with a pure white diamond in it, flash upon the Captain's hand. He was a blue-eyed man, with a blush and a lisp at once, as of one shy, but at times he would look straight and bold at some one of the group, and then he seemed to lose his delicacy and become coarse and cold. One such look he gave at Hulda, who bowed her eyes before it, and looked at him but little again.

To Levin this man had the greatest fascination, partly from his extraordinary dress—like costumes Levin had seen at the theatre in Baltimore, where the pirates on the stage wore a jacket and open shirt and belt similar in cut though not in material—and partly from his countenance, in which was something very familiar to the boy, though he racked his memory in vain for the time and place. The stranger was hardly more than forty to forty-five years of age, but the mistress of the house treated him with all the blandishments of a husband.

"Dear Captain! pore honey!" she said; "to have his beautiful yaller hair tored out by the nigger hawk! Honey, he fell onto me, and I thought a bull had butted me in the stummick."

"He broke no limbs, Patty," the captain lisped, feeding himself in a dainty way—and Levin observed that his fork was silver, and his knife was a clasp-knife with a silver handle, that he had taken from his pocket—" *Chis! chis!* if he had snapped my arm, the caravan must have gone without me to-night. I am sore, though, for Señor was a valiant wrestler."

"He'll git his pay, honey, when they sot him to work in Georgey an' flog him right smart, an' we spend the price of him fur punch. He, he! lovey lad!"

"I took this from him to-day when I searched him carefully," the captain said, handing Patty Cannon a piece of silver coin.

The woman, though she looked to be little more than fifty years of age, drew out spectacles of silver from an old leather case, and putting them on, spelled out the coin:

"George—three—eighteen—eighteen hunderd-and-fifteen!"

She threw up her head so quickly that the spectacles dropped from her nose, and Hulda caught them, and then Mrs. Cannon turned on Hulda with a ferocious expression and snatched the spectacles from her hand.

"Whar did the devil git it?" Patty Cannon asked.

"Ah! who knows?" the Captain lisped with pale nonchalance, giving one of those strong, piercing looks he sometimes afforded, right into the hostess's eyes. "It might be a coincidence: *chis! chito!* A shilling of a certain year is no rare thing. But, Madame Cannon, it becomes slightly curious when six such shillings, all numbered with that significant year, came out of the same pocket!"

With this he passed five shillings of the same appearance over to the hostess, and she put on her spectacles again and looked at them all, and dropped them in her lap with a weary yet frightened expression, and muttered:

"Van Dorn, who kin he be?"

"That is of less consequence, my dear, than whether we can afford to sell him."

The Captain was now looking at Hulda with the same strong intentness, but her eyes were in her plate; and, though Madame Cannon looked at her, too, with both interest and dislike, Hulda quietly ate on, unconscious of their regard.

"Shoo!" the woman said; "people kin scare theirselves every day if they mind to. We've got him, and, if he knows anything, it's all in that nigger noddle. So eat and be derved!"

"My guardian angel," the Captain remarked, with a blush and a stronger lisp, "you may not have

observed that I have never ceased to eat, while you immediately lost your appetite. What will you do with the shillings?"

Mrs. Cannon took them from her lap, and rose as if she meant to throw them out of the window, her angry face bearing that interpretation.

"Stop, remarkable woman," the Captain said, pulling his soft, flaxen mustache with the diamond-flashing hand, "let your fecund resources stop and counsel, for I am only looking to your happiness, that has so abundantly blessed my life and banished every superstition from my heart till I believe in neither ghosts, nor God, nor devil, while you believe in all of them, and give yourself many such unnecessary friends and intruders. *Chito! chito!* as the Cubans say, and hear my suggestion before you throw away those shillings!"

"Take care how you mock me!" cried Patty Cannon, with her dark, bold eyes furtive, like one both angered and troubled, and her ruddy cheeks full of cloudy blood.

"Sit down! Give the shillings to pretty Hulda there."

"To her?"

"*Ya, ya!* to pleasing Hulda; for what will trouble us then, her sinless bosom being their safe depository, and her long-lashed eyes melting our ghosts to gray air?"

With a look of strong dislike, the woman gave Hulda the shillings, saying:

"If you ever show one of 'em to me, gal, I'll make you swaller it."

Hulda took the silver pieces and looked at them a moment with girlish delight:

"Oh, grandma, how kind you are! Why do you speak so mad at me when you give me these pretty things? They seem almost warm in my bosom as I put them there, like things with life. Let me kiss you for them!"

She rose from the chair and approached the mistress of the house, who sat in a strange terror, not forbidding the embrace, yet almost shuddering as Hulda stooped and pressed her pure young lips to the blanched and dissipated face of Patty Cannon.

The Captain looked at the kiss with his peculiar strong, cold look, and smiled at Hulda graciously and said:

"There, ladies, repose in each other's confidence! A few shillings for such a kiss is shameful pay, Aunt Patty. Do you remember as well as I do, Madame Cannon, that once you missed some money, and thought your mother had stolen it, and hunted everywhere for it, and it never came to light?"

"Yes," cried Patty Cannon, "I do," and swore a man's oath.

"Has the Señor been in that direction, do you think? I think he has, for Melson and Milman are up from Twiford's with the news that Zeke's last hide has burst her chain and fled, and all the lower Nanticoke gives no trace of her, and Zeke has passed the heavenly gates."

The Captain drew the back of his silver clasp-knife across his throat, smilingly, and placed on the table a sailor's sheath-knife.

"Zeke only was untied; it was a too generous omission," he said. "The Philadelphia woman the Señor says he set free, and that she has gone to start an alarm against us. The Señor is a cool man: he told me that, and laughed and roared, and says he will live to see us all in a picture-frame. *Ayme, ayme*, Patty!"

With her face growing longer and longer, the woman heard these scarcely intelligible sentences—wholly unintelligible to the younger people—and to Levin it seemed that she grew suddenly old and yet older, till her cheeks, but lately blooming, seemed dead and wrinkled, and, from maintaining the appearance of hardly fifty, and fair at that, she now looked to be more than sixty years of age, and sad and helpless.

"Van Dorn, I'm dying," she muttered, as her eyes glazed, and she settled down in her chair like a lump of dough.

"*Ha! O hala hala!* hands off, fair Hulda," the Captain cried, joyfully, as Hulda had been moved to relieve the poor old woman; "no one shall assist at these ceremonies of expiation but Van Dorn himself, whose rights in Mistress Cannon are of priority. She's dropsical, and hastening to perdition too soon, which I must arrest and let her comfort me still more. Sweet comforter! Young gentleman, you shall help me."

Levin took hold of Patty Cannon's feet and found that she seemed made of bone, so tough were her sinews, and Van Dorn easily lifted her broad shoulders, and so she was laid on a bed in the next room, where the elegant Captain was seen rubbing her limbs, and even handling a bottle of leeches, one of which he allowed to crawl over the hand that wore the diamond, making it look like a ruby melting or in living motion. As this voracious blood-lover took his fill around the straight ankles of the hostess, the dainty Captain held her in his arms like an ardent lover.

"Honey," sighed the woman, "my rent is due, and Jake Cannon never waits. Take Huldy and this yer new recruit, my cousin Levin Cannon, an' drive 'em to the ferry,—an' watch that boy, Van

Dorn: I want him broke in! Give him a pistol and a knife, an' have him cut somebody. Put the blood-mark on him and he's ours."

"Great woman!" the Captain lisped, prolific of his kisses, "Maria Theresa! Semiramis! Agrippina! Cleopatra! ever fecund in great ideas and growing youthful by nightshade, *alto! quedo!* but I love thee!"

"Am I young a little yit, honey?" asked Patty Cannon. "Oh, don't deceive me, Van Dorn! Can my eyes look love an' hate, like old times?"

"*Si! quizá!* More and more, dark angel, entering into black age like torches in a cave, I see your deep eyes flame; but never do they please me, Patty, as when they flash on some new wicked idea, like this of marking the boy for life. Who is he?"

"He's a Cannon, one of the stock that my Delaware man belonged to. His mother looked down on me fur coming in their family: I have remembered her."

"You want your young cousin made a felon, then?"

"Yes, honey, I want him scorched, so the devil will know him fur his own."

The Captain reached down to the lady's feet and pulled off the leech and held it up against his hollow palm, gorged with the blood of the fair patient.

"See, Patty! The boy shall drink blood like this, till, drunk with it, he can hold on no more, and drops into our fate as in this vial."

As he spoke he let the leech fall in the bottle, where its reflection in the glass seemed to splash blood.

"Ha, ha! Van Dorn, I love you!" the woman cried, and smothered him with caresses.

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## CHAPTER XXVII.

### CANNON'S FERRY.

When it was announced to Levin and Hulda, who had meantime been talking in the garden, dangerously near the subject of love, that they were to be given a ride to Cannon's Ferry with Captain Van Dorn, at the especial desire of Aunt Patty Cannon—who also sent them a handful of half-cents to spend—they were both delighted, though Hulda said:

"Dear Levin, if it was only ourselves going for good, how happy we might be! I could live with your beautiful mother and work for her, and, knowing me to be always there, you would bring your money home instead of wasting it."

"Can't we do so some way?" asked Levin. "Oh, I wish I had some sense! I wish Jimmy Phoebus was yer, Huldy, to take me out thair in the garden an' whip me like my father. But, if I hadn't come yer, how could I have seen you, Huldy?"

"How could I have spent such a heavenly night of peace and hope if you had not come, dear? The Good Being must have led you to me."

"Huldy," said Levin, after thinking to the range of his knowledge, "maybe thar's a post-office at Cannon's Ferry, an' you kin write a letter to Jack Wonnell fur me."

"Why not to your mother, Levin?"

"Oh, I am ashamed to tell her; it would kill her."

"If we should be found out, Levin, Aunt Patty would kill me. There is no paper here, no ink that I can get, the postage on a letter is almost nineteen cents, and, look! these half-cents are short of the sum by just two."

"I have gold," cried Levin, thinking of the residue of Joe Johnson's bounty.

He put his hand into his pocket, but the money was no longer there.

"Hush!" cried Hulda, "you have been robbed. Everybody is robbed who sleeps here. Grandma can smell gold like the rat that finds yellow cheese."

The individual who had served the breakfast was seen coming towards them, a man in size, with a low forehead, no chin to speak of, a long, crane neck, and a badly scratched and festered face.

"Mister," he said to Levin, "come help me hitch the horses; I'm beat so I can't see how."

Levin started at once, suggesting to Hulda to make search for his missing money, and, when they were in the little stable, the man observed, in a whisper, to Levin:

"By smoke!"

Levin went on putting the bridles and breeching on the horses, when the man said again, with an

insinuating grin:

"By smoke!"

"Heigh?" exclaimed Levin.

"By smoke!" the man remarked again, with a very ardent emphasis.

"You must have been in Prencess Anne," Levin said, "to swar 'by smoke.'"

The ill-raised man, with such an inferior head and cranish neck, now slipped around to the front of Levin and looked down on him, and whispered:

"Hokey-pokey!"

The idea crossed Levin's mind that the scullion of Patty Cannon must have gone crazy.

"Whair did you pick up them words, Cy?" Levin asked.

"Hokey-pokey!" answered Cy James, with a more mysterious and impressive sufflation; "Hokey-pokey! By smoke! and Pangymonum, too!"

"Why, Cy! what do you mean? Jimmy Phœbus never swars but in them air words. Do you know Jimmy Phœbus?"

"Pangymonum, too!" hissed Cy James, with every animation. "Hokey-pokey, three! an' By smoke, one!"

He put his long arms on his knees, and bent down like a great goose, and stared into Levin's eyes.

"I never had sense enough," Levin said, "to guess a riddle, Cy Jeems. Them words I have hearn a good man—my mother's friend—use so often that they scare me. My mind's been a-thinkin' on him night an' day. Oh, is he dead?"

"By smoke! Hokey-pokey! an' Pangymonum, too!" the long, lean, excited fellow whispered, with the greatest solemnity.

"They're Jimmy Phœbus's daily words, dear Cyrus. He was killed on the river night before last; I saw him fall; it is my sin and misery."

"He ain't dead," Cy James whispered, very low and carefully. "I won't tell you whar he is till you make Huldy *like* me."

"How kin I do that, Cy?"

"She thinks I'm a coward and gits whipped by Owen Daw. Tell her I ain't no coward. Tell her I'm goin' to fry all these people on my griddle—all but Huldy. Tell her I'm only playin' coward till I gets 'em all in batter an' the griddle greased, an' then I'll be the bully of the Cross-roads!"

"Do you hate *me*, Cy Jeems? I ain't done nothin' to you. I'm a prisoner here till I kin git my boat back from Joe an' go to Prencess Anne."

"I won't hate you if you kin make Huldy love me," Cy James replied. "Tell her I ain't no coward; that I'm goin' to be free, an' rich too." He dropped his palms to his knees again, and whispered, "fur I know whar ole Patty buries her gole an' silver!"

"Come with those horses, you idle lads," the lisping voice of the Captain was heard to call. "*Ya, ya!* there, *luego!* the morning passes on."

"All ready," Cy James replied, and as they left the stable door he whispered once again, and looked significantly towards Johnson's Cross-roads:

"By smoke! Hokey-pokey! an' Pangymonum, too!"

The Captain, looking like a gentleman of the knightly ages misplaced in this forest lair, held the reins standing on the ground, and handed Hulda in to the seat beside his own with a grace and a blush and a lisping laugh that, Levin thought, were very fascinating.

"Now, Master Cannon, take your place in the tail of the vehicle," the Captain said, bowing to Levin, and darting one of those cold, coarse looks at him that he vouchsafed but for a moment, like a soft cat that has all the nature of the rabbit except the tiger's glare.

The vehicle was an old wagon without springs, and Levin's seat was a piece of board, while Hulda's had a back to it, and the Captain had padded it with a bear's-skin robe. He looked with the most delicate attention at Hulda, blushed when she looked at him, and, scarcely noticing the horses, yet having them under nearly automatic control, he drove out of Patty Cannon's lane and turned into the woods.

Levin cast one long, prying look at Johnson's tavern, wishing he might have the gift to see through its weather-stained planking and tall blank roof, and then he watched the road, of hard sand or piney litter, with here and there a mud-hole or long, puddly rut in it, unravel like a ribbon behind the wheels among the thick pines.

He also observed the skill with which the Captain threw his long cowhide whip, a mere strip of

rawhide fastened to a stick, awkward in other hands; but Van Dorn could brush a fly from either of the short, shaggy Delaware horses with it, and hardly look where he struck or disturb the horse, and he could deliver a blow with it by mere sleight that made the animal stagger and tremble with the abrupt pain.

At a little sandy rill, the only one they crossed, a long water-snake endeavored to escape before the rapid wagon could strike it, but the Captain rose to his feet quick and cat-like, and projected the long lash into the roadside, and the snake writhed and bounded in the air almost cut in two. Then, sitting again and bending so close to Hulda that his long, downy mustache of gold touched her cheek, Van Dorn said, softly:

"*Qué hermoso!* Young wild-flower, let me take a snake out of your path also?"

"Which one, Captain?"

"It does not matter. Name any one."

"Alas!" said Hulda, "I am of them; how can I wish harm to my stepfather and my grand-dame? They are not what I wish, but I am commanded to honor them."

"By whom, fair Hulda?"

"By God. I read it in the Book after I heard it from a slave."

"*Dónde está!* What slave that we know was so God-read?"

"Poor drunken Dave. He was a good man before he knew us. He told me all the Commandments for a drink of brandy, and I wrote them down and afterwards I found them in a book."

"*Chis! chito!* how graceful is your mind, Hulda! It comes out of the absolute blank of your condition and discovers things, as the young osprey, untaught before, knows where to dive for fish. Who that ever comes to Johnson's Cross-roads brings the Bible?"

"Colonel McLane."

"He? the self-righteous crocodile! he gave you the Book?"

"Yes. He told me Joe and grandma were good people—'conservative good people,' I think he called it; but he said you believed nothing, and there was no basis, I think he called it, for 'conservative good' in you."

"*O hala hala!* But this is good," the Captain softly remarked, stroking his golden mustache with the hand that carried the lustrous ring. "Patty Cannon may be saved; I must be damned; and Allan McLane will sit in judgment. No, I believe nothing, because such as they believe!"

"That is why nobody likes you," Hulda frankly observed, "agreeable as you are."

"And can you believe in anything after the surroundings of your childhood, touching crime like the pond-lily that grows among the water-snakes?"

"The lily cannot help it, and is just as white as if it grew under glass, because—"

"Because the lily has none of the blood of the snake?" the captain lisped. "Do you enter that claim?"

"No," said Hulda; "I know I am born from wicked parents, a daughter of crime, my father hanged, my mother of dreadful origin, but never have I felt that God held me accountable for their works if I kept my heart humble and my hands from sin; and never have I been tempted yet from within my own nature to enjoy a single moment of such hideous selfishness. And I thank my kind Maker that something to love and believe in, though unhappy as myself, has come down the sad pathway I looked along so many years, and found me waiting for him."

Without reply, the Captain kept his own thoughts for several minutes, and finally sighed:

"I know one thing in which I might believe, pretty child."

"Oh, then embrace it," Hulda said, "and give your faith a single straw to cling to."

Van Dorn's hand slipped around her waist, and his florid cheeks and blue eyes bent beneath her Leghorn hat:

"I find it here, perhaps, Hulda. Shall I embrace your youth with my strong passion? I fear I love you."

"Yes," she answered, looking up with her long-lashed eyes of such entrancing gray; "kiss me if it will give you hope!"

The blush and high color went out of his face as he stared into those passive, large gray orbs, wide open beneath his pouting, rich, effeminate lips, and, as he hesitated, Hulda repeated:

"Kiss me, if it will make you hope!"

"No, no," he answered; "of all places I am most hopeless *there*."

"I knew you would not kiss me," Hulda said, with a tone above him, "if I gave you the right for any

pure object. The kiss *you* would give me does not see its mate in my soul."

"You hate me, then?" said Van Dorn.

"No, I pity you; I pray for you, too."

"For me? What interest have you in me?"

"I do not know," said Hulda. "I have often wondered what made me think of you so often and, yet, never with admiration. You are the only person here who appears to have lost something by being here; some portion of you seems to have disappeared; I have felt that you might have been a gentleman, though you can never be again. I shrink from you, and still I pity you. But, with all your handsome ways, I would never love you, while the poor boy who is riding with us I loved as soon as he came."

"*Chis! chito!* You can shrink from me and not from a Cannon, too? Why, girl, you have put him in my power."

"I have been in your power for a long time, Captain Van Dorn, and you have looked at me with bold and evil eyes many a time, but never came nearer. When I gaze at you as I did just now, you fly from me. That boy I love is as safe as I am, in your hands."

"Why, dear presumer? Tell me."

"Because I love him, and you require my pity. As long as you protect that poor orphan boy I shall carry your name to God for pardon; if you ever do him harm, my prayers for you will be dumb forever."

"*Oh! aymé! aymé!*" softly laughed Van Dorn, his blush not coming now; "you forget, Hulda, that I believe in nothing."

They had hardly gone four miles when a little, low-pitched town of small square houses, strewn about like toy-blocks between pairs of red outside chimneys, sat, in the soft, humid October morning, along the rim of a marshy creek that, skirting the hamlet, flowed into the Nanticoke River a few miles, by its course, above Twiford's wharf. Two streets, formed by two roads, ended in a third street along the sandy, flattish river shore, and there stood four or five larger dwellings, like their humbler neighbors, built of wood, but with bolder, greater chimneys, rising into the air as if in rivalry of four large ships and brigs that lay at anchor or beside the two wharves, and threw their masts and spars into the sailing clouds, making the low forest that closed river and village in, stoop to its humility. But the beautiful river, with frequent bluffs of sand and woods, flowing two hundred yards wide in stately tide, and bearing up to Cannon's Ferry fish-boats and pungies, Yankee schooners and woodscows, and the signs of life, however lowly, that floated in blue smoke from many hearths, or sounded in oars, rigging, and lading, seemed to Hulda human joy and power, and she cried to Levin:

"Levin, oh, look! Did you ever see as big a place as this? Yonder is the road to Seaford, just as far as we have come! The big ships are taking corn for West Indies, and bringing sugar and molasses. That is the ferry scow, and on the other side it is only five miles to Laurel."

"Do you like to travel that road?" asked the Captain, with his pleasing lisp and blush returned again.

"It makes me sad," replied Hulda; "but I do not mutter when I go past the spot, like grandma."

"What spot?" asked Levin.

"Where father killed the traveller," Hulda said. "He died shamefully for it. You could almost see the place but for yonder woods, where the road to Laurel climbs the sandy hill."

"What's this?" said Van Dorn, seeing a little crowd around one of the single-story cabins, and turning his team into the parallel street.

A very tall, grand-looking man towered above the rest, and seemed unable to stand upright in the low cottage, with his proportions, so that he took his place on the grassy sand without and gave his directions to some one within:

"Levy on the spinning-wheel! Simplify the equation! Stand by your *fi. fa.!* Don't be chicken-hearted, constable—she's had the equivalent; now she sees the quotient, too."

Van Dorn looked on and saw a spinning-wheel come out of the door, and a little wool in a bag after it. Jacob Cannon put his foot on the wheel and poked his head in the door.

"I see an axe and a coffee-mill there, constable: levy onto 'em with your *distringas. Experientia docet stultos!* Pass out that pair of shoes!"

A voice of a woman crying was heard, and Van Dorn and Levin both leaped out to look.

Hulda also stepped down and disappeared.

A woman, barely able to stand up, and white as illness and anguish could make her, had staggered to the door to beg that her shoes be given back, and pointed to her naked feet.

"Now she's off the bed, levy on that!" cried the military figure with the long, eloquent face and



twinkling eyes; "shove it out the window. Mind your *fi. fa.* and I'll take care of the quotient."

"Have mercy!" cried the woman; "my child was only born last week."

"Fling out that good chair there, constable. Levy on the green chest! Don't you see a whole quilt or blanket anywhere! Allow neither tret nor suttle when you serve a writ for Isaac and Jacob Cannon!"

"Where shall I lie with my babe?" cried the poor woman, looking around on the naked cabin, where neither bed, nor blanket, nor chair, nor chest, nor spinning-wheel remained.

"*Li-vari facias!* and *fi-eri facias!* If there's a mistake a replevin lies, but no mistakes are made by Isaac and Jacob Cannon. Constable, I think I see an iron pot on that crane!"

"It's got meat in it, sir—meat a-bilin'," answered the constable.

"Turn out the meat! Levy on the pot! Make the quotient accurate! Eliminate the pot from the equation!"

Out came the pot, as the material boiling in it put out the October fire, and it was thrown in the miscellaneous heap at Jacob Cannon's feet.

"Now take the cradle, hard-hearted man," the woman cried, "and turn the baby into the fire, too, since I can cook nothing to make its milk in my breasts."

"Is the cradle worth anything, constable?" asked the magnificent-looking man with the gray silvery lights around his horsy nose; "if it's worth taking, I want it. People who can't pay their debts must live single like Jacob Cannon, and not be distrained."

A boy, with his face scratched, and dissipation settled in it, bounded suddenly into the aghast group of spectators, and made a vicious dive to recover the effects around Jacob Cannon's feet, but that mighty worthy took him by the collar and, holding him up, dropped him over a fence like a bug:

"Owen Daw, here be witnesses to an assault *insultus*, actionable as a trespass *vi*, the quotient whereof is damages or the equivalent in Georgetown jail. Take heed, good citizens, and especially I note you, Captain Van Dorn."

"I'll kill him," shouted the young bully of Johnson's Cross-roads, and late distrainer on the profile of Cyrus James, Esquire, seizing an ugly stick.

"Justifiable as *son assault demesne*," remarked the creditor, carelessly, as he wrenched the bobbin from the spinning-wheel and knocked the boy down with it.

His commanding manner and the ready hand operated to abash the latter, and, deeply pained with the scene, Levin Dennis fervently and impulsively cried to Van Dorn:

"Oh, Captain! can't you pay her debts! I'll give all Joe's going to give me, to pay you back. See how she lays on the bare floor! Hear her child crying for her! Oh! I think I hear my mother's voice a-callin' of me home as I listen to it."

Van Dorn, feeling Levin's hands grasp his own with simple confidence, heard and did not turn his head, while blushes like roses bloomed successively upon his fresh, effeminate cheeks. He did not repel the boy's hands, however, but looked at the scene with worldly and unpitiful curiosity.

"To pay the distrains of Isaac and Jacob Cannon," he murmured, softly, "would keep a poor slaver poor. You must grow accustomed to such cries: I had to do so. Learn to love money like that merchant and me, and you will think them music."

"Oh, when we cry to God for mercy, captain, maybe our cries will sound like that! I can't bear to hear it."

"You told mother, Jake Cannon, when she rented this ole house," the boy, Owen Daw, exclaimed, "that she needn't pay the rent, if she didn't want to, till the day of judgment."

"I've got the judgment," Jacob Cannon answered, his whitish eyes seeming to chuckle to the bridge of his nose, "and this is the day it's due. All legal days are 'judgment days' to Isaac and Jacob Cannon."

"My son, my son," the woman's voice wailed out to Owen Daw, "I see the end of your going to Patty Cannon's: my baby to the grave, myself to the almshouse, and you to the gallows."

"Captain, Captain," Levin cried, "oh, pay the debt for me! Mother's never been poor as this. Pay it, and I will work fur you anywhair, dear captain."

"How much is the debt," asked Van Dorn, lispingly.

"Ten dollars," spoke the constable, also moved to shame.

"Cannon, will you take me for it?"

"I'll take your judgment-bond or the cash, Captain Van Dorn, nothing less."

"Put back her stuff," the captain said, slightly pressing Levin's hand, as if to say, "This is for you"—"put back her stuff and I'll settle it with Isaac Cannon."

"God bless you!" cried the woman, taking her babe from the cradle and hushing its hunger at her breast; "they call you a wicked man, but blessings on you for all the good you do!"

"*Chito! chito!*" smiled Van Dorn. "I did it for this foolish boy; I pity none."

Hulda had resorted to the strand, or river street of Cannon's Ferry, where there were two storehouses, and she had borrowed quill and ink, and written a letter addressed to "Mrs. Ellenora Dennis, Princess Anne, Somerset County, Maryland," saying:

"*Madam, Levin, your son, is near this place against his will, among dangerous men and in great temptation, but he has found a friend. In one week this friend will try to write again, and, if not heard from, seek Levin Dennis at Johnson's Cross-roads.*"

This letter, written with all her unproficient speed, had just been folded, wafered, and endorsed, and she had put down one of the shillings of 1815 to pay the postage, when a shadow fell upon the store counter, and the letter was withdrawn from her hand; Van Dorn stood by her side.

"*Chis! chito! Es posible?* A spy, perhaps. Now you will love Van Dorn, or Grandma Cannon shall hear your letter read!"

"Give it to me, Captain," Hulda pleaded; "she will kill me if she reads it."

"If it were sent, *pomarosa*, we all might die. No, you are too dangerous."

He looked, without his blush, at the shilling she was putting back in her bosom, and his eye was cold and fierce. Hulda's heart sank down.

"Brother Isaac," cried Jacob Cannon, to a man of fine, lean height, who was at the desk—a man a little shorter than Jacob, and not so much of a king in appearance but with the same whitish eyes dancing around the bridge of his nose, and a more covert and thoughtful brow—"Brother Isaac, Captain Van Dorn is chicken-hearted, and wants to settle the debt of the Widow O'Day, otherwise Daw."

"By cash or judgment-note, captain?"

"Cash," answered Van Dorn, modestly; "take it out of this double-eagle, with Madam Cannon's rent for your farm."

"There's a tree—a bee-tree, Brother Jacob, I think you said—cut down from Mrs. Cannon's field?"

"Yes, actionable under statute made and provided, wilfully to spoil or destroy any timber or other trees, roots, shrubs, or plants; value of said bee-tree three dollars; *levari facias!* The quotient is unsatisfactory to Isaac and Jacob Cannon."

The eyes of the elder and smaller brother endeavored to have an introduction to each other through the bridge of his nose.

"Oh, Brother Jacob," he chuckled, "what an executive help you air! Captain, isn't he a perfect Marius?"

"Madam Cannon," observed the captain, "throws up the farm with this payment, gentlemen. She has already moved her effects across the line to son-in-law Johnson's. The bee-tree I know nothing about."

"Brother Jacob," spoke Isaac Cannon, "Moore takes the farm! Let him be notified that his rent commences without day."

"Execution made, Brother Isaac," answered the Marius of the family. "This morning, perceiving Patty Cannon about to move her effects, my bailiff seized on her plough as security for the aforesaid bee-tree spoiled, maimed, and destroyed, and Moore is ploughing to put in his wheat with it already. Time is money to Isaac and Jacob Cannon."

"Ha, ha! what an executive comfort! Brother Jacob never adds an item to profit and loss."

"Gentlemen," said Van Dorn, "I recommend you not to be charging bee-trees to tenants in the vicinity of Johnson's Cross-roads. It's an unusual item, and we are raising young men there who may not understand it."

"Captain," said the elder Cannon, chuckling as if still in admiration of Marius's subtlety, "I recollect now that our ferryman brought over a man from Laurel this morning with some news. A woman with a broken shackle reported there last night, and said she was the slave of Daniel Custis of Princess Anne: she came from Broad Creek."

"Where did she go?"

"A Methodist preacher put her in his buggy and started to her master's with her."

"Then she'll beat the wind," said Van Dorn; "these preachers are all horse-jockeys, and can outswap the devil. *Hola! ya, ya!* I must see to this."

He strode out, with a cold eye glanced at Hulda.

"Come, young people," spoke the grand head of Jacob Cannon to Levin and Hulda; "I will show you my museum."

He led the way to a warehouse overhanging the river and unlocked a door, and told them to walk carefully till they could see in the dark of the interior.

Levin kept Hulda's hand in his as they slowly saw emerge from the shadows a great variety of dissimilar things heaped together, till the house could hardly hold the vast aggregate of pots and kettles, spinning-wheels and cradles, bedsteads and beds, harrows and ploughs, chairs and gridirons, rakes and hoes, silhouettes and picture-frames, hand-made quilts of calico and pillows of home-plucked geese feathers, fishermen's nets and oars—whatever made the substance of living in an old country without minerals and manufactures, in the early part of the nineteenth century.

"Whare did you git' em, sir?" Levin asked.

"Executed of 'em," said the warrior head and stature of Jacob Cannon; "pounced on 'em; satisfied judgments upon 'em. *Fi. fa.!* We call this Peale's Museum Number Two, or the Variegated Quotient."

"All these things taken from the poor?" asked Hulda. "How many miseries they tell!"

"Mr. Cannon," said Levin, "what kin you do with 'em? People won't buy 'em. They're just a-rottin' to pieces."

"We keep' em to show all them who trespass on Isaac and Jacob Cannon," answered Marius, with easy grandeur, "that there is a judgment-day!"

Hulda's long-lashed gray eyes, with a look of more than childish contempt, accompanied her words:

"I should think you would fear that day, Mr. Cannon, when you say the prayer, 'Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us.'"

The wind from the river seemed to bend the old warehouse, and the noise it made through the chinks and around the corners, slightly stirring the loosely disposed pile of cottage and hut comforts, seemed to arouse low wails among these as when they were torn from the chimney side and the family.

"Where is my baby?" the cradle seemed to say, "that I received and rocked warm from the womb of pain? Oh, I am hungry for his little smile!"

"Why do I rest my busy wheel?" the spinner seemed to creak, "when I know my children are without stockings? Who keeps me here idle while Mother asks for me?"

"Where is the old gray head," sighed the feathers, sifting in the breeze from a broken pillow-case, "that every night and in the afternoons dozed on our bag of down, and picked us over once a year, and said her prayers in us? Oh, is she sleeping on the cold, bare floor, and we so useless!"

The pot seethed to the kettle, "It is dinner-time, and the little boys are crying for food, and still there is no one to lift me on the crane and start the fire beneath me! What will they think of me, they gathered around so many years and watched me boil, and poked their little fingers in to taste the stewing meat? I want to go! I want to go!"

The kettle answered to the pot: "I never sung since the constable forced me from grandmother's hand, and robbed her of the cup of tea."

The old quilt of many squares fluttered in the draught: "Take me to the young wife who sewed me together and showed me so proudly, for I fear she is a-cold since her young husband died!"

These household sounds the thrilled young lovers, standing so poor and on the brink of what they knew not, seemed to hear in awe, and drew closer to each other, like young Eve and Adam in the great wreck of Paradise and at the voice of God.

Hand in hand they stepped forth into the bright light of day, and walked along the sandy street beneath the tall locust, maple, and ailanthus trees that grew in line along the front yards of the Cannon brothers. Four large houses stood sidewise, end to end, here: first, Cannon's business house; next, Isaac Cannon's comfortable home, where he dwelt, a married man; and, third, the elegant frame mansion, with tall, airy chimneys, of Jacob Cannon the bachelor, whose house, built for a bride, had never yet been warmed by a fire; finally, the old, bow-roofed, low dwelling of the mother of the Cannons, opposite which was the ferry wharf, and Van Dorn talking to the negro ferryman.

"Levin," said pretty Hulda, not sad, but very grave, "this noble house is like that noble-looking Mr. Cannon, hollow and cold. He lives with his brother Isaac, and keeps his own dwelling empty and locked up, because he loved money too much to find a wife."

"Let us love each other, Huldy," Levin said; "it is all we've got."

"It is all there is to get, my love," Hulda answered. "Yes, I do love you, Levin. I will try to save you, if I can, because I love you, though suffering may come to me."

"No," cried Levin, "I cannot leave you, dear. If I could now cross in the ferry-boat, I wouldn't do it; I must go back with you."

As Captain Van Dorn came up from the wharf, blushing like a school-boy, and tapping his white teeth together under the long flax of his mustache, his attention was arrested by a proclamation pasted on a post:

*"Five Hundred Dollars Reward, for*

JOSEPH MOORE JOHNSON, KIDNAPPER.

*"The above reward will be paid by me to any person or persons—and they will be exempted from detention—who will deliver to me the body of the above-named miscreant, that he may be brought to trial in Pennsylvania.*

*"JOSEPH WATSON, Mayor of Philadelphia."*

"*Chis! he!*" Van Dorn sighed; "the end must soon be near. Now, young people, come!"

As they passed Cannon's place, going out of town, the familiar voice of Jacob was heard to cry:

"Owen Daw's escaped, Brother Isaac; but we'll clap it to him on a *de bonis non*. I'll never take my eye off him till I die."

"Brother Jacob, what an executive help you air!"

As Van Dorn drove the horses up the slight ascent in the rear of the ferry, past an ancient double puncheon house there, with an arch in the centre, young Hulda—who now wore shoes and stockings, and a presentable dress of English goods, and looked quite the woman out of her sincere and sometimes proud and eloquent eyes—said to him, as she pointed back:

"Captain, it was there my father killed the traveller, where we see the road beyond the ferry enter the pines."

"Yes," said Van Dorn, giving her a cold look; "we might see the place but for the woods. It is at a hill, a short mile from the Nanticoke."

"Tell Levin about it, captain."

"*Quedo, quedo!* It would not be pleasant."

"Yes," said Hulda; "if it was true, I can hear it: I want Levin to hear it, too, so that no deceit shall be between us."

Her smooth, moist hair, gray, humid eyes, complexion born between the rose and dew, and straight, lithe figure, and air of dignity and truth, impressed Van Dorn curiously:

"How bold you grow, wild-flower! Cannot you stoop to re-create me? I, too, would live without deceit. But I will not tell you that story."

"You are afraid," spoke Hulda, feeling that nothing but this man and three miles of level road separated her from the vengeance of Patty Cannon, and that she must assert herself strongly over him.

"*Ya, ya!* Are you not harsh? Remember, you may be whipped by your grandma."

"No, you will whip me, or kill me, if it is to be done. You dare not give me to her to punish."

"Dare not, again? Why?"

"Because you are my guardian. Between us is an instinct different from love, but strong; I feel it. I lean towards you, but not on you. What is it?"

"*O Dios!*" lisped Van Dorn, his blush suspended and his warm blue eyes fascinated by her. "Is this a child or Echo?"

"Tell me of my father's crime. I want Levin to know the wretched thing he has affection for."

"*Ayme! ah!* Well, listen, young lovers; and see what grisly things walk in these pines! There was a man named Brereton; they call him Bruington here, where their noses are twisted and their chins weak. He came from old Lewes, off to the east by Cape Henlopen, and of a stout family, in which was a grain of evil ever smoking through the blood. Do you sometimes feel it, Hulda?"

"No, not evil like that."

"He was apprenticed to a blacksmith, and held the iron while the master struck. One day a man came in the shop, whose horse had thrown a shoe, to have a shoeing, and, when he paid for it, he took a handful of money from his pocket, and one piece—a dollar—fell in the soft soot of the shop, unperceived but by the boy: *chis!* he covered it with his foot."

Van Dorn's whip-lash firmly covered a huge fly on the horse's ear, and laid it dead.

"When the man departed, the boy raised his foot and uncovered the dollar; his master said, 'Smart boy!' They divided the stolen dollar."

"Jimmy Phoebus says the fust step is half of a journey," Levin noted.

"The blacksmith's boy looked avariciously on travellers ever after, who might possess a dollar. He took the empty shop of Patty Cannon's first husband, years after that saint died, and worked on hobbles, clevises, and chains to hold the kidnapped articles of commerce. Naturally he kidnapped, too, and, while she was yet a child, Patty's daughter became Brereton's wife, bestowed by the fond, appreciative mother. Master Levin, if you fall into his path, Brereton's daughter may be bestowed on you. *Hola!* behold her in Hulda."

"I can't see any of that sin in Hulda, Captain; she ain't even ashamed."

"No," affirmed Hulda, looking sincerely at Van Dorn; "it is too true to make me ashamed. I feel as if God's hand covered me like the silver dollar under my father's foot, because he let me survive such parents."

As she spoke she took one of the silver shillings of 1815 and covered it with her hand in Van Dorn's sight. Van Dorn spoke on rapidly:

"There were two brothers named Griffin from about Cambridge, in Maryland; spoiled boys who had taken to the flesh trade, and they stole men and gambled the proceeds away, and Brereton was their leader. One day a traveller came by from Carolina, hunting contraband slaves, and he was of your boastful sort, and dropped the hint that he had fifteen thousand dollars on his body to be invested. No later had he spoken than he felt his folly, from the burning eyes around him and watering mouths telling him to sleep there and slaves would be fetched; so he started in a fright for Laurel, by way of Cannon's Ferry, intending to deposit his money or make them deal with him there. The word was passed to Brereton by his wife or mother-in-law, and by Brereton to the Griffins, to mount and intercept the gold. Some say," lisped Van Dorn, "that Mistress Cannon, dressed in man's clothes, commanded the band."

A deep, chuckling interest, like the sound of a hidden brook, attended Van Dorn's recital, and he was blushing like a girl.

"At Slabtown, a nondescript spot a mile above Cannon's, the light-marching band crossed in a row-boat; they piled brush and bent down saplings in the traveller's road, where he should almost reach the brow of the hill in his buggy, and when the fleshmonger halted at the obstacle, *chis, hola!* they let him have it on both sides, and sent icicles to his heart. He drew a pistol, but in a dying hand. 'Away!' cried the assassins; 'he is not dead.' His horse, in fright at bursting firearms in the evening shades, leaped the brushy barriers and galloped to Laurel, and delivered there an ashy-visaged effigy, down whose beard the red dye of his life dripped audibly, as he sat stiff in death in the buggy. His name was only guessed; how happy he in that!"

"And what was the fate of the murderers?" Hulda asked, with less horror than Levin showed.

"Three of them were arrested; one of the Griffins exposed his brother and Captain Brereton; these two died on the gallows at Georgetown, young Brereton exerting himself under the noose to prevent his injudicious comrade saying too much on peerless Patty Cannon and her fair sisters, and thinking on their interests more than on this living child. Ha! Hulda *Brereton?*"

"The other Griffin also suffered death?" suggested Hulda, with a pale, unevasive countenance.

"Yes, your fond grandma, then in her blazing charms, drew him to her band again with the lure of Widow Brereton's hand; he killed a constable to recommend himself the better, and died on the gallows at his native Cambridge. *Hala hala!* she gave your mother, wild-flower Hulda, to Joe Johnson next to wife."

"It is an awful story," Levin said, "but Hulda never saw it."

"I can remember my father," said Hulda; "a large, strong man, with a slow, heavy face, but he never smiled on me."

"Well, here is the cross-roads," said Van Dorn. "What shall I do with this letter, bad wild-flower?"

"Read it, if you will, or take this English shilling and post it."

Van Dorn shrank back, rejecting the money.

"Will you not buy it back, Hulda," he whispered, "with love?"

"Never."

"You may pay for this letter this night with your life or modesty!"

"You dare not kill me," Hulda said.

"You will see," said Van Dorn.

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## CHAPTER XXVIII.

### PACIFICATION.

Princess Anne had missed for several days some conspicuous citizens, such as Daniel Custis and wife, Captain Phœbus, Levin Dennis, and the free negro Samson—large components of a small town; but it had also gained what everybody admitted to be the most beautiful woman in the place except Mrs. Vesta Milburn—the brown-eyed, tall, roguish niece of Meshach Milburn, whom Vesta had made a lady of in externals, corrected some of her faults, such as the snuffle, and was daily teaching her the mysteries of grammar and address, aided by the rector of the parish, whose heart was roused to partial animation again by the young visitor.

Loyally William Tilghman had pressed his friendship on Vesta's semi-social husband, determined to like him, and finding small resistance there, and, happily, no suspicion; and this was so grateful to Vesta that she indulged the hope that her cousin and late lover would find compensation for her loss in Rhoda Holland.

Love came easily on as a topic of talk where Rhoda, with her unconventional preference for that subject, introduced it.

"Mr. William"—she had got that far towards the inevitable "William"—said Rhoda, one evening at Teackle Hall, as they sat in the library, "do preachers love jus' like other folks? Misc Somers say they is drea'fle sly-boots. She say thar was a preacher down yer to Girdle Tree Hill that preached the Meal-an-the-Yum was a-goin' to happen right off."

"Millennium," suggested Tilghman.

"Maybe so. Misc Somers call it 'the Meal-an-the-Yum,' I thought. Anyway, they was all goin' to rise, right off, an' he with 'em. Lord sakes! they had frills put on thar night-gowns to rise in. An' the night before they was a-goin' up, that ar scamp run away with a widder an' her darter, jilted the widder an' married the darter; an' they couldn't rise at Girdle Tree Hill caze the preacher wa'n't thar, an' they didn't know when."

"And I suppose Mrs. Somers tells it on him?" William Tilghman added.

"That she do. Now, was you ever in love, Mr. William?"

"I have been thinking, Rhoda, that when you are a good scholar, and grandmother and you grow to like each other, as I believe you will, I might fall in love with you."

"Lord sakes! Me loved by a preacher? Couldn't I never stay home from the preachin'? But then, to hear your own ole man a-barkin' away at the other gals, I think it would be right good!"

The subject had now gone to that length that in a few days, to Grandmother Tilghman's slight indignation, Rhoda called the rector "William," and he answered her, "Dear Rhoda."

The triple widow, however, had one lane to her consideration, up which the artful Rhoda strayed as soon as she saw the gate ajar.

"Misc Tilghman," she said one day, "I been a-lookin' at you. I 'spect you was a real beauty. If you wasn't a little quar, nobody would see you was a ole woman now."

