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OLD EBENEZER.

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OPIE READ'S SELECT WORKS

OLD EBENEZER

BY

OPIE READ

Author of "My Young Master," "The Jucklins," "On the Suwanee River,"

"A Kentucky Colonel," "A Tennessee Judge," "The Colossus,"

"Emmett Bonlore," "Len Gansett," "The Tear in

the Cup and Other Stories," "The

Wives of the Prophet."

ILLUSTRATED



CHICAGO

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OLD EBENEZER.

CHAPTER I.

SAM LYMAN.

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In more than one of the sleepy neighborhoods that lay about the drowsy town of Old Ebenezer, Sam Lyman had lolled and dreamed. He had come out of the keen air of Vermont, and for a time he was looked upon as a marvel of energy, but the soft atmosphere of a southwestern state soothed the Yankee worry out of his walk, and made him content to sit in the shade, to wait for the other man to come; and, as the other man was doing the same thing, rude hurry was not a feature of any business transaction. Of course the smoothing of Lyman's Yankee ruffles had taken some time. He had served as cross-tie purchaser for a new railway, had kept books and split slabs for kindling wood at a saw mill; then, as an assistant to the proprietor of a cross-roads store, he had counted eggs and bargained for chickens, with a smile for a gingham miss and a word of religious philosophy for the dame in home-spun. But he was now less active, and already he had begun to long for easier employment; so he "took up" school at forty dollars a month. In the Ebenezer country, the school teacher is regarded as a supremely wise and hopelessly lazy mortal. He is expected to know all of earth, as the preacher is believed to know all of heaven, and when he has once been installed into this position, a disposition to get out of it is branded as a sacrilege. He has taken the pedagogic veil and must wear it. But Lyman was not satisfied with the respect given to this calling; he longed for something else, not of a more active nature, it is true, but something that might embrace a broader swing. The soft atmosphere had turned the edge of his physical energy, but his mind was eager and grasping. His history was that dear fallacy, that silken toga which many of us have wrapped about ourselves—the belief that a good score at college means immediate success out in the world. And he had worked desperately to finish his education, had taken care of horses and waited upon table at a summer resort in the White Mountains. His first great and cynical shock was to find that his "accomplishment" certificate was one of an enormous edition; that it meant comparatively nothing in the great brutal world of trade; that modesty was a drawback, and that gentleness was as weak as timidity. And repeated failures drove him from New England to a community where, it had been said, the people were less sharp, less cold, and far less exacting. He was getting along in years when he took up the school—past thirty-five. He was tall, lean, and inclined toward angularity. He had never been handsome, but about his honest face there was something so manly, so wholesome, so engaging, that it took but one touch of sentiment to light it almost to fascinating attractiveness. Children, oftener than grown persons, were struck with his kindly eyes; and his voice had been compared with church music, so deep and so sacred in tone; and yet it was full of a whimsical humor, for the eyes splashed warm mischief and the mouth was a silent, half sad laugh.

It was observed one evening that Lyman passed the post-office with two sheep-covered books under his arm, and when he had gone beyond hearing, old Buckley Lightfoot, the oracle, turned to Jimmie Bledsoe, who was weighing out shingle nails, and said:

"Jimmie, hold on there a moment with your clatter."

"Can't just now, Uncle Buckley. Lige, here, is in a hurry for his nails."

"But didn't I tell you to hold on a moment? Look here, Lige," he added, clearing his throat with a warning rasp, "are you in such a powerful swivit after you've heard what I said? I ask, are you?"

"Well," Lige began to drawl, "I want to finish coverin' my roof before night, for it looks mighty like rain. And I told him I was in a hurry."

"You told him," said the old man. "You did. I have been living here sixty odd year, and so far as I can recollect this is about the first insult flung in upon something I was going to say. Weigh out his nails for him, Jimmie, and let him go. But I don't know what can be expected of a neighborhood that wants to go at such a rip-snort of a rush. Weigh out his nails, Jimmie, and let him go."

"Oh, no!" Lige cried, and Jimmie dropped the nail grabs into the keg.

"Oh, yes," Uncle Buckley insisted. "Just go on with your headlong rush. Go on and don't pay any attention to me."

"Jimmie," said Lige, "don't weigh out them nails now, for if you do I won't take 'em at all."

"Now, Lige," the old man spoke up, "you are talking like a wise and considerate citizen. And now, Jimmie, after this well merited rebuke, are you ready to listen to what I was going to say?"

"I am anxious and waiting," Jimmie answered.

"All right," the old oracle replied. He cleared his throat, looked about, nodded his head in the direction taken by Sam Lyman, and thus proceeded: "Observation, during a long stretch of years, has taught me a great deal that you younger fellows don't know. Do you understand that?"

"We do," they assented.

"Well and good," the old man declared, nodding his head. "I say well and good, for well and good is exactly what I mean. You know that's what I mean, don't you, Jimmie?"

"Mighty well, Uncle Buckley."

"All right; and how about you, Lige?"

"I know it as well as I ever did anything," Lige agreed.

"Well and good again," said the old man. "And this leads up properly to the subject. You boys have just seen Sam Lyman pass here. But did you notice that he had law books under his arm?"

"I saw something under his arm," Jimmie answered.

"Ah," said the old man, tapping his forehead. "Ah, observation, what a rare jewel! Yes, sir, he had law books, and what is the meaning of this extraordinary proceedin'? It means that Sam Lyman is studying law, and that his next move will be to break away from the school-teaching business."

"Impossible," Lige cried.

The old man shook his head. "It might seem so to the unobservant," he replied, "but in these days of stew, rush and fret, there is no telling what men may attempt to do. Yes, gentlemen, he is studying law, and the first thing we know he will leave Fox Grove and try to break into the town of Old Ebenezer. And it is not necessary for me to point out the danger of leaving this quiet neighborhood for the turmoil and ungodly hurry of that town. Now you can weigh out the nails, Jimmie."

CHAPTER II.

THE NOTED ADVOCATE.

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Lyman must long have indulged his secret study before the observation of old Buckley Lightfoot fell upon it, for, at the close of the school term a few weeks later, the teacher announced that he had formed a co-partnership with John Caruthers, the noted advocate of Old Ebenezer, and that together they would practice law in the county seat. He offered to the people no opportunity to bid him good-bye, for that evening, with his law library under his arm, he set out for the town, twenty miles away. Old Uncle Buckley, Jimmie and Lige followed him, but he had chosen a trackless path, and thus escaped their reproaches.

The noted advocate, John Caruthers, had an office in the third story of a brick building, which was surely a distinction, being so high from the ground and in a brick house, too. There he spent his time smoking a cob pipe and waiting for clients. His office was a small room at the rear end of the building. The front room, the remainder of the suite, was a long and narrow apartment, occupied by the Weekly *Sentinel*, the county newspaper, published by J. Warren, not edited at all, and written by lawyers and doctors about town. The great advocate paid his rent with political contributions to the newspaper, and the editor discharged his rental obligations by supporting the landlord for congress, a very convenient and comforting arrangement, as Caruthers explained to Lyman.

"I don't see how we could be more fortunately situated," said he, the first night after the co-partnership had been effected. "What do you think of it?"

"I don't know that I could improve on an arrangement that doesn't cost any money," Lyman answered. He sat looking about the room, at the meager furniture and the thin array of books. "We've got a start, anyway, and I don't think Webster could have done anything without a start. Are all these our books?"

"Yes," said Caruthers, shaking his sandy head. "That is, they are ours as long as they are here. Once in awhile a man may come in and take one; but the next day, or the next minute, for that matter, we can go out and get another. The Old Ebenezer bar has a circulating library." He yawned and continued: "I think we ought to do well here, with my experience and your learning. They tell me you can read Greek as well as some people can read English."

"Yes, some people can't read English."

"I guess you are right," Caruthers laughed. "But they say you can read Greek like shelling corn, and that will have a big effect with a jury. Just tell them that the New Testament was written in Greek, and then give them a few spurts of it, and they've got to come. I had a little Latin and I did very well with it, but a fellow came along who knew more of it than I did and crowded me out of my place."

Just then the editor came in. He looked about, nodded at Lyman, whom he had met earlier in the day, and then sat down, with a sigh.

"Well, I have got a good send off for you fellows—already in type, but I lack eighty cents of having money enough to get my paper out of the express office."

No one said anything, for this was sad news. Warren continued: "Yes, I lack just eighty cents. It's about as good a notice as I ever read, and it's a pity to let it lie there and rust. Of course I wouldn't ask either of you for the money: That wouldn't look very well. Eighty cents, two forties. I

could go to some of the advertisers, but an advertiser loses respect for a paper that needs eighty cents."

"Warren," said Caruthers, "I'd like to see your paper come out, for I want to read my roast on the last legislature, but I haven't eighty cents."

Lyman sat looking about with a dozing laugh on his lips: "Are you sure you'll not need eighty cents every week?" he asked.

The editor's eyes danced a jig of delight. "I may never need it again," he declared.

"Well, but how often are you going to print a notice of the firm?"

"I don't know. Why?"

"Well, I didn't know but your paper might get stuck in the express office every time you have something about us. It's likely to go that way, you know. I've got a few dollars—"

The editor grabbed his hand: "I want to welcome you to our town," he cried. "You come here with energy and new life. Now, Caruthers, what the deuce are you laughing at? You know that no one appreciates a man of force and ideas more than I do. Just let me have the eighty, Mr. Lyman, for I've got a nigger ready to turn the press. Now, I'm ten thousand times obliged to you," he effusively added as Lyman gave him the money.

He hastened out and Caruthers leaned back with a lazy laugh. "He told the truth about needing the money. I've known his paper to be stuck in the throat of the press, and all for the want of fifty cents. I'm glad you let him have it. He's not a bad fellow. He lives in the air. Every time he touches the earth he gets into trouble."

"So do we all," Lyman replied, "and nearly always on account of money. I wish there wasn't a penny in the world."

"Sometimes there isn't, so far as I am concerned," Caruthers said. "No, sir," he added, "they keep money out of my way. And I want to tell you that I'm not a bad business man, either. But I'm close to forty and haven't laid up a cent, and nothing that I can ever say in praise of myself can overcome that fact. I don't see, however, why you should be a failure. You have generations of money makers behind you."

"Yes, hundreds of years behind me," said Lyman. "And the vein was worked out long before I came on. There is no failure more complete than the one that comes along in the wake of success. But I am not going to remain a failure. I'll strike it after awhile."

"I think you have struck it now," replied Caruthers. "Business will liven up in a day or two. When a thing touches bottom it can't go any further down, but it may rise."

"Yes," said Lyman, "unless it continues to lie there."

"But we must stir it up," Caruthers declared. "We've got the enterprise all right—we've got the will, and now all that's needed is something for us to take hold of."

"That's about so," Lyman agreed. "Unless a man has something to lift, he can never find out how strong he is."

And thus they talked until after the midnight hour, until Caruthers, his feet on a table, his head thrown back, his pipe between the fingers of his limp hand, fell asleep. Lyman sat there, more thoughtful, now that he felt alone. At the threshold of a new venture, we look back upon the hopes that led us into other undertakings, and upon many a failure we bestow a look of tender but half reproachful forgiveness. The trials and the final success of other men make us strong. And with his mild eyes set in review, Lyman thought that never before had he found himself so well seasoned, so well prepared to do something. He listened to the grinding of the press, to the midnight noises about the public square, the town muttering in its sleep. "I am advancing" he mused, looking about him. "I was not content to skimp along in New England, nor to buy cross-ties, nor to singe the pin feathers off a chicken at night, nor to worry with the feeble machinery of a dull schoolboy's head. And I will not be content merely to sit here and wait for clients that may never come. I am going to do something."

CHAPTER III.

THE TIMELY ORACLE.

A year passed by. Caruthers dozed with his cob pipe between the fingers of his limp hand, waiting for clients whose step was not heard upon the stairs. But the office had not been wholly without business. Once a man called to seek advice, which was given, free, as an advertisement for more work from his neighborhood, and once Lyman had defended a man charged with the theft of a sheep. The mutton was found in the fellow's closet and the hide of the animal was discovered under his bed; and with such evidence against him it was not expected that a lawyer could do much, so, when the prisoner was sentenced to the penitentiary, Caruthers congratulated

his partner with the remark: "That was all right. We can't expect to win every time. But we were not so badly defeated; you got him off with one year, and he deserved two. To cut a thief's sentence in two ought to help us."

"Among the other thieves," Lyman suggested.

"Oh, yes," Caruthers spoke up cheerfully. "A lawyer's success depends largely upon his reputation among thieves."

"Or at least among the men who intend to stretch the law. Let me see; we have been in business together just one year, and our books balance with a most graceful precision. We are systematic, anyway."

"Yes," Caruthers replied, letting his pipe fall to the floor, "system is my motto. No business, properly systematized, is often better than some business in a tangle."

Warren, the editor, appeared at the door. "Are you busy?" he asked.

"Well, we are not in what you might call a rush," Lyman answered. "Are you busy?" he inquired, with a twinkle in his eye.

Before answering, Warren stepped into the room and sat down with a distressful sigh. "I am more than that," he said, dejectedly. "I am in hot water, trying to swim with one hand."

"What's the trouble?"

"Oh, a sort of summer, fall, spring and winter complaint." He took out a note book, turned over the leaves, returned it to his pocket and said: "I lack just sixty-five, this time."

"Dollars?" Lyman asked.

Warren gave him a quick, reproachful look. "Now, Judge, what airs have I ever put on to cause you to size me up that way? Have I ever shown any tax receipts? Have I ever given any swell dinners? Sixty-five cents is the amount I am short, Judge, and where I am to get it, the Lord only knows. My paper is lying over yonder in the express office, doing no good to anybody, but they won't let me take it out and stamp intelligence upon it. The town sits gaping for the news, with a bad eye on me; but what can I do with a great corporation arrayed against me? For sixty-five cents I could get the paper out, and it's full of bright things. The account of your defense of the sheep thief is about as amusing a thing as I ever read, and it will be copied all over the country; it would put a nation in a good humor irrespective of party affiliations, but sixty-five millions of people are to be cheated, and all on account of sixty-five cents, one cent to the million."

"Things are down to a low mark when you have to make your estimates on that basis. One cent to the million," said Lyman with a quiet laugh.

"Distressful," Warren replied. "The country was never in such a fix before. Why, last year about this time I raised eighty cents without any trouble at all."

"Yes," said Lyman, "you raised it of me."

"That's a fact," Warren admitted. "But do you think the country is as well off now as it was then?"

"Not financially, but it may be wiser."

"Now, look here, Judge, am I to accept this as an insinuation?"

"How so?" Lyman asked, looking up, his eyes full of mischief.

"Why, speaking of being wiser. I don't know but you meant—well, that you were too wise to help me out again. You can't deny that the notice of the partnership was all right."

"We have no complaint to enter on that ground," Caruthers drawled.

"Pardon me, Chancellor, but it wasn't your put-in," Warren replied. "Your suggestions are worth money and you ought not to throw them away. But the question is, can I get sixty-five cents out of this firm?"

"Warren," said Lyman, "I am in sympathy with your cheerful distress."

"But are you willing to shoulder the debt of sixty-five millions of people? Are you in a position to do that?"

"No," Caruthers drawled, leaning over with a strain and picking up his pipe from the floor.

"Chancellor," said the editor, "as wise as you are, your example is sometimes pernicious and your counsel implies evil."

"Oh, I am simply speaking for the firm," Caruthers replied. "As an individual Lyman can do as he pleases with his capital. Come in, sir."

Some one was tapping at the door, and Lyman, looking around, recognized the short and wheezing bulk of Uncle Buckley Lightfoot, the oracle. He almost tumbled out his chair to grasp the old fellow by the hand; and then, smoothing his conduct, he introduced him, with impressive ceremony.

"Yes, sir," said the old man, sitting down and looking about, "he got away from us a little the rise of a year ago, and I don't think Fox Grove has been the same since then; and it is a generally accepted fact that the children don't learn more than half as much. Me and Jimmie and Lige agreed on this point, and that settled it so far as the community was concerned. And Sammy, we hear that you have got to be a great lawyer. A man came through our county not long ago and boasted of knowing you, and a lawyer must amount to a good deal when folks go about boasting that they know him. And look here, my wife read a piece out of the paper about you—yes, sir, read it off just like she was a talkin'; and when she was done I 'lowed that maybe, after all, you hadn't done such an unwise thing to throw yourself headlong into the excitement of this town. And mother she said that no matter where a man went, he could still find the Lord if he looked about in the right way, and I didn't dispute her, but just kept on a sittin' there, a wallop'in' my tobacco about in my mouth. Yes, sir; I am powerful tickled to see you."

Long before he had reached the end of his harangue, Warren had taken hold of his arm. "It was my paper your wife read it in," he said in tones as solemn as grace over meat. "I am the editor of the paper, and two dollars will get it every week for a year."

The old man shrugged himself out of the editor's imploring clasp, and looked at him. "Why," said he, "you don't appear to be more than old enough to have just come out of the tobacco patch, a picking off worms, along with the turkeys. But, in the excitement of the town, boys, I take it, are mighty smart. However, my son, I ain't got any particular use for a paper, except to have a piece read out of it once in awhile, but I'll tell you what I'll do. If you'll agree to print some pieces that Sammy will write for you, I'll take your paper. He was always a writin' and a tearin' it up when he boarded with me, and I was sorry to see him wastin' his labor in that way when he mout have been out in the woods shootin' squirrels; so if you'll agree——"

"I print his sketches every week, and some of them have been stolen by the big city papers," the editor cried, unable longer to restrain himself.

"Then I didn't know what I was missin'. Two dollars, you say? Well; here you are, sir, and now you just rip me off a paper every week. See if that's a two dollar bill."

"It's a five," Warren gasped.

"Glad it's that much; change it, please."

"I'll go out and get it changed."

"Don't put yourself to that much trouble. Give it to Sammy and I bet he'll change it in a jiffy, for it don't take a lawyer more than a minute to do such things."

Caruthers looked up with a squint in his eye.

"I think," said Lyman, "that we'd better let him go out and get the change; that is, unless my partner can accommodate us."

"I have nothing short of a twenty," Caruthers replied, shutting his eyes.

"Then run along, son, and fetch me the change," said the old man. "But hold on a minute," he added, as Warren made a glad lunge toward the door. "Be sure that the money changers in the temple don't cheat you, for I hear they are a bad lot, and me and Jimmie and Lige have agreed that they ought to have been lashed out long ago."

"They have never succeeded in getting any money out of me," Warren laughed; and as he was going out he said to Lyman: "I am going to flash this five in the face of the Express Company. I didn't know before that your pen was made of a feather snatched from an angel's wing."

"Yes, sir," Uncle Buckley began, looking at Lyman, and then at Caruthers, "we have missed him mightily. Mother says he was the most uncertain man to cook for she ever run across. Sometimes he'd eat a good deal, and then for days, while he was a studyin' of his law, and especially when he was a writin' and a tearin' up, he wouldn't eat hardly anything. So you see he kept things on the dodge all the time, and that of itself was enough to make him interestin' to the women folks. We've had it pretty lively out in Fox Grove. The neighbors all wanted me to split off and go along with them into the new party, but I told 'em all my ribs was made outen hickory and was Andy Jackson Democrat. But the new party swept everything and got into power; and I want to know if anybody ever saw such a mess as they made of the legislature."

The old man began to move uneasily and to glance about with an anxious expression in his eye. "Sammy," said he, "of course I know you, but I ain't expected to know everybody."

"Yes," said Lyman, smiling at him.

"Well, it just occurred to me whether I wa'n't jest a little brash to let that young feller off with that money. In the excitement of the town he might forget to come back."

"Don't worry; he'll be back. There he comes now."

Warren came in, his face beaming, and gave the old man the money due him. Uncle Buckley looked at him a moment, and then, with an air of contrite acknowledgment, shook his head as he seriously remarked:

"I done you an injury jest now, by sorter questionin' whether you wouldn't run off with that

change, and I want to ask your pardon."

"Oh, that's all right," Warren laughed.

"No, it ain't all right, and I want to apologize right here in the presence of——"

"All right, you may tie it on as a ribbon if you want to, but it isn't necessary. Now you sit over here with me and tell me all about yourself and your neighborhood, for I'm going to give you a write-up that'll be a beauty to behold. You fellows go ahead with your nodding, and don't pay any attention to us. But you want to listen. Come to my sanctum, Mr. Lightfoot."

"I reckon it's safe," said the old man, following him. Caruthers turned his slow eyes upon Lyman. "Has that old fellow got any money?" he asked.

"Well, he's not a pauper."

"Suppose we could strike him for a hundred for six months?"

"No, he's a friend of mine."

"But," said Caruthers, "if we are going to raise money we'll have to borrow from friends. Our enemies won't let us have it."

"That's true, but our enemies in protecting themselves should not be permitted to drive us against our friends. That old man would let me have every cent he has. But he has labored more than forty years for his competence, and I will not rob him of a penny."

"Rob him," Caruthers spoke up with energy. "We'll pay him back."

"How?"

"Oh, you know how. With a little money we can get a start. We can rent an office on the ground floor, and then business will come."

"Yes," said Lyman, "but I don't want that old man to be mixed up in the excitement. Suppose we try the bank."

"You try it. McElwin does not care for me particularly. Suppose you go over and see him. Offer him a mortgage on our library."

"I'll do it. Wait until Uncle Buckley has been pumped; I want to bid him good-bye."

"Go through there, and see him on your way out. The bank will be closed pretty soon."

"All right. But don't hang a hope on the result."

Lyman shook hands with Uncle Buckley, and then went across the street to the First National Bank, the financial pride of Old Ebenezer. The low brick building stood as a dollar mark, to be stared at by farmers who had heard of the great piles of gold heaped therein, and James McElwin, as with quick and important step he passed along the street, was gazed upon with an intentness almost religious. Numerous persons claimed kinship with him, and the establishment of third or fourth degree of cousinhood had lifted more than one family out of obscurity. The bank must have had a surplus of twenty thousand dollars, a glaring sum in the eyes of the grinding tradesmen about the public square. An illustrated journal in the East had printed McElwin's picture, together with a brief history of his life. The biographer called him a self-made man, and gave him great credit for having scrambled for dimes in his youth, that he might have dollars in middle life. That he had once gone hungry rather than pay more than the worth of a meal at an old negro's "snack house," was set forth as a "sub-headed" virtue. He had married above him, the daughter of a neighboring "merchant," whose name was stamped on every shoe he sold. The old man died a bankrupt, but the daughter, the wife of the rising capitalist, remained proud and cool with dignity. The union was illustrated with one picture, a girl, to become a belle, a handsome creature, with a mysterious money grace, with a real beauty of hair, mouth and eyes. The envious said that circumstances served to make an imperious simpleton of her.

It was this man, with these connections, that Lyman crossed the street to see. But to the lawyer it was not so adventurous as grimly humorous. His Yankee shrewdness had pronounced the man a pretentious fraud.

The banker was in his private office, busy with his papers. Lyman heard him say to the negro who took in his name: "Mr. Lyman! I don't know why he should want to see me. But tell him to come in."

As Lyman entered the banker looked up and said: "Well, sir."

Lyman sat down and crossed his legs. The banker looked at his feet, then at his head.

"Mr. McElwin," said Lyman, "we have not met before, though I, of course, have seen you often, but——"

"Well, sir, go on."

"Yes, that's what I am doing. I say that we have not met, but I board at the house of a relative of yours, and I therefore feel that I know you."

"Board with a relative of mine?" the banker gasped.

"Yes, with Jasper Staggs, and I want to tell you that he is about as kind hearted an old fellow as I ever met, quaint and accommodating. He is a cousin of yours, I believe."

"Well,—er, yes. But state your business, if you please. I am very busy."

"I presume so, sir, but I am afraid that my business may not strike you in a very favorable way. I want to borrow one hundred dollars."

"Upon what collateral, sir?"

"Mainly upon the collateral of honor."

The banker looked at him. Lyman continued: "I feel that such a statement in a bank sounds like the echo of an idle laugh, but I mention honor first, because I value it most. I also have, or represent, a law library."

"Is it worth a hundred dollars?"

"Well, I can't say that it is, but I should think that the library, reinforced by my honor, is worth that much."

The banker began to stroke his brown beard. "So you have come here to joke, sir——"

"Oh, not at all," Lyman broke in, "this is a serious matter."

"It might be if I were to let you have the money."

"That isn't so bad," Lyman laughed. "But seriously, I am in much need of a hundred dollars, and if you'll let me have it for six months I will pay it back with interest."

"I can't do it, sir."

"You mean that you won't do it."

"You heard me, sir."

"I realize the bad form in which I present my case, Mr. McElwin, and I know that if you had made a practice of doing business in this way you would not have been nearly so successful, but I will pledge you my word that if you will let me have the money——"

"Good day, sir, good day."

Lyman walked out, not feeling so humorous as when he went in. He looked up and down the dingy, drowsy street. At first he might have been half amused at his failure, tickled with the idea of describing it to Caruthers and the newspaper man, but a sense of humiliation came to him. He knew that in the warfare of business his operation was but a guerrilla's dash, and he was ashamed of himself; and yet he reflected that his great enemy might have been gentler to him. He walked slowly down the street, without an objective point; he passed the group of village jokers, sitting in front of the drug store, with their chairs tipped back against the wall; he passed the planing mill, with its rasping noise, and in his whimsical fancy it sounded like the Town Council snoring. He loitered near a garden where plum trees were in bloom; he looked over at a solemn child digging in the dirt; he caught sight of a pale man with the mark of death upon him, lying near a window, slowly fanning himself. He spoke to the child and the wretched little one looked up and said: "I am digging a grave for my pa." Lyman leaned heavily upon the fence; his heart was touched, and taking out a small piece of money he tossed it to the boy. The grave digger took it up, looked at it a moment in sad astonishment, put it aside and returned to his work.

The office was deserted when Lyman returned. Caruthers had not hung a hope on the result of the attempted negotiations.

CHAPTER IV.

A FOG BETWEEN THEM.

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The following afternoon when Lyman went to the office, having spent the earlier hours in the court house, to assure the Judge that he had no motions to make, and no case to be passed over to the next term—he found Caruthers with his feet on the table.

"Getting hot," said Caruthers.

"Is it? I thought we had been playing freeze-out," Lyman replied, throwing his hat upon the table and sitting down.

"Then you didn't do anything with his Royal Flush?"

