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[Frontispiece: Instantly he was aware of the descent

upon him of a fiery comet of femininity]

DOUBLE TROUBLE

Or, Every Hero His Own Villain

By
HERBERT QUICK

Author of *Aladdin & Co., In the Fairyland of America*

**WITH ILLUSTRATIONS BY
ORSON LOWELL**

Pervasive Woman! In our hours of ease,
Our cloud-dispeller, tempering storm to breeze!
But when our dual selves the pot sets bubbling,
Our cares providing, and our doubles troubling!
—*Secret Ritual of the A.O.C.M.*

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JANUARY

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ILLUSTRATIONS

Instantly he was aware of the descent upon him of a fiery comet of femininity *Frontispiece*

She seemed to emanate from the tiger-skin as a butterfly from the chrysalis

A new thrill ran through the man and a new light came into his eyes.

Vast and complete was the system of notes built up by the professor and the judge

There she sits so attentive to her book that his entrance has not attracted her notice

Soon their heads were close together over plans

"Those red ones," said the judge, "are the very devil for showing on black!"

"I am taking Miss Waldron home," said Mr. Amidon

The Persons of the Story:

FLORIAN AMIDON, a respectable young banker of literary and artistic tastes.

EUGENE BRASSFIELD, for a description of whose peculiarities the reader is referred to the text.

ELIZABETH WALDRON, a young woman just out of school.

JUDGE BLODGETT, an elderly lawyer.

MADAME LE CLAIRE, a professional occultist.

PROFESSOR BLATHERWICK, her father, a German scientist.

DAISY SCARLETT, a young woman of fervid complexion and a character to match.

EDGINGTON AND COX, lawyers.

ALVORD, a man about a small town.

AARON, a Sudanese serving-man.

MRS. PUMPHREY,)
MISS SMITH,)
DOCTOR JULIA BROWN,) Members of the elite of Bellevale.
MRS. ALVORD,)
MRS. MEYER,)

MRS. HUNTER, of Hazelhurst.

MR. SLATER,)
MR. BULLIWINKLE,) Prominent male residents of Bellevale.
MR. STEVENS,)
MR. KNAGGS,)

SHEEHAN,) Labor leaders.
ZALINSKY,)

CONLON, a contractor.

CLERKS, STENOGRAPHERS, SERVANTS, POLITICIANS, WAITERS, MEMBERS OF THE A. O. C. M., PORTERS, AND CITIZENS ON FOOT AND IN CARRIAGES.

SCENE: In Hazelhurst, Wisconsin; New York City, and Bellevale, Pennsylvania. [N. B.—It might be anywhere else in these states, east or west.]

TIME: From June, 1896, to March, 1901—but this is not insisted upon.

DOUBLE TROUBLE

I

A SLEEP AND A FORGETTING

Deep in the Well where blushing hides the shrinking
and Naked Truth,
I have dived, and dared to fetch ensnared this Fragment
of tested Sooth;
And one of the purblind Race of Men peered with a curious Eye
Over the Curb as I fetched it forth, and besought me
to drop that Lie:
But all ye who long for Certitude, and who yearn for the
Ultimate Fact,
Who know the Truth and in spite of Ruth tear piecemeal
the Inexact,
Come list to my Lay that I sing to-day, and choose betwixt
him and me,
And choosing show that ye always know the Lie from the Veritee!
—*The Rime of the Sheeted Sporn.*

"Baggs," said Mr. Amidon, "take things entirely into your own hands. I'm off."

"All right," said Baggs. "It's only a day's run to Canada; but in case I should prove honest, and need to hear from you, you'll leave your address?"

Mr. Amidon[1] frowned and made a gesture expressive of nervousness.

"No," said he, in a high-pitched and querulous tone. "No! I want to see if this business owns me, or if I own it. Why should you need to communicate with me? Whenever I'm off a day you always sign everything; and I shall be gone but a day on any given date this time; so it's only the usual thing, after all. I shall not leave any address; and don't look for me until I step in at that door! Good-by."

And he walked out of the bank, went home, and began looking over for the last time his cameras, films, tripods and the other paraphernalia of his fad.

"This habit of running off alone, Florian," said Mrs. Baggs, his sister, housekeeper, general manager, and the wife of Baggs—his confidential clerk and silent partner—"gives me an uneasy feeling. If you had only done as I wanted you to do, you'd have had some one——"

"Now, Jennie," said he, "we have settled that question a dozen times, and we can't go over it again if I am to catch the 4:48 train. Keep your eye on the men, and keep Baggs up in the collar, and see that Wilkes and Ranger get their just dues. I must have rest, Jennie; and as for the wife, why, there'll be more some day for this purely speculative family of yours if we—— By the way, there's the whistle at Anderson's crossing. Good-by, my dear!"

On the 4:48 train, at least until it had aged into the 7:30 or 8:00, Mr. Florian Amidon, banker, and most attractive unmarried man of Hazelhurst, was not permitted to forget that his going away was an important event. The fact that he was rich, from the viewpoint of the little mid-western town, unmarried and attractive, easily made his doings important, had nothing remarkable followed. But he had exceptional points as a person of consequence, aside from these. His father had been a scholar, and his mother so much of a *grande dame* as to have old worm-eaten silks and laces with histories. The Daughters of the American Revolution always went to the Amidons for ancient toggery for their eighteenth-century costumes—and checks for their deficits. The family even had a printed genealogy. Moreover, Florian had been at the head of his class in the high school, had gone through the family *alma mater* in New England, and been finished in Germany. Hazelhurst, therefore, looked on him as a possession, and thought it knew him.

We, however, may confide to the world that Hazelhurst knew only his outer husk, and that Mr. Amidon was inwardly proud of his psychological hinterland whereof his townsmen knew nothing. To Hazelhurst his celibacy was the banker's caution, waiting for something of value in the matrimonial market: to him it was a bashful and palpitant—almost maidenly—expectancy of the approach of some radiant companion of his soul, like those which spoke to him from the pages of his favorite poets.

This was silly in a mere business man! If found out it would have justified a run on the bank.

To Hazelhurst he was a fixed and integral part of their society: to himself he was a galley-slave chained to the sweep of percentages, interest-tables, cash-balances, and lines of credit, to whom there came daily the vision of a native Arcadia of art, letters and travel. It was good business to allow Hazelhurst to harbor its illusions; it was excellent pastime and good spiritual nourishment for Amidon to harbor his; and one can see how it may have been with some quixotic sense of seeking adventure that he boarded the train.

What followed was so extraordinary that everything he said or did was remembered, and the record is tolerably complete. He talked with Simeon Woolaver, one of his tenants, about the delinquent rent, and gave Simeon a note to Baggs relative to taking some steers in settlement. This was before 5:17, at which time Mr. Woolaver got off at Duxbury.

"He was entirely normal," said Simeon during the course of his examination—"more normal than I ever seen him; an' figgered the shrink on them steers most correct from his standp'int, on a business card with a indelible pencil. He done me out of about eight dollars an' a half. He was exceedin'ly normal—up to 5:17!"

Mr. Amidon also encountered Mrs. Hunter and Miss Hunter in the parlor-car, immediately after leaving Duxbury. Miss Hunter was on her way to the Maine summer resorts with the Senator Fowlers, to whom Mrs. Hunter was taking her. Mrs. Hunter noticed nothing peculiar in his behavior, except the pointed manner in which he passed the chair by Minnie's side, and took the one by herself. This seemed abnormal to Mrs. Hunter, whose egotism had its center in her daughter; but those who remembered the respectful terror with which he regarded women between the ages of eighteen and thirty-five failed to see exceptional conduct in this. His lawyer, Judge Blodgett, with whom he went into the buffet at about seven, found him in conversation with these two ladies.

"He seemed embarrassed," said the judge, "and was blushing. Mrs. Hunter was explaining the new style in ladies' figures, and asking him if he didn't think Minnie was getting much plumper. As soon as he saw me he yelled: 'Hello, Blodgett! Come into the buffet! I want to see you about some legal matters.' He excused himself to the ladies, and we went into the buffet."

"What legal matters did he place before you?" said his interlocutor.

"Two bottles of beer," said the judge, "and a box of cigars. Then he talked Browning to me until 9:03, when he got off at Elm Springs Junction, to take the Limited north. He was wrong on

Browning, but otherwise all right."

It was, therefore, at 9:03, or 9:05 (for the engineer's report showed the train two minutes late out of Elm Springs Junction), that Florian Amidon became the sole occupant of this remote country railway platform. He sat on a trunkful of photographer's supplies, with a suit-case and a leather bag at his back. It was the evening of June twenty-seventh, 1896. All about the lonely station the trees crowded down to the right of way, and rustled in a gentle evening breeze. Somewhere off in the wood, his ear discerned the faint hoot of an owl. Across the track in a pool under the shadow of the semaphore, he heard the full orchestra of the frogs, and saw reflected in the water the last exquisite glories of expiring day lamped by one bright star. Leaning back, he partly closed his eyelids, and wondered why so many rays came from the star—with the vague wonder of drowsiness, which comes because it has been in the habit of coming from one's earliest childhood. The star divided into two, and all its beams swam about while his gaze remained fixed, and nothing seemed quite in the focus of his vision.

Putting out his hand, presently, he touched a window, damp with vapor and very cold. On the other side he felt a coarse curtain, and where the semaphore stood, appeared a perpendicular bar of dim light. A vibratory sound somewhere near made him think that the owls and frogs had begun snoring. He heard horrible hissings and the distant clangor of a bell; and then all the platform heaved and quaked under him as if it were being dragged off into the woods. He sprang upward, received a blow upon his head, rolled off to the floor, and—

Stood in the middle of a sleeping-car, clad only in pajamas; and a scholarly-looking negro porter looked down in his face, laying gentle hands upon him, and addressing him in soothing tones.

"Huht yo' haid, Mr. Brassfield? Kind o' dreamin', wasn't yo', suh?" said the porter. "Bettah tuhn in again, suh. I'll wake yo' fo' N'Yohk. Yo' kin sleep late on account of the snow holdin' us back. Jes' lay down, Mr. Brassfield; it's only 3:35."

A lady's eye peeped forth from the curtain of a near-by berth, and vanished instantly. Mr. Amidon, seeing it, plunged back into the shelter from which he had tumbled, and lay there trembling—trembling, forsooth, because, instead of summer, it seemed winter; for Elm Springs Junction, it appeared to be a moving train on some unknown road, going God knew where; and for Florian Amidon, in his outing suit, it had the appearance of a somnambulistic wretch in his night-clothes, who was addressed by the unfamiliar porter as Mr. Brassfield!

[1] Editorial Note: As reflecting light on the personal characteristics of Mr. Florian Amidon, whose remarkable history is the turning-point of this narrative, we append a brief note by his college classmate and lifelong acquaintance, the well-known Doctor J. Galen Urquhart, of Hazelhurst, Wisconsin. The note follows:

"At the time when the following story opens, Mr. Florian Amidon was about thirty years of age. Height, five feet ten and three-quarters inches; weight, one hundred and seventy-eight pounds. For general constitutional and pathological facts, see Sheets 2 to 7, inclusive, attached hereto. Subject well educated, having achieved distinction in linguistic, philological and literary studies in his university. (See Sheet 1, attached.) Neurologically considered, family history of subject (see Sheets 8 and 10) shows nothing abnormal, except that his father, a chemist, wrote an essay opposing the atomic theory, and a cousin is an epileptic. I regard these facts as significant. Volitional and inhibitory faculties largely developed; may be said to be a man of strong will-power and self-control. The following facts may be noted as possibly symptomatic of neurasthenia; fondness for the poetry of Whitman and Browning (see Nordau); tendency to dabble in irregular systems of medical practice; pronounced nervous and emotional irritability during adolescence; aversion to young women in society; stubborn clinging to celibacy. In posture, gait and general movements, the following may be noted: vivacious in conversation; possessed of great mobility of facial expression; anteroposterior sway marked and occasionally anterosinistral, and greatly augmented so as to approach Romberg symptom on closure of eyes, but no ataxic evidences in locomotion. Taking the external malleolus as the datum, the vertical and lateral pedal oscillation —"

The editor regrets to say that space forbids any further incorporation of Doctor Urquhart's very illuminating note at this place. It may appear at some time as a separate essay or volume.

II

THE RIDDLE OF RAIMENT AND DATES

From his eyne did the glamour of Faerie pass

And the Rymour lay on Eildon grass.
He lay in the heather on Eildon Hill;
He gazed on the dour Scots sky his fill.
His staff beside him was brash with rot;
The weed grew rank in his unthatch'd cot:
"Syne gloaming yestreen, my shepherd kind,
What hath happ'd this cot we ruin'd find?"
"Syne gloaming yestreen, and years twice three,
Hath wind and rain therein made free;
Ye sure will a stranger to Eildon be,
And ye know not the Rymour's in Faerie!"
— *The Trewe Tale of Trewe Thomas.*

As Mr. Amidon sensed the forward movement of the train in which he so strangely found himself, he had fits of impulse to leap out and take the next train back. But, back where? He had the assurance of his colored friend and brother that forward was New York. Backward was the void conjectural. Slowly the dawn whitened at the window. He raised the curtain and saw the rocks and fences and snow of a winter's landscape—saw them with a shock which, lying prone as he was, gave him the sensation of staggering. It was true, then: the thing he had still suspected as a nightmare was true. Where were all the weeks of summer and autumn? And (question of some pertinency!) where was Florian Amidon?

He groped about for his clothes. They were strange in color and texture, but, in such judgment as he could form while dressing in his berth, they fitted. He never could bear to go half-dressed to the toilet-room as most men do, and stepped out of his berth fully appareled—in a natty business sack-suit of Scots-gray, a high turn-down collar, fine enamel shoes and a rather noticeable tie. Florian Amidon had always worn a decent buttoned-up frock and a polka-dot cravat of modest blue, which his haberdasher kept in stock especially for him. He felt as if, in getting lost, he had got into the clothes of some other man—and that other one of much less quiet and old-fashioned tastes in dress. It made him feel as if it were he who had made the run to Canada with the bank's funds—furtive, disguised, slinking.

He looked in the pockets of the coat like an amateur pickpocket, and found some letters. He gazed at them askance, turning them over and over, wondering if he ought to peep at their contents. Then he put them back, and went into the smoking-room, where, finding himself alone, he turned up his vest as if it had been worn by somebody else whom he was afraid of disturbing, and looked at the initials on the shirt-front. They were not "F. A.," as they ought to have been, but "E. B.!" He wondered which of the bags were his. Pressing the button, he summoned the porter.

"George," said he, "bring my luggage in here."

And then he wondered at his addressing the porter in that drummer-like way—he was already acting up to the smart suit—or down; he was in doubt as to which it was.

The bags, when produced, showed those metal slides, sometimes seen, concealing the owner's name. Sweat stood on Florian's brow as he slipped the plate back and found the name of Eugene Brassfield, Bellevale, Pennsylvania! A card-case, his pocketbook, all his linen and his hat—all articles of expensive and gentlemanly quality, but strange to him—disclosed the same name or initials, none of them his own. In the valise he found some business letterheads, finely engraved, of the Brassfield Oil Company, and Eugene Brassfield's name was there set forth as president and general manager.

"Great heaven!" exclaimed Florian, "am I insane? Am I a robber and a murderer? During this time which has dropped out of my life, have I destroyed and despoiled this gentleman, and—and run off in his clothes? I must denounce myself!"

The porter came, and, by way of denouncing himself, Mr. Amidon clapped his waistcoat shut and buttoned it, snapped the catches of the bags, and pretended to busy himself with the letters in his pockets; and in doing so, he found in an inside vest-pocket a long thin pocket-book filled with hundred-dollar bills, and a dainty-looking letter. It was addressed to Mr. Eugene Brassfield, was unstamped, and marked, "To be Read En Route."

There was invitation, there was allurements, in the very superscription. Clearly, it seemed, he ought to open and examine these letters. They might serve to clear up this mystery. He would begin with this.

"My darling!" it began, without any other form of address—and was not this enough, beloved?

—
"My own darling! I write this so that you may have something of me, which you can see and touch and kiss as you are borne farther and farther from me. Distance unbridged is such a terrible thing—any long distance; and more than our hands may reach and clasp across is interstellar space to me. You said last night that all beauty, all sweetness, all things delectable and enticing and fair, all things which allure and enrapture, are so bound up in little me, that surely the very giants of steam and steel would be drawn back to me, instead of bearing you away. Ah, my Eugene! You wondered why I put my hands behind me, and would not see your out-stretched arms! Now that you are gone, and will not return for so long—until so near the day when I may be all that I am capable of becoming to you, let me tell you—I was afraid!"

"Not of you, dearest, not of you—for with all your ardor of wooing (and no girl ever had a more perfect lover—I shall always thank God for that mixture of Lancelot and Sir Galahad in you which makes every moment in your presence a delight), I always knew that you could leave me like a sensible boy, and, while longing for me, stay away. But I—whom you have sometimes complained of a little for my coldness—had I not looked above your eyes, and put my hands behind me, I should have clung to you, dear, I was afraid, and never have allowed you to go as you are now going, and made you feel that I am not the perfect woman that you describe to me, as me. Even now, I fear that this letter will do me harm in your heart; but all the lover in me—and girls inherit from their fathers as well as from their mothers—cries out in me to woo you; and you must forget this, only at such times of tenderness as you will sometimes have while you are gone, when one embrace would be worth a world. Then read or remember this, as my return-clasp for such thoughts.

"Besides, may I not, now that you are away from me, give you a glimpse of that side of my soul which a girl is taught to hide? This was the 'swan's nest among the reeds' which Little Ellie meant to show to that lover who, maybe, never came. Ah, Mrs. Browning was a woman, and knew! (Mind, dear, it's Mrs. Browning I speak of!)

"Sometimes, when the Knight has come, and the wife wishes to show the glories of her soul, 'the wild swan has deserted, and a rat has gnawed the reed.' Let the wild and flowery little pool of womanhood which is yours—yours, dearest—grow somewhat less strange to you than it would have been—last evening—so that when you see me again you will see it as a part of me, and, without a word or look from me, know me, even more than you now do,

"Yours,
"Elizabeth."

Florian read it again and again. Sometimes he blushed—not with shame, but with the embarrassment of a girl—at the fervid eloquence. And then he would feel a twinge of envy for this Eugene Brassfield who could be to such a girl "a perfect lover."

"From one soon to be a bride," said he to himself, "to the man she loves: it's the sweetest letter ever written. I wonder how long ago she wrote it! Here's the date: 7th January, 1901. Odd, that she should mistake the year! But it was the 7th, no doubt. By the way, I don't know the day of the week or month, or what month it is! Here, boy! Is that the morning paper?"

He seized the paper feverishly, held it crushed in his hand until the boy left him, and then spread it out, looking for the date. It was January the 8th, 1901! The letter had been written the preceding evening. Whatever had happened to this man Brassfield, had occurred within the past sixteen hours. And, great God! where had Florian Amidon been since June, 1896? All was dark; and, in sympathy with it, blackness came over his eyes, and he rode into New York in a dead faint.

III

ANY PORT IN A STORM

Cosimo: Join us, Ludovico! Our plans are ripe,
Our enterprise as fairly lamped with promise
As yon steep headland, based, 'tis true, with cliff,
But crowned with waving palms, and holding high
Its beaconing light, as holds its jewel up,
Your lady's tolling finger! Come, the stage
Is set, your cue is spoke.

Ludovico: And all the lines
Are stranger to my lips, and alien quite
To ear and eye and mind. I tell thee, Cosimo,
This play of thine is one in which no man
Should swagger on, trusting the prompter's voice;
For mountains tipped with fire back up the scene,
Out of the coppice roars the tiger's voice:
The lightning's touch is death; the thunder rends
The very rocks whereon its anger lights,
The paths are mined with gins; and giants wait
To slay me should I speak with faltering tongue
Their crafty shibboleth! Most dearest coz,
This part you offer bids me play with death!
I'll none of it.

—*Vision of Cosimo.*

"Comin' round all right, now, suh?" said the learned-looking porter. "Will you go to the Calumet House, as usual, suh? Ca'iage waitin', if you feel well enough to move, suh."

"I'm quite well," said Mr. Amidon, though he did not look it, "and will go to the—what hotel

did you say?"

"Calumet, suh; I know you make it yo' headquahtahs thah."

"Quite right," said Mr. Amidon; "of course. Where's the carriage and my grips?"

He had never heard of the Calumet; but he wanted, more than anything else then, privacy in which he might collect his faculties and get himself in hand, for his whole being was in something like chaos. On the way, he stopped the cab several times to buy papers. All showed the fatal date. He arrived at the palatial hotel in a cab filled with papers, from which his bewildered countenance peered forth like that of a canary-bird in the nesting-season. He was scarcely within the door, when obsequious servants seized his luggage, and vied with one another for the privilege of waiting on him.

"Why, how do you do?" said the clerk, in a manner eloquent of delighted recognition. "Your old room, I suppose?"

"Yes, I think so," said Mr. Amidon.

The clerk whirled the register around, and pointing with his pen, said:

"Right there, Mr. Brassfield."

Mr. Amidon's pen stopped midway in the downward stroke of a capital F.

"I think," said he, "that I'll not register at present. Let me have checks for my luggage, please—I may not stay more than an hour or so."

"As you please," said the clerk. "But the room is entirely at your service, always, you know. Here are some telegrams, sir. Came this morning."

He took and eyed the yellow envelopes with "E. Brassfield" scrawled on them, as if they had been infernal machines; but he made no movement toward opening them. Something in the clerk's look admonished him that his own was extraordinary. He felt that he must seek solitude. To be called by this new and strange name; to have thrust on him the acting of a part in which he knew none of the lines and dared not refuse the character; and all these circumstances made dark and sinister by the mysterious maladjustment of time and place; the possession of another man's property; the haunting fear that in it somewhere were crime and peril—these things, he thought, would drive him out of his senses, unless he could be alone.

"I think I'll take the room," said he.

"If any one calls?" queried the clerk.

"I'm not in," said Amidon, gathering up the telegrams. "I do not wish to be disturbed on any account."

Five years! What did it mean? There must be some mistake. But the break in the endless chain of time, the change from summer to winter, and from the dropping to sleep at Elm Springs Junction to the awakening in the car—there could be no mistake about these. He sat in the room to which he had been shown, buried in the immense pile in the strange city, as quiet as a heron in a pool, perhaps the most solitary man on earth, these thoughts running in a bewildering circle through his mind. The dates of the papers—might they not have been changed by some silly trick of new journalism, some straining for effect, like the agreement of all the people in the world (as fancied by Doctor Holmes) to say "Boo!" all at once to the moon? He ran his eyes over the news columns and found them full of matter which was real news, indeed, to him. President Kruger was reported as about to visit President McKinley for the purpose of securing mediation in some South African war; and Senator Lodge had made a speech asking for an army of one hundred thousand men in, of all places, the Philippine Islands. The twentieth century, and with it some wonderful events, had stolen on him as he slept—if, indeed, he had slept—there could be no doubt of that.

He found his hands trembling again, and, fearing another collapse, threw himself upon the bed. Then, as drowsiness stole on him, he thought of the five years gone since last he had yielded to that feeling, and started up, afraid to sleep. He saw lying on the table the unopened telegrams, and tore them open. Some referred to sales of oil, and other business transactions; one was to inform Brassfield that a man named Alvord would not meet him in New York as promised, and one was in cipher, and signed "Stevens."

He took from his pocket the letters of Brassfield, and read them. One or two were invitations to social functions in Bellevue. One was a bill for dues in a boating-club; another contained the tabulated pedigree of a horse owned in Kentucky. A very brief one was in the same handwriting as the missive he had first read, was signed "E. W.," and merely said that she would be at home in the evening. But most of them related to the business of the Brassfield Oil Company, and referred to transactions in oil.

He lay back on the bed again, and thought, thought, thought, beginning with the furthest

stretch of memory, and coming down carefully and consecutively—to the yawning chasm which had opened in his life and swallowed up five years. Time and again, he worked down to this abyss, and was forced to stop. He had heard of loss of memory from illness, but this was nothing of the sort. He had been tired and nervous that night at Elm Springs Junction, but not ill; and now he was in robust health. Perhaps some great fit of passion had torn that obliterating furrow through his mind. Perhaps in those five years he had become changed from the man of strict integrity who had so well managed the Hazelhurst Bank, into the monster who had robbed Eugene Brassfield of—his clothes, his property, the most dearly personal of his possessions—these, certainly (for Amidon knew the rule of evidence which brands as a thief the possessor of stolen goods); and who could tell of what else? Letters, bags, purses, money—these any vulgar criminal might have, and bear no deeper guilt than that of theft; but, the clothes! Mr. Amidon shuddered as his logic carried him on from deduction to reduction—to murder, and the ghastly putting away of murder's fruit. Imagination threw its limelight over the horrid scene—the deep pool or tarn sending up oilily its bubbles of accusation; the shadowy wood with its bulging mound of earth and leaves swept by revealing rains and winds; the moldy vat of corrosive liquid eating away the damning evidence; the box with its accursed stains, shipped anywhere away from the fatal spot, by boat or ship, to be relentlessly traced back—and he shivered in fearful wonder as to how the crime had been committed. In some way, he felt sure, Eugene Brassfield's body must have been removed from those natty clothes of his, before Florian Amidon could have put them on, and with them donned the personality of their former owner.

And here entered a mystery deeper still—the strange deception he seemed to impose on the dead man's acquaintances. And this filled him, somehow, with the most abject dread and fear. Brassfield seemed to have been a well-known man; for porters and clerks in New York do not call the obscure countryman by name. To step out on the street was, perhaps, to run into the very arms of some one who would penetrate the disguise. Yet he could not long remain in this room; his very retirement—any extraordinary behavior (and how did he know Brassfield's ordinary courses?)—would soon advertise his presence. Amidon walked to the window and peered down into the street. His eyes traveled to the opposite windows, and finally in the blind stare of absent-mindedness became fixed on a gold-and-black sign which he began stupidly spelling out, over and over. "Madame le Claire," it read, "Clairvoyant and Occultist." Not an idea was associated in his mind with the sign until the word "mystery," "mystery," began sounding in his ears—naturally enough, one would say, in the circumstances. Then the letters of the word floated before his eyes; and finally he consciously saw the full sign stretching across two windows: "Madame le Claire, Clairvoyant and Occultist. All Mysteries Solved."

Florian stared at this sign, until he became conscious of deep weariness at so long standing on his feet. Then he saw, blossoming, the multiplying lights of an early winter's dusk—so numbly had the time slipped by. And in the gruesome close of this dreadful day, the desperate and perplexed man stole timidly down the stairways—avoiding the elevator—and across the street to the place of the occultist.

IV

AN ADVENTURE IN BENARES

The silly world shrieks madly after Fact,
Thinking, forsooth, to find therein the Truth;
But we, my love, will leave our brains unracked,
And glean our learning from these dreams of youth:
Should any charge us with a childish act
And bid us track out knowledge like a sleuth,
We'll lightly laugh to scorn the wraiths of History,
And, hand in hand, seek certitude in Mystery.
—*When the Halcyon Broods.*

The house of the occultist was one of a long row, all alike, which reminds the observer of an exercise in perspective, as one glances down the stretch of balustraded piazzas. Amidon walked straight across the street from the hotel, and counted the flights of stairs up to the fourth floor. There was no elevator. The denizens of the place gave him a vague impression of being engaged in the fine arts. A glimpse of an interior hung with Navajo blankets, Pueblo pottery, Dakota beadwork, and barbaric arms; the sound of a soprano practising Marchesi exercises; an easel seen through an open door and flanked by a Grand Rapids folding-bed with a plaster bust atop; and a pervasive scent of cigarettes, accounted for, and may or may not have justified, the impression. On the fourth floor the scent shaded off toward sandalwood, the sounds toward silence, Bohemia toward Benares. He walked in twilight, on inch-deep nap, to a door on which glowed in soft, purple, self-emitted radiance, the words:

MADAME Le CLAIRE
ENTER

The invitation was plain, and he opened the door. As he did so, the deep, mellow note of a gong filled the place with a gentle alarm. It was sound with noise eliminated, and matched, to the ear, the velvet of the carpet.

The room into which he looked was dark, save for light reflected from a marble ball set in a high recess in the ceiling. None of the lamps, whose rays illuminated the ball, could be seen, and the white globe itself was hung so high in the recess that none of its direct rays reached the corners of the apartment. A Persian rug lay in the center, and took the fullest light. There were no sharp edges of shadow, but instead there was a softly graduated penumbra, deepening into murk. Straight across was a doorway with a portière, beyond was another, and still farther, a third, all made visible in silhouette by the light in a fourth room, seen as at the end of a tunnel.

Across this gossamer-barred arch of light, a black figure was projected, and swelled as it neared in silent approach. It came through the last portière, on into the circle of light, and stood, a turbaned negro, bowing low toward the visitor.

"Madame le Claire," said Amidon feebly, "may I speak with her?"

There was no reply, unless a respectful scrutiny might be taken for one. Then the dumb Sudanese, carrying with him the atmosphere of a Bedouin tent, disappeared, lingered, reappeared, and beckoned Amidon to follow. As they passed the first portière, that mellow and gentle gong-note welled softly again from some remote distance. At the second archway, it sounded nearer, if not louder. At the third, as Amidon stepped into the lighted room, it filled the air with a golden vibrancy. It was as if invisible ministers had gone before to announce him.

Amidon took one long look at the scene in the fourth room, and a great wave of unbelief rolled across his mind. Through this long day of shocks and surprises, he had reached that stage of amazedness where the evidential value of sensory impressions is destroyed. He covered his eyes with his hands, expecting that the phantasms before him might pass with vision, and that with vision's return might come the dear, familiar commonplaces of his commonplace life.

The room seemed to have no windows, and the roar of the New York street outside was gone, or faint as the hum of a hive. The walls were hung with fabrics of wool or silk, in dull greens and reds, and the floor was spread with rugs. With mouth redly ravaging at him, and eyes emitting opalescent gleams, lay a great tiger-skin rug, upon which, on a kind of dais, sat a woman—a woman whose eyes sought his in a steady regard which flashed a thrill through his whole body as he gazed. For she seemed to emanate from the tiger-skin, as a butterfly from the chrysalis.



[Illustration: She seemed to emanate from the tiger-skin, as a butterfly from the chrysalis.]

Her dress was of some combination of black and yellow which carried upward the tones of the great rug. Her bare arms—long, and tapering to lithe wrists and hands—were clasped by dull-gold bracelets of twisted serpents. Over shapely shoulders, the flesh of which looked white and young, there was thrown a wrap like feathery snow, from under which drooped down over the girlish bosom a necklace that seemed of pearl. The face was fair, its pallor tinged with red at lips, and rose on cheeks. The eyes, luminous and steady, shone out through heavy dark lashes, from under brows of black, and seemed, at that first glance, of oriental darkness. A great mass of dark-

brown hair encircled the rather small face, and even in his first look, he noted at the temples twin strands of golden-blond which, carried out like rays in the fluffy halo about her brow, reappeared in all the twistings and turnings of the involved pile which crowned the graceful head. The yellow-and-black of the tiger appeared thus, from head to foot. It was afterward that he found out something of the secret of the peculiar fascination in the great dark eyes. One of them was gray, with that greenish tinge which has been regarded as the token of genius. The other was of a mottled golden-brown, with lights like those in the tiger's eye. In both, in any but strong light, the velvet-black pupils spread out, and pushed the iris back to a thin margin; and thus they varied, from gray or brown, to that liquid night, which Amidon now saw in them, as he stepped within the doorway, and looked so long on her, as she sat like a model for the Queen of the Jungle, that under other circumstances the gaze would have seemed rude. Some sense of this, breaking through his bewilderment, made him bow.

"Madame le Claire?" said he.

"The same," said she. "How can I serve you, sir?"

The voice, a soft contralto, was the complement of the steady regard of the eyes. As she spoke, she rose and stepped toward him, down from the little dais to the rug. She rose, not with the effort which marks the act in most, but lightly, as a flower rises from the touch of a breeze. She was tall and lithe, and all the curves of her figure were long and low—once more suggesting the soft strength of the tigress. But when speech parted the lips, the smile which overspread her face won him.

"How can I serve you, my friend?" she repeated.

"I am in great trouble," said he.

"Yes," she purred.

"I saw your sign," he went on. "And I want you to tell me where I have been since June, 1896—and who is Eugene Brassfield? Did I kill him—or only rob him? And who is Elizabeth?"

She had stepped close to him now, as if to catch the scent of some disturbing influence which might account for such incoherence; but Amidon's breath was innocent of taint.

"Yes!" said she, "I think we shall be able to tell you all. But, are you well?"

"I have had no breakfast," said he. "When I found that I had lost five years—I forgot. And—once—I fainted. I'm not quite—well, I'm afraid!"

Madame le Claire stepped to the wall and pushed a button. The turbaned Sudanese reappeared at once.

"Aaron," said she, "tell Professor Blatherwick that Mr.—Mr.—"

"Amidon," said Florian hastily—"Amidon is my name."

"—Amidon will dine with us," Madame le Clair continued smoothly. "He has some very interesting things for us to look into. And have dinner served at once."

Aaron! and dinner! and Blatherwick! The delicious vulgarity of the names was sweet music. For be it remembered that Florian was a banker, and a man of position; and sandalwood, Sudanese, Bedouins and illusions were ill for the green wound of his mystery—which, in all conscience, was bad enough in and of itself! Some confidence in the realities of things returned to him, but he followed Madame le Claire like a faithful hound.

V

SUBLIMINAL ENGINEERING

Now, Red-Neck Johnson's right hand never knew his left hand's game;
And most diverse were the meanings of the gestures of the same.
For, benedictions to send forth, his left hand seemed to strive,
While his right hand rested lightly on his ready forty-five.
"Mr. Chairman and Committee," Mr. Johnson said, said he,
"It is true, I'm tangled up some with this person's property;
It is true that growin' out therefrom and therewith to arrive,
Was some most egregious shootin' with this harmless forty-five:
But list to my defense, and weep for my disease," said he;
"I am double," half-sobbed Red-Neck, "in my personality!"
—*The Affliction of Red-Neck Johnson.*

Madame le Claire led Mr. Amidon to the next room, turned him over to Aaron (now wonderfully healed of his dumbness) with a gesture of dismissal; and he was ushered by the negro into a most modern-looking chamber, in which was a brass bedstead with a snowy counterpane.

"Dinner will be suhved in ten minutes, suh," said Aaron.

They were waiting for him in the little dining-room, when he was wafted through the door by Aaron's obsequious bow. The tigrine Le Claire advanced from a bay-window, bringing a slender man with stooped shoulders.

"Papa," she said, "this is Mr. Amidon, whom I have induced to dine with us; Mr. Amidon, Professor Blatherwick."

Professor Blatherwick was bent, and much bleached, faded and wrinkled. His eyes seemed both enormous in size and sunk almost to his occiput, by reason of being seen through the thickest of glasses. His lank, grayish hair, of no particular color, but resembling autumnal roadside grasses, hung thinly from a high and asymmetrical head, and straggled dejectedly down into a wisp of beard on chin and lip—a beard which any absent-minded man might well be supposed to have failed to observe, and therefore to have neglected to shave. When Madame le Claire stopped in leading him forward, he halted, and feeling blindly forward into the air as if for Amidon's hand, though quite ten feet from him, he murmured:

"I am bleaced to meet you, sir."

"Evidently German," thought Amidon.

"I understandt," said the professor, opening the conversation, as Madame le Claire poured the tea, "that you haf hadt some interesding experiences in te realm of te supliminal."

Amidon's tension of mind, which had left him under the compulsion of the woman's mastery of him, returned at the professor's remark.

"I have been dead," said he, "since the twenty-seventh of June, 1896!"

Madame le Claire stared at him in unconcealed amazement. The professor calmly dipped toast in his tea.

"So!" said he. "Fife years. Goot! Dis case vill estaplish some important principls. Vill you be so kindt as to dell us te saircumstances?"

"Oh, papa!" broke in the lady. "You must wait until after dinner. I saw Mr. Amidon was weak and disturbed, and, I thought—hungry. So I asked him to stay."

"I have eaten nothing but this," said Mr. Amidon, "since June twenty-seventh, 1896——"

"So," said the professor calmly. "Dis vill brofe an important case."

"I saw the sign," said Amidon, "'All Mysteries Solved,' and I came here——"

"De sign," said the professor, "iss our goncession to te spirit of gommercialism, and te gometitife system. It vas Clara's itea. But some mysteries ve do not attempt. In te realm of te supliminal, howefer, ve go up against almost any broposition. I am Cheneral Superintendent of Supliminal Enchineering; Clara is te executant. I make blance, and Clara does as she bleaces aboutt following dem. You vill, at your gonfenience, dell us all you can of your case. I vill analyze, glassify, and tiagnose; she vill unrafel."

It was late in the evening when the professor was through with his diagnosis. He made copious notes of Amidon's story. Several times his daughter called him away from some book in which he had lost himself while on an excursion in search of parallel cases. At last he paused, his face expressing the triumph of a naturalist at the discovery of a new beetle.

"You are not in te least insane!" said he, with the air of telling Florian something hard to believe; "ant you haf none of te stigmata of techeneration. I would say that you are not a griminal—not much of a griminal anyhow, ant bropably not at all!"

"Thank you! Oh, thank you!" fervently exclaimed Amidon.

"It iss a case," went on the professor, "of dual pairsonality. For fife years you haf bropably been absent from Hazelhurst. You haf been someveres!"

"Where, where?" cried Amidon.