"I was a belle," spoke the blind old lady, emphatically. "General John Eager Howard said he would rather talk with me than hear an oration from Fisher Ames. Charles Carroll, of Carrollton, proposed to me when I was old enough to be your grandmother, and after Susan Decatur, the commodore's widow, had tried in vain to get an offer from him. Said I, 'Carroll, is this another Declaration of Independence? No,' said I, 'Carroll, I won't reduce the last signer, it may be, to obedience on a wife going blind. That would be worse slavery than George the Third's!' He said I was a Spartan widow."

"Every widow I ever see was a sparkin' widow," Rhoda naïvely concluded, at which Mrs. Tilghman had to join in the laughter, and there was no evil feeling.

Jack Wonnell now held the temporary post of cook and woodchopper at Teackle Hall, and Roxy saw him every day, sewed his tattered clothing up, put the germs of self-respect in him, and caused Vesta to say to her husband, as they were sitting in his storehouse parlor one afternoon, in the intermission of his chill and sweat:

"Such rapid changes have taken place here, Mr. Milburn, that they have disturbed my judgment, and now I hardly know whether my oldest prejudice is assured, as I see that white man the happy domestic servant of my pure slave girl. She seems to have no greater affection than pity and interest for him, while he is made more of a man by his undisguised devotion to her. No man could work better than he does now."

"Love is so great, so occult," the husband said, his brown eyes searching his wife's face over, "that its combinations have centuries left to run before they shall beat every prejudice down, and prove, in spite of sin and dispersion, that of one blood are all the nations made."<sup>[4]</sup>

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## CHAPTER XXIX.

### BEGINNING OF THE RAID.

The raid into Delaware was all organized when Levin and Hulda were driven to Johnson's tavern, and the arrival of Van Dorn called forth cheers and yells, as that blushing worthy threw his trim, athletic figure out of the wagon and bowed to Joe Johnson, on the tavern porch:

"*O hala hala!* do you go, son-in-law?"

"I'll ride with ye, Captain, a split of the Maryland way, but sprat for that Delaware! I'll go in it no more. I'll stand whack with you, however, fur the madges I give you and fur my stalling ken."

"*Quedito!*" lisped Van Dorn; "we never leave your interests out, son-in-law. How is Aunt Patty?"

"She's made a punch fur the population, an' calls fur young Levin thar to lush with her."

"I'll take mine along," Levin cried, "an' drink it in the chill o' the night."

"No," commanded the voice of Patty Cannon; "it's a-waitin' fur you, son: a good stiff bowl of apple and sugar. Him as misses his drinks yer we sets no account on."

As Van Dorn and Levin pushed through the motley crowd on the little porch into the bar, where Mrs. Cannon administered, she set before them two fiery bowls, and cried:

"Come in yer, Colonel McLane, an' jine my nug an' my young cousin Levin."

"No, Patty," answered a voice from the next room within; "I've drunk my share. There's nothing like a conservative course."

As Patty put her head into this inner room, Levin Dennis, seeing a window open at his elbow, threw the whole of his liquor over his shoulder into the yard and smacked his lips heartily, saying,

"Good!"

"Ha!" exclaimed Van Dorn, evidently noticing Levin's deceit; "smart people are around us, Patty. Beware!"

He took from his pocket the fateful letter and glanced at its endorsement, and, as he did so, Levin heard an exclamation in the yard from a man who had received the whole of the apple brandy and sugar in his face, and was furious; but as soon as he seemed to recognize the thrower he muttered, apologetically:

"Hokey-pokey! By smoke! and Pangymonum, too!"

When Levin looked at Van Dorn again, the blush was on his face, but the letter had disappeared.

"Beware of the conservative course, Colonel," lisped Van Dorn, "except when generous Patty makes the punch; for she holds such measure of it that she does not see our infirmities."

"Honey," cried Patty Cannon to Levin, giving him an affectionate hug, "have ye swallered yer liquor so smart as that? Why, I love to see a nice boy drink."

"But no more for him now, *cajela*," the Captain protested; "two such will make him fall off his horse. *Bebamos*, Patty! *Esta excelente!*"—drinking.

"How purty the Captain says them things," the madam cried to the gentleman within. "Maybe he's a mockin' his ole sweetheart. Oh, Van Dorn, if I thought you could forget me I would kill you!"

Levin noticed the rapid temper and demoniac face of this not unengaging lady as she spoke, her whole nature turning its course like a wheeling bat, and from plausibility to an instant's jealousy, and then to a dark tide of awful rage, took but a thought.

"*Qué disparate! hala o he!*" Van Dorn lisped, sweetly, chucking the hostess under the chin; "but I do love to see thee so, thou charmer of my life. Never will I desert thee, Patty, whilst thou can suffer."

Her dark clouds slowly passed away as Levin turned from the place, but her small head and abundant raven hair showed the blood troubled to the roots, and the eyes, once rich with midnight depths, now glazing in the course of time, like old window panes, by age, searched the bandit's face with a strange fear:

"Van Dorn, time and pleasure cannot kill you: how well you look to-day. I think you are a boy, to be ruined again every time you love me, you blush so modestly. Where is that pot of color you paint your cheeks with even before *me*, whose blushes none can recollect? Why do you love me?"

"*O dios!*" said Van Dorn; "I love thee for these spells of splendor, dark night and noonday passion, the alternations of earth and hell that eclipse heaven altogether. I love to see thee fear, though fearing nothing here, because I see nothing that you fear beyond the grave. You hate this boy?"

"I hate him worse than wrinkles. Let him not come to me a child to-morrow; let him see ghosts long as he lives."

"How are the prisoners, Patty?"

"Why, the white nigger, dovey, is sick to-day; blood-loss and blisters have give him fever. My nigger, that I tied—ha! ha! a good job for Patty Cannon, at her age!—says t'other's a pore coaster

named Jimmy Phoebus."

"Joe must be ready for a quick departure," the Captain exclaimed, "when we come back from Dover: it is a bold undertaking, and the whole of the little state will be aroused like a black snake uncoiling in one's pocket."

The woman pointed from her shoulder towards the inner room, and spoke even lower than before:

"Van Dorn, I have a customer."

"For negroes?"

"No, for Huldy. He shall have her."

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As Levin Dennis stood at the cross-roads without, he saw a strange man ploughing in the farm so recently deserted by his hostess for the gayer cross-roads. The afternoon light fell on the sandy fields and struck a polish from the ploughshare, and, as the ploughman passed the brambly spot again, the buzzards slowly circled up, as if to protest that he came too near their young.

The long, lean servant, who had waited on the breakfast-table, came out to Levin and watched his eyes.

"Ploughin', ploughin'," he said. "Levin, I kin show you how to plough: I can't do it, but you're the man."

"Cyrus, Huldy don't hate you. She says you're the nighest to a friend she's got."

"Oh, I love her like sugar-cane," the lean, cymlin-headed servant said. "Tell her I'm goin' to be a great man. I'm goin' to spile the game. They lick me, but Cy Jeems has courage, Levin."

"Cyrus, tell Huldy all that's goin' on agin her. We don't know nothin'. You kin go and come an' nobody watches you. Huldy will be grateful fur it."

Putting his long arms on his knees and bending down, the scullion stared close to Levin's eyes and whispered, looking towards the field:

"Ploughin'! ploughin'!"

Then, turning partly, and gazing over the old tavern with a look of wisdom, Cy James whispered again:

"Hokey-pokey! By smoke! an' Pangymonum, too!"

"I reckon he's crazy," Levin thought, as the queer fellow turned and fled.

It was about three o'clock when the cavalcade was reviewed by Captain Van Dorn from the porch of the hotel, and it consisted of about twenty persons, white and black; some riding mules, some horses, and there was one wagon in the line—the same that had been driven to Cannon's Ferry—intended for Levin, Joe Johnson, and the Captain. Van Dorn stood blushing, pulling his long mustache of flax, and resting on his cowhide whip.

"Dave," he called to a powerful negro, "get down from that mule; you're too drunk to go. Jump up in his place, Owen Daw!"

The widow's son gladly vaulted on the animal.

"Sorden," continued Van Dorn, "you know all the roads: lead the way! Whitecar, go with him! We rendezvous at Punch Hall at eight o'clock. The order of march is in pairs, a quarter to half a mile apart. If any man acts in anything without orders, or halloos upon the road, he may get this lash or he may get my knife."

"Captain, where do we feed?" asked a small, wiry mulatto.

"Water at Federalsburg," answered Van Dorn; "feed at the Punch Hall."

They rode off in pairs at intervals of ten minutes; Van Dorn's vehicle went last. A moment before he departed, Cy James touched the Captain's sleeve and whispered, "Huldy." Turning to see if he was unobserved, Van Dorn followed to the deep-arched chimney at the northern gable, and dismissed his guide with a look.

"Captain Van Dorn," Hulda said, her large gray eyes strained in tenderness and nervous courage, "do that boy Levin no harm: I love him! God forgive all your sins, many as they are, if you disobey grandmother's wicked commands about my darling!"

"Ha! wild-flower, you have been listening?"

"No, I have only looked: I know Aunt Patty's petting ways when she means to ruin, and watch her black flashes of cunning between: she is no cousin of Levin; he is Joe's gentle prisoner; his very name she made him hide when she saw you coming this morning."

"*Creo que sí*: Hulda, let me kiss you!"



"Yes, if you dare."

She gave him that pure, soul-driven, child's strong look again, exerting all the influence she had ever felt she exercised over him.

Nevertheless he kissed her for the first time:

"To-day, *bonito*, I dare to kiss thee. Believe me, my kiss is a tender one."

"Yes, sir. There is something like a father in it. Oh, my father, art thou in heaven?"

"If there be such a place, wild-flower, I think he is."

"Oh, thank you, Captain Van Dorn. There may you also be and find the faith I feel in my one day's love on earth. I pray for you every day."

"*Ayme*, poor weakling! Pray now for thyself: if thou canst save thyself sinless a brief day or two, it may be well for thee and Levin. Thy grandmother is dreadful in her joys this night."

"I can die," said Hulda, "if Levin be saved."

He kissed her again, and something wet dropped down his blushes.

"Eternal love!" he sighed; "I've lost it."

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## CHAPTER XXX.

### AFRICA.

The Captain took his place at the reins, his picturesque velvet jacket, wide hat, bright hair, and gay shirt, thighings, belt, and boots, deserving all Patty Cannon's encomiums as he made a polite adieu and threw his whip like a thunderbolt, and a cheer rose from the discarded volunteers loitering about the tavern as he drove Joe Johnson and Levin away.

The road was nearly dead level for five miles, but, being the old travelled road from Laurel and the south to Easton, and pointing towards Baltimore, numerous farms and clearings were seen, and tobacco-fields alternated with the dry corn and new-ploughed wheat patches. Here and there, like a measure of gold poured upon the ground, the yellow ears lay in the gaunt corn-rows, to become the ground meal of the slave and the cattle's winter substance. Joe Johnson's popularity was everywhere apparent, and many a shout was given of, "Good luck to ye, Joe!" "Tote us a nigger back from Delaway, Joe!" "Don't be too hard on them ar black Blue Hen's chickens, Joe!"

Van Dorn was too far above the comprehension of his neighbors, or, indeed, of anybody, to be familiarly addressed, but "Patty Cannon's man" was the term of injured inferiority towards him after he had passed.

At Federalsburg they crossed the branch of the Nanticoke piercing to the centre of Delaware state, and saw one large brick house of colonial appearance dominating the little wooden hamlet, and here, as generally within the Maryland line, hunting negroes was the "lark" or the serious occupation of many an idle or enterprising fellow, who trained his negro scouts like a setter, or more often like a spaniel, and crossed the line on appointed nights as ardently and warily as the white trader in Africa takes to the trails of the interior for human prey.

"Joe," said Van Dorn, "what is to be your disposition of the prisoners we have?"

"All goes with me to Norfolk but one,—the nigger boxer; I burn him alive on Twiford's island. If the white chap is too pickle to sell, I'll throw him overboard; he ain't safe."

"*Ea! sus!* it is boyish to burn the old lad. I have had many a blow from a black, and stab, too. A dog will bite you if you lasso him."

"No nigger can knock me down and git off with selling."

"Then you are a bad trader. The negro's price is all the negro is; why make him your equal by hating him?"

"I am a Delaware boy," Joe Johnson said, "and it's the pride with me to give no nigger a chance. In Maryland you pets 'em, like ole Colonel Ned Lloyd over yer on the Wye; he's give his nigger coachman a gole watch an' chain because he's his son! What a nimenog! Some day he'll raise a nigger that'll be makin' politikle speeches, an' then I don't want to live no more."<sup>[5]</sup>

"*Chito!* Since the Delaware lawyer sent you to the post, son-in-law, you're morose. I have had to eat with negro princes, dance with their queens, and be ceremonious as if they had been angels."

"It would be the reign of Queen Dick for me! I couldn't do it, nohow."

"And, by the way, Joseph, I may see your friend, the lawyer Clayton, at Dover, to-night: he may send me to the post, too; and I fear no Delaware governor will take off the cropping of my ears,

as was done for you in state patriotism."

"Beware of that imp of Tolobon!" Joe Johnson muttered. "How I wish you could kill him, Van Dorn. He's got to be a senator; some day he'll be chief-justice of Delaware: then, what'll niggers be wuth thar?"

"I fancy, Joseph, you might be a legislator in Delaware if your inclinations ran that way?"

"Easy enough, but I makes legislators. My wife, Margaretta—her first husband's sister is the wife of the chancellor."

"Hola! oh! How came that great alliance?"

"She was housekeeper; he was a close old bachelor and must break a leg. 'Well,' she says, 'you're a daddy; justice is your trade, and I must have it.' So, from bein' his peculiar, she becomes the madam; but she inwented the kid."

"I have never been in Dover; how shall I tell where Lawyer Clayton dwells?"

"It's on the green a-middle of the town, a-standin' by the state-house—a long, roughcast house in the corner, three stories high, with two doors; the door next the state-house is his office. Go past the state-house, which has a cupelo onto it, an' you see the jug an' whippin'-post. He's got 'em handy fur you."

Levin listened with all his ears. The liquor was now well out of his system, and he thanked God he had refused Patty Cannon's burning dram, else he might be this night—he thought it with remorse—the reckless mate for Owen Daw, whose own mother had predicted the gallows for him.

"And now, Van Dorn, I turn back," Joe Johnson said; "I have a job to do down the Peninsuly. McLane has become the owner of a gal thar, an' wants her sneaked. I takes black Dave with me, an' when I'm back, my boat will be ready an' my cargo packed. Then hey fur Floridey!"

He unhaltered his horse at the tail of the wagon, mounted him, and rode back across the stream. Van Dorn touched his horses and entered the dense woods in a byway to the north.

"Get up here, Master Levin, and ride by me," the Captain said, very soon, and he lifted Levin's old hat from his head and looked at his bright hair parted in the middle, his fine, large eyes, needing the light of knowledge, and his soft complexion and marks of good extraction.

"Where is thy father, Levin, to let thee go so ragged, with such graceful limbs and feet as these?"

"Shipwrecked," said Levin; "gone down, I 'spect, on the privateer."

"A sailor, was he? Well, he should be home to clothe thee and see that thou dost not cheat. I marked how Madam Cannon's punch was tossed out of the window."

"I thought you would not want me drunk beside you all night, sir, and then I might enjoy your company. I don't want to drink no more liquor."

"You like my company?"

"Yes, sir."

The Captain blushed, and asked,

"Why do you like me?"

"Not fur nothin' you do, sir. I like you fur somethin' in your ways; I reckon you're a smart man."

"*Si, señor*, that I am. I have gained the whole world and lost two."

"Two worlds, sir?"

"Yes, two immortal worlds; that is to say, two unaccountable worlds. I am no Christian."

"Maybe you're Chinee or Mahometan, then, sir; I 'spect everybody's got a religion."

"I was a Mahometan for business ends," Van Dorn said. "Having become a slaver, it was nothing to be a renegade. Stealing a man's soul every day, I put no value on mine. Yes, Mahomet is the prophet of God: so are you."

"You have been in Afrikey, I 'spect," suggested Levin.

"A few years only, but long enough to be rich and to be ruined. I know the negro coast from the Gambia to Cape Palmas, and inland to Timbo. I have had an African queen and the African fever: I went to conquer Africa and became a slave."

"In Africa, I 'spect, Captain," Levin remarked, without inference, "a nigger-trader is respectable."

Van Dorn shook his head.

"I doubt if that trade is respectable anywhere on this globe, unless it be *here*. No, I will say for these people, too, that while they do it low lip homage, they look down on it. I was once the greatest guest in Timbo, housed with its absolute prince, attended by my suite, looking like an ambassador, and he called me 'his son' and drew me to his breast. Proclamations were made that I should be respected as such, yet every human object fled before me. As I rode out alone to see

the gardens and cassava fields, the roaming goats and oxen, and the rich mountain prospects, and saw the sloe-eyed girls bathing in the brooks, the cry went round, 'Flesh-buyer is coming,' and huts were deserted, fields forsaken, the gray patriarchs and the little children ran, and I was left alone with the dumb animals, despised, abhorred."

"Don't they have slavery thair, sir?"

"Yes, slavery immemorial, yet the slave-buyer is no more respectable than the procurer. The coin of Africa, its only medium, was the slave. He paid the debt of war, of luxury, and of business. Yet the soul of man, in the familiar study of such universal slavery, grovels with it, and points to bright destiny no more with the head erect: I died in Africa."

"Ain't you in the business now, sir?"

"Now I am a mere forest thief and bushman, Levin. He who begins a base trade rises early to its fulness, and in subsequent life must be a poor wolf rejected from the pack, stealing where he can sneak in. Such is the kidnapper eking out the decayed days of the slaver; such is the ruined voluptuary, living at last on the earnings of some shameless woman; such am I: behold me!"

Van Dorn's eyes turned on Levin in their cold, heartless light, and yet he blushed, as usual.

"You ought to be a gentleman, Captain. What made you break the laws so and be a bad man?"

"*Aymè! aymè!*" mused Van Dorn, "shall I tell you? It was Africa. I was a high-minded youth, cool and bold, and with a thread of pleasure in me. I went to sea in a manly trade, and, fortune being slow, they whispered to me, in the West Indies, that my clipper was just the thing for the slave-trade, and I made the first venture out of virtue, which is all the voyage. In Africa I fell a prey to the voluptuous life a white man leads there, to which the very missionaries are not always exceptions. Young, pale, gentle, graceful, brave, my blushes instant as my passions, the ceaseless intrigue of that hot climate circled around me like a dance in the harem around the young intruder: I forgot my native land and every obligation in it; I was enslaved by Africa to its swooning joys; I went there like the serpent and was stung by the woman."

"Ain't they all right black and ugly in Africa, Captain?"

"The world has not the equals of Senegambia for beauty," said Van Dorn. "The Fullah beauties are often almost white, and the black admixture is no more than varnish on the maple-tree. And even here, my lad, where civilization builds a wall of social fire around the slave, you often mark the idolatry of the white head to captive Africa."

"Did you make money?"

"For some years I did, plenty of it; but degradation in the midst of pleasure weighed down my spirits. The thing called honor had flown from over me like the heavenly dove, and in its place a hundred painted birds flocked joyfully, the dazzling creatures of that thoughtless world. Oh, that I could have been born there or never have seen it! At last I started home, but the world had adopted a new commandment, 'Thou shalt not trade in man.' They took my ship and all its black cargo, and I came home naked. Then my heart was broke, and I turned kidnapper."

"Home is the best place," said Levin; "I 'spect it is, even if folks is pore. When Jimmy Phœbus give me a boat I thought I was rich as a Jew."

"What is that name?" asked Van Dorn.

"James Phœbus: he's mother's sweetheart."

"*Ce ce ce!*" the Captain mused; "your mother lives, then?"

"Yes, sir. She's pore, but Jimmy loves her, and the ghost of father feeds her."

"*Quedo!* a ghost? what kind of thing is that? Aunt Patty sees them: I never do."

"It comes an' puts sugar an' coffee in the window, an' sometimes a pair of shoes an' a dress. Mother says it's father: I guess it is."

"*O Dios!*" lisped Van Dorn. "This Phœbus, is he a good man?"

"Brave as a lion, sir; pore as any pungy captain; the best friend I ever had. I hoped mother would marry him, he's been a-waitin' fur her so long. She's afraid father ain't dead."

"*O hala, hala!* women are such waiters; but this man can wait too. Is he strong?"

"He come mighty nigh givin' Joe Johnson a lickin' last Sunday, sir, in Princess Anne. He hates a nigger-trader. Him an' Samson Hat, a black feller, thinks as much of each other as two brothers."

"And he gave you a boat?"

"Yes, sir: Joe Johnson hired it of me, but I didn't know he was goin' to run away niggers. He's got my boat an' ruined my credit, I 'spect, in Princess Anne, an' what will mother do when I go to jail?"

"Why, this other man, Phœbus, is there to marry her or look after her."

"Oh, Captain," sobbed Levin, putting his hands on Van Dorn's knees, and laying his orphan head

there too, "pore Jimmy's dead: Joe Johnson shot him."

The Captain did not move or speak.

"I've been a drunkard, Captain," Levin sobbed again, in the confidence of a child; "that's whair all our misery comes from. I've got nothin' but my boat, an' people hires it to go gunnin' an' fishin' and sprreen', and they takes liquor with 'em, an' I drinks. God help me; I never will agin, but die first!"

"Are you not afraid to lean on me?" lisped Van Dorn.

"No, sir."

"I have killed people, too."

"The Lord forgive you, sir; I know you won't kill *me*."

A sigh broke from the bandit's lips, in place of his usual soft lisp, and was followed by a warm drop of water, as from the forest leaves now bathed in night, that plashed on Levin's neck.

"O God," a soft voice said, "may I not die?"

Then Levin felt the same warm drops fall many times upon him, and his nature opened like the plants to rain.

"I have found a friend, Captain," the boy spoke, after several minutes, but not looking up; "I feel you cry."

"*Chito! chito!*" lisped Van Dorn; "here is Punch Hall."

Levin raised his head, and saw nothing but an old house standing in the trees, with a little faint light streaming from the door, and heard the low hilarity of drinking men. The whole band poured out to receive Van Dorn's commands.

"One hour here to feed and rest!" Van Dorn exclaimed. "Let those sleep who can. Let any straggle or riot who dare!"

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## CHAPTER XXXI.

### PEACH BLUSH.

Judge Custis, whom we left riding out of Princess Anne on Sunday afternoon, kept straight north, crossed the bottom of Delaware in the early evening, and went to bed at Laurel, on Broad Creek, a few miles south of Cannon's Ferry.

At daylight he was ahorse again, scarcely stiff from his exertion, and feeling the rising joys of a stomach and brain becoming clearer than for years, of all the forms of alcohol. His mind had been bathed in sleep and temperance, the two great physicians, and wiped dry, like the feet of the Prince of sufferers, with women's hairs. Exercise, natural to a Virginian, awakened his flowing spirits again, and he fancied the air grew purer as he advanced into the north, though there was hardly any perceptible change of elevation. The country grew drier, however, as he turned the head springs of the great cypress swamp—the counterbalance of the Dismal Swamp of Virginia—receded from the Chesapeake waters, and approached the tributaries of the Atlantic. At nine o'clock he entered the court-house cluster of Georgetown, a little place of a few hundred people, pitched nearly at the centre of the county one generation before, or about ten years after the independence of the country.

It was a level place of shingle-boarded houses, assembled around a sandy square, in which were both elm and Italian poplar trees; and a double-storied wooden court-house was on the farther side, surrounded by little cabins for the county officers, pitched here and there, and in the rear was a jail of two stories, with family apartments below, and the dungeon window, the debtors' room, and a family bedroom above; and near the jail and court-house stood the whipping-post, like a dismantled pump, with a pillory floor some feet above the ground.

Young maples, mulberry and tulip trees, and ailanthuses grew bravely to make shade along the two streets which pierced the square, and the four streets which were parallel to its sides—pretty lanes being inserted between, to which the loamy gardens ran; and, as the Judge stopped at the tavern near the court, he was told it was "returning day," and the place would soon be filled with constituents assembling to hear how "she'd gone"—*she*, as the Judge knew well, meaning Sussex County, and "gone" intimating her decision expressed at the polls.

"She's gone for Adams an' Clayton, ain't she, Jonathan Torbert?" asked the innkeeper.

"Yes," spoke a plain, religious-looking man, the teller of the bank; "Johnny Clayton's kept Sussex and Kent in line for Adams; Jeems Bayard and the McLanes have captured Newcastle: Clayton goes to the senate, Louis McLane to the cabinet, the country to the alligators."

"Hurrah for Jackson!" answered the host; "he suits me ever since he whipped the British."

At breakfast Judge Custis recognized a gentleman opposite, wearing smallclothes, and with his hair in a queue, who spoke without other than a passively kind expression:

"Judge."

"Ah! Chancellor!"

The Chancellor was nearly seventy years old, wearing an humble, meditative, yet gracious look, as one whose relations to this world were those of stewardship, and whose nearly obsolete dress was the badge, not of worldly pride, but of perished joys and contemporaries. His unaffected countenance seemed to say: "I wear it because it is useless to put off what no one else will wear, when presently I shall need nothing but a shroud."

Judge Custis looked at the meek old gentleman closely, sitting at his plate like a lay brother in some monastery or infirmary, indifferent to talk or news or affairs; and the remembrance of what he had been—keen, accumulative, with youthful passions long retained, and the man buoyant under the judge's guard—impressed the Virginian to say to himself:

"What, then, is man! At last old age asserts itself, and bends the brazen temple of his countenance, like Samson, in almost pious remorse. There sits twenty-five years of equity administration; behind it, thirty years of jocund and various life. No newspaper shall ever record it, because none are printed here; he is indifferent to that forgetfulness and to all others, because the springs of life are dry in his body, and he no more enjoys."

"Are you travelling north, Judge Custis?" the old man asked, for politeness' sake.

"Yes, to Dover."

"There is a seat in my carriage; you are welcome to it."

"I will take it a part of the way, at least, to feel the privilege of your society, Chancellor."

The old man gave a slow, sidewise shake of his head.

"Too late, too late," he said, "to flatter me. I was fond of it once. I have been a flatterer, too."

The Chancellor's black boy was put on the Judge's horse, and the two men, in a plain, country-made, light, square vehicle, turned the court-house corner for the north. As they passed the door they heard the sheriff knock off two slaves to a purchaser, crying:

"Your property, sir, till they are twenty-five years of age."

"Ha, ha!" laughed, in a great horse laugh, a nearly chinless villager; "say till ole Patty Cannon can git 'em!"

The purchaser gave a cunning, self-convicted smile at the passing chancellor, whose look of resignation only deepened and grew more humble. The Judge had some vague recollection which moved him to change the subject.

"We see each other but little, Chancellor, though we divide the same little heritage of land. I suppose your people are all proud of Delaware."

"Yes," said the old man; "being such a little adventurer, a mere foundling in the band of states, our people have the pride of their independence. The laws are administered, some more farms are opened in the forest every year, blossoms come, and old men die and are buried on their farms, and their bones respected a few years. Our history is so pastoral that we must show some temper when it is assailed, or we might let out our ignorance of it."

They rode in silence some hours through an older settled and more open country, with some large mill-ponds and a better class of farm improvements, and the sense of some large water near at hand was mystically felt.

The Judge followed the old man's eyes at one place, seeing that they were raised with an expression of tranquil satisfaction, like aged piety, and a beautiful landscape of soft green marsh lay under their gaze from a slight elevation they had reached, showing cattle and sheep roving in it, tall groves where cows and horses found midday shade, and winding creeks, carrying sails of hidden boats, as if in a magical cruise upon the velvet verdure. Haystacks and farm settlements stood out in the long levels, and sailing birds speckled the air. In the far distance lay something like more marsh, yet also like the clouds.

"It is the Delaware Bay," the Chancellor said.

They soon entered a well-built little town on a navigable creek, with a large mill-pond, sawmills, several vessels building on the stocks, and an air of superior vitality to anything Judge Custis had seen in Delaware. Here the Chancellor pointed out the late home of Senator Clayton's father, and, after the horses had been fed, they continued still northward, passing another small town on a creek near the marshes, and, a little beyond it, came to a venerable brick church, a little from the road, in a grove of oaks and forest trees.

"Here is Barrett's chapel," said the Chancellor; "celebrated for the plotting of the campaign between Wesley's native and English preachers for the conquest of America as soon as the crown had lost it."

They looked up over the broad-gabled, Quakerly edifice, with its broad, low door, high roof, double stories of windows, and a higher window in the gable, trim rows of arch-bricks over door and windows, and belt masonry; and heard the tall trees hush it to sleep like a baby left to them. Nearly fifty feet square, and probably fifty years old, it looked to be good for another hundred years.

"My family in Accomac was harsh with the Methodists through a mistaken conservatism," Judge Custis said. "They are a good people; they seem to suit this peninsula like the peachtree."

A small funeral procession was turning into Barrett's chapel, and the Chancellor interrogated one of the more indifferent followers as to the dead person. Having mentioned the name, the citizen said:

"His death was mysterious. He was a Methodist and a good man, but it seems that avarice was gnawing his principles away. A slave boy, soon to become free by law, disappeared from his possession, and he gave it out that the boy had run away. But suddenly our neighbor began to drink and to display money, and they say he had the boy kidnapped. He died like one with an attack of despair."

As they turned again northward, in the genial afternoon, Judge Custis said:

"What a stigma on both sides, Chancellor, is this kidnapping!"

The old man meekly looked down and did not reply. Judge Custis, feeling that there was some sensitiveness on this and kindred subjects, yet why he could not recollect, continued, under the impulse of his feelings:

"The night before I left Princess Anne, Joe Johnson, one of your worst kidnappers, boldly came to my house for lodging. Why I let him stay there is a subject of wonder and contempt to myself. But there he was, perhaps when I came away."

"Not a prudent thing to permit," the old man groaned.

"I knew his wife was the widow of a gallows' bird, one Brereton—the name is Yankee. He was hanged for highway robbery."

A muffled sound escaped the sober old gentleman of Delaware.

"*You* should remember the murder, Chancellor. It happened in this state. This Brereton killed a slave-buyer for what he brought here upon his person to buy the kidnapped free people and apprentice-slaves. Brereton was the son-in-law of Patty Cannon, that infamous pander between Delaware and the South."

The old Chancellor looked up.

"I wish to anticipate you," he said, "in what you might further say with truth, but perhaps do not fully know. The murderer, Brereton, was the son-in-law of Patty Cannon, it is true; but he was also the brother-in-law of myself."

"Impossible!" Judge Custis said.

"Yes, sir; I married his sister."

The old Chancellor again turned his eyes to the ground.

"Great heavens!" exclaimed the Judge; "how many curious things can be in such a little state!"

It was in the middle of the afternoon that Judge Daniel Custis rode into a small town on an undulating plain, around two sides of which, at hardly half a mile distance, ran a creek through a pretty wooded valley, and a third side was bounded by a branch of the same creek, all winding through copse, splutter-dock, lotus-flower, and marsh to the Delaware Bay.

At the centre of the town, on the swell or crest of alluvial soil, of a light sandy loam foundation, an oblong public square, divided by a north and south street, contained the principal dwellings of the place, one of which was the Delaware State Capitol, a red-brick building, a little older than the American Constitution, with a bell-crowned cupola above its centre, and thence could be seen the Delaware Bay.

Near the state-house stood the whipping-post in the corner, humble as a hitching-post, and the brick jail hid out of the way there also, like an unrepresentable servant ever cringing near his master's company. Various buildings, generally antique, surrounded this prim, Quakerly square, some brick, and with low portals, others smart, and remodelled to suit the times; some were mere wooden offices or huts, with long dormers falling from the roof-ridge nearly to the eaves, like a dingy feather from a hat-crown, with a jewel in the end; and one was an old steep-roofed hotel, painted yellow, with a long, lounging side.

At diagonal corners of this square, as far apart as its space would permit, two venerable doctors' homes still stood, which had given more repute to Delaware's little capital than its jurists or statesmen,—the former residence of Sykes the surgeon and Miller the pathologist and writer.

It was at the former of these houses, a many-windowed, tall, side-fronting house of plastered brick, with side office and centre door, that Judge Custis stopped and hitched his horse to a rack near the state-house adjoining. The sound of twittering birds fell from the large elms, willows,

and maples on the square, and Custis could see the robins running in the grass.

From the door of the two-storied side office the sound of a violin came tenderly, and the Judge waited until the tune was done, when loud exclamations of pleasure, the clapping of hands, and the stamping of feet, showed that the fiddler was not alone.

Presenting himself at the door, Judge Custis was immediately confronted by a large, tall man, fully six feet high, with a strong countenance and sandy hair, who carried the fiddle and bow in his hand, and with the other hand seized Judge Custis almost affectionately, and drew him in, crying:

"Why, how is my old friend? Goy! how does he do? Who could have expected you on this simple occasion? Sit down there and take my own chair! Not that little one—no, the big easy-chair for my old friend! Goy!"

As Judge Custis cast his eye around, to note the company, the demonstrative host, with a flash of his gray-blue eyes, whispered,

"Who is he? who is he?"

"A Custis," whispered a person hardly the better off for his drams; "I reckon he is, by the lips and skin."

"Goy!" rapidly spoke the fiddler. "Friend Custis—I know my heart does not deceive me!—let me introduce you to the very essence of grand old little Delaware: here is Bob Frame, the ardent spirit of our bar; this is James Bayard, our misguided Democratic favorite; here is Charley Marim and Secretary Harrington, and my esteemed friend Senator Ridgely, and my cousin, Chief-justice Clayton. We are all here, and all honored by such a rare guest. Goy!"

As the Judge went through the hand-shaking process, the tall, well-fed host stooped to the convivial person again, and, with his hand to the side of his mouth, and an air of solemn cunning, whispered:

"Where from?"

"Accomac, or Somerset, I reckon," muttered the other.

"Now," exclaimed the host, taking both of Judge Custis's hands, "how do our dear friends all get along in Somerset and Accomac? Where *do* you call home now, Friend Custis? How are our old friends Spence and Upshur, and Polk and Franklin and Harry Wise? Goy! how I love our neighbors below."

There was a strength of articulation and physical emphasis in the speaker that the Judge noted at once, and it was attended with a beaming of the eyes and a fine fortitude of the large jaws that made him nearly magnetic.

"And this is John M. Clayton?" said the Judge. "We are not so far off that we have not fully heard of you. And now, since I belong to a numerous family, let me identify myself, Clayton, as Daniel Custis, late Judge on the Eastern Shore."

"Judge Custis! Daniel Custis! Friends," looking around, "what an honor! Think of it! The eminent American manufacturer! The creator of our industries! The friend of Mr. Clay and the home policy! Bayard, you need not shake your head! Ridgely, pardon my patriotic enthusiasm! Look at *a man*, my friends, at last! Goy!"

As the Judge listened to various affirmations of welcome, Mr. Clayton, with one eye winked and the other resting on Lawyer Frame, the ardent spirit of the bar, made the motion with his lips:

"Cambridge?"

"No; Princess Anne."

"And dear old Princess Anne, how does she fare?"—he had again turned to the Judge—"how is the little river Wicomico—no, I mean Manokin—how does it flow? Does it flow benevolently? Does it abound in the best oysters I ever tasted? in *tarrapin*, too? How is she now? Goy!"

"Are you on your way north, Brother Custis, or going home?" the keen, black-eyed Chief-justice asked.

"No, my journey is ended. I came to Dover to be acquainted with Mr. Clayton."

"*Aunt Braner. Hyo! Come yer, Aunt Braner!*" the host cried loudly, and an old colored woman came in, closely followed by some of her grandchildren, who stood, gazing, at the door. "Take this gentleman and give him the best room in my house. The best ain't good enough for him! Take him right up and give him water and make your son bresh him, and we'll send him the best julep in Kent County. Goy!"

"De bes' room was Miss Sally's, Mr. Clayton," the old woman answered.

A sudden change came over the highly prompt and sanguine face of the host; he hesitated, wandered in the eyes, and caught himself on the words:

"No, give him the Speaker Chew room: that'll suit him best."

As the Judge followed the servant out, the young Senator emptied his mouth of a large piece of tobacco into a monster spittoon that a blind man could hardly miss, and, with a face still long and silent, and much at variance with his previous spontaneity, he absently inquired:

"What can he want? what can he want?"

One of the small negro children had meantime toddled in at the door, and, with large, liquid eyes in its solemn, desirous face, laid hands on the fiddle and looked up at Mr. Clayton.

"Bless the little child!" he suddenly said. "Wants a tune? Well!"

Placing himself in a large chair, the young Senator tilted it back till his hard, squarish head rested against the mantel, and he felt along the strings almost purposelessly, till the plaintive air came forth:

"Ye banks and braes o' bonnie Doon!  
How can ye bloom so fair?  
How can ye chant, ye little birds,  
And I so full of care?"

Thou'lt break my heart, thou bonnie bird,  
That sings beside thy mate;  
For so I sat, and so I sang,  
And wist not of my fate."

He closed his eyes on the strains, and a thickening at his throat, and movement of his broad, athletic chest, as he continued the air, showed that he was inwardly laboring with some strong emotion.

His cousin, the Chief-justice, made a signal with his hat, and one by one the sitters stole out into the square noiselessly, and went their ways, leaving the young man playing on, with the negro child at his knee, leaning there as if to spy out the living voice in his violin.

Other children came to the door—white children from the square, black children from the garden—and some ventured a little way in to hear the tender wooing of the sympathetic strings. He moved his bow mechanically, but the music sprang forth as if it knew its sister, Grief, was waiting on the chords. At last a bolder child than the rest came and pushed his elbow and said,

"Papa!"

"My boy, my dear boy!" the fiddler cried, as tears streamed down his cheeks, and he lifted the lad to his heart and kissed him.

Judge Custis, though no word passed upon the subject, saw the solitary canker at the Senator's heart—his wife's dead form in the old Presbyterian kirk-yard.

It was soon apparent to Judge Custis, from this and other silent things, that a light-hearted, affectionate, strong, yet womanly, engine of energy constituted the young Delaware lawyer-politician. Keen, cunning, impulsive, hopeful, his feet provincial, his head among the birds, he combined facility and earnestness in almost mercurial relations to each other, and the Judge saw that these must constitute a remarkable jury lawyer.

His face was shaven smooth; his throat and chin showed an early tendency to flesh; the poise of his head and thoughtful darting of his eyes and slight aqualinity of his nose indicated one who loved mental action and competition, yet drew that love from a great, healthy body that had to be watched lest it relapse into indolence. The loss of his wife so soon after marriage had been followed by nearly complete indifference to women, and he had made politics his only consolation and mistress, harnessing her like a young mare with his old roadster of the law, and driving them together in the slender confines of his principality, and then locking the law up among his office students to drive politics into the national arena at Washington.

"You require to be very neighborly, Clayton, in a small bailiwick like this?" the Judge inquired, as they strolled along the square in the soft evening.

"We have the best people in the world in Delaware, friend Custis: few traders, little law, scarcely any violence, and they are easy to please; but it is a high offence in this state not to be what is called 'a clever man.' You must stop, whatever be your errand, and smile and inquire of every man at his gate for every individual member of his household. The time lost in such kind, trifling intercourse is in the aggregate immense. But, Goy! I do love these people."

"It seems to me that you encourage that exaction."

"Well, I do. As an electioneerer, I can get away with any of 'em. Goy! Why, Jim Whitecar, Lord bless your dear soul!"—this addressed to a thick-set, sandy, uncertain-looking man who was about retreating into the Capitol Tavern—"what brings you to town, Jim?"

"It's a free country, I reckon," exclaimed the suspicious-looking man.

"Goy! that's so, Jimmy. We're all glad to see you in Dover behaving of yourself, Jim. Now don't give me any trouble this year, friend Jimmy. Behave yourself, and be an honor to your good parents that I think so much of. Oblige me, now!"



As they turned to cross the middle of the square, Clayton said:

"I'll have him at that whipping-post, hugging of it, one of these days."

"What is he?"

"A kidnapper down here in Sockum, and a bad one: a dangerous fellow, too. I hear he says if I ever push him to the extremity of his co-laborer, Joe Johnson—whom I sent to the post and then saved from cropping—that he'll kill me. Goy!"—Mr. Clayton looked around a trifle apprehensively—"I'm ready for him."

"Delaware kidnapping is a great institution," Custis said.

"It has an antiquity and extent you would hardly believe, friend Custis. Long before our independence, in the year 1760, the statutes of Delaware had to provide against it. Our laws have never permitted the domestic slave-trade with other states."

The little place seemed to have a good society, and the beauty of the young girls sitting at the doors or walking in the evening showed something of the florid North Europe skins, Batavian eyes, and rotund Dutch or Quaker figures.

As they returned to the public square, a room in the tavern, almost brilliantly lighted for that day of candles, displayed its windows to the gaze of Clayton, who exclaimed:

"Goy! that is surely John Randel, Junior."

"That distinguished engineer?" observed his visitor, who had been waiting all the evening to broach the subject of his errand. "I have the greatest admiration of him. Shall we call on him?"

"Why, yes, yes," answered Clayton, dubiously; "I'm not afraid of him. I—goy! I owe him nothing. He is such a litigious fellow, though; so persistent with it; *barratry*, *champetry*, mad incorrigibility: he's the wildest man of genius alive. But come on!"

Knocking at a door on the second floor, a sharp, prompt reply came out:

"Come!"

A middle-sized man, with a large head and broad shoulders, and cloth leggings, buttoned to above his knee, sat in a nearly naked, carpetless room, writing, his table surrounded by burning wax candles, and his countenance was proud and intense. Mr. Clayton rushed upon him and seized his hand:

"How is my friend Randel? The indefatigable litigant, the brilliant engineer, to whom ideas, goy! are like persimmons on the tree, abundant, but seldom ripe, and only good when frosted. How is he now and what is he at?"

"Stand there," spoke the engineer, "and look at me while I read the sentence I was finishing upon John Middleton Clayton of Delaware."

"Go it, Randel! Now, Custis, he'll put a wick in me and just set me afire. Goy!"

"'It is the curse of lawyers,'" the unrelaxing stranger read, "'to let their judgment for hire, from early manhood, to easy clients, or to suppress it in the cringing necessities of popular politics: hence that residue and fruit of all talents, the honest conviction of a man's bravest sagacity, perishes in lawyers' souls ere half their powers are fledged: they become the registers of other men, they think no more than wax.'"

Here Mr. Randel blew out one of the candles. The illustration was cogent. Mr. Clayton lighted it again with another candle.

"There's method in his madness, Custis," he said, with a wink. "Let me introduce my great friend to you, Randel?"

"Stop there," the engineer repeated, sternly, "till I have read my sentence. 'Seldom it is that a lawyer of useful parts, in a community as detached and pastoral as the State of Delaware, has a cause appealing to his manliness, his genius, and his avarice, like this of John Randel, Junior, civil engineer! No equal public work will probably be built in the State of Delaware during the lifetime of the said Clayton. No fee he can earn in his native state will ever have been the reward of a lawyer there like his who shall be successful with the suit of John Randel, Junior, against the Canal Company. No principle is better worth a great lawyer's vindication than that these corporations, in their infancy, shall not trample upon the private rights of a gentleman, and treat his scholarship and services like the labor of a slave.'"

"Well said and highly thought," interposed Judge Custis.

"'The said Clayton,'" continued John Randel, still reading, "'refuses the aid of his abilities to a stranger and a gentleman inhospitably treated in the State of Delaware.'"

"No, no," cried Clayton; "that is a charge against me I will not permit."

"'The said Clayton,'" read Randel, inflexibly, "'with the possibilities of light, riches, and honor for himself, and justice for a fellow-man, chooses cowardice, mediocrity—and darkness. He extinguishes my hopes and his.'"