"Brother McElwin? No. He fenced with his astonishment until he could find words, and then he granted me the privilege to retire."

"Wouldn't take a mortgage on the library?"

"No; he said it wasn't worth a hundred."

"But you assured him that it was."

"No; I had to acknowledge that it wasn't."

"You are a fool."

"Yes, perhaps; but I'm not a thief."

"No! But it's more respectable to be a thief than a pauper."

"It is not very comforting to be both—to know that you are one and to feel that you are the other."

"Lyman, that sort of doctrine may suit a long-tailed coat, a white necktie and a countenance pinched by piety, but it doesn't suit me."

"It suits me," Lyman replied. "I was brought up on it. I think mother baked it in with the beans."

"Watercolor nonsense!" said Caruthers. "My people were as honest as anybody, but they didn't teach me to look for the worst of it."

"But didn't they teach you that without a certain moral force there can be no real and lasting achievement?"

Caruthers turned and nodded his head toward the bank. "Is there any moral force over there? Did you notice any saintly precepts on his wall? I don't think you did. But wasn't there many a sign that said, 'get money'?"

"Caruthers, you join with the rest of this town in the belief that McElwin is a great man. I don't. He is a community success, a neighborhood's strong man, but in the hands of the giants who live in the real world he is a weakling."

"He is strong enough, though, not to tremble at the sound of a footstep at the door, and that's exactly what we sit here doing day after day. The joy of the hoped-for client is driven away by the fear of the collector." He was silent for a moment, and then he said: "I don't feel that there's any advantage in being hooked up with a saint."

"I don't know," Lyman replied. "I never tried it."

"I have," said Caruthers, looking at him.

Lyman laughed and rubbed his hands together. "You are the only one that has ever insinuated such a compliment, if you mean that I am a saint. But I hold that there's quite a stretch between a saint and a man who has a desire simply to be honest. Saint—" He laughed again. "Why, the people where I was brought up called me a rake."

"They were angels. But why don't you say where you were 'raised.' Why do you say 'brought up?' You were not brought up; you were raised."

"Yes, that's true, I guess. But we raised vegetables where I was brought up."

"Cabbages?"

"Yes, some cabbages. Round about here, though, they appear to make pumpkins more of a specialty. But come a little nearer with your meaning concerning the saint. I take it that you are tired of the partnership. Am I right?"

"Well," Caruthers spoke up, "we haven't done anything and we have no prospects."

"You are right," said Lyman. "But I am poorer and you are about as well off as you were."

"Do you mean to insinuate—"

"Oh, I don't insinuate, though it's a habit among the people where I was brought up."

"If you don't insinuate, what then? what do you mean?"

"That you've got about all the money I had."

"The devil, you say!"

"I didn't mention the devil. I didn't think it was necessary to speak in the third person of one who is already present."

Caruthers started and took his feet off the table. Lyman regarded him with a cool smile.

"Lyman, I thought that we might have parted friends."

"We can at least part as acquaintances," Lyman replied. "Until a few moments ago I was willing to stand a good deal from you; that part of your principles that I do not like I was willing to ascribe to a difference of opinion, but just now you called me a fool because I had refused to declare those books to be worth a hundred dollars. Up to that time we might have parted in reasonably good humor, but since then I haven't thought very well of you. And you'll have to take

it back before you leave."

"You say I'll *have* to take it back."

"Yes, that's what I said."

"I never had to take anything back."

"No? Then you are about to encounter a new phase of life. Singular, isn't it, that we never know when we are about to stumble upon something new."

"You don't mean——"

"I don't know that I do. But I mean that you'll take that back or carry away a thrashing that will make you stagger. Did you ever see a man wabbling off after a thrashing that he was hardly able to carry? Sad sight sometimes. The last man that I whipped weighed about forty pounds more than I do. He presumed on his weight. But he soon found out that his flesh was very much in his way. He was a saw mill man and a bully; and it so tickled Uncle Buckley that nothing would do but I must come to his house and live as one of the family. Out at Fox Grove a man who won't be imposed upon stands high."

"Lyman, I don't want any trouble, and——"

"Oh, it won't be any trouble."

"And I acknowledge that I was hasty. I take it back, and here's my hand on it."

"I'm obliged to you for taking it back, Caruthers, but I don't want to take your hand. I don't understand it, but a spiritual something seems to have arisen between us."

"All right," said Caruthers, "but I hope we don't part as enemies."

"Oh, no, not as enemies. You speak of parting as if you were the one who has to vacate."

"Yes, I have rented an office over on the other side of the square, on the ground floor."

"It is very kind of you to leave me here," said Lyman. "You might have ordered me out. I am glad you didn't."

"Such a proceeding could never have entered my head," Caruthers replied. "In fact, I thought that if the separation must come you would rather stay here. You appear to have a fondness for that clanking old press out there."

"Yes, I can make it grind out my rent. When are you going to vacate the premises?" Lyman asked, his grave countenance lighted with a smile.

"Now, or rather in a very few minutes."

"Is there anything holding you?"

"Come Lyman, old man, don't jog me that way. And I wish you wouldn't look at me with that sort of a smile. Everybody says you have the kindest face in the world——"

"Without a bristle to hide its sweetness," Lyman broke in.

"Yes," Caruthers assented, "the innocence of a boy grown to manhood without knowing it."

"And you have remained to tell me this?"

"Oh, I'll go now," said Caruthers, getting up.

"I wish you would. Up to a very short time ago I thought you one of the most whimsically entertaining men I ever met, but as I said just now, a spiritual disparagement has arisen between us, a thick fog, and I wish you would clear the atmosphere."

"Well," said Caruthers, "I am off. I don't know what to take with me," he added, looking about. "I suppose I owe you more or less, and I'll leave things just as they are until I am prepared to face a statement."

"All right. Good day."

"But you won't shake hands?"

"Yes, through the fog," said Lyman, holding out his hand. Caruthers grasped it, dropped it, as if he too felt that it came through a fog, and hastened out. Just outside he met Warren coming in. "What's he looking so serious about?" the editor asked.

"Sit down," said Lyman. "Don't take the chair he had—the other one, that's it. Well, we have split the law trust and he goes across the square to open a new office."

"Is that so? Well, I reckon there's a good deal of the wolf about him. Yes, sir, he has seen me bleeding under the heel of the Express Company, without so much as giving me the——"

"Moist eye of sympathy," Lyman suggested.

"That's all right, and it fits. Say, you are more of a writer than a lawyer. And that's exactly in line

with what I came in to tell you. I got a half column ad. this morning from a patent medicine concern in the North, and they want an additional write-up. It all comes through your sketches."

"Do you think so?"

"I know it. A drummer told me this morning that he had heard some fellows talking about my paper in a St. Louis hotel, the best hotel in the town, mind you—and I can see from the exchanges that the *Sentinel* is making tracks away out yonder in the big road. And it's all owing to that quaint Yankee brain of yours, Lyman. Yes, it is. Why, the best lawyers in this town have written for my paper. The Circuit Judge reviewed the life of Sir Edmond Saunders, whoever he was, and Capt. Fitch, the prosecuting attorney, wrote two columns on Napoleon, to say nothing of the hundreds of things sent in by the bar in general, and it all amounted to nothing, but you come along in the simplest sort of a way and make a hit."

"I'm glad you think so."

"Oh, it's not a question of think; I know it. And now I'll tell you what we'll do. We'll let this law end of the building take care of itself and we'll give our active energies to the paper. You do the editing and I'll do the business. You put stuff into the columns and I'll wrestle with the express agent. And I'll divide with you."

"Warren," said Lyman, getting up and putting his hands on the newspaper man's shoulders, "there's no fog between you and me."

Warren looked up with a smile. He was a young fellow with a bright face, and the soft curly hair of a child. "Fog? No, sunshine. There couldn't be any fog where you are, Lyman. I'm not much of a scholar. I've had to squirm so much that I haven't had time to study, but I know a man when I see him, and I don't see how any woman could give you much attention without falling in love with you, hanged if I do."

Lyman blushed and shook him playfully. "I am delighted to pool distresses with you," he said, "but don't try to flatter me. Women laugh at me," he added, sitting down.

"No, they laugh with you. But that's all right. Now, let's talk over our prospects."

CHAPTER V.

THE BELLE OF THE TOWN.

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Once in a long while Banker McElwin made it a policy to gather up a number of his boastful relations, reinforced by a number of friends, and then conduct the party to the house of another kinsman, where he would give them an evening of delight. He did not give notice of these gracious recognitions, preferring to make the event sweeter with surprise. On his part it was a generous forgetfulness of self-importance—it was as if a placid and beneficent moon had come to beam upon a cluster of stars. To the men he would quote stocks, as if, a lover of letters, he were giving a poem to a "mite society." Upon the ladies he would smile and throw off vague hints of future silks and fineries.

One evening this coterie gathered at the home of Jasper Staggs. Old Jasper, in his earlier days, had been a town marshal, and it was his boast that he had arrested Steve Day, the desperado who had choked the sheriff and defied the law. This great feat was remembered by the public, and old Jasper nursed it as a social pension. But it did not bring in revenue sufficient to sustain life, so he made a pretense of collecting difficult accounts while his wife and "old maid" daughter did needlework and attended to the few wants of one boarder, Sam Lyman. The "banker's society" recognized the Staggs family in the evening of the day which followed Sam Lyman's call at the First National, and was in excitable progress while Lyman, in ignorance of it all, prolonged his talk with Warren. In the family sitting room the banker talked of the possibility of a panic in Wall Street. In the parlor the younger relatives were playing games, with Annie Staggs, the old maid, as director of ceremonies. After a time they hit upon the game of forfeits. Miss Eva McElwin, the great man's daughter, fell under penalty, and the sentence was that she should go through the ceremony of marriage with the first man who came through the door. At that moment Sam Lyman entered the room. He was greeted with shouts and clapping of hands, and he drew back in dismay, but Miss Annie ran to him and led him forward. Eva McElwin, with a pout, turned to some one and said:

"What, with that thing?"

"Oh, you've got to," was shouted. "Yes, you have."

"Well, what is expected of me?" Lyman asked.

"Why," Miss Annie cried, "you've got to marry a young lady, the belle of Old Ebenezer."

He had often gazed at the girl, in church, had been struck by her beauty, but had shared the belief of the envious—that she was a charming "simpleton."

"Well, don't you think you'd better introduce us?"

"Oh, no, it will be all the funnier."

"Marry, and get acquainted afterwards, eh? Well, I guess that is the rule in society. I beg your pardon," he added, speaking to Miss McElwin, "for not appearing in a more appropriate garb, but as there seems to be some hurry in the matter, I haven't the time nor the clothes to meet a more fashionable demand. I am at your service."

He offered his arm and the girl took it with a laugh, but with more of scorn than of good humor.

"Take your places here," Miss Annie said. And then she cried: "Oh, where is Henry Bostic? We'll have him perform the ceremony. He'll make it so deliriously solemn." She ran away and soon returned, with a young man serious enough to have divided the pulpit with any circuit rider in the country.

The ceremony was performed, and then began the congratulations. "Oh, please quit," Miss McElwin pleaded. "I'm tired of it. Zeb," she said, turning to a bold looking young man, "tell them to quit."

"Here," he commanded, "we've got enough of this, so let's start on something else. Let's play old Sister Phoebe. Why the deuce won't they let us dance?"

"Henry," said Miss Annie, stepping out upon the veranda with the serious young man, "they always called you queer, but I must say that you know how to perform a marriage ceremony."

"I trust so," he answered.

"You do; and when you are ordained——"

"I was ordained this morning."

"What!" she cried. "Then the marriage came near being actual. It only required the license."

"The last legislature repealed the marriage license law," he replied.

"Mercy on me!" she cried.

"Mercy on them," said the young man who had been regarded as queer.

She took hold of a post to steady herself. She heard the deep voice of the banker; the droning tone of "Old Sister Phoebe" came from the parlor.

"Don't tremble so. It can't be helped now," said the young man. "It's nothing to cry about. How did I know? You said you wanted me to perform a marriage ceremony, and I did. How did I know it was in fun? You didn't say so. The father and mother were in the other room. They could have come in and objected. How did I know but that they had given their consent, and stayed in the other room for sentimental reasons? I am not supposed to know everything."

"Oh, but who will tell Cousin McElwin?" she sobbed. "And who will tell Zeb Sawyer? Oh, it's awful, and it's all your fault, and you know it. You are crazy, that's what you are."

"Well, you can exercise your own opinion about that. You people have all along said that I would never do anything, but if I haven't done something tonight to stir up the town——"

"Oh, you malicious thing. I don't know what to do! Oh, I don't know what is to become of me!"

"It's all very well to cry, for marriages are often attended by tears, but you should not call me malicious. Mr. McElwin laughed when my mother told him I was going to preach, and it almost broke her heart."

"Revengeful creature," she sobbed, clinging to the post.

"No, the Gospel is not revengeful, but it humbles pride, for that is a service done the Lord. Step in there and see if Mr. McElwin has anything to laugh about now. He laughed at my poor mother when he knew that all her earthly hope was centered in me. Well, I'll bid you good night."

"Oh, no," she cried, seizing him. "You shall not leave me to face it all. You shall not."

"No, that wouldn't be right. I'll face it."

CHAPTER VI.

HUMBLED INTO THE DUST.

Lyman found favor with the company, that is, with the exception of Eva McElwin, whose position demanded a certain reserve. He had sought to engage her in conversation, and she had listened as if struck with the tone of his voice, but she turned suddenly away, remembering, doubtless, that she was present as an act of condescension, and that for the time being she was the social property not of any stranger, but of her "poor kin." Lyman looked after her with a smile and a merry twinkle of mischief in his eye. He had heard it said that her complexion was of a sort that would never freckle, and he was amused at his having remembered a remark so trivial. He had

looked into her eyes, had plunged into them, he fancied, for she had merely glanced up at him: and he thought of the illumined-blue that mingles in the rainbow, and he mused that he had never seen a head so fine, so gracefully poised. And then he speculated upon the petulant waste of her life. Almost divine could have been her mission; what a balm in a house of sickness and distress. He thought of the pale man whom he had seen lying near the window; he fancied himself thus doomed to lie and waste slowly away, and he pictured the delight it would be to see her enter the room, like an angel sent to soothe him with her smile. She turned toward him to listen to a worshiping cousin, and Lyman saw her lips bud into a pout, and it was almost a grief to see her so spoiled and so shallow.

"Well, I see you are getting acquainted right along," said Zeb Sawyer, speaking to Lyman. "A man doesn't have to live here long before he knows everybody. But I'm kept so busy that I haven't much time for society."

"What business are you in?" Lyman asked.

"Mules; nothing but mules. Oh, well, occasionally I handle a horse or so, but I make a specialty of buying and selling mules. Good deal of money in it, I tell you. McElwin used to do something in that line himself. Yes, sir, and he paid me a mighty high compliment the other day—he said I was about as good a judge of mules as he ever saw, and that, coming from a man as careful as he is, was mighty high praise, I tell you. Helloa, what's up?"

From the family sitting room had come a roar and a noise like the upsetting of chairs. And into the parlor rushed McElwin, followed by his wife, Staggs, Mrs. Staggs, and the white and terrified Miss Annie.

"A most damnable outrage!" McElwin shouted, making straight for Lyman. "I mean you, sir," he cried, shaking his fist at Lyman. "You, sir. You try to bunco me and now you conspire with an imbecile to humble me into the dust. I mean you, sir. You have married my daughter. That fool is an ordained preacher, and your sockless legislature did away with marriage licenses."

Lyman looked about and saw Miss Eva faint in her mother's arms; he saw terror in the faces about him, and his cheek felt the hot breath of Sawyer's rage. He stepped back, for the banker's hand was at his throat.

"Pardon me," he said, with a quietness that struck the company with a becalming awe. "Pardon me, but I did not know that there was any conspiracy. Is there a doctor present? If there's not, send for one to attend the young lady."

Some one ran out. McElwin stood boiling with fury. Sawyer thrust forth his hand. Lyman knocked it up. "I will not step back for you," he said. "I have committed no outrage and I am not here to be insulted and pounced upon. Mr. McElwin, you ought to have sense enough to look calmly upon this unfortunate joke." He turned, attracted by a wail from Mrs. McElwin. Again he addressed the banker, now not so furious as awkwardly embarrassed. "They were playing and the young lady was to go through the marriage ceremony with the first man to enter the room, a common farce hereabouts, as you know; and I was the first man to enter. Don't blame me for a playful custom, or the action of a populist legislature."

"That may be all true, sir, but how could you presume, even in fun, to stand up with her? How is she?" he demanded, turning toward a woman who had just come from a room whither they had taken the "bride."

"Oh, she is all right. She was more scared than hurt."

He gave her a look of contempt, as if he had been hit with a sarcasm; and then he addressed himself to Lyman. "I ask, sir, how you could presume to stand up with her?"

"Well, I was told that I had to."

"And you were willing enough, no doubt."

"I didn't hang back very much; they didn't have to tear my clothes."

"But I wish they had torn your flesh, as you have torn mine. Who ever knew of so disgraceful and ridiculous a situation? It beats anything I ever heard of."

"But it can be made all right," said old man Staggs. "Nobody's hurt."

"We can get a divorce," Zeb Sawyer suggested.

"Yes," said Lyman, "but our friends, the populists, have enacted rather peculiar divorce laws. And without some vital cause, the application must be signed by both parties. It's in the nature of a petition."

"Well, that can be arranged," McElwin declared, with a sigh. "Annie, is Eva better?"

"Yes, sir."

"Thank you. And you must pardon me for talking to you as I did just now, for I was never so upset in my life. Cousin Jasper, I wish you would have my carriage ordered. Annie, tell Mrs. McElwin that we will go home at once. Mr. Lyman, let me see you a moment in private."

Lyman followed him out upon the veranda. He had not analyzed his own feelings, but he was

conscious of a strange victory.

"Mr. Lyman, you came to me and wanted to borrow a hundred dollars."

"Yes, sir."

"Well, I can let you have it."

"No, I thank you."

"What, you don't want it?"

"Well, it wouldn't look exactly right for a rich man's son-in-law to borrow money so soon after marriage."

"Confound your impudence, sir—I beg your pardon."

"I thank you," said Lyman.

"You thank me? What for?"

"For begging my pardon."

"Come, that is all nonsense, Mr. Lyman. Tell my wife that I'll be ready in a moment," he shouted with his head thrust in at the door. "The most absurd of nonsense," he said, turning back to Lyman. "It will raise a horse laugh throughout the county, and will then be dismissed as a good joke on me. Yes, sir, on me. And now will you agree to conform to the requirements of that ridiculous legislature, and sign the petition to the court?"

"I haven't been informed that the legislature requires me to sign any petition. And I have no favors to ask of the court."

"Is it possible, Mr. Lyman, that you do not see the necessity of it?"

"And is it possible, Mr. McElwin, that you do not see the humor of it?"

"The absurdity, yes. But I see no fun in it. I am a dignified man, sir."

"Of course you tell me this in confidence—that you are a dignified man. All right—I won't say anything about it. But even dignity sometimes stands in need of advice. Go home and get a good night's sleep."

"Do you mean that you won't agree—"

"Not tonight."

"Mr. Lyman, I have heard that you are one of the kindest hearted of men."

"Oh, then you have heard of me? And I was not an entire stranger when I called at your bank? Yes, I suppose I have been what they were pleased to term a good fellow, and it strikes me that I have got the worst end of the bargain all along; so now, for once in my life, I am going to be mean. I will not sign your petition, Mr. McElwin."

"What, sir, do you mean it?"

"Yes, I mean it. I cannot afford to surrender a position so deliciously absurd."

"Then I will compel you, sir." He began to choke with anger.

"All right. I suppose you will invite me to be present."

"I will compel you to leave this town."

"What! After forming so strong an attachment?"

"You are not a gentleman, sir."

"No? Well, I have married into a pretty good family."

"I will not bandy words with you. But I will see you, and perhaps when you least expect it."

"Very well. Good night, and please remember that there is no humor in the law, that the statutes do not recognize a joke, and that, for the present at least, the young woman is my wife."

CHAPTER VII.

THE WEDDING BREAKFAST.

At the breakfast table the next morning old man Staggs spread himself back with a loud laugh as Lyman entered the room. His wife looked at him with sharp reproof.

"Jasper, you ought to be ashamed of yourself," she said. "It is a sin to laugh at a trouble. Sit down, Mr. Lyman."

"Cousin Sam," said Lyman, and the old man roared again. "Well, sir," he declared, with the tears streaming out of his eyes, "I never saw anything like it in my life. It knocked him, knocked him prosperous, as old Moxey used to say. Best joke I ever heard of."

"Jasper, don't," his wife pleaded. "For my sake don't. I am afraid he'll never speak to us again."

"Well, what of that? Can we coin his words and pass them for money? And he has never given us anything but words. He has been promising Annie a silk dress since she was fourteen. Won't speak to us again. What do you want? More promises? I'm gettin' tired of 'em. Why, he has even flung ridicule on my arrest of that desperate man, the most dangerous fellow that ever trod shoe leather. And, as Mr. Lyman don't appear to be upset, I'm glad the thing happened."

"But nearly all the blame falls on me," Miss Annie whimpered. "I am afraid ever to meet him again."

"Oh, you are afraid he won't make you another promise. Well, that would be a terrible loss. Lyman, jest help yourself to that fried ham. Tilt up the dish, and dip out some of the gravy. Sorry we haven't got cakes and maple syrup; wish we had some angel's food. Rather a strange weddin' breakfast with the bride not present."

"Did—did Mrs. Lyman entirely recover before she was taken home?" Lyman asked.

Miss Annie looked up. "I think it was nearly all put on," she said.

"Why, Annie Milburn Staggs!" her mother exclaimed. "How can you say such a thing! I don't know what's come over you and your father. I'm getting so I'm afraid to hear you speak, you shock me so."

"That's right, Annie," said the old man. "Say exactly what you think. To tell the truth, I'm gettin' sorter tired of bein' trod under by the horse that McElwin rides. And if I was you, Lyman, I'd stand right up to him."

"That's about where you'll find me standing. I am sorry for the young woman, but—"

"Don't worry over her," Miss Annie spoke up. "I believe she's laughing alone right now over the absurdity of it. Why, anybody would, and she's no more than human."

"I suppose she denounced me," said Lyman.

"Yes, in a way. She had to keep time with her mother. But they are madder at Henry Bostic than at anyone else. And really, he's the only one that's guilty. But I don't blame him much. The McElwins have always made fun of him."

"What are you going to do, Lyman?" the old man asked.

"Nothing. I am satisfied."

"Don't say that, Mr. Lyman," the old woman pleaded. "Don't distress a proud family."

"Madam," Lyman replied, "I am ready to kneel and beg the pardon of a heart in distress, but senseless pride doesn't appeal to me. I can compare families with the McElwins when it comes to that, and putting my judgment aside, I can be as proud as they are. They have money, but that is all, and they would be but paupers compared with the really rich. There are no great names in their family, while from my family have sprung orators, novelists and poets."

"Good!" Miss Annie cried. "I like to look at you when you talk like that."

"I'll bet you ain't afraid of nobody," the old man declared. "I never saw an eye like yours that was afraid, and a face, nuther. Oh, when it comes to looks, you are there all right. Well, sir," he added, "the town's stirred up. Old Ebenezer is all of a titter. Afraid to laugh out loud, but she's tickled all the same." The old man leaned back with a chuckle, and in his merriment he slowly clawed at the rim of gray whiskers that ran around under his chin. "I like to see a town tickled," he said.

"Never mind, Jasper," his wife spoke up, "your pride may be humbled one of these days."

"My pride," he laughed. "Why, bless you, I haven't any pride. Cousin McElwin knocked it all out of me when he said, and right to my face, that anybody could have arrested the man that choked the sheriff. I knowed then that something was going to happen to him. Knowed it as well as I knowed my name."

The old woman's hand shook and her cup rattled in the saucer as she put it down. "I hope the Lord will forgive you for bein' so revengeful," she said.

"Don't let that worry you, Tobitha," he replied, rubbing his rim of gray bristles. "The Lord takes care of his own, and I reckon your prayers have made me one of the elected."

"One of the elect, father," said Miss Annie.

"All the same," the old man replied. "Why, just look," he added, glancing through the window—"Just look at the folks out there gazin' at the house. Oh, we live in the center of this town, at present."

"Annie," said the old woman, "pull down the shade. The impudent things!"

"I don't believe I would," the old man tittered as his daughter arose to obey. "It ain't right to rob folks of a pleasure that don't cost us nothin'."

"There's that vicious Mrs. Potter," said Annie, and with a spiteful jerk she pulled down the shade. "We will shut off her malicious view."

"It is to be expected that a bridegroom should be an object of interest," Lyman remarked. "I awoke last night and thought that I heard sleet rattling at the window, but recalling the time of year I knew that it was rice thrown in showers by my friends."

The old lady looked at Lyman: "I am sorry that you're not more serious," she said.

"Serious," Lyman repeated with a twinkling glance at the old man. "I have done everything I can to prove that I am serious. I have just been married."

"Oh, you got it that time, Tobitha. Got it, and I knowed you would."

"Jasper, for goodness sake, hush. Annie, come away from there, a peepin' through at those good-for-nothin' people. They'd better be at work earnin' a livin' for their families, gracious knows. Are you going?" she asked as Lyman arose.

"Yes, to my office, to work for the *Sentinel*. I am the editor, now."

"Why, you didn't tell us that," said Annie, turning from the window.

"My mind has been engaged with more important matters," he replied, with his hands on the back of the chair, smiling at her. "It was only yesterday that Warren offered to join his misfortune with mine."

The old woman sighed: "I hope you'll be careful not to say things in the street to stir up strife," she said.

"Strife," the old man repeated with a laugh.

"Yes, strife," she insisted. "There are any number of men that would like to get him into trouble, just to please Cousin McElwin."

"I think I can take care of myself," said Lyman, putting on his hat.

CHAPTER VIII.

SUPPRESSING THE NEWS.

Lyman found Warren almost in hysterical glee, treading air up and down the office. "Ho!" he cried, as the bridegroom entered the office. "Let me get hold of you. Ho!" he shouted louder as he shook Lyman's hand. "Maybe we haven't got the situation by the forelock. Who ever heard of such a thing! Shake again. I didn't hear about it till awhile ago, and then I took a fit and caught another one from it. Glad I held the paper in line with the Grangers."

"Let me sit down," said Lyman.