"Do not fear," said Madame le Claire, laying her hand on his arm. "If it is a case of dual personality, we shall soon find out all about it. You have mysteriously disappeared. Many men do. There was Lieutenant Rogers, of the navy; and Ansel Burns, of Ohio, who woke up in Kentucky in his own store, under the name of Brooks—Brooks' store, you know."

"And Ellis, of Bergen," said the professor, "who was lost for a year, and tiscofered himself in te pairson of a cook in a lumber-gamp in Minnesota, unter te name of Chamison. Oh, dere are many such! Te supchectife mind, te operations of vich are normally below te threshold of gonsciousness, suddenly dakes gontrol. Pouf! you are anodder man! You haf been Smidt; you are now Chones. As Chones you remember notting of Smidt. You go on, guided by instinct, ant te preacquired semi-intellichence of auto-hypnotismus——"

"Oh, papa!" said the tiger-lady, "those are awful words—for a sick man!"

"Vell," resumed Blatherwick, dropping into what he regarded as the vernacular, "you go on as Chones, all right all right. Some day, someveres—in dis case in a sleeping-car—you vake as Smidt again. You now do not remember Chones or te Chones life. You are all vorked up—vat you call it—flabbergasted. You come to Madame le Claire. Vat does she do? She calls te supchectife mind up abofe te threshold of gonsciousness, ant you are restored to te Chones blane of mentality. Hypnotismus, hypnotismus: that is vat does it!"

"And shall I stay—Jones?"

"No, no!" said Madame le Claire. "I will restore you. But while you are—Jones—I shall find out all you want to know about the—Jones—life, and I will tell you when you become yourself again. You will learn all about Bellevale, and Brassfield, and——"

"And Elizabeth?" asked Amidon.

Madame le Claire paused.

"Yes," said she, with much less cordiality, "I suppose so, if you want to know—about Elizabeth."

VI

THE JONES PLANE OF MENTALITY

My lady's eyes
Ensphere the skies,
Around in lovely mysteries:
Behind their bars
Are pent the stars,
Warm Venus' glow, the shafts of Mars.

Once, murky night
Shut in my sight:
One glance revealed the source of light!
Now, to be wise
Or gay, I rise,
By gazing in my lady's eyes!
—*Song from The Oculist.*

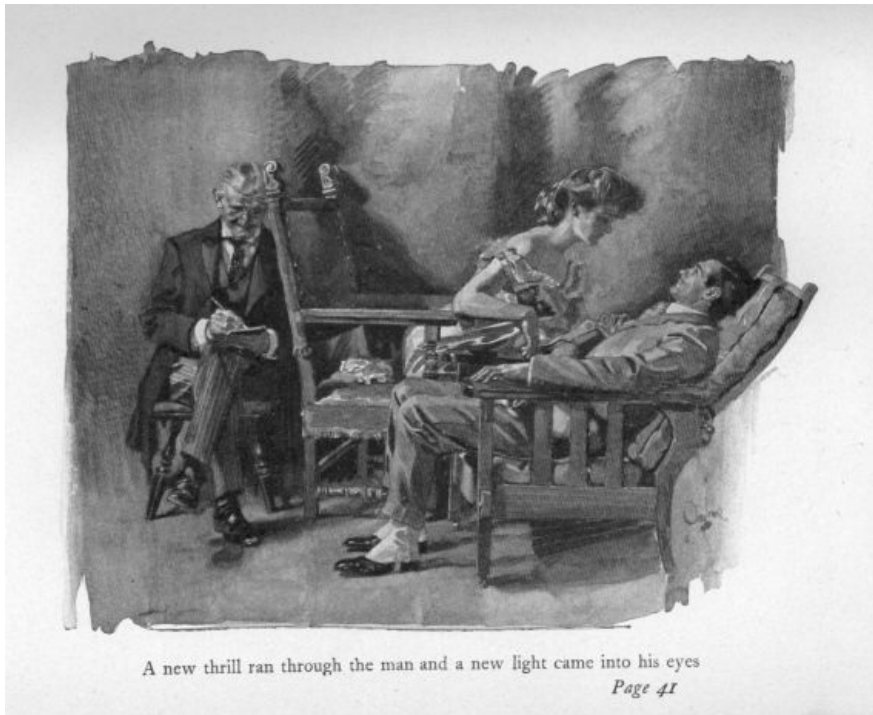
The process of bringing the "Jones plane of mentality" uppermost in Mr. Amidon would not have been regarded by the masculine reader of the unregenerate sort (though to such far be it from me to appeal!) as an operation at all painful. But Mr. Amidon, I must declare, was not of the unregenerate sort.

"Now," said Madame le Claire, "sit down in the arm-chair, and in a few minutes you will feel a sensation of drowsiness. Soon you will sleep. Think with all your power that you are to sleep."

She was sitting in a very high chair, he in a low one, so that her eyes were above his. The professor was blent with the shadows of some corner, in silent self-effacement, with a note-book in his hand.

Amidon tried to think with all his power that he was to sleep; but the lights and shadows and depths of the woman's eyes drew all thoughts to them. Uncle Toby, looking for the mote in the eye of the Widow Wadman, must have felt as did our wandering Florian. Never before had he noted for more than a fleeting glance the light that lies in woman's eyes. Now those limpid orbs met his in a regard, kindly, steady, eloquent of unutterable things. He noted the dark, arched, ebon sweep of the eyebrow, the long dark lashes curved daintily upward, the shining whiteness in the corners, and the wondrous irises. The one which was gray was dark like a moonlit sky; the other, like the same sky necked with clouds, and filled with the golden smoke of some far-off conflagration; and at the inner margin of both, the black of the dilated pupils seemed to spread out into the iris in rays of feathery blackness. They seemed to him like twin worlds—great, capacious, mysterious, alluring, absorbing. Behind the feathery curtains of those irises lay all the lovely things of which he had ever thought or dreamed—the things which sculptors and poets and

painters see, and seek to express. And without changing his gaze, he saw below the eyes the downy cheek, and the red lips so sweetly curved. A new thrill ran through the man, and a new light came into his eyes. Madame le Claire blushed.



**[Illustration: A new thrill ran through the man
and a new light came into his eyes]**

"Are you thinking of going to sleep?"

"I beg your pardon," said he; "I was thinking—I am afraid I was not!"

"Try again," said she; "and please control your thoughts. Think that you—are—going—to sleep. To sleep—Sleep! Sleep!—Slee—ee—eep!"

Now Amidon's eyes sought hers again, and held there; and the twin worlds, sphered in some slowly-turning orbit, seemed swinging in their native space. Now the cheeks and hair and mouth came out in their places, returning to distinctness like features of a face on a screen. Now the eyes became twin stars again, casting on him once more the effulgence of their binary glow.

And now eyes and face and hair, and Madame le Claire—all passed away; and Florian Amidon became as naught, and the tigrine lady and the faded professor played with the thing which had been he, as upon a machine. The pillar of Hazelhurst society, the banker now five years lost, the bewildered wretch of the sleeping-car, was now, by his own act, given over as passively as some inert instrument, body and soul, to the guidance and manipulation of this shady occultist, not four hours known to him—while outside droned the muffled roar of the human cyclone which sweeps and whirls and eddies through Manhattan. So stripped of stability was the pillar, that he was now a mere feather of humanity, self-abandoned to the clasp of the storm of the modern Babylon. Madame le Claire questioned, Amidon answered (or Something answered for him), and Professor Blatherwick wrote in his book—wrote the data, of "te Chones blane of mentality."

"Dis iss enough," said the professor, "for vunce. Pring him to!"

Madame le Claire leaned back, gave her subject a long look, and then, walking to him, took his head tenderly in her hands. With the left, she held his forehead; the fingers of the right crept insinuatingly among the curls resting on his neck, swept thence over to his brow, and down across his eyelids, closing them; and Amidon sat, senseless as a statue, and almost as still.

"Right!" said Madame le Claire sharply. "Wake!"

Amidon opened his eyes wearily.

"When are you going to begin?" said he.

"Ve are t'rough," said the professor. "Ve know it all."

"And Brassfield? Did I—?"

"You have done him notting," said the professor. "You are all recht. You need not fear—"

"And the lady—Elizabeth?" suggested Amidon, as passing to the thing of next importance.

"It is near morning," said Madame le Claire, "and you are prostrated. We are all very tired. Aaron must take you to your hotel. You must sleep. Never fear, no harm is coming to you. When you wake, come to me, and I will tell you all about it—'All Mysteries Solved,' you know. Good night. You will sleep late in the morning."

VII

ENTER THE LEGAL MIND

The need of lucre never looms so large
As when 'tis gotten in some devious way:
It mitigates the blackness of the charge
That every nether level yielded pay.

The man who dares e'en to the prison's marge
Should bring back what he went for—or should stay!
The need of lucre never looms so large
As when 'tis gotten in some devious way.

Men can o'erlook the stain upon the targe,
If from its boss the jewel shoots its ray;
Or blood upon the pirate's sable barge
Covered by silks' and satins' bright array—
The need of lucre never looms so large
As when 'tis gotten in some devious way.
—*Rondels of the Curb.*

Morning passed to noon, and the day aged into afternoon, before Amidon rose from the deep sleep which (according to Le Claire's prediction) followed his evening with her and the professor. With that odd sense of bewilderment which the early riser feels at this violation of habit, he went into the café for his belated breakfast. Impatient to finish the meal so that he might haste to the promised interview, he studied the menu, and with his eye scouted the room for a waiter—failing to bestow even the slightest glance on a man seated opposite. This fact, however, did not prevent the stranger from scrutinizing Amidon's face, his dress, and even his hands, as if each minutest detail were vitally important. He even dropped his napkin so as to make an excuse for looking under the table, and thus getting a good view of Florian's boots. Finally he spoke, as if continuing a broken-off conversation.

"As I said a while ago," he remarked, "Browning falls short of being a poet, just as a marble-cutter falls short of being a sculptor. You were quoting *Love Among the Ruins*, as the train stopped at Elm Springs Junction; or was it *Evelyn*—"

Amidon's eyes, during this apparently aimless disquisition, had been drawn from his meal to the speaker. He saw an elderly gentleman, clothed in the black frock-coat and black tie of the rural lawyer of the old school. His eyes shot keen and kindly glances from the deep ambush of great white brows, and his mouth was hidden under a snowy mustache. His features made up for a somewhat marked poverty of shape by a luxuriance of ruddy color, the culminating point of which was to be found in the broad and fleshy nose. His voice, soft and gentle when he began, swelled out, as he spoke, into something of the orator's orotund. When Amidon looked at him, the speaker returned the gaze in full measure, and leaning across the table, pointed his finger at his auditor, and slowly uttered the words, "—as—the train—stopped—at—Elm Springs Junction!"

"Why, Judge Blodgett!" exclaimed Amidon, "can this be you?"

"Can it be I?" exclaimed the judge. "Can it be me! No difficulty about that. Never mind the handshaking just yet—after a while, maybe. When it comes to the can-it-be part, how about you? How about the past five years, and Jennie Baggs keeping a place for you every meal for all this time, up to the present hour? I tell you, Florian, letting me down in that case of Amidon versus Cattermole, without a scrap of evidence, and getting me licked by a young practitioner who studied in my office, was bad—was damnable; but an only sister, Florian! and not one word in five years!"

"She's well, then, Jennie is?"

"She's as well, Florian, as a woman with the sorrow you've brought to her, and the mother of two infants, can be. But why do you ask?—why do you ask?—why is it necessary to go through the work of surplusage of asking?"

"Children, eh?" said Florian. "Good for Jennie! And how's Baggs?"

"Oh, Baggs, yes—why, Baggs has come through it all with his health about unimpaired, Baggs has! But no Baggs court of inquiry is going to switch me off the examination I'm now conducting;

and I tell you, Mr. Amidon, you can't dodge me. What double life took you away from home, and property, and everything?"

"Judge Blodgett," said Mr. Amidon, in that low voice which, with the English language as the medium of communication, is known as the danger-signal the world over, "the term 'double life' has a meaning which is insulting. Don't use it again."

"Well, well, Florian," said the judge, evidently pleased, "sustaining the motion to strike that out, the question remains. You aren't obliged to answer, you know; but you know, too, what not answering it means."

"Judge," said Amidon, after a long pause, "to say that I don't know where I have been, or what I have been doing, since June twenty-seventh, 1896, until yesterday morning when I came to my senses in a moving sleeping-car, won't satisfy you; but it's the truth."

The judge looked off toward the ceiling in the manner of a jurist considering some complex argument, but was silent.

"Now I have found a way," said Amidon, "of having all this explained. Come with me, and let's find out. There may be complications; I may need your help. You are the one man in all the world that I was just wishing for."

"Complications, eh?" said the judge. "Well, well! Let us see!"

And now he dropped into the old manner so well known to his companion as his office style. Piece by piece, he drew from Amidon his story. He dropped back to previous parts of the narrative, and elicited repetitions. He slurred over crucial points as if he did not see their bearing, and then artfully assumed minute variations of the tale, but was always corrected.

"The prosecution is obliged to rest its case," said he, at last. "You're not crazy, or all my studies in diseases of the mind have done me no good. Your story hangs together as no fiction could. To believe you, brands us both as lunatics. Come on and let's see what your mesmerist frauds have to say. As a specialist in facts, I'm a drowning man catching at a straw. Come on: mesmerism, or astrology, or Moqui snake-dance, it's all one to me!"

Up the stairs again, this time with Judge Blodgett, warily snuffing the air, and shy of both Bohemia and Benares. Into the presence of Madame le Claire, now gowned appropriately for the morning, and looking—extraordinary, it is true, with her party-colored hair and luminous eyes—but not so jungly as when she greeted the despairing sight of Amidon the night before.

"Madame, and sir," said the judge, "as Mr. Amidon's friend and legal adviser, I am here to protect his interests."

"So! Goot!" said the professor. "Bud te matter under gonsideration is psychical, nod beguniary. Howefer, if you are interested in te realm of te supliminal, if you care for mental science—"

"Sir," said the judge, "I may almost claim to be a specialist (so far as a country practitioner is permitted to specialize) in senile and paretic dementia, since I had the honor to represent the proponents in the will case of Snoke versus Snoke. But it's only fair to say that I regard hypnotism as humbug—only fair."

"Goot, goot!" said the professor delightedly. "To temonstrate to an honest ant indellichent skeptic, is te rarest of brifileches. Ve vill now broceed to temonstrate. Here is our friendt Herr Amidon avokened in a car after fife years of lostness; he has anodder man's dotes, anodder man's dictet, letters—unt all. He gomes to Madame le Claire ant Blatherwick. He is hypnotized out of te Amidon blane of being, ant into anodder. He is mate to gife himself away. Now ve vill broceed to dell aboutt his life since he vas lost—is it a dest, no?"

"Huh!" snorted the judge.

"Go on," cried Amidon; "tell me the story!"

"Vell," said the professor, "for four veeks after you left Elm Springs Chunction, you vandered—not, Clara?"

"Wandered," said Clara, "and to so many places that I can't remember them. Then you found oil, or traces of it—I can't get that very plainly—on a farm at Bunn's Ferry, Pennsylvania; and bought an option on the farm. Then you opened an office in Bellevale, and have been there in the oil business ever since.

"How's he been doin' financially?" interjected the judge.

"He has made a fortune," said Clara. "I believe him to be one of the principal men of the town, socially and in a business way. He didn't tell me this, but we think the circumstances seem to indicate it."

"Te saircumstances," said the professor, filling a pause, "show it."

"How is it," said the judge, "that no one has ever heard of his Bellevale career out in Hazelhurst, if he's so prominent? We read, out there, and once in a while one of us goes outside the corporation."

"His name," said Madame le Claire, "in Bellevale is not Florian Amidon."

"What is it?" cried Amidon. "Tell it to me!"

Madame le Claire restrained him with a calm glance.

"It is Eugene Brassfield," said she.

"It is your own dotes," cried the professor gleefully, "your own dictet, your own gorrespondence!"

Amidon was feeling in his breast-pocket for something. He withdrew his hand, holding in it a letter, and looked from it to Madame le Claire questioningly.

"Oh, yes!" said she, not quite in her usual manner, "it's yours. It's from Miss Elizabeth Waldron, of Bellevale, your affianced wife."

"Aha!" said the judge. "Now will you get mad when I speak of a double life? Engaged, hey?"

"I never saw the—the lady in my life," was the reply; "so how can I be—can I be—engaged to her?"

"In te Amidon blane of gonsciousness," said the professor, "you are stranchers. In te Brassfield pairsonality, you are:—*Gott im Himmel*, you are stuck on her, stuck on her—not, Clara? Vas he not gracey? Only Clara cut it short in te temonstration; but as a luffer, in te Brassfield blane, you are vot you call hot stuff."

"You had better read the gentlemen your notes," said Madame le Claire coldly. "And please excuse me. I hope to see you both again." And with a sinuous bow, she swept from the room.

Blodgett, keenly analytical, lost no word of the professor's notes. Florian sat with the letter from Miss Waldron in his hand, lost in thought. Sometimes his face burned with blushes, sometimes it paled with anxiety. His eyes ran over the letter full of sweet ardors; and when he thought of replying to them—or leaving them unanswered—his brow went moist and his heart sick. What should he do? What could he do?

When they returned to the hotel, the judge was in a fever of excitement.

"I tell you, Florian," said he, "I believe the professor is right about this. It seems that there are precedents, you know—cases on all-fours with yours. When I went to the telephone, up there, I called up Stacy and Stacy's and asked 'em to get me Dun's and Bradstreet's report on your Bellevale business. It ought to be up here pretty soon. There may be something down there worth looking after, and needing attention."

"Perhaps," groaned Amidon. "Do you know that I'm engaged——"

"One of the things I referred to," said the judge.

"—to a lady, down there, whom I shouldn't know if I were to meet her out in the hall? If I go back to Hazelhurst, she is put under a cloud as a deserted woman—to say nothing of her feelings. And if I go back to Bellevale—my God, Judge, how can I go back, and take my place in a society where every one knows me, and I know nobody; and be a lover to a girl who may be—anything, you know; but who has the highest sort of claims on me, and a nature, I'm sure, capable of the keenest suffering or pleasure—how can I?"

"Message, sir, from Stacy and Stacy," said a messenger boy at the door.

Judge Blodgett tore open the envelope, and read the telegraphic reports.

"M—m—m—Y—e—es," said he. "It'll take diplomacy, Florian, diplomacy. But, if these reports are to be trusted, and I guess they are, you've got about ten times as much at Bellevale as you have at Hazelhurst. And, as you say, the lady has claims. As an honorable man—an engaged man, who has received the plighted troth of a pure young heart—and a good financier, this Bellevale life demands resumption at your hands. Prepare, fellow citizen, to meet the difficulties of the situation."

POISING FOR THE PLUNGE

Yea, all her words are sweet and fair,
And so, mayhap, is she;
But words are naught but molded air,
And air and molds are free.
Belike, the youth in charmed hall
Some fardels sore might miss,
Scanning his Beauty's household all,
Or ere he gave the kiss!
—*The Knyghte's Discourse to his Page.*

Now it happened that at Bellevalle, the young woman whom we—with the sweet familiarity of art—have had the joy to know as Elizabeth, moved about in unconsciousness, mostly blissful, of the annihilation of Eugene Brassfield. The mails might take to Mrs. Baggs at Hazelhurst vague letters from Judge Blodgett hinting at clues and traces of Florian, preparatory to the restoration of the lost brother; but Brassfield, never anything but a wraith from the mysterious caves of the subconsciousness, was non-existent for evermore, except through the magic of Le Claire. But Elizabeth Waldron, just home from college, full of the wise un wisdom of Smith and twenty-three, and palpitating with the shock which had broken the cables by which she had so long, long ago moored herself in the safe and deep waters of the harbor of a literary and intellectual celibacy, still dreamed of the bubble personality which had vanished, although at times waves of anxious unrest swept across her bosom.

For one thing, that epistle of hers, made for his reading on the train—how could she have written it! Elizabeth's cheeks burned when she remembered it. Then she thought of the weeks of chaste dalliance between her acceptance of him and his departure, and of the *élan* with which he had entered that safe harbor of hers, and swept her from those moorings; and the letter seemed slight return for the rites of adoration he had performed before her.

But (and now the cheeks burned once more) why, why had he not written to her as soon as he reached New York? Was he one with whom it was out of sight, out of mind? Or was he one of those business men who can not place anything more delicate than price-quotations on paper? Or—and here the cheeks paled—was he suddenly ill? She wished, after all, that she had not written it!

And one day, when a special-delivery letter came and surprised her, she ran out in the winter sun to the summer-house where she had sat so much with him, and read it in quiet. Whereupon the unrest increased, because the letter seemed as unlike Eugene as if he had copied it from some *Complete Letter Writer*.

Florian had agonized over this letter—had even tried the experiment of writing one while in the "Chones blane" under the influence of Madame le Claire; but it was too incoherent for any use—and he had done the best he could. Professor Blatherwick and Judge Blodgett were working out a code of behavior for Mr. Amidon when he should return to Bellevalle. They kept him in the Brassfield personality for hours every day; but such a matter as this letter to Elizabeth, he could not intrust to them. Every day, though, he looked into the varicolored eyes of Clara and willed to sleep; and every day the operation grew less and less painful to him.

Vast and complex was the system of notes built up by the professor and the judge. They told him all about his various properties and holdings of stock; they listed the clubs and social organizations to which he belonged, and the offices he held in each. They made a directory of names mentioned by him in his abnormal state, and compiled facts about each person. It must have been very much like the copious information that we think we have about historical characters—elaborate, and the best thing possible in the absence of the real facts; but only the reflection of these people in the mind of some one else, after all. Finally the judge brought the whole to his friend, neatly typewritten, paragraphs numbered, facts tabulated, and all provided with a splendid index and system of elaborate cross-references.



[Illustration: Vast and complete was the system of notes built up by the professor and the judge]

"You see, my boy," said Judge Blodgett, "all any one really needs to know of his surroundings is actually very little. Otherwise, most people never could get along at all. Neander couldn't find his way to market—the greatest philosopher of his time. Now these notes tell you more—actually more—of your Bellevale life, than some folks ever find out about themselves—with a little filling in, on the spot, you know, why, they'll do first rate. For instance, under 'S' we have a man named Stevens, 'Old Stevens' you playfully call him. I figure him out to be an elderly man in some position of authority—he seems to sort of govern things, even you. The professor thinks he's your banker, but his intellectual domination leads me to the conclusion that he's your lawyer. There is a Miss Strong, evidently an important person. I venture the assertion that she's a literary woman, as you speak about asking her to 'look at her notes.' I shouldn't wonder if she's a rival of Miss Waldron's, eh, Professor?"

"Well," said Amidon impatiently, "who else?"

"Oh, lots of 'em," answered the judge. "Here's 'A' for instance, and under it a man named Alvord—a close friend of yours——"

"The one this telegram is from," said Amidon. "And I suppose this one in cipher is from Stevens, the lawyer or banker. It must be important."

"I shouldn't wonder," said Judge Blodgett; "and this Mr. Alvord I take to be a minister, for you connect him with some topic relating to 'Christian Martyrs' and 'rituals.' He must be a close friend, for you sometimes call him 'Jim,' in strict privacy, I presume. Oh, there's a regular directory of 'em here. I've even discovered that you have a little friend, a child of say seven or eight years—tell by the tone, you know—that you call 'Daisy' and 'Daise' and sometimes 'Strawberry.' These fondnesses for children and clergymen prove to me, Florian, that an Amidon is good goods on any confounded plane of consciousness you can throw 'em into—conservative, respectable, and all that, you know."

Amidon looked suspiciously at the notes, unappeased by this flattery. What justification there was for suspicion we shall be better able to say when we meet these Bellevale acquaintances of his.

"Is this the guide by which I am to regulate my conduct in Bellevale?" asked he, after looking it over.

"Well," said the judge, "it may not be quite like remembering all about things; but anyhow it will help some, won't it?"

"I suppose I'm to carry it with me, and when an acquaintance accosts me on the street, I'm to look him up in the index and find out who he is, before I decide whether to shake hands with him or cut him, am I?"

"Not exactly that way," said the judge; "that wouldn't be practicable, you know; but it's ten to one you'll find his name there. I tell you, that compilation——"

"Te tification into gategories," broke in the professor, "according to te principles of lotchik was te chutche's itea. A vonderfully inchenious blan. It vill enaple you——"

"Has it any plan of reference," interrupted Amidon, "by which I shall be enabled to find out about a man when I don't know who he is?"

"N—no."

"Or, in such a case, to give me knowledge of my past relations with him, or whether I like him or hate him?"

"Of course," said the judge, "we only try to do the possible. The law requires no man to do more."

"Does this thing," said Amidon, shaking it in evident disgust, "tell where I live in Bellevale, whether in lodgings or at a hotel, or in my own house? Could I take it and find my home?"

"Damn it, Florian!" said the judge, "I'm not here to be jumped on, am I? No one can remember everything all the time. We'll get those things and put them into a supplement, you know."

"Not for me," said Florian. "I've made up my mind definitely about this. I'll not depend on it. If I go back to Bellevale, I must have at hand at all times the means of connecting things as I find them with the life of this Brassfield. I must take with me the bridge which spans the chasm between Brassfield and Amidon—I mean our friend Clara. Without her, I shall never go back. I haven't the nerve. I should soon find myself in a tangle of mistakes from which I could never extricate myself—I've thought it all out. The Cretan Labyrinth would be like going home from school, in comparison."

"Pshaw!" said the judge, looking lovingly at Blodgett's *Notes on the Compiled Statements of Brassfield*, "you could feel your way along very well—with these."

"Would you go into the trial of a case," said Florian, "no matter how simple, in which not only your own future, but the happiness of others, might be involved, without even a speaking acquaintance with any of the parties, or one of the witnesses? I tell you, Judge, we must have Madame le Claire."

The judge rolled up the notes and snapped a rubber band about the roll. He said no more until evening.

"Then," said he, as if he had only just made up his mind to concede the point, "let's see if it can be arranged at once. Come over to the Blatherwicks' with me."

"I think," said Amidon slowly, "that I'll see her alone."

"Alone, yes—yes!" said the judge, changing an interjection into an assent. "By all means; by all means. Only don't you think there may be things down there needing attention, Florian—money matters—and—and other things, you know, my boy—and that we ought to be moving in the matter? I would respectfully urge," he concluded, using his orator's chest-tones to drown Amidon's protest against his joking, "that no time be lost in deciding on our course."

The judge had noted the increasing dependence of his client on the fair hypnotist, and the growing interest that she seemed to feel in him, and therefore showed some coolness toward the proposal to take her to Bellevale. The eyes inured to the perusal of dusty commentaries and reports were still sharp enough to see the mutual tenderness exchanged in the unwavering, eye-to-eye encounters whereby Amidon was converted into Brassfield, and to note the softness of the feline strokings by which Florian's catalepsy was induced or dispelled. He rather favored dropping the Blatherwick acquaintance: but he could not answer Amidon's arguments as to their need for its continuance.

So it was that, about the time when Elizabeth Waldron sat in the summer-house at Bellevale, with tears of disappointment in her pretty eyes, holding poor Florian's best-he-could-do but ineffective letter all crumpled up in her hand, the tigrine Le Claire rested her elbows upon a window-ledge in the attitude of gazing into the street (it was all attitude, for she saw nothing), and was disturbed by Aaron, who brought in Mr. Florian Amidon's penciled card. She gave a few pokes to her hair, of course, turned once or twice about before her mirror, and went into the parlor.

"The judge and your father," said Amidon, "have got up a wonderful guide from notes of this man Brassfield's talk."

"Yes," said she with a smile; "they are wonderful."

"And perfectly useless," he continued, "so far as my steering by them in Bellevale is concerned."

"As useless," she admitted, "as can be."

"You knew that?" he inquired. "Then why did you let them go on with it?"

"That's good," said she. "I like that! I was nicely situated to mention it, wasn't I?"

"The fact is, Clara," said he, "as you can see, that I've got to have you at Bellevale. I shall not go down there without you. I can't do it. I've thought it all out——"

"So have I," said she. "I knew that you'd have to have me—for a little while; knew it all the time. I was just thinking about it as you came up."

"Then can you—will you go?"

"Can I stay, Florian?" she inquired steadily. "Can I leave you like a just-cured blind and deaf man, and my work for you only begun? I must go! We were just talking about our going to Bellevale, as you came in, papa. Mr. Amidon will need us for a while when he first gets there."

"Surely, surely," said the professor. "Te most interesting phaces of dis case vill arise in Bellevale. I grave te brifiletche of geeeping you unter my opsairfation until—until to last dog is hunk! Let us despatch Chutche Blotchett to spy out te landt. In a day or two he can tiscofer vere dis man Brassfield lifes, vere te fair Fraulein Elizabeth resides, and chenerally get on to te logal skitivation. He vill meet up with us at te train, and see that ve don't put our foots in it. Ve vill dus be safed te mortification of hafing Alderman Brassfield, chairman of te street committee, asking te holiceman te vay to his lotchings; or te fiancé of Miss Valdering bassing her on te street vit a coldt, coldt stare of unrecognition or embracing her young laty friendt py mistake. Goot! Let te chutche dake his tebarture fortwith. Clara and I vill be charmed and habby, my friendt, to aggompany you. Suplidentally considered, it vill be great stuff!"

IX

IN DARKEST PENNSYLVANIA

The good God gave hands, left and right,
To deal with divers foes in fight;
And eyes He gave all sights to hold;
And limbs for pacings manifold;
Gave tongue to taste both sour and sweet,
Gave gust for salad, fish and meat;
But, Christian Sir, whoe'er thou art,
Trust not thy many-chambered heart!
Give not one bow'r to Blonde, and yet
Retain a room for the Brunette:
Whoever gave each other part,
The devil planned and built the heart!
—*In a Double Locket.*

Clara, Amidon and Blatherwick were on their way to Bellevale. The professor was in the smoking-car, his daughter and Florian in the parlor-car. Amidon, his nerves strained to the point of agony, sat dreading the end of the journey, as one falling from an air-ship might shrink from the termination of his. Madame le Claire brooded over him maternally.

"Of course," said Amidon, "this Brassfield must have adopted some course of behavior toward Miss Waldron, when——"

"You must call her Elizabeth," said Madame le Claire, "and——"

"And what?" he inquired, as she failed to break the pause. "Have you found out—much—about it—from him?"

"Not so very much," she replied, "only she'll expect such things as 'dearest' and 'darling' at times. And occasionally 'pet' and 'sweetheart'—and 'dearie.' I can't give them all; you must extemporize a little, can't you?"

"Merciful heaven!" groaned Amidon; "I can't do it!"

"You have," said Madame le Claire; "and more—a good deal more."

"It was that scoundrel Brassfield," said he, in perfect seriousness. "More? What do you mean by 'more'?"

"Well, sometimes you——"

"He, not I!"

"You, I think we had better say—sometimes, when you were alone, your arm went about her waist; her head was drawn down upon your bosom; and with your hand, you turned her face to yours, and——"

"Clara, stop!" Amidon's bashful being was wrung to the sweating-point as he uttered the cry. "I never could have done it! And do you mean to say I must now act up to a record of that kind—and with a strange woman? She—she won't permit it— Oh, you must be mistaken! How do you know this?"

Madame le Claire blushed, and seemed to want words for a reply. Amidon repeated the question.

"I want to know if you are sure," said he. "To make a mistake in that direction would be worse than the other, you know."

"Ah, would it?" said Clara; "I didn't know that!"

"Oh! I think we may take that for granted."

"You really don't get a grain of good from your Brassfield experience," said she, "or you'd know better." Here ensued a long silence, during which Amidon appeared to be pondering on her extraordinary remark.

"But, as to the fact," urged he at last, "how can you guess out any such state of things as you describe?"

"Can't *you* guess a little bit more once in a while? I know about it, from Mr. Brassfield's treatment—of—of me—when I made him think—that I—was Elizabeth! Oh, don't you see that I had to do it, so as to know, and tell you? Oh, I wish I had never, never begun this! I do, I do!"

A parlor-car has no conveniences whatever for heroics, hysterics or weeping, so miserably are our American railways managed; and Clara winked back into her eyes the tears which filled them, and Amidon looked at her tenderly.

"Did I, really," said he confusedly—"to you?"

"M'h'm," said Madame le Claire, nodding affirmatively; "I couldn't stop you!"

"It must have been dreadful—for you," said Amidon.

"Awful," said she; "but the work had to be done, you know."

"Oh, if it were you, now," said he, laying his hand on hers, "I could do it, if you didn't mind. I—I should like to, you know."

"Now see here," said Clara; "if you're just practising this, as a sort of rehearsal, you must go further and faster than a public place like this allows, or you'll seem cold by comparison with what has passed. If you mean what you say, let me remind you that you're engaged!"

Mr. Amidon swore softly, but sincerely. Somehow, the pitiful case of the girl who had written that letter with which he had fallen in love, had less and less of appeal to him as the days drifted by. And now, while the duty of which he had assured himself still impelled him to her side, he confessed that this other girl with the variegated hair and eyes, and the power to annihilate and restore him, the occultist with the thrilling gaze and the strong, supple figure, was calling more and more to the aboriginal man within him. So, while he took Elizabeth's letters from his pocket and read them, to get, if possible, some new light on her character, it was Clara's face that his eyes sought, as he glanced over the top of the sheet. Ah, Florian, with one girl's love-letter in your hands, and the face of another held in that avid gaze, can you be the bashful banker-bachelor who could not discuss the new style of ladies' figures with Mrs. Hunter! And as we thus moralize, the train sweeps on and on, and into Bellevale, where Judge Blodgett waits upon the platform for our arrival.

The judge stood by the steps to seize upon Amidon as he alighted. That gentleman and Madame le Claire, however, perversely got off at the other end of the car. As they walked down the platform, Florian met his first test, in the salutation of a young woman in a tailor-made gown, who nodded and smiled to him from a smart trap at a short distance from the station, where she seemed to be waiting for some one.

"Any baggage, Mr. Brassfield?" said a drayman.

"Yes," said Amidon; "take the checks."

"Do these go to the hotel, or——" The man waited for directions.

"I don't—that is," said the poor fellow, "I really—— Just wait a minute! Judge," this in a whisper to his friend, who had reached his side, "this is terrible! Where do I want to go?—and for

the love of Heaven, where does this hound take my luggage?"

"Your lodgings at the Bellevale House!" returned the judge.

"To my lodgings at the Bellevale House," announced Amidon.

"And say," said the judge, "don't look that way; but the young woman in the one-horse trap across the way is your intended."

"No!" said Amidon. "I lifted my hat to her—she nodded to me, you know!"

"The devil!" said the judge; "I'll bet you didn't put any more warmth than a clam into your manner. Well, you'll have to go over, and she'll take you up-town, I suppose. Don't stay with her long, if you can help it, and come to me at the hotel as soon as you can. She's been driving over to see who got off every New York train ever since I came. Go to her, and may the Lord be merciful to you! Here are these notes, if you think they'll help you any—I've added some to 'em since I got down here."

Amidon waved a contemptuous rejection of the notes, and, casting a despairing glance at Madame le Claire, walked over toward his fate. He could have envied the lot of the bull-fighter advancing into the fearful radius of action of a pair of gory horns. He would gladly have changed places with the gladiator who hears the gnashing of bared teeth behind the slowly-opening cage doors. To walk up to the mouths of a battery of hostile Gatlings would have seemed easy, as compared with this present act of his, which was nothing more than stepping to the side of a carriage in which sat a girl, for a place near whom any unattached young man in Bellevale would willingly have placed his eternal welfare in jeopardy.

Point by point, the girl's outward seeming met Amidon's eyes as he neared her. From the platform, it was an impressionistic view of a well-kept trap and horse, and a young woman wearing a picture-hat with a sweeping plume, habited in a gown of modish tailoring, and holding the reins in well-gauntleted hands. As he reached the middle of the street-crossing, the face, surmounted by dark hair, began to show its salient features—great dark eyes, strongly-marked brows, and a strong, sweet mouth with vivid lips. Then came the impression of a form held erect, with the strong shoulders and arms which come from athletics, and the roundnesses which denote that superb animal, the well-developed woman. But it was only as he stood by the side of the carriage that he saw and felt the mingled dignity and frankness, the sureness and lightness of touch, with which she acted or refrained from acting; the lack of haste, the temperateness of gesture and intonation, which bespoke in a moment that type of woman which is society's finished product.

Her lips were parted in a half-smile; the great dark eyes sought his in the calling glance which seeks its companion; and in the face and voice there was something tremulous, vibrant and pleadingly anxious. Yet she did and said only commonplaces. She gave him her hand, and threw over the lap-robe as an invitation for him to take the seat beside her.

"I am glad to see you back, dear," said she, "and a little surprised."

"I hardly expected to come on this train," he answered, "until the very hour of starting. I can—hardly say—how glad I am—to be here."

She was silent, as she drove among the drays and omnibuses, out into the open street. He looked searchingly, though furtively, at her, and blushed as if he had been detected in staring at a girl in the street as she suddenly looked him straight in the face.

"Have you been ill, Eugene?" said she. "You look so worn and tired."

"I have had a very hard time of it since I left," said he; "and have been far from well."

She patted him lightly with her glove.

"You must be careful of yourself," said she, and paused as if to let him supply her reasons for so saying. "I hope your trouble is over, dear."

"Thank you," said he. "I am sure that after a few hours in my rooms, I shall be quite refreshed. Will you please put me down at the Bellevale House? I shall beg the privilege of calling soon."

"Why!" She looked swiftly at him, looked at the horse, and again at him. "Soon?" she went on, as if astonished. "I shall be alone this evening—if you care about it!"