With this, Mr. Randel, by a singular fanning of his hands and waft of his breath, put out all the candles at once and left the whole room in darkness.

Judge Custis was the first to speak after this extraordinary illustration:

"Clayton, I believe he has a good case."

"That is not the point now," Mr. Clayton said, with rising spirit and emphasis. "The point now is, 'Am I guilty of inhospitality?' Goy! that touches me as a Delawarean, and is a high offence in this little state. It is true that this suitor is a stranger. He comes to me with an introduction from my brilliant young friend, Mr. Seward, of New York, who vouches for him. But the corporation he menaces is also entitled to hospitality: it is, in the main, Philadelphia capital. Girard himself, that frugal yet useful citizen, is one of its promoters. My own state, and Maryland, too, have interests in this work. Is it the part of hospitality to be taking advantage of our small interposing geography, and laying by the heels, through our local courts, a young, struggling, and, indeed, national undertaking?"

"Let the courts of your state, which are pure, decide between us," said John Randel, Junior, relighting the candles with his tinder-box.

"No lawyer ought to refuse the trial of such a public cause because of any state scruples," Judge Custis put in, in his grandest way. "That is not national; it is not Whig, Brother Clayton." The Judge here gave his entire family power to his facial energy, and expressed the Virginian and patrician in his treatment of the Delaware *bourgeois* and plebeian. "Granted that this corporation is young and untried: let it be disciplined in time, that it may avoid more expensive mistakes in the future. No cause, to a true lawyer, is like a human cause; the time may come when the talent of the American bar will be the parasite of corporations and monopolists, but it is too early for that degradation for you and me, Senator Clayton. The rights of a man involve all progress; progress, indeed, is for man, not man for progress. As a son of Maryland, if he came helpless and penniless to me, I would not let this gentleman be sacrificed."

"If I were a rich man, Clayton would take my case," the engineer said; "my poverty is my disqualification in his eyes."

He again essayed, in a dramatic way, to fan out the candles, but his breath failed him; his hands became limp, and then hastily covered his eyes, and he sank to the table with a groan, and put his head upon it convulsively.

"Gentlemen," he uttered, in a voice touching by its distress, "oh! gentlemen, professional life—my art—is, indeed, a tragedy."

The easy sensibilities of Judge Custis were at once moved. Senator Clayton, looking from one to the other in nervous indecision, seeing Custis's dewy eyes, and Randel's proud breaking down, was himself carried away, and shouted:

"I goy! This is a conspiracy. But, Randel, I'll take your case; I can't see a man cry. Goy!"

As they all arose sympathetically and shook hands, a knock came on the door, and there was a call for Mr. Clayton. He returned in a few minutes, with a rather grim countenance, and said:

"Randel, I have just declined a big round retaining-fee to defend the very suit your tears and Brother Custis's have persuaded me to prosecute. But, goy! a tear always robbed me of a dollar."

"This sympathy to-day will make you an independent man for life," exclaimed the engineer.

"I have done Milburn's first errand right," Judge Custis thought; "five minutes' delay would have been fatal."

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## CHAPTER XXXII.

### GARTER-SNAKES.

At Princess Anne Vesta had moved her husband to Teackle Hall, and he occupied her father's room and seemed to be growing better, though the doctor said that he had best be sent to the hills somewhere.

The free woman, Mary, whom Jimmy Phœbus sent to Vesta, had arrived very opportunely, and took Aunt Hominy's place in the kitchen, where all the children's echoes were gone, the poor woman's own bereavement thrilling the ears of Virgie, Roxy, and Vesta herself; but, alas! her tale was not legal testimony, because she was a little black.

Jack Wonnell had found unexpected favor in Meshach Milburn's eyes, and was appointed to sleep in the store and watch it; and there Roxy came down in the twilights, and, with pity more than affection, heard him weave the illusion of his love for her, willing to be amused by it, because it was so sincere with him; for Jack was all lover, and meek and artful, bold and domestic, soft and outlawed, as the houseless Thomas cat that makes highways of the fences, and woos the demurest kitten forth by the magic of his purring.

"Roxy," said Jack, "I'm a-goin' to git you free, gal, fur I 'spect Meshach Milburn will give me a pile o' money fur a-watchin' of the sto'. Then we'll go to Canaday, whar, I hearn tell, color ain't no pizen, an' we'll love like the white doves an' the brown, that both makes the same coo, so happy they is."

"Jack," said the soft-eyed, pitying maid, "you're a pore foolish fellow, but I like to hear you talk. I reckon there is no harm in you. Virgie is in love, too, with a white man, but you mustn't breathe it."

"Never," said Jack, making solemn motions with his eyes, and cuddling closer in dead earnest of sympathy. "Hope I may die! Can't tell, to save my life! Who-oo! Tell me, Roxy!"

"Pore sister Virgie, she was made to love, and, though it's hopeless, I think she loves Mr. Tilghman, our minister, because he loved Miss Vesty once, and Virgie worships Miss Vesty like her sister."

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Vesta told the story of Mary, the free woman, to her husband, who listened closely and said:

"I know of but one thing, my darling, that will make such ignorance and cruelty fade out in the forests of this peninsula: an iron road. A new thing, called the railroad-engine, has just been made by an Englishman, one George Stephenson, and a specimen of it has been sent to New York, where I have had it examined. The errand your father went to do for me, he has done well. I shall send him to Annapolis next, to get a charter for a railroad up this peninsula that will pass inside the line of Maryland, and penetrate every kidnapping settlement hidden there, and light, intercourse, and law shall exterminate such barracoons as Johnson's."

Vesta was glad to hear her father praised by her husband, and hopes rekindled of some happier family reunion, when she should feel the heartache die within her that now raged intermittently during her vestal honeymoon. A letter came on the fourth day which dashed these hopes to the ground, and it was as follows:

"DORCHESTER COUNTY, MD., *October—*, 1829.

"*Darling Niece*,—Idol of my heart, let me begin by entreating you to take a conservative course when I break the sad intelligence to you of the death of my dear sister, Lucy, at Cambridge, yesterday, of the heart disease. She was the star of the house of McLane. She is gone. 'Vengeance is mine,' saith the Lord, and I shall take a conservative though *consistent* course on the parties who have inflicted this injury upon you, my dear niece, and upon your calm and collected, if stricken, uncle.

"The Lord moves in a *mysterious* way, his wonders to perform,' and his humble instruments require only to be *inflexible and conservative* to do all things well. Be assured that *righteousness* shall be done upon the adversaries of our family, and *that* right speedily. My own grief is composed in the satisfaction I shall take, and the assurance that your sainted mother is where the wicked cease from troubling.

"The financial arrangements of my dear sister were of the most conservative and high-toned character, as was to have been expected of her.

"You may be desirous, my outraged, but, I hope, still *spirited*, idol, to hear the particulars of Lucy's death. She did not reach Cambridge till near midnight, having made the long journey from Princess Anne without fitting companions, and, in the excited state of her feelings, after she left Vienna in the evening, a depression of the spirits, accompanied by a fluttering of the heart, came on, and rapidly increased, and, by the time she arrived at our relatives', she was nearly dead with nervous apprehension and weakness. On seeing me, she revived sufficiently to make her will in the most *sisterly* and conservative manner.

"A physician was procured, but he pronounced her system so debilitated and detoned as hardly probable to outride the shock, the nervous centres being depressed and atrophy setting in.

"She talked incessantly about the *Entailed Hat*, and said it was a permanent shadow and weight upon your heart, and made me promise to *mash* it, if it could conservatively be done.

"I read to my dear sister from *the Book of Books*, and tried to compose her feelings, but she broke out ever and anon, 'Oh, Brother Allan! to think I have raised children to be bought and sold, and married to foresters and trash.' She was deeply sensitive as to what would be said about it in Baltimore.

"Just before she died, she said, 'Do not bury me at Princess Anne, where that fiend can come near me with his frightful Hat! Take me to Baltimore, where there are no bog-ores, nor old family chattels, to disturb the respectability of death. Apologize for my daughter, and *do her justice*.'

"And so this grand woman died, in the confidence of a blessed immortality, leaving us to vindicate her motives and continue her conservative course, and to meet at her funeral next Friday, at our church in Baltimore, where Rev. John Breckenridge will preach the funeral sermon over this murdered saint.

"With conservative, yet proud, grief,  
"Affectionately, your uncle,  
"ALLAN McLANE."

"Oh, sir!" Vesta exclaimed, turning blindly towards her husband; "mother is dead. Where can I turn?"

"Where but to me, poor soul!" Milburn replied, knowing nothing of Mrs. Custis's late feelings against him. "Your father shall be notified, and I am able to attend the funeral with you."

"It is in Baltimore," Vesta sobbed.

"Well, honey, there I am ordered by the doctor to go, and get above the line of malaria, in the hills. I can make the effort now."

Her grief and loneliness deprived her of the will to refuse him. Roxy was selected to be her mistress's maid upon the journey, and William Tilghman and Rhoda Holland were to take them in the family carriage down to Whitehaven landing for the evening steamer.

Jack Wonnell, in officious zeal to be useful, gathered flowers, and hung around Teackle Hall to run errands; and, in order not to exasperate Vesta's husband, appeared bareheaded as the party set off, Milburn's hat-box being one of the articles of travel, and Milburn vouchsafing these words to Jack:

"There is a dollar for you, Mr. Wonnell. I rely upon you to watch my old store and conduct yourself like a man."

"I'll do it," answered Jack, grinning and blushing; "hope I may die! Good-bye, Miss Vesty. Purty Roxy, don't you forgit me 'way off thair in Balt'mer. I'll teach Tom to sing your name befo' you ever see me agin."

He waved his arms, with real tears dimming his vision, and Roxy affected to shed some tears also, as she waved good-bye to Virgie, whose eyes were turned with wistful pain upon the beautiful face of her mistress receding down the vista. Vesta threw her a kiss and reclined her head upon her husband's shoulder.

That evening, an hour before the carriage was to return, Virgie and the free woman, Mary, walked together down to Milburn's store, to see if Jack Wonnell was on the watch. As they trode in the soft grass and sand under the old storehouse they saw the bell-crowned hat—a new one, brought from the ancient stock that very day—shining glossily on Wonnell's high, eccentric head, as he sat in the hollow window of the old storehouse and talked to the mocking-bird, which he was feeding with a clam-shell full of boiled potato and egg, and some blue haws.

"Tom, say 'Roxy,' an' I'll give ye some, Tommy! Now, boy! 'Roxy, Roxy, purty Roxy! *purty* Roxy! Poor ole Jack! poor ole Jack!"

The bird flew around Wonnell's head, biting at the hat which stood in such elegant irrelevance to the remainder of his dress, and cried, "Meshach, he! he! he! Vesty, she! Vesty, Meshach! Vesty, Meshach!" but said nothing the village vagrant would teach it. He showed the patience idleness can well afford, and, feeding it a little, or withholding the food awhile, continued to plead and teach:

"'Roxy, Roxy, purty Roxy! Poor, pore Jack! pore Jack!' Now, Tom, say 'Roxy, Roxy, pore Jack!'"

The bird flew and struck, and sang a little, very niggardly, and so, as the lights in the west sank and faded, the shiftless lover continued in vain to seek to give the bird one note more than the magician, his master, had taught.

The stars modestly appeared in the soft heavens, and Princess Anne gathered its roofs together like a camp of camels in the desert, and, with an occasional bleat or bark or human sound, seemed dozing out the soft fall night, absorbed, perhaps, in the spreading news of Mrs. Custis's death and Vesta's wedding-journey, that had to be taken at last.

"Miss Virgie," said the woman Mary—ten years her senior, but comely still—"have you ever loved like me? Oh, I had a kind husband, and, helpless as I was, I tried to love once more. Maybe it was a sin."

"I love my mistress as if she was myself," Virgie said; "I feel as if, in heaven, before we came here, I was with her, Mary! I love her father, too, as if he was not my master, but my friend. Oh, how I love them all! But what can I do to show my love—poor naked slave that I am? They say they will soon set me free. Mary, how do people feel when they are free?"

"They don't appreciate it," sighed Mary. "They go and put themselves in captivity again, like selfish things: they falls in love."

"But to love and be free!" Virgie said, her bosom glowing in the thought till her rich eyes seemed

to shed warmth and starlight on her companion's face; "to give your own free love to some one and feel him grateful for it: what a gift and what a joy is that! He might be thankful for it, and, seeing how pure it was, he might respect me."

"Who is it, Virgie?" Mary said.

"Whoever would love me like a white girl!" the ardent slave softly exclaimed. "It must be some one who does not despise me. I hear Miss Vesta's beau, Master William, read the beautiful service, with his sweet, submissive face, and I think to myself, 'How freely he might have my heart to comfort his if he would take it like a gentleman!' I would be his slave to make him happy, if he could love me purely, like my mother! Oh, my mother, whose name I do not know! where is the tie that fastens me to heaven? Did my father love me?"

"Pore Jack! pore Jack! Sing 'Roxy, Roxy, Roxy,' Tom!" coaxed Wonnell above to the sleepy bird.

"Whoever was your father, Virgie, your mother's love for you was pure. God makes the wickedest love their children, because he is the Father to all the fatherless."

"Oh! could my own father have brought me into the world and hated me?" Virgie said. "They say I am almost beautiful. Will he who gave me life never call me his, and say, 'My daughter, come to my respect, rest on my heart, and take my name'?"

"Poor Virgie!" sighed Mary; "remember we are black! We hardly ever have fathers: they is for white people."

"Dog my hide!" mumbled Wonnell, above, "ef a bird ain't a perverse critter. Purty Roxy won't think I'm smart a bit ef I can't make Tom say 'Roxy, Roxy, Roxy! Pore Jack!'"

"I am almost white," Virgie continued; "I want to be all white. Why can't I be so? The Lord knows my heart is white, and full of holy, unselfish love."

"Pore chile!" Mary said; "we shall all be washed and made white in the Lamb's blood, Virgie. That's where your soul pints you to, dear young lady. I know it ain't pride and rebellion in you: it's like I'm looking at my baby, white as snow to me and God now."

"Hush!" said Virgie, trembling, "what voice is that?"

There was an old willow-tree in a recessed spot at the end of the store, and by it were two sheds or small buildings, now disused, into one of which, with a door low to the ground, Mary drew Virgie, and they listened to a low voice saying,

"Dave, air your pops well slugged?"

"Yes, Mars Joe."

"Allan McLane pays fur the job?"

"Yes, Mars Joe."

"You can't mistake him, Dave. No shap is worn like that nowadays. Look only fur his headpiece, and aim well!"

"Yes, Mars Joe."

"Fur me," continued the other voice, "I'll go right to the tavern an' prove an *alibi*. My lay is to take the house gal that old Gripefist's young wife thinks so much of. I'll snake her out to-night. She's the property of Allan McLane, left him in his sister's will. They found on her body the paper giving the gal to the dead woman only two days before. She's Allan's to-morrow, but to-night she's mine!"

A sensual, sucking, chuckling sound, like a kiss made upon the back of his own hand, followed this significant threat; and Mary, placing her hand over the sinking slave girl's mouth, held her motionless.

"Tommy, Tommy! sing 'Roxy, Roxy, Roxy! Pore Jack! Pore Jack!' Sing, Tommy, sing!"

"*There*," whispered the white man, softly, and was gone.

Mary breathed only the words to Virgie, "*Kidnappers—come!*" and they glided from the old tenement unobserved, and entered the copse along the stream.

"Pore Jack! Pore Jack! His leetle Roxy's gone away. Pore Jack! Roxy! Roxy! Roxy!" the mourner at the window above chattered sleepily to the nodding bird.

The negro at the corner of the old warehouse, half covered by the willow's shade, peered up with blood-shotten eyes to distinguish the covering on the bird-tamer's head.

He saw Jack Wonnell sitting backward on the window-frame, swaying in and out, as he lazily tempted the mocking-bird to sing, and once the bell-crown hat, so singular to view, came in full relief against the gray sky.

"It's ole Meshach," said the negro, silently, with desperate eyes. "I hoped it wasn't. Dar is de hat, sho!"

He cocked his huge horse-pistol, and took aim directly from below.

"Pore Jack! Pore Jack! I reckon Roxy won't have pore Jack, caze Tommy won't sing. Sing, Tommy, little Roxy's pet: 'Pore Jack! Pore—'"

The great horse-pistol boomed on the night, and in the smoke the negro rushed into the bush and sought the fields.

Down from his seat in the window-sill the witless villager came backward, all bestrewn, measuring his body in the sand, where he lay, silent as the other shadows, with his arms extended in the frenzy of death, and his mouth wide open and flowing blood.

Jack Wonnell had paid the penalty of being out of fashion.

The mocking-bird, aroused by the loud report, leaped into the empty window-sill to seek his tutor, and set up the lesson he had learned too late:

"Poor Jack! Poor Jack! Roxy! Roxy! Roxy!" came screaming on the night, and all was still.

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William Tilghman was driving back from Whitehaven in the melancholy thoughts inspired by the departure of his cousin, whom he had at last seen go into the great wilderness of the world the passive companion of her husband, like the wife of Cain, driven forth with him, when the carriage was arrested at the ancient Presbyterian church—which overlooked Princess Anne from the opposite bank of the little river—by a woman almost throwing herself under the wheels.

"Why, Lord sakes! it's our Virgie!" cried Rhoda Holland.

The girl, with all the energy of dread, sprang into the carriage by William Tilghman's side and threw her arms around him:

"Save me! Save me!"

"What ails you, Virgie?" cried the young man, assuringly. "You are in no danger, child!"

"I am sold," the girl gasped, with terror on her tongue and in her wild eyeballs. "Miss Vesty's sold me to her Uncle Allan. He's sent the kidnappers after me. They're yonder, in Princess Anne. Oh, drive me to the North, to the swamps, anywhere but there!"

"I know your mistress made you over to her mother, Virgie, for a precaution, fearing you might not be safe in her own hands. She told me so, and asked if the death of her mother could possibly affect you."

"Oh, it has!" the girl whispered. "Mary knows the kidnapper that's come for me. He is the same that stole Hominy and the children. He kept her chained on an island. He says he'll have me to-night, to do as he pleases. Master McLane lets him have me!"

The girl, in her terror, as the carriage had descended the hill already and crossed the Manokin, seized the reins in Tilghman's hands and drew them with such frenzy that the horses, as they came to Meshach Milburn's store, were pulled into the open area before it, where something in their surprise or lying on the ground gave them immediate fright, and they dashed at a gallop into Front Street, the wheels passing over an object by the old storehouse that nearly upset the carriage.

The street they took for their run crossed a small arm of the Manokin, and led up to a gentleman's gate; but before this brook was crossed Tilghman, an experienced horseman and driver, had reined the flying animals into a nearly unoccupied street, called Back Alley, parallel with the main street of Princess Anne, but hidden from it by houses and gardens, and almost in a moment of time the whole town had been cleared, with hardly a person in it aware of such a vehicle going past.

It was a real runaway, but Tilghman, in a cool, gentle voice, like a brook's music, told the girls to sit perfectly still, as they had a clear, level road; and, seeing that he could not stop the animals by any mere exercise of strength, without danger to his harness, he waited for their power to wear out, or their fears to subside.

Rhoda Holland was ashamed to scream, if her pride was not too well aroused already in the presence of the muscular young minister, sitting there like an artillery teamster driving into battle, and his nostrils and jaws delineated in the gray air, expressed almost the joy he had long put by of following the hounds in the autumn fox-hunts, where Judge Custis said he had been the perfect pattern of a rider.

As for Virgie, she felt no fear of wild horses, since they were leaving behind the bloody hunters of men and women, and she almost wished it was herself alone, dashing at that frightful pace to destruction, until the young man, mindful, perhaps, of his mistress, torn from his sight to inhabit another's arms, and feeling that this poor quadroon was dear as a sister to Vesta's heart, bent down in the midst of his apprehensions and kissed the slave girl pityingly.

Then, with an instant's greater torrent of tears, a sense of rest and man's respect fell upon Virgie's soul, and she paid no heed to time or dangers till the carriage came to a stop in the deep forest sands several miles east of Princess Anne.

"William," said Rhoda Holland, "what air we to do to save Virgie? Uncle Meshach's gone. Jedge Custis is nobody knows whar, now. This yer Allan McLane, Aunt Vesty says, is dreffle snifflin' an' severe. I think it's a conspiracy to steal Virgie when they's all away. Misc Somers would take keer of her, but I'm afraid she'd tell somebody."

"Are you sure that you saw and heard truly?" the minister said to Virgie.

"Oh, yes. I saw the same man at Mr. Milburn's the day he was taken sick. He looked at me a low, familiar look, and muttered something evil. Mary knew him too well. Oh, do not take me back to Princess Anne. I will never go there again."

"It may be true," Tilghman reflected. "It probably *is* true. Vesta has no faith in Allan McLane. She says he makes money in the negro trade, with all his religious formality. He is the trustee already of Mrs. Custis's estate; no doubt, the administrator by will. He may have sent Joe Johnson to kidnap Virgie, under color of his right, and Johnson would abuse anybody. Vesta will never forgive us if we let Virgie go to him."

"But I am a slave," Virgie sobbed. "Oh, my Lord! to think I am not Miss Vesta's, but a strange man's, slave. How could she give me away!"

"It was an error of judgment," Tilghman replied. "She could not anticipate her mother's immediate death. Yet there, where she thought you safest, you were most in peril."

They had now crossed the Dividing creek into Worcester County, and halted to cool the horses off at the same old spring, under the gum-tree, where Meshach Milburn stopped, the evening he went to the Furnace village.

"William," Rhoda Holland spoke, "if Virgie is McLane's slave you can't keep him from a-takin' her. She can't go back to Prencess Anne at all."

"I don't mean that she shall, Rhoda. I know you are a brave woman, and we will drive her to-night to Snow Hill, and leave her there with a nurse, a free woman, once belonging to my family, and this nurse has a husband who is said to be a conductor on what is called the Underground Road to the free states."

"Lord sakes! a Abolitionist?"

"I hope so," Tilghman said. "I know Vesta wants to set this girl free, and there is no way to do it, and respect her womanhood, but by giving her a wild beast's chance to run."

"My, my! And you a minister of the Gospil, William!"

"Yes, of the Gospel that tells me how to be a neighbor to my neighbor." The young man's eyes flashed. "I never felt so humiliated for my cloth and for my country as now. To think how many men preach the Gospel of God all their lives long, and have never set a living soul free. I will do one such Christian felony, by the help of Christ."

As he spoke, the sound of a corn-stalk fiddle, and of foresters' naked feet dancing on the floor of the old Milburn cabin, came crooning out in the night.

In another hour they were at the Furnace village, its blast gone out, its lines of huts deserted, no human soul to be seen; and the mill-pond, lying like a parchment under the funereal cypress-trees, seemed stained with the blood of the bog-ores that oozed upward from the depths like the corpse of murdered Enterprise, suffocated in Meshach Milburn's foreclosure.

A sense of desolation filled them all; but what was it, in either of the white twain, to the bursting ties of that lovely quadroon, raised like a lily in the household heat of kindness and the breath of purity, to be cast forth like a witch, on a moment's information, and consigned to the ponds and night-damps?

The horses toiled through the sand till an open country of farms gave better roads, and at ten o'clock at night they crossed the Pocomoke at Snow Hill, and stopped at a gate before a neat, whitewashed, one-story house, with a large stack-chimney over the centre, and two doors and a single window in the front. It stood in a short street leading to the river, whose splutter-docks and reeds were seen near by among the masts of vessels and the mounds of sawdust.

Virgie kissed Rhoda good-night, and descended with Mr. Tilghman, who opened a gate, and, going up some steps, knocked at a vine-environed door. A window opened and there was a parley, and the door soon afterwards unclosed softly and admitted them.

"Oh, may God let you know some night the pure bed and sleep you have brought me to!" Virgie whispered. "God bless you for the kiss you gave me, my dear white playmate, that you are not ashamed of! Oh, my heart is bursting: what can I say?"

"The people here will hide you, or slip you forward to-morrow night," the young minister said. "Here is money, Virgie, to pay your way. You can write, and write to your young mistress wherever you go."

"Tell her," said the runaway girl, "that I loved her dearly. Oh, dear old Teackle Hall! shall I ever see you again? William, I shall get my freedom, or die on the road to it."

"That is the spirit," the minister said; "we will buy it for you if we can, but get it for yourself if you

can do it."

He kissed her again, with the instinct of a father to a child, and hastened to his horses and the hotel.

As Tilghman and Rhoda, at the earliest dawn, started for Princess Anne, the young girl suddenly turned and kissed her minister.

"Thar!" she said, "I think you just looked magnificens last night, sittin' behine them critters, like Death on the plale horse, an' lovin' Aunt Vesty, though she's gone away an' quit you, enough to fight for her pore, bright-skinned gal. I wish somebody would love *me* like that!"

"So you could quit him, too, Rhoda?"

"Well, William, I likes beaus that's couragelis! You're splendid a-preachin', but I like you better drivin' and showin' your excitemins."

"You are a beautiful girl," the clergyman said; "suppose you try to like me better."

The great question, being thus opened, was not disposed of when they reached Princess Anne, and quietly stabled the horses.

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## CHAPTER XXXIII.

### HONEYMOON.

Meanwhile the steamer was taking Vesta and her husband across the Chesapeake Bay in the night—that greatest, gentlest indentation in the coast of the United States; at once river and sound, fiord and sea, smooth as the mill-pond, and full of life as the nutritious milk of the mother, and on whose breast a brood of rivers lay and suckled without rivalry—the long Susquehanna, James, and Potomac; the short, thick Choptank, Chester, and Patapsco; and, to the flying wildswan, its arborage looked like a vast pine-tree, with boughs of snow, climbing two hundred miles from its roots in the land of corn and cotton into the golden cloud of Northern grain and hay.

Upon one broken horn of this fruitful bay hung Baltimore, like an eagle's nest upon the pine, seizing the point of indentation that brought it nearest to the fertile upland and the valley outlets of the North and West, where the toil-loving Germans burnished their farms with women's hands, and sent their long bowed teams to market on as many turnpikes as the Chesapeake had rivers.

At morning Vesta looked upon the fleet of little sail lying in the basin of the city, among larger ships and arks and barges, and saw Federal Hill's red clay rising a hundred feet above the piers, and the spotless monument to Washington resting its base as high above the tide, on a nearly naked bluff. The rich sunrise fell on the streaked flag of the republic at the mast on Fort McHenry, and the garrison band was playing the very anthem that lawyer Key had written in the elation of victory, though a prisoner in the enemy's hands. Alas! how many a prisoner in the enemy's hands was doing tribute to that flag from cotton-field and rice-swamp, tobacco land and corn-row, pouring the poetry of his loyalty and toil to the very emblem of his degradation!

Vesta heard, with both satisfaction and sorrow, at Barnum's Hotel that her husband was too ill to attend the funeral, and must keep his room and fire; she needed his comfort and devotion in her sorrow, but upon her dead mother's bier seemed to stand the injunction against that fateful hat he had brought with him; and yet she pitied him that he must stay alone, unknown, unrelated, chattering with the chill or burning without complaint.

"God send you sympathy from the angels like you, my darling!" Milburn said. "I know what it is to lose a mother."

Escorts in plenty waited on Vesta, but she wished she could find some kinsman of her husband, if ever so poor, to take his arm to the church and burial-ground; and at the news that her uncle Allan McLane had not arrived, and would not, probably, now be present, she felt another blending of relief and apprehension, because her husband might not to-day be exasperated by him, yet his relations to her mother's property would still remain unknown,—and Vesta feared for Virgie.

In the same impulse which had made her retain Teackle Hall, to secure it against her father's careless business methods, she had made Virgie over to her mother, to place her, apparently, farther from danger, never supposing that in those prudent hands the enemy might insinuate; but Death, the deathless enemy, was filching everywhere, and though she could not see why Virgie could be persecuted, Vesta now wished she had set her free.

The girl belonged to her mother's estate: suppose Allan McLane was the administrator of it? Suppose, indeed, he was the heir? Vesta's heart fell, as she considered that a woman had best let business alone.

The young bride-mourner was an object of mingled admiration and sympathy as she leaned on the arm of a kinsman and entered the Presbyterian kirk. She was considered one of the great beauties of Maryland, and the young Robert Breckenridge, fresh from Kentucky, on a visit to his



brother, the pastor, thought he had never seen Vesta's equal even in Kentucky; and, as he gazed through her mourning veil, the pastor's Delaware wife heard him whisper, "Divinity itself!"

The clear olive skin, eyes of gray twilight, eyebrows like midnight's own arches, and luxuriant hair, were touched by grief as if a goddess suffered; and, in her deep mourning robes, Vesta seemed a monarch's daughter about to pass through some convent to her sainthood.

She had the height to give dignity to this beauty, and the grace to lift pathos above weakness.

The minister's musical tones were wrought to consonance with this noble human model, and he spoke of that ideal motherhood which, to every child at the bier, seems real as the dripping bucket at the fairy's well—of mother's love, trials, weakness, and immortality; of the absence of her sympathy making the first great bereavement in life's progress; of her nature abiding in us and her spirit hovering over, while we live.

Painted in the soft hues of personal experience, prescribed to her needs with a physician's art, doing all that funeral talk can do to raise the final tears from among the heartstrings and pour them in oblation upon the corpse, the pastor's consolation had the effect of some mesmeric hand that weakens our systems while it sublimates our feelings, and Vesta's female nature was almost broken down.

Where could she lean for the close sympathy befitting such grief? Her father was not here, and she had none but her husband—the husband of less than a week, but still the nearest to her need.

On him she allowed herself to rest that solemn evening after her mother's body had sought the ground. He was well again, for the time.

For the first time she was alone with him, and, as the shadows narrowed their chamber, and they sat with no other light than a little wood smouldering in the grate, he came to her and began to talk of childhood and his own mother, of the little sorrows his mother had shared with him, of domestic disagreements and happy love-making anew; how men feel when the partner of life is taken away, and children know not the meaning of Death, that has done so awful a thing upon the inoffensive one; but above all is shining, Meshach said, the star of motherhood, faintly lighting our way, mellowing our souls, and basking on the waters.

As he continued, and she could not see him, but only hear the plaintiveness of his voice, it became comfortable to hear him speak, and she grew more passive, a sense of resignation fell upon her heart, and of gratitude to him that could divine her loss so touchingly; and, like a child, she rested upon his side, upon his knee, and in his arms at last. Not fond nor yet infatuated, but subsiding and consenting, accepting her destiny like a myriad of women that are neither oppressed nor tender, but with reluctance, yield, she passed out of grief to wifedom, like one tired and in a dream.

Visits of consolation were made by a few old friends for a day or two succeeding. The Rev. Henry Lyon Davis, late president of the college at Annapolis, came, bringing his handsome boy of twelve, Master Harry Winter Davis. The attorney-general of Maryland, Mr. Roger Taney, came with Mr. George Brown, the banker. Commodore Decatur's widow sent a mourning token, and the Honorable William Wirt brought Mr. Robert Smith, once the secretary of state at Washington.

These and others, looking at Meshach Milburn a little oddly, found him, on acquaintance, a man of sense; but the McLanes who called were either supercilious or studiously avoided the groom.

An invitation came from Arlington House to Vesta, to bring Mr. Milburn there; and, as they proceeded out the Washington road in a private carriage, they observed Mr. Ross Winans's friction-wheel car, with nearly forty people in it, making its trial trip behind a horse at a gallop. At the Relay House, where the horses on the railroad were changed, Milburn remarked, gazing up the Patapsco valley:

"My wife, we are here at the birth of this little iron highway. If our vision was great enough, we might see the mighty things that may happen upon it: servile insurrection, sectional war, great armies riding to great battles, thousands of emigrants drawn to the West. We shall die, but generations after us this road will grow and continue, like a vein of iron, whose length and uses no man can measure."

The road to Washington was in places good, and often turned in among the pines. At Riverdale they saw the deer of Mr. George Calvert, a descendant of one of the Lords Baltimore, browsing in his park, and his great four-in-hand carriage was going in the lodge-gates from a state visit to the Custises. Passing direct to Georgetown from Bladensburg, they encountered General Jackson, taking his evening ride on horseback, and saw the chasm of the new canal being dug along the Potomac, and then, crossing Mason's ferry, they were set down at Arlington House an hour after dark.

The hospitable, harmless proprietor welcomed them into the huge edifice, half temple, half barn, among his elaborate daubs of pictures, and furniture and relics of Custis and Washingtonian times. He was nearly fifty years of age, of Indian features, but rather weak face, like one whose only substantiality was in his ancestors, and Vesta, placing him beside her husband, reflected that a similar inbreeding had produced a similarity in the two men, both of a sallow and bilious attenuation; but Milburn, beside her kinsman Custis, was like a bold wolf beside a vacant-visaged sheep.

Yet these men liked each other immediately, Milburn's intelligence and money, and real reverence for the great man who had adopted Mr. Custis, giving him admittance to the latter's fancy.

They strolled through those beautiful woods, one day to become a grove of sepulture for an army of dead, while Vesta, in the dwelling, talked with her cousins, and with the graceful Lieutenant Lee, who was courting Mary Custis.

It was a happy domestic life, and in the host's veins ran the blood of the Calverts, though not of the legitimate line.

It was suggested to go to the Capitol, and Mr. Milburn, growing daily better in the hill region, went also, and wore his steeple hat, greatly to the edification of Mr. Custis, who revelled in such antiquities. Vesta heard the ladies whispering, when they returned, that a parcel of boys and negroes had followed the hat, laughing and jeering, and had finally driven the party to their carriage. This, and her husband's impatience to return to his business, hastened their departure from Arlington.

They took the steamer down the Potomac, and, as they came off the mouth of St. Mary's River, Milburn donned his Raleigh's hat again, and stood on deck, looking at the lights about the old Priest's House, where the capital of Lord Baltimore lay, a naked plain and a few starveling mementoes, within the bight of a sandy point that faced the archipelago of the Eastern Shore.

"My hat," said Milburn to himself, "is old as yonder town, and better preserved. The Calverts and Milburns have married into Mrs. Washington's kin. Does my wife love me?"

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## CHAPTER XXXIV.

### THE ORDEAL.

When Levin Dennis awoke in the bottom of the old wagon it was being rapidly driven, and Van Dorn's voice from the driver's seat was heard to say, without its usual lisp and Spanish interjection:

"Whitecar, is your brother at Dover sure of his game?"

"Cock sure, Cap'n. Got 'em tree'd! Best domestic stock in the town thar, an' the purtiest yaller gals: I know that suits *you*, Cap'n!"

"Have they arms?"

"Not a trigger. We trap 'em at one of their 'festivals.' No, sir, niggers won't scrimmage."

"We assemble at Devil Jim Clark's," said Van Dorn, and passed by with a crack of his whip.

Levin, whom some friendly hand had wrapped in a bearskin coat—he had seen one like it upon Van Dorn—next heard the slaver speak to another party he had overtaken:

"Melson?"

"Ay yi!"

"Milman?"

"Ah! boy."

"You get your orders at Devil Jim Clark's!"

The stars were out, yet the night was rich in large, fleecy clouds, as if heaven were hurrying onward too. Levin lay on his back, jostled by the rough wagon, but, being perfectly sober now, he was more reasoning and courageous, and his new-found love impelled him to self-preservation. He might have rolled out of the vehicle and into the woods, and at least saved himself from committing further crime, but how would he see Hulda any more—Hulda, in danger, perhaps? Thus, even to ignorance, love brings understanding, and Levin began to ask himself the cause of his own misery. He knew it was liquor, yet what made him drink if not a disposition too easily led? Even now he was under almost voluntary subjection to the bandit in the wagon, whose voice he heard blandly command again to some pair he had caught up to:

"Tindel?"

"Tackle 'em, Cap'n Van! Tackle 'em!"

"You are not to be in peril to-night, so keep your spirits. I expect you to look out for the cords, gags, and fastenings generally!"

"Tackle 'em, Captin; oh, tackle 'em!"

"You and Buck Ransom there—"

"Politely, Captain; politely, sir!" exclaimed an insinuating voice from a negro rider.

"Are to meet us all at Devil Jim's!"

"Tackle 'em, Captin!"

"Politely, Captain!"

As Van Dorn urged his way to the head of the line, Levin looked out silently upon the flat country of forest and a few poor farms, drained imperfectly by some ditches of the Choptank. He supposed it might be almost midnight, from the position of those brilliant constellations which shone down equally upon his mother and himself—she in her innocence and he in his anxiety—and shone, also, perhaps, upon his poor father's grave in isle or ocean.

Within an hour blood was to be shed, no doubt, and rapine done, and he knew not the road to escape by nor the hole to hide in. Yet in that hour he had to make his choice,—to fight for liberty, or go to the jail, the whipping-post, or, perhaps, the gallows.

Levin considered ruefully his vagrant past, and how little could be said in extenuation of him in a court of justice, except by his mother's faith, which was no more evidence than a negro's oath.

Once it arose in his mind to surprise Van Dorn, overcome him, cast him out in a ditch, and drive to some one of the little farmhouses and rest, till day should give him his whereabouts and remedy.

Levin was not a coward, and his muscles were hard, and his feet could cling to a smooth plank like a bird's to a bough; but his heart relented to the fierce, soft man so unsuspectingly sitting with his back to him, when Levin reflected that he must, perhaps, put an end to Van Dorn's life with his sailor's knife, if they grappled at all, and this day expiring Van Dorn had paid a debt for him to the widow whose son was next overtaken, and who cried, forwardly, without being addressed:

"Van Dorn, what you goin' to give me if I git a nigger?"

"This!" said Van Dorn, without a pause, reaching the boy a measured blow with his whip-lash on the shoulder that made him literally fall from the mule and grovel with pain.

"Discipline is what your mother failed to give you, *reprobo*. Manners I shall teach you. Fall in the rear!"

Owen Daw crawled desperately on his mule and obeyed without parley, but his audacity soon recovered enough to force his animal up to the wagon tail and open whispered communications with Levin there.

Nothing had passed them for hours that Levin had seen, when suddenly a horseman at a rapid lope stopped the wagon, and a hoarse negro voice muttered:

"How de do, now? See me! see me!"

"Derrick Molleston?" spoke Van Dorn.

"See me! see me!"

"Get down and ride with me. Levin, are you awake?"

"Yes, Captain."

"Take this man's horse and ride him. John Sorden is ahead. It will stretch your chilled limbs."

"May I go with him?" asked Owen Daw, in his Celtic accent, quite cringing now.

"Not unless he wants you."

"Come, then," Levin obligingly said.

While the two youths were still lingering by the wagon they heard these words:

"Have you arranged everything with Whitecar and Devil Jim?"

"See me! see me!"—apparently meaning, "Rely upon me."

"Is Greenley ready to make the diversion if any attack be made upon us?"

"See me! see me! His gallus is up and he'd burn de world."

"This Lawyer Clayton?"

"See me! see me! He gives a big party, Aunt Braner tole me. A judge is dar from Prencess Anne, an' liquor a-plenty. See me! see me!"

"The white people absolutely gone from Cowgill House?"

"See me! It's nigh half a mile outen de town. Dar's forty tousand dollars, if dar's a cent, at dat festibal: gals more'n half white, men dat can read an' preach: de cream of Kent County. See me! see me!"

"And not a suspicion of our coming?"

"See me! O see me!" hoarsely said the negro; "innocent as de unborn. To-night's deir las' night!"

Levin trembled as these merciless words reached his ears, but Owen Daw seemed to forget his affront at the tidings, and chuckled to Levin as they trotted away:

"Bet you I git a better nigger nor you!"

"Oh, shame, Owen Daw! Your mother was saved to-day from bein' turned out of doors by my pity. Think of robbin' these niggers of their freedom! What have they done?"

"Been niggers!" exclaimed Owen Daw. "That's enough!"

"What will you do, Owen, to help your poor mother?"

"Wait till I git big enough, bedad, an' kill ole Jake Cannon for this day's work."

As they rode on they came to the man called Sorden, riding as the guide to the invading column, a person of more genteel address than any beneath Van Dorn, and young, pliable, and frolicking.

"My skin!" he said. "Now, boys, Van Dorn oughtn't had to brung you. You're too sniptious for this rough work. I love the Captain better than I ever loved A male, but he oughtn't to spile boys."

"Van Dorn told me to come," Owen Daw cried. "I'm big enough to buck a nigger."

"I love him better than I ever loved A male," said Sorden, apologetically. "Who is t'other young offender?"

"I'm a stranger to your parts," Levin replied. "Mrs. Cannon made me come. I didn't want to."

"Are you afear'd?"

"Yes," Levin said.

"Well, I love the Captain better than I ever loved A male. But boys is boys, and I hate to see 'em spiled. If you was nigger boys I wouldn't keer a cent; but white's my color, and I don't want to trade in it."

They halted at a small, sharp-gabled brick house, of one story and a kitchen and garret, at the left of the road, to which the corner of a piece of oak and hickory woods came up shelteringly, while in the rear several small barns and cribs enclosed the triangle of a field. A door in the middle, towards Maryland, seemed very high-silled, and low grated windows were at the cellar on each side of the steps.

The place had a suspicious appearance, and a pack of hounds in full cry rushed from the kitchen, and, while in the act of leaping the stile and palings, were arrested almost in mid air by a chuffy voice crying from within:

"Hya! Down! Spitch!"

The whole pack meekly sneaked back to the house, whining low, and a few blows of a switch and short howls within completed the excitement.

"What place is this?" asked Owen Daw.

"Devil Jim Clark's," said Sorden.

The dwelling stood about forty yards back from the road, drawing nearly into the cover of the woods, and its little yard was made cavernous by thick-planted paper-mulberry and maple trees, while a line of cherry-trees and an old pole-well rose along the road and hedge. As they rode to the rear of the house a little dormer window, like a snail, crawled low along the roof, and a light was shining from it.

"Devil Jim's business-office," nodded Sorden.

"What's his business?" asked Levin, freshly.

"Niggers. He keeps 'em up thar between the garret and the roof—sometimes in the cellar."

"Does he want a business-office for that?"

"He's a contractor on the canawl, too, Jim is—raises race-horses, farms it, gambles a little, but nigger-runnin' is his best game. My skin! Yer comes Captain Van Dorn. I love him as I never loved A male."

"Van Dorn," spoke a voice from the house, "remember my family is particular. Your men must go to the barn. Come in!"

"Spiced brandy at the barn!"—a quiet remark from somewhere—was sufficient to lead the herd away, and, giving the order to "water and fodder," Van Dorn passed into the kitchen, thence through a bedroom to the chief room of the house, and up a small winding-stair to a scrap of hallway or corridor hardly two feet wide.

The man who led pointed to a trap above one end of this hall, and exclaimed, "Niggers there! family yonder!"—the last reference to a door closing the little passage.

He then opened a wicket at the side of the hall, admitting Van Dorn to an exceedingly small

closet or garret room, barely large enough for the men to sit, and lighted by a lamp in the little dormer window seen from below.

"Drink!" said the man, uncorking a bottle of champagne; "I had it ready for you."

He poured the foaming wine and set the bottle on a sort of secretary or desk, and then looked anxiety and avarice together out of his liquid black eyes and broad, heavy face.

"*Buena suerte, señor!*" Van Dorn lisped, as they drank together.

"Hya! spitch!" nervously muttered Clark, cutting his own top-boots with a dog-whip. "I wish I was out of the business: the risk is too great. My wife is religious—praying, mebbe, now, in there. My daughters is at the seminaries, spendin' money like the Canawl Company on the lawyers. Nothin' pays like nigger-stealin', but it's beneath you and me, Van Dorn."

"*A la verdad!* This is my last incursion, Don Clark. Pleasure has kept me poor for life. To-day I did a little sacrifice, and it grows upon me."