"That's exactly what you must do, and write like a horse trotting. I've left two columns open, and I want you to spread yourself."

"Something important?" Lyman asked, sitting down.

"Now, what do you want to talk that way for? It's a world beater."

"What do you mean?"

"The marriage, don't you understand? Make two columns out of it and I'll get fifty subscribers before night. Hurry up, I've got a tramp printer waiting for the copy."

"Nonsense," said Lyman, lighting a cigar. "You wouldn't expect a man to write up his own marriage, any more than you would his own funeral."

"If his funeral was as extraordinary as this marriage I would. Finest piece of news I ever heard of. Never heard of anything to beat it; and we'll make the hair rise up in this community like bristles on a dog. Go ahead with it. The tramp's waiting and I am paying him time."

"Sit down," said Lyman. Warren did so reluctantly. Lyman put his hand on the young man's shoulder. "My dear boy," said he, "don't you know it would be very indelicate, not to say vulgar, for us to print a sensational account of that marriage? For a day it might be a news victory, but afterwards it would be a humiliating defeat. To tell you the truth, I am about ready to confess my regret that it happened." He was silent for a moment, as if to take note of Warren's hard breathing. "And if McElwin had come to me more as a man and less like a mad bull I would have agreed to sign the divorce petition. But I don't like to be driven. I am sorry to disappoint you; it is hard to throw cold water on your warm enthusiasm, but I won't write a word about the marriage."

Tears gathered in Warren's eyes. "This life's not worth living," he said. "Nothing but disappointment all the time. No hope; everything dead."

"But you shouldn't hang a hope on a poisonous weed, my boy."

"No matter where I hang one, it falls to the dust. But say, you are not going to sign that paper, are you?"

"Not at present. I am man enough to be stubborn."

"Good!" Warren cried, his wonted enthusiasm beginning to rise. "Don't sign it at all. You've got him on the hip, and you can throw him where you please. I've been waiting two years to get even with him. He stopped his paper because I printed a communication from a farmer denouncing money sharks. All right," he said, getting up, "we can make the paper go anyway. I'll put that tramp on another job."

He went out with a rush and the high spirits of glorious and thoughtless youth. Lyman went to the window and gazed over at the bank. The place looked cool and dignified, the province of a bank when other places of business have been forced to an early opening. Lyman smiled at the reflection that there was no crape on the door, as if he had half expected to find it there. "He couldn't let me have a hundred dollars when I offered to give him a mortgage on the library," he mused. "Said he couldn't, but he was willing enough to offer the money in exchange for another sort of mortgage. I suppose he thinks it strange that I was not bought upon the instant."

"Well," said Warren, entering the room, "I paid the tramp thirty cents for his time and he has gone away happier than if he had been put to work. What are you doing? Looking at dad's temple? Fine prospect."

"Yes, for dad."

"But don't you let him browbeat you out of your rights."

"I won't. The son-in-law has rights which the father-in-law ought to respect. What sort of a fellow is Zeb Sawyer?"

"Good deal of a bully," Warren answered, standing beside Lyman and looking through the window as if to keep company with the survey of the bank. "He managed by industry and close attention to shoot a man, I understand, and that gave him a kind of pull with society, although the fellow didn't die. He's a hustler and makes money, and of course has a firm grip on McElwin's heart. There are worse fellows, although he didn't renew his subscription when the time ran out."

While they were looking the porter opened the door of the bank.

"They are going to transact business just the same," said Lyman.

"Yes, they've got to pull teeth, no matter what has happened. Do you know that there are lots of fellows around town that would like to come up here and congratulate you, but they are afraid of McElwin."

"I wonder Caruthers hasn't come," said Lyman.

"No you don't. You've got no use for him and have told him so. Helloa, yonder comes McElwin and Sawyer. They are crossing the street. By George, I believe they are coming here."

"All right. Let's step back and stand at ease ready to receive them."

"Say, I believe there's going to be trouble here," said Warren. "And if there is you wouldn't mind writing it up, would you?"

"No, I wouldn't mind. Ordinary trouble is not quite so personally embarrassing as a marriage."

"Shall I keep the columns open?" Warren asked, his eyes dancing.

"No, not on an uncertainty."

"But it is not an uncertainty. They are coming up the stairs."

"Let us sit down," said Lyman.

McElwin and Sawyer entered the long composing room, looked about and then walked slowly toward the law office.

"Come in," said Lyman, as they approached the open door.

"You are not alone," McElwin remarked, as he stepped in, followed by Sawyer.

"Neither are you," said Lyman. "Sit down."

"We have not come to sit down, sir."

"Then you must pardon my not rising. This languid spring air makes me tired."

"Sir, we wish to see you in your private office."

"And that is where you find me. This was my public law office, but now it is my private editorial room."

"But your privacy is invaded," said the banker, glancing at Warren.

"So I have observed," Lyman replied, looking at Sawyer.

"Ah, but enough of this. Can we see you alone."

"I don't believe I'd waste any more time beating the bush," said Sawyer. "Let's come to the point."

"That's not a bad suggestion," Lyman replied. "We have about thrashed all the leaves off the bush."

The banker cleared his throat: "Mr. Lyman, even after a night of worried reflection, I am even now hardly able to realize the monstrous outrage that has been committed at the instance of a theologic imbecile, helped by a travesty on law enacted by a general assembly of ditch diggers and plowmen."

"That is a very good speech, Mr. McElwin. But I don't know that any outrage has been committed. Let us call it an irregularity."

"We'll call it an infernal shame," Sawyer declared, swelling.

"No," Warren struck in, "call it a great piece of news gone wrong. If I had my way it would be creeping down between column rules right now."

"Infamous!" cried the banker. "Don't you dare to print a word of it."

"Oh, I'd dare all right enough, if Lyman's modesty didn't forbid it."

"Then, sir, I must condemn your impudence, and commend Mr. Lyman's consideration."

"We are still beating the bush," Sawyer broke in.

"And no scared rabbit has run out," said Lyman.

"We might be after a wolf instead of a rabbit," Sawyer replied. The banker gave him a look of warning.

"Yes," said Lyman, "you might hunt a wolf and find a panther."

"I take that as a threat," the banker spoke up.

"Oh, not at all," Lyman replied. "It was merely to help carry out a figure of speech."

"Let's get to business," said Sawyer.

"All right," Lyman agreed. "But you don't expect me to state the object of your visit."

"No, sir. We can do that easy enough," said McElwin. Then he thrust his hand into his pocket and drew forth a paper. "Mr. Lyman, we have here a petition to the Chancery Court, asking for the setting aside of a ridiculous marriage, the laughing-stock of all matrimonial ceremonies. The entrapped lady's name has been affixed, and we now ask, sir, that you append your signature."

He stepped forward to the table near which Lyman was sitting, and spread out the paper. Lyman smiled and shook his head. "This is so sudden," he remarked, and Warren tittered.

"Sudden, sir?"

"Yes, not unexpected, but sudden. I must have time to think."

"To think? How long, sir?"

"Well, say about six months."

"There's no use wasting words with this fellow," said Sawyer. "We'll make him sign it."

Lyman looked at him. "I understand that you are a buyer and seller of mules," he remarked. "That may account for your impulsiveness. But at present you are not in the mule market, that is, not as a buyer."

"Come," said McElwin, "we don't want any trouble."

"But if we have it," Lyman replied, "let it come on before it is time to go to press. Warren wants news."

McElwin bit his brown lip, and Sawyer fumed.

"Don't put it off too long," said Warren. "I've hired a negro to turn the press."

"This is infamous!" the banker shouted, stamping the floor. "It is beyond belief." Then he strove to calm himself. "Mr. Lyman, I ask you, as a man, to sign this petition."

"The interview has wrought upon my nerves, Mr. McElwin, and if I should sign it now the Court might look upon my signature as obtained under coercion."

"Ridiculous, sir. I never saw a man more quiet."

"That is the mistake of your agitated eye. My nerves are in a tangle."

"Let me fix it," said Sawyer, swelling toward Lyman.

Lyman smiled at him: "You are pretty heavy in the shoulders, Mr. Sawyer, but you slope down too fast. I don't believe your legs are very good. You might say that I don't slope enough, or not at all, but I'm wire, Yale-drawn. You are meaty, vealy, the boys would say, but if you think that you'd feel healthier and more contented toward the world after a closer association with me—"

"Come, none of that," the banker interrupted. And then to Lyman he added: "I appeal to your reason, sir."

"A bad thing to appeal to when it sits against you. It is like appealing to a wind blowing toward you. But before I forget it I should like to ask what this man Sawyer has to do with it?"

"He and my daughter are engaged, sir."

"Well," said Lyman, "that might have been, but they are not now. Let me ask you an impertinent question: Does she love him?"

Sawyer started. The banker shifted his position. "I told you that they were engaged," said McElwin.

"I know you did, and that is the reason I asked you if she loves him. Let me ask another impertinent question: Didn't you appeal to her to marry him?"

"Who suggested that—that impudence, sir?"

"You did. Didn't you tell her that he was the most promising young man in the neighborhood and that she must marry him? Hold on a moment. And didn't your wife take the young woman's part, declaring that she looked higher, and wasn't she finally compelled to yield?"

"I will not answer such shameless questions."

"Well, then, I must bid you good day."

"Without signing this petition?"

"Without so much as reading it. But I will agree to do this. When your daughter comes to me and tells me that she loves Mr. Sawyer, that her happiness depends upon him, then I will sign it. At present I am her protector."

The banker snorted, but calmed himself. "You a protector—a mediator! Sir, you continue to insult me."

"He ought to be kicked out of his own office," Sawyer swore.

"Yes, but it would take a mule, rather than a mule driver. But I don't want anything more to say to you. I know your history; you wouldn't hesitate to shoot a man in the back, but when it comes to a face to face fight, you are a coward. Shut up. Not a word out of you. Mr. McElwin, I sympathize with your wife and your daughter, but I am not at all sorry for you. Good morning."

The angry visitors strode out, with many a gesture of unspeakable anger. "Well," said Warren, "that beats anything I ever saw. How did you learn so much about his family affairs? Who told you?"

"You told me Sawyer's history, and I made a bold guess at the rest."

"And you nailed him. Well, I'll swear if it ain't a jubilee. But there's no news in it for me."

"There may be some day," Lyman replied.

CHAPTER IX.

AT CHURCH.

On the following Sunday, which in fact was the day after the scene in the office, Lyman went to church. There were several churches in Old Ebenezer, but he chose the one which was the religious affiliation of the banker's family. A number of clean looking young fellows stood outside to gaze at the girls going in, and they nudged one another and giggled as they saw Lyman approaching. He pretended not to notice them, going straightway into the church. Most of the pews were free, and he sat down about the middle of the house and began carefully to look about over the congregation. A strange feeling possessed him, and he looked back with a thrill when he heard the rustle of skirts in the doorway. At last he saw her and he thought that Zeb Sawyer came with her to the door. The banker and his stately wife came in, but Lyman had no eye for them. He sat almost in a trance, gazing at the young woman as she walked slowly down the opposite aisle. She reminded him of a peach tree blooming in the early spring, there was so much pink and the rich color of cream about her. She sat down not far from him and he gazed at the silk-brown hair on the back of her neck. Once she looked around but her eye did not rest on him. She sang with the congregation, and he selected a sweet tone for her voice, and smiled afterward to discover that it was in the voice of a plain woman seated near her. Some one sat down beside

him, and he was surprised to find Caruthers.

The lawyer was surprised too, and he made a motion as if to move away.

"Never mind," whispered Lyman, "stay where you are."

"Thank you," Caruthers whispered in turn. "I didn't know but that fog was still between us."

"It is, and that's the reason we didn't recognize each other sooner."

"Then I'd better move."

"It is not necessary. I can stand it if you can."

"All right. Deuce of an affair you've got into."

"Yes, rather out of the ordinary."

"Has the old man offered you money to turn loose?"

"He offered to lend me a small sum."

"Why don't you make him give you a big sum?"

"Because I am not a scoundrel."

"No. Because you are weak. I would."

"Yes," Lyman whispered. "Because you are a scoundrel."

"Don't say that to me."

"Sit over there," said Lyman.

Caruthers moved away, and Lyman sat gazing at the young woman. "I am going to be of service to her," he mused. "And one of these days when she finds herself really in love she will thank me. She is dazzling, but I don't believe I could love her. I don't believe she has very much sense. She looks like a painting. I'd like to see her in an empire gown. I wonder what she thinks of me. Perhaps she doesn't." He smiled at himself, and then became aware that the preacher was in the heated midst of his sermon.

While the congregation was moving out, with greetings in low voices, and with many a smiling nod, the banker caught sight of Lyman, and made a noise as if puffing out a mouthful of smoke. His wife, who was slightly in front, glanced back at him.

"That wretched Lyman," he said, leaning toward her.

"Where?" she asked.

"Over at the right, but don't look at him. Everybody is staring at us."

"Where is Eva?"

"You ought to know," he answered.

"She is coming, just behind us."

They passed out. Lyman saw Zeb Sawyer standing at the door. He bowed to Mr. and Mrs. McElwin and continued to stand there, waiting for the young woman. She came out. She said something, and catching the expression of her face Lyman thought she must have remonstrated with him. But she permitted him to join her, and they walked away slowly. Lyman overtook them.

"Pardon me," he said to her, paying no attention to Sawyer, "but do you realize the scandalous absurdity of your action at his moment?"

"Sir!" Her graceful neck stiffened as she looked at him.



"Don't you know that it is not in good form to receive the attentions of an old lover so soon after marriage?"

She stopped, jabbed the ground with her parasol and laughed. But in a moment she had repented of her merriment. "I wish you would go away," she said. "You have already caused me tears enough."

"What, so soon? The beautiful smile, rather than the tear should be the emblem of the honeymoon. But this is not what I approached you to say. I wish to ask when I may expect a visit from you."

"I, visit you!"

"Yes. To ask me to sign the petition to the Court."

"I ask you now, sir."

"There!" said Sawyer, walking close beside the young woman.

"In the name of the love you bear this man?"

She looked at him with a blush. "In the name of my father, my mother and myself," she said.

"Oh," said he, "you are not the simple-minded beauty I expected to find. I suspect that your flatterers have not given you a fair chance. It is difficult to look through the dazzle and estimate the intelligence of a queen."

"Really! You come with a new flattery. My father's money—"

"Miss, or madam, your father is a pauper in comparison with the man who loves nature. He is a slave, living the life of a slave-driver. He is proud of you, not because you are a woman, but because you are, to him, a picture in a gilt frame."

"I just know everybody is looking at us," she said.

"You mean that you are afraid some of them may not be looking."

"Really! You are impudent, Mr.—"

"Have you forgotten your own name? Oh, by the way, your maiden name was McElwin, I believe."

She halted again to laugh. "Oh, this is too funny for anything," she said. "Isn't it, Zeb?"

"It won't be if your father looks around."

"He is too near the bank to look around now," Lyman replied. "He must keep his eyes on the temple."

"Zeb," she said, "why do you let this man talk that way? I thought you had more spirit."

"He has the spirit of anger, but not of courage," Lyman remarked.

"Eva," said Sawyer, "out in the Fox Grove neighborhood this man is known as a desperado."

"That phase of character was forced upon me, madam," Lyman replied, "and I had to accept it. Just as this man has been compelled to accept the name of notorious bully and coward, which was forced upon him. He gained some little prestige by shooting an unarmed man, and has been afraid to meet him since. The people have found this out, and hence his name of coward."

"It's a—" Sawyer hesitated.

"It's a what?" Lyman asked.

"A mistake."

"A soft word," said the young woman.

"A gentleman uses soft words in the presence of ladies," Sawyer replied.

"And a weak man uses a weak word in apology for a weak character," Lyman spoke up.

"Oh, I never heard anything like this before," the young woman declared. "I didn't know that men could be so entertaining."

"The potted plant astonished at the virility of the weed," said Lyman. "But I must leave you here. My office is up there. Mr. Sawyer knows where it is. His name appears on my list of callers. No, thank you, I cannot dine with you today."

"Oh, how impertinent," she laughed. "Nobody asked you, sir."

"No, but I'll ask you. My partner is up there now, with his oil stove lighted and the coffee hot. We have some broken dishes, and some cups that are cracked with age. Won't you come up and dine with us?"

"Why, I thought you boarded with Cousin Jasper Staggs. And ain't he the funniest thing? I like him ever so much."

"I do board with him, but I often dine out. Won't you come up and have a box of sardines?"

"No, I thank you. Wait a moment. When are you going to sign that petition for father?"

"When am I going to sign it for you?"

"Why, as soon as you can."

"No. But as soon as you comply with all the requirements of sentimental rather than of statute law."

CHAPTER X.

THE OLD FELLOW LAUGHED.

[Top](#)

"You are a pestiferous son-in-law," said Warren, as Lyman entered the room. "And I have taken possession of your private quarters," he added, pointing to a pile of country newspapers. "I have brought them in here to see if I could gouge some state news out of them. I know you don't like that sort of drudgery."

"That is all right. But why do you call me a pestiferous son-in-law?"

"I saw you through the window."

"With the lady and the mule?" said Lyman sitting down. "I asked them in to dine with me."

"Where? You say Staggs has nothing but a 'snack' on Sunday."

"Up here, to eat crackers and sardines."

"Extravagant pauper. I'm glad they didn't come."

"I knew they wouldn't."

"Did she ask you to sign the populistic petition?"

"Yes, but not in the name of love for the mule."

"In whose name, then?"

"Of her father, her mother, and herself."

"Are you going to sign it?"

"Not until she convinces me that she loves the mule, and I don't believe she can ever do that. She has a contempt for him, and I believe she is glad that her affairs are temporarily tied up. She's charming."

"There you go, falling in love with a strange woman."

"No, I am not in love with her, but I am naturally interested in her. I believe she has sense."

"Rather too pretty for that."

"No, she is handsome, but pretty is not the word. I'll warrant you she can run like a deer."

"You are gone," said Warren.

"No, I am simply an admirer. But admiration may be the crumbling bank overlooking the river. I may fall," he added, with a laugh.

"Don't. She has been taught to despise a real man. Let the other side of the house have the trouble."

"Yes," said Lyman. "It is better to be under the heel of the express company than under the heel of love."

"Don't say that," Warren objected, with a rueful shake of his head. "Some things are too serious to be joked over. It is all right to make light of love, for that is a light thing, but an express company is heavy. You are restless."

Lyman had got up and begun to walk about the room. "Yes, the bright day calls on me to come out."

"Isn't it the memory of a bright face that calls on you?"

"No. Well, I'll leave you."

"Won't you sit down to a sardine?"

"No. I'll stroll over to see old Jasper, and take cold pot-luck with him."

Old Jasper, his wife and daughter were seated at the table when Lyman entered the dining room. "Just in time," the old fellow cried. "We are waiting for you, although we didn't expect you. We didn't know but you'd gone up to McElwin's to dinner. Sit down."

Annie laughed, but the old woman looked distressed. "Jasper, you know you didn't think any such a thing. And if you did, how could you? Mr. Lyman doesn't intrude himself where he's not invited. And you know that McElwin is so particular."

Lyman frowned. It was clear that Mrs. Staggs, in her ignorance and in her awe of the man at the bank, could not feel a respect for intelligence and the refinement of a book-loving nature. "You may think me rude," said Lyman, "but I should not regard dining at his house a great privilege. Leaving out the respect I have for the young woman, it would not be as inspiring a meal as a canned minnow on a baize table."

"Why, Mr. Lyman, how can you say that?" the old woman cried.

"Madam, the fishes were divided among the thousands when the Son of Man fed the multitude, and that was a more inspiring meal than could have been provided by Solomon in all his glory."

The old man let his knife fall with a clatter. "Oh, he got you then!" he cried. "He set a trap for you and you walked right into it. All you've got to do is to set a trap for a woman, and she'll walk into it sooner or later."

"For goodness sake, hush, Jasper. A body would think you were the worst enemy I have on the face of the earth."

"Enemy! Who said anything about enemy? I was talking about a trap. But it's all right. We saw you, Lyman."

"Yes, and we didn't know it was going to happen," said Annie. "Everybody was watching you. And I heard a woman say that she admired your courage. I did, I'm sure."

"I didn't feel that I was exhibiting any degree of courage," Lyman replied. "All I had to fear was the young woman."

"But the man is—"

"A coward," Lyman broke in.

Old Staggs struck the table with his fist. "I always said it!" he shouted. "And he's another one that made light of my arrest of the man that choked the sheriff. Coward! of course he is."

Mrs. Staggs objected. No one whom McElwin had chosen for a son-in-law could be a coward. She admitted that he was not as gentle as one could wish. His life had been led out of doors. But he was a shrewd business man and would make a good husband. It was all well enough in some instances to permit girls to choose for themselves, but a girl was often likely to make a sad mistake, particularly a girl whose home life had been surrounded by every luxury. Love was a

very pretty thing, but it couldn't live so long as poverty, the most real thing in the world. The old man winked at Lyman. He said that age might soften a man, but that it nearly always hardened a woman. It was rare to see a woman's temper improve with age, while many a sober minded man became a joker in his later years. Mrs. Staggs retorted that women had enough to make them cross. "They have an excuse for scoldin'," she said.

"Nobody has so good an argument as the scold," the old man replied.

"They have men, and that's argument enough," said his wife.

The old fellow laughed. "She put it on me a little right there," he declared. "Yes, sir, I've got a steel trap clamped on my foot this minute. But what do you think of the situation now, Lyman; I mean your situation?"

"I don't know of any material change."

"But of course you are going to sign the petition," said Mrs. Staggs. "Everybody agrees that you must, before court meets. And that reminds me, I met Henry Bostic's mother today. The old lady doesn't appear to be at all grieved over the part her son took in the affair. It would nearly kill me if a son of mine had made such a blunder."

"It was no blunder on his part, and I don't blame him," said Annie. "No one thought enough of his pretensions to ask him if he had been ordained. And besides, Cousin McElwin had made fun of him."

"And a preacher can stand anything rather than ridicule," Lyman declared. "He may forgive all sorts of abuses, but cry 'Go up, old bald head!' and immediately he calls for the she-bears."

"And gives thanks when he hears the bears breaking the bones of his enemies," said the old man.

"I don't blame him," replied Lyman. "Ridicule is the bite of the spider, and it ought not to be directed against the man who dedicates his life to sacred work."

The old woman gave him a nod of approval: "You are right," she said. "But young Henry ought not to have been revengeful."

"No, not as the ordinary man is revengeful," Lyman assented, "but we serve the Lord when we humble a foolish pride. I don't think McElwin could have done a crueller thing than to have crushed the mother's heart with ridicule for the son."

"But about the petition," said Annie. "You will sign it, won't you?"

"I may."

"But why should you refuse. To annoy her?"

"No, to protect her."

"She would be awfully angry if she thought you presumed to pose as her protector. But let us change the subject. The whole town is talking about it, so let us talk of something else. Are you going to church tonight?"

"Yes, with you, if you don't object."

"Oh, I couldn't object, but—but don't you think it might cause remark, after what has happened?"

"There you go, leading back to it. Sawyer walked home with her; did that cause remark?"

"Yes, in a way; and I believe she will wait for the divorce before she goes with him again."

"Then she will be free of his company for some time to come. Well," he added, "I won't go to church. I'll go up stairs and read myself to sleep."

CHAPTER XI.

IN THE LANTERN LIGHT.

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An account of the marriage, written by an effusive correspondent, was published in a newspaper at the State Capital; and a few days later the same journal contained an editorial bearing upon the subject, taking the populistic party to task for its lamentable want of sense in legislation. The State press took the matter up, and then the "paragrapher" had his season of merry-making. "We have always heard it declared," said one, "that marriage is a plunge in the dark, but a preacher over at Old Ebenezer proves that it is all a joke." And this from another one: "'What do you think of young Parson Bostic?' was asked of Banker McElwin. 'I didn't think he was loaded,' the financier replied." It was said that a great batch of this drivel was cut out, credited and sent to McElwin, and Lyman accused Warren, but he denied it, though not with convincing grace.

One evening a picnic was given on the lawn of a prominent citizen. It had been heralded as a moonlight event, but the moon was sullen and the light was shed from paper lanterns hung in the trees. There was to be no dancing and no forfeit games, for McElwin was still raw, and the

master of the gathering on the lawn would not dare to throw sand on the spots where the rich man's prideful skin had been raked off. The entertainment was to consist of talk among the older ones, chatter among the slips of girls and striplings of men, with music for all.

"You will have to go to write it up," Warren said to Lyman.

"It won't be necessary to go," Lyman replied. "We can hold a pleasanter memory of such events if we don't really see them. I can write of it from a distance."

"Yes, but that isn't enterprise, and we want to prove to these people that we are enterprising. They must see you on the ground."

"All right."

"You will go, then?"

"That's what I meant when I said all right."

"And you didn't mean that you'd simply look over the fence and then come away?"

"No, I mean that I'll go and be a fool with the rest of them."

"That's all I ask. Here's an invitation. You'll have to show it at the gate."

"Why don't you go, Warren?"

"It would be absurd."

"Why? Your clothes might be worse."

"There are a good many observations that don't apply to clothes. The entertainment is to be given by the Hon. Mr. S. Boyd. One time, with great reluctance, he lifted a grinding heel off my head. I owe him five dollars."

"And it would be embarrassing to meet him, by invitation, on his own lawn."

"Yes. I'll pay him one of these days, but of course he doesn't know that."

"Probably he doesn't even suspect it," said Lyman.

"No. He's dull, and not inclined to be speculative."

"I should take him to be wildly adventurous."

"Why so?"

"He let you have five dollars."

"Oh, I see. But that's all right. He'll treat you well. Say, he may pass cigars with a gilt band around them. Put a few in your pocket for me."

"I might have a chance to sneak a whole box."

"Come, don't rub the lamp. Rub the ring and get two cigars. I'll sit up and wait for them. If Boyd asks you why I have been dodging him, tell him I'm not well."

The lawn was a spread of blue grass, beneath trees with low, hanging boughs, and through the misty light and moving shadows the house looked like a castle. The air was vibrant with the music of the "string" band, gathered from the livery stable and the barber shop; and mingled with the music as if it were a part of the sound, was the half sad scent of the crushed geranium. At the gate a black man, in a long coat buttoned to the ground, took Lyman's card of invitation. From groups of white came the laugh of youth, and from darker gatherings came the hum of talk. Lyman shook hands with nearly every one whom he met, laughing; and his good humor was an introduction to persons he had never seen before. He felt that he was a part of a joke which everyone was enjoying. The Hon. S. Boyd came forward and shook hands with him.