"Oh, yes!" said he confusedly, "this evening, yes! I meant sooner—in a few minutes, you know!"

"No," said she, in that tone which surely denotes the raising of the drawbridge of pique; "you must rest until this evening. Who is the old gentleman who has been waiting two or three days to see you?"

"Judge Blodgett, an old friend," said he, relieved to find some matter with reference to which

he could tell the truth.

"And the queer-looking lady—do you know her?"

"Oh, yes!" said Amidon; "she is a good friend, too."

"Ah!" the girl answered, in a tone which said almost anything, but was not by any means without significance. "And who is she?"

"Her professional name is Madame le Claire; in private life, she is Miss Blatherwick."

"I didn't see the rest of the troupe," said Miss Waldron icily; "or perhaps she's an elocutionist."

"No," said Amidon, "she's an occultist—a sort of—well, a hypnotist."

There was a long pause here, during which they drew near to the big brick building on the side of which Amidon saw the sign of the Bellevale House.

"Also an old friend?" inquired Miss Waldron.

"Oh, no!" said Florian; "I met her only a week or two ago."

"She must be very charming," said Elizabeth, "to have inspired so much friendship in so short a time. Here we are at the hotel. Do you really think you'll call this evening? *Au revoir*, then."

Even the unsophisticated Amidon could perceive, now, that the drawbridge was up, the portcullis down, and all the bars and shutters of the castle in place. Moreover, in the outer darkness in which he moved, he imagined there roamed lions and wolves and ravening beasts—and he with no guide but Judge Blodgett, who stands there in the lobby, so wildly beckoning to him.

X

THE WRONG HOUSE

When Adam strayed
In Eden's bow'rs,
One little maid
Amused his hours.
He fell! But, friend,
I leave to you
Where he'd have dropped
Had there been two!
—*Paradise Rehypothecated.*

"Now, Florian," said Judge Blodgett, as they sat in Amidon's rooms, "search yourself, and see if you don't feel a dreamy sense of familiarity here in these rooms—the feeling that the long-lost heir has when he crawls down the chimney as a sweep and finds himself in his ancestral halls, you know."

"Never saw a thing here before," said Amidon, "and have no feeling except surprise at the elegance about me, and a sneaking fear that Brassfield may come in at any time and eject us. The fellow had taste, anyhow!"

"Didn't you recognize anything," went on the judge, "in the streets or buildings or the general landscape?"

"Nothing."

"Nor in the young lady? Wasn't there a sort of—of music in her voice, like long-forgotten melodies, you understand—like what the said heir notices in after years when his mother blunders on to him?"

"Well," said Florian, "her voice is musical, if that's what you mean—musical and low, and reminds one of the sounds made by a great master playing his heart out in the lowest notes of the flute; but it is so far from being familiar to me that I'm quite sure I never heard a voice like it before."

The judge strode up and down the room perturbedly.

"Why," said he, "it's enough to make a man's hair stand!"

"It does," said Amidon. "What can I say to her?"

"You haven't a piece of property here," said the judge, going on with the matters uppermost in his mind, "that you could successfully maintain replevin for, if anybody converted it. They'd ask you on cross-examination if it was yours, and you'd have to say you didn't know! And there's a world of property, I find. They could take it all away from you without your knowing it, if they only knew. Have you any course mapped out—any plans?"

"To a certain extent, yes," said Florian. "I shall call on her this evening."

"For help, yes," said the judge. "She must bring Brassfield up, so that we can find out about some property matters."

"I don't mean that," said Amidon. "I must call on Miss Waldron—Elizabeth."

"And neglect——" began the judge.

"Everything," said Florian firmly. "This is something that concerns my honor as a gentleman. While it remains in its present state, I can't bother with these property matters. Have I an office?"

"Have you!" said the judge. "Well, just wait until you see them."

"And an office force?"

"Confidential manager named Stevens, as per the notes,"; said Judge Blodgett. "Bookkeeper, assistant bookkeeper and stenographer. Tried to pump 'em and got frozen out. Yes, you've got an office force."

"Well, then," said Amidon, "we'll go down there in the morning, and I'll tell this man Stevens—is that what you call him?—to show you all through the books and things—going to buy or take a partnership, or something. Then we can go through the business together. We can do it that way, without being suspected, can't we?"

"Maybe," meditatively, "maybe we can. Take a sort of invoice, hey? But don't you think we'd better have Brassfield on the witness-stand for a while this evening? A sort of cramming—coaching—review, on the eve of trial, you know?"

"No, no!" answered Florian. "No more of that, if it can be avoided."

The judge stroked his mustache in silence for a time.

"See here," asked he finally, "what did we bring madame and the professor down here for, anyway, I'd like to know?"

"I know," said Amidon, "but, somehow, I feel like getting along without it if I can. As little of her—of their—services as possible, Judge, from now on."

"Oh!" said the judge, in a tone of one who suddenly sees the situation; "all right, Florian, all right. Maybe it's best, maybe it's best. Abnormal condition, as the professor says, and all that; effect on the mind, and one thing and another. Yes—yes—yes!"

"If I have any duties to perform here, Judge, you must help me to keep straight. I've never had much tendency to go wrong, you know, but that was for lack of temptation, don't you think, Blodgett?"

"Well, well, Florian, I can't say as to that; can't say. Yes—and say! You'll want to go over to the Waldron residence this evening. I'll take you out and show you the house. By George! It must seem extraordinarily odd to walk about among things you are supposed to know like a book, and to be, in fact, a perfect stranger. Dante could have used that idea, if it had occurred to him."

"An idea for Dante, indeed!" thought Amidon, as he walked toward the house, which, from afar, the judge had pointed out to him. "For the *Inferno*: a soul thrown into a realm full of its friends and enemies, its loves and hates, shorn of memory, of all sense of familiarity, of all its habits, stripped of all the protection of habitude. For the *Inferno*, indeed!—Now this must be the house, with the white columns running up to the top of the second story; crossing the ravine and losing sight of it for a few minutes makes even the house look different. Outside, I can get accustomed to it, in this five-minute inspection. But, inside—oh, to be invisible while I get used to it! Well, here goes!"

"Ding-a-ling-ting-ting!" rang the bell somewhere back in the recesses of the house, and the footsteps of a man approached the door. Amidon was frightened. He had expected either Elizabeth herself, or a maid to take his card, and was prepared for such an encounter only. A little dark, bright-eyed man opened the door and seized his hand.

"Why, Brassfield, how are you?" he exclaimed. "Heard you'd got back. Sorry I couldn't meet you in New York. Got my telegram, I suppose?"

"I just called," said Amidon, "to see Miss Waldron."

"Oh, yes!" said the little man; "nothing but her, now. But she isn't here. Hasn't been for over a week. Nobody here but me. Can't you stay a while? Say, 'Gene, we put Slater through the lodge while you were gone, and he knows he's in, all right enough. Bulliwinkle took that part of yours in the catacombs scene, and you ought to have heard the bones of the early Christians rattle when he bellered out the lecture. 'Here, among the eternal shades of the deep caves of death, walked once the great exemplars of our Ancient Order!' Why, it would raise the hair on a bronze statue. And when, in the second, they condemned him to the Tarpeian Rock, and swung him off into space in the Chest of the Clanking Chains, he howled so that the Sovereign Pontiff made 'em saw off on it, and take him out—and he could hardly stand to receive the Grand and Awful Secret. Limp as a rag! But impressed? Well, he said it was the greatest piece of ritualistic work he ever saw, and he's seen most of 'em. Go to any lodges in New York?"

"No," said Amidon, who had never joined a secret order in his life, "and do you think we ought to talk these things out here?"

"No, maybe not," said the Joiner; "but nobody's about, you know. Come in, can't you?"

"No, I must really go, thank you. By the way," said Florian, "where does Miss—er—I must go, at once, I think!"

"Oh, I know how it is," went on his unknown intimate; "nothing but Bess, now. Might as well bid you good-by, and give you a dimit from all the clubs and lodges, until six months after the wedding. You'll be back by that time, thirstier than ever. By the way, that reminds me: the gang's going to give you a blow-out at the club. Kind of an *Auld lang syne* business, 'champagny-vather an' cracked ice,' chimes at midnight, won't go home till morning, all good fellows and the rest of it. Edgington spoke to you about it, I s'pose?"

"Only in a general way," replied Amidon, wondering who and what Edgington would turn out to be. "I don't know yet how my engagements will be——"

"Oh, nothing must stand in the way of that, you know," the little man went on. "Why, gad! the tenderest feelings of brotherly—— Oh, you don't mean it! But I mustn't keep you. Bessie told me that the plans for your house have come. She's got 'em over there, now. I say, old man, I envy you your evening. Like two birds arranging the nest. Sorry you can't come in; but, good night. And, say! Your little strawberry blonde is in town! Wouldn't that jar you?"

"Heavens!" ejaculated Amidon. "How am I ever to get through with this?"

The genuine agony in Florian's tones fixed the attention of the little man, and seemed to arouse some terrible suspicion.

"Why, 'Gene," said he, "you don't mean that there's anything in this blonde matter, do you, that will—— By George! And she's a sister of one of the most prominent A. O. C. M.'s of Pittsburg—and you remember our solemn obligation!"

"No," said Amidon, "I don't!"

"What! You don't!"

"No!" said Florian. "I've forgotten it!"

"Forgotten it!" said his questioner, recoiling as if in horror. "Forgotten it! And with the sister of the Past Sovereign Pontiff of Pittsburg Lodge No. 863! I tell you, Brassfield, I don't believe it. I prefer to think you're bughouse! Cracked! Out of your head! But, 'Gene," added his unknown brother, in a stage-whisper, "if there has been anything between you and anything comes up, you know, Jim Alvord, for one, knowing and understanding your temptations—for the strawberry blondes are the very devil—will stand by you until the frost gathers six inches deep on the very hinges of—— Say, Mary's coming in at the side door. Good night! Keep a stiff upper lip; stay by Bess, and I'll stay by you, obligation or no obligation. 'F. D. and B.', you know: death, perhaps, but no desertion! So long! See you to-morrow."

And Amidon walked from the house of his unfamiliar chum, knowing that his sweetheart but once seen was waiting in her unknown home for him to come to her, and had as a basis for conversation the plans for their house. He could imagine her with the blue-prints unrolled, examining them with all a woman's interest in such things, and himself discussing with her this house in which she expected him to place her as mistress. And the position she thought she held in his heart—vacant, or—— He leaned against a fence, in bewilderment approaching despair. His mind dwelt with horror on the woman whom he could think of only under the coarse appellation of the strawberry blonde. Was there a real crime here to take the place of the imagined putting away of Brassfield? Brassfield! The very name sickened him. "Strawberry blondes, indeed!" thought Florian; and "Brassfield, the perjured villain!" Certain names used by the little man in the wrong house came to him as having been mentioned in the notes of the professor and the judge. Alvord, the slangy little chap who took so familiar an attitude toward him—this was the judge's "ministerial" friend! Yet, had there not been mention of "ritualistic work" and "Early Christians" in his conversation? And this woman of whom he spoke,—it took no great keenness of

perception to see that the "strawberry blonde" must be the "child of six or eight years" whom he had called "Daisy," and sometimes "Strawberry!" Here was confirmation of Alvord's suspicion, if his allusion to the violation of an "obligation" expressed suspicion. Here was a situation from which every fiber of Amidon's nature revolted, seen from any angle, whether the viewpoint of the careful banker and pillar of society, or that of the poetic dreamer waiting for his predestined mate.

In a paroxysm of dread, he started for the hotel. Then he walked down the street toward the railway station, with the thought of boarding the first train out of town. This resolve, however, he changed, and I am glad to say that it was not the thought of the fortune of which Judge Blodgett had spoken that altered his resolution, but that of the letter which greeted his return to consciousness as Florian Amidon, and the image of the dark-eyed girl with the low voice and the strong figure, who had written it, and who waited for him, somewhere, with the roll of plans. So he began searching again for the house with the white columns; and found it on the next corner beyond the one he had first tried.

Elizabeth sat in a fit of depression at the strangeness of Mr. Brassfield's conduct—a depression which deepened as the evening wore on with no visit from him. She sprang to her feet and pressed both hands to her bosom, at the ring of the door-bell, ran lightly to the door and listened as the servant greeted Mr. Brassfield, and then hurried back to her seat by the grate, and became so absorbed in her book that she was oblivious of his being shown into the room, until the maid had retired, leaving him standing at gaze, his brow beaded with sweat, his face pale and his hands unsteady. The early Christian had entered on his martyrdom.

XI

THE FIRST BATTLE, AND DEFEAT

From Camelot to Cameliard
The way by bright pavilions starred,
In arms and armor all unmarred,
To Guinevere rode Lancelot to claim for Arthur
his reward.

Down from her window look't the maid
To see her bridegroom, half afraid—
In him saw kingliness arrayed:
And summoned by the herald Love to yield, her woman's
heart obeyed.

From Cameliard to Camelot
Rode Guinevere and Lancelot—
Ye bright pavilions, babble not!
The king she took, she keeps for king, in spite of
shame, in spite of blot!

—*From Cameliard to Camelot.*

It is a disagreeable duty (one, however, which you and I, madam, discharge with a conscientiousness which the unthinking are sometimes unable to distinguish from zeal) to criticize one's friends. The task is doubly hard when the animadversion is committed to paper, with a more or less definite idea of ultimate publication. I trust, beloved, that we may call Mr. Florian Amidon a friend. He is an honest fellow as the world goes, in spite of the testimony of Simeon Woolaver regarding the steers; and he wishes to do the right thing. In a matter of business, now, or on any question of films, plates or lenses, we should find him full of decision, just and prompt in action. But (and the disagreeable duty of censure comes in here) there he stands like a Stoughton-bottle in a most abject state of woe, because, forsooth, he possesses the love of that budding Juno over there by the grate, and knows not what to do with it! What if he *doesn't* feel as if he had the slightest personal acquaintance with her? What if the image of another, and the thought—? But look with me, for a moment, at the situation.

There she sits, so attentive to her book (is it the *Rubaiyat*? Yes!) that his entrance has not attracted her notice—not at all! One shapely patent-leather is stretched out to the fender, and the creamy silk of the gown happens to be drawn back so as to show the slender ankle, and a glimpse of black above the leather. The desire for exactness alone compels a reference to the fact that the boundary lines of this silhouetted black area diverge perceptibly as they recede from the shoe. It is only a detail, but even Florian notices it, and thinks about it afterward. Her face is turned toward the shadows up there by the window, her eyes looking at space, as if in quest of Iram and his Rose, or Jamshyd and his Sev'n-ring'd Cup, or the solution of the Master-knot of Human Fate. The unconscious pose showing the incurred spine, and the arms and shoulders glimpsing through falls of lace at sleeve and corsage, would make the fortune of the photographer-in-ordinary to a professional beauty. And yet that man Amidon stands there like a graven image, and fears to rush in where an angel has folded her wings for him and rests!



[Illustration: There she sits so attentive to her book that his entrance has not attracted her notice]

He knows that he is expected to claim some of the privileges of the long-absent lover. He has some information as to their nature. His eyes ought to apprise him (as they do us, my boy!) of their preciousness. He is not without knowledge concerning past conduct of that type which, beginning in hard-won privileges, ripens into priceless duties, not to discharge which is insult all the more bitter because it is not to be mentioned. It is not to be denied that the tableau appeals to him; and because another woman has lately touched him in a similar way, he stands there and condemns himself for that! There is small excuse for him, I admit, sir. Her first token of his presence should have been a kiss on the snowy shoulder. You suggest the hair? Well, the hair, then, though for my part, I have always felt— But never mind! Had it been you or I in his place

Yes, my dear, this digression is becoming tedious. Let us proceed with the story.

Elizabeth rose with a little start of surprise, a little flutter of the bosom, and came forward with extended hands. He took them with a trembling grasp which might well have passed as evidence of fervor.

"Ah, Eugene," said she, holding him away, "it has seemed an age!"

"Yes," said he truthfully, "an eternity, almost."

"Sit down by the fire," said she, in that low voice which means so much. "You are cold."

"I am a little cold," he replied. "I must have remained outside too long."

"Y-e-s?" she returned; and after a long pause: "It doesn't seem to take long—sometimes. And the wind is in the east."

Now, when a bride-elect begins to deal in double meanings of this sort with her fiancé, the course of true love is likely to be entering on a piece of rough road-bed.

"How did you find Estelle when you called?"

Estelle? Estelle? Estelle! Nothing in Blodgett and Blatherwick's notes about Estelle. "A whole directory of names," as Judge Blodgett had said, but no Estelle. The world full of useless people—a billion and a half of them—and not an Estelle at poor Amidon's call in this time of need. Hence this long hiatus in the conversation.

"Really, Miss—er—a—my dear, I haven't had time to call on any one."

"It will be a little hard to explain," said she after a silence, "to my prospective bridesmaid and dearest friend, that you were so long in New York and could not call. It is not quite like you, Eugene."

He was sitting where he could see her well, and because she looked into the fire a good deal, he found himself gazing fixedly at her. Her manifold perfections filled him with the same feeling of astonishment experienced by that beggar who awoke in the prince's chamber, clothed in splendor, and with a royal domain in fee.

(Personally, I regard the domain which spread itself before Amidon, as imperial.)

As she pronounced her gentle reproof, her eyes turned to his, and he started guiltily.

"No," he confessed, "it was not the right thing. You must forgive me, won't you?"

"I hope," said she, smiling, "I may be able to do more than that: maybe I shall be so fortunate as to get you Estelle's forgiveness."

"Thank you," he said; and then seeking for safer ground: "Haven't you something for us to look over—some plans or something?"

"Or something!" she repeated with a ripple of laughter.

It was the first time he had heard this laugh; and Marot's lines ran through his mind:

"Good God! 'twould make the very streets and ways
Through which she passes, burst into a pleasure!

* * * * *

No spell were wanting from the dead to raise me,
But only that sweet laugh wherewith she slays me!"

"Or something!" she repeated, I say; "it might just as well be the profiles of a new pipe-line survey, for all the interest you take in it. I oughtn't to look at them with you; but come, they're over here on the table."

Somehow, this lady's air required the deferential offer of his arm; and somehow, the deference seemed to please her. So he felt that the tension was lessened as she turned over the blue-prints. Moreover, in matters of architecture he felt at home—if he could only steer clear of any discussion of the grounds. He had no idea of the location of these.

Soon their heads were close together over the plans. A dozen times her hair brushed his lips, two or three times his fingers touched the satin skin of her arms and shoulders, and all the time he felt himself within the magic atmosphere which enwraps so divine a maiden, as odorous breezes clothe the shores of Ceylon. Her breath, the faint sweet perfume in her hair, the soft frou-frou of her skirts, the appealing lowness of her voice—all these wrought strongly on Florian; and when she leaned lightly upon him as she reached past him for one of the sheets, he felt (I record it to his credit) as if he must take her to his arms, and complete the embrace she had involuntarily half begun. But the feeling that she was, after all, a strange young girl, and was revealing herself to him altogether under a mistake as to his identity, restrained him.



Soon their heads were close together over the plans Page 96

[Illustration: Soon their heads were close together over the plans]

She did not lean against him any more. There were some little improvements in the plans which had occurred to Elizabeth, especially in the arrangement of kitchen, pantry and laundry.

"I'll have the architect come and see you about these," said Amidon.

"What!" said she, in apparent astonishment—"from Boston?"

"Ah—well," he stammered, "I didn't know—that is— Yes, from Boston! We want these matters as you want them, you know, if it were from Paris or Calcutta. And I think there should be some provision for prism-glass to light up the library. It could be cut in right there on that north exposure; don't you think so?"

"Oh, yes, and what an improvement it will be!" she replied. "And may I have all the editions of Browning I want, even if I couldn't explain what *Childe Roland to the Dark Tower Came* means?"

"Oh, does that point puzzle you?" exclaimed Florian, greeting the allusion to Browning as the war-horse welcomes the battle. "Then you have never chanced to run across the first edition of Child's *Scottish Ballads*. You get the story there, of Childe Roland following up the quest for his sister, shut up by enchantment in the Dark Tower, in searching for which his brothers—Cuthbert and Giles, you remember, and the rest of 'The Band'—had been lost. He must blow a certain horn before it, in a certain way—you know how it goes, 'Dauntless the slug-horn to my lips I set!' It's quite obvious when you know the story, and not a bit of an enigma. The line in *Lear* shows that the verses must have been commonly sung in Shakespeare's time—"

The girl was looking at him with something like amazement; but her answer referred to the matter of his discourse.

"Yes," said she, "I can see now how the 'Dark Tower' lightens up. I must read it again in the light of this explanation of yours. Shall we read it together, soon?"

"Oh, by all means!" said he. "Only I warn you I never tire when I find any one who will study Browning with me. I tried to read *The Ring and the Book* with a dear friend once, and reading my favorite part, 'Giuseppe Caponsacchi,' as I raised my eyes after that heartbreaking finale, 'O, great, just, good God! Miserable me!' I saw she was dozing. Since then, I read Browning with his lovers only—"

"Yes, you are right in that. But, Eugene," she exclaimed, "you said to me many times that his verse was rot, that Nordau ought to have included him in his gallery of degenerates, that he is muddy, and that there isn't a line of poetry in his works so far as you have been able to dig into them. And you cited *Childe Roland* as proof of all of this! And you never would listen to any of Browning, even when we almost quarreled about it! Now, if that was because— Why, it was —!"

She paused as if afraid she might say too much. Florian, who had rallied in his literary enthusiasm, collapsed into his chronic state of terror. Even in so impersonal a thing as Browning, the man who does not know what his habits are takes every step at his peril.

"Oh, *that* that I said!" he stammered. "Yes—yes. Well, there *are* obscurities, you know. Even Mr. Birrell admits that. But on the whole, don't you agree with me?"

"Quite," said she dryly; "if I understand you."

There was an implied doubt as to her understanding of his position, and the only thing made clear was that the drawbridge was up again. So Florian began talking of the plans. He grew eloquent on ventilators, bath-rooms, and plumbing. He drew fine and learned distinctions between styles.

"The colonial," said he, "is not good unless indulged in in great moderation. Now, what I like about this is the way in which ultra-colonialism is held in check, and modified in the direction of the Greek ideal. Those columns, supporting the broad portico, hark back to the Parthenon, don't they? I like that taste and flavor of the classic."

She listened in much the same wondering way in which she had regarded him at the beginning of his outburst on Browning. Was it possible that, after all, this lover of hers, whose antecedents were so little known, but whose five years of successful life in Bellevale had won for him that confidence of his townsmen in which she had partaken, was, after all, possessed of some of those tastes in art and literature, the absence of which had been the one thing lacking in his character, as it appeared to her? It would seem so. And yet, why had he concealed these things from her, who so passionately longed for intellectual companionship? Somehow, resentment crept into her heart as she looked at him, and there was something in his attitude which was not frank and bold, as she liked to see a man—but this would not do. He was so lovely in his provision for the future, and surely his conversation disclosed that he had those tastes and that knowledge!

"I think the moon must be letting me look at its other side to-night," said she. "Have you been

saving up the artist and poet in you, to show them to me now?"

"Oh, no," said he, "not at all—why, any one knows these little things. Now let's go through the arrangement of the chambers; shall we?"

"Not to-night, if you please. Let us sit by the fire again. It will be a grand house, dear. Sometimes I think, too grand for Bellevale; and quite often I feel, too grand, too elegant—for me."

"Who then," answered Florian, who saw his conversational duty, a dead-sure thing, and went for it there and then, "who then could have such a house, or ought to have it, if not you?"

The girl looked questioningly, pathetically at him, as if she missed something of the convincing in his words.

"To deny that you feel so—felt so about it when you gave orders for the building, would be foolish," said she at last. "And it was very dear of you to do it. But once a man, having a little gem which he thought of perfect water, placed it in a setting so large and so cunningly wrought that nobody ever saw the little stone, unless it was pointed out to them."

"He saw it," said Florian, "whenever he wanted to—and no setting can be too beautiful for a moon-stone."

He felt that he was rallying nobly.

"Really," he thought, "I am getting quite ardent. And under different circumstances, I could be so in the utmost good faith; for I know she's as good and true as she is queenly and beautiful. But after all, it is duty, only, and——"

"In such a house," she went on, "people may live a little closer than acquaintances, or not quite so close, as the case may be, with their lives diluted by their many possessions."

"Yes?" said he expectantly.

"Before it comes to that," she burst forth, her eyes wide and her hands clasped in her lap, "I want to die! I could gather the fagots for the fire, and cuddle down by it on a heap of straw by the roadside, with the man I love; and if I knew he loved me, he might beat me, and I would bear it, and be happy in his strength—far happier than in those chambers you spoke of a moment ago, with an acquaintance who merely happened to be called a husband! I would rather walk the streets than that!"

Now, a lovers' quarrel requires lovers on both sides. Had Amidon really been one, this crisis would have passed naturally on to protestation, counter-protestation, tears, kisses, embraces, reconciliation. But all these things take place through the interplay of instincts, none of which was awakened in Florian. So he sat forlorn, and said nothing.

"I am going to let you go home, now," said she, rising. "I gave out the date of the wedding, as you requested, the day after you went away. If it were not for that, I should ask you to wait a while—until the house is finished—or even longer. As it is, you mustn't be surprised if I say something surprising to you soon."

"I—I assure you——" began Amidon. "Good night, my——"

He had schooled himself for this farewell, and remembering what Madame le Claire had told him, had decided on a course of action. The two had walked out into the hall and he had put on his top-coat. Now he went bravely up to her and stooped to kiss her.

She raised her face to his, and again the feeling that this man was only a mere acquaintance passed into her being, as she looked into his eyes. She turned her lips away. But Florian, as the feeling of strangeness impressed her, lost it himself in the contemplation, brief but irresistible, of the upturned lips with their momentary invitation so soon withdrawn. The primal man in him awoke. His arm tightened about the lissome waist; the divine form in the creamy silk, on which he had only now almost feared to look, he drew to him so tightly as almost to crush her; and with one palm he raised the averted face to his, and made deliberate conquest of the lips of vivid red. Once, twice, three times—and then she put her hands against his shoulders and pushed him away. Her face flamed.

"Eugene!" she exclaimed, "how——"

"Good night!" he answered, "my dearest, my darling, good night!"

And he ran down the street, in such a conflict of emotions that he hardly knew whither he went.

ON THE FIRM GROUND OF BUSINESS

O merry it was in the good greenwood when the goblin and
 sprite ranged free,
 When the kelpie haunted the shadowed flood, and the dryad
 dwelt in the tree;
 But merrier far is the trolley-car as it routs the witch from
 the wold,
 And the din of the hammer and the cartridges' clamor as
 they banish the swart kobold!
 O, a sovran cure for psychic dizziness
 Is a breath of the air of the world of business!
 —*Idyls of a Sky-Scraper.*

It is recorded in the last chapter that Mr. Amidon ran from Miss Waldron's presence in such a state of agitation that he hardly knew whither he went. To the reader who wonders why he was agitated, I have only to hint that he was wretchedly inexperienced. And as it was, he soon got his bearings and walked briskly toward his hotel; still, however, in a state of mind entirely new to him.

Gradually he lessened his gait, absorbed in mental reconstructions of his parting with Elizabeth. The pet lion which, while affectionately licking the hand which caresses it, brings the blood, and at the taste reverts instantly to its normal savagery, is acted on by impulses much like those of Amidon. His thoughts were successions of moving pictures of the splendid girl whom he had held in his arms and kissed. He saw her sitting by the fire as he entered. His mind's eye dwelt on the image of the strong, full figure and the lovely head and wondrous eyes. He felt her lean against him as they stood by the table, and his arms fairly ached with the thrill of that parting embrace. His lips throbbed still with the half-ravished kisses, and he stopped with an insane impulse to return and repeat the tender robbery. Then, wondering at the turbulence of his thoughts, he walked on.

During this pause, he was dimly conscious that a person whom he had seen approaching had neared the point of meeting, and after a moment's halt, had passed on. As he resumed his walk, he heard rapid steps behind him, and was passed by a man who strongly resembled the passenger whom he had just met. This figure turned a corner a few rods in advance of Florian, and almost immediately reëmerged; having turned, apparently, for the purpose of encountering Amidon once more. This time, he walked up, and halted, facing Amidon.

"You'll be at the office in the morning, I suppose, Mr. Brassfield?" said the man.

"At the office?" said Amidon. "My office? Yes."

"Well," this new acquaintance proceeded, in tones which indicated a profound sense of personal injury, "you'd better come prepared to fill my place in the establishment as soon as possible."

This statement was followed by a pause of the sort usually adopted for the purpose of noting the effect of some startling utterance. Amidon was feeling in his pocket for Elizabeth's first-found letter, and the affairs of the Brassfield Oil Company had little interest for him. Yet he dimly realized that some one was resigning something.

"Let me see," said he musingly; "what—what do you do?"

The man gave a sort of hop, of the kind we have been taught to expect of the stag when the bullet strikes him.

"Do?" he snorted. "What do I *do*? What do I *do*? Do you mean to—— I'll tell what I do! I get together options for you and send you cipher telegrams about 'em, and don't get any answers! I attend stock-holders' meetings and get whipsawed by minorities because you are dead to the world off there in New York, or the Lord knows where, and don't furnish me with proxies! I stay here and try to protect your interests when you desert 'em, and you send some white-headed old reprobate of a Pinkerton man to shadow me for a week and try to pry into my work! And when you get home you never show up at the counting-room, though you know what a pickle things are in; and when I meet you on the street, I get cut dead: that's what I do! And I stand it, do I? Ha, ha, ha! Not if J. B. Stevens knows himself, I don't! Good night, Mr. Brassfield. Come round in the morning, and I'll *show* you what I do!"

After the speaker had rushed away, which he incontinently did following this outburst, Amidon's mind reverted to Elizabeth; and not until he had reached his room did his thoughts return to his encounter in the street; and then it was only to wonder if this man Stevens was really of any importance, and if a breach with him was a matter of any consequence.

His mind soon drifted off from this, however, and he got out of bed to turn on the lights and read the above-mentioned letter. And as he read it, he grew ashamed. That embrace, those kisses, now seemed an outrage to him. Was this his return for the sweet confidences, the

revelations of hidden things, with which she had honored him? "You must forget this," she had written, "only at such times of tenderness as you will sometimes have when you are gone," and: "When you see me again, ... without a word or look from me, know me, even more than you now do, yours." And after this, he had permitted her allurements to fly to his brain, and had given her reason to think that because she had lowered her guard, he had struck her a dastard's blow. His eyes grew soft with pity, and they moistened, as he repeated to himself, "Poor little girl! poor little girl!"

Oh, yes! doubtless it was silly of him; but please to remember that he was quite as far from being blasé as—as we used to be; and that he was just now becoming really in love with Elizabeth. And love is much nearer kin to pity than pity is to love. So he lay there and pitied Elizabeth, and wondered when the wedding was to be. He must have Clara find this out from Brassfield. And he thought regretfully of Madame le Claire. His reflections thus touched on the two most unhappy women in Bellevale.

To the hypnotist he had become so much more than a "case," merely, that a revulsion of feeling was setting in against bringing him here to be turned over to a woman for whom he cared nothing. It was a shame, she thought. It was something which no one had a right to expect of any girl.

And Elizabeth Waldron still sat by the dying fire, her heart full of a fighting which would not let her sleep. She felt humbled and insulted, and her face burned as did her heart. But all the time she felt angry with herself for her inconsistency. She had longed for Eugene's letters, and when they came, so few and cold, she was grieved. She had expected a dozen little caresses, even before he left her carriage; and she was saddened because she missed them. She had thought of his coming in on her in a manner quite different from that in which he had actually crept into her presence—and when he had only pressed her hands, she had felt defrauded and robbed. And when at parting he had done (somewhat forcibly, it is true) what she had many times allowed, and what she had all the time wanted of him, she felt outraged and offended!

These thoughts kept her long by the fire, and accompanied her to her chamber. "Elizabeth Waldron," said she to her mirror, "you are going insane! Aren't you ashamed that now, when he has shown his love and understanding of the things you love and try to understand, and surprised you by the possession of the very qualities you have felt secretly regretful on account of his not having—that you feel—that way? What ails you, that you begin to feel toward the dearest man in all the world as if he were a stranger?—Ah, but you do, you do! And you'll never be happy with him, nor even make him happy!—And, oh, that letter, that letter! That awful letter for him to read on the cars! If you had never written that!"

"What's my manager's name—Stevens?" asked Mr. Amidon of Judge Blodgett. "Yes? Well, I'm going to have trouble with him! I won't be bullied by my clerks. And who is the next man?"

"Alderson," said the judge. "It's all in the notes, you know."

"And very convenient, too," said Amidon. "And who is the stenographer?"

"Miss Strong," answered the judge.

"Strong, Strong," said Amidon musingly. "The author, I believe, by the notes?"

"I never said she was!" protested the judge. "Not positively, but only——"

"Well, let's go down—or perhaps I had better go alone," said Florian. "Please come down in an hour or so, won't you?"

The judge noted for the first time the decision of returning confidence in Amidon's manner. Two things contributed to this: the first was the sense of something tangible and intelligible in this going down to business in the morning like an ordinary American; and the other was rising anger at the attack made on him by this man Stevens in the street last night. What sort of discipline can there be in the business, thought he, when an employee dares use such language toward his employer? A good towering passion is a great steadier of the nerves, sometimes. He walked into the counting-room, saw his name and the word "Private" on the glass of a certain door, went boldly beyond it, and was followed by a young woman with a note-book and pencil. Presently, in came Mr. Stevens without knocking.

"Here's another pretty how-de-do!" he exclaimed, without any greeting except an angry snort. "You promised to sign that contract for the output of the Bunn's Ferry wells while you were in New York, and didn't! The papers are back with a notice that the deal is off except at a lower price. How'm I to make anything of this business, I'd like to know, if you——"

Amidon was surprised that Stevens was ignoring his threat to resign; but he was firm in his resolution to enforce discipline. The fact that he himself had been so long in a state of fear and under control, made the luxury of assuming the attitude of command an irresistible temptation.

"Mr. Stevens," said he sternly, "have the kindness to read what is painted on that door!"

Though he had no need, Mr. Stevens gazed in astonishment at the word "Private."

"Kindly ask Mr. Alderson to step here a moment," went on Mr. Amidon.

Stevens stood mute, but Alderson overheard and came.

"You may draw Mr. Stevens a salary check to date, and a month in advance, in lieu of notice," said Mr. Amidon. "Mr. Stevens, you are no longer in the employ of this concern. Mr. Alderson, you may take charge until a successor to Mr. Stevens is found. I should now regard it as a favor if I might have my private office to myself and my stenographer!"

Alderson took the paralyzed Stevens by the shoulders and walked him out into the main office. Amidon's spirits rose, as he waited for the check to come in for his signature. He stabbed his letters with the paper-knife, and felt in a blissful state of general insurrection. The subjection of the past fortnight seemed to fall from him. After he had signed the check, he turned to Miss Strong.

"If you please," said he, in a voice of tense stridency, "I will give you a few letters."

The stenographer, who seemed to regard the events of the past few minutes as nothing short of a cataclysm, flutteringly leafed over her book, and just as Amidon began wondering what he could think of to put into a letter, she burst into tears. Amidon closed his desk with a bang, and giving Alderson orders covering his absence, walked out into the streets, full of the joy of gratified destructiveness. He met Alvord, and temerarily agreed to go with him to the lodge that evening. He finally found Blodgett, and informed him of what had been the result of his first morning in the office.

"Well, it's your business, Florian," said he, "but you'll need somebody who knows something about your affairs. And if you go on attending lodge meetings where you don't know the passwords, and nosing into houses where you don't intend to go, and discharging all the trusted men in your employ, you'll soon have more things to attend to than a couple of mesmerists and an elderly lawyer can take care of! But it's your affair; I've known you too long to try to turn you when you get one of your tantrums on. The smash-up ought to be worth seeing, anyhow!"

XIII

THE MARTYRDOM OF MR. STEVENS

Pietro: Th' offense, it seemeth me,
Is one that by mercy's extremest stretch
Might be o'erpassed.

Cosimo: Never, Pietro, never!
The Brotherhood's honour untouchable
Is touch'd thereby. We build our labyrinth
Of sacred words and potent spells, and all
The deep-involvèd horrors of our craft—
Its entrance hedg'd about with dreadful oaths,
And every step in thridding it made dank
By dripping terror and out-seeping awe.
Shall it be said that e'en Ludovico
May break our faith and live? Never, say I!
—*Vision of Cosimo.*

The Bellevale lodge of the Ancient Order of Christian Martyrs held its meetings in the upper story of a tall building. Mr. Alvord called for Amidon at eight, and took him up, all his boldness in the world of business replaced by wariness in the atmosphere of mystery. As he and his companion went into an anteroom and were given broad collars from which were suspended metal badges called "jewels," he felt a good deal like a spy. They walked into the lodgeroom where twenty-five or thirty men with similar "jewels" sat smoking and chatting. All seemed to know him, but (much to his relief) before he could be included in the conversation, the gavel fell; certain ones with more elaborate "jewels" and more ornate collars than the rest took higher-backed and more highly upholstered chairs at the four sides of the room, another stood at the door; and still another, in complete uniform, with sword and belt, began hustling the members to seats.

"The Deacon Militant," said the wielder of the gavel, "will report if all present are known and tested members of our Dread and Mystic Conclave."

"All, Most Sovereign Pontiff," responded the Deacon Militant, who proved to be the man in the uniform, "save certain strangers who appear within the confines of our sacred basilica."

"Let them be tested," commanded the Sovereign Pontiff, "and, if brethren, welcomed; if spies, executed!"