"If they should ketch me and set me in the pillory, Van Dorn, for what you do to-night, hya! spitch!"—he slashed his knees—"it would break Mrs. Clark's heart."

"I want this money to-night," said Van Dorn, "to make two young people happy. They shall take my portion, and take me with them out of the plains of Puckem."

"Oh, it is nervous business"—Clark's eyes of rich jelly made the pallor on his large face like a winding-sheet—"hya! spitch! The Quakers are a-watchin' me. Ole Zekiel Jinkins over yer, ole Warner Mifflin down to the mill, these durned Hunns at the Wildcat—they look me through every time they ketch me on the road. But the canawl contract don't pay like niggers; my folks must hold their heads up in the world; Sam Ogg won't let me keep out of temptation."

"Do you fear me, Devil Jim?"

"Hya! spitch! No. If all in the trade was like you, I could sleep in trust. If you go out of it, so will I."

"Then to-night, *penitente!* we make our few thousand and quit. Give up your cards and I my *doncellitas*, and we can at least live."

They shook hands and drank another glass, and then Van Dorn said:

"Send up to me, *hermano!* the lad who will reply to the name of Levin. With him I would speak while you give the directions! Poor coward!" Van Dorn said, after his host had descended the stairs, "he can never be less than a thief with that irksomeness under such fair competence."

At that moment a beautiful maid or woman, in her white night-robe, stood in the little doorway, with eyes so like the richness of his just gone that it must have been his daughter. She fled as she recognized a stranger, and Van Dorn pursued till a door was closed in his face.

"Poor fool!" he said, sinking into his chair again; "I will never be more honest than any woman can make me!"

As Levin entered the little hallway Van Dorn smiled:

"Here is a glass of real wine to inspire you, *junco!*"

"No, Captain. I would rather die than drink it."

"Do you repent coming with me?"

"Oh, bitterly, Captain. I don't want to steal poor, helpless people if they is black."

"Now, listen, lad!"—Van Dorn's face ceased to blush and the coarse look came into his blue eyes—"this night's excursion is for your profit. I like your gentle inclination for me, and the good acts you have solicited from me, and the confidence you have shown me as to your love for pretty Hulda. Join me in this work willingly, and I will give her, for your marriage settlement, all my share."

"Never," Levin exclaimed.

Van Dorn drew his knife and rose to his feet.

"Levin," he lisped, "I promised Patty Cannon that I would bring you back spotted with crime or dead. Now choose which it shall be."

"To die, then," cried Levin, with one hand drawing the long, silken hair from his eyes and with the other drawing his own knife; "but I will fight for my life."

Van Dorn seized Levin's wrist in a vise-like grip, but, as he did so, threw his own knife upon the floor.

"Oh! *huérfano*, waif," Van Dorn murmured, while his blush returned, "take heed thou ever sayest 'No' with courage like that, when cowardice or weak acquiescence would extort thy 'Yes.' This moment, if thou hadst consented, thy heart would be on my knife, young Levin!"

He drew the knife from Levin's hand and put it in his ragged coat again, and set the boy on his

knee as if he had been a little child.

"Oh, God be thanked I did not kill you, sir," sobbed Levin, his tears quickly following his courage; "twice I have thought of doin' it to-day."

"I never would have put you to that test, my poor lad, but that I saw your conscience at work all this day under the stimulation of virtuous love. Think nothing of me. Build your own character upon some good example, and, sweet as life is, fight for it on the very frontiers of your character. *Die* young, but surrender only when you are old."

"Captain," Levin said, "how kin I git character? My father is dead. Everybody twists me around his fingers."

"Then think of some plain, strong, faithful man you may know and refer every act of your character to him. Ask yourself what he would do in your predicament, then go and do the same."

"I do know such a man," Levin said, in another moment; "It is Jimmy Phœbus, my poor, beautiful mother's beau."

"*El rayo ha caído!*" Van Dorn spoke, low and calm; "yes, Levin, any man worthy of your mother will do."

"Captain, turn back with me! Is it too late?"

"Too late these many years, young *señor*. I shall lead the war on Africa to-night again at Cowgill House."

He rose and finished the wine.

"Clark shall give you a horse, Levin. I present it to you. Ride on with Sorden at the lead, and a mile from here, at Camden town, take your own way. Good-night!"

Taking a single look at the miserable band of whites and blacks collected in the barn, and revealed by a lantern's light in the excitement of drink and avarice, or the familiarity of fear and vice—some inspecting gags of corn-cob and bucks of hickory, others trimming clubs of blackjack with the roots attached; others loading their horse-pistols and greasing the dagger-slides thereon; some whetting their hog-killing knives upon harness, others cutting rope and cord into the lengths to bind men's feet—Levin was set on the loping horse he had been already riding, by Clark, the host, and soon met Sorden on the road.

"Where is Van Dorn?" Sorden asked; "I love him as I never loved A male."

"He sends me to Camden of an errand," Levin answered; "is it far?"

"About a mile. Three miles, then, to Dover. My skin! how fresh your critter is; ain't it Dirck Molleston's? I thought so. Then he'll be wantin' to turn in at Cooper's Corners."

"Does Derrick live there?"

"Yes. That's whar he holds the Forks of both roads from below, and watches the law in Dover. I hope Van Dorn will git away with the loot and not git ketched, fur I love him as I never loved A male."

Levin's horse, at his easy gait, soon left Sorden far behind, and the strange events of the night, and his wonder what to do next, kept Levin's brain whirling till he saw the form of a few houses rise among the trees, and a line of arborage indicate a main road from north to south. The scent as of cold, wide waters and marshes filled the night.

"Here is Camden," Levin thought; "where shall I go? If I turn south I shall get no bed nor food all night, and be picked up in the mornin' fur a kidnapper. I can't go back. The big river or the ocean, I reckon, is before me. What would Jimmy Phœbus do?"

He held the animal in as he asked this question, and paused at the crossing of the great State road.

The idea slowly spread upon his whole existence that James Phœbus would, in Levin's place, ride instantly to Dover and give the alarm.

Levin tried to construct Phœbus in a mood to give some other advice, but, as the resolute pungy captain's form seemed to bestride the young man's mind, it rose more and more stalwart, and appeared to lead towards Dover, where so many poor souls, in the joys of intercourse and freedom, were like little birds unconscious of the hawks above them, and no man in the world but Levin Dennis could save them from death or bondage.

Would James Phœbus, with his lion nature, ever hesitate in the duty of a citizen and a Christian under such circumstances, or forgive another man for withholding information that might be life and liberty and mercy?

Yet there was Van Dorn to be betrayed. What would Van Dorn do in Levin's place?

The words of Van Dorn, not a quarter of an hour old, spoke aloud in Levin's echoing consciousness: "Think nothing of me. Refer every act to some faithful man and go and do the same!"

Levin looked up, and the very clouds, now swollen dark in spite of starshine, seemed hurrying on Dover. The night-birds were crying "Mercy! mercy!" the lizards and tree-frogs seemed to cross each other's voices, piping "Time! time! time!"

"*Huldy!*" Levin whispered, and let the reins fall loose, and his animal darted through Camden town to the north.

He had gone by the small frame houses, the Quaker meeting, the stores, the outskirt residences, when suddenly his horse turned out to pass a large, dark object in the road ahead, and a horseman rode right across Levin's course, forcing his animal back on its haunches.

"High doings, friend!" a man's voice raspingly spoke; "I'm concerned for thee!"

"Git out of my way or I'll stab you!" Levin cried, between his new ardor to do his duty and the idea that he had already been intercepted by Patty Cannon's band.

"Ha, friend! I'm less concerned for myself than thee. Thou wilt not stab a citizen of Camden town at his own door?"

"For Heaven's sake, let me go, then!" Levin pleaded. "The kidnappers is coming to Dover in a few minutes. I want to tell Lawyer Clayton!"

Immediately the other person, a tall, lean man, wheeled and dashed after the dark object ahead, which Levin, following also hard, found to be a large covered wagon—something between the dearborn or farmer's and the family carriage.

"Bill," the Quaker called to the driver, "spare not thy whip till Dover be well past. Here is one who says kidnappers are raiding even the capital of Delaware. I'm concerned for thee!"

The driver began to whip his horses into a gallop, and cries, as of several persons, came out of the close-curtained vehicle.

"What's in there?" Levin asked the Quaker, who had rejoined him; "niggers?"

"No, friend," the Quaker crisply answered, "only Christians."

They crossed a mill-stream, and soon afterwards a smaller run, without speaking, and came to a little log-and-frame cabin in a fork of the road, where Levin's horse tried to run in.

"Ha, friend! Is it not Derrick Molleston's loper thee has—the same that he gets from Devil Jim Clark? What art thou, then? I feel concerned for thee."

"A Christian, too, I hope," answered Levin, forcing his nag up the road.

"Then thee is better than a youth in this dwelling we next pass," the Quaker said, pointing to a brick house on the left; "for there lived a judge whose son bucked a poor negro fiddler in his father's cellar, and delivered him to Derrick Molleston to be sold in slavery. I hear the poor man tells it in his distant house of bondage."

"What's this?" Levin inquired, seeing a strange structure of beams on a cape or swell to the right, in sight of the dark forms of a town on the next crest beyond.

"A gallows," said the Quaker, "on which a horse-thief will be hanged to-morrow. To steal a horse is death; to steal a fellow-man is nothing."

As he spoke, the mysterious carriage turned down a cross street of Dover and stole into the obscurity of the town.

"Ha! ha!" exclaimed the Quaker; "if Joe Johnson had not stopped to feed at Devil Jim's, he might have overtaken my brother's wagon full of escaping slaves. I tell thee, friend, because I'm scarce concerned for thee now."

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## CHAPTER XXXV.

### COWGILL HOUSE.

Long after midnight, Dover was in bed, except at one large house on the Capitol green, where light shone through the chinks and cracks of curtains and shutters, and some watch-dog, perhaps, ran along curiously to see why.

The stars and clouds in the somewhat troubled sky looked down through the leafless trees upon the pretty town and St. Jones's Creek circling past it, and hardly noticed a long band of creeping men and animals steal up from the Meeting House branch, past the tannery and the academy, and plunge into the back streets of the place, avoiding the public square.

One file turned down to the creek and crossed it, to return farther above, cutting off all escape by the northern road, while a second file slipped silently through and around the compact little hamlet and waited for the other to arrive, when both encompassed an old brick dwelling standing back from the roadside in a green and venerable yard, nearly half a mile from the settled parts of

Dover.

This house was brilliantly lighted, and the rose-bushes and shade trees were all defined as they stood above the swells of green verdure and the ornamental paths and flower-beds.

One majestic tulip-tree extended its long branches nearly to the portal of the quaint dwelling, and a luxuriant growth of ivy, starting between the cellar windows, clambered to the corniced carpentry of the eaves, and made almost solid panels of vine of the spaces between the four large, keystone windows in two stories, which stood to the right of the broad, dumpy door.

This door, at the top of a flight of steps, was placed so near the gable angle of the house that it gave the impression of but one wing of a mansion originally designed to be twice its length and size.

Between this gable—which faced the road, and had four lines of windows in it, besides a basement row—and the back or town door, as described, was one squarish, roomy window, out of relation to all the rest, and perhaps twelve feet above the ground. This, as might be guessed, was on the landing of the stairs within; for the great door and front of the residence being at the opposite side, the whole of the space at the townward gable, to the width of seventeen feet, was a noble hall about forty feet long, lofty, and with pilasters in architectural style, and lighted by two great windows in the gable and the square window on the stairway.

The stairway itself was a beautiful piece of work and proportion, rising from the floor in ten railed steps to the landing at the square window, where a space several feet square commanded both the great front door and the windows in the gable, and also the yard behind; thence, at right angles, the flight of steps rose along the back wall to a second landing over the dumpy back-door, and, by a third leap, returned at right angles, to the floor above, making what is called the well of the stairway to be exceedingly spacious, and it opened to the garret floor.

No doubt this cool, great hall was designed to be the centre of a large mansion, yet it had lost nothing in agreeableness by becoming, instead, the largest room in the house, receiving abundant daylight, and it was large enough for either a feast or public worship, and such was its frequent use.

Built by a tyrannical, eccentric man at the beginning of the century, it had passed through several families until a Quaker named Cowgill, who afterwards became a Methodist, and who held no slaves and was kind to black people, made it his property, and superintended a tannery and mill within sight of it.

He was frequently absent for weeks, especially in the bilious autumn season, and allowed his domestics to assemble their friends and the general race, at odd times, in the great hallway, for such rational enjoyments as they might select.

In truth, the owner of the house desired it to get a more cheerful reputation; for the negroes, in particular, considered it haunted.

The first owner, it was said, had amused himself in the great hall-room by making his own children stand on their toes, switching their feet with a whip when they dropped upon their soles from pain or fatigue; and his own son finally shot at him through the great northern door with a rifle or pistol, leaving the mark to this day, to be seen by a small panel set in the original pine. The third owner, a lawyer, often entertained travelling clergymen here; and, on one occasion, the eccentric Reverend Lorenzo Dow met on the stairs a stranger and bowed to him, and afterwards frightened the host's family by telling it, since they were not aware of any stranger in the house. The room over the great door had always been considered the haunt of peculiar people, who molested nobody living, but appeared there in some quiet avocation, and vanished when pressed upon.

This main door itself had a church-like character, and was battened or built in half, so that the upper part could be thrown open like a window, and yet the lock on this upper part was a foot and a half long, and the key weighed a pound.

This ponderous door, in elaborate carpentry, opened upon a flight of steps and on a flower-yard surrounded by elms, firs, and Paulownia trees, the latter of a beany odor and nature. A lower servants' part of the dwelling, in two stories, stretched to the fields, and had a veranda-covered rear.

Van Dorn called to a negro:

"Buck Ransom!"

"Politely, Captain," the negro's insinuating voice answered.

"Go to the front door and knock. As you enter, see that it is clear to fly open. Then, as you pass along the hall, throw the windows up."

"Politely, Captain;" the negro bowed and departed.

"Owen Daw!"

"Yer honor!"

"Climb into the big tulip-tree softly and take this musket I shall reach you. Train it on the



staircase window, and fire only if you see resistance there."

The boy went up the tree with all his vicious instincts full of fight.

"Melson!"

"Ay yi!"

"Milman!"

"Ah! boy."

"Get yourselves beneath the two large windows on the hall and serve as mounting-blocks to Sorden's party. I shall storm the main door. As we enter there, Sorden, order your men right over Melson and Milman into the windows Ransom has lifted."

"I love him," muttered Sorden, admiringly, "as I never loved A male," and collected his party.

"Whitecar, you and your brother hold the back door with your staves. If it is forced, Miles Tindel—"

"Tackle 'em, Cap'n Van!"

"Will throw his red-pepper dust into the eyes of any that come out."

"Oh, tackle 'em, Cap'n Van!"

"Derrick Molleston!"

"See me, O see me!" the powerful negro muttered.

"Take Herron and Vincent, and two more, and guard the kitchen and the front of the main dwelling. Knock any creature stiff, except—*ayme! ay!*—the young damsels, whose fears will soon trip them to the ground."

"See me, see me!" the negro hoarsely said.

"As we enter the door, I shall cry, 'Patty Cannon has come!' Then spring in the windows and beat opposition down. *Relampaguéa!* Ransom is slow."

The knocker on the great door sounded, and it sprang open and quickly slammed again, and a stifled, strange sound followed, as of a scuffle.

Van Dorn, agile as a panther, sprang on Milman's back and looked into a window in the gable, drawing his face away, so as to be unseen in the night.

The bright interior was full of people, sitting back against the wainscoting, as if listening to a sermon, while down the middle of the stately hall stretched a table lighted by whale-oil lamps and many little candles, and filled with the remnants of a feast. The stairway in the corner Van Dorn could not see, and there the dusky audience was all facing, as if towards the preacher. There seemed a something out of the common in the kind of attention the inmates were paying, but Van Dorn's eyes were absorbed in the sight of several drooping and yet almost startled dove-eyed quadroom maids, and he only noticed that the spy, Ransom, could not be seen.

"Sorden," Van Dorn said, slipping down, "can Ransom have betrayed us? *Chis!* they all look as if a death-warrant was being read."

"My skin! No, Captain. Air they all there?"

"All," said Van Dorn; "I see thirty thousand dollars of flesh in sight."

"And niggers won't scrimmage nohow," spoke Whitecar. "Let's beat 'em mos' to death."

"Come on then," said Van Dorn, softly; "if the windows are not lifted, break them in."

He twisted, by main strength, a panel out of the palings near the house, and led the way to the great front door. A dozen desperate hands seized the heavy panel and ran with it. The door flew open, but at that moment every light in Cowgill House went out.

"Dar's ghosts in dar," the hoarse voice of Derrick Molleston was heard to say, and the negro element stopped and shrank.

"Tindel, your torch!" Van Dorn exclaimed, and, after a moment's delay—the old house and shady yard meantime illumined by lightning, and sounds of thunder rolling in the sky—a blazing pine-knot, all prepared, was procured, and Van Dorn, holding it in his left hand, and with nothing but his rude whip in his right, bounded in the door, shouting:

"Patty Cannon has come!"

At that dreaded name there were a few suppressed shrieks, and the great windows at the gable side fell inwards with a crash as the kidnappers came pouring over.

Van Dorn's quick eye took in the situation as he waved his torch, and it lighted ceiling and pilaster, the close-fastened doors on the left and the great stairway-well beyond, filled with black forms in the attitude of defence.

"Patty Cannon has come!" he shouted again; "follow me!"

An instant only brought him to the base of the staircase, and the lightning flashing in the gaping windows and fallen door revealed him to his followers, with his yellow hair waving, and his long, silken mustache like golden flame.

A mighty yell rose from the emboldened gang as they formed behind him, with bludgeons and iron knuckles, billies and slings, and whatever would disable but fail to kill.

Van Dorn, far ahead, made three murderous slashes of his whip across the human objects above, and, with a toss of that formidable weapon, clubbed it and darted on.

At the moment loud explosions and smoke and cries filled the echoing place, as a volley of firearms burst from the landing, sweeping the line of the windows and raking the hall. The band on the floor below stopped, and some were down, groaning and cursing.

"They're armed; it's treachery," a voice, in panic, cried, and the cowardly assailants ran to places of refuge, some crawling out at the portal, some dropping from the windows, and others getting behind the stairway, out of fire, and seeking desperately to draw the bolts of the smaller door there.

"Patty Cannon has come!" Van Dorn repeated, throwing himself into the body of the defenders, who, terrified at his bravery, began to retreat upward around the angles of the stairs.

One man, however, did not retreat, neither did he strike, but wrapped Van Dorn around the body in a pair of long and powerful arms, and lifted him from the landing by main strength, saying:

"High doings, friend! I'm concerned for thee."

Van Dorn felt at the grip that he was overcome. He tried to reach for his knife, but his arms were enclosed in the unknown stranger's, who, having seized him from behind, sought to push him through the square window on the landing into the grass yard below, where the rain was falling and the lightning making brilliant play among the herbs and ferns.

As the kidnapper prepared himself to fall, with all his joints and muscles relaxed, the boy, Owen Daw, lying bloodthirstily along the limb of the old tulip-tree, aimed his musket, according to Van Dorn's instructions, at the forms contending there, and greedily pulled the trigger.

The Quaker's arms, as they enclosed Van Dorn, presented, upon the cuff of his coat, a large steel or metal button, and the ball from the tree, striking this, glanced, and entered Van Dorn's throat.

"*Aymé Guay!*" Van Dorn muttered, and was thrown out of the window to the earth, all limp and huddled together, till John Sorden bore him off, muttering,

"I loved him as I never loved A male."

The desperate party beneath the stairs at last broke open the back door there and rushed forth, only to receive handfuls of red pepper dust thrown by Miles Tindel, as he cried,

"Tackle 'em, Cap'n Van!"

They screamed with anguish, and rolled in the wet grass, and yet, with fears stronger than pain, sought the road in blindness, and some way to leave the town.

Young Owen O'Day, or Daw, crept down the tree, and, seeing Van Dorn in Sorden's arms at the wagon, contemptuously said, as he mounted his mule and vanished:

"I reckon he'll never discipline me no mo'."

Derrick Molleston, regretting the loss of his loping horse, bore out to the wagon an object he had found striving to escape from the veranda at the kitchen side, though with a gag in his mouth, and a skewer between his elbows and his back.

"See me, see me!" the negro kidnapper spoke, hoarsely. "He's mine an' Devil Jim Clark's. I tuk him."

"Why, it's Buck Ransom," Sorden said.

"An' I'm gwyn to sell him, too," the negro muttered, seizing the reins. "You see me now! Maybe he cheated us. Any way, he's tuk."

The old wagon started at a run through the driving rain, the black victim lying helpless on his back, and Van Dorn bleeding in Sorden's arms, who continued to moan,

"I loved him as I never loved A male!"

Van Dorn made several efforts to talk, and often coughed painfully, and finally, as they reached a lane gate, he articulated:

"The Chancellor's?"

"Yes, dis is it," Derrick Molleston said. "See me, Cap'n Van. I's all heah."

As they advanced up a shady lane, fire from somewhere began to make a certain illumination in spite of the loud storm.

"It's Bill Greenley. He's set de jail afire," the negro exclaimed. "See me, O see me!"

The conflagration gave a vapory red light to a secluded dwelling they now approached, upon a bowery lawn, and Sorden saw a woman of a severe aspect looking out of a window at the fire.

"What is the meaning of this trespass so late at night?" she called. "Are you robbers? My aged husband is asleep."

"Madam," answered Sorden, "here is the husband of Mrs. Patty Cannon. She was your brother's mother-in-law. I love this man as I never loved A male. He is wounded, and we want him taken in till he can have a doctor."

"Take him to the jail, then, if that is not it burning yonder," the woman exclaimed, scornfully. "Shall I make the home of the Chancellor of Delaware a hospital for Patty Cannon's men as a reward for her sending my brother to the gallows?"

She closed the window and the blind, and left them alone in the storm.

"Drive, Derrick, to your den at Cooper's Corners, quick, then," Sorden said.

As they left the lane a flash of lightning, so near, so white, that they seemed to be within the volume and crater of it, enveloped the wagon. One horse sank down on his haunches, and the other reared back and tore from his harness, while the wagon was overset.

The negro picked up his helpless fellow-African and lifted him on his back, starting off in mingled avarice and terror, and saying,

"Derrick's gwyn home, sho'. See me, see me!"

Van Dorn put his finger at his throat, where blood was all the while trickling, and, with a gentle cough, extorted the sounds:

"Leave me—under a bush—to—die."

"No," cried Sorden, raising Van Dorn also upon his back; "I love him as I never loved A male."

The fire of the burning jail lighted their return into the outskirts of Dover and to the gallows' hill, where stood the scaffold, split with the lightning from cross-beam to the death-trap. As they halted opposite it to rest, a horse and rider came stumbling past, and Molleston, dropping his burden, shouted:

"Bill Greenley, dat's our hoss. We want it."

"His is the hoss that's on him," cried the escaped horse-thief, looking scornfully up at his own gallows as he lashed his blinded animal along in the rain.

"Cheer up, Captain Van," John Sorden said, soaked through with the rain; "'t'ain't fur now to Cooper's Corners."

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## CHAPTER XXXVI.

### TWO WHIGS.

"Goy! Look at the trees, friend Custis," said John M. Clayton, standing before his office as the rising sun innocently struck the tree-tops in the public square of Dover.

Judge Custis, sitting at an upper window, observed that many noble elms and locusts had been riven by lightning, or torn by wind and wind-driven floods of rain.

"What a night!" Custis exclaimed; "the jail burned, the lightning appalling, and I thought I heard firearms, too."

Judge Custis heard Clayton say, as he entered the room:

"So ole Derrick Molleston, Aunt Braner, asked you about my dinner, did he? And it's Bill Greenley that burned the jail? Goy! And the black people licked the kidnappers at Cowgill House?"

"Dat dey did, praise de Lord!" ejaculated Aunt Braner, fervently.

Clayton turned to a young man at the table, now dressed in a good clean suit of clothes, and said, as the old cook left the room:

"Now, friend Dennis, tell your tale. Goy!"

The boy, whom the Judge was startled to recognize, at once began:

"Jedge Custis, the kidnapper man you left in the kitchen has stole Aunt Hominy and your little niggers. They was at Johnson's Cross-roads last night. Maybe they's gone before this. My boat was hired to take 'em off, and I had to come along, but I run away from the band and give warnin' last night to Mr. Clayton yer."

Before the Judge could reply, Clayton exclaimed,

"Now, Brother Custis, permit me now! Let my noble old constituent and fellow-Whig, Jonathan Hunn, resume!"

"Friend," spoke out a wiry, lean, healthy-skinned man, "this young man surprised me last night with intelligence that thy Maryland friends were marching on the very capital of Delaware, to steal men. I was out in the road at that late hour for another Christian purpose, and the Lord rewarded me with this good one: I brought friend Dennis to John Clayton's back door, and he lent us all his firearms. At the little brick grocery of William Parke, just beyond the Cowgill House—where I am told he sells ardent liquors to negroes contrary to law, and so takes the name among them of 'Kind Parke'—I found several of our free Delaware negroes, I fear on no good errand. So I remarked, 'If William Parke, contrary to law, has been selling thee brandy out of an eggshell, as if he knew not the contents, I shall pay him to repeat the vile enticement quickly, for ye who are of the world must fight this night.'"

"Goy!" said Clayton, warming up; "Quakers will set other people on, won't they? Goy!"

"Other gunpowder arms were there procured, and we barricaded Cowgill House so as to make it at once a decoy and a hornet's nest. I despise war and men of war so much that I have somewhat studied their campaigns, and I suggested, friend Clayton, that the stairway was a good tactical defensive position—is that the vain term?—to send a volley out the main door, and a flank fire on every door and window on the sides of Cowgill's hall. It also commanded the back yard by a window on the staircase. A door beneath the staircase was barricaded. There was a festival, or feast, given that night, by absent friend Cowgill's permission, by these Dover folks of color. I would not wonder if it was designed or discovered by these scoundrels on thy line of states, friend Custis. I told the men-at-arms to leave their huzzies all below in the feasting-hall till the attack began, and then to let them escape up the stairway, and to defend that stair like sinful men. But first a negro spy knocked on the door, and a loop was thrown over his neck, and two of the black boys gagged him. Then the attack was made, and, at my order, all the lights were put out."

"Oh, Jedge," Levin Dennis broke in, "it was short and dreadful! Captain Van Dorn had got to the bottom of the stairs, when the niggers half-way up fired over his head and shot mos' everything down. The Quaker man yer then pinioned the captain an' dropped him, wounded, out of the high window. I pity Van Dorn, but *he* says that he's in a bad business. I hope he ain't dead."

"Who is this Van Dorn?" asked Judge Custis. "I've heard of such a dare-devil, but he has never pestered Princess Anne."

"I ran and hid in the deep eaves of the garret story," Levin continued, "which is built in like closets, and the wasps there, coming in to suck the blossoms on the vines that has growed up through the eaves from outside, flew around in the dark among the yaller gals that was a-hidin' and a-prayin', and never feelin' the wasps sting em', thinkin' about them kidnappers. I reckon, gen'lemen, the kidnappers will never come to Dover no more."

"Two things surprise me," Clayton said; "that Joe Johnson would venture to raid Dover itself after the licking I got him; and that free darkeys could make such a defence."

"Ah! John Clayton," spoke Jonathan Hunn, "there was a white witness there, to affirm that they only defended their lives."

"It was Captain Van Dorn that raided Dover," Levin spoke; "Joe Johnson is a coward."

"Judge Custis," said Mr. Clayton, "you and I can save this peninsula, at least, from the sectional excitements that are coming. You must surrender to Delaware old Patty Cannon and her household. She now lives on your side of the line. Come over to the Governor's office with me, and I will get a requisition for her on the business of last night. Young Dennis here knows the band; friend Hunn saw the attack."

Judge Custis's face grew suddenly troubled.

"Clayton," he said, "I would rather not appear in this matter. Indeed, you must excuse me."

"What!" said Clayton; "hesitate to do a little thing like this, after the free opinions you have expressed?"

There was a long, awkward pause. The Quaker arose, and, looking well at Judge Custis, said:

"None but Almighty God knows the secrets of a slave-holder's mind. No son of Adam is fit to be absolute over any human creature."

"Amen!" Judge Custis said, meekly.

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The news from Princess Anne confirmed the loss of Vesta Custis's slaves. Judge Custis was told to come home and take steps for their recovery, but he was strangely apathetic. The day after the raid Levin Dennis disappeared, Clayton only saying:

"Who would have thought that soft-eyed boy was already fascinated by these kidnappers? He has

taken his horse and gone back to Patty Cannon's."

The suit against the Canal Company required a great deal of research, as law-books were then scarce, and precedents for breaches of contract against corporations were not many; this form of legal life being comparatively modern in that day, like the dawn of the floral age, or before megatheriums grazed above the trees or iguanodons swam in the canals. Clayton and Custis walked and ate and lay down together, comparing knowledge and suggestions, and the litigious mind of John Randel, Junior, was rather irritating to both of them, so that, to be rid of his society in Dover, the two lawyers, meantime supplied with money by Meshach Milburn's draft, resolved to visit the canal, which was distant about thirty miles.

The three men started together in a carriage, after breakfast, on a soft yet frosty morning, such as often gives to this region a winter sparkle and mildness like the Florida climate. They passed several tidal creeks, as the Duck and the Little Duck, the Blackbird and the Apoquinimink, and, as they advanced, the barns became larger, the hedges more tasteful and trimmed like those in the French Netherlands, the leafless peach orchards stretched out like the tea-plants in China. Two or three little towns studded the roadside, the woods gave way altogether to smaller farms, and, at a steep bottom called the Fiddler's Bridge, they turned across the fields to an old four-chimneyed, galleried mansion, at the end of a long lane, and near a great stagnant pond, where John Randel, Junior, as he fully named himself on every occasion, had a fine dinner spread.

After dinner they launched upon the stream in a row and sail boat, to Mr. Clayton's trepidation, and bore out through acres of splutter-docks, and muskrats and terrapins unnumbered, and many wild-fowl, to the Chesapeake and Delaware Canal, which extended for several miles through a mighty pond or feeder, like a ditch within a bayou.

The negro rower tied their boat behind a passing vessel, which towed them out to the locks at the Delaware River, at a point opposite a willowy island, and where an embryo "city" had been started in the marshes, and there they waited for the packet from Philadelphia. Mr. Randel took his negro man, a person of sorrowful yet inexpressive countenance, to be a kind of piano or model on which to play his fierce gestures.

"Clayton," said he, sitting on a stone lock in the evening gloaming, "I ought to have been a lawyer. Not that I am not the greatest theoretical engineer in the country, but my legal genius interposes, and I sue the villains who employ me."

Here he gave the melancholy negro a violent shaking, who took it as stolidly as a bottle of medicine shaken by the doctor.

"Yes, you sued Judge Ben Wright and he nonsuited you."

"I tell you a new axiom, Clayton," the earnest engineer cried, putting the negro down on his hams and sitting on him; "whoever employs genius has to be a scoundrel. In the nature of their relations it is so. He deflects genius from its full expression, absorbs the virtue from it, and is a fraud."

Here he kicked the negro underneath him, who hardly protested.

"Well, then," spoke Judge Custis, "as Clayton is a man of genius, and you employ him—"

"I'm a scoundrel, of course," Randel exclaimed. "His sense of law and right must yield to my ideas. Now look at this canal! Had I not been obliged to defer to the soulless corporation which employed me, I would have dug it to the depth that the tides of the two bays would have filled it, instead of damming up the creeks for feeders, and pumping water into it by steam-pumps. Then the war-vessels of the country could go through, and the channel would be purged by every tide."

He stood up and put his foot on the negro, to the amusement of the boys gathering around.

"John Fitch, the engineer," said John M. Clayton, "left a curious will; it begins, 'To William Rowan, my trusty friend, I bequeath my Beaver Hat.'"

Judge Custis's countenance fell, thinking of another hat which had entered his family.

The barge on which they embarked had numerous passengers, and soon came to a small lock-town and turn-bridge, and, a few miles beyond, entered upon a serious piece of work, leaving the trough of a creek, of which the canal had previously availed itself, and cutting through the low ridge of the peninsula, which, to Judge Custis, seemed almost mountainous. He was of that patriotic opulence, just short of imagination, which rejoiced in public works, and this little canal, only fourteen miles long, was, with two or three exceptions, the only achieved work in the Union, turnpikes and bridges omitted. Built by the national government, by three of the states it connected, and by private subscription, it had involved two and a quarter million dollars of expense—no light burden when the population was, by the previous census, less than eight million whites in all the land.

Judge Custis's family troubles faded from his mind as he looked up at the deep cutting, nearly seventy feet in height of banks, with sands of yellow and green, and stains of iron and strata of marl, some of which had fallen back into the excavation and threatened the navigation again; and, when he saw a bridge, called the Buck, leap the chasm ninety feet overhead, by a span that then seemed sublimity itself, he touched Clayton and said:

"Never mind my failures! Thank God, I'm a Whig."

"Goy! there's nothing like it," said Clayton.

Not far from this point the canal passed an old church and graveyard at a bridge where Mr. Clayton said his namesake, the revolutionary Governor of Delaware, was buried. Here Randel's plain conveyance took them in, and in the moonlight they drove a few miles to Mr. Randel's estate, near the banks of a river, under a long table-mountain of barren clay and iron stain, on the farther shore.

"Here," said Randel, "is my future estate of Randalia. Here I shall see all the commerce of the canal passing by, and garnishee every vessel that pays my tolls to the Canal Company."

"Randel," asked Mr. Clayton, "what were those stakes I saw some distance back, running north and south across the fields?"

"A railroad survey."

"Who is making it?"

"They say Meshach Milburn, of Princess Anne."

"Goy!" exclaimed Clayton, "I'll beat him."

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For two or three days the three men, still studying the canal suit, drove over a picturesque country, visiting the old manor of the Labadists and their Bohemian patron, Augustine Herman, the homestead of the late treaty minister, Bayard, and the ancient Welsh Baptist churches among the hills of the Elk and Christiana, where some of Cromwell's warriors lay. It was the favorite land of Whitefield, and in the neighborhood was an iron furnace Judge Custis examined with melancholy interest, as one of the investments of General Washington's father more than a hundred years before, when the Indians made the iron. They also went to Turkey Point, where the British army was disembarked to capture Philadelphia, and Knyphausen's division obliterated the history of Delaware by carrying her records away from Newcastle. Returning from one of these pleasant journeys, two messages from different points seared Judge Custis's eyeballs:

"Your wife died at Cambridge." "Your daughter is very ill at Wilmington."

"To Wilmington!" cried Judge Custis, staggering up. "Oh, my daughter! I have killed her."

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## **CHAPTER XXXVII.**

### **SPIRITS OF THE PAST.**

"What do they say, William, about Jack Wonnell's being found shot dead?"

"It is generally said that he was killed by the negroes for gallantries to their color. Some talk of arresting little Roxy Custis."

"What do you say, William Tilghman?"

"I can say nothing. The night I drove Virgie to Snow Hill I drove over poor Wonnell's body. A strange negro was seen here—an enemy of your servant, Samson. The new cook at Teackle Hall thinks he fired the shot."

The young rector felt the searching look of those resinous forester's eyes staring him through.

"That shot was meant for me, William Tilghman."

"Perhaps so."

"It was the shot of a hired murderer, who mistook Wonnell's unusual hats for mine, that was not well described to him, or the description of which his drunken and excited memory did not retain."

"Mr. Milburn, please save Vesta this suspicion."

"Oh! that pure soul could not know it," Milburn continued, with a moment's gentleness; "but some of her proud kin, to whom I am less than a dog, did send the assassin. I think I guess the man."

"Do not rush to a conclusion! Remember, Vesta has suffered so much for others' errors."

"He was killed in this room, where Wonnell never came before. The wound shows the shot to have come from a point below, where nothing but Wonnell's hat, and not his features, could be seen. The mistake of bell-crown for steeple-top shows that it was a stranger's job: the poor fool died for me. Now where did the bungler who killed me by proxy come from?"

"I will be frank with you, sir. Joe Johnson, the kidnapper, was also here: Mary says so. To save Virgie from him, I helped her away."

"Now," said Milburn, "what enemy of mine delegated the kidnapper to procure a murderer?"

He waited a moment without response, and answered, in a low tone of voice, his own question:

"The man is at Johnson's Cross Roads: letters from Cambridge tell me so. It was the deceased Mrs. Custis's brother, Allan McLane."

"Again I ask you to think of Vesta and her many sacrifices!"

"I do. I have promised her that she shall never receive a cruel word from me. But I shall not spare my assassins. To them I shall be as one they have killed, and whose blood smokes, for vengeance. I possess the only warrant that can drive them from Maryland."

He laid a roll of bank-notes on the table suggestively.

"No wealth is accumulated in vain," said Meshach Milburn, his delicate nostrils distended and his fine hand pointing to the bank-bills. "Now, *war* on Johnson's Cross Roads!"

He crossed the old room over the store, and, opening the green chest, brought out the Entailed Hat, and took it in his hand with a grim smile.

"Here is something I thought to lay aside on my wife's account," he spoke. "Her people compel me to wear it! I thought all malice to this poor hat would be done with my social triumph here. But I am not a man to be frightened. Let them kill me, but it shall be under my ancestral brim."

"Oh! hear your mocking-bird sing again as it did: 'Vesta—Meshach—Love!' Where is the bird?"

Meshach Milburn shook his head and put the Entailed Hat upon it. "Tom left me," he said, "when they began to fire bullets at my Hat."

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Vesta's female instinct had already found the explanation of Wonnell's death.

From the moment of knowing her husband, his fatal hat had been the shadow across her life's path. His person had never been offensive to her, and something attractive or modifying in him had led her, when a child, to offer a flower to his hat, to give it consonance with himself, that seemed to deserve less evil.

A fancied insult to his hat had made him quarrel with her father, a quarrel which involved her conquest, not by wooing, but by the treaty of war. The same hat had inspired the superstition which led her kitchen servants to leave their comfortable home, and had been the insuperable obstacle to her mother's consent to her marriage. It had caused the only bitter words that ever passed between her and her father. At last it had spilled blood, and her uncle, she well knew, from his implacable nature, had set the ruffians on, and she knew as well that her husband had found him out.

His intelligence, which would have been otherwise a matter of pride to her, became a subject of fear, involved with his hat.

Then, the loss of Virgie was hardly less severe to Vesta than her own mother's.

It was true that Roxy, pretty and loving, now poured all her devotion at her mistress's feet, but there had been something in Virgie that Roxy could never rise to—a dignity and self-reliance hardly less than a white woman's. Vesta shed bitter tears at the news of that dear comforter's flight, and on her knees, praying for the delicate young wanderer, she felt God's conviction of the sins of slavery. Alas! thousands felt the same who would not admit the conviction, and gave excuses that welded into one nation, at last, the sensitive millions who could not agree to a lesser sacrifice, but were willing to give war.

A little note from Snow Hill told Vesta that her maid had already departed, and would only write again from free soil.

So the upbraided hat was worn more often than before, and Vesta had to suffer much humiliation for it. Her husband now moved actively to organize his railroad, and visited the Maryland towns of the peninsula, taking her along, and wearing on the journey his King James tile, now swathed in mourning crape.

At Cambridge, which basked upon the waters like an English Venice, he applied the sinews of war to a listless public sentiment, and the county press began to call for Joe Johnson's expulsion, and Patty Cannon's rendition to the State of Delaware. At Easton, lying between the waters on her treasures of marl, like a pearl oyster, the people turned out to see the little man in the peaked hat, with the beautiful lady at his side; and Vesta was more pained for her husband than herself, to feel that his *outré* dress was prejudicing his railroad, as business, no less than beauty, revolts from any outward affectation. At the old aristocratic homes on the Wye River, more scowls than smiles were bestowed on the eccentric *parvenu*; and at Chestertown, where originated the Peales who drew this hat into their museum, the boys burned tar-barrels on the market space, and marched, in hats of brown loaf-sugar wrappers, like Meshach's, before the dwelling of Vesta's host.

The greater the opposition, the more indomitable Milburn grew to live it down. He wrote to her

father to go to Annapolis and work for a railroad charter and state aid, and began grading for his line in the vicinity of his old store at Princess Anne, throwing the first shovelful of earth himself, with the immemorial hat upon his sconce. This time there were no shouts, and he almost regretted it, seeming to feel that jeers carry no deep malice, while silence is hate.

Loyal to her least of vows, and wishing to love and obey him in spirit fully, Vesta felt that his own good-nature was being darkened again by his obstinacy upon this single point of an obsolete hat.

He looked, in their evening circle at Teackle Hall, like a younger and knightlier person, in a modern suit of clothes, and slippers of Vesta's gift. His delicate hand well became the ring she put upon it, and, when he talked high enthusiasm and sense, and stood ready to back them with courage and money, Vesta thought her husband lacked but one thing to make him the equal of his supposititious kinsman, the democratic martyr in the seventeenth century, and that was another head-dress. She almost feared to broach the subject, knowing that an old sore is ever the most sensitive, and being too direct and frank to insinuate or practise any arts upon him.

She was embroidering an evening-cap of velvet for him one day when Mrs. Tilghman sent a hat-box, and in it was a fine new hat of the current style. He answered her letter politely, and put the new hat upon the rack of Teackle Hall, and never touched it again.

Next, Rhoda Holland, his niece, procuring, from some country beau, a beaver-skin—and beavers were growing scarce and dear in that peninsula—had him an elegant cap made of it for the cold weather now coming; but he only kissed her and put it on the rack, and there it tempted the moth.

His chills and fever continued at broken times, but more regular became the dislike and opposition of the old class of society as he undertook to become the promoter of his region. They regarded it as audacity worse than crime: he had outstripped them in wealth, and now was undermining their importance. Many avowed that they would never ride on a railroad built by such a man; others hoped it would break him; some took open ground against his work, and wrote letters to Annapolis to prejudice him with the Legislature, where the Baltimore interest was already crying loudly that an Eastern Shore railroad meant to take Maryland trade and money to Philadelphia. Meshach fiercely responded that, unless the railway took the line of the Maryland counties, Delaware state would build it and carry it off to Newcastle instead of to Elkton, where Meshach meant to unite with a projected Baltimore system. Prudently estimating the sparseness of his fortune to execute a hundred miles of embankment and railroad, Milburn yet kept up a display of surveyors and graders in several counties, and his local patriotism had at least the appreciation of Vesta's little circle.

In the meantime the continued absence of Samson surprised him, and Judge Custis's letters were irregular and long coming as he went farther north, while two letters received by the Widow Dennis were as mystical as they were assuring: one, in a female hand, told her that her son Levin was being tenderly watched, and another, in man's writing, enclosed some money, and said her son would soon be home. Mrs. Dennis was far from happy in this indefinite state of mind, and her heart told her, also, that the absence of James Phœbus was a different strain. She loved that absentee already too well to forgive his silence.

One day, before November, Vesta said to her husband:

"The air and sky are warm and sparkling yet, and the roses are out. You work too hard between your canal case and your railroad. Let us fill the two carriages and drive to old Rehoboth, and eat our dinner there."

He consented, and they took with them Grandmother Tilghman and William, Rhoda Holland, Roxy, and Mrs. Dennis, and also the poor free woman, Mary, whom Jimmy Phœbus had released from her chains.

The road passed in sight of the birthplace of the lion of independence in Maryland, Samuel Chase, who forced that hesitating state, by threatenings and even riots, to declare for permanent separation from England, as Henry Winter Davis, by the same means, eighty-five years afterwards, forced her rebels against the Union to show their hands.