"I am delighted to welcome you to my grounds," said the great man, speaking as if he had invited Lyman to hunt in a forest of a thousand acres. "And your partner, will he be here?"

"No, he's not very well this evening," Lyman answered, walking slowly, arm-hooked with the great man.

"I am sorry to hear it. A man of wonderful energy, sir. Quite the sort of a man we need in Old Ebenezer. And I am glad to see that his paper is picking up. I was over at the State Capital the other day, and the Governor spoke of something taken from its columns."

"Mr. Warren remembers your kindness, sir," replied Lyman; "not only your words of encouragement, but the money you so generously advanced to him."

"A paltry sum, and really I had forgotten it."

"The sum was not large, but any debt is embarrassing until we pay it, and then we can look back upon it as a pleasure."

"Sound doctrine, Mr. Lyman. But there must be no embarrassment in this matter. So, if you please, you may tell Mr. Warren that I will take enough copies of the next edition to cancel the

debt. Not enough to embarrass him, you understand. It would come to about one hundred copies, I believe. But let him make it two hundred, as I wish to send it out pretty largely, and I will send him five dollars in addition. Will you pardon me if I mix business with pleasure, and give you the money now?" He unhooked his arm.

"I shall be delighted to act as your messenger," Lyman replied.

"I thank you, sir; you are very obliging. And now," he added, when he had given Lyman the money, "we'll go over to the grotto and get a lemonade and a cigar."

They went to a hollow pile of stones, where a negro stood ready to serve them. "Help yourself to the lemonade. It was deemed advisable to have nothing strong. A very old ladle, that, sir; it was the property of my grandfather. The cigars, Jacob, the gold band. Now, here's a cigar, sir, that I can recommend. Oh, don't stop at one. Here," he added, grabbing a handful, "put these in your pocket, for I am sure you'll not get any like them down town. Well, if you will be kind enough to excuse me, I'll slip off to look after my other guests."

Lyman walked about, joking and gathering the names of the joyous maidens, the heavy men, the light young fellows, and the dames who had come to enjoy their daughters' conquests and their own dignity. With a feeling of disappointment he wondered why the banker's family was not represented, and more than once he looked about sweepingly, believing that he had heard the loud voice of Zeb Sawyer. He mused that his work was done, that the company had transacted its business with him, and he turned aside to a quiet spot, to a seat behind a clump of shrubs, to smoke a cigar and to picture Warren's surprise and delight. The cigar burned out and he was about to go, when he heard the ripple of skirts on the soft grass. A woman came across the sward, and in the light of a neighboring lantern Lyman recognized Eva. She saw him and halted.

"Won't you please sit down," he said, rising.

"I—I—didn't know you were here," she replied, looking back.

"The fact that you came is proof enough of that," said he, with a quiet laugh.

"How shrewd you are," she replied.

"No, I am only considerate. But now that you are here, won't you please sit down. I am weary of senseless chatter, and I would like to talk to you."

"Oh, I couldn't refuse, after such a compliment as that. And, besides, I am tired."

She sat down; he continued to stand. She did not appear to notice it.

"I looked all over the ground, but could not find you," he said.

"Mamma and I did not come until just now. We live so near that we put off our coming until late."

"Did your father come?"

"No. Only mamma and I. Some of us had to come."

"Just you and your mother, and not Mr. Sawyer?"

"He didn't come with us. I don't know that he is here." For a few moments they were silent. "I am so tired of everything," she said.

"Tired of yourself?"

"Yes, I am."

"Why don't you do something? Did you ever think of that?"

"What would be the use of thinking of it? There's nothing for me to do."

"There is something for everyone to do. Why don't you take up some line of study?"

"I hate study. I can't put my mind on it."

"But you could read good books."

"I do, but I get tired. I must have been petted too much."

"Ah! A girl is beginning to be strong when she feels that way. I suppose you have been flattered all your life."

"Do I show it?"

"Yes. But not so much as you did."

"And do you know the reason?"

"I don't know, unless it is that you have been sobered by a joke."

"That has something to do with it. You have made me think. You don't regard me as a spoiled child; you seem to believe that I have a mind. And that, even if you were a field hand, would cause me to be interested in you. I would like to talk with you seriously, but you joke with me."

"To hear you in a serious mood would be as sweet as an anthem."

"You must not talk that way. I want your friendship."

"You shall have it."

"I need your help."

"You shall have it."

"I don't want to be wicked," she said, looking up at him, "but I beg of you not to sign that petition to the Court, until—"

"Until when?"

"Until Zeb Sawyer is—is—out of the way. People flatter me and praise me, but they don't know what I have suffered. And my father doesn't understand me. When you called Sawyer a coward I wanted to shout in the street."

"Still you consented to marry him."

"Yes, to live for a little longer in peace. But I know a tall rock over on the creek, and from the top of it is a long way to the cruel boulders below. They call it 'Lover's Leap,' and I have thought after awhile the name might be changed to 'Despair's Leap.' At night I have dreamed of that rock, and sometimes my dream would continue after I opened my eyes. Our engagement was for one year, and often I said to myself that I had but one year longer to live. At church I would pray, and I could hear the words, 'Children, obey your parents.' And then I would go home and pretend to be happy in that obedience."

"But you signed the petition."

"Yes, with a prayer that you would not sign it."

"And I won't."

"Not even if they should come with pistols?"

"Not if they should come with a mob and a rope."

She looked up at him, with her hands clasped in her lap. The light fell upon her face, and in its human loveliness was the divine spirit of sadness. Lyman looked upward at the fleece among the stars, the lace curtain of the night.

"With the strength accidentally dedicated to me by a body of men assembled to break the customs of a class opposed to them, I will hold you a prisoner, free from the grasp of a feelingless clown," he said. "I will protect you. And when you have really fallen in love, and believe that your happiness depends upon a man, I will sign the petition."

With the frankness of a child she sprung from the seat and grasped his hand: "Oh, you stand between me and the tall rock," she said. "Good night—God bless you."

She ran away. Lyman looked after her, with dim vision—her white gown spectral in the misty light.

CHAPTER XII.

WANTED TO DREAM.

Lyman walked slowly down the tree-darkened lane that led to the main street of the village. Beneath a forest oak, where the desolate town cow and the stray sheep had come to seek freedom from the annoyances of the day, he halted and looked back. The few remaining lanterns were like fire-flies in a growth of giant grass. The members of the "string-band" were singing a negro melody. The notes came floating with the mirth-shriek of a maiden, and the hoarse laugh of the boy who aspired to be a man. Far away on a hillside a dog was barking at the mystery of night. Near by a mocking-bird, in a cage, was singing out of the melodious fullness of his heart. The muser felt two distinct senses, one that a sweet voice had touched the quick of his nature, the other that he had been grandiloquent in his talk while looking at the stars. She had threatened to destroy herself. No, she would not do that. She could but shrink from it if the time should come. But to resolve upon it, driven by a father who could not understand her, was so girlishly natural, so complete a bit of romantic despair, that she must have found it a source of great consolation.

Warren was waiting. "I'll bet you didn't bring a cigar," he said, tossing a cob pipe on the table.

"You've lost," Lyman replied, rolling out a handful of cigars upon a pile of newspapers.

Warren reached over, his eyes snapping. "Gold bands," he said. "Oh, I knew you would bring them if they were to be had. You are all right, Samuel," he added, striking a match. "Yes, sir, but I have been sitting up here, almost envious of the good time you were having. However, I was not

sorry that I had not faced the Hon. S. Boyd. He frowned at me the last time we met. I can stand to be dunned once in awhile, but I don't like to be frowned at. Did he say anything about the money I owe him?"

"Well," said Lyman, leaning back in his chair, "the subject was mentioned."

"What, the old skinflint! Did he blurt it out before everybody?"

"No. He talked to me privately."

"Well, I am glad he had that much consideration. But why did he want to speak of it at all? I suppose you told him I'd pay it as soon as I could, didn't you?"

"Yes, I told him so."

"Well, then, what more does he want? No man can pay a debt before he can. There are in this town some of the queerest people I ever saw. They expect a man to pay a debt whether he's got the money or not. I'll pay that fellow and tire him to death with meeting him afterward. I'll cross the street a dozen times a day to shake hands with him. Yes, sir, I'll make him wish that I owed him."

"He sent you this," said Lyman, handing over the five dollars.

Warren's eyes flew wide open with astonishment. "Sent it to me?"

"Yes, he wants two hundred copies of our next edition. One hundred to discharge the old debt, and the five dollars is to pay for the other hundred."

"Lyman, you rubbed the lamp. Don't rub it again right away. Let me hold this thing a minute."

"You may hold it until the express company takes it away from you."

"Hush, don't make a noise. You'll wake me up. Let me dream."

"She was there," said Lyman, after a brief silence.

"A dreamer listening to a dream," Warren vacantly replied.

"I had quite a talk with her. She is not a doll. She's a woman with a soul and a mind."

"You are gone," said Warren, wrapping the bank note about his finger.

"No, I'm not gone. I am decidedly here, and I am going to stay here to protect her."

He related the talk that had passed between the young woman and himself. He told even of his gaze at the stars and his theatric declaration to stand as her protector. But he did not tell that she had caught his hand. In that act there was something sacred to him.

"As I said before, you're all right," declared Warren. "No one but a great man could have done what you have done tonight. Why, that old fellow was a jewel, and was not revealed until you brushed the dust off him. Two hundred copies? He shall have them, together with a write-up that will make this town's hair stand on end. And, by the way, don't you think you had better get at it while it's fresh?"

"Don't you fear. It will never fade, my boy. It is in my mind to stay."

"Look here, don't let that joke turn on you," said Warren. "It would be serious if you should fall in love with her."

"Yes, but I won't."

"Were you ever caught by a woman?"

"Not very hard; were you?"

"Rather," Warren answered; "I loved a girl several years ago, while I was running a paper over at Beech Knob. Yes, sir, and I reckon I loved her as hard as a woman was ever loved. I thought about her every day. And I believe she cared for me."

"It's of no use to ask you why you didn't marry her. Money, I suppose."

"That's it, Lyman; money. You see, her old man was rather well fixed, and one day when he was in the office I borrowed ten dollars of him. Then I couldn't go to the house, you see, and before I could pay it back the girl was married. Lost one of the best girls this country ever produced just because I couldn't raise ten dollars to pay her father. I guess Brother McElwin wishes now that he had let you have the hundred. It would have given him a hold on you."

"It would have given him a club," said Lyman. "A man could snatch out a hundred dollar debt and run me off the bluff. 'Lover's Leap,'" he added to himself, smiling. Warren looked up and saw the smile, but he had not caught the words.

"It's too serious a matter to grin over," he remarked, sadly, but with a bright eye turned toward the cigars that lay upon the pile of newspapers. "It's a curse to be poor," he said, with solemnity, though his eye was delighted.

"A crime," Lyman replied. "It gives no opportunity to be generous, sneers at truth and calls virtue

a foolish little thing. It is the philosopher, with money out at interest, that smiles upon the contentment and blessedness of the poor man."

"Helloa, you are more of a grumbler than I ever saw you before."

Lyman leaned back with his arms spread out, and laughed. "It would seem that the rich man's coach wheel has raked off a part of my hide, but it hasn't, my boy." He got up and walked about the room; he went to the window. Damp air was stirring and an old map was flapping slowly against the dingy wall. He gazed over the housetops in the direction of the grove where the paper lanterns had hung, but all was dark and rain was fast falling.

"It's raining," he said. "I'm glad it held up until after the picnic."

"Yes," Warren replied, "for we might have been cheated out of the cigars and the five dollars."

"And I might have been robbed of a pleasant few moments."

"You are gone," said Warren, yawning.

"No, not yet, but I am going." He reached for his hat.

"In the rain?" Warren asked. "I'm going to smoke another cigar before I turn in. Stay here tonight; you can have my cot. I'd as soon sleep on the floor."

"No, I won't rob you."

"Rob me? Your work tonight would make a stone slab a soft place for me to rest."

"And my mind might turn a bed, formed of the breast feathers of a goose, into a stone slab. Good night."

The hour was late, but a light was burning in old Jasper's house. As Lyman stepped upon the veranda Henry Bostic came out of the sitting room.

"Ah, Mr. Lyman, but you are dripping wet."

"I hadn't noticed it, but it is raining rather hard. You are not going out in it, are you?"

"I have but a short distance to go. I found Miss Annie so entertaining that I didn't know it was so late. I came to invite her to hear me preach the third Sunday of next month, at Mt. Zion, on the Fox Grove road, five miles from town. I should like you to be present."

"Yes, as I was present at your first—"

"Don't mention that, Mr. Lyman," he said, hoisting his umbrella. "That was not wholly free from a spirit of revenge, and I have prayed for pardon. My mother has called on the McElwins to beseech them to forgive me, and I went to the bank today on the same errand."

"Wait a moment," said Lyman, as the young minister moved toward the steps leading to the dooryard. "Did the banker forgive you?"

The young man stood with his umbrella under the edge of the roof, and the rain rumbled upon it. "No, sir. He said I had done his family a vital injury. I told him I might have been an instrument in the hands of a higher power, and he sneered at me. I hope you forgive me, Mr. Lyman."

"To be frank, I am secretly glad that it happened," Lyman replied.

"But not maliciously or even mischievously glad, I hope," said the preacher.

"No, I am glad for other reasons, but I cannot explain them."

The rain rumbled upon the umbrella and the preacher was silent for a moment. "Mr. McElwin said that if I could induce you to sign the petition he would forgive me. And I told him I would. Will you sign it?"

"I cannot, Mr. Bostic."

"May I ask why?"

"Because I stand as the young woman's protector. She despises Sawyer, and her father was determined that she should be his wife."

"Did she tell you, sir?"

"Yes, and I have promised; but this is confidential."

"Then, sir, the petition must not be signed. The ceremony, after all, was a blessing, and I shall not again crave the banker's forgiveness. Good night."

CHAPTER XIII.

There came a day, and it followed the picnic, with not a week between, when Lyman's midnight scratching, done at the house of old Uncle Buckley, came out into the dazzling light. A story written by him appeared in one of the leading magazines of the East. It was a simple recital, a picture of the country and its people, and so close down upon the earth did it lie that a patter of rain that fell somewhere among the words brought a sweet scent from the blackberry briars, and a smell of dust from the rain. There were intelligent reading persons, in Old Ebenezer, and with the big eye of astonishment they viewed the story, but they were afraid to form an opinion until the critic of the "State Gazette," following a bold lead struck by an eastern reviewer, declared it to be a piece of masterly work. And then the town of Old Ebenezer was glad to assert its admiration. The leading hardware man said that he had noticed from the first that there was something strange about the fellow.

"And," said he, "you can never tell what a strange sort of a fellow may pop up and do. Now, there was old Kincade's son Phil. Everybody knew he was curious; everybody could see that, but they didn't know how to place him. I told them not to place him. I told them there was no telling where he might break out. His daddy said he was a fool. I said 'wait.' Well, they waited, and what came? The boy discovered a process for tanning coon hides without bark, and now look at him. Worth ten thousand dollars if he's worth a cent."

A saddler gave his opinion: "I knew he had it in him. I haven't read his article, but I'll bet it's good. Why, he's said things in my shop that it would be worth anybody's while to remember. Just stepped in and said them and went out like it wasn't no trouble at all. And look what he's done for the paper here! Every time he touches her he makes her flinch like a hoss-fly lightin' on a hoss. And when everybody was making such a mouth about that fool marriage, I—well, I just kept my mouth shut and didn't say a word."

Warren was the proudest man in town. He was so elated and so busy talking about the story that he never found time to read it, except to dip into it here and there, to find something to start him off on a gallop of praise.

"Why didn't you tell me, so that I might have known what to expect? Why did you nurse it so long?" Warren asked, as he and Lyman sat in the office.

"Oh, I hadn't anything to tell, except of a probable prospect. And nothing is more tiresome than to listen to a man's hopes."

"But you must have known that the story would be a success."

"No, I didn't."

"Well, maybe not. It was fortunate to drive center the first shot."

Lyman laughed sadly. "Warren," said he, nodding toward the magazine, which lay upon the table, "I began to scatter seeds so long ago that I hardly know when; and one has sprouted. I have been writing stories for the magazines ever since I was a boy, and they were returned with a printed 'thank you for—' and so forth. I had thought, as many young writers think, that I must be deep and learned. I didn't know that one half-hidden mood of nature, one odd trait of man, one little reminder to the reader of something that had often flitted across his mind, was of more value than the essence of a thousand books. I strove to climb a hill where so many are constantly falling and rolling to the bottom. At last I opened my eyes and shut my memory, and then I began to progress. But not without the most diligent work. This story, (again nodding toward the magazine) was written six times at least."

"Why, you have made it look as easy as falling off a log," said Warren.

"Yes; it was work that made it look easy. There are two sorts of successful stories; one that makes the reader marvel at its art; the other one that makes the reader believe that almost anybody could have written it. The first appeals to the stylist and may soon die. The other may live to be a classic."

"Go ahead. That sort of talk catches me. It seems now that I have thought it many times, but just didn't happen to say it. Have you got anything in hand now?"

"Yes; I might as well let it all out now. I have a book accepted by a first-class house, and I have a long story which I may submit to a magazine to be published as a serial in the event of the success of the book."

"You are all right. I have often told you that. Why, some of the things you have written for this paper would do to go into the school readers along with the dialogue between some fellow—forget his name now—and Humphrey Dobbins; and that barber who lived in the City of Bath. Recollect? Let's see, 'Respect for the Sabbath Rewarded.' Don't you know now? 'And say,' the stranger says to him, 'I have glorious news for you. Your uncle is dead,' and so on. But it used to tickle me to think the fellow could find any glory in the news of his uncle's death, but I guess he did."

"Yes, I remember. He was the barber that wouldn't shave on Sunday. And as a reward his uncle died and left him a lot of money. And you'd hit it off pretty well now by marking out virtue in 'Virtue Is Its Own Reward,' and substituting 'money.'"

"But I don't think we've got very much cause to complain," said Warren. "We gathered in five

subscribers yesterday, and three today, besides an electric belt ad, to run for six months. Oh, we're all right, and the first thing you know, we'll have some new clothes. We don't want any hand-me-downs. About two weeks ago I went into the tailor's shop across the square, and picked out a piece of cloth. But when I passed there yesterday I noticed that some scoundrel had bought it. Why, helloa; come in."

Uncle Buckley Lightfoot stood in the door. His approach had been so soft that they did not hear him. His tread was always noiseless when he walked in strange places. He appeared to be afraid of breaking something.

"Come in!" Lyman shouted, springing to meet him.

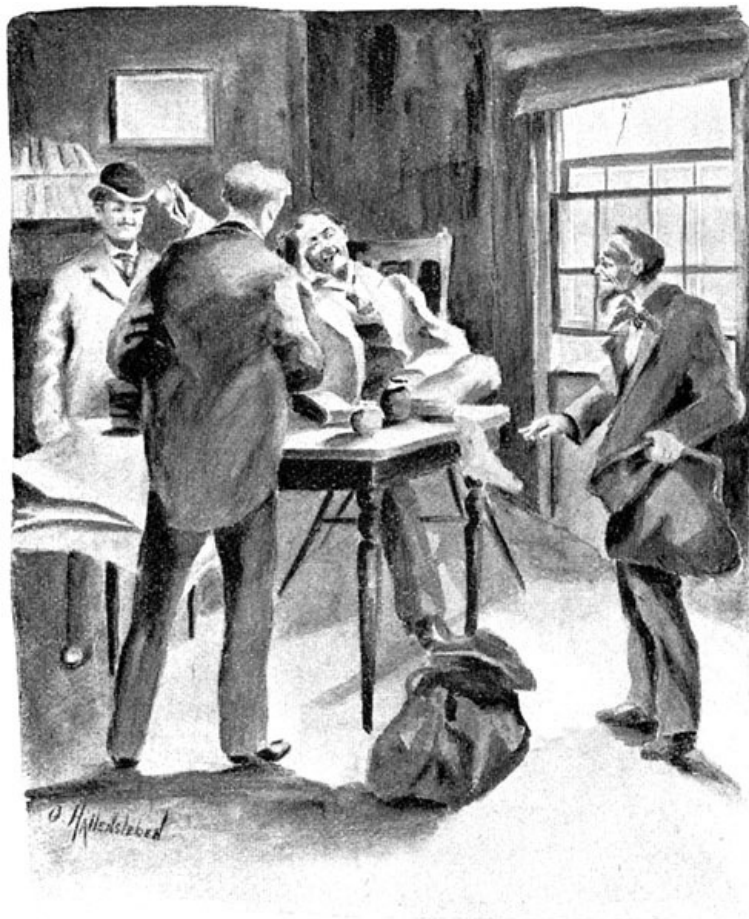
"Howdy do; howdy do." He seized Lyman and then shook hands with Warren. "I jest thought I'd look in and see how Sammy was gettin' along. And I promised mother that if he was busy I'd jest peep in and then slip away. Sammy, you look as peart as a red bird."

"Sit down, Uncle Buckley," said Lyman. "Let me take off your leggings."

"Jest let them alone where they are, Sammy," the old man replied. "I haven't got long to stay, for I don't want to keep you from your work. Jest put those saddle-bags over there on the table. No, wait a minute. I've got something in 'em for you. Look here," he added, taking out a package; "mother sent you some pickles."

"Oh, I'm a thousand times obliged to her," said Lyman, putting the package and the saddle-bags on the table. "Tell her so, please."

"I'll do that. Lawd bless you, Sammy; I do reckon she knows what a man needs. And she says to me, 'Pap, you shan't go one step toward that fetch-taked town unless you agree to take Sammy some pickles made outen the finest cucumbers that ever growd.' And I jest said, 'You do up your pickles and don't you be askeered of me.' And she begins then to fix 'em up, a-talkin' all the time fitten to kill herself. 'The idea of a man bein' shet up there in that musty place, without any pickles,' she says; 'it's enough to kill him, the Lord knows.' And I wanted to sorter relieve her distress, and I 'lowed that mebbly there was pickles in town; and she turned about, lookin' like she wanted to fling somethin' at me. 'Pap,' she says, and I begin to dodge back, 'for as smart a man as you are, I do think you can say the foolishhest things of anybody I ever seen. Pickles fitten to eat in a town where if a person ain't dressed up he can't get into the churches on the Lord's day; and where, if they do get in, the minister won't even so much as cast his eye on 'em while he's a preachin' of his sermon! Pickles indeed,' she says, and I kep' on a dodgin'. How are you gettin' along, Sammy?"



"First rate."

"But what's this joke they've got on you about bein' married?"

"That's what it is, Uncle Buckley, a joke."

"I told Jimmy and Lige that it was only a prank. I knowed you weren't goin' to throw yourself away on no one here, when the woods are full of 'em out our way that would like to have you. Don't dodge, Sammy. Stand right up to your fodder, for you know it's a fact. It made mother powerful mad. She took it that you wanted the gal, and the old man thought you wa'n't good enough. And she boiled. 'Why, he can start a church tune better than any person we ever had in the neighborhood,' she 'lowed. 'Not good enough, indeed!' And I dodged on off, sorter laughin' as I ducked behind the hen-house. And that reminds me, Sammy, that a varmint come the other night and toated off the likeliest rooster I had on the place. Mother woke me at night, and asked if that wa'n't a chicken squallin.' I told her that I had the plan of a new barn in my head, and that I couldn't let the squallin' of no sich thing as a chicken drive it out, and I went to sleep. But you ought to have seen the look she gave me the next mornin' when we found feathers scattered all over the yard. By the way, Sammy, where is the other man; the great lawyer that was your partner? Is he out at present?"

"Yes, Uncle Buckley, he's out at present, and for good. We have dissolved partnership."

"No!" said the old man, dropping his jaw. "Why, I thought you and him was together for keeps. And you don't really mean to tell me that you ain't, Sammy?"

"He has an office on the other side of the square, and I'm not in the law business," Lyman replied. "Warren and I are running this paper."

"When did you quit each other?" the old man asked, leaning forward and picking at his blanket leggings.

"Why, the day you were in here. You remember I left you here with him. When I came back he had decided to set aside the partnership."

The old man looked up at the ceiling. "I reckon it's all right, but I don't exactly get the hang of it," he said, getting up and taking his hat off the table.

"Understand what, Uncle Buckley?" Lyman asked.

"Oh, nothin'. It's all right, I reckon. Young feller, jest keep on a shootin' your paper at me. We find some mighty interestin' readin' in it; and sometimes Lige he breaks out in a loud laugh over a piece, and he 'lows, 'if that ain't old Sammy, up and up, I don't want a cent.' Well, boys, I've some knockin' around to do and I'll have to bid you good day."

CHAPTER XIV.

NOTHING REMARKABLE IN IT.

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Mr. McElwin put aside his newspaper and paced slowly up and down the room, his slippers falling with an emphatic pat on the carpet. His wife sat near the window, watching the swallows cutting black circles in the dusky air. Eva was seated at the piano, half turned from it, while with one hand she felt about to touch the nerve of some half-forgotten tune. McElwin dropped down in an arm chair.

"I wonder if this newspaper will ever stop talking about that fellow's story," said he. "I read it over and I didn't see anything remarkable in it. Of course it's all right to feel a local pride in a thing, but gracious alive, we don't want to go into fits over it. Now, here's nearly half a column about it."

"Let me see it," said Eva. He picked up the paper and held it out to her. She got off the piano stool, took the paper and stood near her father, under the hanging lamp.

"Can't you find it? On the editorial page."

"Yes, I have found it. But it is not written by the pen of local pride."

"It is in the state paper."

"Yes, but if you had read to the bottom you would have seen that it was from a New York paper."

"Ah, well, it doesn't interest me, no matter what paper it is from."

"What is it?" Mrs. McElwin asked, turning from the window.

"Something more about Mr. Lyman's story," the daughter answered.

"It appears to have stirred up quite a sensation," said Mrs. McElwin. "One of those happy accidents."

"It was not an accident," the girl replied. "It was genius."

"Come, don't be absurd," said her father. "There is such a thing as a man finding a gold watch in

the road. I call it an accident. I had quite a talk with him in my private office before our relations became strained, and I found him to be rather below the average. He surely has but a vague and confused idea regarding even the simplest forms of business. But I admit that his story is all well enough, and so are many little pieces of fancy work, but they don't amount to anything. Educated man? Yes, that's all right, too, but the highways are full of educated men, looking for something to do. Sawyer is worth a dozen of him."