Amidon started, and looked about for aid or avenue of escape. Seeing none, he warily watched the Deacon Militant. That officer, walking in the military fashion which, as patristic literature teaches, was adopted by the early Christians, and turning square corners as was the habit of St. Paul and the Apostles, received whispered passwords from the two or three strangers, and, with a military salute, announced that all present had been put to the test and welcomed. Then, for the first time remembering that he was not among the strangers, so far as known to the lodge, Amidon breathed freely, and rather regretted the absence of executions.

"Bring forth the Mystic Symbols of the Order!" was the next command. The Mystic Symbols were placed on a stand in the middle of the room, and turned out to be a gilt fish about the size of a four-pound bass, a jar of human bones, and a rolled-up scroll said to contain the Gospels. The fish, as explained by the Deacon Militant, typified a great many things connected with early Christianity, and served always as a reminder of the password of the order. The relics in the jar were the bones of martyrs. The scroll was the Book of the Law. Amidon was becoming impressed: the solemn and ornate ritual and the dreadful symbols sent shivers down his inexperienced and unfraternal spine. Breaking in with uninitiated eyes, as he had done, now seemed more and more a crime.

There was an "Opening Ode" which was so badly sung as to mitigate the awe; and an "order of business" solemnly gone through. Under the head "Good of the Order" the visiting brethren spoke as if it were a class-meeting and they giving "testimony," one of them very volubly reminding the assembly of the great principles of the order, and the mighty work it had already accomplished in ameliorating the condition of a lost and wandering world. Amidon felt that he must have been very blind in failing to note this work until it was thus forced on his notice; but he made a mental apology.

"By the way, Brassfield," said Mr. Slater during a recess preceding the initiation of candidates, "you want to give Stevens the best you've got in the Catacombs scene. Will you make it just straight ritual, or throw in some of those specialties of yours?"

"Stevens! Catacombs!" gasped Amidon, "specialties! I——"

"I wish you could have been here when I was put through," went on Mr. Slater. "I don't see how any one but a professional actor, or a person with your dramatic gifts, can do that part at all—it's so sort of ripping and—and intense, you know. I look forward to your rendition of it with a good deal of pleasurable anticipation."

"You don't expect me to do it, do you?" asked Amidon.

"Why, who else?" was the counter-question. "We can't be expected to play on the bench the best man in Pennsylvania in that part, can we?"

"Come, Brassfield," said the Sovereign Pontiff, "get on your regalia for the Catacombs. We are about to begin."

"Oh, say, now!" said Amidon, trying to be off-hand about it, "you must get somebody else."

"What's that! Some one else? Very likely we shall! Very likely!" thus the Sovereign Pontiff with fine scorn. "Come, the regalia, and no nonsense!"

"I—I may be called out at any moment," urged Amidon, amidst an outcry that seemed to indicate a breach with the Martyrs then and there. "There are reasons why——"

Edgington took him aside. "Is there any truth in this story," said he, "that you have had some trouble with Stevens, and discharged him?"

"Oh, that Stevens!" gasped Amidon, as if the whole discussion had hinged on picking out the right one among an army of Stevenses. "Yes, it's true, and I can't help confer this——"

Edgington whispered to the Sovereign Pontiff; and the announcement was made that in the Catacombs scene Brother Brassfield would be excused and Brother Bulliwinkle substituted.

"I know I never, in any plane of consciousness, saw any of this, or knew any of these things," thought Florian. "It is incredible!"

Conviction, however, was forced on him by the fact that he was now made to don a black domino and mask, and to march, carrying a tin-headed spear, with a file of similar figures to examine the candidate, who turned out to be the discharged Stevens, sitting in an anteroom, foolish and apprehensive, and looking withal much as he had done in the counting-room. He was now asked by the leader of the file, in a sepulchral tone, several formal questions, among others whether he believed in a Supreme Being. Stevens gulped, and said "Yes." He was then asked if he was prepared to endure any ordeal to which he might be subjected, and warned that unless he possessed nerves of steel, he had better turn back—for which measure there was yet time. Stevens, in a faint voice, indicated that he was ready for the worst, and desired to go on. Then all

(except Amidon) in awesome accents intoned, "Be brave and obedient, and all may yet be well!" and they passed back into the lodge-room. Amidon was now thoroughly impressed, and wondered whether Stevens would be able to endure the terrible trials hinted at.

Clad in a white robe "typifying innocence," and marching to minor music played upon a piano, Stevens was escorted several times around the darkened room, stopping from time to time at the station of some officer, to receive highly improving lectures. Every time he was asked if he were willing to do anything, or believed anything, he said "Yes." Finally, with the Scroll of the Law in one hand, and with the other resting on the Bones of Martyrs, surrounded by the brethren whose drawn swords and leveled spears threatened death, he repeated an obligation which bound him not to do a great many things, and to keep the secrets of the order. To Amidon it seemed really awful—albeit somewhat florid in style; and when Alvord nudged him at one passage in the obligation, he resented it as an irreverence. Then he noted that it was a pledge to maintain the sanctity of the family circle of brother Martyrs, and Alvord's reference of the night before to the obligation as affecting his association with the "strawberry blonde" took on new and fearful meaning.

Stevens seemed to be vibrating between fright and a tendency to laugh, as the voice of some well-known fellow citizen rumbled out from behind a deadly weapon. He was marched out, to the same minor music, and the first act was ended.

The really esoteric part of it, Amidon felt, was to come, as he could see no reason for making a secret of these very solemn and edifying matters. Stevens felt very much the same way about it, and was full of expectancy when informed that the next degree would test his obedience. He highly resolved to obey to the letter.

The next act disclosed Stevens hoodwinked, and the room light. He was informed that he was in the Catacombs, familiar to the early Christians, and must make his way alone and in darkness, following the Clue of Faith which was placed in his hands. This Clue was a white cord similar to the sort used by masons (in the building-trades). He groped his way along by it to the station of the next officer, who warned him of the deadly consequences of disobedience. Thence he made his way onward, holding to the Clue of Faith—until he touched a trigger of some sort, which let down upon him an avalanche of tinware and such light and noisy articles, which frightened him so that he started to run, and was dexterously tripped by the Deacon Militant and a spearman, and caught in a net held by two others. A titter ran about the room.

"Obey," thundered the Vice-Pontiff, "and all will be well!"

Stevens resumed the Clue. At the station of the next officer to whom it brought him, the nature of faith was explained to him, and he was given the password, "Ichthus," whispered so that all in that part of the room could hear the interdicted syllables. But he was adjured never, never to utter it, unless to the Guardian of the Portal on entering the lodge, to the Deacon Militant on the opening thereof, or to a member, when he, Stevens, should become Sovereign Pontiff. Then he was faced toward the Vice-Pontiff, and told to answer loudly and distinctly the questions asked him.

"What is the lesson inculcated in this Degree?" asked the Vice-Pontiff from the other end of the room.

"Obedience!" shouted Stevens in reply.

"What is the password of this Degree?"

"Ichthus!" responded Stevens.

A roll of stage-thunder sounded deafeningly over his head. The piano was swept by a storm of bass passion; and deep cries of "Treason! Treason!" echoed from every side. Poor Stevens tottered, and fell into a chair placed by the Deacon Militant. He saw the enormity of the deed of shame he had committed. He had told the password!

"You have all heard this treason," said the Sovereign Pontiff, in the deepest of chest-tones—"a treason unknown in all the centuries of the past! What is the will of the conclave?"

"I would imprecate on the traitor's head," said a voice from one of the high-backed chairs, "the ancient doom of the Law!"

"Doom, doom!" said all in unison, holding the "oo" in a most blood-curdling way. "Pronounce doom!"

"One fate, and one alone," pronounced the Sovereign Pontiff, "can be yours. Brethren, let him forthwith be encased in the Chest of the Clanking Chains, and hurled from the Tarpeian Rock, to be dashed in fragments at its stony base!"

Amidon's horror was modified by the evidences of repressed glee with which this sentence was received. Yet he felt a good deal of concern as they brought out a great chest, threw the struggling Stevens into it, slammed down the ponderous lid and locked it. Stevens kicked at the lid, but said nothing. The members leaped with joy. A great chain was brought and wrapped

clankingly about the chest.

"Let me out," now yelled the Christian Martyr. "Let me out, damn you!"

"Doom, do-o-o-oom!" roared the voices; and said the Sovereign Pontiff in impressive tones, "Proceed with the execution!"

Now the chest was slung up to a hook in the ceiling, and gradually drawn back by a pulley until it was far above the heads of the men, the chains meanwhile clanking continually against the receptacle, from which came forth a stream of smothered profanity.

"Hurl him down to the traitor's death!" shouted the Sovereign Pontiff. The chest was loosed, and swung like a pendulum lengthwise of the room, down almost to the floor and up nearly to the ceiling. The profanity now turned into a yell of terror. The Martyrs slapped one another's backs and grew blue in the face with laughter. At a signal, a light box was placed where the chest would crush it (which it did with a sound like a small railway collision); the chest was stopped and the lid raised.

"Let the body receive Christian burial," said the Sovereign Pontiff. "Our vengeance ceases with death."

This truly Christian sentiment was received with universal approval. Death seemed to all a good place at which to stop.

"Brethren," said the Deacon Militant, as he struggled with the resurgent Stevens, "there seems some life here! Methinks the heart beats, and——"

The remainder of the passage from the ritual was lost to Amidon by reason of the fact that Stevens had placed one foot against the Deacon's stomach and hurled that august officer violently to the floor.

"Let every test of life be applied," said the Sovereign Pontiff. "Perchance some higher will than ours decrees his preservation. Take the body hence for a time; if possible, restore him to life, and we will consider his fate."

The recess which followed was clearly necessary to afford an opportunity for the calming of the risibilities of the Martyrs. The stage, too, had to be reset. Amidon's ethnological studies had not equaled his reading in *belles-lettres*, and he was unable to see the deep significance of these rites from an historical standpoint, and that here was a survival of those orgies to which our painted and skin-clad ancestors devoted themselves in spasms of religious frenzy, gazed at by the cave-bear and the mammoth. The uninstructed Amidon regarded them as inconceivable horse-play. While thus he mused, Stevens, who was still hoodwinked and being greatly belectured on the virtue of Faith and the duty of Obedience, reëntered on his ordeal.

He was now informed by the officer at the other end of the room, that every man must ascend into the Mountains of Temptation and be tested, before he could be pronounced fit for companionship with Martyrs. Therefore, a weary climb heavenward was before him, and a great trial of his fidelity. On his patience, daring and fortitude depended all his future in the Order. He was marched to a ladder and bidden to ascend.

"I," said the Deacon Militant, "upon this companion stair will accompany you."

But there was no other ladder and the Deacon Militant had to stand upon a chair.

Up the ladder labored Stevens, but, though he climbed manfully, he remained less than a foot above the floor. The ladder went down like a treadmill, as Stevens climbed—it was an endless ladder rolled down on Stevens' side and up on the other. The Deacon Militant, from his perch on the chair, encouraged Stevens to climb faster so as not to be out-stripped. With labored breath and straining muscles he climbed, the Martyrs rolling on the floor in merriment all the more violent because silent. Amidon himself laughed to see this strenuous climb, so strikingly like human endeavor, which puts the climber out of breath, and raises him not a whit—except in temperature. At the end of perhaps five minutes, when Stevens might well have believed himself a hundred feet above the roof, he had achieved a dizzy height of perhaps six feet, on the summit of a stage-property mountain, where he stood beside the Deacon Militant, his view of the surrounding plain cut off by papier-mâché clouds, and facing a foul fiend to whom the Deacon Militant confided that here was a candidate to be tested and qualified. Whereupon the foul fiend remarked "Ha, ha!" and bade them bind him to the Plutonian Thunderbolt and hurl him down to the nether world. The thunderbolt was a sort of toboggan on rollers, for which there was a slide running down presumably to the nether world, above mentioned.

The hoodwink was removed, and Stevens looked about him, treading warily, like one on the top of a tower; the great height of the mountain made him giddy. Obediently he lay face downward on the thunderbolt, and yielded up his wrists and ankles to fastenings provided for them.

"They're not going to lower him with those cords, are they?"

It was a stage-whisper from the darkness which spake thus.

"Oh, I guess it's safe enough!" said another, in the same sort of agitated whisper.

"Safe!" was the reply. "I tell you, it's sure to break! Some one stop 'em——"

To the heart of the martyred Stevens these words struck panic. But as he opened his mouth to protest, the catastrophe occurred. There was a snap, and the toboggan shot downward. Bound as he was, the victim could see below him a brick wall right across the path of his descent. He was helpless to move; it was useless to cry out. For all that, as he felt in imagination the crushing shock of his head driven like a battering-ram against this wall, he uttered a roar such as from Achilles might have roused armed nations to battle. And even as he did so, his head touched the wall, there was a crash, and Stevens lay safe on a mattress after his ten-foot slide, surrounded by fragments of red-and-white paper which had lately been a wall. He was pale and agitated, and generally done for; but tremendously relieved when he had assured himself of the integrity of his cranium. This he did by repeatedly feeling of his head, and looking at his fingers for sanguinary results. As Amidon looked at him, he repented of what he had done to this thoroughly maltreated fellow man. After the Catacombs scene, which was supposed to be impressive, and some more of the "secret" work, everybody crowded about Stevens, now invested with the collar and "jewel" of Martyrhood, and laughed, and congratulated him as on some great achievement, while he looked half-pleased and half-bored. Amidon with the rest greeted him, and told him that after his vacation was over, he hoped to see him back at the office.

"That was a fine exemplification of the principles of the Order," said Alvord as they went home.

"What was?" asked Amidon.

"Hiring old Stevens back," answered Alvord. "You've got to live your principles, or they don't amount to much."

"Suppose some fellow should get into a lodge," asked Amidon, "who had never been initiated?"

"Well," said Alvord, "there isn't much chance of that. I shouldn't dare to say. You can't tell what the fellows would do when such sacred things were profaned, you know. You couldn't tell what they might do!"

XIV

THE TREASON OF ISEGRIM THE WOLF

Then up and spake Reynard, the Fox, King Leo's throne before:
"My clients, haled before you, Sire, deserve not frown nor roar!
These flocks and herds and sties, dread lord, should thanks
give for our care—
The care of Isegrim the Wolf, and Bruin strong, the Bear!
Its usefulness, its innocence, our Syndicate protests.
We crave the Court's support for our legitimate interests!"
—*An Appeal to King Leo.*

The sifting of St. Peter
Seems quite credible to me,
When I see what's done to absentees
At our Society!
—*Annals of Sorosis.*

Any business man will be able to appreciate the difficulties which beset the president of the Brassfield Oil Company, on the discharge of Mr. Stevens. On the morning after the lodge meeting, behold Mr. Amidon at his desk, contemplating a rising pile of unanswered letters. His countenance expresses defeat, despair and aversion. His politeness toward Miss Strong is never-failing; but that he is not himself grows more and more apparent to that clear-headed young woman.

"Here's the third letter from the Bayonne refinery," she said. "An immediate reply is demanded."

"Oh, yes," said Amidon; "certainly; that has gone too long! We must get at that matter at once: let me see the contracts and correspondence."

"That is the business," said Miss Strong, "which they claim to have arranged with you in a conversation over the long-distance 'phone. That's what seems to be the matter with them—they

want to make a record of it."

"I don't remember— Well," said Amidon, "lay that by for a moment. And this piece of business with the A. B. & C. Railway. Who knows anything about this claim for demurrage?"

"Mr. Stevens," said Miss Strong, "had that in hand, and said he told you all about it before you went away, and that you were going to see about it in—"

"In New York, I suppose!" exclaimed Amidon. "Well, I didn't. Can't you and Mr. Alderson take up this pile of letters and bring 'em to me with the correspondence, and—and papers—and things? I've been too lax in the past, in not referring to the records. I must have the records, Miss Strong, in every case."

"Yes, sir," said Miss Strong; "but since we adopted that new system of filing, I don't see how the records can be made any fuller, or how you can be more fully acquainted with them than you now are—"

"Not at all," asseverated Mr. Amidon. "I find myself uncertain as to a great many things. Let's have the records constantly."

"Yes, sir, but these are cases where there isn't anything. Nobody but you and Mr. Stevens knows anything about them."

"Well, I can't answer them now," protested Mr. Amidon. "I've a headache! My—my mind isn't clear—is confused on some of these things; and they'll all have to wait a while. Who's that tapping? Oh, it's you, is it, Mr. Alderson—you startled me so that I— Mr. Edgington here? Well, why don't you show him in? After luncheon, Miss Strong, you may come in again."

Mr. Edgington had a tightly-curved mustache, a pink flush on his cheeks, wore an obviously new sack suit, had a carnation in his buttonhole, came in with an air of marked hurry, and carried a roll of papers.

"I thought I must have a talk with you," said he, "on the evidence in that Bunn's Ferry land case. The time for taking evidence is rapidly passing, and the court warned us that it wouldn't be extended again. That proof you must furnish, or we shall be beaten."

"Yes—yes, I see," said Amidon, who knew absolutely nothing about the matter. "We should feel really annoyed by such a termination!"

"Annoyed!" exclaimed the lawyer. "Say, Brassfield, that reminds me of Artemus Ward's statement that he was 'ashamed' when some one died! You'd lose the best wells you've got. And it would involve those transfers to the Waldrons, and might carry them down."

"The Waldrons!" exclaimed Florian.

"Why, I mean Miss Bessie and her aunt," said Edgington. "I mean bankruptcy— But we've gone all over that before."

Amidon nodded, with an air of knowing all about the matter.

"Lots of times," said he. "And this evidence is—? Please give me the exact requirements—er, again."

"The exact requirements," said Edgington, "as I have frequently shown you, and without its doing much good, are to prove that some time in March, 1896, you did not make a partnership agreement with this man Corkery by which you were to share with him the proceeds of your oil-prospecting, and under which he went into possession of this tract of land. He has a line of testimony which shows that you did. Proving a negative is rather unusual, but about the only thing which will save you is an alibi. Now you must pardon the expression, but you've always evaded my questions as to your whereabouts prior to June of that year. You've never flatly denied Corkery's story, but if it weren't for the inherent improbability of it, I'd have given up the fight long ago, for you have not helped as a client should. You haven't confided—"

"But I will!" said Amidon energetically. "The man's a perjurer, and I'll prove it! All that time I was in Wisconsin. I was—I'll prove where I was—"

"Good!" cried Edgington, noting a tendency to falter. "And now for the names and addresses of a few witnesses, and we'll go after them!"

"Witnesses—yes, yes—we shall need witnesses, won't we?" faltered Amidon. "Say, Mr. Edgington, I'll tell you what I'll do: I'll turn you over to Blodgett."

"The old gentleman at the hotel?"

"The same," replied Amidon. "He was my lawyer, years ago. I'll send him to you directly this afternoon."

Edgington made some notes in a book.

"Very well," said he. "I'm glad that puzzle is in process of solution. And now one thing further, and I am done. This is a question of local politics. You know the talks we've had with the fellows about this trolley franchise, and the advisability of making you mayor. We all agree that your interests and mine and those of all our crowd demand your election to the place——"

"Me mayor!" shouted Amidon. "Me run for office! Why, Mr. Edgington, you must be crazy!"

"Well, this—certainly—is refreshing!" expostulated Edgington, in apparent amazement. "When can anything be supposed to be settled, between gentlemen, if that isn't? Why, confound it, didn't we make up the complete slate, including control of the Common Council? And aren't we to have an exclusive franchise on all the streets, with your signature as mayor? Of course, you're joking now. Why, we're right on the eve of the caucuses, and with Conlon in line everything will go as it ought. I mean Barney Conlon, the labor leader. Since you've come back from this trip of yours, everything seems to be going in unexpected ways—and somehow you've given offense to Conlon. Do you know what it was?"

"No," answered Amidon, with some heat. "I don't know what it was! I don't know Conlon, and I don't know anything about this business except this: that if you think I'm going to sneak into office for the purpose of stealing the streets of this town, you don't know Florian Amidon, that's all!"

"Don't know what? Don't know whom?"

"Don't know Flo—ah—me! Me!"

"Then you won't see Barney Conlon?"

"I won't foul my hands with the dirty mess! I won't——"

"Dirty mess, indeed!" retorted Edgington, "when the best business men—— Oh, well, if that's the way you feel—— Why didn't you say so, instead of—— I think we'd best not discuss the thing any further, Mr. Brassfield; and returning to legal matters, where we are happily at one, let me remind you that you are to send Judge Blodgett up to see me regarding the Corkery case this afternoon. Good day, Mr. Brassfield!"

Mr. Edgington went forth from Amidon's presence in a state of mind which can be appreciated by no one but some "good" citizen who has perfected all the preliminaries for securing a particularly fat financial prize by the cheap and simple device of a popular vote, and finds the man on whom he relies going off into a fanciful ism induced by some maggot of so-called conscientiousness. Any one ought to be able to see that there is nothing wrong in accepting gifts from those able to give: and who is more able than the public? Everybody would be better off for the arrangement contemplated, and no one the worse. So reasoned Mr. Edgington as he saw with chagrin the Bellevale franchise slipping away, and with it the core of their ambitious project of interurban lines connecting half a dozen cities. Bellevale, with its water-power, was the hub of it; and to lose here by such a sudden exhibition of so-called "civic patriotism"—Edgington knew the patter of these reformers—was disgusting, and all the more so from the fact that the one to blame was Brassfield, whose ethical attitude had always been so "safe and sane" in business matters.

He must find some way of re-forming the lines, and adjusting the action of the machine—now engaged in grinding out Brassfield's nomination—so as to produce other grist just as good, if that were possible. It was ticklish business, but it must be done. The time was short, but before the caucuses met a new candidate must be found, and the word passed down the line that the dear people had changed their minds over night on the subject of the next mayor.

To decide, with Mr. Edgington (who fancied that he resembled the first Napoleon), was to act, and almost instantly, his forces, hastily mobilized, began an enveloping movement for the purpose of surrounding and bringing into camp a proper candidate for the local chief magistracy.

Mr. Amidon was flushed after this encounter. Mr. Edgington's cool manner of approaching him with this questionable and shady political job had generated some heat in Florian—a man always possessed of strong convictions concerning civic purity. He was offended; yet he knew that it was to the turpitude of Brassfield that he owed this, rather than to any fault of Edgington's.

"How could such a fellow as Brassfield reap such success!" was Amidon's mental ejaculation. "Ready to rob the community, he enjoys the confidence of all; full of the propensities of Don Juan, he wins the respect and love of Elizabeth Waldron! Shameful commentary upon society, and—— Yes, Miss Strong, who is there? Judge Blodgett: send him right in.... Judge, I'm glad you came in. I'm very glad! I need your advice and aid."

"All right," said the judge, biting a cigar. "What's up, Florian?"

"You've seen a Mr. Edgington?"

"Your lawyer," replied the judge. "The *Notes* tell all about him."

"Well," resumed Amidon, "he's been here, and I learn that there is some very important litigation pending, which we've got to win, because it involves others—Miss Waldron and her aunt—and this man Brassfield never could give Edgington the evidence he needed in order to win."

"Why couldn't he?"

"Because," said Amidon, with the air of a man uttering something of the deepest significance, "it involves matters happening before June, 1896, and Brassfield was not in existence until the twenty-seventh of June! I've promised Edgington that you will get him the evidence he wants."

"What's the nub of the case?" asked the judge.

"A man claims I gave him some rights—or that Brassfield did—you understand?"

"I see."

"—in March, 1896."

"H'm!" exclaimed the judge contemptuously. "March, eh? Why, we can subpoena the whole town of Hazelhurst, and show that you were at that time acting as a pillar of society there, every day in that year, up to June twenty-seventh!"

"But don't you see," said Amidon, "that proving this makes my whole story public?"

Judge Blodgett thoughtfully gazed into space.

"Yes, it would appear that way," said he, at last; "but is it necessarily so? You can testify that you were in Hazelhurst at that time, and legally, that's the same thing as saying that Brassfield was—I guess; and I'll swear to it, too; and if they aren't too searching on cross-examination, we may slide through—but there'll be some ticklish spots. I'll see Mr. Edgington, and find out just how strong a fabric of perjury we've got to go against. We may have to get more witnesses—and that'll be thin ice, too. I'll look in again this afternoon."

"Please do so," replied Mr. Amidon. "Look at these letters! Do you suppose your *Notes* would shed any light on what they're driving at?"

The judge looked them over.

"I don't remember anything in the *Notes*," said he, "regarding these matters. But you could take 'em up to the hotel, and Madame le Claire could put you to sleep and talk it out of you in five minutes."

"I'll do it!" said Amidon. "I'll get Brassfield's views on them, confound him. I'll do this while you're with Edgington. Good-by until after luncheon."

Madame le Claire was examining Mr. Brassfield with reference to the unanswered letters. Professor Blatherwick was engaged in taking down his answers. In a disastrous moment, Mr. Alderson knocked at the door, and, following his knocking, delivered a breathless message to Brassfield that an important telegram demanded instant attention.

"All right," replied Mr. Brassfield cheerily, "I'll toddle right down to the office with you, my boy. Excuse me, Madame; you may rely on my seeking a resumption of this pleasant interview at the earliest possible moment. *Au revoir!*"

Madame le Claire was perplexed. Should she allow him to go out in this hypnotic state? Could she exercise her art in Alderson's presence? While she debated, Mr. Brassfield airily bowed himself out, and was gone!

Brassfield was gone, that was clear: but no system of Subliminal Engineering had any rule for calculating the results of his escape back into the world from which he had for a fortnight or so been absent. What would he be, and what would he do? Would he return the same hard-headed man of business who had won riches in five short years? Or would he be changed by the return to the normal—his equilibrium made unstable by the tendency to revert to his older self? How would he adjust himself to the things done by Amidon? How would the change affect his relations with Miss Waldron and this bright-haired inamorata so balefully nearing the foreground, like an approaching comet? How would the professor and Judge Blodgett stand with this new factor in the problem? Would he continue to care for her, his rescuer? Owing to some things which had taken place in the Brassfield intervals, her heart fluttered at the thought of a possibly permanent Eugene.

For be it remembered, that many things had taken place in these days of Bellevale life. The situation had, of course, been changing daily by subsurface mutations which the intelligent student of this history will not need to have explained to him. For instance (and herein the

explanation of that fluttering of Madame le Claire's heart) such things as these:

Bellevale is not so large a place that neighbors' affairs are not observed of neighbor. Prior to the elaboration of the law of thought-transference, there was no way of accounting for the universality of knowledge of other people's affairs which certain Bellevale circles enjoyed. The good gossiping housewives along the highways leading into the town are often able to tell the exact contents of the packages brought home by their neighbors, under the seats of their buggies and farm-wagons and late at night; but this is a phenomenon not at all unusual. Neither is it in the least strange that, in town or country, John and Sarah could not sit out an evening together in the parlor or settin'-room without all that occurred being talked over, with perfect certainty as to facts, in the next day's meeting of the Missionary Society or the Monday Club. But what Phyllis thought, what were the plans of Thestylis, and how Jane felt when William jilted her, and why William did it—all of which difficult circumstances were canvassed with equal certitude—are things, the knowledge of which, as I said above, was not to be accounted for on any theory at all consistent with respect for the people possessing it, until thought-transference came into fashion. Now all is clear, and our debt to science is increased by another large item.

Mr. Brassfield and his affairs were as a city set upon a hill, and could not be hid. There was a maid in Elizabeth's home, and a maiden aunt who had confidential friends. A stenographer and bookkeepers were employed in the counting-room of the Brassfield Oil Company, and the stenographer had a friend in the milliner's shop, and an admirer who was a clerk in one of the banks. There were clubs and other organizations, social, religious and literary; and the people in all of them had tongues wherewith to talk, and ears for hearing.

Hence:

At the meeting of the Society for Ethical Research, Mrs. Meyer read an essay on "*What Parsifal Has Taught Me*," during the reading of which Mrs. Alvord described Miss Waldron's trousseau to Miss Finch and Doctor Julia Brown. Because of the conversation among these three, the president asked Doctor Brown, first of all, to discuss the paper. And Doctor Julia, who talked bass and had coquettish fluffy blond bangs and a greatly overtaxed corsage, said that she fully agreed with the many and deeply beautiful thoughts expressed in the paper.

"I'm sincerely glad *Parsifal* taught her something!" said the fair M.D. to her companions, as she resumed her seat. Mrs. Meyer was the only woman in the town who had ever been to Bayreuth, she added short-windedly in explanation of her remarks, and had lobbied herself into a place on the program on the strength of that fact.

"Does Bess know," asked Miss Finch, "about this mesmerist person?"

"Oh, there isn't anything there," said Doctor Brown, "I feel sure. Though his inti—ah, friendship with this Le Claire woman is, just at this time, in bad taste. But all men are natural polygamists, you know."

"They say," said the voice of a member from across the room, "that it will be quite a palace—throw everything else in Bellevale in the shade—entirely so."

"They are all talking of it," said Mrs. Alvord. "Jim says it seems odd to have this Mr. Blodgett looking into the Brassfield business. But everything is odd, now—the hypnotist and Mr. Blodgett, and Daisy Scarlett; she's still here."

"O—o!" said Doctor Brown, in a sinuous barytone circumflex.

"Really," said Miss Finch, who wore her dress high about the neck, and whose form was a symphony in angles, "such promiscuous associations may be shocking, but as to surprise—who knows anything of his life before he came here?"

"Judge Blodgett," said Doctor Brown, "told a friend of mine that he had known Brassfield from infancy."

"The first light Bellevale has ever received on a dark past," said Miss Finch, "if it is light. And how strangely he acts! Everybody notices it. Always so chatty and almost voluble before, and now—why, he's dreadfully boorish. You know how he treated you, Miss Brown!"

"Yes, and he knows how I treated him for it!" said Doctor Brown. "I propose to call people down when they act so with me!"

"Quite right," said Mrs. Alvord, "quite correct, Doctor. Oh, what a change! And who has changed for the worse lately more than Bessie Waldron? Pale, silent and clearly unhappy. I can't attach any importance to that affair of the strange woman with the striped hair; but that Miss Scarlett matter—that's quite different. Jim and I saw the beginning of that up in the mountains last summer. Daisy Scarlett is a queer girl, so wild and hoidenish—but the people who know her in Allentown just think the world of her, the same as do the people in Bellevale—and her appearance here right after the announcement of the engagement means something. Poor Bess! Hush! There she comes. Oh, Bessie, it's so sweet of you to come, even if you are late! Everybody has been saying such sweet things of you!"

"How kind of them!" said Elizabeth. "Has *Parsifal* received any attention?"

At the club, of course, no such gossip as that uttered at the meeting of the Society for Ethical Research was heard. Men are above such things. To be sure Alvord and Slater and Edgington and the rest of the "the gang" did exchange views on some matters involving the welfare of the club—and in the course of duty.

"I tell you," said Slater, "Brass has been practising that French doctrine about hunting for the woman—a little too industriously. They're getting to be something—something——"

"Fierce," suggested Alvord.

"Well, that isn't quite what I meant to say," said Slater, "but pretty near. 'Terrible as an army with banners,' you know, and condemned near as numerous."

"It's changed Brassfield like a coat of paint, this engagement," said Edgington. "I saw something last week that showed me more than you could print in a book as big as the Annual Digest. You see, he went sort of gravitating down by where the sewer gang was at work, like a man in a strange country full of hostiles, and although he must have been conscious of the fact that he's slated for mayor in the spring, he never showed that he knew of the presence of a human being, to say nothing of a voter, in the whole gang, and Barney Conlon's gang, too. Why, he'd better have done anything than ignore 'em! He'd better a darn sight have stood and sung *Drill, Ye Tarriers, Drill!* as a political move. Now that shows a revolution in his nature. It's uncanny, and it'll play the very deuce with the slate if it goes on."

"Well, you all know what took place at his counting-room," asked Slater, "the day after he got back from New York? Old Stevens resigned, on the street the night before, and Brass didn't seem to know any more than to accept his resignation. Hired him back since, I've heard, but he ought not to have noticed it. He certainly has gone off badly."

"I knew a fellow once," said Edgington, "who went sort of crazy on the girl question—batty. D'ye s'pose this engagement——"

"They change to their lady friends," said Slater, "sometimes. But he—why, he passed me a dozen times with a cold stare!"

"Me, too," said Edgington, "and he didn't seem to know Flossie Smith when he met her, and Doctor Julia Brown gave him a calling-down on the street—a public lecture on etiquette. Colonel McCorkle claims to have been insulted by him, and won't serve any longer on the same committees with him in the Commercial Association. And he stays at the hotel all the time, and seems afraid to leave this old judge, and colloques with the German professor and the occultist—and, let me say, I've seen cripples in the hospital that were worse-looking than she is!—and what in thunder it means beats me."

"He wants the judge and the professor at our supper next week," added Slater.

"I've sent 'em invitations," said Alvord. "Anything to please the patient. I could tell you a good deal about this, fellows; but 'Gene and I are brothers and closer than brothers; and F. D. and B. goes with me; but it won't hurt anything for you to know that he's got carloads of trouble, and you haven't any of you come within a mile of the mark. He told me all about it the night he got back from New York. I think it will blow over if things can be kept from blowing up instead, for a few days—slumbering volcano—woman scorned—hell's fury, you know; don't ask me any more. But this hiding out won't do."

"Well, I should think not," said Slater. "We've got to get him going about as usual or there'll be questions asked and publicity—those red-headed women are pretty vivacious conversationalists when they get mad, and you can't tell what may be pulled off, even if he acts as natural as life."

"This supper ought to help some," said Edgington.

"It will," said Alvord. "We must make it a hum-dinger. And we must see that he shows himself of tenor at the club and lodge meetings and hops. Why, it's shameful, the way we've let him drop out."

And men being above gossip, at this point the meeting dissolved.

At the hotel, conference after conference had taken place in the parlor of Professor Blatherwick, and Blodgett and Blatherwick's *Notes* had been studied out most assiduously. Judge Blodgett and Florian Amidon had spent their days at the counting-house, and an increased force of clerks worked ceaselessly in making up statements and balances showing the condition of the business. Amidon could now draw checks in the name of Brassfield with no more than a dim sense of committing forgery. The banks, however, refused to honor them at first, and the tellers

noted the fact that after his return from New York Mr. Brassfield adopted a new style of signature, and wondered at it. Some noticed a change in all his handwriting, but in these days of the typewriter such a thing makes little difference. His abstention from bowling (to the playing of which Brassfield had been devoted), and his absolute failure at billiards, were discussed in sporting circles, and accounted for on the theory that he had "gone stale" since this love-affair had become the absorbing business of his life. No one understood, however, his sudden interest in photography, and his marvelous skill in it. He seemed to be altogether a transformed man.

"I am beginning to see through this," said Amidon, referring to the business.

"Yes," said the judge, "this side of the affair is assuming a pretty satisfactory aspect. But your reputation is suffering by the sort of constraint you've been under. These things are important. A man's behavior is worth money to him. Many a man gets credit at the bank on the strength of the safe and conservative vices he practises. Business requires you to act more like Brassfield. A man who uses a good deal of money must be like other people who use a good deal of money. He mustn't have isms, and he mustn't be for any reforms except impractical ones, and he mustn't have the reputation of being 'queer.' Isn't that so, Professor?"

"Kvite uncontrofertible," said the professor. "You must minkle up vit more beople."

"And in other matters besides business," said the judge; "boxes of flowers every few minutes are all right, but some things require personal attention."

Amidon blushed.

"You see," said he, "if every one were not so strange; if part of the people were as familiar to me as I am to them, it wouldn't be so trying. I suppose these receptions, and other functions to follow, I must attend alone. But you two are going to that banquet with me?"

"Oh, certainly," said the judge. "I want to see just what sort of a gang you've been forgathering with here. The folks at Hazelhurst——"

"Must never know, Judge! And you, Professor?"

"I shall be more tan bleaced. Supliminally considered, I re kard it as te shance of a lifetime."

"Well," said Amidon, "you are very good, and I am glad that's settled. Now I want you to grant me another favor—or Clara, rather. I should be more than glad if she would ask Brassfield about some things that there's no need for you people to hear. It's nothing about the business. Won't you see if she will give me a—a—demonstration?"

The judge and the professor disappeared, and soon word came that Madame le Claire would give him audience. Amidon's heart beat stiflingly as he came into her presence. For this man's conscience was a most insubordinate conscience, and held as wrong the things felt and thought, as well as things said and done; and his remorse was as that of an abandoned but repentant jilt. But when he saw how cheerfully she smiled, he grew easier in his mind. The women always have such a matter fully under control—I mean the other party's mind.

"Well?" said she interrogatively—"at last? I have been wondering why I was brought down here?"

"It must have been very dull and lonesome——"

"Oh, no!" she answered. "I am a business woman, you know, and I haven't been idle. And now, there is something you need, my friend? Let us begin at once."

There were definite repudiation of claims to tenderness, clear denial of resentment, in her tone. Amidon brightened and reddened. He stammered like a boy teased by reference to his first love-affair.

"You are wonderfully kind," he said. "I wanted to ask you to have this Brassfield tell you all he will about the wedding—the date, and everything you can get out of the fellow. And have him act as naturally as you can, so as to see more clearly how he carries himself. You see what I want, don't you?"

"I think so," she returned. "Conversation must be a little difficult, isn't it? You remembered some of the things I told you about?"

"Difficult?" he exclaimed. "Oh, Clara, it's impossible! It's so much so, that I hardly dare go back any more. I'm sending flowers and notes and doing the best I can; but it won't do at all: I must call oftener—must! And I'm afraid I have spoiled everything."

"Then you find the lady quite—quite endurable?"