Near Chase's birthplace, on the glebe, rose the old Washington Academy, out in a field, raised in that early republican day when a generous fever for education, following the act of tolerance, made some noble school-houses that the growth of towns ultimately discouraged. With four great chimneys above its conical roof, and pediments and cupola, and two wide stories, and high basement, all made in staid, dark brick, the academy yet had a mournful and neglected look, as if, like man, it was ruminating upon the more brutalized times and lessening enlightenment false systems ever require.

"Ah!" said Vesta's husband, "how many a poor boy thou hast sent from yonder mutilated for life, honey, like the lovers of the queen bee."

"How is that?" Vesta inquired.

"You never heard of the queen bee? Women, when they die, may turn to bees, and reverse their hard conditions in this life. The queen bee has no rival in the hive; all other females there are immature, and all the males are dying for the queen. She has five hundred lovers, so lovesick for her that they never work, and forty times as many maids, like Penelope's, all embroidering comb and wax."



"How was that proved?"

"By putting the bees in a glass house and watching them. To God all mankind may be in a glass hive, too, and every buzzer's secret biography be kept."

"And the queen bee's honeymoon?"

"From her that word is taken. She flies high into the air and meets a lover by chance; she has so many that one is sure to be met; she kisses him in that crystal eddy of sunshine, and, in the transport, he is wounded to the heart. How many young drones from the academy have seen thee once and swooned for life!"

"But the queen bee also has a fate some time, sir?"

"Yes. She leaves the ancient hive at last, and settles on an unsightly forest-tree somewhere, and all that love her follow: the long-neglected herb becomes busy with music and sweetness, and the flashing of silver wings, till into some gum-tree cone the farmer gathers the swarm, and it is their home."

Vesta looked up at the poetical illustration, and saw her husband's conical hat, into which she had been hived, and her eyes fell to her mourning weeds.

"Oh, my father!" she thought; "has he kept his good resolutions! It is all I have left to hope for."

They travelled down the aisles of the level forest, sometimes the holly-trees, in their green leafage and red fruit, sometimes the cleanly pine-tree's green, enriching the brown concavity of oaks; and at the scattered settlement of Kingston, the Jackson candidate for governor, Mr. Carroll, bowed from his door. Crossing Morumsco Creek, they bore to the east, and soon saw, on a plain, the still animate ecclesiastical hamlet of Rehoboth, extending its two ancient churches across the vision.

The road ran to the bank of the River Pocomoke, where a ferry was still maintained to the opposite shore and the Virginia land of Accomac, and the cold tide, without a sail, went winding to an oystery estuary of the bay, where the mud at the bottom was so soft that vessels aground in it could still continue sailing, as on the muggy globe that Noah came to shore in.

Close by were oyster-shells high as a natural bluff, made by the Indian gourmands before John Smith's voyage of navigation.

Vesta was set out at the great, ruined Episcopal church that, like a castle of brick, made the gateway of Rehoboth; while William Tilghman and Rhoda strolled into the open door of the brick Presbyterian church farther on, and Milburn put up the horses at the tavern.

"William," Rhoda asked, "was this the first Presbyterian church ever made yer?"

"The first in America, Rhoda. This was Rev. Francis Makemie's church. He lived in Virginia, not far from here, where no other worship was permitted but ours, so he came over the Pocomoke and reared a church of logs at this point, and this is the third or fourth church-building upon the spot. Rehoboth then came to be such a point for worship that the Established Church put up yonder noble old edifice, as if to overawe this Calvinistic one, in 1735."

"It's a quare old house," said Rhoda. "The little doors that opens from the vestibule into the side galleries sent a draught right down the preacher's back at the fur end, and when he give out the hymn, 'Blow ye the trumpet, blow,' he always blowed his nose twice. So they boarded up the galleries and let the ceiling down flat, and if we go up thar we can see the other old round ceiling, William."

So they went up the narrow stairs from the door, and came into the tubes of galleries all closed from the congregation, and there, sitting down in the obscurity, the preacher passed his arm around Rhoda's waist.

"Take keer," she said; "maybe you was predestined to be lost yer. I'm skeered to be up yer half in the dark, even with a good man."

Nevertheless, she came a little closer to him, and looked into his eyes with her arch, demure ones. The young rector suddenly kissed her.

"You've brought it on yourself, Rhoda, by looking so pretty in this stern old place of creeds and catechisms. Could you love me if I asked you?"

"You couldn't love me true, William. Your heart is in t'other old church among the bats and foxes, where Aunt Vesty sits this minute."

"No, my sorrow is there, Rhoda. I am trying to build a nest for my heart. We all must love."

"William, I don't think a young man in love can remember so much history when he's sittin' in the dark by his gal."

"Love among the ruins is always melancholy, Rhoda."

"Yes, William, and your love comes out of 'em: the ruins of your old first love. I couldn't make you happy."

"Try," said William; "my fancy wavers towards you. You are a beautiful girl."

"Yes," said Rhoda, practically, "it's time I was gittin' married. I think I'll take you on trial, and watch Aunt Vesty to see if she is jealous of me."

All differences of education passed away, when, standing for a moment with this tall, willowy girl in his arms, her ardent nature in the blush of uncertainty, her very coquetry languishing, like health taking religion captive, the rector of Princess Anne felt that there is no medicine for love but love.

They walked together around the square old edifice, among the graves of Tilghmans, Drydens, Revells, and Beauchamps, and saw the round-capped windows and double doors in arched brick, and, passing back along the road, entered the enclosure of the grand old Episcopal church, which was nearly eighty feet long, and presented its broadside of blackish brick, and double tier of spacious windows, to the absolute desertion of this forest place.

The churchyard was a copse of gum-tree and poplar suckers, and berry bushes, with apple-trees and cedars and wild cherry-trees next above, and higher still the damp sycamores and maples, growing out of myrtle nearly knee-deep upon the waves of old graves.

In beautiful carpentry, the thirteen windows on this massive side upheld in their hand-worked sashes more than four hundred panes of dim glass, and two great windows in the gable had fifty panes each, and stood firm, though the wall between them, fifty feet in width, had fallen in, and been replaced with poorer workmanship. In the opposite gable was another door that had been forced open, and, as they stepped across the sill, a crack, like ice first stepped upon, went splitting the long and lofty vacancy with warning rumbles.

Now the whole interior, in fine perspective, stood exposed, at least seventy-five by fifty feet, like a majestic hall unbroken by any side-galleries, and with double stories of windows shedding a hazy light, and, at the distant end, a low pulpit, with spacious altar. The walls of this neglected temple were two feet thick, and its high ceiling was kept from falling down by ten rude wooden props of recent rough carpentry; the pews were stately, high-fenced things, numbered in white letters on a black ground, and each four-sided, to contain ten persons; the rotting damask cushions in many of them told of a former aristocracy, while now all the congregation could be assembled in a single pew, and worship was unknown but once a year, when the bishop came to read his liturgy to dust and desolation.

So, on the opposite western cape of the Chesapeake, shivered the Roman priests of Calvert's foundation, in the waste of old St. Mary's; the folds had left the shepherds, and fifty people only came to worship in the kirk of the earliest Presbyterians.

Two tall, once considered elegant, stoves were nearly midway up the cracking church-floor; and Mary, the free woman, had made a fire in one of them, and the pine wood was roaring, and the long height of pipe was smoking. Startled by the fire, a venerable opossum came out of one of the pews, and waggled down the aisle, like a gray devotee who had said his prayers, and feared no man.

Vesta was reading her prayer-book aloud near the stove to the pretty widow and Grandmother Tilghman. In a few moments the young rector emerged from a curious old gallery for black people, by the door, wearing his surplice; and he read the service at the desk, plaintive and simple, Milburn and his group responding in the room a thousand might have worshipped in.

"Cousin Vesta," the minister said, after the service, "Miss Holland is going to try to love me. Mr. Milburn, may I address her?"

"She is a wilful piece," Meshach said; "you must school her first. Let my wife give my consent."

Vesta went to both, and kissed them:

"I feel so much encouraged, dear Rhoda and William, to see love beginning all about me. Now, Norah, if you could be just to James Phœbus, who is proving his love to you, perhaps, with his life!"

"Yes, that is a match I approve of," said Grandmother Tilghman, "but I don't want Bill to marry. Disappointed men make rash selections."

"Oh," said Rhoda, "don't congratulate him too soon; I haven't tuk him yet. He's goin' teach me outen the books, and I'll teach him outen the forest."

They walked together to the river bank, and Mrs. Dennis had the poor woman, Mary, tell the adventures of Jimmy Phœbus to save her from slavery. All were deeply moved.

"Now, Norah," Grandmother Tilghman said, "the moment that man comes back you go to him and kiss him, and say, 'James, you have been the only father to my son. Do you want me to be your wife?' This world is made for marrying, Norah. Women have no other career. Nature does not value the brain of Shakespeare, but keeps the seed of every vagrant plant warm, and marries everything."

"Well," said Vesta, "Norah loves James Phœbus; don't you, Norah?"

The widow blushed.

"Take him, my pretty neighbor," said Milburn.

As they all looked at her, she suddenly cried:

"I want to, indeed. I would have done so before, but I am superstitious. Who is it that feeds me so mysteriously?"

"Has he been coming of late?" asked Mrs. Tilghman.

"No, not since you were married, Vesta."

"Then I think it will come no more," Milburn said. "You have waited longer than I did."

His eyes sought his wife's. He added:

"Will I ever be more than your husband?"

"Yes," said Grandmother Tilghman, with a special effort, "when you wear a hat a young wife is not ashamed of."

All felt a cold thrill at these words from the blind woman. Milburn said, gravely,

"How can you know about hats, when you cannot see them?"

"Oh," said Grandmother, herself a little frightened, "that hat I think I can smell."

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That same night, in Princess Anne, Mrs. Dennis, in her little cottage, undressed herself by a fragment of hearth-fire that now and then flashed upon the picture of her husband, as he had left her sixteen years before, when Levin was a baby—a rich blonde, youthful man, dressed in naval uniform, like Decatur, whose birthplace was so near his own.

His golden hair curled upon his forehead, his blue eyes were full of handsome daring, and his red, pouting mouth was like a woman's; upon his arm a corded chapeau was held, epaulettes tasselled his shoulders, his rich blue coat was slashed with gold along the wide lappels, and stood stiffly around his neck and fleecy stock and fan-shaped shirt-ruffles. He seemed to be a mere boy, but of the mettle which made American officers and privateersmen of his days the only guerdons of the republicanism of the seas against the else universal dominion of England.

This portrait, the last of her family possessions, was the young sailor's parting gift to her when he sailed in the *Ida*, leaving her a mere girl, with his son upon her breast. The picture hung above the lowly door, the bolt whereof was never fastened in that serene society, and seldom is to this day.

Mrs. Dennis knelt upon the bare floor, and raised her branching arms, white as her spirit, to the lover of her youth:

"Oh, thou I have adored since God gave me to feel the beauty and strength of man in my childhood, if I have ever looked on man but thee with love or wavering, rebuke me now for the offence I am to do, if such it be, in choosing another father for thy boy!"

A low wail seemed to be breathed upon the midnight from somewhere near, and a sick man's cough seemed to break the perfect silence. The widow's hand instinctively covered her bosom as she listened, and, deep in the spirit of her prayer, she continued:

"Oh, Bowie, if thou livest, let me know! May I not live to see thee come and find me in another's arms; thy look would kill me. If thou art detained by enemies, by savage people, or by foreign love, no matter what thy errors, I will still be true! Give me some token by the God that has thee in his keeping, whether thou liest on the ocean's floor or lookest from the stars. If thou art dead, love of my youth, assure me, oh, I pray thee!"

The wail and hacking cough seemed to be repeated very near. A footstep seemed to come.

The door flew open, and in the moonlight stood a man, pale as a ghost, of bandit look, with Spanish-looking garments, and head and neck tied up with cerements, like wounded people in the cockpits of ships of war.

He bent upon her the eyes of the portrait above the door. How changed! how like! There seemed upon his throat the stain of blood.

The widow, fascinated, frozen still, let fall her arms of ivory, and, as she gazed, her beautiful neck, strained in horror and astonishment, received upon its snow the rapture of Diana's shine.

The effigy, so like her husband, yet so altered, reached towards her his hand, on which a diamond caught the moon, and seemed to drink it. A wail, like the others she had heard, broke from his lips, and said the words:

"To lose those charms! To lose that heart! O God!"

As thus he stood, ghastly and supplicating, as if he would fall and die upon her threshold, another hand came forward in the moonlight, and drew the door between them. A voice she had not heard tenderly exclaimed:

"I love him as I never loved A male!"

"It is my husband's spirit," the widow breathed. "I cannot marry."

She swooned upon her floor, before the dying fire.

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## CHAPTER XXXVIII.

### VIRGIE'S FLIGHT.

Snow Hill, when Virgie looked forth upon it, almost seemed built on snow, a white sand composing the streets, gardens, and fields, though the humid air brought vegetation even from this, and vines clambered, willows drooped, flowers blossomed, on winter's brink, and great speckled sycamores, like freckled giants, and noble oaks, rose to heights betokening rich nutrition at their roots.

Heat and moisture and salt had made the land habitable, and the wind from a receded sea had piled up the sand long ago into mounds now covered with verdure, which the freak or fondness of the manor owner had called a hill, and put his own name thereto, perhaps with memories of old Snow Hill in London.

Upon this apparent bank or hill two venerable churches stood, both of English brick, the Episcopalian, covered with ivy, and the Presbyterian, which had given its name to the first synod of the Kirk in the new world, and now stood, surrounded with gravestones, where the visitor might read Scottish names left to orphans at Worcester, as yonder at the Episcopate graveyard, names left to English orphans in the same rolling tide of blood; and Worcester was the name of the county, as the court and jail might tell.

Hidden in the sand, like Benjamin's cup in the bag of flinty corn, a golden lustre yet seemed to betray Snow Hill, as the sun rose into its old trees, and woke the liquid-throated birds, and finally made the old brick and older whitewashed houses gleam, and exhale a soft, blue smoke. Virgie heard a sound as of hoofs upon a bridge, and saw, across the lily-bordered river, the Custis carriage winding up a golden road.

"Alone!" said Virgie; "love has gone. Now I must live for freedom."

"Breakfast, Miss," spoke a neat, kind-faced, yet ready woman, of Virgie's own size and color; "my husband is going to drive you out of town before any of the white people are up to see you."

At the table was a mulatto man, whom the woman introduced as her husband.

"Mrs. Hudson," Virgie said, "you are doing so much for me! may the good Lord pay you back!"

"Oh, no," replied the woman, "I am always up at this hour. I work hard, because I am trying to buy my mother, who is still a slave."

"How came you free?" Virgie asked, wistfully.

"I saved a sick gentleman's life, and he bought me for it, and gave me my freedom. See, I have a pass that tells the color of my eyes and skin, my weight, and everything. With this I can go into Delaware and the free states. I wish you had one, Miss Virgie."

"Oh, Mrs. Hudson, I dearly wish I had. Let me read it. Why, I could almost pass for you, from this description."

"Indeed you could," the housewife said; "we are not of the same age, but white people don't read a pass very careful."

"How I would love anybody that could get me such a pass!"

"I have given my word of honor that I will never lend it. Much as I like to help my color to freedom, I cannot break my word. To-morrow I have to go into Delaware with my pass to nurse a lady."

"You attend the sick, Mrs. Hudson?"

"Yes, I have a kind of call that way, Miss Virgie. Ever since I was a girl I pulled herbs and tried them on myself, and studied 'tendin' on people, watchin' their minds, that is so much of sickness, and how to wrap and rub them. My husband oysters down in the inlets. Here is his wagon."

"The Lord remember you in need, dear Mrs. Hudson."

The old wagon, an open thing, to peddle oysters and fish, was driven across the town to the south, and soon was in the open country, going towards Virginia. A smell of salt bay seemed in the air; the hawks' nests in dead trees indicated the element that subsisted everything, and the trees in the fields were often lordly in size, though sand and small oak and pine woods were seldom out of sight. As they turned into a lane near a little roadside place of worship, a young white man rode by on horseback, and, seeing Virgie, reined in and shouted,

"Purty, purty, purty as peaches and cream! Ole Virginny blood is in them eyes, by the Ensign!"

The colored man muttered, "Go 'long, Mr. Wise!"

"By the Ensign now," continued the man, who was young, but of a cadaverous countenance, "if 'tis a Maryland huzzy, she is marvellous. What's the name, angel gal?"

"She's a Miss Spence. I'm a takin' her home yer," the mulatto man interposed, hastily, and went in the gate, while the horseman, with a shout like one intoxicated, galloped towards the north.

"I'm sorry he seen you, sho'!" the conductor said; "that's Henry A. Wise, the big lawyer from Accomac. Maybe he'll inquire at Snow Hill, where he's goin' to court."

"What house is this, Mr. Hudson?" Virgie asked, seeing at the end of the short lane a thick-set house and porch, with small farm-buildings around it.

"That's ole Spring Hill, built by the first of the Milburns; by the one that made the will leavin' his hat and nothin' else to be son. It's got brick ends. I 'spect they had money when they come here, Virgie."

The quickened mettle of the girl noticed that he had ceased to call her "Miss."

"Now," said Hudson, "I'm goin' to leave you here with my sister till I see about gittin' a boat. If you is tracked to Snow Hill, it'll be found you come out this way, now. The inlets run up along the coast yer past the Delaware line. I'm a goin' to sail you past Snow Hill agin an' double on 'em. Yes, Miss Virgie, I'll git you away if it costs all I have got together."

An excited light seemed to be in his eyes.

Virgie was put in a loft over the kitchen of the house, and left to her contemplations. The place was nearly dark, and she was jaded for want of sleep, the past night's excitement having shaken her nervous system, and soon she began to doze fitfully, and dream almost awake.

She saw Meshach Milburn, who seemed to have become a little, old-faced child, reaching up to an older person, very like himself in features, and taking a steeple hat from his hand. This older child reached back, and took a similar hat from another, still older; and then the first two vanished, and two old men were giving and receiving the hat.

Then nothing was left but the hat alone, which was a huge object with fire belching from it, and by the flame a circle of wizards went round and round in dizzy glee, all wearing hats of similar form, but higher, higher, till they reached the sky and stars, and each was spouting flames.

Among these riotous wizards she recognized the features of the tall kidnapper and of Judge Custis; and Vesta, too, was there, and old Aunt Hominy, all giving a hasty look of shame or sorrow or severity at her, till she, fearing, yet fascinated, leaped into the circle, and danced around and around with the rest, till her feet made a fiery path and her head was burning hot, and finally she lost her balance, and fell into the great hat, whose high walls, like mountains, surrounded her, and nothing could she see in the bottom of the old felt tile but a little grave, and peeping from it was the face of the murdered child the kidnapper had taken away.

"Come," said a voice, and Virgie awoke, with fever in her temples and hot hands, to see the head of her conductor looking into the loft as if with red-hot eyeballs.

She only knew that she was going again in the old wagon, and a boy was in it, and that after a certain time, she could not tell how long, she was helped to the ground at an old landing, where the road stopped, and was placed on board a sort of scow, which the breeze, laden with mosquitoes, was carrying into a broad, islet-sprinkled water.

The man Hudson was sounding, and was watching the sail, while the boy steered, and Virgie was lying, sick and cold, in the middle of the skiff, covered with the man's large coat.

It seemed to her to be afternoon, and the ocean somewhere near, as she heard low thunder, like breaking waves; and once, when she rose, in a stupefied way, to look, there were familiar objects on both shores, and she thought it was the Old Town beach near Snow Hill inlet.

A little later the man brought her oysters and some cold pork-rib, with corn-bread, to eat, and the shores grew closer, and finally seemed almost to meet, as the skiff, scraping the bottom, darted through a narrow strait.

Then the stars were shining over her, and the waters grew wide again, and, lying in a trance of flying lights and images, she thought she felt her lips kissed, and a voice say "Darling!"

Finally, she felt lifted up and carried, and, when she could realize the situation, she found herself lying on a pile of shingles at an old wharf, and the man, beside her, was weeping, as he watched the boat receding down a moonlit aisle of wave.

"My boy, my poor ole woman," she heard her conductor mutter, "I never can come back to you no mo'!"

"Why?" spoke Virgie, hardly realizing what she said.

"Because—because—*you* did it!" the man exclaimed, with ardent eyes, seen through his streaming tears.

"Oh, tell me where I am!" Virgie said. "Is it far to freedom now?"

She looked at the sky, all agitated with clouds and stars moving across each other, and it seemed the nearest world of all.

"Is my father there?" thought Virgie, "my dear white father? Can he see me here, sick and lonely, and hate me?"

"We're at de Shingle landing; yonder is St. Martin's," said the negro, cautiously; "there's two roads nigh whar we air, goin' to the North, dear Virgie; one is the stage-road, and t'other is the shingle-trail through the Cypress Swamp.

"Take the road that's the safest to Freedom," Virgie sighed.

In a few moments, walking over the ground, they came to a place where the cart-trail crossed a sandy road, and went beyond it, along the edge of a small stream. The man walked a few steps up the better road undecidedly, and suddenly drew Virgie back into the bushes, but not quick enough to be unobserved by two men coming on in an old, rattling wagon.

"My skin!" cried the man driving, a youngish man, of sharp, but not unkindly eyes, "thar's a sniptious gal. Come out yer and show yourself!"

Virgie felt the man's eyes resting on her, but not with the coarse ardor of his companion, who wore a wide slouched hat and red shirt, and was bandaged around the head and throat, yet from his ghastly pale face, like death, on which some blood seemed to be smeared, and to stain the bandage at his neck, lay a coarse leer, and he kissed his mouth at her, and uttered:

"*O flexuosa! esquisita!* It is dainty, Sorden!"

"Now ef we was a going t'other way, Van Dorn," the driver said, "we could give them a lift. Boy, what are you out fur? Where's your passes?"

"Yer they is. It's my wife an' me, gwyn to nurse a lady in Delaware."

"Let me see!" He puffed his cigar upon the paper, and exclaimed, "Prissy Hudson? why, my skin! that's my wife's nurse. And that ain't the same woman! where did you get this pass?"

"Go on, Sorden!" coughed the other man, "I'm bleeding. Let me lie down."

His eyes had lost their wanton fire, and were hollow and glazing. The driver caught him in his arms, and uttered the kind words,

"I love him as I never loved A male!"

"Give me back the passes!" exclaimed the mulatto man, as the wagon started south.

"No," shouted the driver, "I shall keep them as evidence against Prissy Hudson for assisting a runaway!"

"Lost! lost!" muttered the mulatto. "Now, darling, the swamp's our only road!"

He seized her in his flight, and pulled her up the cart-track along the swampy branch.

"What have you done?" cried Virgie.

"Come! come!" answered the man. "Here is no place to talk."

With fever making her strong, and heightening, yet clouding, her impressions, so that time seemed extinct, and fear itself absorbed in frenzy, the girl followed the man into the deep sand of the track, and scarcely noted the melancholy cypress-trees rising around them out of pools that sucked poison from the starlight, basking there beside the reptile.

Flowers, with such rich tints that night scarcely darkened them, sent up their musky perfumes, and vines, in silent festoons, drooped from high tips of giant trees like Babel's aspiring builders, turned back and stricken dumb. They fell all limp, and, hanging there in death, their beards still seemed to grow in the ghastly vitality of an immortal dream.

The sounds of restless animation, intenser in the night, as if the moon were mistress here, and wakened every insect brain and tongue to industry, grew prodigious in the sick girl's ears, and seemed to deaden every word her male companion had to say, and, like enormous pendulums of sound, the roaming crickets and amphibia swung to and fro their contradictions, like viragos doomed to wait for eternity, and each insist upon the last word to say:

"You did!" "You didn't!" "You did!" "You didn't, you didn't, you didn't!" "You did, you did!"

Thus the eternal quarrel, begun before Hector and the Greeks were born, had raged in the Cypress Swamp, and increased in loudness every night, till on the flying slave girl's ears it pealed like God and Satan disputing for her soul.

As this idea increased upon her fancy she heard the very words these warring powers hurled to and fro, as now the myriads of the angels cheered together, "Hallelujah! Hallelujah!" and, like an army of spiders, assembled in the swamp, a deep refrain of "Hell, hell, hell!" groaned back.

"Hallelujah!" "Hell!" "Hallelujah!"

She found herself crying, as she stumbled on, "Hallelujah! hallelujah!"

The swamp increased in depth and solemnity as they drew near the rushing sluices of the Pocomoke, and kept along them, the trail being now a mere ditch and chain of floating logs where no vehicle could pass, and the man himself seemed frightened as he led the way from trunk to float and puddle to corduroy, sometimes balancing himself on a revolving log, or again plunging nearly to his waist in vegetable muck; but the light-footed girl behind had the footstep of a bird, and hopped as if from twig to twig, and seemed to slide where he would sink; and the man often turned in terror, when he had fallen headlong from some treacherous perch, to see her slender feet, in crescent sandals, play in the moonlit jungle like hands upon a harp.

He stared at her in wonder, but too wistfully. The cat-briers hung across the opening, and grapevines, like cables of sunken ships, fell many a fathom through the crystal waves of night; but the North Star seemed to find a way to peep through everything, and Virgie heard the words from Hudson, once, of—

"Jess over this branch a bit we is in Delaware!"

Then the crickets and tree-frogs, the bullfrogs and the whippoorwills, the owls and everything, seemed to drown his voice and halloo for hours, "We is in Delaware! we is, we is! we is in Del-a-a-ware!"

A little warming, kindly light at length began to blaze their trail along, as if some gentle predecessor, with a golden adze, had chipped the funereal trees and made them smile a welcome. Small fires were burning in the vegetable mould or surface brush, and the opacity of the forest yielded to the pretty flame which danced and almost sang in a household crackle, like a young girl in love humming tunes as she kindles a fire.

The mighty swamp now grew distinct, yet more inaccessible, as its inner edges seemed transparent in the line of fires, like curtains of lace against the midnight window-panes. The Virginia creeper, light as the flounces of a lady, went whirling upward, as if in a dance; the fallen giant trees were rich in hanging moss; laurel and jasmine appeared beyond the bubbling surface of long, green morass, where life of some kind seemed to turn over comfortably in the rising warmth, like sleepers in bed.

Suddenly the man took Virgie up and carried her through a stream of running water, brown with the tannin matter of the swamp.

"We is in Delaware," he said, soon after, as they reached a camp of shingle sawyers, all deserted, and lighted by the fire, the golden chips strewn around, and the sawdust, like Indian meal, that suggested good, warm pone at Teackle Hall to Virgie.

She put her feet, soaked with swamp water, at a burning log to warm, and hardly saw a mocasson snake glide round the fire and stop, as if to dart at her, and glide away; for Virgie's mind was attributing this kindly fire to the presence of Freedom.

"Oh, I should like to lie here and go to sleep," she said, languidly; "I am so tired."

The man Hudson, wringing wet with the journey's difficulties, threw his arms around her and drew her to his damp yet fiery breast.

"We will sleep here, then," he breathed into her lips; "I love you!"

The incoherence of everything yielded to these sudden words, and on the young maid's startled nature came a reality she had not understood: her guide was drunken with passion.

She struggled in his arms with all her might, but was as a switch in a maniac's hands.

"I stole my ole woman's pass fur you," the infatuated ruffian sighed; "you said you would love the man who got you one, Virgie. You is mine!"

A suffocating sense and heat, more than animal nature, seemed to enclose them. The girl struggled free, her lithe figure exerted with all her dying strength to preserve her modesty.

"Hudson," she cried, "I will tell your wife! God forgive you for insulting a poor, sick, helpless girl in this wild swamp!"

"My wife is dead to me, Virgie. You is the only wife I has now. Here we shall sleep and forgit my children and my little home that was enough fur me, gal, till your beauty come and tuk me from it."

"Stop!" the girl called, with her face blanched even in her fever, though not with fear, as her white blood rose proudly. "If you do not keep away, I will throw myself in that deep pool and drown. I would rather die than cheat your good wife as you have done."

"Nothing is yer," the negro said, "but you, an' me, an' Love. I would not let you drown. You are too beautiful. We will get to the free states together and live for each other. Kiss me!"

He darted upon her again and bent her fair head back by the fallen braids of her silky hair.

The tall woods filled with majestic light; something roared as if the winds had gone astray and were rushing towards them.

"Hark!" cried Virgie. "God is coming to punish you."

As she spoke the ground beside them burst into flames and black smoke. The man's arms relaxed; he looked around him and exclaimed,

"It's the underground fire. Run for your life!"

He led the way, running to the north, as they had been going. In a moment fire, like a golden wall, rose across their path.

They turned whence they had come, and the fire there was like a lake of lava, and over it the enormous trees seemed to warm their hands, and up the dry vines, like monkeys of flame, the forked spirits of the burning earth dodged and chased each other.

"Gal, I can't leave you to perish," the desperate man shouted; "you must love me or we'll die together."

He threw his wet great-coat around her head, so that she could not breathe the smoke nor spoil her beauty, and dashed into the fire ahead of them.

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Virgie awoke, lying upon the ground, the stars still standing in the sky, but some streaks of light in the east betokening dawn.

Her hands were full of soot, her skirts were burned, some smarting pains were in her legs and feet, but she could walk.

"Where is that poor, deluded man?" she thought.

A groan came from the ground, and there lay something nearly naked, burrowing his face in a pool of swamp water.

"Thank the Lord you are not dead," the girl said, "but have lived to repent and be a better man."

He rose up and looked at her with a face all blackened and raw and hideous to see.

"Merciful Lord!" exclaimed Virgie; "what ails you, poor man?"

"The Lord has punished me for my wickedness," he groaned. "Virgie, you must lead me now; I am gone blind."

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## CHAPTER XXXIX.

### VIRGIE'S FLIGHT (*continued*).

"Can you walk, Hudson?" asked Virgie, when her horror would permit.

"Yes, child, I can walk, I reckon; but both my eyes is burned out. Oh, my poor old wife: she could nurse me so well. I have lost her."

The girl comforted the sightless man, and led him on, indifferent to danger. He waded the deep places, where the water soothed his wounds and filled his blistered sockets with cool mud.

"Blessed is the pure in heart," he murmured, as they reached some sandy ground and sank down. "You, Virgie, can see God; I never can."

The great Cypress Swamp of Delaware—counterpart of the Dismal Swamp in Virginia—the northern border of which they had now reached, had probably been once a great inlet or shallow bay in the encroaching sand-bar of the peninsula, and was filled with oysters and fish, which in time were imprisoned and became the manure of a cypress forest that soon started up when springs of water flowed under the sand and moistened the seed; and for ages these forests had been growing, and had been prostrated, and had dropped their leaves and branches in the great inlet's bed, until a deep ligneous mass of combustible stuff raised higher and higher the level of the swamp, and, dried with ages more of time than dried the mummies of the Pharaohs, it often opened tunnels to burrowing fire, which at some point of its course belched forth and lighted the hollow trees, and raged for weeks. Such a fire they had come through.

Virgie, in the early daylight, came upon a small, swarthy boy, driving a little cart and ox.

"Are you a colored boy?" Virgie asked.

"No," answered the boy, proudly. "I'm Indian-river Indian; reckon I'm a *little* nigger."

"Take this poor man in and I will pay you. Where are you going?"

"To Dagsborough landing, for salt."

"Leave me at Dagsborough, at the old Clayton house," spoke up the blind man; "it's empty. I can



die thar or git a doctor."

Before the people were up they entered a little hamlet, on that stage road from which they had made the night's detour, and saw a few small houses and a little shingle-boarded church near by among the woods, and one large house of a deserted appearance was at the town's extremity. The man said, "This is John M. Clayton's birthplace: my wife used to work yer."

"Virgie!" exclaimed a familiar voice.

The girl turned, her ears still ringing with the echoes of the swamp, and saw a face she knew, and ran to the breast beneath it, crying,

"Samson Hat! Oh, friend, love me like my mother. I am very ill."

"Pore, darlin' child," Samson said; "no love will I ever bodder you wid agin but a father's. Why air you so fur from home?"

"I'm sold, Samson: I'm trying to get free. The kidnappers is after me. Oh, save me!"

"I've jist got away from 'em, Virgie. The ole woman, Patty Cannon, set me free. I promised her I would kidnap somebody younger dan ole Samson. Bless de Lord! I come dis way!"

He led her into the oak-trees of the old church grove, where English worship had been celebrated just a hundred years; and she gave him money to buy medicine and get a doctor for the blind man, and to purchase her a shawl at the store. Then Virgie sank into a fevered sleep under the old oak-trees, and, when she knew more, was gliding in a boat that Samson was sailing down a broad piece of water, and her head was in his lap.

"You air pure as an angel yit, my little creatur," Samson said; "and now I'm a-takin' you down the Indian River into Rehoboth Bay; and arter dark I'll git you up the beach to Cape Hinlopen, and maybe I kin buy you a passage on some of dem stone boats dat's buildin' de new breakwater dar, and dat goes back to de Norf."

"Oh, Samson, if I could love any man it would be you," Virgie said; "but I cannot love any now except my dear white father. Who is he?"

"De Lord, I reckon, has got yo' pedigree, Virgie."

"Am I dying, Samson?" asked the girl, wistfully, with her brilliant eyes full of fever. "Oh, friend, let me die so good that Miss Vesty and my father can come and kiss me!"

"Tell me about Princess Anne an' my dear old Marster Meshach Milburn, dat I'se leff so long, Virgie!" the old pugilist said, wiping his eyes of tears.

She began to try to remember, but faces and events ran into each other, and she felt aware that her mind was wandering, but could not bring it back; and so the boat, sailing in sight of the ocean and the stately ships there, grounded after noon almost within sound of the surf.

Sheltered in a piece of woods for some hours, Virgie found herself, at dark, carried in old Samson's arms up a beach of the sea where the sand was yielding and seldom firm, except at the very edge of the surf, which rolled ominously and at times became a roar, and often swept to the low, sedgy bank. Lightning played across the black sea, lifting it up, as it seemed, and showing vessels making either out or in, and finally thunder burst upon the gathering confusion, and Samson said:

"Dar's a gun in dat thunder!"

The next flash of lightning showed a vessel close to the shore, coming rapidly in on the southeaster, and her gun was fired again, and feeble hailing was heard; but the storm now broke all at once, and a wave threw Samson to the ground and nearly carried Virgie back with it to the boiling sea; but the faithful old man fought for her, and she ran at his side, uttering no complaint, till once, as they stopped to get breath, and the heavenly fire drew into sight every foot, as it seemed, of that vast ocean, cannonading it also with majestic artillery, the girl sighed,

"Freedom is beautiful!"

"Oh, Virgie," Samson answered, covering her with his own coat, "if I could buy you free, pore chile, I'd a-mos' go into slavery to save you from dis night."

"I can die in there," Virgie said, pointing to the waves; "they must not catch me."

A wail came out of the storm, so close before that it hushed them both, and the lightning lifted upon their eyes a stranding vessel, so close, it seemed, that they could touch it, and she was full of people, halloing, but not in any intelligible tongue.

As the black night fell upon this magic-lantern sketch they heard a crash of wave and wood, and falling spars and awful shrieks, and, when the next vivid flash of lightning came, nothing was visible but floating substance, and spluttering cries came out of the bosom of the sea, and a black man, flung, as if out of a cannon, upon a wave that drenched these wanderers, struck the ground at their feet, and looked into Samson's eyes as the convulsion of death seized his chest and feet.

Before they could speak to each other, the beach was full of similar corpses, a moment before alive as themselves, and every one was naked and black.

"It's a slave-ship, foundered yer," cried Samson.

He caught at a yawl-boat driving past him, in the many things that drifted around their feet, and Virgie saw painted upon its bow the word "*Ida*."

"Samson," she said, feeling all the influences of Princess Anne again, and forgetting her own misery, "it's Mrs. Dennis's husband come home and shipwrecked."

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When Virgie next remembered, she was on a vast hill of sand, near a lighthouse that was built upon it, and flashed its lenses sleepily upon a sullen break of day, the mutual lights showing the tops of trees rising out of the sand, where a forest had been buried alive, like little twigs in amber.

Almost naked with fighting the storm, Samson Hat slept at her side, peaceful as hale age and virtue could enjoy the balm of oblivion in life.

"Happy are the black," thought the sick girl, "that take no thought on things this white blood in me makes so big: on freedom and my father. Father, do love me before I die!"

She knelt on the great sand hillock by Cape Henlopen and prayed till she, too, lost her knowledge of self, and was sleeping again at Samson's side. She dreamed of innumerable angels flying all around her, and yet their voices were so harsh they awoke her at last, and still these seraphs were flying in the day. She saw their wings, and moved the old man at her side to say,

"Samson, why cannot these angels sing?"

The old man looked up and faintly smiled:

"Poor Virgie, dey is wild-fowls, all bewildered by dat storm: geese and swans. Dey can't sing like angels."

"Yes," said the girl; "something sings, I know. What is it?"

"Jesus, maybe," the negro answered, looking at her, his eyes full of tears.

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The great Breakwater, which required forty years and nearly a million tons of stone to build it, was then just commencing, and where it was to be, within the shallow bight of Henlopen, they saw the wrecks of many vessels, some sunken, some shattered in collision, some stranded in the marsh, proving the needs of commerce for such a work, and also the fury of the storm that had so innocently vanished, like a sleeping tiger after his bloody meal.

In the gentle sunshine floated the American flag upon several vessels there—the flag that first kissed the breeze upon that spot in the year 1776, when Esek Hopkins raised over the *Alfred* the dyes of the peach and cream in the centre of his little squadron. And there, along the low bluff of the Kill, still lay the shingle-boarded town of Lewes, in the torpor of nearly two hundred years, or since the Dutch De Vries had settled it in 1631. Lord Delaware, Argall, and the Swede, Penn, Blackbeard, Paul Jones, Lord Rodney, a thousand heroes, had known it well; the pilots, like sea-gulls, had their nests there; the Marylanders had invaded it, the Tories had seized it, pirates had been suckled there; and now the courts and lawyers had forsaken it, to go inland to Georgetown.

"Virgie," said Samson, "I'll try to buy some of de stone-boat captains to carry you to Phildelfy."

He waded the Kill, carrying her, and left her in an old Presbyterian church at the skirt of Lewes, and procured medicine for her, and then labored in vain nearly all day to get her passage to a free state. The reply was invariable: "Can't take the risk of the whippin'-post and pillory for no nigger. Can't lose a long job like bringin' stone to the Breakwater to save one nigger."

At the hotel a colored man beckoned Samson aside—a fine-looking man, of a gingerbread color—and they went into the little old disused court-house, in the middle of a street, where there was a fire.

"Brother," said the stranger, "I see by your actions that you're trying to git a passage North. Is it fur yourself?"

"No," Samson said, taking an inventory of the other's fine chest and strength, and mentally wishing to have a chance at him; "I'm a free man, and kin go anywhere; but I have a friend."

"Why, old man," spoke the other, frankly, "I'm the agent of our society at this pint."

"What is it?" asked Samson, warily.

"The Protection Society. They educated me right yer. I went to school with white boys. Now, where is your friend?"

"What kin you do fur her?" asked Samson.

"It's a gal, is it? Why, I can just put her in my buggy, made and provided for the purpose, and

drive her to the Quaker settlement."

"Where's that?"

"Camden—only thirty miles off. I've got free passes all made out. Give yourself, brother, no more concern."

Samson looked at the handsome person long and well. The man stood the gaze modestly.

"Oh, if I had some knowledge!" spoke Samson; "I might as well be a slave if I know nothin'. I can't read. I wish I could read your heart!"

"I wish you could," said the man; "then you would trust me."

"What is your name?"

"Samuel Ogg."

"I want you to hold up your hand and swear, Sam Ogg, that you will never harm the pore chile I bring you. Say, 'Lord, let my body rot alive, an' no man pity me, if I don't act right by her.'"

"It's a severe oath," said the stranger, "but I see your kind interest in the lady. Indeed, I'm only doing my duty."

He repeated the words, however, and Samson added, "God deal with you, Sam Ogg, as you keep dat oath. Now come with me!"

The girl was found asleep, but delirious, her large eyes, in which the blue and brown tints met in a kind of lake color, being wide open, and almost lost in their long lashes, while flood and fire, sun and frost, had beaten upon the slender encasement of her gentle life, that still kept time like some Parian clock saved from a conflagration, in whose crystal pane the golden pendulum still moves, though the hands point astray in the mutilated face.

Her teeth were shown through the loving lips she parted in her stormy dreams, like waves tossing the alabaster sails of the nautilus, or like some ear of Indian corn exposed in the gale that blows across the tasselled field.

Her raiment, partly torn from her, showed her supple figure and neck, and, beneath her mass of silky hair, her white arm, like an ivory serpent, sustained her head, her handsome feet being fine and high-bred, like the soul that bounded in her maiden ambition.

There had been days when such as she called Antony away from his wife, and Cæsar from his classical selfishness; when on many an Eastern throne such beauty as this stirred to murmurous glory armies beyond compute, and clashed the cymbals of prodigious conquests. She lay upon the altar-cushions of the church, like young Isaac upon his father's altar, and where the mourners knelt to pray for God's reconcilment, the cruelty of their law flashed over her like Abraham's superstitious knife.

Priceless was this young creature, in noble hands, as wife or daughter, human food or fair divinity, and all the precious mysteries of woman awake in her to love and conjugality, like song and seed in the spring bird; yet a hard, steely prejudice had shut her out from every institution and equality, let every crime be perpetrated upon her, made the scent of freedom in her nostrils worse than the incentive of the thief, and has outlasted her half a century, and is self-righteous and inflexible yet.

In that old churchyard that enclosed her slept revolutionary officers, who helped to gain freedom: they might be willing to rise with her, not to be buried in the same enclosure.

How small is religion, how false democracy, how far off are the judgments of heaven! There stood over the pulpit an inscription, itself presumptuous with aristocracy, saying, "The dead in Christ shall rise first;" as if those truly dead in the humility of Christ would not prefer to rise last!

Samson watched his new friend narrowly, whose countenance was profoundly piteous, and his teeth and lip made a "Tut-tut!" Satisfied with the man, Samson knelt by Virgie and kissed her once.

"Pore rose of slavery," said Samson, "forgive me dat I courted you like a gal, instead of like an angel. I am old, and ashamed of myself. Dear, draggled flower, we may never meet agin. May the Lord, if dis is his holy temple, save you pure and find you a home, Virgie. Good-bye!"

"Come," said the man, as Samson sat bowed and weeping, "the buggy is ready; I'll wrap you warm, Miss."

"Freedom!" spoke the girl, awakening; "oh, I must find it."

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The next that Virgie knew, she was in a cabin loft, and voices were heard speaking in a room below.

"See me!" said one; "we sell you, dat's sho'! See me now! You make de best of it. Sam Ogg yer, we sold twenty-two times. Sam will be sold wid you and teach yo' de Murrell game."

"Politely, gentlemen," said a feminine voice; "I don't know that I have the nerve for it. My occupation has been marrying them. It is true that the hue-and-cry has made that branch dull, but I had great talent for it."

"Kidnapping," said a third voice, "is running low. It surrounds the whole slave belt from Illinois to Delaware. The laws of Illinois were made in our interests till Governor Harrison, whose free man was kidnapped, raised an excitement out there six years ago. Newt Wright, Joe O'Neal, and Abe Thomas were the smartest kidnappers along the Kentucky line. But Joe Johnson, who is getting ready to go south, will be the last man of enterprise in the business. John A. Murrell's idea is to divide fair with black men, sell and steal them back, and I think it is sagacious. It's safer, any way, than Patty Cannon's other plan."

"What is that, Mr. Ogg?" said the feminine-voiced negro.