Mrs. McElwin glanced at her daughter, as if she had heard a footstep on dangerous ground. She was not far wrong.

"Sawyer is a man, ready—"

"He has not shown it," the girl was bold enough to declare. She stood under the lamp and the newspaper rattled as she held it now grasped tightly.

"Eva," said her mother, in gentle reproof, "don't say that."

"But I want her to say it if she thinks it," the banker spoke up, almost angrily. "I want her to say it and prove it."

"He proved it to me, but I may not be able to prove it to you. Mr. Lyman called him a coward and he did not resent it."

"Lyman did? How do you know?"

"I heard him."

The banker blinked at her. "You heard him? When? And how came you to be near him?"

"It was on the Sunday after the mar—the foolish ceremony. As Mr. Sawyer walked off with me from the church door Mr. Lyman joined us."

"Joined you! The impudent scoundrel! What right had he to join you, and why did you permit it?"

"He took the right and we couldn't help ourselves. At least I couldn't and Mr. Sawyer didn't try to."

"I wish I had been there."

"You were just in front, but you didn't look around."

"Well, and then what happened?"

"Why, during the talk that followed, Mr. Lyman called him a coward."

"Mr. Sawyer is a gentleman and he couldn't resent it at the time in the presence of a lady."

"He has had time enough since," she said with scorn.

Mrs. McElwin came from the window and sat down near her husband. The banker looked hard at his daughter, and a sudden tangling of the lines on his face showed that the first words that flew to the verge of utterance had been suppressed, and that he was determined to be calm.

"He has had time, but he has also had consideration," said McElwin. "To resent an insult is sometimes more of a scandal than to let it pass. He hesitated to involve your name."

He was now so quiet, so plausible in his gentleness that the young woman felt ashamed of the quick spirit she had shown.

"Sit down," he said, and she obeyed, with her hands lying listlessly together in her lap.

"Your mother and I know what is best for you," he said. A slight shudder seemed to pass through the wife's dignified shoulders. "You have always been the object of our most tender solicitude," he went on. "And if I have been determined, it has been for your own ultimate good. I admit that there is not much romance about Mr. Sawyer. He is a keen, open-eyed, practical business man, with money out at interest, and with money lying in my bank. His family is excellent. His father was, for many years, the Clerk of the Court of Appeals, and his grandfather was a judge. And I believe as firmly as I ever believed anything, that he will be a very rich man. He is constantly widening out and will not confine himself to the buying and selling of mules. His judgment of the markets is fine, and I repeat that he will be a very rich man. In looking over the field I don't know another man I would rather have associated with me."

His wife, long since convinced by his practical logic, looked up with a quiet smile of approval. The girl sat weaving her fingers together. She met her father's questioning eye and did not waver.

"I don't presume to question what you say," she said. "But I am no longer a spoiled child to be petted and persuaded. I am a woman and have begun to think. This marriage, though brought about in so ridiculous a way, has had a wonderful effect upon me. I have heard that marriage merges a woman's identity with that of her husband, but this marriage has made an individual of me. It has freed me from frivolous company; it has given me something that I once thought I could not endure—solitude—and I have found it delightful. The hard and stubborn things that were beat into my head at school, and which I despised at the time, are useful pieces of knowledge now, and, viewing them, I wonder that I could ever have been so silly as to find my greatest pleasure in flattery."

Never before had she spoken at such length, nor with an air so serious. Her mother looked at her with a half wondering admiration, and the banker's countenance showed a new-born pride in her—in himself, indeed—for nothing in his household was important unless it showed a light reflected from him; and now, in his daughter, he discovered a part of himself, a disposition to think. This thought was seditious, and there is virtue in even a rebellious strength, and it convinced him that henceforth he must address her reason rather than a feminine whim. He was proud of her, admitted it to himself and conveyed it in a look which he gave his wife; but he was not the less determined to carry his point. Sawyer was a man of affairs. His judgment was sure, his spirit adventurous. Figures were his playthings, and who could say that he was not to become one of the country's great financiers? Once he had made a bid against many competitors acquainted with the work, to build a bridge for the county. Sawyer's bid was the lowest. His friends said that the undertaking would ruin him; McElwin deplored the young man's rashness. But he built the bridge, made money on the speculation; and the first traffic across the new structure was a drove of Sawyer's mules, en route to a profitable market.

"I am glad you have begun to think," he said, smiling at her. "I knew the time would come, and, as it has come, let me ask you a question. Did you request this Mr. Lyman to sign the petition?"

"I mentioned it to him."

"You did. That ought to have been sufficient. What did he say?"

"He said that he would—under certain conditions." McElwin winced in memory of his and Sawyer's visit to Lyman.

"Conditions? How does he dare enforce conditions? What were they?"

"That I must avow my love for Zeb—Mr. Sawyer."

"Well, is that all?"

"All! Isn't it enough?"

"You can do that, my daughter," Mrs. McElwin said meekly.

"Yes, I could, if the time should ever come."

"What time?" the banker asked.

"The time when I can say that I love him."

McElwin crossed his legs with a sudden flounce. "You put too serious an estimate upon love," he said. "You expect it to be the grand, over-mastering passion we read about. That was all well enough for the age of poetry, but this is the age of prose. You can go to that man and tell him that —"

"That I have a Nineteenth century love for Mr. Sawyer," she interrupted.

"Well, yes."

"And he would laugh at me."

"Laugh at you," he frowned. "No gentleman can laugh at a lady's distress."

"But he might not regard it as distress. It might seem ridiculous to him."

"Hump," he grunted. "Well, it's undignified, it is almost outrageous to be forced to do such a thing, but you must go to him. Your mother will go with you."

"No, James," his wife gently protested, looking at him in mild appeal. "I don't really think I can muster the courage for so awkward an undertaking. Please leave me out."

"Leave you out of so important an arrangement, an arrangement that involves the future of your daughter!"

"Then, why should not all three of us go?" she asked.

"I have trampled my own pride under my feet by going once," he replied. "Yes, and he treated me with cool impudence. And if I should go again something might happen. That man has humiliated me more than any man I ever met, and once is enough; I couldn't bear an insult in the presence of my wife and daughter. Eva, do you know what that man tried to do? He gained admission to my private office, and actually strove to bunco me out of a hundred dollars."

"He may have tried to borrow it, father, but I don't think he tried to get it dishonestly."

"Didn't I tell you that he tried to beat me out of the money? Why do you set up a mere opinion against my experience? And why are you so much inclined to take his part? Tell me that. You can't be interested in him?"

"I don't want injustice done him."

"Oh, no; but you would submit to the injustice he does you. He has robbed you of the society of your younger acquaintances—he compels you to sit almost excluded in a town where you are an acknowledged belle. Young gentlemen are afraid to call on you."

"Well, I don't know that it would be exactly proper," she replied.

"And," he went on, lifting his voice, "the strangest part of it is that you quietly submit to this treatment when there is a way to free yourself. And I request you to make use of it."

He got up, went to the mantel-piece, took up a sea-shell, put it down, turned his back to the fire place, stood there a moment and strode out.

"You must do as he commands," said the mother.

"I can't."

"Don't say that. You must. I have thought it over, and I know it's for the best."

"You have permitted him to think it over, and you hope it is for the best," the daughter replied.

CHAPTER XV.

MUST LEAVE THE TOWN.

[Top](#)

At eleven o'clock the next day, Zeb Sawyer was to meet McElwin at the bank. The hour was tolled off by a grim old clock standing high in a corner, a rare old time piece with a history, or at least a past, of interest to McElwin, for it had been bought at the forced sale of fixtures belonging to a defunct bank. It struck with solemn self-importance, as if proclaiming the hour to foreclose a mortgage; and though not given to this sort of reflective speculation, McElwin must have been vaguely influenced by its knell-like stroke, for he nearly always glanced up as if a tribute were due to its promptness. A few minutes later Zeb Sawyer was shown into the room. The banker had been sitting in deep thought, with his legs stretched forth, and with his hands in his pockets, but he turned about when the clock struck, and as Sawyer entered the office he was busy with papers on a table in front of him.

"Good morning, Zeb; sit down."

"Hard at it, I see," said the young man, taking a seat at the opposite side of the table.

"Yes, day and night. No rest for the wicked, you know."

"I don't know as to that," Sawyer replied, "but I do know that there is mighty little rest for the man that wants to do anything in the world."

"You are right. The gospel of content builds poor houses. I never knew a happy man who wasn't lazy."

"You ought to go to Congress, McElwin; they need such talk there."

"They need a good many qualities that they are not likely to get." He put his papers aside, and leaning with his arms on the table looked into the eyes of his visitor. "My daughter has developed into a thinking woman, Zeb."

The over-confident young money-maker's face brightened, as if the banker had given him a piece of encouraging news.

"Yes, sir," McElwin went on, "and no cause is lost so long as thinking is going on. Why, sir, it took my wife years and years to learn how to think. It was not expected that a young woman in this part of the country should think. Men were the necessities and women the adornments of society when I was a young fellow."

"But you said your daughter had become a thinking woman," Sawyer hastened to remark, to bring him back from his wanderings.

"Yes. And it will require all my strength and influence as a father, to get her to think as I want her to. Still, in our dealings with a woman there is always hope—if she thinks. I had quite a talk with her last night, but I did not convince her that she ought to go to that fellow and ask him to sign—sign that infamous petition." McElwin took his arms off the table and leaned back in his chair. "And, sir, I don't believe she'll do it."

"It can't be that she can care anything for him," said Sawyer.

"Nonsense," the banker replied. "Such a thing has never entered her head. I think she enjoys the oddity of her position, married and yet not married. I think it tickles her sense of romance. But there is a way of getting at everything, and there must be some way of approaching this outrageous affair. I have looked into the law, and I find that in case the fellow should go and remain away one year, his signature would not be necessary. However, being a sort of a lawyer, he knows this as well as I do. We can't bring the charge of non-support, for we have not let him try. Zeb, she has intimated that you are afraid of him."

The banker looked straight at him, but the mule-trader did not change countenance. "No, I am not afraid of him," he said, "but unless I'm shoved pretty far, I don't care to mix up with him, I tell you that. My life is too valuable to throw away, and they tell me that Lyman is nothing short of a

desperado when he is stirred up, though you wouldn't think it to look at him. But you can never tell a man by looking at him, not half as much as you can a mule. Oh, if the worst comes, I'd kill him, but—"

"That would never do," the banker broke in. "Don't think of such a thing. I wonder if we couldn't buy him off," he added, after a moment's musing. "I should think that he might be induced to go away. There is one thing in support of this; he has had a taste of success, or rather a nibble at ambition, and he may, even now, be thinking of going to a city. Suppose you go over and see him—offer him five hundred dollars."

Sawyer studied awhile. "He couldn't take offense at that," he said. "At least no sensible man ought to. Suppose you write me a check payable to him."

McElwin, without replying, made out a check, blotted it and handed it to Sawyer. "Come back and tell me," he said.

Lyman was writing when Sawyer tapped at the open door. "Come in," said the writer. His manner was pleasant and his countenance was genial, and Sawyer, standing at the threshold, felt an encouragement coming to meet him. He stepped forward and Lyman invited him to sit down.

"A little warm," said Lyman.

"Yes, think we'll have rain, soon; the air's so heavy."

"Shouldn't be surprised. It would help farmers when setting out their tobacco plants."

"I reckon you are right. But the farmers would complain anyway, wet or dry. The weather wouldn't suit them, even if they had the ordering of it."

"Well, in that they are not different from the rest of us," said Lyman. "We all grumble."

A short silence followed. Lyman moved some papers. Sawyer coughed slightly. They heard the grinding of the press.

"Printing the paper in there?" said Sawyer, nodding toward the door. He began to turn about as if nervous at the thought of his errand. "How many do you print a week?"

"I don't know, but we have a pretty fair circulation."

"I see it a good deal out in the state."

"Yes, it spreads out fairly well. We try to make it interesting to the farmers."

"By telling them something they don't know," said the visitor.

Lyman shook his head slowly: "By reminding them of many things they do know," he replied. "Tell a man a truth he doesn't know and he may dispute it; call to his mind a truth which he has known and forgotten, and he regards it as a piece of wisdom. The farmer is the weather-cock of human nature."

"I guess you have about hit it. By the way, Mr. Lyman, I have called on a little matter of business, and I hope you'll not fly off before you consider it. The only way we can get at the merits of a case is by being cool and deliberate. The last time we had a talk, you—"

"Yes," Lyman interrupted, "I must have gone too far when I called you a coward."

"I think so, sir, but be that as it may, let us be cool and deliberate now. I have just had a talk with Mr. McElwin and he is still greatly distressed over—over that affair, and he thinks by putting our reasons to work we can get at a settlement. The fact is, he wonders that you would want to stay in such a small and unimportant place as this is, after your editorial that everybody is talking about."

"Did he call it an editorial?" Lyman asked, smiling at his visitor.

"Well, I don't know as he called it that, but whatever it is, he was a good deal struck by it, and he wondered that you didn't go to some big city and set up there. And I wondered so too, from all that I heard. Somebody, I have forgotten who, hinted that maybe you didn't have money enough and—"

"Money," said Lyman; "why, I've got money enough to burn a wet elephant."

Sawyer blinked in the glare of this dazzling statement, but he managed to smile and then to proceed: "I spoke to Mr. McElwin about what had been hinted, and inasmuch as you had applied to him for a loan, he didn't know but it was the truth."

"A very natural conclusion on his part," said Lyman, leaning back and crossing his feet on a corner of the table.

"Yes, he thought so, and I did, too. He ain't so hard a man to get along with as you might think."

"He is not a hard man to get away from. It doesn't seem to put him to any trouble to let a man

know when he's got enough of him."

"I'm afraid you didn't see him under the best conditions."

"No, I don't believe I did. He made me feel as if I looked like the man standing at the threshold of the almanac, badly cut up, with crabs and horns and other things put about him."

"I think you would find him much more agreeable now."

"Oh, he was agreeable enough then, only he didn't agree. And I am thankful that he didn't."

"Well, he regrets that he didn't let you have the money, although you came in an unbusiness-like way."

"Yes, I did. And pretending to be a lawyer, I ought to have known better. I don't blame him for that."

"What do you blame him for, then?"

"For wanting his daughter to be your wife."

Sawyer jerked his hand as if something had bitten him. "But what right have you to blame him for that? It was arranged long before you ever saw me, and besides what right have you, a stranger, to interfere in his affairs?"

"That's very well put, Mr. Sawyer, but there are some affairs that rise above family and appeal to humanity. You requested me to be cool and deliberate, and you will pardon me, I hope, if I am cooler than you expected, and more considerate than you desire. It would be a crime to attempt to merge that young woman's life into yours."

"I know you have a pretty low estimate of me, but I won't resent it. We are to be cool."

"And considerate," said Lyman, with a slight bow.

"Yes, sir; and considerate. But I don't see where the crime would come in. My family is as good as hers."

"That may be. I am not looking at her family, but at her. She was spoiled, it is true, but she is developing into the highest type of American womanhood."

"Yes, but I haven't come to discuss her. We were talking just now about the prospect of your going away, and the probability that you might not have money enough to settle in a city. Mr. McElwin is willing to help you toward that end, and has signed a check for five hundred dollars, made out in your name. Here it is." He handed the check to Lyman, who took it, looked at it and said: "He writes a firm hand. Money gives a man confidence in himself, doesn't it?" He held out the check toward Sawyer. The latter did not take it, and it fluttered in the air and fell to the floor. Sawyer took it up and put it on the table, with an ink stand on it to hold it down.

"It is yours, Mr. Lyman; it is made out to you."

"Upon the condition that I leave here and remain away as long as one year. Is that it?"

"Well, yes."

"I told you that I have enough money to burn a wet elephant. I haven't—I haven't enough to scorch a dry cricket."

"Then you will accept the check," said Sawyer, brightening.

Lyman had struck a match, as if to light his pipe. He took up the check and held it to the blaze. "Look out," he said, as Sawyer sprang to interfere. "Sit down." He took the cinders and wrapped them in a piece of paper, folding it neatly. "Give this to Mr. McElwin and tell him that I have cremated the little finger of his god, and send him the ashes," he said.

Sawyer stood gazing at him in astonishment.

"I told you to sit down. You won't sit down. And you won't take the god-ashes to the devotee. Come, that's unkind."

"Sir, you have insulted me."

"What, again?"

"And you shall regret it. And you shall leave this town," he added, turning to go. "You have not only insulted me, but you—you have put an indignity upon Mr. McElwin." Indignity was rather a big word, coming from him unexpectedly out of his vague recollection, and he halted to stiffen with a better opinion of himself. "I say you shall leave this town."

"I heard what you said. But I thought we were to be cool. Oh, pardon me, it was the fire that gave offense."

"I say you are going to leave this town."

"Good-bye, then."

"I will make one more attempt," said Sawyer, standing in the door.

"Don't exert yourself."

"I will offer you a thousand dollars to go away."

"My stock is rising."

"Will you take it?"

"The advance is too rapid. Can't afford to sell now."

Sawyer began to sputter. "I'm done," he said. "I have no other proposition to make. But remember what I say. You are going to leave this town."

"Then I may not see you again; good-bye."

CHAPTER XVI.

SAWYER'S PLAN.

[Top](#)

McElwin was engaged when Sawyer returned to the bank, but he soon cleared the room. "Well," he said, when the mule buyer entered. Sawyer sat down before he replied.

"He refused."

McElwin's feet scraped the floor. "Refused?"

"Yes. He took the check, struck a match and burned it up."

"The scoundrel."

"Worse than that, he wrapped up the cinders and told me to take them to you, and tell you that he had burnt the little finger of your god."

"Blasphemous wretch!"

"And I told him that he had not only insulted me, but had put an indignity upon you. I talked to him just as cool as a man could talk to anybody; we got along first rate until he burnt the check, and then, of course, it was all off. No it wasn't, not even then. As I stood in the door on my way out I offered him a thousand dollars. And he refused. And do you know why? I think he's got the notion that by sticking out he may win you and Eva over and get a partnership here."

McElwin jumped up and slapped his hand upon the table. "I would see him in——first." He turned about and began to walk slowly up and down the room.

"But he's going to leave this town," said Sawyer. "When I set my head on a thing I go at it with reason and work on that line until I find it hasn't any power, and then I use force. I am going to do it in this case."

"How?" McElwin asked.

"The boys have a way of getting at a thing that persuasion can't reach."

"Speak out," said McElwin. "Tell me what you are going to do."

"Well, I am going out into the Spring Hill neighborhood and appeal to the boys—the White Caps. Then, some fine night, a party, all dressed in white head-gear, will call on Mr. Lyman. They will put him on a horse, take him out to the woods, take off his shirt, tie him across a log and give him fifty lashes as a starter. Then, when they untie him, they'll remark that if he is not gone within three days they will give him a hundred. See the point?"

"Zeb, he deserves it, but I'm afraid that course won't do."

"Not weakening, are you?"

"Weakening? Who ever knew me to weaken? I say he deserves it."

"But you say it won't do."

"And I'm afraid it won't. It would create a terrible scandal."

"It's done every week, in some part of the country. Even the most law-abiding citizens acknowledge that it is a good thing."

"It might do in the country, severe as it is, but it would be different in town. The law would interfere, and that would be disgraceful."

"But the law will not interfere. I can fix the town marshal, and as for the sheriff—he owes me for a span of mules. I have worked it all out. In the evening I'll go around to Uncle Jasper's with a bottle of old Bourbon. I'll tell him that I am celebrating my birthday or something. Once in a while he takes to the bottle, and the old liquor will tempt him. Well, when he's in good condition, I'll put him to bed and shortly afterwards the boys will come for brother Lyman. In the meantime I will see that there are no guns in the way. The women will be scared, of course, but they'll soon

get over it. Isn't that a plan worthy of a county surveyor?"

"The plan's all right, Zeb, but I'm afraid of it's execution. Supposing my name should become involved. It would ruin me."

"Yes, but your name sha'n't be involved."

"He will suspect you and me, too."

"But he couldn't prove anything."

"Well, now, you may do as you please, but I'll have no hand in it. I refuse to countenance it."

"You simply don't know anything about it."

"Of course not. I'm too much taken up with other affairs."

Sawyer arose to go. "I shall see you again, I suppose. I mean before anything is done," said McElwin. "At the house," he added.

Sawyer looked down: "I don't feel free to come there," he said. "She has told me not to."

McElwin coughed dryly: "Nonsensical proprieties," he remarked, scraping his feet upon the floor. "But I am to see you again?"

"I think not—until afterwards. Whatever is done, you know, must be done at once."

Sawyer went out. The clock struck and McElwin glanced up at it. Then he settled down into a deep muse. Sawyer's plan was desperate—it was outlawry. It ought not to be carried out, and yet the provocation was great. But supposing it should be known that he had given countenance to the undertaking. Suppose the newspapers should print his name in connection with it; the public, to say nothing of the law, would frown upon him. It must not be done. He snatched a piece of paper, and writing upon it the words: "Give up that scheme at once," sealed it up and gave it to a negro, with instructions to find Mr. Sawyer and hand it to him at once. About half an hour later the negro returned with a note written on a piece of paper bag, and unsealed. The note ran: "Don't you worry, but it shall be done tonight. Don't try to find me. I have been fooling long enough, and now I am getting down to business." He tore the paper into bits, and then strode slowly up and down the room. Presently he took down his hat, rubbed it abstractedly with the sleeve of his coat, and went out, remarking that he might not be back that day. He felt like a criminal as he stepped upon the sidewalk. But he was stiff, and merely nodded to the tradesmen who bowed to him cringingly. He was looking for Sawyer, but was afraid to inquire after him. He went to the wagon yard where Sawyer stabled his mules, and looked about, but did not find him. The owner of the place, hard in the presence of the farmers, but obsequiously soft under the banker's eye, invited him into the office, a dismal place, the walls hung with halters, bridles, chains and twisting sticks, used to grip the jaw of a refractory horse and wrench rebellion out of him. The rough appearance of the stable men within and the pungent smell of the place, turned McElwin at the threshold.

"No, I don't think I have time," he said.

"Is there anything I can do for you? If there is, name it, and I will stir up this place from top to bottom."



McElwin thought that it was stirred up quite enough, with its rough men, its mangy dogs and rat-like smell. "Nothing at all," he answered. "I am looking for a farmer, a man named Brown."

"Old Jack? He's around here somewhere. It will tickle him pretty nigh to death to know you'd look for him. I'll tell him when he comes in."

"Oh, no. He's not the man. This man's quite young, and his name is Lucian Brown, I think."

"Then I don't know anything about him, I'm sorry to say."

"Are you feeding many mules at present?"

"Well, not many at present, but I expect to have more in a day or two. Mr. Sawyer has gone down in the country to gather up a lot. He drove out just a few moments ago. I tell you, there's a hustler, Mr. McElwin. He don't wait, he makes things happen."

"Which way did he go?" McElwin asked.

"I don't know, exactly, but I think he took the Spring Hill road. He must be going after something particularly fine, for I heard him tell old Josh that he wanted a bottle of the oldest liquor in town, no matter what it costs. But he didn't take it with him, come to recollect. He 'lowed he'd want it this evening when he come back."

McElwin walked straightway to his home. His appearance at that odd hour caused surprise, and his wife, having seen him through the window, came to the door with something of a flurry.

"Is there anything wrong?" she asked, as he stepped into the hall.

"Nothing at all," he answered, hanging up his hat. "Why?"

"Because you are home so early."

"Oh, that's it. I was tired and I thought I'd come home to rest."

She took his arm and they passed into the rear parlor. "Where is Eva?" he asked, sitting down.

"I don't know. I think she's out for a walk. Are you tired?" she asked, standing behind him, with her hands resting on the back of the chair.

"Not now," he said, reaching back and taking her hands. He pressed them against his cheeks. "You always rest me."

"Do I?" She leaned affectionately over him. "I was afraid that I did not. You have had so much to worry you of late."

"Yes," he sighed. "But when we are alone I can forget it all. Play something for me, please."

She looked at him in surprise: "When did you ask me to play, before?"

"I don't know," he answered frankly. "You most always play without my asking. Sing an old song, something we used to sing long ago."

She went to the piano and touched to life the strains of "Kitty Clyde." And when her voice arose, he felt a lump in his throat, and he sat with his eyes shut, with a picture in his heart—an old house, a honey-suckle, a beautiful girl in white, with a rose in her hair.

CHAPTER XVII.

AT THE CREEK.

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Shortly after Sawyer took his leave, Lyman went out for a meditative stroll in the wooded land. About a mile and a half distant was a creek, with great bluffs on one side, and with a romantic tumble of land on the other. Of late he had gone often to this stream, not to listen to the melody of water pouring over the rocks, not to hear the birds that held a joy-riot in the trees, but to lie in the grass on a slope, beneath an elm, and gaze across at a limestone tower called "Lover's Leap." And on these journeys he always went through the shaded lane-like street that led past the banker's house. It was the most pretentious house in the town, of brick, trimmed with stone. In the yard, which was large, the great man had indulged his taste for art, stucco statuary—a deer, a lion, a dog, two Greek wrestlers, a mother with a child in her arms, and a ghastly semblance of Andrew Jackson.

Lyman reached the shore of the creek and walked slowly among the large, smooth rocks, that looked like the hip bones of the worn and tired old earth, coming through. As he approached the tree and the grassy slope whereon he was wont to lie and muse, he saw the fluttering of something white, and then from behind the tree a woman stepped. His heart beat faster, for he recognized her, and when he came up, with softened tread, to the tree, he was panting as if he had run a race. The woman did not see him until he spoke, her eyes having been cast down when she passed from behind the tree, and she started and blushed at beholding him.

"I hope I don't intrude," he said, taking off his hat.

"Oh, no, since you have as much right here as I have."

"I don't know but that I have a pretty good right," he said. "That is, if occupancy means anything. I come here often."

"Do you?" she cried in surprise. "Why, I have never seen you here before, and this has been my favorite spot for years."

"Well, as we are both at home," he said, laughing, "we might as well sit down."

They laughed and seated themselves on the spreading roots of the tree, though not very near each other. She took off her hat and he looked with admiration at her brown hair, tied with a ribbon. She flushed under his gaze and said he must pardon her appearance, as she had not expected to meet anyone.

"A violet might say as much," he replied.