"She's adorable," went on Florian, with the gush which comes at the first opportunity to discuss the dear one with a sympathetic third party. "She's perfectly exquisite! I have thought of nothing, dreamed of nothing, since I left her, except, except——"

"Ah!" said Clara, "the situation must be perfectly lovely—for you—both— And I'm sure you got along nicely."

"No, no! I spoiled everything, I know I did. But bring this fellow up and ask him those things, please; and also about a Miss Scarlett— No, leave that out. Just about the wedding, and about— I was going to ask about our house; but the judge found that out, where it is, and all. Just about the—the things between her and me, a little more, you know!"

The hypnotic subject yields to control more and more readily by repeated surrender. So there was little of gazing into the party-colored eyes now.

"You will soon sleep," said Madame le Claire, in that dominating way of hers; "and when you wake you will be Eugene Brassfield just as he used to be, and the room and all the surroundings, and myself—all will seem familiar, and you will be quite at home with me. Sleep, sleep!"

Her hand swept down and closed his eyes, and he lay back in his chair entranced. Madame le Claire sat long and looked at him yearningly. She smoothed back the hair from his brow with many soft touches, and stooped and softly kissed his forehead. Then she lightly tapped his wrist, and sharply said, "Wake!"

Eugene Brassfield opened his eyes with a smile. There was something still faintly suggestive of tenderness in the look with which Madame le Claire regarded him, and he returned it with the air of a man to whom such looks are neither unusual nor repugnant.

"We were just talking," said she, with the air of reminding him of a topic from which he had wandered, "about your wedding. When is it to be?"

"The appointed date," said he, "is April the fifth; but, of course, I shall move for an earlier one if possible."

"I should think," remarked Madame le Claire, "that the date fixed would give Miss Waldron all too short a time for preparation."

"From a woman's standpoint," said Mr. Brassfield, "it probably seems so. But you and I can surely find matters of more mutual interest to talk about, can't we?"

"Perhaps," said the girl, "but I don't think of anything just now. Do you?"

"Well, for one thing," said he, "I have just found out what makes your eyes so beautiful."

"Wouldn't it be just as well to cease discovering things of that kind? It's so short a time to the fifth of April, you know."

"I've made all my money," said Brassfield, "by never quitting discovering. I like it. And this last find especially."

"I think there are other lines of investigation," said she, "which demand your time and attention."

"Oh, pshaw!" said he. "Don't be so prudish. You know that your eyes are beautiful, and you are not really offended when I tell you so. Such eyes are the books in which I like to read—I can understand them better than Browning, or the old Persian soak. It's not unpleasant to get a volume you understand—at times."

"Why, Mr. Amidon—Brassfield, I mean—aren't you ashamed of yourself!"

"A little," said he; "not much, though. And who is this 'Mr. Amman,' or whatever the name is, that is so much in your mind that you call me by his name when you speak without thinking?"

"A dear friend of mine!"

"Well, now, if you should happen to see something agreeable in me, and should let me know about it, I shouldn't throw your Mr. Amden, or Amidon, at your head. Why not forget about the rest of the world for a while? We can be in only one place at a time, and so, really, our whole world just now has only us two. You oughtn't to repel the only person in the wide, wide world; you won't, will you?"

"Don't be foolish!"

"Don't be wasteful! This may be the only world of this kind we shall be allowed to have. Come over and sit by me and be nice to me, won't you?"

"I certainly shall do nothing of the kind!"

"No? Ah, how wasteful of opportunity! Well, then, I shall have to come to you!"

Oh, the depravity of society in these days, and oh, the unpleasantness of setting these things down! But, on the other hand, what a comfort it is to think that men as base as Brassfield are so

rare that you and I, my boy, have probably never met a specimen. And if you ever find, my love, that any person in whom you have any tender interest has ever behaved in a way similar to the conduct of Brassfield, you should give the prisoner the benefit of every doubt, and accord full weight to the precedent contained in this history, and to the fact that it was Brassfield and not Amidon who did this. A man can not be blamed for lapsing into the Brassfield state. A man should be acquitted—eh? Defending some one? Why, certainly not! And how long this paragraph is growing! Yes, I feel sure Clara Blatherwick repulsed these advances as she should, and that Brassfield, being fully under "control," did not—why, of course not, as you say!

But I am going no further with the matter now; except to say that in something like an hour Mr. Amidon departed much perturbed by the prospect of the nearness of his happiness, fully convinced of his unworthiness, and quakingly uncertain as to many things, but most of all, just then, as to his clothes!

"This man Brassfield," said he to himself, "seems to have been a good deal of a dude, and Elizabeth—the darling!—will expect me to be fully up to vogue in this regard—as she will be in all things. And I don't believe a thing has been done about clothes."

Meantime, Madame le Claire walked up and down in a locked chamber, struggling with her grief.

"Oh, it is hopeless, hopeless!" said the poor girl to herself, over and over again. "Florian, my darling Florian, whom I found blind and wandering in the wilderness, and took by the hand and guided to the light—Florian has gone from me! She has taken him, just as she took him before. But the man she thinks loves her—her Eugene—I'm sure he's coming to love me; and to be tired of her! And I could keep him Brassfield, if I chose—if I chose! I wonder—I wonder if it would be wrong? What would she do if she had my power? Twice I had to try, before I could restore him. I could! I could!"

Small wonder, therefore, that Madame le Claire sat wild-eyed and excited, and flew fearfully to Judge Blodgett and the professor, when Mr. Brassfield went free, with Alderson at heel. And all the time, as the crew of a ship carry on the routine of drill while the torpedo is speeding for her hull, these social amenities went on all unconscious of the explosion now imminent.

XV

THE TURPITUDE OF BRASSFIELD

Man to black Misfortune beckons
When upon himself he reckons,
Marshals Faith among his assets,
Blinks his nature's many facets.
This dull gem is an ascetic,
Bloodless, pulseless, apathetic:
Shift the light—a trifling matter—
Fra Anselmo turns a satyr!
—*The Kaleidoscope.*

Airily, Mr. Brassfield preceded his clerk down the stairway, and out into the street. There, something in the air—the balm of advancing spring; a faint chill, the Parthian shot of retreating winter; some psychic apprehension of the rising sap; the slight northing of the sun; or some subconscious clutch at knowledge of minute alterations in the landscape—apprised Mr. Brassfield's strangely circumscribed mind of the maladjustment with time resulting from the reign of Amidon. But however bewildered Florian's mentality might become at such things, it was different with Brassfield. The plane of consciousness in which he had so long moved, with a memory running back five years and there ending in a blank wall of nescience, had made him cunning and shifty—necessarily so. The struggle for existence had had its inevitable effect—the faculty paralyzed had been compensated for by the development of others. So he was not at all at a loss now, when this little hiatus in time struck on his mind in the form of a suspicion. He turned to Alderson with a smile.

"Do you remember what date this is, my boy?" he inquired.

Alderson named the date. Brassfield nodded, as if he were pleased to find Alderson correct in his exercises.

"Of course you know what we've arranged for to-day, don't you?" he went on.

"The deferred annual meeting of the Construction Company?" asked Alderson. "If that's it, it's

all attended to. I took the proxies to Mr. Smith yesterday."

"Good!" was Brassfield's hearty response. "You'll do for an animated 'office tickler' if you continue to improve. You used to forget all these things."

They had now come to a certain turning, down which Brassfield gazed, to a place where the highway was torn up and excavated. A center line of bowed backs, fringed by flying dirt. Indicated that the work was still in progress.

"You may go on to the office," said Brassfield, "and I'll be up immediately. I'm going down to see Barney Conlon a moment."

He walked down among the men, nodding to the busy ones, and stopping for a handshake or a joke with others.

"Hello, Barney," he shouted to the man who seemed to be in charge. "How long are you going to keep people jumping sideways to prevent themselves from being buried alive? You old Fenian!"

Conlon looked at him for a moment with an air of distinct disfavor.

"Look out there!" he shouted to a teamster who was unloading pipe. "D'ye want to kill the min in the trinch? Ah, is thot you, Mr. Brassfield?"

"What's left of me," replied Brassfield, quickly aware of the coolness of the reception—the politician's sensitiveness to danger. "By the way, Conlon, can't you come up to the office soon? I've got some specifications I want you to see. Pipe-line. Can you do that sort of work?"

"Do it!" gushed Conlon, thawing. "Do it! Ah, Mr. Brassfield, d'ye ask me thot, whin ye mind 'twas me thot done the Rogers job!"

"Oh, yes, I remember now, you did have that," said Brassfield. "Well, that was fairly well done. Come up and figure with me, and I believe we can make a deal."

"Thank ye kindly, Mr. Brassfield," said Conlon, all his obsequiousness returning. "Thank ye! Annything new in politics, Mr. Brassfield?"

"I don't know a thing," said Brassfield. "I'm so busy with other things, you know——"

"It'll be a great honor," said Conlon, "or so I should take it, to be the mare of the city, an' the master of the fine new house an' all that'll be in it, all this same spring!"

"Yes, Conlon, yes—but as to the office—I don't know about that."

"They can't bate you," asseverated Conlon promptly.

"Oh, I don't know," demurred Brassfield. "You can't always tell."

"We're wid ye, to a man," asserted Conlon unhesitatingly, growing warmer. "The common people are wid ye!"

"I'm glad to hear that," said Brassfield, "very glad. But business first; and this pipe-line is business. Of course, if the people demand it——"

"They will!"

"—why, I may—— I'll see, Conlon. Anyhow, I appreciate your friendship. Come up and see me."

And the candidate for mayor walked away, wondering how he could have offended Conlon, and rejoiced that he had "fixed" him in time.

"Where's the telegram?" he asked, as he entered his private office. "Why, Stevens might have attended to this. Where's Mr. Stevens? Miss Strong, send Mr. Stevens in!"

"Mr. Stevens!" gasped Miss Strong. "Mr. Stevens—why——"

"Oh, I mean where does he live now? I heard he was moving. And by sending him in, I mean, if you happen to meet him," hastily amended Mr. Brassfield, noting some error. "I want to see him. And show me his account, please; and kindly ring for a boy to take this message."

The books showed the discharge of Mr. Stevens, and the closing of his account. Brassfield frowned over it, but resumed his smile at Miss Strong's re-entrance.

"Let's see," said he. "What have we for this afternoon? These unanswered—Why, Miss Strong, these must be attended to at once! Please take some letters for me."

He had dropped into his rut. For an hour or more Miss Strong's fingers flew as she noted down his dictation, and at the end of that time the letters were answered, and the

communications which had so perplexed Amidon were filed away among other things done. The office force breathed freely once more, with the freedom of returning efficiency in management.

The man who had brought this relief to his employees now looked at his watch, rose, went out, and walking briskly down the main street, nodding to an acquaintance here, and speaking to another there, made his way out among the homes of the town.

Here his brisk walk gradually slowed down to a saunter. He was strolling toward the house with the white columns. Suddenly coming into view, as she turned a corner and walked on before him, appeared a young lady. Not much ability in the detective line would be necessary for the recognition of her by any of this girl's acquaintances, within any ordinary range of vision. If there were no certain revelation in the short, smartly-attired, quick-moving figure, there could be no mistake concerning the vividly brilliant hair, which glowed under the saucily-turned fabric of felt, feathers and velvet which crowned it, like a brilliant cloud display over a red sunset. Mr. Brassfield seemed to recognize her, for he quickened his pace so as to overtake her before she could come to a gateway, into which her glance and movements indicated that she was about to turn. He walked up by her side, and manifested to her his presence by falling into step and lightly pinching her shapely elbow.

"How-de-do, Daisy-daise!" said he, with the utmost assurance. "When did you bring the town the blessing of your presence?"

The lady gave a little scream.

"Gene Brassfield!" she ejaculated; and then, with a little quivering emphasis, "You! How you frightened me!"

"I know, I know!" replied Brassfield, peeping under the big hat into her eyes. "Almost scared to death, as is quite proper. But, to my question: how long, how long hast been here?"

"Oh, several days—before you came back. Aunty wanted me to be here when her sister, my Aunt Hunter from Hazelhurst—that's up in Wisconsin—visits her. There's to be a reception. Of course you'll be there, and——"

"Of course," responded Brassfield. "Did I ever absent myself from any social affair in which your charming aunt, Mrs. Pumphrey, is interested? Nay, nay; but don't dodge. Why this throw-down? Why didn't you let me know——"

"Gene," said the girl, "you can't deceive me. I'm ashamed that I wrote the note, and your telling a fib about getting it won't make it any better. But it was wicked of you not to answer. I only wanted you to come to me and—and talk it all over, and say good-by for ever. It wasn't necessary to——"

"I have never received any note," said Brassfield, totally unconscious of the missive which Amidon had promptly waste-basketed. "What was it?"

"Really? Didn't you?" she queried, pouting her red lips most kissably. "A little note, unsigned, with some—some verses? No? Then I'll forgive you—for that. But—go on, 'Gene, up to the house yonder—go on!"

"You oughtn't to be permitted to run at large," said he, "with that hat, and those lips. I wonder if any one's looking?"

"You mustn't talk that way," she said, "nor look at me like that! Go on, or I shall cry—or something quite as bad! Or, maybe you'll come in? Billy Cox is in there waiting for me, and watching, I dare say."

"Some other time," replied Brassfield, "I shall be delighted. But Miss Waldron has just been driven out into the street, and if she comes this way, I must exhibit myself to her, and maybe she'll pick me up. She's turning this way—— Billy, eh? Happy Billy; nice boy, too, since he stopped drinking. By-by, Daisy-daise!"

Elizabeth came driving down the road, and walking up it came Aaron, sable messenger of the anxious Madame le Claire, who had enlisted Aaron in her service to bring Brassfield again within her magic realm. He reached the object of his search before the carriage passed, and delivered a note.

"Tell Madame le Claire," said Brassfield, whose ideas with reference to that person must have been very hazy, "that such an invitation is a command. I'll be with her immediately."

He stood smiling, hat in hand, at the crossing, as Elizabeth drove by. She halted, and looked questioningly at him. This smile, this confident aspect—all these were so different from his recent bearing that she was surprised, and not more than half pleased. The element of assurance in his attitude toward the other girl was not seen in his treatment of Elizabeth, to whom it would have been offensive. Perhaps the cunning of the consciously abnormal intellect was the cause of this; or it may have been some emanation of dignity from the woman herself acting on a mind in a state chronically hypnotic. Be the cause what it may, to Elizabeth, with all his confidence and

ardor, he was most deferential and correct in manners, and, to her, these manners had undergone no change. Confidently, as if no shadow had ever come over their relations, he put his foot upon the step of the carriage.

"Won't you give me a lift," said he, "and put me down at my home?"

She made room for him with scarcely more than a word. "To the Bellevale House," said she to the coachman.

Brassfield looked at her, so grave, so *distinguée*, so coolly sweet, and forgot apparently that there was any one else in the world. He slipped his hand under the lap-robe, and gave hers a gentle pressure.

"Dearest!" he half-whispered, caring very little whether he was overheard or not.

She returned the caress by the slightest possible compression, and put her hand outside the robe. Whether the one action was incited by a desire to avoid complete unresponsiveness, and from a sense of duty only, the other left undecided.

The circumscribed mind of Brassfield which, with the intensity of observation rendered necessary and inevitable by its narrow field, had noted, as he stepped out in the street, the intangible shifting of relations in his surroundings incident to the mere passage of time in the few days of his obliteration, now felt, as a blind man feels the mountain in his approach, or as the steersman in a Newfoundland fog apprehends the nearing of the iceberg, some subtle alteration in the attitude toward him of the young woman by his side. Instantly he was on guard and keenly alert.

"This is a case," said he, "of the prophet coming to the mountain. I was on my way to you, and lo, I met you coming my way—let me hope coming to me—after seeing me!"

"The mountain is at liberty to draw his own conclusions," said Miss Waldron. "One may be reasonably charged with the design of meeting every one in Bellevale when one goes out."

"The mountain, then," said he, "must be content with its place as a portion of the landscape—happy if it pleases the prophet's eye."

"The prophet did not foresee—but let's have mercy on the poor hunted figure. I was about to say that your occupation—or preoccupation—as I drove down the street brought to my attention a new phase of our scenery—a brilliant one. Is this the girl I used to know as Daisy Scarlett?"

"It must be," said Brassfield, "and it surprises me that you speak of knowing her as of the past. How does it happen?"

"The exile of school," she answered, "and the fact that her visits to Bellevale have not been during such vacations as the girls would let me spend with Auntie. It's my loss—I have lived too tame a life."

"I, too; let's take the trail for sensations."

"Let me begin with a mild one," said Elizabeth. "Estelle writes me that she has been away from New York for the past month. So you are not a convicted criminal, at least."

Brassfield scanned her face to get the revelation of every turn of expression, as an aid to this mysterious reference to Estelle as related to his visit to New York.

"That's good," said he promptly, and with marvelous luck, "even a verdict of 'not proven' is a glad surprise on returning from New York. By the way, Bessie dear, won't you drive over by that gang of men? The foreman seems to want to speak to me."

Entirely oblivious of this dexterous turn, Miss Waldron complied, and drew up to the place where Barney Conlon's gang still labored in the trench.

"What is it, Conlon?" asked Brassfield.

"I was wonderin', sir," said Conlon, hat in hand, "if I could see you at your office in a half-hour or so. I'd not ask it, sir, if it wasn't important. It's about the business you was speakin' to me about this mornin'."

"Ah, yes: the pipe-line," said Brassfield. "Be at the office in half an hour, Conlon. Drive to the top of the hill, William. So goes our search for new thrills—road runs slap into pipe-lines and business, dearie."

"Well, we mustn't find fault with it for that," said she. "I've wanted to say to you—since the other evening—that I can see widening vistas showing oceans of good things I never reckoned on in the least. And when I get unreasonable and generally brutal and abusive, I am not really and fundamentally so any more than I am now!"

"I know, dearest; I know, Bessie. And, now, don't give yourself a minute's uneasiness about

anything that took place. I apologize for everything out of the proper which I said——"

"Which you *said*?"

"Yes—yes! You were quite right, and I never loved you more than then—except now. Let's not allude to it again, but just go on as before."

"Not quite as before," said she. "I'll not ask you why you kept back so many of your—your *my*—qualities from me—*must* you get down here at this old counting-room?—and I'll only ask you two questions—cramp the carriage a little more, William! One is, where can I get a copy of the first edition of Child's *Scottish Ballads*—wasn't that the name of the 'Dark Tower' book?"

"You may search me, Bessie," said he, standing by the curb in front of his office. "Don't think I ever heard of it."

"Oh, Eugene!" cried Elizabeth, "don't take that attitude again! But bring it up to me when you come to begin our readings in *Pippa Passes*!"

"Ah! Now you are joking! Good-by, Bess. Unless I'm run over between now and eight-thirty, you may look for me. By-by!"

Not quite so fortunate, this last five minutes of conversation. But all unaware of that fact, Brassfield went back into the private office, and found Conlon awaiting him. Brassfield opened a drawer and drew out a roll of drawings and typewritten specifications.

"Now as to this contract, Conlon——" he began.

"Ixcuse me, Misther Brassfield," interrupted Conlon, "but the contract may wait: some things won't. What's the matther with Edgington?"

"Edgington? The matter? What do you mean?"

Conlon leaned over the shelf of the roll-top desk, and pressed upon a paper-weight with his knobby thumb.

"Thin ye don't know," said he impressively, "that he's out pluggin' up a dale to bate you an' nominate McCorkle!"

Brassfield faced him smilingly.

"Oh, that notion of Edgington's!" said he. "That amounts to nothing! If you and my other strong friends stay by me, there's nothing to fear. I'm glad you know of that little whim of Edgington's. But about this contract. Now, I usually look after these things myself, and do them by days' work. But if I am forced to take this office of mayor, I sha'n't be able to do this—won't have the time; and I'll want you to do it. Perhaps I'd better give you a check on account now—say on the terms of the Rogers' job? All right, there's five hundred. That settles the contract. Now with that off our minds, let's talk of the political situation. You can see that, being forced into this, I don't want to be skinned. Now, what can you do, Conlon?"

"Do?" said Conlon. "Ask anny of the byes that've got things in the past! Wait till the carkuses an' ye'll see. But mind, Misther Brassfield, don't be too unconscious. Edgington an' McCorkle, startin' in on the run the day of carkuses, may have good cards. Watch thim!"

XVI

THE OFFICE GOES IN QUEST OF THE MAN

Victory brings peace without;
Amity conquers within.
How can my thought hide a doubt?
Doubt in the mighty is sin!
Yet, as I watch from my height,
Rearing his spears like a wood,
On swarms the dun Muscovite—
Slavish, inebriate, rude!
Dim-seen, within the profound,
Shapeless, insensate, malign,
Fold within dragon-fold wound,
Opes the dread Mongol his eyne!
*One waking, one in the field—
Foe after foe still I see.
Last of them all, half-revealed
Prophecy's eye rests on—Me!*

Mr. Brassfield sat alone, listening to Barney Conlon's retreating footsteps. A few years ago I could have described the solitude of the deserted counting-house, and made a really effective scene of it. Now, however, telephones exist to deny us the boon. No sooner do we find ourselves a moment alone, than we think of some one to whom we imagine we have something to say, and call him up over the wire; or, conversely, he thinks of us with like results. Conlon's back was scarcely turned before Brassfield took down the receiver and asked for Alvord's residence.

"Jim," said he, "I've just found out that Sheol is popping about town.... Yes, it's Edgington. Conlon tells me he's out for McCorkle and against me.... Well, maybe not, but Conlon generally knows. You must go out and run it down. We can't have McCorkle nominated—you can see why.... All right. I'll wait for you somewhere out of sight.... In the Turkish room at Tony's?... Very well: I had another engagement, but I must call that off. Thanks, old man. I shall rely on you! Good-by!"

Up went the receiver, and then, almost at once was lifted to Brassfield's ear again as he sent in a call for Miss Waldron's residence.

"Is this 758? Is Miss Waldron at home?... Yes, if you please.... This you, Bess? Well, I'm in the hardest of hard luck. Things have come up which will keep me cooped up all the evening.... You're awfully good to say so! Good night, dearest!"

The lock clicked behind him, and he was out on the street once more. Came into view a figure which was clearly that of a stranger to Bellevale, and yet had an oddly familiar air to Brassfield, as it moved uncertainly along the darkening highway. It came to the point of meeting and halted, facing Brassfield squarely.

"I peg bardon," it said, "but haf I the honor of addressing Herr Brassfield, or Herr Amidon?"

"My name is Brassfield," was the reply. "What can I do for you?"

"I am stopping at the Bellevale House," said the professor. "Blatherwick is my name. I hat hoped that you might rekonice me, as—"

"I am sorry to dispel your hope," said Brassfield. "What do you want with me?"

"I should pe klad to haf you aggompany me to my rooms," said the professor, "vere I shouldt esdeem it a brifiliche to bresent you to my daughter, and show you some dests in occult phenomena. As the shief citizen of the city—"

"My good man," said Brassfield, "whatever would be my attitude ordinarily toward your very kind, if rather unlooked-for, invitation, permit me now to decline on account of pressure of business. Ordinarily I should be curious to know just what kind of game you've got, as I haven't enough in my pockets to be worth your while to flimflam me. Pardon me, if I seem abrupt."

And he hurried down the street, leaving the professor drifting aimlessly in his wake, vibrating between anger and perplexity.

"I wonder where I've seen that man?" thought Brassfield. Dim reminiscences of such a figure sitting in shadowy background, while a glorious tigrine woman ruled over some realm only half-cognized, vexed the crepuscular and terror-breeding reaches of his mind. He met a policeman, who respectfully saluted him. Brassfield stopped as if for a chat with the officer.

"A fine evening, Mallory," said he.

"Fine, indeed, sir," said the officer.

"Who is the old gentleman whom you just passed?" asked Brassfield. "The one with the glasses."

"That?" asked the policeman. "Why, didn't you recognize him? That's your friend the hypnotist, up at the hotel—Professor Blatherwick."

"Oh," said Brassfield as he walked on, "I didn't know him in the dusk. We'll have to have better street lighting, eh, Mallory?"

"No bad idea!" said Mallory. "Well, it'll be for you to say, I'm thinking."

"You don't think there's anything in this new movement, do you?" asked Brassfield.

"Oh, no, sir," said the officer. "And yet, in politics you never know. But I feel sure it'll be all right. They can't do much this evening and to-morrow. Time's too short."

Brassfield hurried on with an air of anxiety. The policeman's words were not reassuring. He turned down a side street and entered a restaurant, the proprietor of which at once placed himself and his establishment at Mr. Brassfield's command.

"Give me the Turkish room, Tony," said Brassfield.

"Yes, sir, the Turkish room: and Charles to wait?"

"Yes," said Brassfield. "Cook me a tenderloin; and don't let any one come into the room."

"Certainly, Mr. Brassfield! The Turkish room, and a steak, and no one admitted——"

"Except such people as Mr. Alvord may bring. We shall want some good cigars, and a few bottles of that blue seal."

"Yes, sir," said Tony. "Will you speak to this gentleman before you go up, sir?"

Brassfield turned and confronted an elderly man of florid countenance, whose white mustache and frock-coat presented a most respectable appearance. Mr. Brassfield bent on him a piercing look, and strove mentally to account for the impression that he had met this man before, wondering again at that hazy association with the mystical, dreamy region of the woman in yellow and black. It was as if he saw everything that evening through some medium capable of imparting this mystic coloring. The stranger faced him steadily.

"I presume you remember me, Mr. Brassfield," said he. "Blodgett of Hazelhurst."

"Of course it's unpardonable in me," said Brassfield, "but I don't remember you, and I fear I've never heard of the place."

"Well," said Judge Blodgett, "it's entirely immaterial. I merely wanted to say that I've some matters of very great importance to communicate to you, if you'll just step up to my rooms at the Bellevale House."

"I can hardly conceive of anything you may have to say," said Brassfield guardedly, "which can not be as well said here. We are quite alone."

"I—the fact is," said the judge, floundering, "what I have to say must be communicated in the presence of a person who is there, a person——"

"May I ask whom?"

"A lady—Madame—Miss Blatherwick."

The cunning of mental limitation again served Brassfield. He recognized the name as the one mentioned by the professor on the street. Why this conspiracy to bring him to this strange woman at the hotel? Was it a plot? Was it blackmail or political trickery, or what?

"I am very much engaged to-night," said he. "Whatever you have to say, say here, and at once."

The judge felt like seizing his man forcibly, and taking him to Madame le Claire for restoration. The Brassfield cunning was an impenetrable defense. Bellevale's chief business man seemed to be himself again, a keen, cool man of affairs, to whom Judge Blodgett, Professor Blatherwick and Clara were, except for the brief and troubled intervals during which the Amidon personality had been brought uppermost, strangers,—until she could once more bring him within the magic ring of her occult power. Brought within it he must be, but how? The judge felt beaten and baffled. Yet he would try one more device.

"The matter can hardly be discussed here," said he, "but I may say that it relates to the evidence you lack in the Bunn's Ferry well cases. I happen to know of your desire for proof of certain facts in the spring of 1896, and——"

Mr. Brassfield started and changed color.

"You know—this woman knows," he said, "something to my advantage in the matter?"

Judge Blodgett nodded. Brassfield looked at his watch, paced back and forth, and made as if to follow Blodgett to the door. Blodgett's heart beat stifflingly.

"You are coming?" said he.

Something in the tone betrayed his anxiety. Again suspicion rose to dominance in the mind of Brassfield; and entering at the door came Jim Alvord, and one or two hulking, mustachioed citizens of the ward-heeler type. He turned on the judge.

"No," said he, "it is impossible for me to go now. But I am much interested in what you say, and to-morrow—— No, not to-morrow, for I shall be very busy; but the day after we will take it up with you, if quite convenient to you. In the meantime, if you will be so kind as to call on my lawyer, Mr. Edgington, I shall be very glad. He is authorized to make terms—anything reasonable, you know. Good night, Mr. Blodgett. I hope we shall meet again!"

"Your old friend Blodgett seems agitated to-night," said Alvord, as they sat alone in the Turkish room. "He's got to be quite a fellow here on the strength of your friendship. Wish he was a voter. We could use him. Maybe he can help in a quiet, way. Anything wrong with him? Seemed

worked up."

Smilingly, as if Alvord's remarks had been as plain to him as they were charged with mystery, Brassfield replied that so far as he knew Blodgett was all right, and that he might be of use further along in the campaign.

"And now," said he, "tell me what on earth has sent Edgington off on this tangent. He's the man who first suggested to me that I ought to run. It was his scheme. He's my lawyer and my friend. What does it mean?"

"Well, I saw Edge, and he's got a list of reasons longer'n an anaconda's dream. He says that since your return from your New York trip you've seemed different. I don't mind saying that there's others say the same thing."

"Different?" said Brassfield, in an anxiety rendered painful by the missing time and these strangers whom he was accused of knowing, but who behaved as strangers to him. "How?"

"Well," said Alvord, "kind of not the same in manner—offish with the gang, an' sort of addicted to the professor and the hypnotist—no kick from me, old chap, you understand, but I'm filing a kind of bill of exceptions, an' these things go in."

"I see," said Brassfield. "Go on!"

"Then you'll have to own you've done some funny stunts," continued Alvord. "You've fired old Stevens, and you've been going over your books with this man Blodgett, and talking of selling him an interest——"

"Talking of what?" exclaimed Brassfield.

"Oh, it's your own business, you know, but a sort of shock to the feelings and finances of the community all the same. Not that it affects me, or that many know of it, but the inner circle is disturbed—and, mind, I'm leading up to Edgington's flop."

"I see," said Brassfield. "Go on!"

"Well," said Alvord, "the mystery comes in right here. He says he went up to see you and you flew up and took a high moral attitude and said it was a dirty mess, and you wouldn't touch it. He thought it was some of Bess's isms that she brought home from college—civic purity, and all that impractical rot that these intellectual women get, and he says he began hunting for some one to run in to fill the vacancy caused by the declination of E. Brassfield. He was knocked numb when he found out that you were out for the place. You must have said *something* to him, you know. Now what in the name of Dodd was it?"

Brassfield walked up and down the room for a few moments, wringing his hands and alternately hardening and relaxing the muscles of his arms as if engaged in some physical culture exercise, but saying never a word. This blank Cimmeria of his past, into which he had stared vainly for five years, seemed about to deliver up its secret, or a part of it. Already, it was clear, it had disgorged this man Blodgett, and these other questionable characters at the inn. But they would find him ready for them. This man that was looking over his books would discover that what Eugene Brassfield wanted he took, and what he took he held. They were after his money, no doubt. Well, he would see. And in the meantime, Edgington's defection should not be allowed to disarrange matters. The business interests involved were too great. When he turned to answer Alvord, he was pale as death, but calm as ever.

"Oh, Edgington misconstrued entirely what I said," he answered. "I can't just repeat it—we had some talk along the lines he mentioned, but I never said anything that he ought to have understood in that way. Is he on the square, do you think?"

"On the dead square," said Alvord. "I'll stake my life on that."

"Well, what has he done?"

"He's got McCorkle out for the nomination."

"To stay?" asked Brassfield. "Can't we give Mac something else, later?"

"No, Edgington says not: you see, the colonel has wanted to be mayor a long time. Edgington can't pull him off, and as long as he sticks, Edge's got to stick by him. Edgington's for you as hard as ever after the caucuses—if you win."

"Yes," said Brassfield, "most everybody will be. You've run your eye over the line-up: can we win?"

"It depends," said Alvord, "on the two men down in the restaurant—Sheehan and Zalinsky. You know their following, and what they want. Our crowd stands in with the better element. McCorkle can't hold more than half his own church, and we're as strong as horseradish with the other gospel plants. The A. O. C. M. gang Edgington won't try to split, but will leave to us, and through them we'll get the liberal element in line—the saloons, and the seamy side generally, I

mean, of course. The labor vote we need help with, and I've brought in Sheehan and Zalinsky to sort of arrange a line of policy that'll round 'em up. With their help we'll control the caucuses. After the caucuses, it's plain sailing."

Brassfield made a few figures on a card, and handed it to Alvord, who looked at it attentively and nodded approvingly.

"That ought to be an elegant sufficiency," said he.

"All right," said Brassfield, "you handle that end of it, and I'll discuss the interests of labor. We'll show Colonel McCorkle what a fight without interests means in this town. Are the wine and cigars here? Then go down and bring the patriots up, Jim."

XVII

THE HONOR NEARS ITS QUARRY

And every man, and woman, too, was forged at Birmingham,
And mounted all in batteries, each on a separate cam;
And when one showed, in love or war or politics or fever,
A sign of maladjustment, why you just pulled on his lever,
And upside down and inside out and front side back he stood;
And the Inspector saw which one was evil, which was good.

Chorus:

On the other side!
On the other side!
Oh, you must somehow see the other side!
If you'd repair or clean
This delicate old machine,
You must have a way to see the other side!
—*The Inventor's Song in, "Bedlam."*

Messrs. Sheehan and Zalinsky, before being ushered into the Turkish room where Mr. Brassfield sat awaiting them, were told by Mr. Alvord that, should Mr. Brassfield's position on the labor question be found satisfactory to them, he would like to have their good offices in the matter of getting a fair attendance at the caucuses the next evening. As this is always an expensive thing for the patriot who engages to do it, he, Mr. Alvord, would beg to place at their disposal funds in an amount named by him, for use in the transportation of distant and enfeebled voters and for such refreshment as might be thought necessary.

"Weh-ull," said Sheehan, "Fr th' carkuses only it may do. What say, Zalinsky?"

Mr. Zalinsky, his eyes gleaming with gratification, thought the sum named might possibly suffice.

"Good!" said Alvord. "And now come up and see the next mayor."

"What's de use?" asked Zalinsky. "Don't we know him all right? Ain't it all fixed? I want to git busy wit me end of deliverin' de goods."

"Mr. Brassfield's views on labor—" began Alvord, but Sheehan interrupted him.

"Your word goes wid us!" said he. "Ye've convinced us Brassfield's the laborin' man's frind. What say, Zalinsky?"

"So!" said Zalinsky. "Ve better git to work over in de fourt' ward."

"They didn't come up," said Alvord, returning to the Turkish room. "The figures on that card seemed to convince 'em. Now for the saloons and their end of the vote."

"What do *they* want?" asked Brassfield.

"Why," said Alvord, "it's the policy of the office more'n anything else they want assurances on. I've sent for Fatty Pierson and his fellow members of the retail liquor dealers' association, and they'll be here by the time we dispose of this steak. I must be counted in on the dinner—I forgot mine."

While Alvord, greatly rejoiced at the sudden restoration of his friend to the possession of those qualities which made him so useful and reliable in all business projects, and promised so well for the future of Bellevale under his wise, conservative and liberal administration as mayor, was cozily discussing the dinner in the Turkish room at Tony's, awaiting the arrival of Mr. Fatty

Pierson and his committee, there was a council of the hypnotic board of strategy at the Bellevue House. The board consisted of Judge Blodgett, Professor Blatherwick, and Madame le Claire. The matter under consideration was how to return Brassfield to his much-to-be-desired nihility: how to recover Amidon from his relapse into occultation.

"I can never forgive myself for allowing it!" cried Madame le Claire. "And yet, how could I help it? His clerk came running in with a telegram, or something of the sort, and Mr. Amidon rushed away with him. What would this man have thought and said, if I had subjected his employer to the treatment necessary to restore him—put him into the cataleptic state, and then into the normal, by passes and manipulations!"

"Just now," answered the judge, "when he seems to be doing the meteor act in local politics, such an occurrence in public might be misconstrued in non-hypnotic circles, and commented on. Passes and manipulations are not thoroughly understood in politics—except in a different sense! I guess you had to let him go. How to get him back, is the question. He's certainly off the map as Amidon: turned me down when I tried to get him up here, with the air of a bank president dealing with a check-raiser; and yet, the way he rose to the lure of getting evidence in this lawsuit of his shows that he's as sharp as ever in business. What's likely to be the result if he's allowed to go in this way, Professor?"

"Nopody can say," said the professor. "He may go on as Brassfield for anodder fife years or more. He may vake up as Amidon to-morrow morning. Propoply he vill geep on intefinitely, aggululating spondulix, and smashing hearts, unless ve can pinch him some vay."

"Oh, we must get him back!" said Madame le Claire. "We *must!*"

"In te interests off science," said the professor, "id vould pe tesiraple to allow him to go on as Brassfield ant note results. Ve haf already optained some faluaple data in the fact of his attempt to buy the destimony of our frient the chutche, and his gontemptuous treatment of me as a con man. He didn't seem to remember us at all. Should ve not allow de gase to go on a vile? Suplimentally considered, it vill be great stuff!"

"No!" exclaimed the judge. "It ain't safe. He'll be running for mayor, and doing a lot of things to make him trouble when he does come to. We've got to surround him somehow; and he's a wary bird."

"Anyway," said the professor, "I should like to opsairve the result of a meeting with Clara. In his short Brassfield states he saw her, ant her only. Vill he remember her clearly, or how? How vill dis mind of his coordinate te tisonnected views of her, with te rest of his world? It ought to pe vorked out."

"Well," said the judge, "I don't owe science much. I'm against any experiments. Can't some one suggest something to do? Is it feasible to kidnap him?"

"Let me suggest something," said Madame le Claire hesitatingly. "In his Brassfield state he seemed to—to like me very much. In affairs concerning—that is, affairs relating to women—he seems less wary, to use Judge Blodgett's word, than he is on other lines. Maybe I could—could induce him to come. It seems a sort of—of questionable thing to do; but—"

"Questionable!" cried the judge, "questionable! Why, not at all. We must try it. I'll risk it!"