"Making away with the negro-traders, they say."

"See me! see me!" exclaimed the first voice. "Dey'll hang her some day fur dat."

"Now," resumed Mr. Ogg, "a man of intelligence like you and me, Mr. Ransom—pardon, sir, does your shackle incommode you? I'll stuff it with some wool—"

"Politely, Mr. Ogg; I'm ironed rather too tight."

"I say, Mr. Ransom, you and I can always play the average slaveholder for a fool. Why, I hardly get into any family before I make love to some member of it, and if I don't vamose with a black wench, it's with her mistress."

"Ah, Mr. Ogg, they are perfectly fiendish in resenting *that!*"

"Of course, but there's a grand tit-for-tat going through all nature. Why, sir, the pleasures of the far South, to a man of art and enterprise like you, far exceed this poor, plain region. Take the roof off slavery and the blacks have rather the best of it; the whites would think so if they could see what is going on."

"Politely, Mr. Ogg; will not the entire institution some day blow itself out, like one of their Western steamboats?"

"No doubt of it, Mr. Ransom. When we have disposed of you, and you can see the country for yourself, observe how sensitive slaveholding is! A thousand anxieties lie in it. They believe in insurrections, rapes, and incendiaries. A perfect sleep they hardly know, but go prowling around night and day, driven by their suspicions. It makes them warlike, yet unhappy, and the slaves eat the ground poor. Besides, they have terrible enemies in the negro-traders, whom they look down on socially, and really drive them into sympathy with the negroes. Mr. Murrell, for instance, has a grand plan for a slave insurrection. He says white society is all against him, and he'll get even with it."

"See me, see me!" hoarsely chimed in another voice. "Slavery is bad scared, sho! Joe Leonard Smith, Catholic, over on de western sho', has jess set twelve niggers free. Governor Charley Ridgely has set two hundred and fifty free. John Randolph, dey say, is gwyn to set more dan three hundred free. Dar's fifty abolition societies in Nawf Carolina, eleven in Maryland, eight in ole Virginny, two in Delaware. Ho, ho! dey set' em free and we'll steal' em back! Ole Derrick Molleston will never be out of pork an' money!"

"Politely, gentlemen," said the individual with the shackle. "Have you heard of the incendiary proclamation issued in Boston by David Walker, telling all slaves that it is their religious duty to rise?"

"Yes, and rise they will, but to what end? It will be a big scare, but no war. The next thing they will stop reading among all slaves, prevent emancipation by law, and watch the colored meeting-houses. The fire will be buried under the amount of the fuel, yet all be there."<sup>[6]</sup>

"Mr. Ogg, your experience is remarkable. And you have been sold and run away in nearly every slave state? Politely, sir, are they not kidnapping white men, too? Who is this Morgan that was stolen last year in the State of New York?"

"Oh, that's a renegade Free Mason, Mr. Ransom. As much fuss is made over him as if we did not steal a hundred free people every day. It only shows that kidnapping of all sorts is getting to be unpopular. If a new political party can be made on stealing one white Morgan, don't you think another party will some day rise on stealing several millions of black Morgans?"

"See me! see me!" exclaimed the hoarse voice, suddenly.

"Escaping, are you?" cried the second voice.

"Politely, gentlemen, politely!" was heard from the third voice, some distance off in the dark, and then chasing footsteps followed, and Virgie arose and peeped below.

A fire was burning in a clay chimney beside a table, on which were meat and liquor. The girl swung herself out of the loft to the ground-floor, and, seizing the meat and bread, rushed noiselessly into the night.

She hardly knew what she was doing until she had crossed a bridge and come to the edge of a

small town, around which she took a road to the right that led into another country road, and this she followed a mile or more, till she saw a small brick house, by a stile and pole-well, in the edge of woods.

The light from a little dormer-window in the garret beamed so brightly that it charmed Virgie's soul with the fascination of warmth and home, and, without thinking, she crossed the stile, bathed her hot temples at the well, and walked into the kitchen before the fire.

"Freedom!" said Virgie, wanderingly; "have I come to it?" She fell upon the rag carpet before the fire, saying, "Father, dear father," and did not move.

"Well," spoke a man of large paunch and black snake's eyes, sitting there, "it's not often people in search of freedom walk into Devil Jim Clark's!"

"She is white," exclaimed a woman, looking compassionately upon the stranger, "and she is dying."

"No," retorted the man, "she is too pretty to be white. This is the bright wench Sam Ogg was seen with. She belongs to Allan McLane, and there's a reward of five hundred dollars for her, but she'll bring two thousand in New Orleans for a mistress."

"Hush!" said the woman; "you may bring a judgment upon your daughters."

"Joe Johnson is about to sail," remarked Devil Jim Clark; "he shall take her with him."

The girl had heard *that* name through the thick chambers of oblivion. She rose and shrieked, and rushed into the woman's arms:

"Save me, mother, save me from that man!"

The woman's heart was pierced by the cry, and she folded Virgie to her breast and kissed her, saying:

"She shall sleep in our daughter's bed and rest her poor feet this night—our daughter, James, that we buried."

The man's mouth puckered a little; he looked uneasy, and drew his handkerchief to his eyes.

"You're all agin me! you're all agin me!" he bellowed, and rushed from the room.

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The wife of Devil Jim Clark was a pious Methodist, and, with her rich-eyed daughter, spent the next day at Virgie's bedside, hearing her broken mutterings for fatherly love and Vesta's cherished remembrance.

"Your father is out for mischief," Mrs. Clark said. "Jump on your saddle-horse, my daughter, and ride to the Widow Brinkley's, just over the Camden line. Tell her to send for this girl."

"Mamma, they say she's an abolitionist."

"That's what I send you for. It's a race between you and your father. Be with me or with him!"

The girl tied on her hood, took her riding-whip, and departed.

In an hour she returned with a tidy black woman, whom Mrs. Clark took into Virgie's chamber.

"My heart bleeds for this poor girl," the hostess said. "They say your son spirits negroes North. Mr. Clark says so. I do not ask you if it is true, but, as one mother to another, I give you this girl. She is too white to be sold. She looks like a dead child of mine."

"Bill is not due home till sunset. If she is alive by that time, he has just time to drive her to Mr. Zeke Hunn's vessel at the mouth of the creek, which lies there every trip one hour—"

"To let runaways come aboard?"

"I have never been accused of helping them, Mrs. Clark."

The trader's wife slipped a bank-bill into the colored woman's hand.

"Lend to the Lord!" she said. "I depend upon you to save us the sin of selling this girl."

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There came to the little black house that lurked by the woods two riding-horses, and stopped at the stile.

"Wait here!" said the voice of Devil Jim Clark. "Will you take her if she is still delirious?"

"Bingavast! Why not? I'm delirious myself, Jim, fur it's my wedding-night. I'll rest her at Punch Hall."

The herculean ruffian coolly proceeded to prepare some saddle-ropes to tie his victim before him on his horse. He was interrupted by a woman:

"Come and see your work, Joe Johnson!"

Following up the short cupboard stairs, the kidnapper was pointed to an object on the bed, with peaked face and sharpened feet, as it lay white as lime, with eyelashes folded and the arms drawn to its sides.

"Take her to Patty Cannon now," said Mrs. Clark, "who is only fit for dead company."

"The dell dead and undocked?" the ruffian exclaimed, slightly shrinking from the body; "maybe she's counterfeited the cranke. I'll search her cly. But, hark!"

A wagon and hoofs were heard.

"Joe," whispered the woman's husband, "you're only four mile from Dover. Maybe it's warrants for both of us?"

"Hike, then!" hissed the pallid murderer; "the world's agin me," and he slipped away with his companion.

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"Now, Bill Brinkley," the wife of Devil Jim whispered, as a tall, ingenuous-looking colored boy came in the room, "you are just in time. She has had laudanum enough to keep her still; my daughter powdered her; let me kiss her once before she goes."

As the woman departed, the black boy, looking around him, muttered:

"Whar is dat loft? I've hearn about it."

Some movements overhead in the low dwelling directed his attention to a small trap-door, and, standing on a stool, he unbolted it and pushed it upwards, whispering,

"Any passengers for Philadelfy? De gangplank's bein' pulled in!"

First a woolly head, then another, and next two pairs of legs appeared above.

"Take hold yer and carry de sick woman to de dearborn," the boy said, not a particle disturbed, as two frightened blacks dropped from the loft, with handcuffs upon them.

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In the clear evening a wagon sped along towards the east, through the saffron marshes, tramping down the stickweed and ironweed and the golden rod, and, while the people in it cowered close, the negro driver sang, as carelessly as if he was the lord of the country:

"De people of Tuckyhoe  
Dey is so lazy an' loose,  
Dey sows no buttons upon deir clothes,  
And goes widout deir use;  
So nature she gib dem buttons,  
To grow right outen deir hides,  
Dat dey may take life easy,  
And buy no buttons besides.

"But de people of Tuckyhoe  
Refuse to button deir warts,  
Unless dey's paid a salary  
For practisin' of sech arts;  
Like de militia sogers,  
Dat runs to buttons an' pay,  
De folks is truly shifless,  
On Tuckyhoe side of de bay."

A sail was seen in the starlight, rising out of the marshes at an old landing in the last elbow of Jones's Creek, and hardly had the fugitives been put on board when the anchor was weighed and the packet stood out for the broad Delaware, her captain a negro, her owner a Quaker.

The girl was awakened by the cold air of the bay striking her face.

"Freedom!" she murmured; "it must be this. Oh, I am faint for father's arms to take me."

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Was this Teackle Hall that Virgie looked upon—a square, bright room, and her bed beside a window, and below her stretching streets of cobblestone and brick, and roofs of houses, to green marshes filled with cows, and a river that seemed blue as heaven, which sipped it from above like a boy drinking head downward in a spring? How beautiful! It must be freedom, Virgie thought, but why was she so cold? Her eyes, looking around the room, fell upon a lady in a cap, reading a tract to a large, shaven, square-jawed man, and this woman was of a silver kind of beauty, as if

her mind had overflowed into her heart, and, not affecting it, had made her face of argent and lily, milk and sheen.

"What sayeth Brother Elias, Lucretia?"

"He sayeth, Thomas: 'This noble testimony, of refusing to partake of the spoils of oppression, lies with the dearly beloved young people of this day. We can look for but little from the aged, who have been accustomed to these things, like second nature. Without justice there can be no virtue. Oh, justice, justice, how art thou abused everywhere! Men make justice, like a nose of wax, to satisfy their desires. If the soul is possessed of love, there is quietness.'"

"Yes," said the girl, from the bed, thinking aloud; "love is quietness. Will father come!"

She dreamed and heard and looked forth again upon the hill descending to the river, the stately sails, the farther shore, so like her native region, and asked with her eyes what land they might be in.

"Wilmington," said the beautiful woman. "This is the house of Thomas Garrett, the friend of slaves. When you can be moved, it shall be to the green hills of the Brandywine, where all are free."

"Hills? What are they?" mused Virgie, looking at her wasted hand. "Must I climb any more? Must I wade the swamps again? I know I have a father somewhere."

She dreamed and wept unconsciously, and told of many things at Teackle Hall, being, indeed, a little child again, playing with her little mistress, Vesta. The stars stood in the sky right over her pillow, and she talked to them, and some she seemed to know, as little Vince, or little Roxy, or Master Willy Tilghman, all playmates of her childhood; but ever and anon these vanished, and the young Quaker woman was reading again from the sermons of Elias Hicks, and the words were: "Love is quietness;" "Light only can qualify the soul;" "If I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you."

"What Comforter?" sighed Virgie, and there seemed a great blank, and then she heard a scream—was it she that screamed so?—and she was trying with all her might to get somewhere, and was fainting in the labor, but trying again and again, and then a calmness that was like gentle awe, strange because so painless, spread into her nature, and she only listened.

"My daughter," said a voice, "my own child! Call me 'father,' and say I am forgiven."

"Father! forgiven!" she murmured, and felt a warm face, that yet could not warm her own, shedding tears and kissing her, and close to it her arms were thrown tight, as if she never could let go, and everything was music, but wonderful.

She feared she must fall if she did not hold to him. Who was it that called her "daughter"? Why came those cold stars so close, as if to spy upon him?

Oh, holy purity, that held so fast and did not know, but trusted nature's quivering embrace! She wrestled with something, like a rock of ice, to move her eyes and see, or ere she was dashed down forever, the eyes that gushed for her. They were her master's.

"Master," she said, "whose am I?"

"Mine before God. Pure to my heart as your white sister, Vesta! White as young love, in fondness and trust forever!"

"And mother?" gurgled the girl's low notes; "where is she?"

"Yonder," said the Judge, "in Heaven, that will judge me, whither she winged in bearing thee to me!"

A happy light came over Virgie's face. She kissed her father twice, as if the second kiss was meant for her happier sister, and, raising her arms towards the sky he pointed to, whispered, "Freedom!" and died upon his breast.

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## CHAPTER XL.

### HULDA BELEAGUERED.

Owen Daw brought the news of the repulse from Cowgill House and the wounding of Captain Van Dorn.

"Where is the little tacker, Levin?" asked Patty Cannon, furiously.

"Arrested, I 'spect," cried O'Day, boldly; "Van Dorn's hit in the throat."

"He'll not talk much, then," muttered the woman; "his time had to come. Where will I find another lover at my age? Why, honey," she chuckled to herself, in a looking-glass, "that son of his'n may come back. He's took a shine to Huldy: why not to me?"

At the idea another hideous thought came to her mind: to settle Hulda's fate in her young lover's absence, and monopolize the corrupting power over Levin Dennis, if he ever lived to see Johnson's Cross-roads again.

As individual fugitives returned, confirming the decisive repulse of the band, Patty Cannon's face grew dark, and her oaths low and deep; Cyrus James heard her say:

"If I could only hang some one for this! Joe Johnson's the white-livered sneak that would not go. I've hanged a better son-in-law."

"Aunt Patty, I love your grandchild, Huldy," Cy James ventured to say. "The Captain's wounded and Joe's going away to Floridy. Maybe I kin git you up another band."

Without an instant's consideration of this ambitious proposition, Mrs. Cannon threw Cy James, by main strength, through the window of her bar, into her kitchen, and he bawled like a baby, yet came out of his grief muttering, "Ploughin', ploughin'! I'll make her into batter and fry her yet."

With this reflection Mr. James hid himself for the remainder of the afternoon in some secluded part of the Hotel Johnson.

Mrs. Cannon, however, had instantly resumed her monologue on business.

"They all think to give the old woman the go-by: a sick man's no good, and there's that wife of Van Dorn's hopin' to git him yit. By God! she sha'n't have him in his shroud. No; I'll recruit from young material. Ruin 'em when they's boys, and, while you kin pet 'em, they'll do your work! I have one nigger in the garret Joe wants to burn: he's my nigger, and I'll let him loose to bring me more niggers. Money is what I need to put on a bold front: Huldy must fetch it!"

With this resolution Patty Cannon mounted the stairs to a room on the second floor, and, without knocking, pushed her way in.

A man of a voluptuous form and face, like one overfed, yet on the best, and with stiff, military shoulders, and of colors warm in tint, yet cold in expression, blue eyes, and rich, wine-lined cheeks and lips, that still seemed hard and self-indulged, spoke up at once:

"Always knock, Patty! it's more conservative. My way in life is to reach my point, but respect all the forms. What do you want?"

"When do you leave for Baltimore, Cunnil McLane?"

"As soon as Joe returns with my dear sister's property: to-morrow, I hope."

"You can take Huldy Bruington if you pay my price for her: two thousand dollars down. If you won't give it, she shall be married to some young kidnapper, who will fetch twice that pile for her in niggers. They'll all fight their weight in black wildcats to git her."

"Very, very abrupt proposition, Patty; not conservative at all. What's the matter with you, dame, to-day. Van Dorn not lucky, heigh?"

He gave her a vitreous smile and watched her over his round paunch, on which a crystal watch-seal hung, like a more human eye than his own. Her color began to rise.

"I'm mad," said Patty Cannon; "don't worry me; don't Jew me! Do you mind? Yes, Van Dorn has been whipped—by niggers, too. Will you pay my price or not?"

"Tut, tut, good woman! What can I want with a white girl. It wouldn't look conservative at all in Baltimore."

Patty Cannon stamped her foot.

"Don't rouse me with any of your hypocritical cant, Cunnil McLane! What have you been teachin' that child to read an' write fur—out of your Bible, too? What do you bring her presents fur, and hang around us when we know you despise us all, except fur the black folks we can sell you cheap? Haven't I been sold to men like you time and again before I was a woman, and don't I know the sneaking pains that old men take to look benevolent when youth an' beauty is fur sale; and how they pet it to keep it pure fur their own selfish enjoyment? God knows I do!"

"Patty, you shock me!" the rubicund gentleman observed. "I have always found you conservative before. Now, go and send sweet Hulda here, and, for Heaven's sake, Patty, don't reveal this bargain to her."

"Is it a bargain, Cunnil?"

"It is, if she can be made willing to it."

"That she shall, or make her bed in the forest, where good looks are not safe around yer."

Hulda was found at a window, looking out upon her former home, and at a ploughman who had nearly completed the furrows in a large field, sparing only some low places piled with brush, over one of which some buzzards circled, lofty, yet intent as anglers watching their tackle. Hard as that home had been to Hulda, she regretted leaving it for this men's tavern, where her grandmother's saucy temperament found so many incentives to bravado, and her caution, that had to be exercised in Delaware, was quite unnecessary on the Maryland side of the line.



At the little hip-roofed white cottage Hulda had felt a sense of privacy pleasing to her growing life, and her ability to read often charmed Patty Cannon to a stillness that was like the hyena's sleep, and even made her acquiescent and cordial.

But where she met men alone, unmodified by modest women's example, the bold tendency of Patty was to out-do men, and lead them on to audacities they would have feared to follow in but for her courage and policy; for she could coax either young or coarse natures, as well as she could drive.

These feats of strength and cunning, statecraft and desperation, reminded Hulda of a book she had read about the Norman knights in England kidnapping and robbing the poor Saxons; and one description of King William the Conqueror suggested to Hulda that he was perhaps a Patty Cannon in his times, as his body and legs were short and powerful, like hers, and he could bend a bow riding on horseback that no other knight could bend on foot with the legs planted firmly. He could not read nor write, and was superstitious, yet cruel as the grave. All this was true of Patty Cannon, whose feat of standing in a bushel measure and putting three hundred pounds of grain on her shoulder has been related.

She often wrestled and bound, without assistance, strong black men fighting for their liberties. She could ride horseback, sitting like men, in a way to make Joan of Arc seem a maid of mere tinsel.

Hulda was dressed in her best clothes, her hair was tied in wide braids, her fine features and large, tender, yet seeking, gray eyes, never had been turned on Patty Cannon so directly.

Her grandmother abandoned in a moment an attempt to be complaisant, and sternly ordered her to attend to Colonel McLane's chamber.

"I can support you no longer, huzzy," said the dark-eyed woman, her cheeks full of blood. "Make haste to find some easy life or Joe shall get you a husband. We are ruined. You must make money, do you hear!"

"Here is money, grandma!" said Hulda, producing some of the shillings of 1815.

At the first glance of these Patty Cannon turned pale, but, in an instant, the hot blood rushed to her face again, and she swore a dreadful oath and chased Hulda, with uplifted hands, into the chamber of Allan McLane.

"Ah, Hulda, inflaming your poor grandmother again!" said that carefully clad and game-fed gentleman. "Now, now, lovely girl, it's not conservative. Honor thy father and mother, and grandmother, of course; didn't I teach you that?"

"What is it to be conservative?" Hulda asked, sitting before the fire, while the Colonel ran over her straight feet and tall, willowy figure, and stopped, a little chilled by her clear, dewy eyes.

"Conservative? why, it's never to rush on anything; to oppose rushing; to—to be a bulwark against innovations. To prefer something you have tried, and know."

"Like you?" asked Hulda.

"Yes, your benefactor, instead of having some impulsive passion. Of course, you never loved in this place?"

"It is the only place I know. To be conservative, as you call it, I must take my life and opportunity as I find them, like something I have tried and know."

"Ah, Hulda! I see you have a radical, perverse something in you, to twist my meaning so close. You do not belong to this vile spot, except by consanguinity. It would be perfectly conservative for you to look to a better settlement."

"You have hinted that before," Hulda said, serene in his presence as a young woman used to proposals. "I do want to change this life, but I cannot do it and be conservative. I must fasten upon a free impulse, a natural chance of some kind. God has kept my heart pure in this dreadful place, where I was born. Why are you here, if you are conservative? It is not a gentleman's resort."

He grew a little angry at this thrust, but she continued to look at him quietly, unaware that she was impertinent.

"I often have business, Hulda, with Joe and Patty; negroes are very high, and we must buy them where they are to be had. But a deepening religious interest in you often attracts me here."

"Why religious as well as conservative, sir?"

"I have been afraid that the sights you see here, after the good instructions I have given you, might make you an infidel."

"What is an infidel?"

"One who, being unable to explain certain evils in life, refuses to believe anything. That is the case with Van Dorn, a very bad man. Stepfather Joe is always conservative on that subject. Deviate as much as he may, he never disbelieves. Aunt Patty, too, erratic as she is, holds a conservative position on a Great First Cause."

Here McLane drew out his gold spectacles, and turned the leaves of his Bible over, and pointed Hulda a place to read, beginning, "The fool hath said in his heart, There is no God." At his command she read it, with faith, yet observation, her mind being fully alert to the warning Van Dorn had left her, that in his absence her great trial was to be.

McLane was wearing a gray English suit, with full round paunch, sleek all over the body, his hair a little gray, his gold glasses dangling in his hand, patent varnished slippers and silk stockings, and a silk scarf and cameo pin in it, and a cameo of his deceased sister upon his finger-ring, marking his attire; his eyes, of a pop kind, much too far forward, and blue as old china, and yet an animal, not a spiritual blue—the tint of washing-blue, not of distance; a hare-lip somewhere in his talk, though the fulness of his very red lips hardly allowed place for it; and his nose and brows stern and military, as if he had been a pudding stamped with the die of a Roman emperor or General Jackson.

He watched her reading with censorship, yet desire, patronage, and oiliness together.

Glancing up when she had read far enough, Hulda thought he was looking at her as if she was some rarer kind of negress.

"Beautifully read, Hulda! I never go to such places as theatres, but you might be, I should say, an actress. Don't think of it, however! Very unconservative profession! I take great pride in you, my lovely girl; suppose I take you home with me!"

He walked to her stool, and laid his warm hand on her neck, standing behind her; she did not move nor change color.

"Something has happened to me, Colonel McLane," Hulda spoke, clear as a bell out of a prison, "to make even Johnson's Cross Roads good and happy. Can you guess what it is?"

She bent her head back, and looked up fearlessly at him, as if he were the negro now.

"Not religious ecstasy?" he said. "Not camp-meeting or revival conversion, I hope. That's vile."

"No, Colonel. It is knowing a pure young man, whose love for me is natural and unselfish."

"Great God!" spoke McLane, removing his hand. "Not some kidnapper?"

"No," Hulda said, "no slave-dealer of any kind. They cannot make him so. He is perfectly conservative, Colonel, as to that vileness. I believe he is a gentleman, too."

"You must have great experience in that article," he sneered, looking angry at her.

"I have seen you and my lover; you have the best clothes, and profess more. He has a nature that your opportunities would bring real refinement from. He respects me, wretched as I am; I read it in his eyes. You are looking for a way to degrade me in my own feelings, yet to deceive me. Can you be a gentleman?"

She was serene as if she had said nothing, though she rose up, and stood at one side of the fireplace, opposite him; between them was a print of General Jackson riding over the British.

In that moment Allan McLane felt that the girl was cheap at her grandmother's figure.

He had always conceived her a flexible, peculiar child; in a few minutes she had grown years, and become a rare and nearly stately woman, not now to be moulded, but to be tempted with large, worldly propositions.

"May I ask who this lover is that I am so much beneath, Hulda—I, who have taught you the accomplishments you chastise me with? I found you sand; I made you crystal."

He drew out a large pongee handkerchief, and really dropped some tears into it. She continued, cool and unmoved:

"My love is Levin Dennis, from Princess Anne. I am not afraid to tell it."

"Why?"

"Because I want his danger and mine to be fully known to him, and make him a man."

The Colonel folded his pongee, and came again to Hulda's side.

"That dissipated boy! Oh, Hulda, where is your real pride? He has abandoned his mother. He is a poor gypsy. No, I must save you from such a mistake. It is my duty to do it."

"I thank you for teaching me, whatever made you do it. If I could awaken in you some unselfishness towards me and my new love, sir, it would be the greatest gratitude I could show you. You conceal so many hard, bad things under your word 'conservative,' that the gentle feelings, like forgiveness, have forsaken you, I fear."

"No," the Colonel said, stiffly, his shoulders becoming more military, "insults to my honor I never forgive. People who do not resent, have no conservative principle."

"I forgive, as I hope to be forgiven, Joe, Aunt Patty, Van Dorn, and you. I hope pity and mercy and sweet, unselfish love, such as I think mine is, may grow in all of you! Oh, Colonel,"—she turned to him earnestly, and, raising her hands to impress him, he merely noted the elegance of her wrists

and brown arms—"the buying and selling of these human beings makes everybody unfeeling. It is stealing their souls and bodies, whether they be bought at the court-house or kidnapped on the roads. My dream of joy is to have a husband who will work with his own free hands, and till his little farm, and sail his vessel, without a slave. Above that I expect and ask nothing from the dear God who has so long been my protector in this den of crime."

"Warm or cold, hectoring or tender, you are splendid, Hulda," McLane said, his face fairly refulgent. "Now let me show you a conservative picture of your real deserts. I am a bachelor. I keep an elegant house in Baltimore. My table is supplied with the best in the market; my servants are my slaves, and never disobey me; my paintings are celebrated; books I never run to—they are radical things—but I can buy them; my carriage is the best Rahway turn-out, and my horses are Diomedes. In Frederick County I have an estate, in sight of the mountains. As a Christian act, I will take you away from this spot, to which you seem but half kindred, and make you my wife."

"You ask me to marry you?"

"Conservatively; that is, continue to be my pupil, and obey me. I will bring your mind out of its ignorance, your body out of rags, your associations out of crime. I will provide for you, as you are obedient, while I live and after I am dead. You shall travel with me, and see bright cities—New Orleans, Charleston, Havana. If you remain here, you will be another Patty Cannon or go to jail. There! Look at it conservatively: warmth, riches, pleasure, attention, change, dress to become you, a watch and jewels, against villainy and lowness of every kind."

"How are you to be repaid for this?"

"By your love."

"But it is not mine to give; Levin has it."

"Pooh! that's beneath you."

"But it is gone; I cannot get it back; it will not come."

"Give me yourself," McLane said, drawing her towards him; "the refinements I do not care about. Be mine!"

The girl allowed herself to be brought nearly to his side, and, as he bent to kiss her with his large, complacent lips, she glided from his hands.

"I could never stoop," said Hulda, "to be even the wife of a negro dealer."

He colored to the eyes, yet with admiration of her almost aristocratic composure.

"You could not stoop to me?" he said "Not from your father's gallows?"

"No; he was a robber, but a bold one. You only receive the goods."

She was gone; and he stood, with evil lights in his face, but no shame. He drank some brandy from a flask, and murmured, "Now I have an insult to revenge, as well as a fancy to be gratified; her father must have been a cool rogue. Well, everything has to be done by force here; Patty Cannon shall see my gold."

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## CHAPTER XLI.

### AUNT PATTY'S LAST TRICK.

Opposite McLane's room was the vestibule to the slave-pen in the garret, a room Van Dorn usually slept in. With her emotions profoundly excited, though she had not revealed them—her modesty having received a stab that now brought bitter tears to her eyes, and blushes, unseen except by the angels, whose white wings had hidden them from her tempter—Vesta fled into this room to deliberate upon her dire extremity.

Three persons only were now in the house, each one an interested party in her ruin; the man she had left, and Cy James, who was full of cowardly passion for her, and Patty Cannon, who, in her present frame of mind, would gloat to see Hulda's virtue sacrificed as something inconsequential and merry and heartless.

"Perhaps I can fly to our old house across the State Line, and take refuge with the new tenant there," Hulda thought. "Oh! I wish Van Dorn was here; he is so brave; and when he left me his kiss was like my father's."

Chains clanked, and the drone of low hymns came down the hatchway from the slave-pen.

"There is a white man up there," Hulda reflected; "dare I go up to see?"

She unlocked the padlock, and stepped up the ladder. At the pen door she peeped, but could not make out anything in the blackness. Then she pulled the peg out of the staple, and walked into the sickly odor of the jail.

"How many are here?" Hulda asked. "I hear you, but cannot see."

"Three men, one old woman, and some little things, makes the present contents of Pangymonum," spoke up a rough, cheery voice, "an', by smoke! it's jess enough."

"Is it the white man that talks?"

"He says he's white, but they think it's goin' to be easy hokey-pokey to pass him off for a nigger."

Her eyes soon recognized the speaker as he said, "By smoke! miss, you're not much like a Johnson. I reckon you're Huldy."

"Yes, and you, sir?"

"I was Jimmy Phœbus before I was a nigger."

The girl went rapidly up to him, and put her arms around him.

"Thank God!" she said, "you are not dead. Levin Dennis, my dear friend, wept to think you were at the river bottom. But, quick, sir; I may be caught here. Are you all true to each other?"

"Yes, the traitor's cut his wizen. Speak out, Huldy!"

"I heard Patty Cannon mutter that she was going to set her black man free to kidnap for her. Hark! I must fly."

Hulda descended the ladder in time to surprise Cy James coming up. He bent his goose neck down as he leaned his hands upon his knees, and, looking up into her face, ejaculated,

"Hokey-pokey! By smoke! And Pangymonum, too."

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"Samson," said Jimmy Phœbus, as soon as Hulda disappeared, "git ready to be a first-class liar; I want you to take up Patty Cannon's offer."

"An' leave you yer alone, Jimmy? I can't do it."

"Don't be a fool, Samson. Ironed here, we can't help nobody. Make your way to Seaford and Georgetown, and go round the Cypress Swamp to Prencess Anne. Alarm the pungy captains; fur Johnson'll try to run us by sail, I reckon, down the bay to Norfolk. I've got a file that cymlin-headed feller give me, an' I reckon I'll git out of my irons about the time you git to Judge Custis's. There! ole Patty's coming."

"Go, Samson," spoke the Delaware colored man. "I'm younger than you, and I'll fight as heartily under Mr. Phœbus's orders."

Aunt Hominy's voice came in blank monologue out of the background:

"He tuk dat debbil's hat, chillen, an' measured us in wid little Vessy."

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That evening there was a long, free conference between Samson and Patty Cannon, in her kitchen, next to the bar, where Hulda heard laughing and invitations to drink, and all the sounds of perfect equality, the negro's piquant sayings and *bonhommie* seeming to disarm and please the designing woman, whose familiarity was at once her influence and her weakness, and she lavished her sociable nature on blacks and whites. Samson was so fearless and observing that he betrayed no interest in escaping, and came slowly into the range of her temperament; but, as Hulda peeped, towards midnight, into the kitchen, she saw old Samson kindly patting juba, while Patty was executing a drunken dance.

As the latter dropped upon a pallet bed she had there, and fell into a doze, the colored man quietly raised the latch and walked off the tavern porch.

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In the morning dawn horses and voices were heard by Hulda, and she recognized Joe Johnson's steps in the house. He shook Patty Cannon, but could not awaken her; then looked into Van Dorn's room, and found Hulda, apparently sound asleep, and heard his name called by Allan McLane across the hall:

"Joe! not so loud. Be conservative. Come in; I'm waiting for you. Is all done and fetched?"

"The bloke with the steeple felt will never snickle," spoke the ruffian.

"Good, good, Joe! Vengeance is mine, and it's a conservative saying. My dear sister is at peace."

"The two yaller pullets have slipped you; the abigail mizzled to the funeral with your niece, and t'other dell must have smelt us, and hopped the twig."

"Not tasteful language at all, Joe. I don't understand you. Where are the two bright wenches,

Virgie and Roxy?"

"Roxie's in Baltimore; Virgie's run away."

"Run? Where? Don't trifle with me, Joe Johnson! Conservative as I am, I don't like it, sir. Where could she have run?"

"There's no way for her to slip us but by water or through the Cypress Swamp, Colonel. She ain't safe this side of Cantwell's bridge. Word has gone out, and every road is watched."

"But Van Dorn is beaten back; he hasn't made a single capture; the niggers drove him out of Dover with firearms, and he is wounded somewhere."

The tall kidnapper turned pale, and then consigned Van Dorn's shade to eternal torment.

"Don't swear before me, sir!" McLane, also irritated, exclaimed. "It's not conservative, and I won't permit it. How do I know Meshach Milburn is dead? who did it?"

"Black Dave fired the barker, and saw him settled."

"Send him here!"

The negro came in, red-eyed, and hoarse with diseased lungs, and stood, the wreck of a once gigantic and regular man.

"Gi' me a drink," he muttered; "I'm mos' dead wi' misery an cold."

"Tell this man what you did," Joe Johnson spoke; "you waited till you saw the hat at the window, and fired, and fetched hat an' man to the ground?"

Swallowing a thimbleful of McLane's brandy, the negro grunted "Blood!" and looked tremblingly at his hands.

"What shape of hat was it?" McLane asked, shaking the negro savagely; "was it like this?" shaping his own soft slouched hat to a point.

Black Dave looked, and shook his head.

"Not like that? Damnation!"

"No swearing, Colonel, before us conservatives," ventured Joe Johnson; "what was the hat like, Dave? You're drunk."

"Like dis, I reckon." He modelled the crown into a bell form with his finger.

Joe Johnson and McLane looked at each other a minute with mutual accusation and confusion, and the former unceremoniously knocked the negro down with his great fist.

"No gold of mine for this job, Joe Johnson," said Allan McLane; "in your conservatism to save your own skin, you have let your tool kill an innocent man."

He waved his hand, with all his strong will, towards the door, and shut it in the kidnapper's face. Then, in haughty emotion, not like fear, but disappointed pride and revenge, McLane sat down, glanced around him as if to determine the next movement, and instinctively reached his hand towards his Bible, which he opened at a marked page, and softly read, till tears of baffled vindictiveness and counterfeited humility stopped his voice, as follows:

"To everything there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven: A time to be born and a time to die; a time to plant, and a time to pluck up that which is planted; a time to kill, and a time to heal; a time to break down, and a time to build up ... God requireth that which is past ... man hath no pre-eminence above a beast, for all is vanity.... a man should rejoice in his own works; for that is his portion: for who shall bring him to see what shall be after him?"

When tears of pious vindictiveness had closed the reading, Colonel McLane spread his pongee handkerchief on the bare floor, and knelt in silent and comfortably assured prayer.

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Black Dave had crawled into the room where Hulda partly heard these revelations, and he entered the large closet under the concealed shaft to the prison pen, where his groans and mental agony touched Hulda's commiseration. She opened the trap, and crawled there too.

"Hush, Dave!" she whispered. "What makes you so miserable?"

"Missy, I'se killed a man. Dey made me do it. I'll burn in torment. Lord save me!"

"Dave," said Hulda, "my poor father died for his offences. You can do no more; but, like him, you can repent."

"Oh, missy, I's black. Rum an' fightin' has ruined me. Dar's no way to do better. De law won't let me bear witness agin de people dat set me on. How kin I repent unless I confess my sin? De law won't let me confess."

"Confess your poor, wracked soul to me, Dave. The Lord will hear you, though you dare not turn

your face to him."

"Missy, once I was in de Lord's walk. My han's was clean, my face clar, my stummick unburnt by liquor. I stood in no man's way; at de church dey put me fo'ward. My soul was happy. One day I licked a man bigger dan me. It made me proud an' sassy. I backslid, an' wan't no good to be hired out to steady people; so de taverns got me, an' den de kidnappers used me, an' now de blood of Cain an' Abel is on my forehead forever."

Hulda knelt by the murderer, and prayed with all her heart; not the self-conscious, special pleading of the prayer across the hall, but the humble prayer of the penitent on Calvary: "Lord, we, of this felon den, ask to be with thee in Paradise."

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The whole of the next day was spent in preparations for flight by Patty and her son-in-law.

A boat of sufficient size, and crew to man it, had to be procured down the river, and this necessitated two journeys, one of Patty, to Cannon's Ferry, another by Joe, to Vienna and Twiford's wharf.

During their absence Cy James was equally intent on something, and Hulda saw him in the ploughed field near the old Delaware cottage, under the swooping buzzards, directing the farmer where to guide his plough, and it seemed, in a little while, that one of the horses had fallen into a pit there.

Later on Hulda observed Cy James, with a spade, digging at various places near Patty Cannon's former cottage.

"All are at work for themselves," Hulda thought, "except Levin and me. How often have I seen Aunt Patty slip to secret places in the night, or by early dawn, when she looked every window over to see if she was watched. Her beehives were her greatest care."

A sudden thought made Hulda stand still, and cast the color from her cheeks.

"They are all going away. I shall be taken, too, or kept for worse evil here. My mother, in Florida, hates me; she has told me so. I know the marriage Allan McLane means for me—to be his white slave! Levin is poor, and his mother is poor, too; they say Patty Cannon has buried gold. Perhaps God will point it out to me."

She slipped down the Seaford road, and walked up the lane in the fields she knew so well. No person was in the hip-roofed cottage. Hulda went among the outbuildings, and began to inspect the beehives, made of sections of round trees, and the big wooden flower-pots Patty Cannon had left behind her.

She was only interrupted by a gun being fired in the ploughed field, and saw the pertinacious buzzards there fall dead from the air as they exasperated the ploughman.

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"I shall have one piece of fun in Maryland before I go," Hulda heard her stepfather say, as he went past her bed to ascend the hatchway at morn, "and that is to burn the nigger who mugged me. This is his day."

Almost immediately he came, cursing, down the ladder, followed by a jeering laugh from above, and the cry, "We'll all see you hanged yit, by smoke! an' mash another egg on your countenance, nigger-buyer!"

In a moment or two a tremendous quarrel was going on below stairs between the kidnapper and his wife's mother, and Hulda believed they were murdering each other; and, peeping once to see, beheld Johnson holding Patty to the floor, and stuffing her elegant hair, which had been torn out in the scuffle, into her mouth.

"I'll be the death of you, old fence, before I go," he shouted; "the verdict would be, 'I did the county a service.'"

"Come away there!" cried Allan McLane, pushing past Hulda and between the combatants. "Shame on you, Joe! To whip your grandmother is hardly conservative. Here is an errand that will pay you well: my wench Virgie has been caught."

The kidnapper released the woman and turned to his guest.

"Good news!" he said; "ef it puts my neck in the string, I'll fetch her fur you."

His countenance had begun to assume a sensual expression, when Patty Cannon, to whom his back was turned, rushed upon him like a tornado, lifted him from his feet, and threw him through the back door into the yard and bolted him out. McLane retreated by the other door.

"Thank heaven!" reflected Hulda, looking down in terror, "no one is murdered yet, and I have another day of grace to wait for Levin."

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"Cunnil McLane," said Patty Cannon, in his room that night, "what interest have you in the quadroon gal an' Huldy, too? You don't want 'em both, Cunnil?"

"No, Aunt Patty. All my views are conservative. Quite so! Hulda I want to reform and model to my needs. She'll ornament me. By taking the girl Virgie from my niece Vesta, I desire to punish the latter for consenting to the degradation of our family, and marrying the forester, Milburn. She loves this quadroon; therefore, I want to deprive her of the girl: Joe is to bring her to me, do you see?"

His face expressed the indifference he felt to Virgie's safety on the way, and the coarse suggestion gave Patty Cannon her opportunity:

"Cunnil, there's but three in the house to-night; I am one."

"I am two, Patty."

"And three is purty Huldy, Cunnil!"

They looked at each other a few minutes in silence.

"There is two to one," said Patty Cannon, with a giggle. "We have no neighbors that air not used to noises yer."

The silence was restored while the two products of men-dealing read each other's countenances.

"I made a very conservative and liberal proposition to her, Patty, and she insulted me, yet beautifully. But I owe her a grudge for it."

"Insulted you, Cunnil? The ongrateful huzzy! Can't you insult her back? She never dared to disobey *me*. Her pride once broke down, she'll be like other gals, I reckon."

"That's true, no doubt. But, Patty, haven't you a little remorse about it, considering she's your grandchild?"

"My mother had none fur me, honey," the old woman chuckled, familiarly.

"What is that story I have heard something of, about your origin, Patty?"

"I don't know no more about it, Cunnil, than a pore, ignorant gal would, you know. I've hearn my grandfather was a lord. A gypsy woman enticed his son and he married her. His father drove him from his door, an' his wife fetched him on her money to Canady, where she went into the smugglin' business at St. John's, half-way between Montreal and the United States."

"And he was hanged there for assassinating a friend who detected him?"

"They says so, honey. Anyhow, he was hanged. We gals was beautiful. Says mother: 'It's a hard world, but don't let it beat you, gals! Marry ef you kin. Anyway, you must live, and you can't live off of women.' I married a Delaware man, and so I quit bein' Martha Hanley and became Patty Cannon."<sup>[7]</sup>

"And what a career you have led, Aunt Patty! Lived anywhere but in this old pocket between the bays, you would have had the reputation of Captain Kidd. Tell me now, conservatively, was not your own helpless childhood the cause of your mistakes, and does it never make you feel for other sparrow-birds like Hulda?"

The black-haired woman, with a certain evil-thinking, like one reflected upon harshly, finally clapped her bold black eyes on McLane's, and replied, chuckling:

"I don't know as it do, Cunnil. Before my mother pinte the way, I loved the men. I loved 'em to be bad. Mommy tuk us as we drifted. An' as fur Huldy yer, her mother throws her onto me; she's not like the Cannons an' Johnsons; she's full of pride, and," with an oath, "let it be tuk out of her! Will you pay my price?"

He hesitated.

"It's not the price, Patty; it's the way. Isn't it cowardly?"

"Yes," said Patty, saucily, "it's kidnappin'. That's the trade yer. Pay down the money, Cunnil, an' this bare room will brighten to be your wedding chamber. Pah! are you a man!"

Her words aroused the visions self-love can reluctantly repulse, and which, entertained but an instant, grow irresistible.

The limber, maturing, rounding form of Hulda stepped on the footstool of his mind, touched his knee, and exhaled the aroma of her youth like a subtile musk, till he leaned back languidly, as if he smoked a pipe and on its bowl her bust was painted, and all her modesties dissolved into the intoxication. Brutality itself grew natural to this vision, as a fiercer joy and substitute for the deceit he could no longer practice. The child had flown from her in the instant of his grasping it, like a pale butterfly, but there remained where it had floated, a silken and nubile essence, fairy and humanity in one, clad in pure thoughts and sweet respect, the profanation of which would be as rare a game as Satan's struggle with the soul of Eve.

Her innocence and spirit, self-respect and awakened womanly consciousness, weakness and sensibility, mettle and beauty, presented themselves by turns; and the cold, woodeny room, the neglected tavern, the autumn night wind coming down the chimney and starting the fire, all seemed instinctive, like him, with mischief, as if Patty Cannon's soul flew astraddle of a broom and led a hundred witches.

McLane was fifty; his family was a stiff commercial one, that had generally kept demure, yet grasping, and practised the conservatism he also boasted of, but had departed from: he was the outlaw of the house, yet elevating its tenets into an aggressive shibboleth, the more so that he prospered by anti-progress.

He was a backer of domestic slave-dealers, and put his money into forms of gain men hesitated at; not only at the curbstone, for usury, but behind pawnbrokers and sporting men, in lottery companies and liquor-houses, and, it was said, in the open slave-trade, too, clippers for which occasionally stole out of the Chesapeake on affected trading errands to the East Indies, and came home with nothing but West India fruits.