"You must not talk that way," she said.

"Why? Because you like to hear it?"

"The idea! How could you say that?"

"Because modesty protests against the words that a woman most likes to hear, and modesty does not chide until she ventures upon an enjoyment."

"Then modesty is a scold, instead of a friendly guide."

"No. But over-modesty is over-caution."

"We were not talking of over-modesty. Are you as bold with all women as you are with me?" She looked at him with quizzical mischief in her eyes. He plucked a white clover blossom and tossed it upward. It fell in her lap.

"Bold, did you say? Am I bold? Most women have laughed at my angular shyness."

"Laughed at you; how could they?"

"On account of my peculiarities. I was called an old bachelor before I was twenty, and as I grew older I considered myself one, irredeemably, for I never expected to marry."

"I should have thought your life full of romance, wandering about, as you must have done."

"My life has been a tread-mill," he answered.

"But you see so many beautiful things in nature."

"The horse on the tread-wheel can look through a crack, and see a flower growing outside."

"Has your life been really hard?" she asked.

"Yes, desperately hard, at times."

"But you don't show it. You seem so kind and gentle."

"If I do, it is out of charity for those who have suffered."

"But I don't see any sign of your suffering, you write so beautifully."

"I had to suffer before I could write. The heart cannot express a joy until it has felt a sorrow."

She gave him her frank, admiring eyes. "Why haven't I met such men as you are? I have not lived here all my life; I have travelled with my aunt, who knew the world, and she took me to many strange places, and I met many men, but they didn't appeal to me or interest me any more than those I met at home. It was all the same old commonplace flattery."

"You have never found a man so interesting because you have never had the opportunity to see a man standing in the light I stand in now," he replied. "Our relationship has given me a new color."

She shook her head: "I have thought of that, but I believe that I should have found you interesting, even if I should have met you in the ordinary way."

"No, you would never have allowed yourself the time. Some sobering process was required."

"Yes, that is true," she frankly admitted.

In the tree tops above them the birds were riotous. The air was scented with a sharp sweetness from the wild mint that grew at the edge of the water.

"Has Mr. Sawyer been to see you?"

"He came today."

"Tell me about his visit. What did he say?"

"He wanted to buy me—wanted to hire me to go away."

"Tell me all about it. Remember, we are friends."

"He brought a check for five hundred dollars, signed by your father."

"I think you have told me enough," she said.

A flock of sheep came pattering along the road that skirted the hill-top, not far away. A bare-footed boy shouted in the dust behind them.

"Not much more remains to be told. He said I would regret not having taken the check."

"Did he threaten you?"

"Well, he said that I would have to leave town."

"He is afraid of you, and he knows it."

"If he is, he ought to know it," Lyman drolly replied. "If he doesn't know it, somebody ought to tell him. But I won't go away and leave you unprotected."

She looked at him gratefully. "How strange it sounds, and yet how true it is that you are my only real protector. My father cannot understand why I don't place Mr. Sawyer's money-getting ability above everything else. He thinks Mr. Sawyer will become one of the greatest men in the country. And I admit that at times this, together with father's entreaty, has had a strong influence over me. But I don't think," she added, shaking her head, "that I could ever have married that man. No," she said energetically, as she pointed across the stream, "that rock, first."

"You wouldn't do that," Lyman replied.

"Wouldn't I? Don't we read every day of women who kill themselves?"

"Yes, of women whose minds are not sound."

"But who shall say when a mind is not sound? How do you know that it is? What proof have I? We often read that no one suspected that Miss So-and-So had the slightest intention of destroying herself. Well, I may be a Miss So-and-So."

"I have no right to doubt your word," said Lyman. "Things that we most doubt sometimes come to pass, and then we wonder why we should have questioned them. But I will stand between you and the rock; I will be your friend and confidant, your brother, let us say. You must keep faith with me, and if you ever really fall in love, the sweet, torturing, the desperate sort of love which must exist, come to me and tell me."

"I will keep faith. But why do you say the sweet and torturing and desperate love that must exist? You talk as if it was a speculation of the mind rather than a fact of the heart. Don't you know that

it does exist? Was there not a woman in the past who aroused it within you?"

"I have seen one or two women who might have done so. I remember one particularly. I was young and foolish, of course, but as I looked at her I thought she could win my soul. I did not know her; I saw her only once and that was at a hotel in the White Mountains. She and a party of ladies and gentlemen dined at the hotel, and I was a waiter." She looked up at him. "Yes, a waiter, with a white apron on and a Greek Testament in my pocket. The employment was menial, perhaps loathsome in your eyes."

"No," she said with a shiver. "Perhaps you had to do it."

"Yes, under a keen whip, the desire to continue my education. I think I must have been the first of my race to run forward at the tap of a knife on a dish. In my strong determination to fit myself—as I then thought—for the duties of life, I would have done almost anything to further my plans; and I was never really ashamed of my having to wait at table to earn knowledge-money, until the night I saw you—until you turned to some one and said: 'What, that thing!'"

"I did say that," she answered, "yes, and I have censured myself a thousand times. I hoped that you had not heard me. I am awfully sorry."

"Oh, I don't take it to heart. It hurt my pride a little and it gave me a wrong impression of you."

"Let us forget it. I was always a fool—until after that night. But about the woman, what became of her?"

"I don't know. She blew away like the down of the dandelion."

"And you didn't see her again?"

"Never again."

"But you dreamed of her?"

"No. You misunderstand me. I didn't fall in love with her. I say that I might have loved her. Perhaps upon becoming acquainted with her, I might have smiled at my foolish belief—might have found her uninteresting."

"You said there was one or two—the other one? What about her?"

"I don't remember her at all. I say that I may have seen her, but I don't recall her."

"Perhaps the other one has read your story."

"Or perhaps her daughter honeyed over it on her wedding journey," he suggested, laughing.

A light vehicle rattled down the road, and she looked up. "I was thinking that someone might drive past and recognize us," she said. "It may be wrong, but I don't want father to know that we meet, except by accident."

"Wasn't this meeting an accident?" he asked, hoping that she would say it was not, on her part.

"Yes. But sitting here under this tree is not. And I must go," she added, arising. He got up and stood there, hoping that she would hold out her hand to him, but she did not. "Good-bye," she said, smiling as she turned away.

"Let me hope for another accident, soon," Lyman replied, bowing to her.

CHAPTER XVIII.

AT THE WAGON-MAKER'S SHOP.

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Sawyer drove rapidly toward Spring Hill, about eight miles distant from Old Ebenezer. The land was uneven, with oak ridges, beech slopes and shell-bark hickory flats, but the road was smooth, and for the two trotting horses the buggy was merely a plaything. He drew up at a wagon-maker's shop, the end of his journey, and threw the lines to a negro who came forward to meet him.

"You needn't feed them," he said. "Take the harness off and let them run about the lot. They've been shut up till they're frisky."

A large man, in his shirt sleeves, and with collar unbuttoned, met him at the door.

"Helloa, Mr. Zeb."

"Helloa, Steve, where's Bob?"

"Come in. He's about, somewhere."

Sawyer entered and sat down on a large block of wood, his feet half hidden in a pile of chips. A hand-saw, hanging on the wall, caught a shaft of light from the sun, and threw it into his eyes. He turned slightly and spoke to the wagon-maker.

"How's business with you?"

"Bad enough. People can buy wagons a good deal cheaper than I can afford to make 'em. They tell me that up north a man can go into a place and they'll make him a wagon while he waits, ironed and all ready for the road, and for a third less than I can do it. I can't buck against anything like that. I've got to get my timber out of the woods and season it, and take care of it like it was a lame leg, and all that sort of thing, to say nothin' of the work after I get down to it. Just before the election," said the wagon-maker, sitting down upon an unfinished hub, taking up an oak splinter and putting one end of it into his mouth, "a man come around here and 'lowed, he did, that if we could get a majority of farmers into the legislature, the condition of affairs would be changed. He 'lowed that they'd make it a point to put a tax on wagons not made in the state. Well, they got in, and about all they did was to fight the railroads, tear the digest to pieces and tinker with the marriage law, as some of you folks in Old Ebenezer have good cause to know. Why, if you read the papers at the time, you recollect that one old feller from Blaxon county said that marriage license was an outrage—'lowed, he did, that there wa'n't no license writ out for Adam. Yes, and he said that down in his neighborhood several young fellers held off from marryin' because they couldn't afford to pay for the license. He said it was a sin and a shame to put a tax on a man that was tryin' to do somethin' for his country."

"Do you think Bob will be back pretty soon?" Sawyer asked, working his feet deep down among the chips.

"Yes, he ought to be here now. If he don't come pretty soon I'll send the nigger to look for him. How's that marriage of McElwin's daughter gettin' along?"

"Not at all. It's just the same."

"Feller still there?"

"Yes; he's running the paper."

"Don't 'pear to mind it, I reckon. I wonder McElwin don't hire him to pull out. Well, down in this neighborhood we've got a way of settlin' such things. We tell a feller to go and if he refuses, why, we see that he goes. We've got a mighty lively set of young fellers."

"And your brother Bob is one of the liveliest," said Sawyer.

"Well, Bob ain't slow. The other night they took out a feller over on Caney Fork, feller that had dropped into the habit of whippin' his wife—and they hit him about forty-five, with a promise of more; and they say now that he's as sweet to his home folks as a June apple-pie. Oh, it do have a powerful sweetenin' effect on a sour citizen. Any sour citizens up your way?"

"One," Sawyer answered.

"Don't know why, but I sorter thought so. It's dangerous in town, ain't it?"

"Not when you fix everything."

"Well, then, go ahead, but keep outer the way of the law. Here's Bob now."

A tall, gaunt young fellow stepped into the shop. He was a type of the southern ruralist, broad, flapping straw hat, home-woven shirt, cottonade trousers, one suspender. He grinned upon seeing Sawyer, and said, "Hi."

"Ho, Bob. Busy tonight?"

"Ain't rushed. Anything blowing in the wind?"

"A little fun, that's all."

"Then let her blow my way. Steve, here, 'lows he's gettin' so old that he don't care for fun any more, but I have to have it—bread and blackberry jam to me."

"Well, you shall have it. How are the boys, the White Caps?"

"Finer'n silk split three times."

"Can you call them together for tonight?"

"By howlin' like a wolf. Do you want 'em?"

"Yes. Will twenty dollars pay the way?"

"We'll whip the governor of the state for that much."

Sawyer unfolded his plan. The boys were to be in front of old Jasper's house at midnight.

"Don't let nobody take a gun with him," said Steve. "If you do there mout be serious trouble. And there won't be no need of it, as you say everything will be fixed. I know what I'm talkin' about. Give one of them boys a pop and he'll use it whether occasion warrants or not. I know 'em."

"Well, they needn't put themselves to the trouble of firing off a gun to scare that chap. He ain't one of the sort that scares," Sawyer was gracious enough to admit. "He don't tote a pistol and I'll manage to slip into his room and see if he has one there, and if he has, I'll hook it. I have also hatched out a plan to get the women folks away. I've got my mother, and of course she knows

nothing about the affair, to send a message by me asking them to come over to our house. If I can get the old man to go, too, so much the better. But he don't care to go out much at night, and I reckon my only course will be to get him drunk."

"Say," said Bob, "you 'lowed your man wa'n't easy to skeer, and if that's the case, what's the use of takin' him a mile or two to the woods? Men that don't skeer don't holler. Why not put it to him right then and there, out in the yard, over a barrel?"

Before Sawyer could reply, the philosophic mind of Steve saw the practical sense of his brother's suggestion. "I reckon he's got the right idee, Mr. Sawyer. He's done so much of this sort of work lately that now it comes to him somewhat in the natur' of a trade. You can tell him a good deal about mules that I reckon he don't know, but he knows the fine p'int in men like a hungry feller knows the fine p'int of a fried chicken. Better let him have his way."

"I am more than willing," said Sawyer. "The sooner it's over with the better it will suit me. It's results I'm after. There's a rain-water barrel at the corner of the house," he went on, reflectively. "We can pour the water out and roll the barrel around where we'll have plenty of room. Do you think he'll be willing to go away, Bob?"

Bob stood leaning back, with his elbows on the vise bench. "Well," he drawled, "an examination of the books of my firm will show that none ain't never failed yet. I have know'd them to argy and object, but I'll jest tell you that a hickory sprout laid on right, can soon make a man lose sight of the p'int in his own discussion. Why, when we get through with a man, and tell him what we want him to do, he thanks us, as if we had given him the opportunity of his life."

"All right," Sawyer laughed, getting up. "Be there on time is all I ask."

CHAPTER XIX.

A RESTLESS NIGHT.

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The air was damp. At evening a heavy mist came with the soft June wind, and the night was dark. McElwin had gone over to the town after supper, something he rarely did alone, having the rich man's dread of a dark street; but he soon returned and paced nervously up and down the room. And more than once he muttered, shaking his head: "I can't help it; I tried to prevent it, but couldn't." He told his wife that he was worried over a piece of business, and as business was the awe-inspiring word of the household, she stood aloof from him, in nervous sympathy with his worry; and the negro servants spoke in whispers. From her walk her daughter had returned in a solemn state of mind. Her manner, which had been growing gentler, was now touched with a winsome melancholy, and her eyes appeared to be larger and dreamier. Of late an old minister, who for nearly half a century had worn a tinkling bell in the midst of a devoted flock, had called frequently to talk to her, and in her smile the old man saw the spirit of religion, though not of one creed, but the heart's religion of the past, of the present, of Eternity.

Mrs. McElwin went up to Eva's room, leaving her husband to continue his troubled walk. The girl was sitting at the window. "Come in," she said.

"I'm worried about your father," said Mrs. McElwin, sitting down with a sigh. "Have you said anything to annoy him?"

"No, nothing that I can remember."

"Well, something has happened. Have you seen—seen Mr. Lyman since the evening of the picnic? You told me that you saw him then, but you haven't told me of seeing him since. And I don't dare tell your father."

"No, for you promised me that you wouldn't."

"But have you kept your promise to me? You told me you would tell me if you met him again."

"Yes, and I will keep my word. I met him today, over by the creek, and we sat down under a tree and talked. And, oh, his voice almost made me sob as I sat there, listening to him."

"Eva," said her mother.

"I can't help it. His life has been so hard, and yet it has made him so considerate and so gentle. Mother, why haven't I met such a man among our friends—why didn't I see one in my travels?"

"My daughter, can't you understand the strange interest you take in him? Have you considered the circumstances—"

"I have considered everything, and it would have been the same no matter where we might have met. Mother," she said, turning with a smile, more than sad in the dim light, "do you know that old log cabin over on the hill where the pension woman used to live? Yes, for we could see it from here in daylight. I passed there today, coming home, and I stopped and gazed at the wretched place, and suddenly there came a thought that almost took my breath away. I thought that with him—" she leaned over and took her mother's hand—"that with him I could live there and bless

God for my happiness."

"My darling child, you must not think that—you couldn't think that."

"But I did, and though the world seemed further away, heaven was closer. I ought to have been a poor man's daughter, mother, for love is all there is to live for."

They put their arms about each other. "It would break your father's heart," the mother said, her tears falling. "It would crush him to the earth."

"I know it, and my heart may be crushed, instead of his. But that petition must not be signed."

"Let us wait, my child. Don't say anything. Don't—"

They heard McElwin calling from the foot of the stairs. "Lucy, Lucy, I think I'll have to go down town again."

"Wait a moment," his wife cried, hastening out, Eva following her. He turned back before they reached the foot of the stairs, and had resumed his anxious walk when they entered the parlor.

"Why, what can you be thinking about, James?" his wife asked.

"Thinking about going down town. I must go."

"Not tonight? Why, it's going to rain."

"Doesn't make any difference if it rains bearded pitchforks, I must go."

His wife took him by the arm: "James, you are keeping something from me—something has happened."

"No, nothing has happened. A friend of mine has a project on foot. I am interested in it, and I want to advise him not to go ahead with it."

"But he couldn't go ahead with it tonight," Eva spoke up.

"Yes he can. You don't know how rash he is; he's got no head at all when it comes to such matters. Let me get my umbrella."

"James," said his wife, looking into his eyes, "don't deceive us, tell us what it is."

"What noise was that?" he cried, leaning toward the window. "I heard something. Gracious!" he exclaimed, as the doorbell rang.

Mr. Menfee, the old minister, was shown in. "Ah, good evening," McElwin cried, starting toward him, but then remembering his dignity he said: "You are always welcome. Sit down."

The old gentleman bowed to the ladies and took the easy chair which the banker shoved toward him. McElwin turned to the window and stood there, looking out, listening, with no ear for the solicitous common-places concerning the health of his household, indulged by the old gentleman. He glanced at the clock on the mantel, and was surprised to find that the hour was no later. He turned to the preacher.

"You can do me a service, Mr. Menfee; you can quiet the fears of my wife and daughter while I go down town. I have a most important matter of business on hand but they don't want me to go. Why," he added, with a dry laugh, "what is it to go down town at half past nine?"

"What, is it that late?" the old gentleman spoke up. "Why, I am getting to be a late prowler. But if you have an important matter to attend to, surely you ought to do it."

"I rarely ever go down town at night," said the banker; "that is the reason of their uneasiness. Yes, the only cause, I assure you."

He passed out into the hall, his wife following him. He took an umbrella from the rack, and preparing to hoist it, stepped out upon the veranda. His wife spoke to him and he started as if he had not noticed her. "James," she said, "something is wrong and you are deceiving me."

"Nothing at all, my dear," he replied, hoisting the umbrella. "The truth is, I want to see Sawyer."

"In relation to Mr. Lyman?" she asked, putting her hand on his arm to detain him.

"Well, yes, indirectly. The truth is, I authorized Zeb to offer him a sum of money to go away—quite too much I am sure—and I want to ask him to withdraw the offer. I can't afford to invest that much ready money at present, I really cannot."

"If you have been afraid that he will accept the offer—"

"What," he said, closing the umbrella and looking at her, "what do you know about it?"

"I know, or at least I believe, that he is not a man to be bribed,—to be turned from his purpose."

"His purpose. What is his purpose?"

"To claim his wife."

"Lucy, whatever you may be unreasonable enough to think, don't talk that way to me. He may

claim her as his wife and may force his claim, but it will be after I am dead. I don't like the fellow personally. He is impudent; he is an anarchist. There now," he added, hoisting the umbrella, "go back and don't worry about me."

He stepped out upon the walk, and she stood in the door until he had passed into the lane, into the heavy darkness of the trees. When she returned to the parlor the minister was preparing to take his leave.

"My mission in coming might have been discharged in a moment," he said; "but seeing that your husband was worried I did not like to bring it up in his presence. Young Henry Bostic is soon to preach over at Mt. Zion. I know that in this family a prejudice is felt against him, but he is deeply in earnest and I feel that it is your Christian duty, madam, to give him on that occasion the encouragement of your presence. He believes that he is inspired to preach the Word, and who, indeed, shall say that he is not? I have talked to him frequently of late, and I am convinced that toward this household he bears no malice."

"Eva and I will go," Mrs. McElwin replied promptly.

"Nobly said, madam," the minister rejoined, looking upon her with an eye that had swept over many a field of duty. "I did not believe that I should appeal to you in vain. We have but a little while here," he went on, his white head shaking. "The future has seemed far, but the past is short, and soon the time comes when we must go. They may dispute our creed and pick flaws in our doctrine, but they acknowledge the mighty truth of death. There is nothing in life worth living for—"

"Except love," said the girl standing beside him.

He put his tremulous hand upon her head, a withered leaf upon a flower in bloom. "Yes, my child, love which is God's spirit come down to earth."

He bade them good night, and for a long time they sat in silence.

"Sometimes," said the mother, "I feel a sudden strength, and I look up in surprise and see that it has come from you."

"I believe that I am developing," the daughter replied. "But I shall be strong if he asks me to go with him."

"What do you mean, my dear?"

"I mean that if he were to ask me, I would be strong enough to go."

"And leave me?"

"Leave the world—everything!"

"Why, my child, how can you talk so? Really, you alarm me. You scarcely know the man; you have met him but a few times, and then your talks with him were brief."

"I don't attempt to explain, mother. I simply know."

"But you must wait and see. It may be possible that he has no such feeling toward you; it may be that he has not permitted himself to aspire—"

"Oh," she cried, moving impatiently; "it is almost sacrilege to talk that way. Who am I that he should aspire to me? What have I done? What can I do? Nothing. I haven't a single talent, hardly an accomplishment. Oh, I know that I was intoxicated with vanity, but that has worn off. I am simply a country girl, that's all."

"You are a girl bewitched," said the mother, sadly.

CHAPTER XX.

AFRAID IN THE DARK.

McElwin hastened along the hard and slippery path that ran on a ridge at the side of the road. Sometimes a low-bending bough raked across his umbrella, and once he was made to start by a cold slap in his face, dealt by the broad leaf of a shrub that leaned and swayed above a garden fence. He came upon a wooden bridge over a small stream and halted to breathe, for his walk beneath the dark trees had been rapid and nervous. Frogs were croaking in the sluggish water. A cradle in a hovel bumped upon the uneven floor, and he remembered to have heard from his father that in the pioneer days he had been many a time rocked to sleep in a sugar trough. The lights of the town, the few that he could see, looked red and angry. He remembered a newspaper account of the way-laying and robbing of a prominent citizen. It was so easy for a tramp to knock down an unsuspecting man. Tramp and robber were interchangeable terms with him, and often, on a cold night, when he had seen the wanderer's fire, kindled close to the railway track, he had wondered why such license had been allowed in a law-abiding community. He moved off with a brisk step, for he fancied that he heard something under the bridge. There was many a worse

man than McElwin, but it is doubtful whether a ranker coward had ever been born to see the light of day, or to shy at an odd shape in the dark. He felt an easy-breathing sense of relief when he reached the main street, and in the light of the tavern lamp, hung out in front, he was bold; his head went up and his heels fell with measured firmness upon the bricks. He halted in front of his bank, as his own clock was striking ten, and looked up at Lyman's window. The room was dim, but the other part of the floor, the long room, was bright. He was afraid to show anxiety concerning either Sawyer or Lyman, nor did he deem it advisable to call at old Jasper's house. For what purpose had he come, he then asked himself. He must do something to pay himself for coming, to make himself feel that his time had not been utterly thrown away. In his arrangement of economy, every piece of time must show either an actual or a possible result. To go even in the direction of old Jasper's house was out of the question, for if anyone should see him he would surely be associated with the White Caps. Why would it not be a wise move to find out whether or not Lyman was in the printing-office, and to warn him. He could easily put his call upon the ground of an argument against the impulsive man's rashness in burning the check. No, that would invite the ill-will and perhaps the outright enmity of Sawyer. He could not afford to lose Sawyer; he needed his energy for the future and the use of his money for the present. But he could bind Lyman to secrecy. "I wonder," he mused, "that I should have any faith in his word, but I have. Confound him, he has upset us all. But I ought to warn him. It is terrible to be taken out and whipped upon the bare back. I'll make him promise and then I'll tell him."

He crossed the street and began slowly to climb the stairs. He reached the first landing and halted. "It won't do," he said. "Sawyer might find it out and that would ruin everything. I advised against it; I have done my best to prevent it, and it is now no concern of mine. I will go home. I have been foolish."

He turned about and walked rapidly down the stairs. When he reached home his daughter had gone to bed, but his wife was sitting up, waiting for him. She met him at the door and looked at him, searchingly, as he halted in the light of the hall lamp to put the umbrella in the rack.

"Did you see him?" she asked, not in the best of humor, now that the worry was practically over.

"Sawyer? No, he's out in the country, so a man told me. I have decided to dismiss the matter from my mind or to think about it as little as possible. It isn't so very late yet," he added, looking at his watch. He found his slippers beside his chair when he entered the sitting-room, but he shoved them away with his foot.

"Did Mr. Menifee have anything of interest to say?" he asked, leaning with his elbows on the table.

"It may not interest you, but it has been put to Eva and me as a matter of duty, that we ought to go out to Mt. Zion to hear Henry Bostic preach."

McElwin grunted: "Menifee may put it as a matter of duty, but I don't. Fortunately I have other duties that are of much more importance. I will not go."

"He didn't seem to expect that you would," she replied.

"I hope not. He may have reason to believe me worldly in some things, but I trust he has never found me ridiculous."

"Would it be ridiculous to hear that young man preach?"

"For me to hear him? Decidedly. The true gospel has not been handed over to the keeping of the malicious idiot, I hope."

"I believe he is sincere."

"Sincere? Of course he is. So is a wasp when it stings you."

She laughed in her dignified way, her good humor having suddenly returned; and he looked up with a smile, pleased with himself. They sat for a time, talking of other matters, and he went to bed humming the defineless tune of self-satisfaction. But late in the night Mrs. McElwin awoke and found him standing at the window, listening.

"What is it, dear?" she asked.

"Nothing."

"Then why are you standing there?"

"I thought I heard something."

"In the house?" she asked, rising up with sudden alarm.

"No. Over in town, or rather over by the railroad track. I noticed some tramp-fires along there."

"Oh, well, don't worry. The watchman will look after them."

"Hush," he said, leaning from the window. "There it is again."

"I don't hear anything," she declared. "Why, it's only a negro singing."

"So it is," he said. "I thought it was someone yelling over in town. Are you sure that it was a

negro singing?"

"Oh, I don't know whether he is a negro or not, but it is someone singing. But what if it is someone yelling over in town? It's nothing unusual, I am sure. I have heard them yell at all times of the night. I believe it is someone singing," he finally said, turning from the window.

CHAPTER XXI.

WITH OLD JASPER.

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Early in the evening old Jasper Staggs received a visit from Zeb Sawyer, and inasmuch as the social exchanges between them had never been particularly marked, the old man was not a little surprised.

"Well, you see, it aint altogether on your account that I've come," said Sawyer with a weak laugh, seeing that in the old man's astonishment there lurked an unfavorable suspicion. "Mother—and you know she's getting along—took it into her head today that nothing would do her so much good as a visit from your wife and Miss Annie. And she says she'd like mighty well to have you."

"Well," said old Jasper, "the women folks are out there in the dinin' room a fussin' around, and I reckon they'll take the time to answer for themselves, jest as I am agoin' to answer for myself, when I say that I'm obleeged to you, but I can't come. I'm talkin' for myself, recollect," he added, with emphasis, nodding his head and running his fingers through his rim of gray beard. "Yes, sir; for myself, and for myself only."