"If ve are to gif up te itea of vorking out the gase," acquiesced the professor, "vy I agree with the chutche."

"That is," said the girl, "like the judge, you'll 'risk it.' Very brave of you both to 'risk' so much! As for me, I must ask for time to think over my own proposal, before I undertake to entrap this prominent business man at my apartments. I'm not so sure that I'll 'risk' it. And yet it seems the only way!"

Speaking of traps: The emissaries of the retail liquor dealers' association were engaged in a trapping enterprise of their own in the Turkish room at Tony's, at this very crucial moment. Fatty Pierson, and two fellow retailers, gentlemen of smooth-shaven face, ample girth, and that peculiar physiognomy which seems fitted to no artistic setting except a background of mirrors and glasses, and a plain foreground of polished wood, were arranging for a police policy to their liking, during the Brassfield administration.

"Colonel McCorkle," said Fatty, "is a mighty good man, and, while a church member, seems to be liberal. On the other hand, you're well known to be broad in your views, and you do things"—here Fatty's arm took in the bottles and the cigars with a sweeping gesture—"that he don't. You've got property rented for saloon purposes. We know you're a good man, Mr. Brassfield, but in such matters we saloon men have learned to be careful. A police force can make our business profitable or put us all dead losers, just as they're steered by the mayor. Now, what would be your policy?"

"I should expect," said Mr. Brassfield, "to give the city a good, conservative, business

administration, and to make my oath of office my guide."

"Good!" said Fatty. "But we've all heard that before. Colonel McCorkle, or the Reverend Absalom McCosh, would say *that*."

"Well," said Brassfield, "now, definitely, what do you want? Anything reasonable and not contrary to law, you have only to ask for."

I wonder if burglars, in arranging their business, stipulate that nothing "contrary to law" is to be done!

"Exactly," replied Fatty. "But now as to reasonableness: when the hour for closing comes, our customers bein' gathered for social purposes, it seems abrupt to fire 'em all out when the clock strikes. Now, when a policeman comes along after hours an' finds one of us with a roomful of customers discussin' public questions, we don't want to turn up in court next morning. See?"

"I see," said Brassfield. "My view of the function of the saloon is that it is a sort of club for those too poor to belong to the more exclusive organizations. As long as they are performing these functions in an orderly way, why inquire as to the hour?"

"That seems reasonable," said Fatty. "And about how long ought a man to have to slow up an' stop performin' functions, do you think?"

"Well," said Mr. Brassfield, "there isn't much doing in the way of business, say from two to five A. M., is there?"

"No," said Mr. Pierson, "not much. But on special occasions——?"

"I shall do the right thing," said Brassfield.

"An' you wouldn't feel obliged," queried Pierson, "to start any detectives out spyin' upon the uses we put our second stories to, or the kind of tenants we have?"

"Not at all," said Brassfield. "I shan't disturb things. Alvord can tell you that. What I want is the policy that is best for the property owners; and things as they are are good enough for me. Is that satisfactory?"

"Well, I should smile!" said Mr. Pierson. "And now, gentlemen, before we go an' begin work for the caucuses to-morrow, in the interests of our friend here, I propose a toast to Mr. Eugene Brassfield, who will be the best mayor Bellevale ever had!"

"You've got to give me a bed to-night," said Brassfield, as the last of the delegations Alvord had brought to the Turkish room retired in apparent satisfaction. "I don't care to go to my rooms—there are too many folks up there at the hotel who seem anxious to see me. And I want to be where I can talk the situation over with you."

"Glad to have you," said Alvord. "Come on, and we'll turn in. As for the situation, how can you improve it? If Conlon and Sheehan and Zalinsky can't control these caucuses, I'm mistaken. Put them along with the saloons and the others that depend on police permission for existence, and you've got a dead open-and-shut."

As they walked along the street they noticed a motley crowd emerging from a public house and moving in a body to another, seemingly under the leadership of a little man with Jewish features. Alvord took Brassfield's arm and hurried him on.

"You see what Edgington's up to?" asked Brassfield. "He's got Abe Meyer out taking the crowd down the line in McCorkle's interest. I wonder if they won't turn things over somewhat."

"Turn nothing!" said Alvord. "They'll make the noise to-night; we'll have the votes to-morrow night. The boys'll rake in McCorkle's money now, and in the morning the word will be passed that the best interests of the town require every one to boost for you. They won't know what hit 'em!"

"I hope you're right," answered Brassfield, "but Edgington's no fool. I wouldn't have him for my lawyer if he was."

"Of course he's no fool," was Alvord's reply, "but he's handicapped by the personality of his man. Edge's doing pretty well, considering. He probably is wise to the situation. He didn't expect anything like a contest, you know, owing to that confounded blunder one of you two made. Now he's doing the best he can; but his man's been too strong in the God-and-morality way in years gone by to wipe out the stain by one evening of free booze. On the other hand, your life has been perfect—always careful and sound in business, no isms or reform sentiments on any line, a free spender, a paying attendant of the richest church, but not a member, and no wife full of wild ideas for the uplifting of folks that don't want to be uplifted. Why, Mrs. McCorkle's advanced ideas alone are enough to make him lose out."

"I don't know about that," said Brassfield. "McCorkle and his wife are not the same in these affairs."

"Well, don't you fall down and forget it," said Alvord, "that the fellows on the seamy side won't see it your way. They've got good imaginations, and they can see the colonel on one side of the table and his wife, the president of the Social Purity League, pouring tea on the other, and they can see the position it would put the mayor in to do the right thing along liberal lines—and he sort of strict in habits himself. No, sir, my boy, you go to bed and sleep sweetly. You are about to reap the reward of living the right kind of a life."

And sweetly Mr. Brassfield slept, with none of the anxiety felt by Judge Blodgett as to whether he would awake as Brassfield or Amidon.

XVIII

A GLORIOUS VICTORY

Narcissus saw his image, and fell in love with it,
But jilted pretty Echo, who wailed and never quit.
This beauteous youth was far less kind than I, my friend, or you:
For we adore our own good looks and love our echoes, too.
—*Adventures in Egoism.*

I really shrink from giving an account of the result of the Bellevale caucuses next evening, for fear of imparting to the general reader—who is, of course, a violent patriot—the idea that I am narrating facts showing an exceptionally bad condition in municipal affairs, in the triumph of one or the other of two bad men. This impression I should be loath to give. Colonel McCorkle, whom we know by hearsay only, seems to be so good a citizen that his belated attempt to be "broad" and "liberal" excites laughter in some quarters. As for Mr. Brassfield, there are at least nine chances in ten that he is the man who would have received the support of the gentle reader had it been his own city's campaign.

In fact, Mr. Brassfield is psychologically incapable of deviating much from the course marked out by the average ethics of his surroundings. This subconscious mind which—as Professor Blatherwick so clearly explained to us—normally operates below the plane of consciousness, happens, in his case, to be abnormally acting consciously; but it is still controlled by suggestion. The money-making mania being in all minds, he becomes a money-maker. The usual attitude of society toward all things—including, let us say, women, poetry, politics and public duty—is the one into which the Brassfield mind inevitably fell. The men on whom any age bestows the accolade of greatness, are those who embody the qualities—virtues and vices—of that age. Your popular statesman and hero is merely the incarnate Now. Every president is to his supporters "fit to rank with Washington and Lincoln." Future ages may accord to him only respectable mediocrity; but the generation which sees itself reflected in him, sees beauty and greatness in the reflection. Bellevale was psychically reflected in Brassfield. Therefore Bellevale raised him on the shield of popularity. One may see this reflected in the conversation of Major Pumphrey, one of Bellevale's solid citizens, with Mr. Smith, who owned the department store, on the morning after the caucuses.

"Rather lively times, I hear," said Major Pumphrey, catching step with Mr. Smith on their walk down town. "Rather lively times at the caucuses last evening."

"Really," answered Mr. Smith, "I don't know. I never attend caucuses. Every one has his friends, you know, and by not taking sides one saves many enmities."

"I don't agree with you," said the major. "Every one should attend his party primaries, as a matter of duty."

"You were out last night?" said the merchant interrogatively.

"Why, no," said the major, "not last night. The fact is, Colonel McCorkle and I served in the same regiment, and belong to the post here, and he expected me to support him. At the same time, the nomination of Mr. Brassfield appeared to be the only right thing from the standpoint of party expediency or business wisdom. Brassfield can be elected. He is strong in business circles. His integrity is unquestioned, and there'll be no graft or shady deals under him. He stands well in society, too. I just saw Doctor Bulkon, who expressed himself as thoroughly delighted with the nomination of so good a man as Brassfield, and intends to preach next Sunday on 'The Christian's Vote,' handling the subject in such a way as to point to Brassfield as the right man. I couldn't consistently oppose Brassfield, and so I stayed at home."

"Oh, you're quite right!" exclaimed Mr. Smith. "My attendance would not have made any difference in the result. Colonel McCorkle is a good man, but after Mr. Brassfield made us a present of the money to pay off our church debt recently none of us could decently have gone out and worked against him even for the colonel. They say that McCorkle is a good deal chagrined by the small showing he made—claims that the saloons and the lower classes ran the caucuses, and

that the decent element stayed away altogether."

"Pooh!" scoffed Mr. Pumphrey. "A little sore is all—soon get over it. I only hope Brassfield will be able to get us that trolley line he promises. That would bring Bellevalle abreast of the times."

"That's certainly true," was Mr. Smith's answer. "Mr. Brassfield is an enterprising citizen, broad and liberal, safe and sane, and fully in touch with the great business interests of the country. His nomination will reflect credit on Bellevalle."

Inasmuch as such citizens as Conlon, Pierson, Sheehan and Zalinsky were equally well contented, no one, it would seem, ought to have been dissatisfied. The fact that Mr. Brassfield's success meant the giving away of Bellevalle's streets to Brassfield's interurban trolley line must be considered in connection with the fact that Bellevalle seemed only too anxious to give them away.

One must look at such things from all sides, if one is to come to a satisfactory conclusion. Miss Waldron, having a keenly personal interest in the matter, and being a member of the cultured and leisure class, endeavored to do this. Her conclusions, both personal and political, seem to be fully set forth in a letter which she wrote to her friend Estelle in New York.

"You know I always was a queer little beast," said this letter, after a few pages in which such words as "chiffon," "corsage," "lingerie," "full ritual," and similar expressions occur with some frequency, but the contents of which are quite obscure in their bearing on the course of this history—"and was ever finding happiness where others saw misery, and *vice versa*. Well, I am doing something of the same sort now in turning over and over in my mind the question as to whether I should ever marry any one or not. I know perfectly well that no one can ever be the One for me if Eugene is not—but is there a One? Don't say that I am a little—goose, but listen and ponder.

"You remember the sort of literary friendship I had with George L—? Well, of course George was a veritable Miss Nancy, and perfectly absurd, but there was something basically likeable about him. Now, I always have thought that if one could grind George and Eugene to a pulp and mix them, the compromise would be my ideal. I like men who do things, and Eugene is the most forceful man I ever knew. Owing to your absence when he was in New York you missed seeing him, but his pictures must have shown you how handsome and strong and masterly he is. Well, this phase of a man must please any girl.

"Is it possible for such qualities to subsist in the same personality with those I loved (there's no use denying it—in a platonic sense) in George? In other words, can one reasonably expect to find a man who can win battles in the world's life of this twentieth century, who will not stare at one in utter lack of comprehension when he finds one dropping tears on the pages of *Charmides*, or *McAndrew's Prayer*, or Omar, and perhaps try to comfort one—at the moment when the divine despair wrought by poignant beauty fills one with divine happiness? It's horribly clumsy as I put it; but you'll know.

"He's just as good and kind and considerate as a man can be, and as little spoiled by the fierce battles which he has fought—*and won!*—as could possibly be expected—in fact, not at all spoiled. Even this suspicion of a lack of the gift of seeing that the violet 'neath a mossy stone is a good deal more than that—the chief good quality George had—around which I have been writing in these pages, seems to be more a suspicion than a reality; for recently he has once or twice ventured on discussions of such matters with a confidence and an insight which put me—me, who have plumed myself on my mental St. Simeon's tower, like a detestable intellectual cockatoo (you must untwist the metaphors!)—at his feet in the attitude of a humble learner. It took some of the conceit out of me; and yet, with true Elizabethan inconsistency I turned this new view of his character against him, and because he—well, it doesn't matter what—I gave him a pre-nuptial instalment of 'cruel and inhuman treatment.'

"Then he became timid and over-respectful, and not at all like himself, and I all the time just longing to make up to him all the arrears of kindness which were due. It seemed as if I had a new lover, one who needed encouragement, one who made a goddess of me, in the place of the almost too bold gallant who had been mine; and lo! when he suddenly comes on me with all his pristine assurance and seeming contempt for the weepful things I mentioned above, I don't like it at all. I feel as if two men in the same mask are courting me, and I without discernment enough to tell one from the other.

"Now, if I am so shilly-shallying as this before marriage, what shall I be after? Can I go on with so much of doubt in my own mind?

"Oh, if I could only be sure of the Eugene I think I sometimes see, strong to do, tender to feel, and with the uplift of insight—"

"To show how thoroughly insane my state of mind is, I have only to say to you that by the exercise of the most tremendous pressure on the part of our very best men, Eugene, much against his will, has been put in nomination for mayor. He will purify the civic life of our town, and, I am assured, will, if he will enter public life to that extent, be sent to Washington.

"I have always thought that I'd like Washington society—"

Here Elizabeth's letter came to an end. She read it over carefully, tore it up, threw the fragments in the grate, and wrote her friend another and maybe a wiser one. Then she wrote to Mr. Brassfield a note which Mr. Amidon found in his room when he returned to being.

One can easily see from that which has gone before, what happened to Colonel McCorkle. Edgington and Alvord and Brassfield talked it over in the Turkish room at Tony's after the caucuses.

"Of course you've made an ass of yourself, Edgington," said Mr. Brassfield, "but you've gone through with it consistently, and it's all right. I could have explained all that idiotic talk of mine about not running—but why go over that now? Fill your glasses, and let's forget it!"

"That's the talk!" said Alvord. "Forget it and all pull together in this campaign you've made me the manager of."

"Well, as for forgetting it and pulling together," said Edgington, "I, as the originator of the Brassfield idea, am not likely to hang back in the harness. So, here's to success! But——"

"There's no 'but' in this," said Alvord. "The 'buts' are postponed until after election."

"There's nothing to the election," said Edgington. "You have things lined up——"

"We have things lined up——" suggested Alvord.

"Yes, that's right," acquiesced Edgington. "It's 'we,' with all my heart since the decision. I was saying that the way you have the different interests working together is perfectly ideal, the wets and the dries, the wide-opens and the closed-lids, the saloons and the dives and the churches—all shouting for Brassfield; and each class thinks he's for its policy. The other man has about as much show—well, the next is on me. Would you mind pressing the button, Jim?"

The waiter came, bringing a penciled note to Mr. Brassfield.

"One of your constituents," it read, "would like a moment's conversation with you in the lobby."

Brassfield drew the waiter aside.

"Who is this, George?" asked he, tapping the note. "A woman?"

"A young lady, suh," was the answer. "A mahty hahnsome young lady, suh."

"Bright auburn hair?" asked Brassfield, "and short?"

"Er—no, suh," answered the waiter, "sutn'y not that kin' o' haiah; an' tall, suh."

"Make mine the same," said Brassfield, "and excuse me a moment, boys. I'll be right back."

The note had said in the lobby, but the waiter guided him to a private room. Brassfield, cautious as usual, by a gesture commanded the waiter to precede him into the room, and himself halted at the entrance, looking about the room for the young woman. She sat near the window, and rose to greet him as he entered—a tall and graceful girl with wonderful eyes and variegated hair.

"I could not wait to give you my congratulations," said she, offering him her hand, "until you came home. We at the hotel are wondering why we have lost you. Let me rejoice with you in your great triumph."

Brassfield's eyes sought hers. His soul recognized this as the queen of those hazy recollections which he could scarcely believe more than dreams, and felt her dominance.

"Thank you, ever so much," said he. "I was just coming up to see you."

"How nice of you," said she. "And in that case, why not go up with me and join me at my supper, which will be served in ten minutes?"

"Why not, indeed!" said Brassfield. "George, tell Mr. Alvord and Mr. Edgington that I'll see them in the morning!"

THE ENTRAPPING OF MR. BRASSFIELD

Ol' Mistah Wolf is a smaht ol' man,
An' a raght smaht man is he;
He take all the meat fum the trap an' he eat
Not a mossel dat poisoned be!
He laff at the snaiah, an' he nevah caiah
When de niggah wake fum his nap;
But he foller the trail o' little Miss Wolf
Raght inter the jaws o' the trap!
But he foller the scent o' little Miss Wolf
Kerslap in the deadfall trap!
—*"Hidin'-Out" Songs.*

From a room adjoining that in which Madame le Claire had won her seeming victory over Mr. Brassfield's caution, emerged hastily that young woman's accomplices—her father and Judge Blodgett—who had shamelessly listened to the whole conversation. With more of haste than seemliness they sped before Le Claire and her captive, and by vigorous expletives put the patient Aaron into unwonted motion in the procuring of the "little supper" which they had heard Clara promise to the candidate for mayor. Then, in a chamber farthest from the door, and well sheltered by draperies, they sat them down and waited for their prey.

"He's hooked!" said the judge, "hooked well; and I'll gamble she lands him. She's a brick, Professor."

"So!" answered the other. "Ant now, if she vill only—what you call: reel him, blay him—until ve can get the data ve vant——"

"To blazes with the data!" exclaimed the judge. "I'm for getting him back into the Amidon state and respectability, data or no data, before some one else tolls him off into the poisonous swamp of popularity. Why, I tell you, Professor—hark! There they come! Lay low, now!"

The professor grasped his note-book, the judge the arms of his chair, as the door opened, and in the front room they heard Madame le Claire's voice joining in companionable chat with that of Brassfield.

"Oh, how slow Aaron is!" she said. "And I'm so hungry. Aren't you?"

"Not so much so as I was," said he. "Sweets take away the appetite. I'd rather call the supper off, and exclude Abraham—or whatever his name is: much rather."

"Selfish!" she reproved very severely. "And I just in from a two hours' walk. *I* haven't eaten any sweets——"

"Nor I," said he. "May I have just a little taste?"

"Mr. Brassfield! Don't make me sorry I invited you here! Aaron's likely to come in at any moment. Do you know when you were here last?"

Brassfield's brow wrinkled, as he looked about him.

"Ye-e-es," said he slowly, as if in doubt; and then in his ordinary manner: "Well, I should think I did. The day that donkey, Alderson, came with the telegram. My faith, and so much has happened in the two or three days since! But to suggest that I could forget!"

"Why not?" said she, slipping close to him as he sat in a broad-armed easy chair. "I'll wager anything you say you can't remember half the times you've been in my presence. Come now, the first time!"

"Pshaw!" said he, "I'm not going into ancient history, further than to say it was in a room with hangings like these, and a roar of traffic in the street below. Come, dear, let's not talk of that——"

Her hand, straying near his hair, he took in his, and, crushing it to his lips, kissed it passionately. She sank down on the side of his chair, and his arm crept insinuatingly about her waist. Her arms went round his neck, and she drew his head to her breast, softly, tenderly, and her lips met his—so many times that for years she blushed when the memory returned to her.

"Darling!" he whispered, "do you love me?"

"Love you?" said she. "Look in my eyes and see!"

Slowly, with her left hand in the curls on his neck, she drew her face from his, and, as if fascinated, his eyes sought hers in a long, long, hungry look.

"You do!" he began gaspingly. "Yes——"

The slender fingers moved upward over his head, the commanding eyes held his, the other hand, as if for a caress, swept his eyes shut, and he lay back in the chair, inert as a corpse. Madame le Claire untwined his arms from her waist, and knelt on the floor before him, her hands

clasped on his knees, her head pillowed in his senseless lap.

Their unseen auditors heard no more conversation, and the judge moved softly out to a place where he could see. Clara was sobbing as she groveled at the feet of the man she had obliterated, rescued and restored, and as she sobbed she pressed his hands to her lips. Judge Blodgett went back to the window, lifted it noisily and lowered it with a crash. Then he walked into the front room, and found Madame le Claire sitting in a chair across the room from her subject, smilingly and triumphantly regarding the result of the exercise of her mystic power.

"Is he all right?" queried the judge, looking at the inert form. Madame waved her hand at their prisoner, in answer.

"Cataleptic," said the professor, peering at him through his glasses. "Bulse feeble, preath imberceptible. Yes, he is reeled in."

"Well, give him the gaff," said Blodgett. "In other words, fetch him to."

Madame le Claire stretched vibrant hands toward the entranced man, and again uttered the sharp command, "Awake!"

Amidon smilingly opened his eyes, and looked about him.

"Where are the letters?" said he, looking about for those vexing communications, to find the meaning of which had been the object of the inquiry from which Alderson had drawn him with the telegram. "Did you note on them the information we wanted? Why, is it night? How long have you had me under the influence? Is anything the matter, Clara?"

"Not now," said Le Claire.

"Now eferyding is recht," added the professor.

"But you have given us the devil's own chase," said the judge.

"It is nearly midnight," said Mr. Amidon. "Have I been out all the afternoon?"

"All the afternoon!" exclaimed Blodgett. "Yes, and all day, and all yesterday, and the day before, and other days! You've been raising merry Ned, Florian, in your Brassfield capacity. Do you want to know what you've done?"

"*Do I?*" he cried. "Tell me all at once!"

"Well, for one thing," said the old lawyer, "Edgington's long-incubated scheme has hatched, and you've been through a strenuous mayoralty contest with Colonel McCorkle, and have swept the board. Your friends insisted on it, you know, and you couldn't decline."

"Friends!" sneered Amidon. "I tell you, the whole thing is hypocrisy and graft. That villain Brassfield has a scheme for stealing the streets. I told Edgington I wouldn't—"

"Yes," said the judge, "and he took you at your word and trotted McCorkle out, and you trimmed them up. But it's all made up with him, now, and you and he and Alvord are as thick as thieves. You've got a jewel of a campaign manager in that man Alvord—"

"Judge," cried Amidon, "I want you to get up a letter of withdrawal—you have watched the miserable business, and know more of it than I do—one that will make me as little ridiculous as possible, you know. I don't care for the people in general, but there are some whose good opinion I prize—"

"I know, Florian," said the judge. "I know. But you can't expect to cut a very good figure, you know."

"Well, manage it as well as you can, and—I suppose you've watched me?" he continued. "Why did you let me go this way! Have I been up to Miss Waldron's?"

"Once or twice for a few minutes," answered Madame le Claire. "You have been very busy indeed; and yesterday Miss Waldron went out of town."

"I think," said Judge Blodgett, "that you will find a letter from her in your room. Alderson brought it up from the counting-house."

"Well, you must excuse me," said Mr. Amidon. "I want to talk this all over with you early in the morning; but I must go to my room now. No, thank you, Clara, I really can not stay to your supper. To-morrow you must tell me how you kidnapped me—I never can repay you for your faithful service to me. Good night!"

The discerning reader has already anticipated that Mr. Amidon went straight to the letter and opened it.

"Dearest Eugene," it said, "I want to give you a word to say that I am proud of the love and confidence which every one has for you, and to say that I do not regard the place to which you are to be elected as unimportant, or one which you should decline. Of all men you are best able to protect our town against corruption, and to lift its civic life to a higher plane. I wish I might help your fellow townsmen to confer *you* upon *it*. Maybe I can help in cheering you along the way after this is done.

"I have all sorts of pride in and ambition for you. Hitherto, you have confined yourself too closely to the practical and productively utilitarian. I shall watch with all the interest you can desire me to feel, this new career of yours, beginning so modestly and so much against your will; but reaching, I feel sure, to the state and national capitals.

"Do you know, I have always imagined myself capable of founding Primrose Leagues, and becoming a real political force? Spend the afternoon with me Sunday, and we'll talk it over—come early.

"Yours in loving partizanship,
"Elizabeth."

Florian sat for a long time pondering over this letter. It was the thing about which his thought centered the next morning. When the judge said that he was at work on the letter of withdrawal, Amidon remarked that there was no hurry, as he should not use the letter until after a conference with Miss Waldron. Then he went to spend his Sunday afternoon with his fiancée, according to her invitation.

The "dear Eugene," and the tone of co-proprietorship in this new "career" of his which seemed so deliciously intimate in her letter, faded from his memory as he faced her in her home, so stately, so kind, so far from fond. Her rebellion from those mad kisses of his on his first visit had thoroughly intimidated him. He felt, now, that he must win his way to such blisses by slow degrees, as if the Brassfield life had never been for her more than for him. So they talked over the cool and sensible things they might have discussed had she been his grandmother; among others, the campaign.

She had tremendously good ideas as to city government. Amidon had long entertained similar notions, and that their unity of sentiment might appear, each wrote answers to a list of questions which they made up, and Amidon was hugely delighted to find that they agreed precisely.

"Why not make it your platform?" she asked.

"You mean, a public manifesto?" he queried.

"Surely," said she. "The people ought to know what we represent. Print it, so all may be well informed."

"But that would be an acceptance of the nomination," said he.

"Hardly," she replied. "We have already accepted, and that's settled. But it will raise the contest to one of principle. The best elements of society are with you—Doctor Bulkon might as well have mentioned your name as he described the ideal candidate to-day—and such a noble declaration from you will fill them with joy. Oh, don't you think so?"

"Elizabeth," said he, "if I take this office, it will be for your sake. I shall withdraw, or run on your platform."

"Oh, you can't withdraw," she asseverated. "Not now!"

The adoring glances, in which she constantly surprised him, mitigated somewhat the pique which his ceremoniously respectful parting raised in her heart. She stood looking at the hand he had kissed, and wondering if this was the Eugene of days gone by, but was not quite able to think him cold to her. This was true at all events, she thought, the offensiveness—half-reserve, half-familiarity—the curious impression of strangeness which so nearly caused a breach between them on his return from New York—that was gone, at least. This new attitude of his—well, that was to be considered. In some respects, the change had its element of piquancy—like a love affair with an innocent boy where the wiles of experience had been expected.

In the meantime, Mr. Alvord was happy. He had opened "Brassfield Headquarters," over which he presided with a force of clerks who were busy with poll-books and other clerkly-looking properties. "But," said he to Slater, who called to see him about funds for putting in order the links of the Bellevalle Golf and Boating Club against the coming of spring, "there's nothing to it. With the preachers exhorting for us and the wet-goods push and sports plugging enthusiastically, and not a drop of water spilling from either shoulder, the outlook couldn't be better. Of course, we have to go through the form of a contest, but there's no real fight in it."

"I don't see how there can be," said Mr. Slater. "But what's all this work for?"

"Well," said Alvord, "we've got to keep up the organization, and so we poll the town. It gives some men employment for a few days that would be sore if they didn't get it. Then we have to

send out the *pièce de resistance* for keg parties of evenings. The way the petitions come in for kegs is surprising. A man calls and says his name's Pat Burke, or Karl Schmidt, and that they've organized a club for the study of public questions, meeting every night at Jones' Coke Ovens or Webber's Chicken House, and they expect to have up the mayoralty question for debate to-night—only he generally calls it the 'morality' question—and could we send them a barrel of beer? We know that there's only a corporal's guard, mostly aliens, but we send 'em a pony. Another puts up a spiel that he's been spending his own money electioneering for Brassfield—he never had over fifty cents in the world, but he's spent forty dollars—and he can't stand the financial strain any longer. He's palpitating with love for Brassfield. He knows where there's twenty-five votes he can get, if he can have say ten dollars for booze—he'll leave it entirely to us. We know he's a fake, of course, but we give him a V. We've got to spend Brass's roll somehow."

"Where's he keeping himself?" asked Slater. "I haven't seen him since Saturday. Isn't he out shaking hands?"

"No," was the answer. "He'd rather buy what he wants, and not do any canvassing. It isn't necessary, anyhow. That supper we arranged for before he was put up will bring him into contact with some of the strongest lines of influence, and will finish the reconciliation with Edgington. Then Mrs. Pumphrey's reception and some other affairs will be all the publicity we'll need. No noise for ours, anyhow. The gum-shoe is our emblem, and we don't let our right hand know what our left wing is driving at. 'Gene leaves it all to me, and don't ever show up here. That girl business—the strawberry blonde, you know—seems all lost sight of, and there ain't a cloud in the sky."

A clerk entered and informed Alvord that a man named Amidon wanted to speak to him at the telephone.

"Another debating society wants irrigating, I s'pose," said he. "Hello! This is headquarters... Yes, it's Alvord speaking to you.... Oh, is it you, Brass? They said it was a man named Amidon. Wire's crossed, I s'pose. Worst telephone service I ever saw. All right, go ahead."

Here followed a long pause broken occasionally by "yes," and "I know," and "no," from Alvord. At last, in tones of amazement, he broke forth in a storm of protest.

"What! Publish a platform?" he shouted. "Are you crazy? No, I most emphatically don't think so. Why—now listen a moment, 'Gene,—I've got the best still hunt framed up you ever saw. We're winning in a walk.... Well, if you want to make your position clear, I know I can trust you to make your manifesto the right thing. But mind, I advise against it!... Yes, sure, as many things as you want to talk about, old man.... Yes, I've heard about the idea; but never saw it indorsed by any practical people.... Yes.... No. No!... *No!* ... I tell you NO!... Why, you know we've spent sums that we couldn't possibly publish. What have you been drinking, 'Gene? Here, damn you, this is all a josh! Come down here and I'll buy.... What's that? You really want to publish a schedule of your election expenses? Well, I'll keep the schedule, and you can print 'em if you want to. Come up to headquarters, and I'll show 'em to you. Good-by!"

Alvord hung up the receiver, and went back to his inner office.

"By George, Slater," said he, "Brassfield is absolutely the most deceptive joshier I ever saw. He had me going just now by pretending that he was about to publish a platform of principles, and a statement of campaign disbursements. So blooming solemn it gave me the shivers for a minute. List of disbursements: think of it, Slater! And a platform, in our kind of politics!"

XX

THE STRAWBERRY BLONDE

The year will all be summer weather
When speech and action go together;
When Aucassin's sage words are met
In all his deeds with Nicolette;
And though fair Daphne's words be free,
Look not too soon her swain to be:
The year will all be summer weather,
When speech and action go together.
—*Song from The Monarch of Nil.*

The reader of this history may have been conscious, from time to time, of a mysterious glow—now baleful, now rather cheerful, like the light from the tap-room of an inn—which has illuminated the horizon of the narrative. It appeared in certain allusions found in Mr. Alvord's conversation with Mr. Amidon during the episode of the Wrong House, and so terrified him as to give him thoughts of flight from Bellevale. It glared more brightly in the chat at the Club. It

flamed concretely on our sight when Mr. Brassfield met its source on the street that day he made his fatal escape. Mr. Alvord slangily called it "the Strawberry Blonde." Mr. Brassfield very improperly pinched its elbow, and called it "Daise." It is high time that we put on our smoked glasses and look it in the face in such a formal introduction as will enable us to do it tardy justice—for we may have been guilty of misjudgment!

Miss Daisy Scarlett, sitting on a piano-stool, with one foot curled up under her, was entertaining Doctor Julia Brown and Miss Flossie Smith, who had called on her at the home of Major Pumphrey, her uncle. Miss Scarlett was well and shiveringly known in Bellevale, where she visited often, and was generally esteemed for her many good qualities of heart and mind, and for the infinite variety of her contributions to the sensations of a not over-turbulent social swim. Her entertainment in this instance consisted in readings from a certain book which must be regarded as an early literary imprudence of a most estimable and industrious, as well as improving writer—*Poems of Passion*. The particular selection rendered by Miss Scarlett was the one (unknown, I presume, to my readers—no, my dear, we haven't it) which informs us what the first person singular feminine, being invited into Paradise, would do if the third person singular masculine, down in the regions infernal, should open his beautiful arms and smile. Miss Scarlett read ill sentiments very well, and Miss Smith laid violent hands on herself and looked shocked.

"Oh, Daisy!" she exclaimed, "don't, please don't!"

"Oh, Flossie!" said Miss Daisy imitatively, "don't pretend! That poem is simply great!"

Doctor Brown laughed, quite in the manner of the bass villain in the comic opera.

"The dissecting table," said she, "brings all these beautiful arms and brows to the same dead level of tissue—unpoetical, but real."

Miss Scarlett liberated her foot, spun about, and dashed into a stormy prelude, modulating into the accompaniment to the refrain of Sullivan's *Once Again*, which she sang with much fervor.

She was about the height of a well-grown girl of twelve or thirteen, and had appealing eyes of delf blue, and a round face of peachy softness. Her hair was undeniably red, of a shade which put to shame such verbal mitigations as "auburn" or "golden," and was of tropic luxuriance and anarchistic disposition. It curled and uncurled and strayed all about her brow and neck like an explosion of spun lava. For the rest, had she really been a little girl of twelve, one would feel free to describe her as fat and roly-poly; but in the case of a young spinster of somewhere in her third decade, well-gowned and stayed and otherwise in physical subjection to the modiste, and singing of love like a diva, what can one say? No more than this, perhaps, that the fortunate man who carries her off the field a prize, will realize before he has got very far that he has captured something.

"Love, once again, meet me once again!
Old love is waking; shall it wake in vain!"

Thus sang Miss Scarlett, ending with a fervid trill. Then she turned about, sitting with her feet very wide apart, and faced Doctor Brown.

"Dissecting table, indeed!" she burst forth. "I tell you, it's blasphemy to speak of making such use of a nice man! But, if I could pick 'em out, so as to be sure the right ones were dissected, I don't know but I'd agree."

Flossie Smith said that some of them ought to be put to *some* use; and Doctor Brown, having reminded the company of her profession, merely laughed again.

"Here I am down from Allentown," Miss Scarlett proceeded, "on purpose to be stayed with flagons and comforted with apples, as I have been here in the past. I wanted to have a good sort of lackadaisical time with the nice boys here, and I've had to stay—I don't know how long—on a famine diet of women and girls, with Ella Wheeler for sauce. It makes me swearing mad!"

"I like that now!" said Flossie. "I really like that!"

"Well, I don't," Miss Scarlett went on. "I'm not used to it. To be left alone—oh, of course Billy Cox has been trying to butt in, but what good is he? My Hercules, my Roman Antony, who won my trusting heart last summer, at a time when I had just got it back from what I had thought a final and total loss—I find him away, and when he gets back, because, forsooth, he happens to be newly engaged, he's so wrapped up in a little thing like that, that he might as well have stayed in New York. He doesn't respond when I ring up his office on the telephone; he doesn't see me on the street—or, at least, only once—he seems scared. I've a good mind to give him something to *be* scared about!"

"Your condition," said the doctor, "is verging on the pathological."

"I don't know what path it's verging on," was the reply, "but it isn't the primrose path of dalliance. There's some mystery in it."

"Go to Madame What's-Her-Name down at the hotel," said Flossie. "She has solved almost all the mysteries we used to have—for a consideration. And she is said to have superior facilities for observing this Great Brassfield Mystery of yours."

"I must!" replied Miss Scarlett, looking out of the window. "There's Billy Cox just going into his house! What a pity for a bachelor to have such a big house all to himself—it has filled me with sighs for the past week, that thought! Oh, girls, I've an idea! Let's call him over and have him take us down to her! Central! Give me 432, please. Is that you, Billy? This is Daisy. Don't you want to do something for me?—Oh, you behave, now! We want you to take us somewhere down town, so don't take off your coat. We'll explain when you come over. Good-by!"

"Well, of all things!" exclaimed Flossie. "I don't care about Mr. Cox, nor his big house! And the doctor and I have just started——"

"Oh, we can't go," said the doctor, "but that won't break Daisy's heart; she didn't expect we would, did you?"

"Well, I shall be sorry not to have you go, of course," said Miss Scarlett. "But if you must go, how would it do for you to slip away before Billy comes in, so as to leave him to me? I may be able to make something of Billy, if I'm allowed to have my way with him. *Must* you go? So glad you called. Of course, we shall meet at our reception? Good-by!"

Madame le Claire looked amusedly down on Miss Scarlett. The bright-haired one was questioning her concerning her mystic art.

Could she see into the future?

Sometimes, when the conditions were right.

Could she read thoughts?

Let the lady judge, on the statement that two men, one with brown and the other with gray eyes, had been much in the lady's thoughts lately.

Marvelous! And could she tell what her thoughts in that connection had been? Well, never mind about that! Did she know about palmistry? And could she *really* put people under her influence so that they must do as she willed? How nice that must be! And would she and the professor come up to the Pumphreys' reception and arrange to give a program of occult feats for the entertainment of the guests? Surely; they should be very glad; that was a part of their profession.

During these negotiations Mr. Cox waited outside, and Florian Amidon, meeting him in the lobby and being accosted as 'Gene, stopped for a talk, fearing to slight some dear but unknown friend. The word "Gene" was becoming a sort of round shot across the bows in his Bellevale cruises. The parley (concerning wells and tanks) he cut as short as possible, and, passing on, started up the stairway.

Half-way up there was a broad landing, and as Florian turned on this, he saw at the head of the flight the blast-furnace of hair, the striking hat and the pleasantly rounded figure of Clara's visitor—a person to him quite unknown. Fate, however, seemed to have in store for him an extraordinary introduction, for instantly he was aware of the descent upon him of a fiery comet of femininity. The lady seemed to be falling down stairs. With a little cry she descended, partly flying, partly falling, partly sliding down the baluster—a whirl of superheated hair, swirling skirts, and wide, appealing eyes of delf blue. Amidon caught her in his arms, and sought to place her gently on her feet: but in the pure chance and accident of the encounter, her arms had fallen about his neck, and she hung upon him in something like a hug.