He strove to maintain his credit by ostentatious abhorrence of novelties and heterodoxies, and of all liberal agitations, and had the sublime hardihood to carry his Bible into every sink of shame, as if it was the natural baggage of a gentleman, and expected with him; and he would rebuke "blasphemy" while bidding at the slave auction or sitting in a bar-room full of kidnappers, among many of whom he passed for a religious standard.

No portion of that Bible gave him any delight or occupation, however, except the Old Testament, with its thoroughgoing codes of servitude, concubinage, and an-eye-for-an-eye. He knew the Jewish laws better than the Scribes and Pharisees in the time of Herod and John, and had persuaded himself that the mental endorsement and, wherever possible, the practice of these, constituted a firm believer. Revenge, intolerance, formality, and self-sleekness had become so much his theory that he did not know himself whether he was capable of doing evil provided he wanted anything.

Not particularly courageous, he was so destitute of sensibility that he felt no fear anywhere; and, generally going among his low white inferiors, he was in the habit of being looked up to, and rather preferred their society. On everything he had an opinion, and permitted no stranger in Baltimore to entertain any. The riot spirit, so early and so frequent in that town, reposed upon such vulturous and self-conscious social pests as he, ever claiming to be the public tone of Maryland.

"Patty," said Allan McLane, in his hare-lip and bland, yet hard, voice, like mush eaten with a bowie-knife, "I may pay you this money and you may fail to deliver the property. Will she be tractable?"

"Cunnil, I'll scare her most to death. She'll hide from me yer by your fire, and my voice outside the door will keep her in yer till day."

McLane went to his portmanteau and unlocked it, and took out rolls of notes and a buckskin bag of gold.

The yellow lustre seemed to flash in Patty Cannon's rich black eyes, like the moon overhead upon a well.

"How beautiful it do shine, Cunnil!" she said. "Nothing is like it fur a friend. Youth an' beauty has to go together to be strong, but, by God! gold kin go it alone."

He counted out two piles, one of notes and one of gold, using his gold spectacles upon his hawk nose to do so, and said:

"Patty, I've bought many a grandchild *with* the old woman, but this is the first child I have bought *from* the grandmother. Now fulfil your contract and earn your money!"

He put his spectacles in his pocket, stretched his gaitered slippers before the fire, looked at his watch and let the crystal seal drop on his sleek abdomen, and his vitreous, blue-green eyes filled with color like twin vases in a druggist's window. He was ready and anxious to substitute the ruffian for the tempter.

Patty Cannon, glancing at the money on the table, and bearing a lamp, started at once through the house, calling "Huldy! Huldy!"

Nothing responded to the name.

She searched from room to room, peering everywhere, and made the circuit twice, and, taking a lantern, went into the windy night and round the bounds of the old tavern.

The house was easily explored, having no cellar nor outbuildings, and the trap to the slave-pen was locked fast. The girl's shawl and hat were also gone.

"She's heard us, I reckon," the old woman muttered; "she's run away an' ruined me. Joe's cruel to me; Van Dorn is gone; without gold I go to the poor-house. McLane is pitiless—"

She dwelt upon the sentence, and, with only an instant's hesitation, turned into the tavern again and buttoned the outer door.



Beneath her feather bed she reached her hand and drew out a large object, took a horn from the mantel and sprinkled it with something contained there, and then, in a bold, masculine walk, stamping hard went in the dark up the open stairs again, talking, as she advanced, loudly, complaisantly, or sternly, as if to some truant she was coaxing or forcing. Finally, at McLane's chamber, she knocked hard, crying:

"Open, Cunnil! Here's the bashful creatur! She daren't disobey no mo'. Step out and kiss her, Cunnil!"

"Ha!" said McLane, throwing open his door, out of which the full light of fire and candles gleamed, "conservative, is she? Well, let her enter!"

As he made one step to penetrate the darkness with his dazzled eyes, Patty Cannon silently thrust against his heart a huge horse-pistol and pulled the trigger: a flash of fire from the sharp flint against the fresh powder in the pan lit up the hall an instant, and the heavy body of the guest fell backward before his chair, and over him leaned the woman a moment, still as death, with the heavy pistol clubbed, ready to strike if he should stir.

He did not move, but only bled at the large lips, ghastly and unprotesting, and the cold blue eyes looked as natural as life.

Patty Cannon took the chair and counted the money.

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## CHAPTER XLII.

### BEAKS.

The wind was blowing in spells, like crowds moved during an argument, at one time mute as awe, again murmurous, and sometimes mutinous and fierce, when Hulda, having heard a few words only of her grandmother's overture, glided from the old tavern and passed on into the night, terrified but not unthinking, till she reached some large pines that seemed to say over her head, high up towards heaven: "Where now, oh where, oh-h-h wh-h-here, in the co-o-o-old, co-o-o-old w-h-h-h-ilderness of the wh-h-h-orld?"

"Anywhere!" answered Hulda, not afraid of cold or nature, so intense had become her fear of men and women. "Still, where? I might go to Cannon's Ferry and tell my tale to those hard-hearted merchants, or to Seaford and beg a shelter somewhere there; but first I will try our old cottage home again."

She went so quietly up the field lane that dogs could not have heard her, and, as she approached the little house, saw lights in it, and soon heard voices and saw moving figures within.

Knowing every knot-hole and crack of the little dwelling, Hulda soon had a perfect view of the contents of the house by standing in the dark, a little distance from one of the low, small windows.

A table stood in the middle of the main room, on which was an old mouldered chest with the earth clinging to it, and beside the chest were bones and shreds of clothing on the riven lid of the chest.

"You swear that the evidence you give shall be the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, so help you God!" exclaimed a small, chunky, Irish-looking person, presenting a book to be kissed by a scrawny, chinless, goose-necked lad, whom Hulda immediately recognized as Cyrus James.

"Shall I take him, Doctor Gibbons?" asked a fine-looking, easy-mannered man, of the magistrate.

"Yes, Mr. Clayton."

"Do you know the nature of an oath? What is it?"

"I'll be fried like a slapper on the devil's griddle ef I don't tell right," whined Cy James, zealously.

"No you won't; at least, not *first*. If you don't tell me the truth I'll have your two ears cut off on the pillory, and no slapper shall enter that hungry stomach of yours for a month. Goy!"

He looked at Cy James as if he had a mind to bite his nose off as a mere beginning.

"Now, Hollyday Hicks, you and Billy Hooper and the other constables take away this box, which smells too loud here, as soon as the witness has sworn to it. When did you last see this box, James?"

"About ten year ago, sir, when I had been bound to Patty Cannon four year, I reckon, I see Patty an' Joe Johnson an' Ebenezer, his brother, all toting this chist to the field an' a-buryin' of it."<sup>[8]</sup>

"What did you see them put in that chest?"

"A dead man—a nigger-trader. I can't tell whether his name was Bell or Miller; she killed two

men nigh that time, an' I was so little that I've got 'em mixed."

"Did you see her kill this man?"

"No, sir, I wasn't home. I got home in time to see 'em packin' him in the box. I hearn Patty tell the boys how she killed him. Oh! she was proud of it, sir, becaze she didn't have no help in it."

Half a dozen heads of constables, some of whom Hulda knew, leaned forward together to hear the witness, while others removed the unsavory remains. Mr. Clayton continued:

"How did she say she killed him?"

"She said he come to Joe's tavern with a borreyed hoss from East New Market, where he told the people he was buyin' niggers, and would take fifteen thousand dollars wuth if he could git 'em. He was follered out, an' Ebenezer Johnson got in ahead of him. They told him the tavern was full, an' he would be better tuk care of at a good woman's little farm close by. They made him think, she said, that a gentleman with much money wasn't allus safe at the tavern. Aunt Patty got him supper. He sit at the table after it a-pickin' of his teeth. She got her pistol an' went out in her garden a-hoein' of her flowers. Once she come up on him at the window to shoot, but he turned quick, an' she says to him: 'Oh, sir, I only want to see if you didn't need somethin' more.' 'No, no,' says he; 'I've made a rale good supper.' 'I loves my flowers,' Aunt Patty says, 'an' likes to hoe 'em at sundown, so they can sleep nice an' soft.' 'Do you?' says he; 'I reckon you're a kind woman.' He turned around agin an' begin to look over his pocket-book. She hoed an' hoed, an' hummed a little tune. All at once she slipped up, an' I heerd her say, 'Boys, I give it to him good, right in the back of the head, an' he fell on to the table, an' the water he had been drinkin' was red as currant wine.'"

"James Moore, I'll swear you next," the magistrate said to the new tenant of the farm; and this man proceeded to testify concerning the finding of the chest as he was ploughing in a wet spot where he had removed some brush.

Cy James, being recalled, gave testimony as to other buried bodies, chiefly of children slaughtered in wantonness or jealousy, or to avoid pursuit.

"Take this boy, Joe Neal," said Constable Hicks,<sup>[9]</sup> "and hold him fast."

"Goy!" said Clayton, with a terrible frown at Cy James, "we may have to hang him yet! Guilty knowledge of these crimes for so many years, and exposure at last only for a private resentment, constitute an accessory. Well for you, depraved young man, if you had possessed the principle of *this* young gentleman!"

The Senator placed his hand upon a sitting figure, and there arose in Hulda's sight the image of her lover, Levin Dennis.

"Constables," said Dr. Gibbons, the magistrate, "I shall give you your warrants now. The Maryland authorities propose, without waiting for extradition proceedings, to deliver your prisoners at the state line."

"Goy!" said Clayton, "they may have friends in the executive chambers at Annapolis. No, boys, act together, like patriots, as the Maryland and Delaware lads served in the same revolutionary brigade. Joe Johnson is due here at noon to-morrow: be careful not to disturb old Patty nor awaken her suspicions till he arrives. She is almost past doing evil, but he has a lifetime left to do it in."

"Constable Neal, I'll shove them over the line to you!" spoke the Maryland officer.

"Constable Wilson, look out when you lay on to old Patty: she may be loaded and go off," exclaimed the Delaware officer.

"Doctor John Gibbons," spoke Clayton, "waste no time with them at the hearing in Seaford, but get horses and send them right to Georgetown jail; they are slippery as eels. Goy!"

As Cy James was being taken to a secure place in the garret he turned to Levin Dennis, much wilted and crestfallen.

"Oh, Levin," he said, "Huldy won't have me now, I know. Won't you stand by me, Levin? She's goin' to marry you, and I'll give ye all I've found."

"Huldy!" Levin exclaimed; "oh, must I leave her yonder at the tavern another night?"

"No," answered Hulda, coming forward; "we are both preserved, my friend. But I must have made my bed in the forest this night if God had not directed me to you."

As they clasped each other fondly, Senator Clayton exclaimed,

"What? Doves among the rattlesnakes. Goy!"

## PLEASURE DRAINED.

The dawn had not broken when that fleet traveller, Joseph Johnson, anticipating his enemies by hours, noiselessly tied his horses at the tavern he had erected, and nearly fell into the arms of Owen Daw.

"Joe," said that scapegrace, "thar's queer people hanging around yer. They say a blue chist has been dug outen the field yonder, an' bones in it. I 'spect they're a-lookin' fur you, Joe."

"I'll give you a job, Owen," said Johnson, quick on his feet as the boy. "Run these horses into my wagon thar while I git some duds together before I hop the twig."

Slipping to the rear of the house, he entered, and looked in Patty's room—she was not there; a slight smell of gunpowder seemed to be in the hall. Passing rapidly up the stairs, Johnson saw a light shine in McLane's room, and he kicked the door wide open, exclaiming,

"Bad luck everywhere; the gal's stone dead; the beaks are round us. Wake up, McLane!"

"Joe!" said a voice, and Patty Cannon threw her arms around him.

"To burning fire with you!" bellowed the filial son. "Take your arms away!"

"Let us make up, Joe! Everybody has run away from us. Huldy is gone, too. McLane is dead."

"Dead? Dead where?"

"There"—she pointed to a feather-bed lying upon the floor, the outlines of which seemed unusually pointed and stiff for feathers, though it was sown up in its own blankets and quilts. Joe Johnson touched it with his foot and bounded back.

"Hell-cat!" he cried, "is this one of your tricks?"

"I did it fur you, Josie. He brought it on hisself. There's his portmanteau full of money to pay our travelling expenses. He's sewed up beautiful, and in the bay you can drop him to the bottom."

Joe Johnson's face became almost livid pale, and, rushing upon Patty Cannon with both hands raised, he struck her to the floor and put his boot upon her.

"If I had time, I'd have your life," he hissed. "But it would lose the uptucker a job. To-night I leave you forever. Margaretta, your daughter, wishes never to see you again. Take this crib and the blood you still must shed to keep your old heart warm, and take my curse to choke you on the gallows!"

He rushed away and gave a low whistle at the window; Daw and Joe's brother, Ebenezer, a lower set and more sinister being, bounded up the stairs and loosened and drove before them the little band of captives.

"One word from you, white nigger, in all this journey to-day, scatters your brains in the woods!"

Joe Johnson drew a pistol as he spoke, and Jimmy Phoebe saw his nervous determination too clearly to provoke it.

"Now, put this dab upon the wagon," Johnson said, referring to the bed, and it was carried down by the brothers, and the dead man's portmanteau thrown in beside it.

"Joe! Joe!" came the voice of Patty Cannon, from the guest's room, "take the poor old woman that's raised you along."

"Stow yer wid!" he answered; "we go to be gentlemen in a land where you would spot us black. Cross cove and mollisher no more; raise another Joe Johnson, if you can, to make this old hulk lush with business: I give it to you."

He was gone in the vague dawn. She fell upon her face across the little bar and moaned,

"A pore, pore, pore old woman!"

How long she had been leaning there she did not know, till familiar sounds fell on her ears, and, looking up with a cry of recognition, she shouted,

"Van Dorn! God bless you, Van Dorn! Is you alive again?"

The Captain was supported in the arms of another person, who took him, ghastly pale, into the little bar and laid him upon her pallet, muttering,

"I loved him as I never loved A male."

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The morning was well advanced, and the sun made the gaunt and steep old tavern rise like a mammoth from the level lands, and filled its upper front rooms with golden wine of light, as Patty Cannon sat in one of them by a window near the piazza, and talked to Van Dorn, whom she had tenderly washed and re-dressed, and placed him in her own comfortable rocking-chair of rushes, with his feet raised, as all unaffected Americans like, and blanketed, upon a second chair.

Her woes and his relief made Patty social, yet tender, and the instincts of her sex had returned, to be petted and beloved.

"Oh, Captain," she said, fondly, "how clean and sweet you look, like my good man again. Don't be cross to me, Van Dorn! My heart is sad."

"*Chito, Patty! chito!* Fie! *you* sad? I like to see you saucy and defiant. Let us not repent! So Joe has left you?"

"With cruel curses. My daughter hates me, he says, and means to be a lady where I can't disgrace her. Oh, honey! to raise a child and have it hate an' despise you goes hard, even if I have been bad. There's nothing left me now but you, Van Dorn; oh, do not die!"

He coughed carefully, as if coughing was a luxury to be very mildly exerted, and wiped a little blood from his tongue and lip.

"I'll try not to die till I comfort you some, *Márta delicióso!* The ball is at my windpipe, and, when the blood trickles in, it makes me cough, and I must beware of emotions, the surgeon says, lest it drop into my lung and break a blood-vessel by some very spasmodic cough. So do not be too beautiful or I might perish."

He stroked his long yellow mustache with the diamond-fingered hand, and drew his velvet smoking-cap tight upon his silken curls, but he was too pale to blush as formerly, though he lisped as much, like a modest boy.

"Captain," the woman said, pleased to crimson, "you are so much smarter than me I'm afraid of you. Am I beautiful a little yet? Do I please you? I know you mock me."

"*O hala hala!*" sighed Van Dorn. "You are the star of my life. All that I am, you have made me. Patty, I worship you. When you are gone, human nature will breathe and wonder. Do you remember when first we met?"

"A little, Captain. Tell it to me again. Praise me if you kin. I'm almost desolate."

Her lip trembled, and she glanced at the fields across the way, she had so long inhabited, where, as it seemed to her, more life than ever was visible to-day, though she did not look carefully.

"How many years it has been, Patty, we will not tell. I was coming home from Africa with an emigrant, a Briton, my capturer, indeed—that officer in the blockading squadron on that coast who seized my privateer, the *Ida*, with all her complement of Guinea slaves. His name was all I took from him—you got the rest—*Van Dorn!*"

She stole a startled look at him out of her listening eyes, as if this might be unpleasant talk, but he parried it with a compliment.

"*Chis! Dios!* What a family of beauties you were! Betty, with her hoyden air, and Jane, with her wealth of charms, and Patty, with her bold, rich eyes and conquering will. We sailed into the Nanticoke by mistake for the Manokin. My friend had pitied my misfortunes and liked my company, and, when he broke me up as a slaver—having already been broken as a privateer—had said: 'Dennis, that country you praise so well has infatuated me; I'll resign my commission and buy a little vessel, and settle in America with you for the sake of my dear little daughter, Hulda Van Dorn.' *Ayme!* that poor little wild-flower: where did she spend the chill night yesterday, Patty, can you tell?"

He coughed again, very carefully, and his eye, the brighter for his fretted lungs, never left his hostess, as though he feared she might overlook some pleasing feature of his story. She trotted her foot and muttered:

"You made me jealous of her: I got to hate an' fear her, lovey."

"Voluptuous as two young widowers were after a long cruise, we tarried among you sirens, myself almost at the threshold of my home, where my wife believed me dead, yet waited longingly and waits this morn, dear Patty. *Dios da fe!* My friend, entasselled with bright Betty, sooner felt remorse at the spectacle of his little child so ill-caressed, and beckoned me away; but he had shown his gold, and could better be spared than reckless I. You know the cool, deep game, dear Pat. *Hala ha!* I was made to buy the poison you sisters gave Van Dorn, and seem the accomplice in his death: never till this week has that murder given up a testimony—the portion of the dead man's coin your mother stole and hid, which Hulda inherited at last. *Verdad es verde!* I became afraid to leave you: I am here at the death with you, my old enchantress."

A crack ran through the empty wooden house, which made her rise; Van Dorn, as he was called, enjoyed her uneasiness, like a pallid mask painted with a smile.

"Captain," she said, "how many people I see out yonder in the fields! Maybe thar's to be a fox-chase."

"Sit, Patty! Let me drink, in my last days of life, the wine lees of your memory. You are so dear to me! Turn in the golden sun, that I may linger on that face which autumn's ashes fall upon, though through the dead leaves I see the russet colors smoulder yet! How daring was your girlhood: the poor blacksmith farmer, whose name you will transmit forever, fretted you with his sickness and his scruples, and, *he aqui!* you stilled him with the same cup you mixed for Betty's husband. His daughter you gave to wife to his apprentice, a strong, stolid man, capable of heroism, Patty, for

he died for you, his dear misleader, on the shameful scaffold, though all the crowd knew who his instigator was; but, like a man, he died and never told."

"Van Dorn, you hurt me," Patty broke out; "I cannot laugh to-day, and these tales depress me, honey. Where shall we go when you are well?"

"*La gente pone, y Dios dispone!* Stay yet, and chat awhile. I would not, for the world, see you discouraged,—you, unfathomable angel! who, in this mangy corner of the globe, looked abroad over the land like Catherine, from her sterile throne, over the mighty steppes, and levied war upon the hopes of man. How you did trouble Uncle Sam, great Patty, robbing his mails for years between Baltimore and the Brandywine! Young Nichols still serves his term for that shrewd trick you taught him, of cutting the mail-bags open as he sat, with the corrupted drivers, on the crowded stage, stealthily throwing the valuable letters in the road, to be gathered by a following horseman.<sup>[10]</sup> *Es admirable!* Young Perry Hutton, reared by you to kidnap, then to drive the mail and filch its letters—a Delaware boy, too—perished on the gallows for killing a mail-driver more scrupulous than himself, who detected him under his mask.<sup>[11]</sup> Young Moore—was he your connection, darling?—stopping the mail-stage at the Gunpowder Forge, fell under the driver's buckshot.<sup>[12]</sup> And Hare—"

"Captain," called Patty, "I see men and boys all over the fields yonder, running and digging and dragging away the bresh. Is them ole buryins of mine suspected?"

"Pshaw! darling, 'tis your warm imagination, and Joe's unkindness. I would make you happy with the memory of your daring acts. *Que maravilla!* In your little pets you stamped a life out, when another woman would only stamp her foot. There was that morning when your fire would not burn, and a little black child bawled with the cold and angered you; if its body is ever dug up where it was laid, the skull cracked with the billet of wood will tell the tale. You once suspected me of truantry from your charms—*Quedo, quedo!* exacting dame—and the pale offspring of poor Hagar you threw upon the blazing backlog, and grimly watched it burn. The pursued children whose cries you could not still, that yet are stilled till hell shall have a voice, not even you can number. Evangelists, O Patty, dipping their pens in blood of saints to write your crimes, would make the next age infidel, where you will seem impossible, and all of us mythology!"

"Be still!" the woman cried, rising and walking, in her rolling gait, to watch things without that stirred her mind more than her lover's recitation; "what good kin these tales do you, Captain? My God! the roads is full of people, and they are all looking yer. Is it at me, Van Dorn?"

He coughed painfully, still watching her, however, and answered:

"Only a quarter-race, I guess, dear Pat! What! are you *fearing*, at your time of life?"

"No," cried Patty Cannon, defiantly, taking something from her bosom; "here is the same dose I gave my husband, if the worst comes."

"Bravo, Patty! you only tarnish into age, like an old bronze, that is harder by time and oxidizing. I was a gentleman, and yet you mastered me. How strange to see us together beleaguered here, myself by death, and you by the law! Why, we have defied them both! Let them come on! Do you believe in everlasting fire?—that every injury is a live coal to roast the soul? I know you do; and, if you do, how beautiful your rosy grate will be, tough charmer, with boys spoiled in the bud, and husbands in the blossom, with families of freemen torn apart, and children, born free as the flag of their country, sent to perpetual bondage and the whip. *Poca barba, poca vergüenza!*<sup>[13]</sup> Who but a woman could have put it into William Bouser's head, when she had kidnapped him and thirty negroes more, and sold them all to Austin Woolfolk, in Baltimore, to rise at sea on Woolfolk's vessel, and massacre the officers, only to be hanged at last, and all to make Woolfolk a better customer!"<sup>[14]</sup>

"There are people all round the house, Van Dorn. I hear them on the stairs and in the rooms. Have mercy!"

"Devils, or men, Patty? Both are your courtiers, remember, and perhaps they crowd each other. What do we care? *Que contento estoy!* Perhaps I am indifferent because no blood is on my hands, vile slaver though I am! Joe Johnson and his low-browed brother you could teach to kill; me, nothing worse than to steal and fondle you. Patty, you believe in hell. I am a believer, too; for I believe in heaven."

"O Van Dorn; how you do talk!"

"Since you entrapped my son, young Levin Dennis—*chito! quedito!* do not start, fair fiend—to have his father make another Johnson of him, I have discovered, through the little girl, the beauteous damsel now, Hulda Van Dorn, the sin you meant to spot me with; and, listen, Patty! it was my son, rich with his mother's loyalty and love—dear guardian wife, that never shall learn of my ruin here, nor see me more!—it was my Levin, set free by me, who gave the news at Dover and beat us back."

He had partly risen as he spoke, and the exertion seemed to choke him. The woman sat in dreadful silence, watching his veins rise upon his pale and wilful face. He caught at his throat with his fingers, and for a time could speak no more.

"Patty," said he, at last, between his coughing spells, "I believe again, for I have seen my wife,

true as an angel, beautiful as a child, in prayer for me. An honest man waits my death to love her better, and be the father of my son. *Hala o hala!* I have had the daughter of my murdered friend to kiss and bless me, and to love my son. My son has given me his confidence, unknowing whom I was, and shown to me a brave, pure heart. *Yo soy amado!* Their prayers may knock for me at the eternal door. But thou, the murderer of my youth, no heart will pray for. Believe in hell, and die; *ha! hala! ho!*"

He pointed his white finger at her in an ecstasy, with a mocking smile in his blue eyes, like fading stars at dawn, and then the rosy morning flowed all round his mouth, as the bullet, detached in his emotion, fell towards the lung, and wakened hemorrhage, and to the last of his strength he pointed at her, and then fell back, in crimson linen, smiling yet in death.

Terrified at the unwonted scene of a natural decease in that abode of violence, the mistress only sat, the image of paralysis, till her door slowly opened, and there entered, hand in hand, young Levin Dennis and Hulda Van Dorn.

"Levin," the young girl said, composed as one to whom reputable life and obsequies were familiar, "I have heard the dying sentences of this misled, strong, disappointed man. Let us kneel down, dear friend, and say a prayer. He was our father, Levin; not Van Dorn—*that* is my name, the daughter of his friend—but Captain Oden Dennis, of the *Ida* privateer."

As they knelt, with closed eyes, the room slowly filled, and Patty Cannon's arms were seized by two constables, and the warrant read to her. She heard it with humility, making no answer but this:

"Once I had money an' friends a plenty; my money is gone, and so is my friends; there's no fight now in pore ole Patty Cannon."

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## CHAPTER XLIV.

### THE DEATH OF PATTY CANNON.

As Patty Cannon came out of the tavern the cross-roads were full of people, taking their last look at the spot where she had triumphed for nearly twenty years.

None thought to look at Van Dorn, nor ask what had become of him, and his friend Sorden removed his body, unseen, to a spot in the pine woods, where his unmarked grave was dug, and standing round it were three mourners only, and Sorden said the final words with homely tears:

"I loved him as I never loved A male."

The Maryland constable marched Patty Cannon down to the little bridge of planks where ran the ditch nearly on the State line, and tradition still believes the figment that Joe Johnson at that moment was hiding beneath it.

There, driven across the boundary like some borderer's cow, the queen of the kidnapers was seized by the Delaware constable, and placed in a small country gig-wagon, and, followed by a large mounted posse, the road was taken to the little hamlet of Seaford, five miles distant.

She watched the small funereal cedars and monumental poplar-trees rise strangled from the underbrush, the dark-brown streams flowing into inky mill-ponds, the close, small pines, scarcely large enough to moan, but trying to do so in a baby tone, and her eyes turned to the sand, where she was soon to be. Not agony nor repentance nor any hope of escape fluttered her cold heart, but only a feeling of being ungratefully deserted by her friends, and ill-treated by her equals and neighbors, who had so seldom warned or avoided her; no preacher had come to tell her the naked gospel, and some had bowed to her respectfully, and even begged her oats, and made subscriptions from her ill-gotten silver.

Seaford was a sandy place upon a bluff of the Nanticoke, and, as the procession came in, a party of surveyors, working for Meshach Milburn's railroad, paused to jeer the old kidnapper. She had grown suddenly old, and never raised her voice, that had always been so forward, to make a reply.

The magistrate, Dr. John Gibbons, had been an educated young Irishman who landed from a ship at Lewes, and, marrying a lady in Maryland, near Patty Cannon's, became the legal spirit of the little town. His office, a mere cabin, on a corner by his house, being too small for the purpose, the examination was adjourned to the tavern, at the foot of the hill, near where a mill-pond brook dug its way to the Nanticoke. Around the tavern some box-bush walks were made in the sand, and willow-trees bordered the cold river-side, and, at pauses in the hearing, wild-fowl were heard to play and pipe in the falling tide.

The evidence of Cy James and other cowardly companions in her sins was quickly given, and the procession started through the woods and sands to Georgetown, twelve miles to the eastward, where Patty Cannon was received by all the town, waiting up for her, and the jail immediately closed her in.

"I didn't ezactly make out what that cymlin-headed feller did it fur," Jimmy Phœbus remarked, in the hold of an old oyster pungy, where he found himself with his mulatto friend and Aunt Hominy and the children, "but the file he fetched me has done its work at last. Yer, Whatcoat," addressing his male fellow-prisoner, "take this knife the same feller slipped me, an' cut these cords." Standing up free again, Mr. Phœbus further remarked,

"Whatcoat, thar's two of us yer. By smoke! thar's three."

The docile colored man opened his eyes.

"Him!" exclaimed the sailor, indicating the feather-bed in the hold, with its stiff, invisible contents; "Joe'll chuck him overboard down yer about deep water somewhere. Now, for a little hokey-pokey; I think I'll git in thar myself, an' let Joe sell t'other feller fur a nigger."

Phœbus's power over his fellow-prisoners—little children and idiotic Hominy included—was now perfect, and he began to explore the rotten old hold, which contained oyster-rakes, fish-lines, and the usual utensils of a dredging-vessel, and soon discovered that there could be made a clear passage to crawl through her from forecabin to-cabin by removing a few boards.

"Yer, Hominy," he said, "get to work with your needle, old gal; I'm goin' to take you home."

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With a good start, and a fair wind and slack tide, Johnson was off Vienna at eight o'clock.

"Ten mile to go, an' they can't catch me with a racehorse," he said, "after I pass Chicacomico wharf, an' git abaft the marshes. I'm boozy fur sleep. Thar's two in this crew I don't know, and I must be helmsman. Bingavast! I'll make my nigger work his passage."

He walked to the hatchway over the hold, and, sliding it back, dropped in, and, with a few expert blows of the professional smithy, set Whatcoat free, merely glancing where Phœbus lay upon his face, snoring hard.

"Cool cucumber of a bloke," Johnson said, "he'll be too much fur me in a trade; I'll have to stifle him!" Then, ordering the mulatto man astern, Johnson gave him the tiller, and sat near, nodding, till the second wharf on the starboard was passed.

"Now Gabriel can't overhaul me," Johnson exclaimed; "thar's no more road on the Dorchester side, an' the Somerset roads is all gashed by creeks an' barred by farm-gates. I'll sink that dab an' stiffy."

He called two deck hands, and lifted the body out of the hold. Phœbus still placidly slept upon his face, and Johnson looked at him with peculiar envy after a hurried glance at the dead. Some ropes being put around the bed, and drag-irons attached to them, the whole weight was unceremoniously thrown overboard at the point of Hungry Neck, and the dealer remarked, apologetically:

"There goes a great hypocrite, gentlemen; he wasn't above piracy, ef he could git another man to fly the black flag for him. I reckon he'll be 'conservative' enough after this. And now I'll snooze. Steer her for Ragged Point, yonder, Whatcoat, an' when you git thar wake me. It's clear broad inlet all the way; an' remember, nigger, I sleep and shoot, on hair triggers!"

With his pistols in his hand, Johnson lay down in the cabin a few feet from the helmsman, and tried to see and sleep at once. He had been without rest for many nights, and sleep soon bound him in its own clevis and manacles.

When he awoke, so deep had been his slumber that he could not recall for a moment where he was. The tiller was unmanned, the stars shone in the cabin hatchway, a cold bilge-water draft blew through the old hulk, and, as he dragged himself up the steps, he saw tall woods near by, and heard the voice of solemn pines.

The vessel was aground; wild geese were making jubilant shrieks as they cut the water with their fleecy wings, like cameo engraving; the outlaw gazed and gazed, and finally muttered:

"Deil's Island, or I'm a billy noodle! I run from it the last time I was yer, an' my blood runs cold to be yer agin; my daddy got his curse from this camp-meetin'."

Taking speed from his apprehensions, Johnson slid back the hatchway and leaped into the hold, starlight and moonlight following him, and nothing did they reveal there except one man, peacefully sleeping upon his face, as Phœbus had last been seen.

The kidnapper shook his captive, but he did not awaken. He turned the man over, and there met his eyes the cold blue stare and Roman nose and bleeding lips of Allan McLane, apparently returned from the bottom of the river.

With a shriek, the outlaw bounded upon the deck and ran to the bow of the pungy.

"Help me!" came a faint cry from the forecabin, and, peeping in, Joe Johnson recognized one of his own familiars he had shipped at Cannon's Ferry, gagged, like his companion, and tied fast.

The man had just been able to articulate.

"Now, spiflicate me!" spoke the skipper, relieving the man, "the ruffian cly you! who did this?"

"The white nigger did it all, Joe. He crawled through the stays to the cabin, and got your pistols, first; leastways, we found him an' the yaller feller at the helm on top of us, coming up the fo'castle, and next t'other two men jined 'em. They said ole Samson had give 'em the wink. We two was tied and throwed in yer, an' ef you had awaked, thar was a man to stab you to the heart, sot over you."

"The portmanteau?" cried Johnson.

"That's gone, I reckon. They sowed you up a feather an' oyster-shell man on a plank to heave overboard; that's what they said. They steered for Deil's Island, an' sot the Island Parson yer to watch that you don't git the pungy off, an' I reckon they're half-way to Princess Anne."

Joe Johnson heard no more. He released his creatures from their bonds, took the dead body in the pungy's canoe, and gave the command:

"Row fur the open bay! We'll strike St. Mary's County or Virginny. Bingavast! Hike! Never agin will I put foot on this Eastern Shore."

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At Georgetown Jimmy Phœbus, Samson, and Levin Dennis met again, and Levin told the mystery of his father's disappearance.

"Never tell your mother, Levin, that Captain Dennis died in that Pangymonum; it would break her heart, and she never would trust man agin."

"Jimmy," spoke up Samson, "let her understand that he got wrecked on the *Ida*. It looks a little bad, but the slave-trade sounds better than kidnappin'."

"They say that Allan McLane owned that slave vessel," Phœbus put in; "but he didn't live to know his loss. He'll meet his heathens at the Judgment Seat."

"Who has fed mother?" Levin asked. "Hulda can't explain that."

"I kin, Levin," Samson Hat said, bashfully. "It was me. Good ole Meshach Milburn, that everybody's down on, pitied that pore woman, an' made me set things she needed in her window. He said if I ever told it he'd discharge me."

"Dog my skin!" Jimmy Phœbus observed, "the next man that calls 'steeple top' after ole Meshach I'll mash flat! But, come, my son, I've buried at Broad Creek your wife's family relics. We'll hire a wagon, and drive to ole Broad Creek 'piscopal church on the way, and there I'll have you married to Huldy."

The sword-hilt and coins were disinterred, and in that ancient edifice of hard pine, where the worship of her English race had long been celebrated, the naval officer's daughter became the wife of the son of his voluptuous and perverted friend. As Jimmy Phœbus kissed them he said:

"Levin, when your mother says 'Yes,' all four of us will settle in the West. Illinois has become a free state, after a hard fight, and I reckon that'll suit us."

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For a while Patty Cannon, by her affability and sorrow, had easy times in jail, and was allowed to eat with the jailer's family; but, as the examination proceeded before the grand jury, and her menials hastened to throw their responsibility in so many crimes upon her alone, an outer opinion demanded that she be treated more harshly, and some of the irons she had manacled upon her captives were riveted upon her own ankles. Very soon dropsy began to appear in her legs and feet, and, after it became evident to her that neither money nor friends were forthcoming in her defence, she fell into a passive despair.

The frequent conferences between Jimmy Phœbus and Cy James led to the belief that not only had Hulda recovered portions of her father's money and valuables, hidden in the beehives and flower-pots old Patty had so assiduously attended, but that Phœbus had seized upon property indicated by the informer, and was to have whatever remained of it after procuring the latter's release.

This result was hastened by Patty Cannon's death, which happened, to the great relief of many respectably considered people in that region, who had feared from the first that she would make a minute confession, implicating everybody who had dealt with her band.

Among these was Judge Custis, who opened his skeleton-in-the-closet to John M. Clayton one spring-like day. Clayton had quietly prodded on the conviction of Patty Cannon, but the jealousy of the slaveholding interest made him wary of any open appearance against her.

They were sitting in the little parlor of the Methodist parsonage, a small frame house with a conical-roofed portico and big end-chimney, a little off from the public square, whither they had



gone to send the pastor to wait on the aged Chancellor, who had been taken ill in the court-room, and lay in the hotel.

"Clayton," said Judge Custis, in a low tone of voice, "what this woman may do or tell, you would not think concerned me, but I will show you how deep her influence has reached, as well as explain to you why I would not pursue my own servants to her den. In this I humiliate myself before you, as I must do, if I am to become your client."

"You had been trading with Patty Cannon; I guessed that much."

"Such was the case. When I was a collegian at Yale, returning home one holiday, I fell in love with a beautiful quadroon, the property of my uncle, in Northampton County. She was an elegant woman, with a good education, and had been my playmate. I was ardent and good-looking, and easily found lodgment in her heart; but the conquest of her charms was long, and agonizing with sincere esteem. You must believe me when I declare that I fell dangerously ill because I was refused by her, and, making a confidant of my doctor, he told the girl that she must choose between my death and her surrender. Pity, then, prevailed, even over religion. I was happy in every point but one—the injury concealment worked upon her self-respect; for, Clayton, my mistress was my own cousin."

"Goy!"

"I never desired to marry, although no children had been born in my patriarchal relation; but, in the course of years, my uncle became pressed for debts, and he appealed to me to save my beautiful handmaiden from sale, he being in full sympathy with my relation to her, because she was his daughter."

"I goy!"

"The case was urgent. I possessed some negroes, the legacy of my mother. To sell them publicly would be a stigma both upon my humanity and my credit. I adopted the cowardly device of letting a kidnapper slip them away, and take a large commission for his trouble. I saved my lady, but at the expense of a secret."

"And that secret Joe Johnson depended on, Custis, when he was suddenly driven into your house, and found your old servant already demoralized by the announcement of your son-in-law?"

"The scoundrel pressed his advantage; and he saw, besides, my daughter—not Vesta, but her half-sister, Virgie—and, between his persecution of her and my brother-in-law's vindictiveness, poor Virgie was literally run to the ground and into it; she is in her grave."

Judge Custis broke into a long fit of sobbing, and Clayton, who had noticed his dejected mien since their separation, passed an arm around him, saying:

"Never mind, now! Never mind, old friend! Johnson is fled; McLane, they whisper, has never been seen since he entered Johnson's tavern. His will was found there, and your daughter gets her mother's property and servants back."

"I must finish my story," Judge Custis said, stanching his tears. "By the decline of every family with natural feelings and refinement, under what Mr. Pinkney termed 'the contaminating curse of reluctant bondsmen,' we, also, became poor. To save others, it was necessary that I must marry, and get money by my own prostitution. My God, how we are repaid! A bride was found for me in Baltimore, the sister of Allan McLane, and a beauty."

"I began my married life with the best intentions; my poor mistress herself advised me to turn to my wife, and become a true man. She told me so with her heart breaking. In heaven, where she dwells with my poor child, she hears me now, and knows I speak the truth!"

Judge Custis broke down again, and leaned his convulsed head on Clayton's tender breast, whose own widower's grief gushed forth responsively.

"Children were born in Teackle Hall; my servitude was becoming adjusted to me, when Allan McLane, in his love of vindictiveness and of low, formal respectability, conceived that my poor quadroon required some chastisement for having been his sister's rival, and he set a trap to buy her. I was forced to have her bought, to protect her, and to bring her to my care again, and thus our passion was revived, and, giving birth to Virgie, she died. Reared together, and unconscious of their kindred, those daughters loved each other as dearly as when, in heaven, they shall hide in the radiance of each other, and cover my sins with their angelic wings."

"Rise up, old friend!" cried Clayton; "your transgressions are, at least, washed out in sincere tears. Hear the birds all around us loving and condoning, and filling the air with praise. Come out!"

As they stepped upon Georgetown Square they saw John Randel, Jr., leading a party of surveyors to locate the opposition railroad to Meshach Milburn's. These and many others were pressing towards the whipping-post and pillory, in the rear of the court-house, where stood, exposed by the sheriff, the cleanly mulatto woman who had entertained Virgie in Snow Hill the first night of her flight.

"This free woman, Priscilla Hudson," cried the sheriff, "is to stand one hour in the pillory for the crime of lending her pass to a slave. Thirty lashes she was sentenced to, the Governor has

graciously taken off. She is to be sold, out of the state, at the end of one hour, for the term of her natural life, to the highest bidder."

The poor woman stood there, bare armed and bare almost to the bosom, delicate and lovely to see, and the mother of free children, her clothing having been partly removed before the pardon of the stripes was announced to her.

Her head and arms were thrust through the holes in one leaf of the pillory, and thus, thrown forward, her modesty was exposed to the wanton gaze of the crowd, while, on the other side of the same elevated platform, pilloried in like manner, was a female chicken-thief, impudent, indifferent, and chewing tobacco, and spitting it out upon the pillory floor.

As Clayton and Custis saw this scene on their way to the tavern, an egg, thrown from a window of the debtor's jail, whether meant for Mrs. Hudson or not, struck her in the face, and its corrupt contents streamed down her white and shivering breast.

"Shame! shame!" cried the people, as they saw the woman cry, and, gazing up to the jail window, another female face appearing there, turned their cries to curses:

"Hang her! hang her!"

For the last time in life Patty Cannon's bold and comely face swelled again with passionate blood to the roots of the glossy black hair, and the few who saw her rich, dark eyes, inflamed with anger, say their pupils were dilated like the wild-cat's. She was gone in a moment, and the sheriff had wiped Mrs. Hudson's face and breast with a handkerchief passed up by a colored woman.

Two men were now actively going around the crowd, hat in hand, soliciting contributions to buy the woman, the first a blind man, whose eyes were bandaged, and a white man led him, calling loudly:

"The abolitionists have raised three hundred dollars to buy this woman's freedom. We want a hundred more, as some mean people may bid her up high. This man, her husband, stole her pass, to slip a friend away. We couldn't git the evidence in, but it's God's truth, gentlemen! The woman's nursed my wife, an' done a heap of good; and she come here, of her own free will, out of Maryland, to nurse the Chancellor."

Little money was raised in that crowd, since there was little to give, and, addressing the two distinguished strangers, Sorden, the crier, exclaimed:

"What, gentlemen, will you let the Hunn brothers and Tommy Garrett and the Motts give three hundred dollars for a woman they never saw, and we, who see her always doing good, give nothing?"

"Pity! pity!" sobbed the blind man. "I'm burned so bad nobody will buy *me*, but I stole her pass to help a slave off that I fell in love with."

Judge Custis left Clayton's side, and waited till the hour in the pillory was done, and, after a fierce contest, saw Sorden come off victorious at the sale, though it took every dollar the Judge could raise in Georgetown on his private credit.

"What is the name of the girl you gave her pass to?" asked the Judge of the blind mulatto.

"Virgie, marster."

"My heart told me so," exclaimed the Judge. "Your crime has been punished enough. I will send you to your wife."<sup>[15]</sup>

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John Randel, Jr., observed, that evening:

"Devil Jim Clark has taken example from Patty Cannon, and squared the circle."

"Not dead?" asked Clayton.

"Yes, dead and buried. He was cleaning up his contract on the canal, and mistook the white Irish laborers there for kidnapped niggers. They set on him, and beat him and scared him together, so that he never recovered. They say he was 'converted' on his death-bed; or, as the saying is, 'he died triumphantly;' but the darkeys report that the devil came straight down with a chariot and drove him off."

"That fellow, Whitecar, I'm reserving," said Clayton, "to punish when I can use him to sustain an argument in favor of admitting negro testimony in kidnapping cases."<sup>[16]</sup> Without that admission, these kidnapers cannot be convicted: even Patty Cannon here may escape us, though she has killed white men."

Sorden spoke up, he being of the party:

"A disease called leprosy has broke out in ole Derrick Molleston's cabin; Sam Ogg has got it, too, and they say he fetched it up from the breakwater. Nobody will go near them. Black Dave is dead; he said he killed a man at Prencess Anne: the young wife of Levin Dennis, who turns out to

be a lady, stayed and prayed with him to the last, and he went off humble and happy. But, my skin! another kidnapper has rented Johnson's tavern a'ready."