"But I guess Aunt Tobithy and Miss Annie will go, won't they?"

"I have said my say, and it was for myself only, but if you want to know anything consarnin' the other members of this house, just step right out there where they are tinkerin' with the dishes, and ask them."

Sawyer went into the dining-room. There was a hush of the rattle of dishes and knives, and then Sawyer came back and said they were kind enough to go. "I am going to stay here with you," Sawyer remarked.

"All right," the old man replied.

"And I believe it will be a little more than all right when I tell you of something. The other day I was at an old house in the country, and an old fellow that lives there took me down into the cellar to show me a new patent churn that he was working on. Well, I didn't care anything about the churn, you know, not having much to do with cows, but I looked at the thing like I was interested, just to please him. And while I was looking about I saw a small barrel, with dried moss on it, and I asked him about it, and he said it was a whisky barrel that was hid out all during the war. This made me open my eyes, I tell you; but as quiet as I could I asked him if there was any of the liquor left. He said he had about a gallon left, and I told him I'd give him twenty dollars for a quart of it, and I did, right then and there; and if I haven't got that bottle right with me now, you may crack my head like a hickory nut."

By this time old Jasper's jaw had fallen, and now he sat, leaning forward with his mouth wide open. "Zeby," he said, and his voice sounded as if he had been taken with a sudden hoarseness. "I reckon I am about as fond of a joke and a prank as any man that ever crossed Goose Creek—and some great jokers came along there in the early days—but there was things too sacred for them to joke about. You know what I said, Zeby?"

"I know all about them old fellows," Zeb said, with a laugh. "I have heard my granddad talk about them. In fact, he was one of them, and I get it from him not to joke on some things. I've that bottle of liquor in my pocket this very minute."

The old man stepped to the door. "Tobithy; oh, Tobithy."

"Well," his wife answered from the dining-room.

"Zeb is powerful anxious for you to go over to his mother's, as the old lady is wanting to see you, but I don't see how you can get off."

Sawyer looked at him in surprise. The old man made him a sign to be quiet.

A dish clattered and his wife exclaimed: "You don't see how I can go. Oh, no, but you see how I can stick here day after day, killing myself with work. I am going."

The old man grinned and sat down. "I was afraid she would back out," he said, "and I wanted to clinch the thing. Jest let me tell her that I am afraid she can't do a thing and then it would take a good deal more high water than we've had for a year or two to keep her from doing it."

His wife and Annie came into the room and he put on a sober air. "I don't think you can stay late, for it looks like rain," he said.

"I'm going to stay until I get ready to come back, and it can rain brick bats for all I care," she

replied; and the old man, knowing that everything was fixed, leaned back with a long breath of contentment. The women soon took their departure; the old man watched them until they passed through a gate that opened out upon the sidewalk, then he looked at Sawyer and said:

"The bottle; I believe you 'lowed you had it with you."



"Right here," Sawyer replied, tapping a side pocket of his coat.

The old man flinched like a horse prodded in a tender place. "Don't do that again, you might break it," he said. "There ain't nothing easier to break than a bottle full of old liquor. Let me see," he added, with an air of deep meditation. "It has been about five months since I renewed my youth; it was the night Turner was elected Sheriff. And I want to tell you, Zeby, that to a man who has seen fun and recollects it, that's a good while. We'll jest wait a minute before we open the ceremonies. You can never tell when a woman's clean gone. The chances are that she may forget something and come bobbin' back at any minute. And it might take me quite a while to explain. There are some things you can explain to a woman and some things you can't, and one of the things you can't, is why you ought to take liquor when she don't feel like takin' any herself. Well, I reckon their start was sure enough," he said, looking through the window. "Now, jest step out here in the dinin' room and make yourself at home, while I pump a pail of fresh water."

Old Jasper put a pitcher of water on the dining room table. Sawyer sat with his arms resting on the board, and with a flask held affectionately in his hands. Old Jasper cleared his throat, and drawing up a large rocking chair, sat down. He said, as he looked at the flask, that he had not felt well of late, and that whisky would do him good. Sawyer would make no apology for drinking such liquor. Good whisky was to him its own apology. Life at best was short, with many a worry, and he did not see how a so-called moral code should censure a man for throwing off his troubles once in a while. The old man needed no persuasion to lead him on. And in the dim light of a lamp, placed upon the corner of an old red side-board, they sat glowing with merriment. Sawyer drank sparingly, but Jasper declared that it took about three fingers at a time to do him any good, and into the declaration the action was dove-tailed. He told a long and rambling story, relating to a time when he had driven a stage coach; a tickling recollection touched him and he leaned back and laughed till the tears rolled down through the time-gullies in his face. Sawyer snapped his watch. The old man told him to let time take care of itself.

"That's what I'm doing," said Sawyer. "By the way, I've an idea that I'd like to go squirrel hunting. But I broke my gun the other day and sent it to the shop. Haven't got an old gun around, have you?"

"There's an old muzzle-loader in there behind the door, standing there ready to break the leg of a dog that comes over to howl in the garden."

"Can't shoot a pistol much, can you?"

"Ain't much of a hand with a pistol, Zeby."

"Haven't got one, have you?"

"Had one, but I believe Lyman took it up to his room. There's a good man, even if you have a cause not to like him; and when I got well acquainted with him I jest 'lowed that nothin' on the place was too good for him, so we brushed up the room right over the sittin' room, and there he sets late in the night and does his work, and sometimes, 'way late, I hear him walkin' up and down, arm in arm with an idea that he's tryin' to get better acquainted with, he says."

"Is he up there now?"

"No. He ain't come in yet. Sometimes he don't come till late. He's got fewer regular hours about him than any man I ever seen. He jest takes everything by fits and starts, and he's mighty funny about some things—he don't let a man know what he's doin' at all; never comes down and reads to a body the things that he writes—might write a hymn to sing at the camp-meeting, and he never would read it to you."

The old man drifted into another stage coach reminiscence and Sawyer sat in an attitude of pretended interest, but he heard nothing, so deep-buried was he within himself. He had not much time to spare, and there was one thing that must be done; it was absolutely essential that he must go to Lyman's room and get the pistol. He poured out more whisky for the old man. Jasper continued to talk, but the memories of the past did not arise to tickle him; they made him sad. He wept over a girl, his first love, a grave more than forty years old. He sobbed over his boy, killed in the army. His chin sank upon his breast. Sawyer got up quickly and began to search for the gun. He found it and hid it under a bed. Then he turned his attention to Lyman's room. The apartment was approached by an encased stairway, leading from the sitting-room. He lifted the latch and listened, the old man was snoring; the young man felt like a thief; but that was to be expected, and therefore did not alarm his conscience. The stairs creaked, still he did not pause. The door of Lyman's room, to the left at the head of the stairs, was not locked. Sawyer struck a match and stepped inside. He lighted a lamp and looked about the room. On the table lay sheets of paper, some of them covered with close, nervous writing, and upon others were scratches, half-formed words, the tracks of a mind wandering in a bog. He pulled open the table drawer and eagerly grabbed up a pistol. Then he turned out the light and walked hastily down the stairs. Old Jasper was still asleep, his head on one side, like an old hawk worn out with a long fight. Sawyer put the pistol on the side-board, behind a tin tray standing on edge, and then sat down to wait. It was nearly time for the "boys" to come. He heard a key in the front door lock, and he put out the light. The door opened and closed, the latch of the stair door clicked; he heard Lyman going up to his room.

CHAPTER XXII.

THE "BOOSY."

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Lyman had been helping Warren with the work of putting the paper to press, and he was tired, but when he had lighted the lamp he drew the writing paper toward him, and took up a pen, turning it between his fingers, as if waiting for a word, but it did not come, and he sat there musing. His heart was heavy, though not with a sadness, but with an overweight of gentleness, a consciousness that he stood as a protector to bide the time of the lover's coming. He was proud, but had no vanity. He knew that he could win friendship, for in friendship a strong and rugged quality was a factor, but he did not realize that the same rugged quality appealed to a deeper affection. In his work he saw the character of woman, and he could fancy her capricious enough to give her heart to the most awkward of men, but when he turned this light upon himself, so many blemishes were brought out that he stepped back from the glaring revelation. He believed that in his peculiar position Eva gave him the affection that a daughter might give a father, and he was determined that this charming relationship should not be undone by the appearance, on his part, of a selfish love; and in his resolve he was strong, but in cold dread he looked forward to the time when she should come with a new light in her eyes and ask him to release her. Suddenly a noise came from below, the tramping of feet upon the veranda. Could it be a surprise party at so late an hour? He listened. The door was opened, but there was no sound of greetings, no laughter. The visitors were evidently trying to soften their foot-weight, but the house shook under their uneven tread. He heard the click of the stair-door latch; the stairs groaned. He remembered what Sawyer had said, and caution prompted him to lock the door. The next moment there came a gentle tap, but he knew that the gentleness was assumed, for he heard suppressed breathing at the head of the stairs.

"Who's there?" he asked.

"Open the door."

"But who's there?"

"The good of the community."

"Well, I don't know that I have any business with you at this time of night, Mr. Good-of-the-Community."

"But we have business with you. Open the door or we'll break it down."

Lyman stepped back and snatched open the table drawer. He straightened up and thought for a moment. They were throwing themselves against the door. He seized a light chair and stood near the door. Word to hurry up came from below. The door creaked.

"Once more, are you going to open it?"

"Wait a moment," said Lyman. "I don't know who you are, but I can guess at your business. You are violating the law, you are house-breakers and I wish to tell you—"

Crash went the door. And crash went the chair. The opening was narrow. The first man fell back. The second man staggered. The third man hesitated, then sprang upon Lyman, giving him no time to strike. Across the floor they struggled, the old house shaking. They strove to choke each other, they rolled upon the floor. Lyman got hold of the fellow's throat. His fingers were like steel clamps. The White-Cap gurgled. Lyman got up, dragged him to the door and tumbled him down the stairs. Just then there came shrieks from below. The two women had returned. The White Caps were treading one upon another in their hurry to get out. Lyman, with a chair post in his hand, followed them. They ran through the sitting-room, a flutter of white in the dark. Lyman went into the dining-room, whence the women had run. The lamp had been relighted, and there sat old Jasper, fast asleep.

"There's nothing to be alarmed about," said Lyman, as the women with their hands in the air, ran to him. "A few White Caps out of employment wanted work, and got it. There, now, don't take on. Sit down, Aunt Tobithy. Oh, old Uncle Jasper is all right."

"He is drunk," said the old woman, anger driving away her fright. "They have made him drunk and he would sit there and sleep and let them burn the house over his head. Oh, was there ever anything so disgraceful! Jasper! Jasper!" she shook him.

"Horse that would trot—trot—" the old man muttered.

"Oh, you ought to be ashamed of yourself. Take hold of him, Annie, and let's put him to bed."

"I'll take care of him," said Lyman. They put him to bed and then sat down. "I don't understand it," the old woman remarked. "Did they hurt you?"

"No, they didn't get at me. They were at a disadvantage, out on the narrow landing, while I had plenty of room to swing around in. I must have hurt two of them pretty badly."

"What do you think of it?" Annie inquired

"Sawyer," said Lyman.

The old woman made a noise that sounded like a cluck. "And he fixed it so we were to go over to his mother's," she said. "Oh, it's perfectly clear. And he brought whisky here and got Jasper drunk. I do think this is the worst community the Lord ever saw. Talk about churches and school-houses, when such things are allowed to go on."

"What are you going to do about it, Mr. Lyman?" Annie asked. "Are you going to have them arrested?"

"They ought to be hanged," the old lady spoke up. "Oh, I knew something would happen the moment I put my foot off the place. I never did know it to fail. And I might have told this morning that something wrong was goin' to take place, for I had to try twice or three times before I could pick up anything when I stooped for it, and I saw a hen out in the yard trying to crow. But, Mr. Lyman," she added, reflectively, "I do hope you will think twice before you go to law about it. I don't tell you not to, mind you, for I am the last one in the world to tell a person not to have the law enforced, but if you could see that old woman—Zeb's mother—you wouldn't want to do a thing to bend her down with grief; it makes no difference how many laws it would enforce."

"And besides what would the law do?" Annie broke in, to strengthen her mother's position. "You might have him arrested and all that, and a trial and a scandal, too, but after all, it wouldn't amount to anything. I should think that his conscience would punish him enough. And you couldn't have the others arrested without bringing him into it."

"You don't need to argue any longer," Lyman replied. "The merest reference to his old mother settles it with me. The law part would be a farce anyway. But let me remind you that it is quite a serious thing when an American citizen is ordered to leave his home at the whim of a scoundrel."

He bade them good night and went up to his room. The door lay upon the floor and fragments of the cast-iron lock were scattered about. The image of Sawyer arose before him, as he had appeared in the office, and so hateful and disturbing was the picture, that he arose and bathed his face, as if to wash out the vision. He heard a man's voice below and he stepped to the head of the stairs and listened. He recognized the voice of the town marshal. Already the law had begun its feeble farce. The marshal came up the stairs and looked around, at the door and the fragments of the lock. He took up a bit of iron and put it into his pocket, as if he had found a ton's weight of evidence.

"I'll take this along," he said gravely.

"Help yourself," said Lyman.

"Yes, for little things count," the marshal replied with the air of a great and mysterious detective. "And now," he added, "have you any idea or any suspicion as to who led this gang?"

Lyman had sat down and was crossed-legged, swinging one foot. "Oh," he answered carelessly, "I guess you know who it is. However, we will let the subject drop. I don't wish to discuss it."

"But, my dear sir, the law—"

Lyman held up his hand. "Let us hear nothing more about the law," said he. "Good night."

The marshal tramped down the stairs and Lyman went to bed to forget the mob and to dream of the rippling creek and a voice that was softer and sweeter than the echo of a flute. At early morning there came a rapping on the stairway, to summon him to breakfast. Old Jasper, with his hot hands in his pockets and with a sick expression of countenance was doddering about the sitting room.

"Ah, Lord," he said, when Lyman stepped down upon the floor. "Walt a minute. Let me shut this door. The smell of the kitchen gig—gig— gags me. Lyman, I do reckon I ought to take a rusty knife and cut my infamous old throat. Yes, I do. I deserve it. And all because I wanted to renew my youth. I know I've said it before, but I want to say right now that I'll never touch another drop of the stuff as long as I live, I don't care if Noah had it with him in the Ark. But it is a fact that I sat here asleep while a mob was in my house?"

"Yes," said Lyman, "you were asleep when I came down stairs."

"Well, sir, it's news to me. And it shows what licker will fetch a man to. It will take me some little time to explain it to Tobithy."

"I suppose it will," said Lyman, smiling at him.

"Oh, it's a fact. Women fight against reason, you know, as long as they can. Yes, sir, it will take me a month to convince her that I wa'n't drunk. I admit that I drank a few drinks, small ones, not enough to hurt me if I had been right at myself, but I was tired and sleepy before I touched a drop. Lyman, I wish you would explain it to her. She's got a good deal of confidence in you—a good deal more than she has in me. I wish you would tell her that I wasn't drunk."

"I think the best plan, Uncle Jasper, would be to say nothing about it."

"All right, we'll let it drop then. But I'll have to reason with her, and, as I said before, it is goin' to take some time to explain. Go in to breakfast and let me sit down here in my misery. Say, if you could hint that I am awfully sorry I'd be obliged to you; and if you could give them to understand that you don't think I'm goin' to live long, it would be a big favor."

When Lyman stepped out upon the street he was soon made to feel that the White Cap affair had become common property. Some of the villagers were inclined to treat it as a great joke, but the graver ones looked upon it as a serious infraction of the law. Sawyer's name was not mentioned, but everyone appeared to understand that he was the leader.

Warren was standing at the foot of the office stairs as Lyman came up. They smiled at each other.

"Well," said Warren, "have you got another piece of news to suppress?"

"I am afraid so," Lyman answered, as he started up the stairs.

"You are afraid so?" said Warren, tramping beside him. "How much longer is this suppression act to remain in force? Confound it, you help make three-fourths of the news in the neighborhood and then won't print it because it concerns you. All news concerns somebody, you must understand."

They went into the editorial room. Lyman took up his pipe and Warren stood looking at him. Lyman sat down and lighted his pipe. "My boy," said he, "it may seem hard, but I have a reason for keeping this thing out of print. It is not for myself, for my own sense of delicacy does not protest against it, but it would wound an old woman, and we can't afford to do that. We might say something about the mob, but it won't do to mention names."

"You mean Mrs. Sawyer?"

"Yes; it would hurt her."

"Lyman, you are the best writer I ever saw, but you were not intended for a newspaper man."

"I know that, my boy. If I thought we could sell ten thousand papers I wouldn't print a thing to hurt an old woman."

"Oh, I don't want to hurt an old woman or a young one either," said Warren, "but I look at the principle of the thing. Somebody's hurt every time a paper comes from the press, and if everybody was as tender-hearted as you are, there would be no newspapers after awhile, and then where would we be?"

"We would be slower, less wise, but in many instances more respectable," Lyman replied. He

leaned back in his chair, slowly puffing his pipe.

"From the high-grade point of view I reckon you're right," said Warren, raking up the newspapers on the table, "but we can't all live on the high grades. By the way," he added with a laugh, "I walked over to the express office this morning and took my paper out, as if it were a matter of course. The fellow looked at me and sighed, and I thought he was going to say something about the numerous times I had bled under the hob-nailed heel of his company. But he didn't; he asked me to send him the paper, and he paid for it right there. Oh, things are getting pretty bright when trusts and corporations begin to bid for your influence. But what are you going to do with that fellow Sawyer?" he asked, becoming grave, or rather, more serious, for gravity could hardly spread over his lightsome face.

"I don't know," Lyman answered.

"But you can't afford to keep on letting him hurt you; you'll have to hunt him to shut him off."

"Yes, I'll have to do something, but I don't know what it will be. I have met a good many mean men—mean fellows at a saw mill, and I thought that a mean mill man was about the meanest—but Sawyer strikes off somewhat in advance of any meanness I ever encountered."

"Well, don't you get mad? Don't you feel like you want to take a gun and shoot him?"

"Yes, I have all sorts of feelings with regard to him; and sometimes when I awake at night it is a good thing he is not within reach. But I'll try to worry along with him. I don't expect to stay here very much longer."

Warren caught his breath, as if he had stuck a splinter into his finger, and his face pinched up with sharp anxiety. "I have been expecting to hear that," he said, smoothing out the papers on the table. "I have been looking for it, and I don't blame you in the least, though I hate to give you up. But," he added, brightening, "you have given me a start and they can't take it away from me. I'm all right and I know you are. And the first thing you know, I'm going to get married and settle down. I am about half way in love with a girl now. She put her hand on a high seat and jumped right up into a wagon. And when she batted her eyes, I wondered that they didn't crack like a whip, they were so sharp. I said to myself right then that I was about half way in love with her, and I watched her as she sat there, eating an apple; and when she drove away I went and got an apple and ate it, and I never tasted an apple before, I tell you. It must be a great girl that can give flavor to fruit."

"Who is she?" Lyman asked, his eyes brightening with amusement.

"I don't know her name. She drove in with her father—I reckon he was her father—and I didn't find out her name or anything about her. I went into the store where the man bought a jug of molasses and asked the clerk in there if he knew the man, and he said he didn't. But I'll find out and will marry her if she has no particular objections. A woman who can jump like that and then flavor an apple can catch me any day."

"You don't know but that she may be already married," said Lyman.

"Oh, no. We must not suppose that. Why, that would kill everything. Of course the fellow with her might be her husband, but it would be nonsense to presume so when, with the same degree of reason, I can presume he is not. If you've got to do any presuming, always presume for the best."

Lyman threw himself back and laughed. "Neither the ancients nor the moderns ever evolved from life any better philosophy than that," he declared. "Why, of course she is not married, nor shall she be until you marry her. It was intended that she should flavor your life, even as she flavored the apple. Here comes someone. Why, it's McElwin. Step out into the other room a moment, please. I believe he wants to see me alone."

CHAPTER XXIII.

AFTER AN ANXIOUS NIGHT.

McElwin arose after a night of cat-naps. He was up long before breakfast. He stood at the gate, looking up and down the road; and when a peddler came along the banker hailed him and asked if there were any news in the town. The fellow held up a chicken. McElwin shook his head and repeated the inquiry. The fellow put the chicken back into his cart and held up a duck, whereupon McElwin ordered him to move on. At the breakfast table he sat with an unseeing stare. The clouds were gone, the day was bright and the air came sweet from the garden. His daughter spoke to him and he broke his stare and looked at her.

"Did you speak to me?" he asked.

"I said I was afraid you were not well this morning."

"Oh, yes, quite well, I thank you. But I didn't sleep very much."

"You might say you didn't sleep at all," his wife spoke up; "and I don't think you ought to go down

town today."

This preposterous suggestion made him nervous. "Gracious alive, don't make an invalid of me," he replied. "I am all right, but an over-concern about my health will make me sick. Did you ever notice that when the newspapers begin to discuss a man's health he dies pretty soon? It's a fact. One newspaper comes out and says that Mr. Jones is not looking well. Another paper declares that Mr. Jones is looking better than he has looked for years. Then all the papers have their fling and the first thing you know Mr. Jones is dead."

Eva laughed; the idea struck her as being so humorously true, and Mrs. McElwin smiled, but it was the sad smile of protest. "James," she said, "you are a man of wonderful judgment, but sometimes you persist in looking at life through stained glass. Something is wrong with you and you ought to see a doctor at once."

"There you go," he cried, winking at his daughter. "Call in a doctor and that would settle it. The newspapers would then have their fling and that would fix me. I am worried, I acknowledge that, but it won't last long. Who is that at the gate?" he broke off, looking through the window. "He's moving off now. I thought at first that it was old Jasper Staggs."

It was his custom to read a newspaper in the library after breakfast, but this morning he did not tarry a moment, but went straightway toward the bank. At the wooden bridge he met Caruthers, and halted to speak to him. It was the first time that the lawyer had ever received the great man's attention, but knowing the cause of the interest now manifested, he was determined to dally with it as a sort of revenge.

"Any news, Mr. Caruthers?"

"Oh, you know my name. I am much flattered, I assure you. Of course I have known you for many years, but I didn't think you remembered me."

McElwin stood blinking at the sun. "I think I have spoken to you on an average of once a day for the last fifteen years," said he. "I am not a gusher, however. I have not seen a newspaper this morning and ask you if there is any news."

"Oh, I suppose there must be," Caruthers replied, leaning back against the rail of the bridge. "I haven't seen a newspaper either and I don't know what may have happened in the outside world."

"Any news about town?"

"No, nothing unusual, I believe. A dog was found dead on the public square, I understand; and I hear that old Mart Henley's son has been suspected of stealing a ham from Avery's meat house. Let me see." He passed his hand over his brow, as if in deep meditation. "Maxey's cow tramped down the roses in Donalson's yard and Thompson's hogs, covered with mud, have rubbed themselves against Tillman's white fence."

"Such occurrences are of no interest to me," said the banker.

"No, nor to me either. Well, I'll bid you good morning. Wait a moment," he added. "There was something else on my mind. Oh, did you hear of the White Caps?"

"No!" McElwin said with a gasp. "What about them?"

"Well, they went last night to have some fun with Sam Lyman."

"Ah, and they took him out and whipped him?"

"Well, hardly. He wore out a chair over them, and about three miles from town, I understand that old Doc Mason has been kept pretty busy since midnight sewing up their heads. Lyman didn't tell me, but I got it pretty straight that somebody stole the pistol out of his room; and if it hadn't been for that the undertaker would have had no cause to complain of the dullness of the season."

"You don't tell me!"

"Yes, I am inclined to think I do. Old Jasper had a visitor early in the evening; the women went out calling, and the visitor got the old man drunk."

"And it is suspected that the visitor had something to do with the subsequent call of the White Caps?"

"Well, it is not only suspected, but pretty well established. I suppose you could guess the name of the visitor."

"How could I, sir?"

"Well, I have heard it said that the visitor never makes an investment without consulting you, and it is thought more than likely that he consulted you on the occasion of this bad investment."

Caruthers leered and the banker winced. "As yet I am at a loss as to who the visitor might have been," said McElwin; "but no matter who, I wish to say that he did not consult me. I have never been known to violate the law, sir."

"Oh, no one would suspect you of that, Mr. McElwin. We all know that you never break the law, but we don't know that you are not sometimes aware that the law is going to be broken. Good

morning."

"Wait a moment, sir. Do you mean to tell me that I am suspected of complicity in this infamous outrage?"

"No, I don't mean to tell you that. Neither do I mean to say that you would be wrong in doing so. You have had cause. Lyman's stubbornness is quite enough to rasp a saint. I couldn't stand it; and between me and you, I wish they had lashed him till he would have craved the privilege of going away."

"Wait just one more moment, Mr. Caruthers. Is what you have told me in reality suspected by the people or did you evolve it out of your own richness of observation?"

Caruthers bowed his head under the outpour of this compliment. "It is not public talk," he admitted.

"Ah, thank you. Drop in at the bank some time and see me, sir. Good morning."

Warren stepped out of the room, merely nodding to McElwin as he passed. Lyman got up, handed McElwin a chair, and without speaking, sat down again. McElwin stood with his hands on the back of the chair, looking at Lyman, and evidently embarrassed as to what he ought to say. "Beautiful morning," said Lyman, seeing his embarrassment and feeling that it was his duty as host to help him out of it.

"Yes, very bright after the rain."

"That's a fact; it did rain last night."

"Mr. Lyman, I heard something this morning that has grieved me very much."

"Oh, about the White Caps. Sit down, won't you?"

McElwin sat down. "Yes, the White Caps." He was silent for a moment and then he continued: "The intercourse between you and me has been far from friendly. I do not deny that I should like to see you leave this place, never to return; I acknowledge that I would bribe you to go, but I would not give countenance to a mob that would force you to leave."

Lyman looked at him with a cool smile. "Do you mean to tell me, Mr. McElwin, that Sawyer did not speak to you of his intention to take me out as if I were a thief or a wife-beater—"

"Stop, sir!" McElwin commanded, holding up his hand. "I forbid you to—"

"Forbid is rather a strong word. Don't you think that request would be better?"

"Well," said McElwin, softening, "we will say request. As I tell you, your presence in this community is distasteful to me, and your farcical marriage stands directly opposed to my plans. But I would not violate the law and commit a misdemeanor to drive you off. You have reasons for believing that Mr. Sawyer—"

"Yes, he was the organizer."