"Oh! oh!" said she, "the idea of your flying to me like that! But it's nice of you!"

Amidon bowed distantly, and in evident embarrassment. Miss Scarlett drew herself up, as at an undeserved rebuke.

"I am very glad," said he, "to have been of any service, even at the risk of seeming familiarity, in saving you from a fall. I hope you will pardon me, a stranger, for so far——"

"A stranger!" she ejaculated; "oh, heavens! Leave me, 'Gene! Go away!"

The "Go away" was pronounced as Mr. Cox appeared at the foot of the stairs. Amidon passed on, now fully aware of having committed a *faux pas*. Looking back, he saw Miss Scarlett leaning against a newel-post as if in agitation; saw Mr. Cox come up and lead her down; and as she disappeared, leaning weakly on her escort's arm, the mop of ruffled hair faded from his sight like a receding fire-ship. Who could she be? Suddenly Alvord's whispered caution flashed on his mind, and he knew that he had encountered, embraced and repudiated the Strawberry Blonde. He paused for a moment to think over the situation—considerations of policy were coming more and more to appeal to him as guides, and he found himself feeling vulpine and furtive. But here,

thought he, would it not really have been best to temporize with the situation, and not to have terminated all relations with Miss Scarlett in this public way? Would it not—

Then rolled over his heart the consciousness of the manifold glories of his Elizabeth's womanhood. Temporize with another woman? The very thought repelled him. He involuntarily brushed his coat where it had supported and encircled Miss Scarlett. He felt a sense of unworthiness in having, even of necessity and for a proper purpose, embraced this other girl. Looking up, he saw Judge Blodgett regarding him like a portly accusing angel from the head of the stairway. He made a feint at assisting Amidon in brushing his coat.

"Those red ones," said he, "are the very devil for showing on black! I'd carry a whisk-broom, if I were you!"



**[Illustration: "Those red ones," said the judge,
"are the very devil for showing on black!"]**

"Blodgett," said Amidon, "I don't care to be chaffed about an accident of that sort."

"Oh, certainly not!" said the judge. "But pick off the ringlets all the same. And say, Florian, of course I don't count, but there was another fellow at the foot of the stairs, the junior in the firm of Fuller and Cox, my fellow practitioners; and in accidents of this sort one sometimes does as much damage as a regular cloud of witnesses. And remember, if you won't use the letter of withdrawal, you're to be a good deal in the public eye, now."

Amidon moved on in disgust. And the poor faithful fellow, that his spiritual tone might be restored, sat down and read once more his Bible—the letter superscribed in the large, scrawly hand, "To be Read En Route."

XXI

SOME ALTERNATIONS IN THE CURRENT

One made himself a name for skill to trace
To its last hiding-place,

Each secret Mother Earth engaged to save,
Of jungle, sea or cave.
No path so devious but he mastered it;
And, bit by bit,
From off the face of mystery, he tore
The veil she wore;
Then, turning inward all his skill in seeing,
To solve the knot of Being,
In the deep crypts of Self fordone he lay,
Quite cast away.

—*Adventures in Egoism.*

Every morning, now, a box of flowers went up to Elizabeth, at the house with the white columns; and every evening Mr. Amidon bravely followed. The terror he felt of women was overpowered by the greater terror of losing this woman, and the fortitude and resolution he possessed in all other fields of action were returning to him. His violets and carnations she always wore for him, and all the roses except the red ones, which she put in vases and kept near her, but did not wear. She was ineffably kind and sweet, in a high and pure and far-off way fit for Olympus, but all the intimate little coquetries and tricks of charm with which she had at first received and disconcerted him were gone. She talked to him in that low voice of hers, but oftener she sat silent, and seemed to desire him to talk to her.

Since that first night, he could not bring himself to act a part, further than to assume the name and place of Eugene Brassfield. He stood afar off, looked at his divinity and worshiped. He read to her her favorite books, and ventured somewhat, out of his exceptional knowledge, to expound them—whereat she looked away and listened with something of the astonishment with which she had received his disquisitions on poetry and art on that first unlucky evening. For the most part, however, he, too, was inclined to silences, in which he looked at Elizabeth in the happiness of a lover's wretchedness. The love she had given to Brassfield seemed to him based on the deceitful pretensions of that wretch, and in any case it was not his, and he felt repelled from accepting it. He yearned to show her the soul of Florian Amidon, purified, adorned, and dedicated to her.

Once or twice she had hinted at something fateful which she wanted to say to him; but he had begged her to wait. After a few days of this slavish devotion of his, she seemed less aloof, not quite so much the unattainable goddess.

She gave him her hand, as usual, one evening at parting.

"I shall not expect to see you to-morrow," said she, "until we meet at the Pumphreys' reception. Until then, good-by."

"I thought," said he, "that if you would permit, I should like to call in the afternoon—say at three or four. May I?"

He looked so pleadingly at her, holding the little hand in both of his, that it is no wonder her color rose. It was like the worshipful inception of a new courtship.

"I shall be invisible," said she, "all day—so you must wait. You haven't any time to bother with me, anyhow. Haven't you your platform to complete? A public man must attend to public matters first, and, anyhow, I shall be denied to all my friends, and you must wait with the rest!"

"It is hard to wait," he answered, "when you are so near."

"I shall try to make amends," said she, "by endeavoring to be as beautiful as—as you used to describe me—at the reception. Good night! Good night!"

He once more violated the Brassfield traditions; he simply raised her hand to his lips and kissed it. To do more, he felt, would spoil all. She went in, more nearly happy than at any time since his return, but sorely puzzled. "I shall never understand him," she thought.

Mrs. Major Pumphrey, standing in line with Miss Scarlett and Mrs. Pumphrey's sister from Wisconsin; a procession of people coming in by twos and threes, and steered by attendants into rooms for doffing wraps; a chain of de-wrapped human beings circulating past the receiving line and listening to Mrs. Pumphrey's assurances that she was delighted to welcome them that she might have the pleasure of introducing them to her sister—and of course they knew Miss Scarlett; an Italian harper who played ceaselessly among palms; a punch-bowl presided over by Flossie Smith and Mrs. Alvord; a mélange of black coats, pretty frocks and white arms and shoulders; a glare of lights; a hum like a hive's—in short, a reception. Such was the function to which Florian made his way, waiting until he could arrive concomitantly with the Waldron carriage so that he might hand the ladies therefrom, and receive from his divinity a little, uncertain pressure of the hand. Then came his respects to Mrs. Pumphrey. Amidon started as he recognized in the bright-haired second person in line his fairy of the balustrade.

"So delighted to see you here, Mr. Brassfield!" said Mrs. Pumphrey. "It gives me the opportunity of presenting you to—why, Daisy, where's your auntie gone? She was here just now!"

"She was called away for a few moments," said Miss Scarlett. "Yes, I believe Mr. Brassfield

and I have met"—this with an icy bow—"and please, Mr. Cox, don't go, until I have told you the end of the story!" And she went on vivaciously chatting to Billy Cox, who had moored himself as close to her as the tide of guests sweeping by her would permit. Which current swept Mr. Amidon onward as he was in the act of assuring his hostess of his sense of loss in her sister's absence—until an eddy left him in a quiet corner, where he found absorbing occupation in trying to imagine again as vividly as possible that pressure of the hand. Was it meant as an evidence of affection?—or did her foot slip, so that she clung to his hand to prevent a fall? This question seemed of the most transcendent importance to him, and he debated it mentally all the evening, as he talked the set conversation of such an occasion. He knew no one; but every one knew him; yet he had no difficulty in getting on, because there was no sense in any of the conversation. He could answer all the remarks regarding his new role of political leader without committing himself to anything serious. Bright eyes flashed meaning and soulful glances into his, as sweet lips said things which he could answer quite as well as if the context of the conversation had been as familiar to him as it was supposed to be. Platitudes, generalities, inanities; and inanities, platitudes and generalities in reply. Amidon looked the part of Brassfield perfectly, and on occasions of this sort, to look the part is quite enough.

He found Elizabeth again, surrounded by a circle of admirers—men and women—an oasis of intelligence, it seemed to him as he listened, in a desert of twaddle. She smiled at him with her eyes, as he looked at her through the press, and just as he had won to a place by her side, the tide was sent flooding into a large room where, it was announced, Professor Blatherwick and Madame le Claire were doing feats of occultism.

"Laties ant shentlemen,"—it was the professor who spoke, "you are at liperty, of gourse, to adopt any t'eory vich seems to you goot to eggsblain dese phenomena. Madame le Claire offers none. Ven she hass broduced te phenomena, she iss—she iss all in! If dey seem to you to be de vork of tisempodied spirits, fery well—goot! Somedimes it seems so to her. If you rekard letchertemain as a sufficient vorking hypot'esis, vy, letchertemain goes, and upon dat hypot'esis ve vill continue to vork de miracles ant de public. Id iss kvite de same to Madame le Claire. It iss only fair to say, howefer, dat she hass nefer yet detected herself in any fraut. Bud she offers no eggsblanation; she chust gifes dese tests for your gonsiteration."

A ripple of laughter and a buzz of interested comment ran through the room.

"But how was it possible for her to get her hands loose?" said one.

"I assure you," said Mrs. Meyer, she of the *Parsifal* impressions, and the wife of the Hebrew leader of the Gentile mob who went "down the line" for McCorkle the night before the caucuses, "I assure you that what she told me was unknown not only to every one else, but to me also; but it turned out true. It's uncanny!"

"It's humbug," said the bass voice of Doctor Brown, "and until you show me the source of this 'occult' energy, I shall so contend. Animal magnetism and sleight-of-hand! What do you think, Mrs. Hunter?"

Amidon looked across and saw—Mrs. Hunter, of Hazelhurst! It was she and her daughter from whom he had bashfully flown to the buffet, just before he alighted from the train at Elm Springs Junction. As he looked at her all the old life returned to him! He saw himself sitting with her and Minnie in the car, as she talked fashions to him and chattered her anticipations of the lovely time Minnie was to have with the family of Senator Fowler on the Maine coast. He saw Blodgett come in, and himself seize the opportunity to escape with his lawyer to the buffet. Then he saw the rural railway platform, the fading glory of the west—and then the waking in the sleeping-car! Could it all be possible?

"Do you know the lady talking with Doctor Brown?" he asked of Miss Waldron.

"Mrs. Hunter?" said Elizabeth questioningly. "Why, didn't you meet her when you came in? She is Mrs. Pumphrey's sister, of Hazelhurst, Wisconsin. She receives with Mrs. Pumphrey to-night."

"I thought it was Mrs. Hunter, as soon as I saw her," answered Amidon; "she is an old acquaintance of mine."

And it was some little time, so far had he forgotten his peculiar position, before the baleful possibilities of this innocent and truthful remark occurred to him. When he thought of it, any observing friend might well have inquired after his health, so gray with pallor and moist with sweat had his face become. Not that he felt hanging over him any such danger as he had feared when he found himself in the shoes of another man, with that other man unaccounted for. He really cared very little about *that*, now. The people of Bellevale, and Hazelhurst, too, might think what they pleased about this mystery of disappearance and reappearance: he was independent of them all, and those he really cared about would understand.

But Elizabeth! Everything now revolved about her. Now that she had grown so dear—that she had come to smile on him in his new character—how could he let her know that this Eugene Brassfield whom she so admired and loved, was no more for ever; and that Florian Amidon had never seen her, never loved her, never wooed her until these past few days! Would she ever see

him again? Could she regard him as anything else than an interloper and an impostor? His right to Brassfield's clothes and Brassfield's fortune might be as clear as Judge Blodgett said; but would not Elizabeth feel that as to her he had attempted the very deed of which he had first suspected himself—fraud and robbery? And her "perfect lover," whom Amidon habitually thought of as "that fellow Brassfield"—all the perfections which Elizabeth had learned to attribute to him, would no longer be credited to Amidon. It was tragic!

As a matter of fact, beloved, any man would have been a perfect lover, or none at all, to Elizabeth. A perfect lover is the noblest work of woman.

"Te autience," went on the professor, "vill haf te eggstreme gourtesy to assist in a temonstration of Madame le Claire's power as a hypnotist. Not effery vun gan pe hypnoticed te fairst dime; bud ve vill try. Vill te autience bleace suchest te name of a laty or shentleman as a supchecht?"

"Doctor Brown!" said many voices. "Alvord!" said others, but most of the votes appeared to be for Brassfield—a name which the professor hailed joyfully as insuring against failure. It is not often that the audience will hit on the only practised sensitive in the room.

Madame le Claire started, as there was thus presented to her the thought of bringing her power to bear on Amidon. The serious results of her last exercise of it came vividly to her mind. Yet, here she was openly hypnotizing him. Here she could keep him under control. She could limit his Brassfield state as to time, or she could keep him in a state of automatism.

"Mr. Brassfield vill greatly obliche by goming forvart," said the professor; and, as he had learned to do, Amidon obeyed his request.

Elizabeth, standing near Mrs. Hunter, heard an agitated exclamation from that lady as Mr. Amidon went forward.

"For heaven's sake," said she, "it's Florian Amidon!"

"Who?" inquired Mrs. Pumphrey, "that? Why, that's our chief citizen, soon to be our chief magistrate, Mr. Eugene Brassfield."

Elizabeth heard no more, but in spite of perplexity at what she regarded as Mrs. Hunter's recognition of her lover's face and forgetfulness of his name, she could not help noticing her excited talk to her sister, and the meaning glances finally directed toward her, Elizabeth. Whereat, to hide a little rosy flush, Miss Waldron turned more completely toward the place of the hypnotist.

Madame le Claire stood in the little curtained alcove, empty save for the great tiger-skin rug, the dais, and a chair or two. She was gowned once more in the yellow and black, and stood in tigrine splendor cap-a-pie. Amidon felt her old power over him, as he approached her and looked into those mysterious eyes, and knew that he should do her bidding. She looked at his troubled countenance, and pitied him for his long evening of mental strain. She had seen his devotion to Elizabeth, and, be it confessed, was jealous in spite of herself. Pity and jealousy inspired the resolution which now formed in her mind: she would for an interval—an interval definitely limited—restore Eugene Brassfield to this company in which he was so completely at home, and lay the troubled ghost, Amidon. He would appear to better advantage altogether and do himself more credit; he would, in fact, be more convincingly Bellevale's "chief citizen."

She bowed deeply and waved him to the chair. Then she performed the charm of "woven paces and of waving arms," and he slept, "lost to life and use and name and fame."

"When he opens his eyes," said she, "he will know nothing, think nothing, do nothing, except what I suggest."

"Make him dance with the broom," suggested Cox.

"Let's have his inaugural address," petitioned Edgington.

"Give him this," said Alvord, offering a coin, "and make him think it's hot. People in this neighborhood would go farther to see Brassfield drop a piece of money, than to interview a live dinosaur!"

The laughter at this sally was lost on Madame le Claire. She was looking down on the unconscious Amidon, and wondering how any one could think of making him the instrument of buffoonery.

"I will perform only one simple, yet very difficult, lest," said she. "This gentleman will soon wake as Mr. Brassfield, and will be his old and usual self among you until a certain hour, which I will write on this card, and seal up in this envelope, so that no one will know, and inform Mr. Brassfield by suggestion. When that particular moment arrives, wherever he may be, whatever he may be doing, he will enter the cataleptic state. The test is regarded as a severe and perfect one. The card will remain in the possession of Major Pumphrey until it succeeds or fails, and the envelope will then be opened."

Kneeling on the dais, she seemed whispering in the subject's ear. Then, tapping his wrist, she said, decisively, "Wake!"

It was Eugene Brassfield who opened his eyes on a circle of his friends, associates and cronies. He rose lightly and confidently, and laughed at the chaffing of his friends. He bowed to Madame le Claire, and moved across the room to Elizabeth's side, with an air of incipient proprietorship.

"No true lover of carnations," he confided to her, "could wish you to wear them as you do to-night."

"Really? I suppose I ought to ask why?"

"It isn't fair to the flowers," said he. "Flowers have rights, you know, and to be outdone in sweetness— Ah, Jim! Go away, and don't bother me! Don't you see I'm very busy?"

"Old man," said Alvord, answering to the name of "Jim," "it's good to see you as you are to-night—your old self. You'll make a hit, my boy. This will make it more than ever a cinch!"

Self-possessed, masterful, Mr. Brassfield moved through the assembly like a conqueror. Those who, a short time ago, found him dull and moody, rejoiced now in his confident persiflage pitched safely in the restful key of mediocrity, but possessed withal of a species of brilliancy, like the skilful playing of scales. Elizabeth noted the return of that dash and abandon which she had lately so missed—but for the first time the Brassfield music had a hollow ring in her ears. The subtler melody of last night—after all, it was best!

Madame le Claire, immensely popular, gave readings in palmistry. Miss Smith was to have a husband with dark eyes. Mr. Brassfield offered to cross her palm with any gold coin she might name, if she would promise him a sweetheart with party-colored eyes, who would meet him for a long talk next day. Madame le Claire blushed and dropped the hand.

Mr. Brassfield adroitly overtook Miss Scarlett, who seemed endeavoring to retreat. He stood by her, chatting lightly, using two voices, a distinct and conversational tone, and one so low as to be for her ear alone.

"Oh, isn't it a crush?" said he. "*(Daise, what's the matter?)* A perfect evening, though. *(Are you running away from me?)* And such delightful people! *(The east room in ten minutes; is it yes?)*"

Miss Scarlett nodded, and Brassfield moved on. Mrs. Pumphrey, Mrs. Hunter and Elizabeth Waldron were sipping punch.

"May I have some?" said he. "And, please, Mrs. Pumphrey, may I be presented to the guest of the evening?"

Mrs. Hunter received the introduction with a gasp.

"Is it possible," said she, "that you don't know me? Can the possessor of that voice and face be any one but Florian Amidon?"

"Amidon, Amidon?" he repeated. "Pardon me, but some one else spoke that name to me lately, and I was trying to recall the circumstances. It is in every way on my part to be regretted, as the fact has deprived me of the happiness of knowing you, that I am not Mr. Amidon. Am I so like him?"

"Oh, it isn't a matter of resemblance, but of identity!" replied Mrs. Hunter. "Were you never in Hazelhurst, Wisconsin?"

"Never," said Mr. Brassfield; "but I am beginning to see its beauties as a place of residence. And I hope to know more of this other Dromio before the evening is past."

Mrs. Hunter bowed in acknowledgment of the compliment, and Mr. Brassfield took himself gracefully from their presence. In the fashion of one pressed for time, he moved on.

Elizabeth had grown suddenly very grave. What did this conduct of her lover mean? A little while ago he had recognized Mrs. Hunter, at a distance, as an old acquaintance. Now he had audaciously outfaced her, and denied that he ever knew her. Could this be the man she had trusted with her all? Again her doubts and fears and scruples rose—rose instantly in full strength. The new impressions she had lately received of him vanished, and all the subtle suggestions of sordid lightness which the diplomacy of Brassfield, even, had not entirely kept from her mind, came back with multiplied distinctness. These transformations of character, these curious duplicities, and now this lie. She must think it over: it impressed her, and she must act.

"Auntie," said she, "let us go."

As down the stairway they came, robed for departure, they were conscious of a hum of excitement running through the assembly.

"Where is he? The envelope has been opened and the time is up! Where is he?" were the cries. "It's eleven: it's a minute past eleven! Where's Mr. Brassfield?"

At this moment, a scream, a soprano scream, high, long-drawn and piercing, the scream of a woman in terror, came echoing from the deserted east room. A body of guests rushed through the portières, Madame le Claire, pale with fright, at their head, and Elizabeth borne with them, all looking to see what violence had provoked that scream. They saw Mr. Brassfield, seated on a sofa in a shadowy corner, holding both Miss Scarlett's hands in his; saw the girl frantically, but in vain, trying to take them from his grasp. He sat like a statue, with his eyes set wide and unwinking like a corpse's, every limb and muscle rigid, his body tense and immovable as a stone image. The sight was terrible. It was as if the living man had been transformed in an instant into a ghastly trap, to catch those soft, warm, pretty hands! She ceased her efforts to break away, but stood white and almost fainting, and begging hysterically for help.

Madame le Claire leaped forward like a tigress, so light was her step, and passed her hand over his eyes, so as to close them. Then, bending her gaze one moment piercingly on his face, she sharply tapped his wrist and uttered the single word, "Wake!"

Florian Amidon opened his eyes. He saw that something extraordinary was taking place, for, in the act of opening his eyes, he had seen Miss Scarlett fall back into the arms of Mr. Cox, and knew that she was being conveyed rapidly away.

"It iss now," said the professor, "vun minute past eleven. Te test, you vill atmit, hass been a gocomplete success. Dis sairgumsdance vill pe noted as exdabishing to a sairtain eggstent an important brinciple, ant hass been in effery vay bleasant ant a success: not?"

A laugh or two was heard, then more laughter, then a little hum of reviving talk, and one could observe that the affair was to be passed off as one of the mysteries of occultism.

"Well," said Mr. Amidon, "if I have contributed my share to the gaiety of the occasion, I shall beg now to be permitted to depart."

The Waldrons were waiting for their carriage as he came down.

"There will be plenty of assistance," said the aunty "and we shall not need to detain you."

"Oh, auntie, auntie!" wept Elizabeth, when they were safely alone, "there was a spell upon him, as you say, there in the east room, but the spell that took him there was none of the hypnotist's working! I am shamed, and humiliated, and robbed of all I have to live for! He went there, auntie, of his own accord, *and left me!*"

Mr. Alvord passed the thing off more lightly.

"Confound it!" said he, "I wish they were in Hades with their mesmeric stunts! I shan't tell Brass what happened, for it won't do any good; and the less notice there's taken of it the better. But carrying things before him as he was—it was hard luck to have that occur. Puts him in an undignified position, to say the least. I wish I could think there was nothing more to it!"

XXII

A REVIVAL OF BELSHAZZAR

We are but Sitters at the Table, Guests,
Where each drinks more, the more that he protests,
Sees, One by One, his Fellows slip from Sight,
And then himself beneath the Table rests.

* * * * *

Some walk the Sinuous Crack for Test, and Some
Judge by the throbbing Fullness of the Thumb—
But lo! the Fool continues till the Guests
Are changed to Pairs of Twins as in they come!

—*Imitations of Immorality.*

Barring the somewhat equivocal episode of the east room at Major Pumphrey's, everything had gone to Mr. Alvord's liking since Mr. Brassfield had placed the campaign in his hands. And, as a matter of fact, that affair was so susceptible of plausible explanation, and so fenced about by the sanctities of private hospitality, that Alvord was reassured after a day or two had passed with no public scandal. Amidon stayed away from headquarters, and Alvord, acting under the unlimited authority granted by Brassfield, took all responsibility and proceeded most effectively in his own way. Amidon's instructions by telephone, to prepare a statement of disbursements to be made public, he regarded as one of Brassfield's jokes. His suggestion that he meant to stand on a platform of principles seemed equally humorous. To propose such ridiculous things in a

perfectly serious way, and laugh at the victim's credulity in "biting" on the hoax, was quite in harmony with the relations among the members of the set to which they belonged, where practical jokes, merciless chaffing and perpetual efforts to get the best of one another had given the group a more than local celebrity.

Having, therefore, no suspicion that his candidate's platform of principles was in the hands of the reporters, and would appear in the next morning's papers, Alvord took his way to the annual supper of the A. O. C. M. feeling that all was well in the world, and that here, at least, his candidate would acquit himself well.

Messrs. Bulliwinkle and Cox were absent when the time came for sitting down to supper, and Mr. Simpson, the Master of the Revels, decreed that no one was to be waited for. So the chairs of the absentees were shoved up, and reminded Mr. Slater, who was quite high in spirits, of *The Vacant Chair*, which he sang to the bass of Judge Blodgett, and a humming accompaniment by Alvord and Edgington. Professor Blatherwick listened with rapt attention and was much affected.

"Dis iss Heidelberg unt stutent tays," said he. "Strong and luffing hearts, ant veak hets ant stomachs! Oh, te svorts ant steins ant songs ant scraps! It iss brotuctife of tears ant schmiles!"

"Especially smiles," said Mr. Simpson; "and right in that connection, these cocktails are supposed to go in ahead of the refectation. Gentlemen, a good time to all!"

Now, after some courses of soup and fish and *entrées*, Mr. Alvord noted the cocktails and the unconsumed glasses of wine at the plates of Bulliwinkle and Cox, and with a sense of equity truly Anglo-Saxon, he raised the point that it was an injustice to those who had been prompt, to have these two fresh competitors come in late and entirely sober in the middle of the feast.

"Point seems to be well taken," said Judge Blodgett. "I move, your Honor, that the wet goods apportionable to our absent friends be set aside for them."

"Sustained!" roared Simpson. "Let the booze of Bulliwinkle and Cox be filed away for future reference, in the sideboard!"

So their glasses stood in two rows, lengthening course by course, awaiting the coming of the absentees. And thus it was that when Mr. Bulliwinkle, fat, bald, and rubicund, made his appearance, the proceedings were suspended until he had imbibed his share, glass by glass, beginning with the cocktails and ending temporarily with Madeira. Then Mr. Bulliwinkle suddenly became profoundly grave, and was soon detected by Alvord in the act of stealthily endeavoring to place his finger accurately upon certain small round spots in the table-cloth. Whereupon, Mr. Bulliwinkle, to show how entirely he had himself in hand, proposed a toast in verse beginning,

"Now here's to the girl with the auburn hair,
And the shoulders whiter than snow,"

and drank it off in a bumper. All seemed to forget Bulliwinkle at this and transferred their attention to Amidon, and pounded on the table and called for a response from him. Blodgett nodded for him to yield, and in order that he might be fully in character, Florian began by saying that they, who knew him so well were quite well aware that he could respond to a toast in honor of the girl with the auburn hair—

"Or any other old color!" shouted Edgington.

"Or all colors at once!" roared a nameless wight at the foot of the table.

At which gaucherie, the nameless wight was the recipient of nudges and scowls in the direction of the professor (who was probably unaware of the color of the hair on his own head, to say nothing of his daughter's) and Edgington filled the gap caused by the unexpected collapse of Amidon's response by charging that Cox was absent because of his having recently taken passage upon the water-wagon, and was traitorously staying away. Alvord proposed that a messenger be sent for him, and when the A. D. T. boy came, a written summons was penned on a menu card, on which progress to date was checked, and instructions given that the document be presented to Cox at his home every twenty minutes until he came—Cox to pay the charges; and the messenger to return between trips to report, and to have the menu checked up so that Cox might note the forward movement of events, and see how far he was behind.

When Mr. Simpson rose to make a few general observations ushering in that part of the program usually devoted to speech-making, Mr. Bulliwinkle, whose vision was slightly impaired, took him for the tardy Cox and some friend whom Cox had brought, and greeted them with a strident "How-de-do!" After this blunder, of course, Mr. Bulliwinkle was logically bound to show that the exclamation was uttered by virtue of a deliberate plan, and so he repeated it from time to time all the evening, until the ordeal of mixed drinks, to which his late arrival had subjected him, proved too much for his endurance and robbed him of speech. But this is anticipating.

A dozen matches were burning and a dozen Havanas sending forth their first cloudlets of blue over the sparkling glasses of champagne, as Mr. Simpson began his remarks.

"To most of those present," he said, "I don't need to say that this is a sort of annual affair. To our new friends I will explain that this club is an institution of Bellevale Lodge, Number 689, of the Ancient Order of Christian Martyrs, of which noble fraternity we are all devoted members. Present company are members, ex or incumbent, of the Board of Control, and a system of fines for absence at board meetings accumulates a fund which has to be spent, and we are now engaged in spending it. Beyond the logic of the situation, which points unerringly to the blowing-in of this fund, the impending happy event in the life of our treasurer, Brother Brassfield, together with the public honors already and about to be conferred on him, render it fitting that this banquet be in his honor. What the devil is that racket? Oh, the boy—! Let the wandering caitiff enter! What says the recreant invader of our Mystic Circle?"

"He said he'd hev' me 'rested 'f I came there any more, an' the whole bunch pulled," said the boy. "An' he chucked the paper out o' the winder."

"Let another scroll be prepared," roared Simpson, "and go back to him as per schedule."

"But," said the boy, "he said—"

"We hold the police force in the hollow of our hands!" shouted Simpson. "We will protect you."

"I should say we would!" "You trust us!" "To the death!" chorused the roisterers.

"I'll collect damages from him for your death!" said Judge Blodgett. "Whom do you want 'em paid to?"

"D'vide the boodle," said the boy, "among my grandchildren—ekally. Do I go back?"

"You do," said Simpson, "as soon as another Exhibit A is prepared."

"It's ready, most noble Potentate," said Edgington ritualistically.

"Then let the messenger depart. Where's that menu I had? Hang it, you've used it for the kid, and it had my remarks on it. As I was saying, this is Brassfield's night. Everybody tells a story, sings a song or dances."

Edgington told a story which, he said, was "on Brassfield," and showed what regular devil that gentleman had been. It seemed that he and "Brass" were at one time fly-fishing in the mountains, and Eugene had so wrought on the fancy of the schoolmistress that she had let school out at three, and gone to learn casting of Brassfield.

"And when they came to the house at suppertime," he went on, "the whole family were laying for them. 'Ketch anything?' said the old lady, 'anythin' more'n a bullhead?' 'I c'n see,' said the hired man, 'that she's been castin' purty hard, by the way her dress is kinder pressed around the waist. It allers fixes mine that way!'"

And so on, to the narration of the outbreak of hostilities with the hired man, and the flight of Brassfield and Edgington. At every point Amidon winced, as he got views of Brassfield's character which hypnotism could not yield, and the assembly roared the louder at his embarrassment.

The messenger boy returned again by this time, still unsuccessful, and was provided with a bunch of cannon fire-crackers to be exploded in Cox's front yard so that the invitation to the banquet might not be overlooked. Then Slater told of Mr. Brassfield's adventures at the Mardi Gras, the story consisting mostly of the account of Eugene's wonderful series of winnings at the race course, where he adopted the system of always finding what horse was given the longest odds, and playing him.

"Our friend," said Slater, "on that last day, was too full of mint-juleps and enthusiasm to tell the field from the judges' stand. Said he never saw the judges' stand with the horses before (laughter); thought it was a good idea—judges could always tell whether the riding was fair (cheers); and put his money on Azim at about one hundred to one; and when Azim romped in a winner, they stuffed all his pockets full of money, and the reporters came with cameras to get shots at the northern millionaire who had such a thundering run of luck, and you ought to have seen 'Gene when he saw the papers in the morning! Had to take him to Pass Christian next day. It was too strenuous for your humble servant at New Orleans. All the sports knew him by this time, and wanted to run into him so as to touch him for luck, and 'Gene wanted to fight every guy that touched him, and about half the time was getting accommodated and taking second money in every fight!" (Great laughter and applause.)

Amidon was unable to tell as to the absolute truth of these tales, but they had such verisimilitude that they impressed and shocked him. He was doubly astounded at the evident enjoyment with which they were received by his friends, and especially at the fact of the hearty and unrestrained manner in which Blodgett and even Blatherwick joined in the applause. Every shot from the quiver of horse-play (except those aimed at the luckless Cox) seemed directed at him, Amidon the dignified. Here, it seemed, he was known to have been guilty of gambling, drunkenness and libertinism—the three vices that he most detested. His face burned with shame.

How had Elizabeth ever cared for such a man as that villain Brassfield? Where was the Sir Galahad, or Lancelot either, in this life? He must somehow, some time, find a way to tell her that it was Brassfield, not Amidon, who had done these things, and that he, Amidon, reared by a doting mother and cared for by a solicitous sister, and all his life the model of the moral town of Hazelhurst, was as innocent of these things as she was.

These thoughts so filled his mind that he heard very little of Judge Blodgett's dialect story. Professor Blatherwick began a German song full of trilled r's, achs and hochs; but became offended at Bulliwinkle's strident "How-de-do!" at the end of the first stanza, and quit. Whereupon Bulliwinkle, for the first time sensing the fact that something was wrong, in the goodness of his heart began singing, *Dot's How Poor Yacob Found It Oudt*, in seeming compliment to the nationality of the professor; but, owing to the subtlety of the reasoning, the professor failed to take it as such. He took mortal umbrage instead, and hurled his card down on the table with a bang, at which Bulliwinkle slipped under the mahogany,

"Gently as a skylark settles down
Upon the clustered treasures of her nest."

Meantime, Mr. Simpson had called on Mr. Knaggs to do a dance, as he alleged himself unable to do anything else. Mr. Knaggs responded, and did pretty well considering the lateness of the hour, but insisted that he ought to have a better surface than the carpet. Amidon dimly resented as an impropriety Mr. Knaggs' brilliant proof of the correctness of his position regarding the carpet, by a tumultuously successful clog-dance on the table.

By this time, it being past the hour for retiring, according to the habit of most, several of the guests were asleep, and most of the rest were indulging in monologues under the impression that they were conversing with their neighbors. Edgington was on his feet proposing a series of interrogatories in strictly legal form requiring Amidon to say how he got the support of Barney Conlon, what there was in his labor record to win the support of Sheehan and Zalinsky, and various other matters. At Alvord's request, Judge Blodgett was moving that these be "struck out," while Slater insisted that it ought to be a "base on balls." It was a new experience for Amidon. He was surprised to find a something in it which he enjoyed. The very hubbub was interesting.

No wonder, such being the conditions, that the A. D. T. boy rapped long and was not heard. No wonder that the ultimate opening of the door was unnoted by those present, or that no one observed the tall man with whisker extensions to a mustache naturally too large, who came in after the messenger. Observed or not, however, he entered and walked heavily down the banqueting-hall.

"Brassfield, a summons for you," said he fiercely. "Here's the copy; this is the 'rig'nal. Waive the readin', I s'pose? Sorry to interrupt. So long."

Amidon looked at the stiff document as if it had been a Gila monster on toast. He saw such words as "State of Pennsylvania, County of Rockoil, ss," and "Default will be taken against you, and judgment rendered thereon," and sundry dates and figures. Instinctively he turned to Judge Blodgett, saying:

"What's this, Blodgett?"

A tremor of panic seized on Amidon, and a wave of sobriety passed over the guests. Much the same thing must have marked the breaking up of the feast of Belshazzar. The roisterers gazed at the paper, or began their preparations for departure.

"What is it?" asked Amidon.

"I don't know enough about the practice here," said the judge slowly, "to be able to say whether it's good or not—seems to have been hastily and rather slovenly gotten up—"

"But what is the damned thing?" shouted Alvord; "cut it short and tell us."

"Seems perfectly regular, though," went on the judge deliberately. "It's a summons in the case of Daisy Scarlett versus Eugene Brassfield in a suit for twenty-five thousand dollars for breach of promise of marriage."

Amidon sank back in a collapse which was almost a faint. The little nervous Alvord rose to command.

"Now," said he, standing in his place, "I want to say a few words before a man leaves this room. I know something of this case, and I want you to take my word that there's no more foundation for it than there would be if it were brought against any one of us. And furthermore, there must be nothing said about this. These papers are not on record yet, and I believe something can be done. Why, confound it, something shall be done! Every man must pledge me his word that he won't breathe a word of this, and will deny it if asked about it."

"We promise!" came the unanimous shout.

Alvord walked toward the guest of honor, tripping over the legs of Bulliwinkle as he went, and offered his hand to Amidon.

"I say, old man, I warned you that you were carrying on a little strong; and now here's a—"

"How-de-do!" said Bulliwinkle.

In vino veritas! Truly, most bibulous Bulliwinkle, thou hast supplied the very word to convey the meaning for which we at this moment desire expression! Here's a how-de-do indeed! Just as our friend Amidon has made a successful lodgment in the outworks of Port Waldron—a citadel which he had taken by stratagem, abandoned for conscience' sake, and re-invested on lines of fairer warfare, to say nothing of the investment of the mayoralty—the hope of victory is swallowed up in a sea of disasters. The meeting on the stairway, the repudiation of Mrs. Hunter, the arrested flirtation in the east room: all these—any of these—were enough: but what hope for us remains, after this sensational summons, served in the small hours of a bacchanalian revel, in a breach-of-promise action at the suit of the dreadful "Strawberry Blonde"? Verily, Bulliwinkle, here is indeed a how-de-do!

"Old man," said Mr. Alvord, in private communication to Mr. Amidon at parting, "we're none of us in condition to discuss this calmly now; but don't give up. It's a blow, but with our pull with the press, and our personal relations with Cox, can be squelched, I believe. Until after election ___"

"Until when?" asked Amidon dazedly.

"After election," answered Alvord. "After that, while it will be a blow, of course, it won't wreck things quite so completely, you know. And even if it does sort of leak out, it's one of those mix-ups that lots of voters'll rather admire you for, you know. It may react in your favor, if we can ___"

"Mr. Alvord," said Amidon, "please to understand that I don't care a rush, one way or the other, about this election!"

"Now, now, don't say that!" said Alvord soothingly. "I can see how you feel, 'Gene—pride, and affection, and Bessie, and the wedding coming on—but, pshaw, we lots of us have things kind of tangle up on us coming in on the home stretch of a pretty swift heat! Go home, and don't worry too much. I'm with you, and we'll win. F. D. and B., you know. Keep the other strings pulling right—it's only a day or so now. Good night, old man, and brace up! See you to-morrow."