"The railroad will clear all these evils out," exclaimed Randel. "I've put it into poetry," and he began to recite:

"To dark Naswaddox forest fled  
The murderer from the main,  
And with the otter laid his head  
Amid the swamp and cane:  
'Here nothing can pursue my ear,  
From travelled paths astray;  
I shall forget, from year to year,  
The world beyond the bay!'

"The hunted man one morning heard  
A whistle near and strong,  
And in the night a fiery light  
The thickets flashed among:  
The demon of the engine rushed  
Along on blazing beams—  
The hound the murderer had flushed,  
The outlaw's path was Steam's!"

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The cry of hate from the crowd around the whipping-post, as it awoke Patty Cannon's last anger, also determined her last crime.

Fear was relative in her: she had neither the fear of men nor of shame, and only of death as it involved a hereafter. Whether that hereafter was a latent conviction in her mind, or the vivid admonition of guilt and dead men's eyes peering over her dreams and into the silent, lonely watches of haunted midnights, who shall tell? There is no analysis of a native and ancient depravity: it was sown in the marrow, it strengthens in the bone, and, with a cunning, daring self-assertion, gambles upon the faith of living and of dying not. Its very fears push it onward in crime, and make it cruelly tantalize its own fate, as cowards lean over graveyard walls, and shout, with an inner trembling, "Come forth—I dare you!"

So had this woman, conscious of her deserts, bullied eternal justice through its long postponements, never doubting, while ever vexing, the Spirit of God, until the number of her crimes crowded the tablet of her memory, and out of the hideous gulf of her past life gazed faces without names and deeds without memoranda; a procession the longer that strangers were in it, and, shrinking from her, yet pressing on, exclaimed her name or only shrieked "'Tis she!" as if her name was nothing to her curse.

Sleeping in her chains, there were children's eyes watching her from far-off corners, as if to say, "Give us the whole life we would have lived but for you!"

As her swollen limbs festered to the irons, there were babies' cries floating in the air, that seemed to draw near her breasts, as if for food, and suddenly convulse there in screams of pain, and move away with the sounds of suffocation she had heard as they expired.

All night there were callers on her, and whom they were no one could tell; but the jailer's family saw her lips moving and her eyes consult the air, as if she was faintly trying bravado upon certain business-speaking ghosts who had come with bills long overdue and demanded payment, and went out only to come again and again.

Some of these mystic visitors she would jeer at and defy, and stamp her feet, as if they had no rights in equity against her soul, having been on vicious errands when they met their ends, and bankrupts in the court of pity; but suddenly a helpless something would appear, and paralyze her with its little wail, like a babeless mother or a motherless babe, and, with her forehead wet with sweat of agony, she would affect to chuckle, and would whisper, "Nothin' but niggers! nothin' more!"

Day brought her some relief, but also other cares, and of these the chief was the care of money. She had been a spendthrift all her life, and robbed mankind of life and liberty to enjoy the selfish dissipation of spending their blood-money; and what had she bought with it? Nothing, nothing. To spend it, only, she had wrecked her sex and her soul; to spend it for such trifles as children want—candy and common ornaments, a dance and a treat, a gift for some boor or forester or even negro she was misleading, or to establish a silly reputation for generosity: generous at the expense of human happiness, and of robbing people of liberty and life, merely for spending-money!

Now she had none to appease the all-devouring greeds of habit intensified by real necessity: no money to buy dainties or even liquor; no money to spend upon the jailer's family and keep the reputation of kindness alive; no money for decent apparel to appear in court; none to corrupt the law or to hire witnesses and attorneys.

The two demons she had created alternately seized the day and the night: the demon of money plagued her all day, the demon of murder pursued her all night.

Every morning she had insatiate wants; all night she had remorseless visitors; and, close before, the gallows filled the view, with the Devil tying the noose.

That Devil she plainly saw, so busy on the gallows, fitting his ropes and shrouds and long death-caps, and he evaded her, as if he had no commerce with her now.

He was a cool and wistful man, perfectly happy in the prospect of getting her, and not anxious about it, so sure was he of her soon and complete possession.

He was always out in the jail-yard when she looked there, fixing his ropes, sliding the nooses, examining the gallows, like a conscientious carpenter; and in his complacent smile was an awful terror that froze her dumb: he seemed so impersonal, so joyous, so industrious, as if he had waited for her like a long creditor, and compounded the interest on her sins till the infernal sum made him a millionaire in torments.

A Devil it was, real as a man—a slavemaster to whose quiet love of cruelty eternal death was not enough; a man whose unscarred age, old as the rising sun, still came and went in immortal youthfulness and satisfaction, but for the nonce forgetting other debtors in the grip he had on her, as his majestic expiation for his own shortcomings.

He looked like a storekeeper, a man of accounts, a cosmopolitan kidnapper, who knew a good article and had it now. She was so terrified that she wanted to cry to him, and see if he would not remit that business method and become more human, and sauce her back.

But no; the longer she watched, the less he looked towards her, though she knew his smile meant no one else. To hang upon his cord was very little; to go with him after it was stretched, down the burning grates of hell, and see him all so cool and busy in her misery, was the gnawing vulture at her heart.

In vain she tried to throw responsibility for her sins upon a vague, false parentage and fatherhood, and say that she was bred to robbery and vice; a something in her heart responded: "No, you had beauty and health and chaste lovers whom you rejected or tempted, and a mind that was ever clear and knew right from wrong. Conscience never gave you up, though drenched in innocent blood. The often-murdered monitor revived and cried aloud like the striking of a clock, but never was obeyed!"

Thus haunted, deserted, peeped in upon from the hereafter, racked with vain needs, her outlets closed to every escape or subterfuge, revenge itself dead, and disease assisting conscience to banish sleep, the wretched woman crawled to her window one day and saw the helpless effigy of her sex exposed there for doing an act of humanity; and instantly an instinct she immediately obeyed exacted from her one last familiar, heartless deed, to show the crowd that even she, Patty Cannon the murderess, had "no respect for a nigger."

That doctrine long survived her, though she found it old when she came among them.

She aimed an egg at the breast of her sex, and, with a barefaced grin, she saw it strike and burst. The next moment the crowd had recognized and defied her.

In the exasperation of their shout, and of being no longer praised even for insulting a negro, a convulsion of desperate rage overcame the murderess.

Too helpless to retort in any other way, yet in uncontrollable recklessness, she exclaimed, "They never shall see me hang, then!" and swallowed the arsenic she had concealed in her bosom.

That night she died in awful torments.

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The venerable Chancellor, lying in the hotel near the whipping-post corner, watched by the released Mrs. Hudson, who must to-morrow depart from the state forever, heard that night voices on the square, saying:

"Patty Cannon's dead. They say she's took poison."

A mighty pain seized the Chancellor's heart, and the loud groans he made called a stranger into the room.

"Is that dreadful woman dead?" sighed the Chancellor.

"Yes; she will never plague Delaware again, marster."

"God be thanked!" the old man groaned. "Justice and murder are kin no more."

They said he died that instant of heart disease.

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## CHAPTER XLV.

### THE JUDGE REMARRIED.

Vesta found her circle reunited, though with many absentees, at Princess Anne.

Aunt Hominy took her place in the kitchen, and cooked with all her former art, but her voice and understanding were gone, and she never would go past the Entailed Hat, and still regarded it, as nearly as could be made out, as the cause of all her errors and dangers, though she seemed to admit its unevadable dominion.

The poor woman, Mary, finding Samson Hat, in time, wishing to have a partner in the old storehouse, where he had become the only resident, had faith enough left to make her third marriage with him; and his means not only made good the property she had lost, but the hale old man presented her with a babe boy, which took the name of Meshach Phœbus, and on which Judge Custis sagely remarked that it "ought to have been a red-headed nigger, having both the fiery furnace and the blazing sun in its name."

On Samson Hat's death, which resulted from rheumatism reaching his heart, his widow joined her deliverer from slavery, James Phœbus, in the West, where he lived happily with his bride and stepson, and often wrote home of a friend he had there named Abe Lincoln, who made flat-boat voyages with him down the Mississippi. Both Ellenora Phœbus and Hulda Dennis reared Western families which played effective parts in the drama of civilization.

Vesta lost no time in setting free every slave about Teackle Hall and on the farms, with the approval of her father and husband also, and Roxy became the wife of Whatcoat, the rescued freedman, and the replacer, at her mistress's side, of poor Virgie, whose body was brought home and interred by the church where she had been her white sister's bridesmaid. The grief of Vesta for Virgie was quiet, but long, and as that of an equal, not a mistress, though she may have never known how equal.

In the fatalities thronging about her marriage Vesta observed one signal blessing—the complete reform of her father's habits.

He drank nothing whatever, supplying with fruit the pleasures of wine, and with exercise and business, on her husband's behests, the vagrant tours he once made in the forest for politics and amours.

Aware of his sociable and voluptuous nature, Vesta desired to see him married again, to complete and secure his reformation; and, while she was yet puzzling her brain to think of a wife to suit him, he solved the problem himself by cleanly cutting out Rhoda Holland from under the attentions of William Tilghman.

Rhoda had rapidly learned, and had corrected her grammar without losing her humor and her taste for dress, and her free, warm spirits soon made her an elegant woman, in whom, fortunately or unfortunately, a very decided worldly ambition germinated,—at once the proof and the vindication of *parvenues*.

She may have patterned it upon her uncle, or it may have emanated from his ambitious family stock, which, in and around him, had wakened to the vigor of a previous century; but it was so different from Vesta's nature that, while it but made nobler her soul of tranquil piety and ease of ladyhood, Vesta was interested in Rhoda's self-will and business coquetry.

A higher vitality than Vesta's, Rhoda Holland soon showed, in the superficial senses, more acuteness of sight and insight, quicker intuitions, more self-love, though not selfishness, less scrupulousness, perhaps, in dealing with her lovers, and, with fidelity and virtue, a pushing spirit that Vesta only mildly reproved, since she made the allowance that it was in part inspired by herself.

"Take care, dear," Vesta said one day, "that you grow not away from your heart. With all improving, there is a growth that begets the heart disease. Do you love cousin William Tilghman? He is too true a man to be hurt in his feelings. Nothing in this world, Rhoda, is a substitute for principle in woman."

"I don't want to lose principle, auntie," Rhoda said; "but I am afraid I love life too much to be a pastor's wife. I never saw the world for so long that I'm wild in it. I want to go, to look, and to see, everywhere. I feel my heart is in my wings, and must I go sit on a nest? Miss Somers—"

"The question is, dear, do you love?"

"Auntie, I reckon I love William as much as he does me."

"But he is devoted, Rhoda."

"If I thought I had the whole, full heart of William, Aunt Vesta, and it would give him real pain to disappoint him, I would marry him. But I have watched him like a cat watches a mouse. He wants to marry me to make other people than himself happy; to reconcile you and uncle more; to take uncle more into your family by marrying his niece. William is trying to love Uncle Meshach like a good Christian, but, Aunt Vesta, he thinks more of your little toe than of my whole body."

The crimson color came to Vesta's cheeks so unwillingly, so mountingly, that she felt ashamed of it, and, in place of anger, that many wives so exposed would have shown, she shed some quiet tears.

"Rhoda, don't you know I am your uncle's wife."

Rhoda threw her arms around her.

"Forgive me, dear! When you tell me, Aunt Vesta, that William loves me dearly, I'll gladly marry him. I only want, auntie, not to make happiness impossible, when to wait would be better."

Vesta wondered what Rhoda meant, but, kissing her friend tenderly again, Rhoda whispered:

"Auntie, it's not selfishness that makes me behave so. Indeed, I love William; it's a sacrifice to let him go."

Vesta looked up and found Rhoda's eyes this time full of tears.

"Strange, tender girl!" cried Vesta. "What makes you cry?"

Yet, for some unspoken, perhaps unknown, reasons, they both shed together the tears of a deeper respect for each other.

Soon afterwards Judge Custis, being sent to Annapolis by Milburn, was requested to take Rhoda along, as a part of her education, and Vesta went, also, at her husband's desire.

She feared that her father, devoted as he had become to her husband's business interests, still disliked him and bore him resentment; and Vesta wished to see not only outward but inward reconciliation of those two men, from one of whom she drew her being, and towards the other began to feel sacred yet awful ties that took hold on life and death.

They were taken to the landing by Mr. Milburn and the young rector, and there, as the steamboat approached, Tilghman said:

"Rhoda, your uncle has consented. He wishes us to marry. I ask you, before all of them, to consider my proposal while you are gone, and come home with your reply."

The impetuous girl threw her arms around him and kissed him in silence, and, covering her face with her veil, awaited in uncontrollable tears the steamboat that was to carry her to the mightier world she had never seen, beyond the bay.

After she reached the steamer her stillness and grief continued, and going to bed that night she turned up her face, discolored by tears, for Vesta to kiss her, like a child, and faltered:

"Aunty, don't think I have no principle. Indeed, I have some."

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Annapolis, half a century the senior of Baltimore, and the first town to take root in all the Chesapeake land, was now almost one hundred and fifty years old, and the stern monument of Cromwell's protectorate. Its handful of expelled Puritans from Virginia, compelled to organize their county under the name of the Romanist, Anne Arundel, unfurled the standard of the Commonwealth, reddened with a tyrant king's blood, against the invading army of Lord Baltimore, and, shouting "God is our strength: fall on, men!" annihilated feudal Maryland, never to revive; and, after King William's similar revolution in England, "Providence town" took his queen sister's name, *Annapolis*, like Princess Anne across the bay.

Annapolis became a place of fashion and of court, with horse-races, stage-playing, a press, a club, fox-hunting clergymen, a grand state-house, the town residences of planters, the belles of Maryland, and the seat of war against the French, the British crown, and the slaveholders' insurrection.

It was now in a state of comfortable decline, having yielded to Baltimore and to Washington its once superior influence and society; but a lobby, the first in magnitude ever seen in this province, had assembled in the name of canals and railroads to compete for the bonded aid of the Legislature, and Judge Custis was leading the forlorn hope of the Eastern Shore for some of the subsidy so liberally showered upon the cormorant, Baltimore.

Judge Custis was instructed to lobby at Annapolis for one million dollars, or only one-eighth part of the grants made by the state, and he was to draw on Meshach Milburn for funds, who, meantime, continued out of his private resources to grade and buy right of way for one hundred and thirty miles of railroad.

The adventure was gigantic for the private capital of that day, and the unpopularity of the adventurer at home was soon testified at the state capital.

Vesta, whose carriage had been brought over, looked with a gentle patriotism—being herself of divided Maryland and Virginia sympathies—upon the little peninsulated capital, with its old roomy houses of colonial brick, its circles and triangles in the public ways, and the unchanged names of such streets as King George, Prince George, and the Duke of Gloucester; but Rhoda was excited to the height of state pride in everything she saw, and, with strong faculty, seized on the

historical and political relations of Annapolis, till Judge Custis said:

"Vesta, that girl is of the old rebel Milburn stock, I know. She takes it all in like a wild duck diving for the bay celery."

With two such beautiful women to speak for it, the Eastern Shore railroad seemed at first to have many friends, but it was not in the nature of the enterprising elements about Baltimore to yield a point, however complaisant they might appear.

Vesta did not go into general company, but her influence was mildly exercised in her rooms at the large old hotel, and in her carriage as she made excursions in pleasant weather to the South and West rivers, to "the Forest" of Prince George and to the thrifty Quakers of Montgomery. She wrote and received a daily letter, her husband being attentive and tender, despite his growing cares, as he had promised to be on that severe day he made his suit to her.

But the story of her sacrifice, shamefully exaggerated, with all that intensity of expression habitual in a pro-slavery society whenever money is the stake and denunciation the game, was used to injure her husband's interests.

Mr. Milburn was described as a vile Yankee type of miser and overreacher, who had plotted against the fortune of a gentleman and the virtue of his daughter for a long series of remorseless years.

Local opposition affirmed that he would use the railroad to ruin other gentry and oppress his native region, and that he was a Philadelphia emissary and an abolitionist, scheming to create a new state of the three jurisdictions across the bay.

Judge Custis, with his great popularity, did not escape censure; he was said to have winked at the surrender of his child for money and ambition, and to have broken the heart of his estimable wife after he had lost her fortune in an iron furnace.

Senator Clayton, whose mother had originated near Annapolis, made a visit there from Washington, and was entrapped into saying that Delaware would furnish all needful railway facilities for the Eastern Shore, and that two railways there would never pay.

Finally, Judge Custis wrote to his son-in-law to come to Annapolis and meet these misstatements in person.

Milburn came, and his pride being irritated by the nature of the opposition, he wore to the scene of the combat his ancestral hat.

He became at once the most marked figure in Maryland.

In one end of the state he was caricatured in drawings and verses as the generic Eastern-Shore man, wearing such a hat because he had not heard of any later styles.

The connection of a man of last century's hat with such a progressive thing as a railroad, seemed to excite everybody's risibilities. His railroad was called the Hat Line, even in the debates, and coarse people and negroes were hired by wits in the lobby to attend the Legislature with petitions for the Eastern Shore railroad, the whole delegation wearing antique and preposterous hats, gathered up from all the old counties and from the slop-shops of Baltimore; and in that day queer hats were very common, as animal skins of great endurance were still used to manufacture them.<sup>[17]</sup>

From Somerset word was sent that Milburn retained his hat from no amiable weakness or eccentricity, but because he had entered a vow never to abandon it till he had put every superior he had under his feet; and that he was a victim of gross forest superstition, and had made a bargain with the devil, who allowed him to prosper as long as he braved society with this tile.

The hotel servants chuckled as he went in and out; the oystermen and wood-cutters called jocosely to each other as he passed by; respectable people said he could have no consideration for his wife to degrade her by raising the derision of the town. Judge Custis finally remarked:

"Milburn, I resolved, many years ago, never to address you again on the subject of your dress. My duty makes me break the resolve: your hat is the worst enemy of your railroad."

Vesta, however, was the Entailed Hat's greatest victim. It lay upon her spirits like a shroud. Nervous and apprehensive as she had become, the perpetual admonition and friction of this article drove her into silence and gloom, poisoned the air and blocked up the sunlight, made going forth a constant running of the gantlet, and hospitality a comedy, and human observation a wondering stare.

The hat was the silent, unindicated thing that stood between her and her husband and the rest of the world. She never mentioned it, for she saw that it was forbidden ground. Kind and liberal as her husband was in every other thing, she dared not allude to a matter which had become the centre of his nervous organization, like an indurated sore; and yet she saw, from other than selfish considerations, that this hat was his own worst foe.

Some positive vice—and he had none—some calculating conspiracy—and he was direct as the day—some base amusement or hidden habit or acrid disease would hold him in captivity and pervert his heart less than this simple aberration of behavior. Had he been a hunchback men would have

overlooked it; a hideous goitre or wen they would not have resented; but extreme gentility or high-bred courtesy could not refrain from turning to look a second time at a man with a beautiful lady on his arm and a steeple hat upon his head.

The existence of any subject man and wife must not talk together upon, which is yet a daily ingredient of comfort and display, itself disarranges their economy and finally becomes the chronic intruder of their household; and, when it is a trifle, it seems the more an obstacle, because there is no reasoning about it.

This Hat had long ceased to be external: it was worn on Milburn's heart and stifled the healthy throbbing there. It made two men of him,—the outer and the household man,—and, like the Corsican brothers, they were ever conscious of each other, and a word to one aroused the other's clairvoyant sensibility.

"If people would only not observe him," Vesta said, "I think he would lay his hat aside; but that is impossible, and all his pride is in the unending conflict with a law of everlasting society. Who sets a fashion, we do not know; who dares to set one that is obsolete must be a martyr; independence no one can practise but a lunatic. Oh, what tyranny exists that no laws can reach, and how much of society is mere formality!"

Vesta pitied her husband, but the disease was beyond her cure. She had anticipated some compensation for her marriage, in a larger life and society, and in the exercise of her mind, especially in art and music; yet these were purely social things with woman, and the baneful hat was ever darkening her threshold and closing the vista of every other one. She meditated escaping from it by a visit to Europe, which her father had promised her before his embarrassments, and which had been spoken of by Mr. Milburn as due her in the way of musical perfection.

"Uncle," Rhoda Holland said one day, "do put off that old hat. Aunt Vesta could love you so much better! People think it is cruel, uncle. Oh, listen to your wife's heart and not to your pride."

"Stop!" said Milburn. "One more reference to my honest hat and you shall be sent back to Sinepuxent and Mrs. Somers."

It may have been this dreadful threat, or rising ambition, or the fascinations of Judge Custis's position and attentions and remarkable gallantry, that disposed Rhoda to turn her worldly sagacity upon the father of her friend.

The visit to Annapolis occupied the whole winter; as it proceeded, Judge Custis, suppressing the temptations of the table, and feeling his later responsibilities thoughtfully, and desirous of a fixed settlement in a home again, felt a powerful passion to possess Rhoda Holland.

He contended against it in vain. Her beauty and coquetry, and ambition, too, seized his fancy, and worked strongly upon his imagination. He had seen her grow from a forest rose to be the noblest flower of the garden, superb in health, rich in colors, tall and bright and warm, and easily aware of her conquests, and with a magical touch and encouragement. She began to lead him on from mere mischief. He was wise, and observant of women, and he threw himself in the place of her instructor and courtier. She became his pupil, and an exacting one, driving his energies onward, demanding his full attention, stimulating his mind; and Vesta soon saw that her father was a blind captive in the cool yet self-fluttered meshes of her connection.

"Is there any law, husband," Vesta asked, "to prevent Rhoda marrying Judge Custis?"

"I think not. There is no consanguinity. In a society where every degree of cousins marry together, it would be as gratuitous to interfere in such a marriage as to forbid my hat by law."

"He is so enamoured of her," said Vesta, "that I fear the results of her refusing him upon his habits. Father is a better man than he ever was: a wife that can retain his interest will now keep him steady all his life."

The adjournment of the Legislature was at hand; another year, and perhaps years unforeseen in number, were to be occupied in the same slow, illusive quest.

Judge Custis found himself one morning early above the dome of the old state-house, where he frequently went at that hour with Rhoda Holland, to look out upon the bay and the town and "Severn's silver wave reflected."

He turned to her with a sparkle of humor, yet a flush of the cheek, and said:

"My girl, what is to be your answer to Pastor Tilghman's marriage offer?"

"It cannot be."

"Then I am free to ask for another. Rhoda, you have seen that I am foolish for you. I was your admirer when you were a poor forest girl—"

"And when you were a married man," Rhoda interrupted. "How splendid and sly you were! But, even then, I was delighted that a great man like you could even flirt with me. Perhaps you will cut up the same way again?"

"No, Rhoda. This is my last opportunity. I will devote to you my remaining life. I am fifty-five, but it is the best fifty-five in Maryland. You shall have the devotion of twenty-five."



"I want to be taken to Washington," Rhoda said. "I think I could marry an old man if he took me there."

"I will run for Congress, then. You will make a great woman in public life. I do not ask you to love me, but to let me love you. Oh, my child, marriage has been a tragedy with me. I will be a repentant and a fond husband. Hear my selfishness speak and make the sacrifice."

"If I say 'Yes,'" said Rhoda, "it is not to settle down and nurse you. You are to be what you have been this winter: a beau, and an ever fond and gallant gentleman."

"Yes, as long as time will let me."

"Then say no more about it," Rhoda answered, with a little pallor; "if the rest are willing, a poor girl like me will not refuse you, but say, like Ruth, 'Spread thy skirt over thine handmaid; for thou art a near kinsman.' I love your daughter."

Meshach Milburn, not more than half pleased with the turn affairs had taken, hastened to Princess Anne in advance and sought William Tilghman.

"Dear friend," he said, "I hope your heart was not committed to my wayward niece?"

"Has she engaged herself to another, Cousin Meshach?"

"Yes, to Judge Custis. You know what a taking way he has with girls. It was not my match, William."

Milburn looked at the young man and beheld no disappointment on his face—rather a flush of spirit.

"Cousin Meshach," he said, cheerfully, "I thought I could make Rhoda happy; I thought I interpreted her right. Since I was mistaken, it is better that she has been sincere. No, my heart is still a bachelor's and a priest's. See, cousin! The bishop has sent for me to take a larger field."

He united Rhoda and the Judge, as he had married his first love—to another; she was pale and in tears; he kissed her at the altar, and gave his hand to the Judge warmly:

"I know you will be a better Christian, Cousin Daniel. God has given you much love on the earth. Our prayers for you have been answered."

Vesta was disappointed, expecting to see William made happy in a marriage with Rhoda.

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## CHAPTER XLVI.

### THE CURSE OF THE HAT.

As the spring burst upon Princess Anne in cherry blossoms and dogwood flowers, in herring and shad weighting the river seines, and broods of young chickens and peach-trees pullulating, and as the time of fruit and corn and early cantaloupe followed, the life in human veins also unfolded in infant fruit, and Vesta became a mother.

The forest and the court had harmonized in the offspring, and the young boy took the name of Custis Milburn.

Healthy and comely, as if Society had made the match for Nature, the infant flourished without a day's ailing, and grew upon its parents' eyes like a miracle, having the symmetry and loveliness of the mother, and the bold, challenging countenance of the father; and to Meshach it brought the satisfaction of an improved posterity, and an heir to his success; to Vesta, compensation for the loss of worldly society.

She found more joy in Teackle Hall, with this wondrous product of her sacrifice and pain, than with the admiration of all the good families in Maryland; and a sense of warmth and gratitude sprang to her conscience towards the father of this matchless gift.

"I have not given him my whole loyalty," she reflected, with exacting piety; "I have let trifles stand before my vows."

Accordingly, when Milburn, conscience-stricken, and accusing himself of hard conditions in exacting a marriage without love, came one day, with all the magnanimity of a new parent, before his wife to make some restitution, she surprised him by arising and kissing him.

"Sir, I have been very proud and stubborn. Do forgive me!"

He pressed her to his breast, while his tears ran over her face.

"Honey," he said at length, "what a mockery my crime to you has been—to think that you could ever love me! No, I will give you freedom. Dear as your captivity is to me, your cage shall open and you shall fly."

Vesta stepped back at these strange words and waited for him to explain. He continued:

"I will send you to Italy with our child. Your father shall go, too, if you desire. Go from me and these unloved conditions, this hateful bondage and constraint"—his tears flowed fast again, but he let them fall ungrudged,—"find in your music and your noble mind forgetfulness of this unworthy marriage. I can live in the recollection of the blessing you have been to me."

"What!" said Vesta; "do you command me to leave you?"

"Yes. Let it be that. I know how conscientious you are, my darling, but it is your duty to go. A hard struggle is before me: I am deeply embarked in an untried business. Now I can spare the money. Go and find happiness in a happier land."

She went to him again and put her arms around him.

"Leave you?" she said. "What have I done to be driven away? How could I reconcile myself to let you live alone? 'For better or for worse,' I said. God has made it better and better every day."

He held her head between his palms and looked into her eyes, to see if she spoke from the heart.

"Husband," she whispered, "I love you."

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The minds of both husband and wife, after this reconciliation, turned to the disturbing hat as the subject of their estrangement hitherto.

Said Milburn to himself: "What a sinner I have been to distress that poor child with my miserable hat! At the first opportunity she gives me, I will lay it aside forever."

Said Vesta to her father and his bride: "What a wicked heart I have kept, to oppose my husband in such a little thing as his good old hat—the badge of his reverence to his family and of his bravery to an impertinent age. I have let it discolor my married life and all the sunshine. But my baby has melted my obdurate heart. Come, unite with me, and let us show him that everything he wears we will adopt proudly."

Therefore, when Milburn next went out, his wife came with a beaming face and elastic step and put on his head his steeple hat. He looked at her grimly, but she stopped his protest with a kiss.

He thought to introduce the subject to Judge Custis, but that fond bridegroom broke in with:

"Milburn, you're a game fellow. It was impudent in me to say one word about your hat. I'll get one like it myself if I can find one. Tut, tut, man! It becomes you. Say no more about it."

Milburn undertook to make the explanation to his niece, but before he could well begin she cried:

"Uncle Meshach, Aunt Vesta is just in love with your hat! She won't hear of your wearing any other. We're all going to stand by it, uncle."

A man chooses his own verdict by a long course of behavior; austerity in the family begets fear; an affectation, whether of folly or resentment, is at last credited to nature; man is seldom allowed to escape from the trap of his own temperament.

So Meshach Milburn never obtained the opportunity to relieve himself from the affliction with which he had afflicted others. Like an impostor who has established the claim of deafness, and mankind bawls in his ear, the hatted spectre was made to feel uncomfortable when he put off his tile—his consistency was at once on trial. He was like a boy who had pricked a cross upon his hand in India ink, and, growing to be a man with taste and position, sees the indelible advertisement of his vulgarity whenever he takes a human hand.

To have put on any other hat would have subjected him to new hoots and comments, and made himself publicly smile at his own folly; he must have climbed as high as the pillory to explain the change and make apology; the society he had faced in defiance seemed all at once united to refuse him a *status* without his Entailed Hat, and it would have taken the courage of throwing off a life-long *alias* and living under a forgotten name, to appear in Princess Anne in a new, contemporary head-dress.

Milburn saw that he must wear his old hat for life; he bent under the servitude, and was alone the victim of it now.

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## CHAPTER XLVII.

### FAILURE AND RESTITUTION.

The railroad struggle was renewed from year to year.

The Legislature was annually beset by strong lobby forces, and an embittered contest between the Potomac Canal and the greater railway company, to strangle each other, left the Eastern Shore railroad out of notice. Locomotive engines of native invention began to appear; the railroad

to Washington was finally opened, and, next, to Harper's Ferry, as Vesta's boy became a young horseman and learned to read. The venerable court-house at Princess Anne, with its eighty-seven years of memories, burned down during these proceedings, and a panic extended over Patty Cannon's old region at the whisper of another Nat Turner rebellion among the slaves; but no mention of the thousands of abductions there was made in the anti-Masonic convention at Baltimore, where Samuel S. Seward and Thaddeus Stevens nominated Mr. Wirt for President, because one white man had been stolen. The murder of Jacob Cannon by Owen Daw did produce some distant comment a little later, chiefly because of the apathy of the Delaware society to pursue the murderer.

By a long course of usury and legal persecution the Cannon brothers had become detested in their own community, and when they sued O'Day, or Daw, for cutting down a bee-tree on one of their farms he had tilled, and then enforced the judgment of ten dollars, Daw,—now a man in growth and of Celtic vindictiveness,—loaded his gun and started for Cannon's Ferry, and waylaid Jacob just as he was leading his horse off the ferry scow.

"Are you going to give me back that ten dollars, you old scoundrel?" shouted O'Day.

"Stand back! stand back!" answered long Jacob; "the quotient was correct; the *lex loci* and the *lex terræ* were argued. The *lex talionis*—"

"Take it!" cried the villain, adroitly firing his shot-gun into the merchant's breast, so as not to injure his humaner beast.

Jacob Cannon staggered to the fence at the head of the wharf, and caught there a moment, and fell dead.

"You scoundrel," screamed Isaac Cannon from the window, "to kill my brother, my executive comfort."

"Yes," answered O'Day, "and I'll give the other barrel to you!"

As Isaac Cannon barricaded himself in, Owen O'Day collected his effects without hurry, and betook himself to the wilds of Missouri.

Cannon's Ferry fell into decay when the railroad at Seaford carried off its trading importance, but there are yet to be seen the never tenanted mansion of the disappointed bridegroom, and the gravestones which show how Jacob's fate frightened Isaac Cannon to a speedy tomb.

In the meantime, John M. Clayton had made use of the fears of Calhoun and his nullifiers, who were menaced with the penalties of treason by the president, to pass a great protective tariff bill by their aid, thus establishing the manufactures in the same period with the railways.

This triumph in the senate left him free to conduct the suit of Randel against the Canal Company, which occupied as many years as the railroad enterprise of Meshach Milburn.

The barbarous system of "pleadings" was then in full vogue, though soon to be weeded out even in its parent England, and the law to be made a trial of facts instead of traverses, demurrers, avoidances, rebutters and surrebutters, churned out of the skim milk of words. Clayton's pleadings require a bold, dull mind to read them now, but he tired his adversaries out, and his cousin, Chief-Justice Clayton, who was jealous of him, had yet to decide in his favor.

Then, after the lapse of years, the issue came to trial at the old Dutch-English town of New Castle, and from the magnitude of the damages claimed, the weight and number of counsel, and the novelty of trying a great corporation, it interested the lawyers and burdened the newspapers, and was popularly supposed to belong to the class of French spoliation claims, or squaring-the-circle problems—something that would be going on at the final end of the world.

"Never you mind, Bob Frame! Walter Jones is a great advocate, but, Goy! he don't know a Delaware jury. I'll get my country-seat, up here on the New Castle hills, out of this case," Clayton said, as he pitched quoits with his fellow-lawyers from Washington and Philadelphia, on the green battery where the Philadelphia steamer came in with the Southern passengers for the little stone-silled railroad.

John Randel, Jr., had ruined a fine engineer, to become a litigious man all his life.

He sued his successor and fellow New-Yorker, Engineer Wright, and was nonsuited. He garnisheed the canal officers, and beset the Legislature for remedial legislation, and threatened Clayton himself with damages; yet had such a fund of experience and such vitality that he kept the outer public beaten up, like the driving of wild beasts into the circle of the hunters. He had surveyed the great city of New York and planned its streets above the new City Hall. Elevated railroads were his projection half a century before they came about. He now looked upon engineering with indifference, and considered himself to have been born for the law.

In the midst of many other duties, Clayton, in course of time, convicted Whitecar of kidnapping, on negro testimony, having obtained a ruling to that end from his cousin, the chief-justice; and a constituent named Sorden (*not* the personage of our tale), being prosecuted for kidnapping, in order to spite Clayton, was cleared by him at Georgetown after a marvellous exhibition of jury eloquence, and repaid the obligation, years after our story closes, by breaking a party dead-lock in the Legislature of Delaware, where he became a member, and sending Mr. Clayton for the fourth time to the American senate.

The Entailed Hat became more common in the streets of Annapolis than it had been in Princess Anne, as Milburn pressed his bill for assistance year after year, and was shot through the back with slanders from home and hustled in front by overwhelming opposition.

Judge Custis took the field for Congress on the railroad issue, and was elected, through the Forest vote, and his wife went through a Washington season with as much dignity as enjoyment, few suspecting that she was not the Judge's social equal.

The ancestral hat defied all worldly hostility, but became the iron helmet to bend its wearer's back. He prayed in secret for some pitying angel to break the spell that bound him to it, but none conceived that he would let it go.

His boy grew strong, and took his father's dress to be a matter of course; his wife pressed upon him the nauseous ornament he had so long affected; a wide conspiracy seemed to have been formed to drive his head into that hereditary wigwam, and he could not escape it.

Even Grandmother Tilghman, who now was an inmate of Teackle Hall, in William's absence of years, forgot all about the queer hat, and rejoiced to herself that "Bill" had not married "that political girl."

Milburn had maintained his financial solvency by turns and sorties that even his enemies admired, but a railroad built along one man's spine and terminated by a steeple depot on his head must wear out the unrelieved individual at last.

The banks in Baltimore began to break; fierce riots ensued; the state debt had mounted up, through aid to public works, to fifteen million dollars; the Eastern Shore Railroad obtained, too late, the vote of the subsidy expected, and the state treasurer could not find funds to pay it.

The gazettes announced the failure of Meshach Milburn, Esq., of the Eastern Shore.

Without an instant's hesitation, Vesta surrendered her own property, and she and Rhoda Custis opened a select school in a part of Teackle Hall, and let the remainder for residences.

"Why do you make this sacrifice?" asked her husband; "nobody expected it."

"They may say we were married to protect my parents," Vesta answered, "but not that it was to secure myself. My boy shall have a clear name."

His failure ended the active life of Meshach Milburn; too considerate of his family to renew his former low endeavors, he became a clerk in the county offices, through Judge Custis's influence, and wore his hat to stipendiary labor with the regularity, but not the rebellious instincts, of old days, becoming, instead, the victim of a certain religious trance or apathy, which deepened with time.

Vesta saw that Milburn's misfortune extinguished the last remnant of animosity in her father's mind, and the two men went about together, like two old boys who had both been prisoners of war, and were cured of ambition.

Milburn resumed his forest walks and bird-tamings, all traces of ambition left his countenance, and he was as dead to business things as if he had never risen above his forest origin.

He often talked of William Tilghman, and seemed to wish to see him, though for no apparent purpose.

The Asiatic cholera, having begun to make annual visits to the United States, singled out, one day, the wearer of the obsolete hat, and put to the sternest test of affection and humanity the household at Teackle Hall.

Whether from the respect his steady purposes had given them, or the natural devotion in a sequestered society, no soul left his side.

But it brought the final visitation of poverty upon Vesta. Her school was broken up in a day. She dismissed it herself, and calmly sat by her husband's bed, to soothe his dying weakness, and await the providence of God.

He rapidly passed through the stages of cramp and collapse, a nearly perished pulse, and the cadaverous look of one already dead, yet his intellect by the law of the disease, lived unimpaired.

"The stream cannot rise above the fountain," he spoke, huskily; "all we can get from life is love. My darling, you have showered it on me, and been thirsty all your days."

"I have been happy in my duty," Vesta said; "you have been kind to me always. We have nothing to regret."

He wandered a little, though he looked at her, and seemed thinking of his mother.

"Where can we go?" he muttered, pitifully; "I burned the dear old hut down. It would have been a roof for my boy."

His chin trembled, as if he were about to cry, and sighed:

"Fader an' mammy's quarrelled; the mocking-bird won't sing. Ride for the doctor! ride hard! Oh!

oh! too late, little chillen! They'se both dead!"

He returned to perfect knowledge in a moment, and fixed his eyes on Vesta, saying,

"I leave you poor. I tried hard. Perhaps—"

His eye was here arrested by some conflict at the door, where Aunt Hominy, notwithstanding her imperfect wits, was striving to keep guard.

"De debbil's measurin' him in! Measurin' him in at las'!" the old woman said; "Miss Vessy's 'mos' free!"

"Admit me!" spoke a clear, familiar voice, "I must see him. Mr. Clayton has won the lawsuit, and two hundred and twenty-six thousand dollars damages! Cousin Meshach is rich again."

"That friendly voice," spoke Meshach, with a happy light in his eyes; "oh, I wanted to hear it again!"

Yet he put his hand up with all his little strength to push away the intruder, who would have kissed him, and whispered,

"No. The cholera!"

"It's the bishop, uncle!" cried Mrs. Custis; "Bishop Tilghman, from the West."

"Don't I know him," Milburn whispered, with sinking voice and powers. "Honest man! Bishop of our church! Bishop in the free West! God bless him!"

He was lost again, as if he had fainted, for some time, and, all kneeling, the young bishop made a prayer.

When they arose Milburn seemed speechless, yet he tried to raise his hand, and, Vesta coming to his aid, his long, lean fingers closed around hers, and he signalled to William Tilghman with his eyes.

The bishop came near, and, by a painful effort, Milburn put his wife's hand in her cousin's. His lips framed a word without a sound:

"*Restitution.*"

"Glory to God!" suddenly exclaimed Grandmother Tilghman, who seemed to see without sight all that was going on.

"I knew it would be so, if both would wait," sighed Rhoda to her husband, through her tears.

There was still something on Milburn's mind, though he was unable to explain it. Every attempt was made to interpret his want, but in vain, till Aunt Hominy broke the silence by mumbling:

"He want dat debbil's hat!"

Vesta saw her husband's eyes twinkle as if he had heard the word, and it gave her a thought. She left the room, and returned with her boy, a fine young fellow, obedient to her wish. In his hand was his father's hat.

"What will you do if papa leaves us, Custis?" Vesta spoke, loudly, so that the dying man could hear.

"I will wear my forefather's hat, papa!" said the child.

The dying man drooped his eyes, as if to say "No," and looked fervently at his son and wearily at the old headpiece.

Vesta placed it on his pillow, and waited to know his next wish.

He made a sign, which they interpreted to mean,

"Lift me!"

He was lifted up, livid as the dead, and raised his eyes towards his forehead.

His wife set the Entailed Hat upon his temples.

"Bury it!" he said, in a distinct whisper, and passed away.

**THE END.**

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### FOOTNOTES:

[1] In the original manuscript a circumstantial story, as taken from Milburn's lips, was preserved. The "Tales of a Hat" may be separately published.

[2] "Slavery, in the State of Delaware, never had any *constitutional* recognition. It existed in

the colonial period by custom, as over the whole country, but subject to be regulated or abolished by simple legislative enactment. Very early the State of Delaware undertook its regulation, with the view of securing the personal and individual rights of the persons so held in bondage, and to prevent the increase by importation. In 1787 the export of Delaware slaves was forbidden to the Carolinas, Georgia, and the West Indies, and two years later the prohibition was extended to Maryland and Virginia, and it never was repealed, and in 1793 the first penalties were enacted against kidnappers."—*Letter of Hon. N. B. Smithers to the Author.*

- [3] The skull of Ebenezer Johnson can be seen at Fowler & Wells' Museum, New York, with the bullet-hole through it. There, also, are the skulls of Patty and Betty Cannon.
- [4] At this point the second episode, telling the descent of the Entailed Hat from Raleigh to Anne Hutchinson, is omitted, to shorten the book.
- [5] Frederick Douglass, afterwards Marshal of the District of Columbia, was at this time a slave boy twelve years old, living about twenty miles from the scene of this conversation.
- [6] The Nat Turner insurrection in Virginia occurred a year or thereabout later than this time.
- [7] The origin of Patty Cannon is in doubt; a pamphlet published near her time gives it as above, with strong circumstantial embellishments, yet there are neighbors who say she was of Delaware and Maryland stock—a Baker and a Moore. The weight of tradition is the other way.
- [8] This incident is fully related in "Niles's Register" of April 25, 1829 (No. 919 of the full series), page 144, where also is a contemporary account of Patty Cannon's arrest. The date of the exposure in this story is transposed from April to October. She was to have been tried in October, but died in May, about six weeks after her arrest.
- [9] Thomas Hollyday Hicks, the Union Governor of Maryland in 1861, was at the date of these events member elect to the Legislature from the neighborhood of Patty Cannon's operations, and was thirty-one years old. Lanman's "Dictionary of Congress" says: "He worked on his father's farm when a boy, and served as constable and sheriff of his county."
- [10] See "Niles's Register," 1826.
- [11] See "Niles's Register," 1820, for two long accounts of this crime, saying, "One of them, Perry Hutton, a native of Delaware, formerly a well-known stage-driver, who lately broke jail at Richmond, where he had been committed for kidnapping." See, also, "Scharf's Baltimore Chronicles," pp. 398, 399.
- [12] "Niles's Register," 1823.
- [13] Spanish proverb: "Little beard, little shame."
- [14] This case is related in the "Life of Benjamin Lundy."
- [15] A case actually like this, happening twenty-five years later, was related to me by Judge George P. Fisher, of Dover.
- [16] See the case of Whitecar in the Delaware reports.
- [17] I take the following note from the *New York Tribune* of December, 1882: "The town of Richmond, Ind., is said to be the centre of Quakerdom in this country, and has five meetings in the two creeds of Fox and Hicks, and the Earlham Quaker College. There I saw the large, fur-covered white hats, a few of which are still left, which were imported into Indiana by the North Carolina Quakers from 'Beard's Hatter Shop,' an extinct locality in the North State, where the Quakers were prolific, and they all ordered these marvellous hats, which are said to be literally *entailed*, being incapable of wearing out, and as good for the grandson as for the pioneer. They are made of beaver-skin or its imitation in some other fur."

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