One rather likes the optimistic fighter—purely as a fighter—of the Alvord stripe. He was so occupied with plans for the next day's battle that the dubious features of the contest were already clearing up in his mind with the forming of plans for attacking the situation. A few hours of sleep, and he was up and at them. His telephone called up the editors of the town with the morning star. Long before the enemy could have known of the breach in his works, his trusty troops were busy filling it up. He was almost happy again, when Edgington rushed into his presence with a newspaper crushed in his clenched fist, and all sorts of disaster depicted in his expression.

"Jim," he cried, "have you seen this?"

"No," answered Alvord. "It ain't that Scarlett business? I thought I'd got that—"

"No, no! It isn't that!" groaned Edgington. "But we're done, all the same! Done to a finish! You might as well close the headquarters and go home, for if we win, on this platform, we lose, and all the money we've put in is lost! I tell you, Jim, 'Gene Brassfield is either insane—and I believe it's that—or he's the damndest traitor and sneak and two-faced hound that ever stepped, and I'll have it out with him! Some way, if I wait ten years, I'll have it out with him, if I have to do it with a gun! His business leaves my office at once. Why, there aren't words fit for me to use, to describe the miserable, false, lying—"

"See here, Edge!" said Alvord. "We may be done, as you say, but Eugene Brassfield has made you, and he's my friend, and you'd better not go on like that, here! Let me see that paper!"

Edgington threw it to him. In heavy type he saw the fateful platform summarized in a black-bordered panel on the first page:

BRASSFIELD'S PLATFORM

1. Strict enforcement of early closing regulations for saloons.
2. No franchises except on public bidding, and ample provision for subsequent acquisition by the city.
3. Gambling laws to be strictly enforced.

4. Segregation of vice.
5. Vote of the people on all important measures.
6. Appointments non-partizan on the merit system.
7. Publication of all items of campaign expenses.

Alvord fell back in utter dismay. Then he read in full the manifesto which Amidon and Elizabeth had prepared; and, folding up the paper, he stuck it in a drawer, which he locked, as if thereby to seal up the direful news. For a moment he felt betrayed and utterly defeated. Then he straightened himself for a resumption of the battle.

"See here, Edge," he said insinuatingly, "this is pretty bad, I admit. I think, myself, that Brass is off his head. He 'phoned me once about this, but he's such a josh, and it was such wild-eyed lunacy that I thought he was kidding. You'd have thought so, too, in my place. But we can pull through yet. We can convince the sports that this high-moral business is only for the church people, and the civic purity push. Why, Brassfield himself couldn't make Fatty Pierson believe he stands for this stuff. It's so out of reason,—the safe and sane life he's lived. And I'll undertake to keep the God-and-morality folks lined up, because these are really the things they say they want. This ain't going to be so very bad, after all, Edge!"

"Bad!" ejaculated Edgington. "Why, Alvord, you're so wrapped up in Brassfield that you're ready to go crazy with him!"

"Well, I want to say right here," shouted Alvord, "that if you think I'm going to quit on a man I've eaten with and slept with and sworn to stay by—By gad, I won't!"

"Well, stay by him, then!" cried Edgington. "Go on and butt your brains out on this stone wall of ism, and see where you come out. You're already beaten. The other side knew about this last night, and you'll be blown out of water before to-morrow morning. Doctor Bulkon and his crowd are already lined up against you: the doctor will take the position that Brassfield's proposal to segregate vice is a compromise with sin, and that that's the paramount issue. Why, Pumphrey and Johnson and the Williams set are all among his best-paying parishioners, and they've put the screws to Bulkon—who doesn't see the point, anyhow. I tell you that there are too many pillars of the church with downtown property to rent, for you to keep either them or their pastors in line. They'll find moral issues to fight the ten commandments on, if they have to. You ought to know this, Jim."

"Well," said Alvord, "let the Pharisees oppose us! I'll appeal to the liberal element. I'll convince 'em that Brassfield don't mean this stuff. They like him, and they'll stick!"

"Stick!" sneered Edgington. "Like him! You make me tired, Jim! How long will they 'stick' against the influence of their landlords and bankers? Why, they've all read this platform, and the story has gone down the line that Brassfield is so infatuated with Miss Waldron that he's allowing her to write his platform, and that she'll be the mayor. Don't you think that that won't cut the ground from under you, either! A saloon man or gambler fears a good woman's influence as a wolf fears fire. Why, Jim, when this 'advanced thought' platform of yours comes to be voted on, there won't be any one for it except thick-and-thin party men who 'never scratch.' Now I'm not going down with any such sinking scow. I shall make terms for my financial interests with the other side."

"Go, then!" shouted Alvord, "and find you've hopped out of the frying pan into the fire! By George, I tell you we've got the money to buy this election!"

"Oh!" said Edgington, "*have* you! And how about your publishing an itemized account of campaign expenses?"

Alvord, his last card played, fell back beaten, every vestige of optimistic pugnacity gone from his face. Edgington laid his hand on the other's shoulder, in sympathy.

"I tell you, Jim," said he, as he departed, "this is no place nor time to run a reform campaign. Brassfield isn't the candidate for it, and you're not the manager. You're simply fish trying to fly. Come with me and we'll get into our natural element."

"Not by a good deal," said Alvord stubbornly. "I don't know anything in this but Brassfield, and to him I'll stick!"

"As you please," said Edgington. "But keep the lid on the Scarlett business!"

Alvord made no reply. But when Edgington was gone he took up his work with a groan of real distress.

XXIII

THE MOVING FINGER WRITES

To the Queen came the guard full of zeal:
Haled in bonds the Pretender:
"Shall it be noose or knout, rack or wheel?"
But her proud face grew tender.
Down she stepped from her throne—made him free;
"Love," she said, with a sigh,
"What is rank? You are you, we are we, I am I!"
—*The Cheating of Zenobia.*

I should like to write, just here, a little disquisition on Crises. I should show how all nature moves ever on and on toward certain cataclysmic events, each of which marks a point of departure for new ascents in progression. I should begin, of course, with the Nebular Hypothesis, its crash of suns, followed by the evolution of the star and its system of planets, its life, cooling, death, and a fresh crisis forming a new nebula. I should end with either Revolutions or Malaria, depending on whether I should last consider the subject in its relation to sociology or to pathology; but in any case, somewhere along in the latter third of the work, I should treat of Love and Marriage, and therein of the Crisis and Catastrophe in Romance.

I have a good mind to do it!

But, no; crises in general must wait, seeing that our particular one stands clamoring for solution. The concrete bids away with the abstraction. None of our friends of this history could be brought just now, for a single moment, to seek solace in philosophy, unless it might be Professor Blatherwick—and he is entirely oblivious of the fact of the crisis having made its appearance.

Not so, for instance, with the professor's extraordinary daughter, whose feelings were so lacerated by the culminating proof of the fickleness of Brassfield at the Pumphreys' reception that she wondered how she could ever have thought of keeping him in that perfidious plane of consciousness in the hope that therein he would cleave to her only. Better a good friend in Amidon, said she, than a false lover in Brassfield. Howbeit, she isolated herself and mourned, thinking much of the wrong her deed of the reception had done to Amidon, and wondering how it might be remedied.

Nor with Mr. Amidon, who, while ignorant of the full extent of his misfortune in the eyes of Elizabeth, yet knew that he was deep, deep in disgrace with her, and found so many plausible reasons for it that the episode at the reception seemed the least of them. He knew enough of Brassfield to believe him guilty on any charge which might be brought against him. The only doubt he allowed himself was as to how far he, Florian Amidon, was morally responsible for Brassfield's wrong-doings. He had no doubt that Miss Scarlett had a real grievance against Brassfield, and, in an extremity of woe, made up his mind that Amidon must hold himself to the sorry trade of answering a debt he never contracted. He knew from a brief interview with Alvord that the political situation was bad, but for this he had scarcely a thought since the tragic breaking-up of their little Belshazzar's Feast. It was his relations with Miss Waldron and Miss Scarlett which placed him beyond the reach of philosophy.

So also is Judge Blodgett, who has been busy since the banquet, some of the time with a towel about his brow, searching through Edgington's library, to which his connection with the Bunn's Ferry well case gave him the *entrée*, for the law of breach of promise of marriage as defined by the Pennsylvania decisions. Edgington himself was apparently always from his office. Blodgett's call on Fuller and Cox was most unsatisfactory, Mr. Fuller with some acerbity disclaiming all knowledge of any such case as Scarlett versus Brassfield, and Mr. Cox being invisible.

"They act," said he to Florian, "like people who are out for revenge, or a vindication, or something besides money. I don't consider their attitude favorable to a compromise."

"Well," said Amidon, "that does not surprise me at all."

"It doesn't, eh?" went on the judge. "Well, I can't say that anything surprises me; though I was a little taken off my feet by a rumor that something took place between you and the plaintiff at that party the other night. How was that?"

"There may have been something," said Amidon calmly, "but you must get particulars from some one else—Clara, perhaps. You see, she was giving tests, and put me into that—Brassfield state, (why, I can't understand)—and I don't know what occurred; but there was something."

"I'd like to know about that," said the judge contemplatively, "I'd like to know. That stairway episode—that collision, you remember—may not count for much on the trial; but with a few corroborative circumstances, eh, my boy? Farmer jury; pretty girl; blighted affection; damned

villain, you know. But say! she's got something to prove if she wins, under the authorities here, and there are more cases in this state than there ought to be in the whole world; but a summer-resort engagement, girl of mature years, a little bit swift down the quarter-stretch and all that—cheer up, Florian, we'll win, or we'll make it a great case——"

"Blodgett," answered Amidon, who heard with horror the lawyer's forecast of the trial, "she may not have to prove anything. There may not be any trial. I must know these facts! I may owe her reparation. I may—anything! I must know; and no one but Madame le Claire can help us, and she must act through that accursed scoundrel who has got us into all this—Brassfield! Go to her, Blodgett, and tell her that she must see us. I have asked for an interview a dozen times since that reception but she won't see any one. Get an interview for this afternoon; and you must be present and hear her bring out of him a full confession; not as my attorney, but as my friend, as a gentleman. If you find out the worst, as I believe, I shall offer——"

Judge Blodgett gave Amidon's hand a warm grasp.

"That's like you, Florian," he exclaimed, "and it's the part of a man! But I'd see her in Halifax first! Why, you may be called to give up—have you considered—Miss Wald——"

"No no!" said Amidon, "that—*she* is no longer a factor in the case. It's all over with her anyhow, if—— I can't talk of that; but can't you see that this other matter must be cleared up—before I can even come into her presence? Can't you see——"

"I'll see the madame," said the judge. "Yes—I'll see her! I'll see her at once. I guess you're right about it, Florian."

Madame le Claire was keenly conscious of the converging lines of fate, the meeting of which was so rich in baleful promise. She was prostrated at the result of her work at the reception. She had seen Florian in a position of utter humiliation. She had observed the gray pallor in Elizabeth's face as she walked from the room, and felt on her conscience the murder of their happiness. She had seen—and this hurt her more than she would to herself admit—she had seen Brassfield walk from a whispered conversation with herself—an amorous, wooing conversation—to a secret meeting with Daisy Scarlett; so that she felt despoiled of the hold she had had on the affections of even Amidon's false second self, Brassfield. For all this she blamed herself because of the little jealous spite, to gratify which she had made Brassfield walk his disastrous hour on the stage. What should she do? What could she do? She secluded herself and pondered. On this second day, she made her resolve: she would see Miss Waldron, and if possible explain as much of the mystery as might serve to satisfy her with reference to the affair of the East Room. Accordingly, a note went up to the house with the white columns, asking for a meeting. And as the messenger departed, the card of Judge Blodgett came in.

"No!" said Madame le Claire, to his request, "no, I must be excused! I can not conscientiously put him in that state again. If you could have seen him when last——"

"Exactly!" said the judge, filling in the pause. "And as I didn't see that reception affair, you must tell me about it. It's important for me to know."

When he had been told, the judge walked back and forth in evident perturbation, fingering over the leaves of a little square book which he took from his pocket.

"Did you ever," said he at last, "happen to hear what was the rule laid down in the breach of promise case of Hall versus Maguire?"

"Breach of promise!" ejaculated the young woman, inferring a volume from the words. "What do you mean?"

"These facts of which you inform me," said he, "bring Mr. Amidon's case within the rule in Hall versus Maguire, square as a die! Oh, I forgot to tell you! Mr. Amidon, doing business under the name and style of Eugene Brassfield, has been sued by Miss Daisy Scarlett, for breach of promise. No publicity, as yet, but——"

"Oh, it must be stopped!" exclaimed the occultist; "it shall be stopped! He is not guilty. He was irresponsible—ask papa about it; he will tell you so. This girl is coming to see me here to-day: I'll tell her how wrong——"

"No, no, my dear!" said the judge in a fatherly manner. "That would never do, never! You may have given a hint as to this matter of irresponsibility, worth considering. Promise of marriage—civil contract; abnormal state—irresponsibility: it looks pretty well! You should have been a lawyer. But this thing of having dealings with Miss Scarlett except in the presence of and through her legal advisers, Messrs. Fuller and Cox—not for a moment to be thought of by an honorable practitioner: not for a moment!"

Madame le Claire regarded him with a lofty scorn meant for these antiquated scruples of his; but before she could find words, the knock of the bell-boy called her attention to the door.

"Miss Waldron is below!" said she. "Judge, you may bring Mr. Amidon up in half an hour. I shall then be at liberty, and may grant his request. Please leave me, now; I have asked Miss

Waldron to be shown up, and must see her alone."

Elizabeth Waldron, in this plexus of disasters, found nowhere a gleam of comfort. Her fine chagrin at the thought of such things as she feared might be censurable as overfree self-revelation to her lover in such things as letters and the sweet concessions of the new betrothal—all this was past, now. Tragedy has this of comfort in it: its fateful lightnings burn out of the atmosphere of life all the noisome littlenesses which have seemed worthy of concern. So it was with Elizabeth, as she now faced the very annihilation of all for which she had lived—centered in that "perfect lover," who was now worse than annihilated in this descent to a plane which made every act of homage to her so mean and common that she would have felt his status uplifted by some proof of great guilt on his part. And she could see no way of acquitting him. There was mystery in it, but no exculpation. Mystery—

With the idea of mystery came in the image of the strange girl with the fascinating glance and the party-colored hair. Could it be possible that the occult power possessed by her might somehow furnish an explanation of her lover's strangely base behavior? More and more did this fixed thought engross her mind. She felt that she must know—must see this woman and her colorless father. Desire grew to resolve; resolve bred inquiry as to ways of compassing an interview; and in the midst of the inquiry, came Madame le Claire's messenger. Her answer was the putting on of her cloak for a visit to the occultist's parlors.

The two women faced each other like hostile champions in a truce. Elizabeth's first aversion to the other had been swept away in the flood of righteous jealousy created by the Scarlett episode. Madame le Claire's unreasoning feeling of injury had been mitigated by the same baleful affair, and her sense of justice fought for Elizabeth; but no two women loving the same man ever met without antagonism.

"I thank you," said Miss Waldron, "for this invitation. I think you owe me the benefit of such light as you can give on some—some things—which are dark to me."

A little angry flush rose to Madame le Claire's cheek at the tone in which the first part of this speech was uttered. It passed away, and was replaced by a gentler expression at the doleful and faltering conclusion.

"I owe you," she answered, "more in the way of knowledge than you imagine. I expect other visitors. Will you step into this little rear room? I may be called away from you for a while, but I shall return."

"I need not tell you," said Elizabeth, "how vitally important it is to me to know whether there was anything in your mesmeric influence over—Mr. Brassfield—which would cause him to do—things unworthy of him—as he did. Did you impose any such thing on him by your power?—could you have been so cruel?"

"Before I answer that," replied Clara, "there are many things to tell. When did you first meet Mr. Amidon.—Brassfield, I mean?"

"Why do you call him by that name?" cried Elizabeth. "That is what Mrs. Hunter called him! One moment he told me he knew her; the next, he denied it to her face. What is there in this matter of names?"

Madame le Claire looked with a fixed and unwavering calmness at Miss Waldron, and answered in a tone of perfect reassurance.

"There is nothing in it which can't be easily explained. You have known Mr. Brassfield a long time?"

"Since I was seventeen. He did my aunt and me a great favor, which lifted us out of poverty—about some land we had, and oil discoveries—I went away soon after this, but he has always been very kind and good—until—until this——"

Elizabeth walked to the window and looked out for a long time, during which Madame le Claire regarded her fixedly and tried not to hate her.

"Did he tell you much of his past?"

"No, he said it was a very ordinary past, and that he would tell us all about it some time; and then the subject never came up again. I never really cared!"

"Let me tell it to you," said Madame le Claire. "He was, all his life, a man of wealth and standing. He was a scholar and a student of the fine arts and letters. He was the pride of his town and his university. Then, all at once, nearly six years ago, came on him one of those strange experiences of which I, through my profession, am able to speak to you as one having knowledge. He became another man. His mind had drawn across it a dead line cutting off everything back of a certain date. He did not tell you of his life, *because he did not remember it himself.*"

Elizabeth gasped, and turned pale.

"This life of his——" she began.

"—was a life which was in every way better—which will add to your pride in him. But you must be prepared for some strange and unexpected things. Now, for instance, a name—a name seems important; but what is it? This loss of personality—of self-consciousness relating to the past—it was loss of name, of mode of life, of all memory, except certain blind, unconscious reflexes, in which the brain had no part. How the name of Brassfield was suggested to this new-born personality of his, no one can tell, he least of all. But——"

"Then his name—his name is—is not——"

Now here was a situation for a diplomat. To say that Brassfield was an assumed name, an alias, was to shock the girl's womanish conservatism to its very base. Madame le Claire proved herself a diplomat.

"Why," said she, as if the matter were, after all, of no importance, "the name of Brassfield is his, legally, Judge Blodgett says, and morally. These business names, as distinguished from others, are quite common now, I am told—take mine, for instance. Eugene Brassfield was not his name until five years ago, when this happened. He is really Florian Amidon, son of the chemist Wilford Amidon, of whom, I have no doubt, you have read."

The fact that the name of Wilford Amidon had never reached her ears, did not occur to Elizabeth. Madame le Claire's choice of expression sounded like the announcement that Florian was a prince just throwing off his incognito. The subtle sophistry of this way of putting it found grateful harborage in Elizabeth's hungry soul. For a moment she felt comforted. Then came back the thought that, after all, she had found out nothing of the matters she had come to search out.

"It is very strange," said she, "but, after all, it only adds to the mystery. Why did he do those things? Did you make him do them? And why did he say that he knew Mrs. Hunter, and then deny it? And if he knew about his past when he said he knew her, did he not know it as well afterward? I can not be blinded to these matters by a statement of things merely mysterious and strange. I must have——"

"My friend," said Madame le Claire, "all these things will be explained, trust me. The person tapping at the outer door is Judge Blodgett with Mr. Am——with your future husband. Things will occur of which you should know, and which can not take place if they know you are here. It will be most honorable for you to stay. Remain here and note well what happens, and you will get much light on your troubles, and on his—of some of which you do not yet know, which I do not understand, but which will be cleared up. You will say nothing, but watch and listen."

Before Miss Waldron could protest, the other woman was gone. Florian and Judge Blodgett were brought into the middle room, and seated with their faces from the portière, behind which Elizabeth waited, wondering what she should do, feeling that she had the right to know, and obedient to the mesmerist's commands. Mr. Amidon began *in medias res*, too full of grim determination for any circumlocution.

"Madame le Claire," said he, "recently, as I sat at supper, I was notified that this Miss Scarlett has begun suit against me for breach of promise."

"Yes," said Madame le Claire, "I have heard of it. It is most unjust."

Elizabeth, astounded at Amidon's statement, heard her new friend's reply as some far-off note of succor in doubtful and deadly battle. She sat close, now, and listened.

"Ever since I came to myself," went on Amidon, "and through your wonderful power found out about this life of mine here in Bellevale, the name of Miss Scarlett has come up from time to time as connected with it. I have always shrunk from having you find out just what our—relations—have been, and the whole thing has been dark to me—dark and forbidding. What wrong I—this man Brassfield—may have done her, I can not know without your aid. I must know this, now. If she has been wronged, she shall have reparation, as full as I can give."

"What do you mean," said Madame le Claire—and Elizabeth held her breath—"by full reparation?"

"First let us know the wrong! If that exists, the reparation will be for Miss Scarlett and her advisers to name."

"But they may name the keeping of the promise they say you have made!"

"I have thought that all over."

"But your engagement to——"

"The lady you are about to mention," said Amidon, "must have ceased to care much for me, after what I am told took place the other night; and when she learns of this other disgrace, as she must before she sees me again—if she ever does—it will be all over—for ever—except the wrong

to her—for which reparation can never be made. I——"

"Oh, it is too dreadful!" cried Madame le Claire. "And for that worst thing—the other night—I only am to blame! I put into you the character in which you have become weak and drawn aside by suggestions not natural to your own character. Can you ever forgive me?"

"I have never thought of blaming you!" he protested. "You? Why, no one ever had so good a friend; all the chance I have had to win happiness here, you gave me. I have lost that—by misfortune. Now help me to make things as near right as I can. Put me back into the world of Brassfield, and let me know the worst that I—he—has done."

"Coom een!" said the voice of the professor in the corridor. "Coom een! Clara iss not here now: den she must be someveres. Pe bleaced to sit vile I look. Anyhow, she vill soon return. Ach, Herr Cox, ve missed you creatly at our supper—eatings of reasons and sdreams of souls! Ach! Here iss our friendt te chutche, ant Herr Amidon—Brassfield, I mean!"

Madame le Claire appeared in the archway.

"Ah, Miss Scarlett," said she, "you are early. May I ask you to return, in——"

"No!" It was the voice of Miss Scarlett which replied. "No, I'm not going! And if 'Gene Brassfield is in there, Billy Cox has something to say to him. Here, Mr. Alvord, you come in, too; he's out there hunting for 'Gene. Billy, do your duty now!"

"Pardon me," said Mr. Cox, advancing into the next room, followed by Miss Scarlett. "Pardon me, Judge Blodgett, I have a few words for you and your client. Miss Scarlett has made me agree to apologize to Mr. Brassfield about that summons; and if 'Gene Brassfield thinks I owe him any apology for putting it on to him a little before his out-of-town friends, I'll make it. But here are the facts, and he knows it: for four years he's been rawhiding me at every chance with his practical jokes. He had me arrested and detained for a whole day on fake telegrams at Wilkesbarre, only last fall; and just before that he got everybody at the Springs to thinking I was Tascott, and induced a rural constable to take me into custody. Why, Alvord here in his worst estate hasn't been as bad as he's been. If he's lost any opportunity, I don't remember it; and, of course, I've got back once in a while, and may be about even. But everything has been good-natured and brotherly, as ought to be between members of the gang. *And*, of course, when the cannon-crackers began to go off that night, I knew he was doing it. I was over in Major Pumphrey's parlor, where Daisy had invited me, during the eruption, and I told her about these things, and wished for some way of getting even, and—and some one spoke of this breach of promise suit, and we—that is, I—got up the summons, and I told Ed Tootle to serve it on you at your orgy—you had no business to expect me to enter any free-for-all inebriates' competition—you know that, 'Gene! It may have been a little extreme as a joke; but if you'd laughed it off as you always do, nobody would have thought anything of it except to chaff you about it. But what do you do? You make as serious a thing of it as if you hadn't been trotting with our crowd for five years or so. You set this old—my learned friend from the West—briefing it up, and you make a fool of me. Worse than that, you place Daisy in a most objectionable position; and, by George, 'Gene, I claim the apology is due from you, to me and Daisy!"

That he, Florian Amidon, had ever been guilty of playing such pranks as the ones described by Mr. Cox, seemed incredible; but his sense of relief at the way his burden rolled away in the light of Cox's indignant apology overcame all other sensations. He sprang forward to offer his hand cordially to Mr. Cox.

"I agree with you!" said he. "I do owe you an apology, and I freely offer it. As for the offense I have given Miss Scarlett, I can only say that I have had a very strange mental experience lately, of which my friends here can tell you, or I should never have—never have taken the matter—as I did. I beg you both to forgive me!"

"'Gene," said Miss Scarlett, offering her hand, "I'm too game a sport to go mourning because I lost out, and you ought to have known—I declare, I believe you've been crazy! I told Billy—Billy and I are engaged, now, and are really going to be married—I told Billy how, when we were at the watering-place, I insisted that it seemed a shame not to be engaged, and how we fixed it to be engaged for a week, and it made him furious! But as good a fellow as I've been, the way you took our joke was shabby. You people may know some good excuse, but——"

Madame le Claire was not only a diplomat: she was a strategist. Now, she saw, was the supreme moment in which to complete for Florian the good work she had begun.

"Please excuse Mr. Brassfield," said she. "He is wanted in the back parlor; come, Mr. Brassfield, give me your arm!"

Through the portière she swept, bearing Amidon as on wings. There sat Elizabeth, her face bowed down upon her arms, on the back of a sofa. She rose as they entered.

"Elizabeth!" cried Florian. "My darling!"

He stretched out his hands pleadingly, and walked toward her. She shrank back; and Madame le Claire retreated, knowing that the struggle of Amidon's life was before him.

Yet, gentle reader, why should not Amidon win? To us, a thousand things might seem to need explanation; but to Elizabeth, all this separation of Amidon from Brassfield was so new, so little realized, that her love bridged the chasm, and nothing was required except the clearing up of a week or two of curious happenings, most of which had already been so glozed over by Madame le Claire's generous plea, that what girl in love would require any greater price in humble wooing than Florian yearned to pay? Why, mesmerism alone covers all sorts of odd and suspicious doings. The case, for instance, of— But that is beside the point. The point is, that with half of Brassfield's skill, Amidon will win handsomely. Some scenes ought not to be painted—in this plain and flippant prose. Let us wait, therefore, until the arrival of the voices of Florian and Elizabeth at the pitch of ordinary conversation admonishes us that the prose writer's psychological moment has arrived. Then we may take and transcribe some notes.

"Of course," Florian said, "he must have had some redeeming traits—superficially, or you would never have cared for him——"

"Oh, don't say such things!" she protested. "Your real, real self came uppermost, I am sure, in your behavior to me. You were perfectly lovely, even if you didn't understand me as I wanted you to do—as you do now."

"Dearest!" he whispered. "You never loved him as you do me, did you?"

That little laugh that first charmed him filled the pause.

"Don't say 'him!'" she commanded. "Think of the original absurdity of being jealous of a rival, and that rival yourself! And remember that 'he' was my sweetheart, and for my own sake, don't abuse him. Why, it was you all the time; and I always felt, even at the worst, that hidden in the Brassfield personality was the one man for me in all the world. It was this woman's instinct, that men never believe in, and the girl's eyesight. I look at you, and I know you are the same. Don't slander yourself as you appeared in your other mental clothes. I won't have it—but don't change back, dear!"

"But really," said Elizabeth, "is it necessary for us to live in Bellevale?"

"Would you go away—with me?"

There was a silence here, during which something seemed to take place which removed the necessity of answer; for surely, Elizabeth would not have allowed this question to go unanswered otherwise.

"Oh," said she, "there are more places I want to go, and more things I want to see and study—you never would believe it! It will take years and years."

"Well, why not?" answered Florian. "'Whether in Naishapur or Babylon', I want to go to every one of those places myself—and always have. We won't build that house. We'll have Blodgett stay and look after the closing up of the business here by Stevens. We'll run out home so I can say hail and farewell to Jennie and greet my new nephews and nieces there, and then, ho! for Japan and India and the East, on our way to those high places where you want to erect your idolatrous altars. Elizabeth! Do you realize what a Paradise we're planning?"

"There!" she said quaveringly. "I knew it was too perfect to be true, and that we'd find some obstacle, and I've found it! That miserable office you'll have to fill!"

Chillingly the wet blanket descended on their fervid joy, and they looked at each other in consternation. This public call on Mr. Brassfield now became an incubus to Mr. Amidon, pinning him to earth as he essayed to rise and fly. Gradually, as he looked fondly in his lady-love's face, the hope dawned in his heart that perhaps her desire that he should have a "career" might not be much greater than his.

"Dear," said he at last, "would you feel very sorely disappointed if we were to give it up—the state and national capital life, and all that?"

"I disappointed!" exclaimed she. "Why, could you bring yourself to give them up? I hate to say it—but—I just detest the whole thing!"

"So do I!" said Amidon.

They wondered in the next room what could have excited so much hilarity.

"What a beginning!" said Elizabeth. "To start out in our life with such a mutual deception! But I wanted to have a part in your life, whatever it might be; and I could organize Primrose Leagues, and succeed in them, if it were necessary to help in any ambition of yours. So there! Oh, it was silly to write in that way—but you really seemed at that time——"

"I never did, my dear! It was that Brassfield; and when I was caught and restored by Madame le Claire, I should have declined if it hadn't been for the—the Washington career, you know——"

"Oh, please don't say any more——"

"And I had Blodgett get up a letter of withdrawal——"

"Do you suppose he has it yet?" she cried.

"'Letter of withdrawal!' It sounds so sort of parliamentary and correct and comforting!"

"It does," agreed Amidon, "especially in view of the fact that I believe I'm beaten anyhow. Judge Blodgett thinks I am, and Mr. Alvord——"

"Poor Jim Alvord!" interposed Elizabeth. "His wife says he would desert his family for you."

"For Brassfield, she means," said Amidon. "It is really not the same thing, dear. But I was saying that even he half confesses defeat. I've made an awful mess of this thing, Elizabeth, on account of not really knowing anything of the people or their opinions or desires. Even that platform of ours couldn't pull us through. No wisdom—and I haven't much—could keep a man from making blunders when he went out to do things for himself, knowing nothing of the situation except what he got from his inner consciousness, and from what he was told. A political situation is too delicately balanced for that. If I had done nothing, I should have remained undeservedly popular and reaped the reward of Brassfield's cunning and hypocrisy—don't stop me, please! But you and I tried to impose righteousness on the people from the outside and above. It never comes in that way, but always from the inside and below, like lilies from the mud. I'm really a most unpopular man, opposed by most of the 'good citizens' and all of the bad except a few who still believe me dishonest, and will desert me as soon as their fellows can convince them that I'm sincere—isn't it a pretty plot! Facing defeat because of my advocacy of principles everybody concedes to be right, because I'm suspected of an actual intention to act according to my platform pledge; when that man Brassfield, who was preparing to carry out a policy of selfish spoliation, could have carried every precinct!"

"It does me so much good," she said, "to see you in such a glow of indignation, that I allowed you to go on with that unjust condemnation of my Eugene. Well, then, it seems my noble platform actually ruined you. How nasty of the people! Can't we elope—run away—and never come back, or look at a paper or think of it again? Or shall we use Judge Blodgett's letter of withdrawal—bless him!"

Something—perhaps it was the elopement proposal—induced eventualities which delayed the conversation again for some minutes.

"Let's go out," said she, "and ask him to—to do whatever they do with letters of withdrawal—at once!"

The room into which Amidon led the shy Elizabeth had been a clearing-house of confused ideas during their long tête-à-tête. Madame le Claire had explained the mystery of dual personality as well as it can be explained, with some comment on the fact that such things happen to people occasionally, no one knows why. Alvord and Judge Blodgett agreed that the candidate for mayor should be withdrawn. Alvord even raised the question as to whether, the nomination papers being issued to Brassfield, Amidon could be legally elected. Judge Blodgett said it raised the finest legal question he ever had encountered, and if carried up would be a case of first impression in the world's jurisprudence. Alvord assented to this without argument.

Then Le Claire told them of Amidon's life in his old home as she had learned of it, of his bewildered application to her in New York, and how he had been helped. She was a long time telling it, and all the while she was thinking of the tender things happening in the next room. She heard the murmuring of their voices, as full of meaning as the flutings of mating birds. And she faltered and stopped.

"Papa, papa!" she cried, "help me out! Tell them the rest."

"You vill vonder, berhaps," said the professor, "at sairtain egsentricities of gonduct of our friendt, in his later Brassfield phace, in vitch he has shown de kvality of sportiness—or sportif—vat iss de vort?"

"Sportiness," said Miss Scarlett, "is the word."

"T'anks!" said the professor. "Vell, de egsblanation is dus: te Brassfield state vas vun of gontinuous self-hypnotismus. It iss apnormal. Its shief garacteristic is suchestibility. Now, if ve find dat te supchect hass been frown into de society of people of—vat you gall?—sporty tendencies, he vould gradually yield to te suchestion of dese tendencies. He vould——"

"I am glad I heard that," said Elizabeth. "We must not allow you to return to this abnormal state!"

"Mr. Cox," said Judge Blodgett, "do we need a detective to run this sporty influence down? or shall we look among the Christian Martyrs?"

"It will relieve me," said Miss Scarlett, hugging Mr. Cox's arm, "if you won't look. I'm afraid

to be searched!"

Elizabeth and Florian appeared in the archway. Her eyes were shining with the soft radiance which, like the flush of dawn, comes only once in the day's journey, and never returns. His sought her face in a worship that she would never have seen had Eugene Brassfield looked out from them.

"I am taking Miss Waldron home," said Mr. Amidon. "Matters have just taken such a turn that I shall leave soon for my former home in Wisconsin, where I have large interests, and I may not be able to return. Such being the case, we do not feel that it would be just to the people of this city to continue in the position of a candidate for public office, and—pshaw! why not be honest? We're beaten, and we don't want the office, anyhow. Judge, have you that letter of withdrawal convenient?"



[Illustration: "I am taking Miss Waldron home," said Mr. Amidon.]

"I have," said the judge. "I figured all the time that you'd need it."

"Thanks!" said Amidon. "Take it, Mr. Alvord, and give it to the world at large. You understand, do you not, the peculiar change of personality which makes it improper——?"

"Sure," said Alvord. "The man who put out that platform of ours can't afford to be caught short-changing the public by switching candidates on them on the eve of election. And right here let me say, that be it Amidon or Brassfield, the ties of brotherhood still hold with Jim Alvord, in F. D. and B., and I hate to use this letter. I believe still we could pull through, with proper management from now on, and, confound it! I'd rather be licked with you than to win with any other man on earth!"

"In all phases of my life," said Amidon, grasping the little man's hand warmly, "I'm going to take the liberty of holding you as my friend. I know faithfulness and unselfishness when I see it, no matter if I don't quite fall in with its methods."

Alvord's eyes filled, as his emotions rose with the parting. Yet he could not allow his methods to be questioned even by implication.

"Well, now, as to methods," he began, "theoretically you may be right about publicity and that platform, but practically—well, let's forget it! But, 'Gene—or whatever your damned name is!—don't forget me! Good-by!"

The judge, the professor, Miss Scarlett, and all the rest had gone on their various ways, and Madame le Claire was in one of the inner rooms attended by Aaron, whom she had summoned.

"I'm not going to adopt poor Jim's language yet," said Elizabeth, when she and Florian were again left alone. "'Florian, Florian!'—I like that name. But think how hard it was to learn to call you 'Eugene.' Do you remember where we were when I first called you that?"

"Don't you realize, dearie," said he, "that I know nothing of all that? And except for your sweet letter, I knew nothing of you before that day when I came from New York?"

"O—h!" she cried. "And all the lovely things you did to win me—— Oh, dear, I never thought of that. And you remember nothing—nothing at all? Oh, it is dreadful, dreadful! No wonder I almost hated you that night!"

He put his arm about her and kissed her lingeringly.

"Dearest! Sweetheart!" he said. "The loss is all mine! And to make up for it, you must let me do them all over again—every one, a thousand times. Come, let us go!"

At the door, she stopped and turned back.

"I must see Madame le Claire," said she.

Already the rooms were filled with the disorder of packing, and Aaron was busy preparing for one of their Arab-like flittings. Madame le Claire stood looking down into the street.

"Are you leaving Bellevale?" said Miss Waldron.

"On the next train," answered the hypnotist. "Our tour has been a long time delayed."

"I hope," said Elizabeth, "that we shall see you again some time."

"It is quite probable," said Clara. "We are wanderers, and public characters. Almost everybody sees us from time to time—if they desire."

"I'm not going to leave you this way," said Elizabeth, with hurried obscurity of expression. "You have done for me more—much more—than—than I can say; but you know, you know!"

"I know you would do as much for me!"

"No, no!" exclaimed Elizabeth. "I never would. I'm not good enough. I'm going away now, to be very, very happy, and I want you to see—to know—how I feel toward you—oh, oh, I can't say what I mean! But some time, when you get settled down from the agitations we've had, after a long time, write and tell me that you're happy, won't you?"

She had put her arm around the slender waist, and faced Madame le Claire, gazing at her intently. Le Claire kissed her forehead, and looked long, with the varicolored eyes, into those of Elizabeth. She seemed to speak in that way, as an easier mode of communication at this time than by the words which would not come in any adequate form. So the two girls stood as Professor Blatherwick came in and noticed the labors of Aaron.

"Packing, Clara?" said he. "Vell, vere shall ve vork te hypot'esis ant te public next? I shall pe glad vunce more to hit te pike. Dis gase, vile supliminally great stuff, is pretty vell vorked out: not?"

"Quite worked out," said Clara, "to the end; indeed, indeed, it is completely worked out!"

Elizabeth's arm tightened about her waist, and Elizabeth's breath was caught in a quick little sigh. Madame le Claire replied to these inarticulate expressions of sympathy as if they had been words.

"Don't think that!" said she, looking Elizabeth again steadily in the face. "Don't let that haunt your mind in this new life of yours; for it will not be so. Let us be friends though we never meet. Yes, I will write to you; but it will not be necessary. Whenever you think of me, this is what you will think, because I command it: 'She is busy with her wandering life. New things are dimming the memory of me—and mine. She has found the love her soul covets. She is happy!'"

*** END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK DOUBLE TROUBLE; OR, EVERY HERO HIS OWN VILLAIN ***

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