"But not with my sanction, sir."

"No? But perhaps not without your knowledge."

"Sir!"

"Keep your seat. Now I am going to tell you what I believe. I believe that Sawyer came to you, after I had burned the check, and told you what he intended to do."

"He did, and I told him not to do it."

"Ah. But did you go to the law and enter a protest against an outrage which you knew he was going to commit? Did you send me a word of warning or did you quietly wait in the hope that the result might rid you of me?"

"Mr. Lyman, I am going to tell you the absolute truth. I advised against it, and after he was gone, I went out to look for him, but he had driven down into the country to—"

"To organize his mob," Lyman suggested.

"Well, yes, we will say that he had gone for that purpose. And at night I came down town in the rain to see if I could not find him, and when I failed in this, I thought that I would come up here to warn you." He hesitated, with a slight cough.

"But you didn't come."

"No, not all the way. I halted on the stairs and turned back. I felt that I—" He hesitated.

"You felt that you could not afford to antagonize Mr. Sawyer."

McElwin coughed. "It was not exactly that, Mr. Lyman. But I did think that it was meddling with

something that—that did not concern me."

"Didn't concern you? I thought you were deeply concerned, enough at least to feel yourself warranted in attempting to buy me, to hire me to leave."

"You don't quite understand, Mr. Lyman."

"Oh, yes I do. The trouble with you is that I understand too well. Go ahead with your absolute truth."

McElwin cleared his husky throat. "I went home, sir, and passed a most anxious night; I suffered, sir, far more than you did."

"No doubt of that. I enjoyed myself."

"Mr. Lyman, will you please not make a joke of this affair."

"Oh, I won't make a joke of it. It will be earnest enough by the time it is over with. I am informed that Mrs. Sawyer is very old and that to introduce her son's name in connection with the White Caps would greatly distress her, and I have resolved not to do this. But there are punishments, moral lessons to be served out, and I think it well to begin with you."

"Mr. Lyman, we are not friends, but would you ruin me in the estimation of the public?"

"No, I will say nothing to the public. I will tell your daughter."

McElwin started. His mind had been so directly fixed upon the public that he had not thought of his home. Being the master there he could command respect, and it was on the tip of his tongue now to say that his daughter would not believe Lyman, but, as if a bitter taste had suddenly arisen in his mouth, he felt that this man's word out-weighed his own. He had a strong hope that when his daughter should be set free and left to choose at will, her judgment would finally settle upon Sawyer. But he knew that should she be convinced that her father had counseled him to engage the services of lawless men or had even connived at the brutal procedure—he knew that, convinced of this, she would turn in scorn upon Sawyer and, in a moment, wreck the plans that it had taken years to build.

"Mr. Lyman," he said, "I admit that I am largely to blame, and I now throw myself upon your mercy, sir. Please don't tell my daughter."

All his dignity and arrogance had vanished, and the chair creaked under him. His brown beard, usually so neatly trimmed, looked ragged now, and his eyes, which Lyman had thought were full of sharp and cutting inquiry, now looked dull and questionless. "I throw myself upon your mercy," he repeated.

"Then, sir, you knock my props from under me," Lyman replied. "I am not equipped with that firmness which men call justice. Nature sometimes makes sport of a man by giving him a heart. And what does it mean? It means that he shall suffer at the hands of other men, and that when his hour for revenge has come, his over-grown heart rises up and commands him to be merciful. McElwin, I ought to punish you—I ought to tell your wife and daughter that you have conspired with ruffians to have me whipped from the town, but I will not. You may go now."

The banker's arrogance flew back to him. "You may go" were words that pierced him like a three-pronged fork, but he controlled himself, for now his judgment was stronger than his dignity. He arose and stepped up close to Lyman. "I am under deep obligations to you," he said. "You are a kind and generous man."

"Why don't you say that you are thankful to find me a fool?"

McElwin took no notice of this remark. "And I hope that I may be able to do something for you," he said. Still he stood there, as if he had not struck the proper note. "Do something for you. And if you need—need money, I shall be glad to let you have it."

"Oh, you couldn't get away without mentioning your god-essence, could you? Good day."

CHAPTER XXIV.

AT MT. ZION.

On a Sunday morning, Lyman and Warren hired a light spring wagon and drove out through the green and romantic country that lay stretched and tumbled along the Mt. Zion road. The great clover-fields, now red with bloom, looked like a mighty spreading of strawberry-land ready for the pickers; and a red bird, arising from the ground, might have been a bloom of a berry suddenly endowed with wings. The air breathed delicious laziness, and when the horse stopped midway and knee-deep in a rivulet, he stood with his mouth in the water pretending to swallow, stealing the enjoyment of the cool current against his legs. The two men enjoyed the old rascal's trick, agreeing to let him stand there as long as he practiced the duplicity of keeping his mouth in the stream. Minnows nibbled at his lips, and he lifted his head, but observing the men, who leaned out to look at him, he again immersed his mouth and pretended to swallow. At last, as if ashamed

of himself, he pulled out, trotting briskly in the sun, but hanging back in the shade. Down in the low places bright-winged flies had come in swarms to hum their tunes, and on the high ridges where the thin grass was wilting, the gaunt rabbit sat in the sun. Driving along the low, smooth and sandy margin of a stream, where the thick bushes bore a bloom that looked like a long caterpillar, they reached an iron spring, deep red, a running wound on the face of the earth. They came to an old water mill, long ago fallen into decay and halted to listen to the water pouring over the ruined dam. They turned into a broader road, and now saw numerous vehicles, bright with calico and dun with home-spun, all moving in one direction, toward the old Mt. Zion meeting house on a hill. To view one of those places of worship is to gaze upon religious history. We look at the great trees, the rocks worn smooth, the house squatting with age, and we no longer regard our country as new. In Mt. Zion there were loop-holes where men had stood to shoot Indians, while their wives were muttering a prayer. The old oak benches, made of split slabs, were almost as hard as iron. A slab, called the altar, but known as the mourners' bench, had caught the tears of many an innocent maiden and roistering youth.

Lyman unhitched the horse and led him down a glade to feed him in the cool shadow of a chestnut tree, and while he was spreading the oats Warren came running down to him.

"Lyman, she's here," he said. "It's a fact and I'll swear it. Yes, sir, she's here, and I was never more surprised in my life."

"I am not surprised," Lyman replied. "I expected her."

"The deuce you did! Then you know her."

"Know her. Of course I do."

"Then why didn't you tell me?"

"Tell you? What do you mean?"

"Why, I mean that you ought to have told me. What's her name?"

"Look here, have you gone crazy?"

"No, but you have. How the deuce did you know she would be here? All right, but she won't get away from me so easy this time. I see the old man's with her, and the idea of supposing that he could have been her husband is preposterous."

"Oh," Lyman laughed, "I thought you meant my—meant Eva McElwin."

"No, I mean the girl that flavored the apple. Come up and I'll introduce you to her."

"But have you met her?"

"I met her in the path a minute ago."

"But have you been introduced to her?"

"No, but I'll fix that all right. Come on."

Lyman was laughing, but Warren was deeply in earnest. They went up the hill toward the church. Everybody was outside in the shade, the preacher not having arrived. "There she is," Warren whispered; "that girl standing with that man near the door. Stand here till I go and fix it."

He hastened toward the man, and not the slightest abashed, walked up to him. He said something; the man spoke to the girl and Lyman saw Warren lift his hat. They stood for a few moments, talking, and then they came out toward Lyman, the girl blushing and hanging back, and Warren gently urging her.

"Miss Nancy Pitt," said Warren, approaching, "I have the honor to present Mr. Lyman, one of the best writers in the country, although he is not cut out for a newspaper man."

Miss Pitt blushed and smiled and said that she was glad to meet him. She looked like a spirit of the woods, on a day when red buds and white blossoms are mingled; she was not handsome, but striking, fresh, and with an early morning brightness in her eyes; she was an untrained athlete of the farm, ready to put a back-log into the yawning fire-place or to choke a greedy calf off from its mother. She had no manners and was shy; and, without knowing how to play with a man's affection, was coy. Lyman looked into her eyes and thought of the bluish pink of the turnip. She blushed again and said: "I reckon we'd have rain if it was cloudy, but it ain't. Where's pa?" And then looking round she called: "Come on, pap."

"Comin'," the old man replied, walking with a limp in his Sunday shoes. He did not wait for an introduction to Lyman, but shook hands with him, glanced upward and said: "Mighty bright day."

"Just as fresh as if this were the first one," Lyman replied.

"Well, sir, I hadn't thought of that, but I reckon you're right." His daughter reached over and brushed a measuring-worm off his shoulder. "Going to get a new coat," she said. "Worm measuring you."

"Put him on me," said Lyman, looking about as if searching for the worm.

"Get away," Warren broke in, shoving him to one side. "I want him. Well, let him go. How far do

you live from here, Mr. Pitt?"

"Well, a leetle the rise of three mile and a half, at this time of the year, but when the weather is bad, the road stretches powerful. My wife wanted to come today to hear the new preacher, but along come some folks visitin' from over the creek, with a passul of haungry children, and she had to stay and git 'em a bite to eat. Her doctrine is that it's better to feed the haungry than to eat, even if the table is served by a new preacher. Well," he added, as a hymn arose within the church, "they've struck up the tune of sorrow in there and I reckon we'd better go in."

Warren walked with Nancy. "What, we ain't going in the same door?" she said as they approached.

"Yes," he replied, "and I'm going to sit with you during the sermon."

"No," she said, drawing back. "That won't do. I have heard that in town the women and the men sit together in church, but they don't out here, and if I did I'd never hear the last of it."

"All right, I don't want to mark you in any way, but I want you to wait for me when you come out."

Bostic came in. His face was grave, and he carried the timid air of a first appearance as he walked slowly down the aisle. The men mumbled, the women whispered, and Lyman heard a girl remark: "He ain't so mighty good-looking." At the door, there was a rustle of strange skirts, and as if a new note had been introduced into an old melody, the congregation looked around. Lyman looked too, and his breast grew warm with the new beating of his heart. Mrs. McElwin and her daughter entered the church. The preacher glanced up from his text and saw them, and his eye kindled. He gave out an old hymn and the congregation arose. The air was vibrant in the unctuous swell of sound. The spider webs hanging from the rafters trembled; the woods caught up the echo and bore it afar through the timber-land, and the distant leaves caught it as a whisper and hushed it. In it there was not music, not the harmony that seeks the approval of the brain; it was a chant that called upon the heart to humble itself in the sight of the Lord and to be brave in the presence of man, the tune that subdued the wilderness of a new world, a tune that men have sung before plunging into the swallowing fire of battle. The city is ashamed of it, laughs at it, but, far away in the country, it is still the war-cry of Jehovah.

The preacher began in a rambling way, missing the thoughts that he expected to find, finding thoughts that surprised him. Sometimes his road was rough, and he clamored over rocks and fell into gullies, but occasionally he struck a smooth path and then he ran because the way was easy. After a time he forgot to be impressive and then he impressed. He filled the house with words, like a flight of pigeons, and on their backs some of them caught the sunlight that streamed through the cracks in the walls. Lyman was reminded of one Of William Wirt's stories—"The Blind Preacher"—the man who in a ruinous old house raised his hand and cried: "Socrates died like a philosopher, but Jesus Christ like a God."

There was to be another sermon in the afternoon, by an old man who plowed for a living and who preached without pay, and Lyman caught himself wondering whether the McElwins would remain to hear him. Through the window he saw a light buggy under the trees, and he mused that they would at least let him help them into it. He was afraid that they might get away, and he was nervous at the fear that slow-moving persons, halting in the aisle to talk over the sermon, might obstruct his path; and as soon as the benediction was pronounced, he hastened toward the rear end of the house. Eva stepped toward him and frankly held out her hand.

"Mother, this is Mr. Lyman," she said.

Mrs. McElwin bowed, resolved to be cool and dignified. She said that she was pleased to meet Mr. Lyman, which statement Mr. Lyman looked upon as a polite fib. She spoke of the charm of the day and expressed surprise that the young preacher had done so well. Lyman asked if she were going to remain to hear the afternoon sermon. She did not think it wise to stay so long. The road home was very attractive by day, with its over-hanging branches and streams of clear water, but it was dark and rather desolate at night. Still they would not start immediately. She would like to look at the old spring at the foot of the hill; history bubbled in its water; her grandfather had camped there. They walked down to the spring and seated themselves on the rocks. The men who had come down to "swap" saddles and lies, got up and moved away.

"Mr. Lyman," said Eva, sitting with her hands full of leaves and wild-flowers, and glancing down at them, "we were very sorry to hear that the White Caps had called on you."

"I wasn't expecting them," Lyman replied, "but I made them feel at home."

Mrs. McElwin looked at him with a cool smile. "Yes," she said, "for home probably means a fight with most of them. It was an outrage and everybody is glad that you sent them off with broken heads. Of course there has been a great deal of talk, but have you any idea as to who lead the party?"

"Not the slightest," Lyman answered, and the girl looked up at him.

"Some one has been mean enough, so a very dear friend told us, to insinuate that—that father knew of it in time to have prevented it," she said.

"Eva, why should you mention such a thing. Mr. Lyman couldn't give it credence, even for a moment." She frowned.

"Mr. McElwin was kind enough to come to me the next morning," said Lyman. "He was very much moved, and I feel that if he could he would have the ruffians punished."

"I thank you for saying that, Mr. Lyman," Mrs. McElwin spoke up. "I know he would." She glanced about and appeared to be nervous under the gaze of the people on the hill. "I don't know what they think of us three sitting here together," she said. "People out here are peculiar."

"Let them think," the girl replied.

Lyman looked down and saw her shapely foot on the rock. The light was strong where she sat, and he noticed a freckle on her cheek, and this slight blemish drew her closer to him.

"But we must respect their thoughts," the mother replied.

"We should not put ourselves out on account of their prejudices," Lyman was bold enough to remark. The girl smiled at him.

"Perhaps not," Mrs. McElwin weakly agreed.

"Perhaps not!" Eva repeated. "Mother, you don't seem to think that I am just as human as any of those girls up there, that I have practically the same feelings. But I am, and I am not a bit better than they—not any better than that girl up there under the tree talking to that young man. Why, he's from town."

"He is Mr. Warren, my partner," said Lyman.

"Oh, is he? They say he is such a funny man. But he's nice looking. I have seen him many a time, and he was pointed out to me once, but I had forgotten his name."

"We'd better go now," said Mrs. McElwin.

"Oh, not yet," the daughter replied. "There's plenty of time. It won't take us long to drive home. And besides, we haven't congratulated the preacher yet. And there he comes now, down this way. See that girl draw back as if she were going to throw something at Mr. Warren. He must be a tease. Look at that old man laughing. Everybody wants to shake hands with the preacher. I think he did splendidly. He surprised me, I'm sure."

"He surprised us both on one occasion," said Lyman. Eva laughed, but her mother looked grave. "Let us not speak of that," she said. "It has caused us trouble enough; and not even now do I fully understand it. Oh, I know that the legislature made some sort of blunder and that Henry Bostic had been ordained, but I cannot realize that I am sitting here talking to my daughter's legal husband. Still we can get accustomed to anything in time, I suppose."

"I can hardly realize that I am a married man," Lyman replied. Mrs. McElwin looked at him with a start, as if his words hurt her, as if she suddenly felt that she was doing a grave injustice to her husband to sit there talking to a man who would not have been permitted to cross her threshold. She got up. "We must go," she said.

"Oh, not now," the daughter pleaded.

"Yes, we must go."

"But can't you let me stay and come home with Mr. Lyman."

If the mother had been startled before she was shocked now. "If you talk like that, my daughter, I shall not believe that you are very much different from the girls up there. Do you want your father scandalized? Pardon me, Mr. Lyman, but I must speak plainly to her."

Lyman, who had also arisen, bowed to her. "No offense," he said. "I am thoroughly in harmony with the absurdity of my position, even if I can't realize that I am married."

Mrs. McElwin winced. "Please don't repeat that again," she said.

The girl stamped her foot upon the rock. "Don't talk that way," she commanded. "If Mr. Lyman wants me to stay and go home when he does no one could prevent it. He can command me to stay."

Mrs. McElwin fluttered, but afraid of a scene, she smoothed herself down. "I was joking," she said.

"We will go now," the daughter replied, "but I do wish you would stay. I'd like to go up there among those girls. I know they are having a good time. Help me up." She put out her hand and Lyman took hold of it, but she pulled back, laughing. "Help me up." She put out the other hand, her mother looking on in a fright. "You'll have to help me into the buggy," she said.

CHAPTER XXV.

AT NANCY'S HOME.

[Top](#)

Lyman stood gazing after them as they drove away. The girl waved her hand at him, and then

removing her glove, she waved it again. He saw the mother turn to her as if with a word of caution. The road was crooked, and a clump of bushes, a leafy bulge, soon hid them from view. Lyman walked slowly and not light of heart, up the hillside to the tree beneath which he had seen Warren and his new-found friends. There they were, sitting on the ground, eating.

"You are just in time for a snack," old man Pitt cried, waving the leg of a chicken.

"And here is some pie that Miss Nancy baked with her own hands," said Warren, moving closer to the girl to make room for his friend. "I have been telling Mr. Pitt about your funny marriage."

"Yes," Pitt spoke up, "and I was tellin' of him that if I was in your place and wanted her, now that I had the law on my side, I'd have her or a fight or a foot race, one or tuther, it wouldn't make much difference which. Of course I mean if I found out after the joke was all over that I wanted her, for I tell you—have a piece of this light corn bread—I tell you that it is a mighty serious thing when a man wants a woman and wants her bad. Here's some pickles—they ain't good, but they'll do at a shake-down. But this here ham's prime. Serious thing, sir, when a man wants a woman and wants her right bad. There's a case in our neighborhood of a young feller goin' crazy after a woman he wanted. It ain't but once in a while, you know, that a feller finds the woman set up to suit him, and when he do find her, why he ought to sorter spit on his hands—figurative like," he made haste to add, catching the reproving eye of his daughter. "Spit on his hands figurative like and give it out cold that he is there to stay till the cows come home. And that reminds me that this here butter ain't of the best. The cow eat a lot of beet tops and it didn't help her butter none, I contend, still some folks wouldn't notice it. I hear 'em say, Mr. Whut's-your-name, that you come from away up yander whar rocks is so plenty on the farms that in a hoss trade it would be big boot if a feller was to throw in a hankerchuf full of dirt. I don't blame you for comin' away from thar."

"It's pretty rocky up there," said Lyman. "One of our humorists—Doesticks," he added, nodding to Warren, "said that we had to slice our potatoes and slip them down edgeways between the rocks."

The old man sprawled himself on the ground and laughed. "Well, if they was to go out a shootin' at liars wheat straw would leak through that feller's hide. How are you gittin' along over thar, Mr. Warren?" he inquired, sitting up and again devoting himself to the chicken.

"First rate, don't know when I've eaten as much."

"Oh, you haven't eat a thing," Miss Nancy protested, looking at him in great surprise. "You'd soon die at this rate."

"You are right, but not of starvation. I suppose they are feeding the preacher," he said, looking round. "Yes, they've got him up there. Look the women are bringing him things from all directions. Lyman, your people didn't wait to congratulate him. I think it hurt him, too, for I saw his countenance fall. You must have said something to hurry the old lady off."

"No, on the contrary I rather urged her to stay."

"Yes, and that's what sent her off."

"But what's to be the outcome of the affair?" the old man asked. "Of course you wouldn't want to tie her up so she couldn't marry anybody else, though I honor your pluck in not lettin' 'em force you into signin' the paper. McElwin is a mighty over-bearin' sort of a man. I worked a piece of land year before last over on the creek near a field that belonged to him, and sir, the hired feller that delved and swetted thar 'peered like he thought it was a great privilege to drag himself over the ground that belonged to McElwin. He p'inted him out one day as he driv along in a buggy and when my eyes didn't pop out of my head he was might'ly 'stonished. Yes, sir, they think the Lord was proud of the job when that man was put on earth. Well, I believe they are gettin' ready to go back into the house, and if you folks want to go, don't let me hold you."

"Ain't you goin' to hear him, pap?" the girl asked, getting up and brushing the twigs from her skirt.

"Wall, I don't believe I will jest at the present writin'," he drawled. "He's a good old feller and all that sort of thing, and I reckon he do love the Lord, but he nipped me in a hoss swop about twenty-odd year ago, and whenever I hear him preach I can't git it out of my head that he's trying to nip me agin."

"Why, pap, that was long before he joined the church."

"Yes, but I can't help from holdin' that a man that will nip you in a hoss swop one time will do it agin if he gets the chance."

"Well," she said, "you would have nipped him if you could."

"Yes, that mout be, but I wouldn't have come round preachin' to him afterwards. Go on in, you young folks, and I'll waller around here a while and then go down and see how my hosses air gettin' along."

"And I will stay with you," said Lyman. The romance had gone out of the old house, for him, but not for Warren and Nancy. Warren walked to the church with her, and she pleaded with him to let her go up to the door alone.

"Why should we care what they think?" he said.

"Oh, I care a good deal. They would talk about me and laugh at me, and besides you ain't no kin to me. It's only kin folks that set together."

"They don't know whether I'm any kin to you or not."

"Yes, they do. They know that I haven't any young men kin folks round here but cousin Jerry."

"Who the deuce is he? Hold on a moment. Tell me about that fellow Jerry."

"Oh, there ain't nothin' to tell except he's my cousin. If you let me go in alone I'll tell you all about him when I come out."

He suffered her to go in alone, but he sat as close to her as he could, on a bench just opposite, and it was so evident that he wanted to be nearer that a hillside wag remarked to a friend; "See that young feller a leanin' in toward her like a young steer with a sore neck." The remark was passed from one to another and a titter went round the room. Warren saw her blush and realizing that he was the cause of her embarrassment, he leaned back, and the wag remarked: "Other side of his neck's sore now—he's leanin' tuther way."

Lyman and the old man walked about the grounds. Pitt suggested going to the spring, but Lyman drew back from the idea as if the place were desolate now. They went down the road to a mossy place where the ironwood trees leaned out over a stream. They looked at the sun-fish flashing their golden sides in the light; they sat down to smoke a pipe, the rising voice of the preacher seeming to sift in the leaves above them. The sun was shining aslant when they got up and a shadow lay upon the pool.

"He must be on the home-stretch," said the old man, nodding toward the house. "I'll go over and hitch up the horses."

"I have a similar task to perform," Lyman replied. "I'll see you again before I start home."

"All right, and I am much obleeged for your company."

The sermon was over before the horses were harnessed. Warren came running to Lyman. "You ride with the old man and let me take the girl in the spring wagon," said he.

"What; we may not go in the same direction."

"Of course we do. We are going home with them. It's all right. I've put the old man down for a year's subscription."

"And you want to go over there to board it out. Is that it?"

"I hadn't thought of that. But I could do it."

"Does he know that he's a subscriber?"

"Not yet, but I can tell him. Miss Nancy wants us to go."

"Did she say so?"

"Well, now what would be the use of saying so? She could say it as easily as not. And I guess she would have said it if she had thought to. But I know she wants us to go. Come, now, won't you go just to oblige me? Remember, I didn't kick very hard when you killed all my best pieces of news. Let me have a fling now, won't you? You've been having all the fun—marriage and White Caps. Won't you go just to oblige me?"

"Yes, I'll ride with the old man or I'll ride on a rail when you put it that way."

"All right. Here she comes now, and the old man's up there waiting for you."

During the drive, the old fellow commented upon the historical places along the road. He pointed out the spot where he had killed the last diamondback rattlesnake seen in that neighborhood; he directed Lyman's attention to a barn wherein five negroes had been hanged for rising against the whites in 1854; he pointed at a charred stump and told the story of a fanatic who had tied himself there and burned himself on account of his religion. They came at last to a large log house, the Pitt homestead, and had unharnessed the horses before Warren and Nancy came within sight. A tall woman, followed by a score of children of all sizes, came out to meet them.

"They ain't all mine," said the old man. "Them as looks about fryin' size belongs to the folks over the creek. Mother, this here is a friend of ourn from away up yonder whar they have to slice the potatoes and slip 'em down between the rocks, and I want to tell you that him and me fits one another like a hand and glove."

"I am mighty glad to meet you," said the woman, wiping her hands on her apron. "Come right in and excuse the looks of everything and make yourself at home. But, pap, where's Nancy?"

"Oh, she's comin' along in a carry-all with the town man that runs the paper. She's all right—she can take care of herself anywhere."

They went into the house, the children scattering and peeping from corners and from behind the althea bushes in the yard. Warren and Nancy soon came in laughing. The girl threw her hat on

the bed, tucked up her skirts and went out to the kitchen to help her mother, and the old man excused himself on the grounds that he must go out to feed the stock.

"Warren, gallantry is all right, but this is cruel," said Lyman. "We are imposing on this family. Look how those women have to work, and they will strain every nerve to get us something to eat."

"Of course they will, and they like it. Do you know that? They do. You couldn't please them more than by eating with them, and I'm always willing to put myself out to please folks. Say, we'll stay here tonight and go in tomorrow."

"I am not going to stay. Doesn't it strike you that you are a trifle too brash, as they say around here? Don't you think so?"

"Not a bit of it. I want to stay till tomorrow to see whether I want to come back again or not. I want to find out whether I am in love with her or not. I think I am, but still I don't know, and my rule is that a man ought to know where he stands before he walks. We were passing under a tree and she reached up and pulled at a limb and her loose sleeve fell down and I saw her arm. That almost settled it. But I think I'll know definitely in the morning."

"Warren, I'm going back to town tonight."

"What, over that dark road? Don't you know we passed a good many dangerous places coming? Stay till tomorrow."

"No, I'll walk back and leave the wagon for you."

"That would be an outrage. If you go back, drive."

"No, to tell you the truth I would rather walk. I want to think."

"Then you'd rather go alone, anyway, wouldn't you? All right, and probably I can get her to come to town with me tomorrow. They've got to send in to buy things sometimes, I should think. By the by, I've got a lot of seeds sent by a congressman, and I'll tell the old man he can have them. Nothing catches one of these old fellows like seeds. He'll send her in after them tomorrow morning, and then I can find out how I stand."

"With her?"

"No, find out how I stand with myself—see whether I love her or not. Have you found out yet—in your case? Tell me, I won't say anything about it."

"Yes, I have found out."

"You needn't say—I guess I know." Warren reached over and took Lyman by the hand. "We save time and trouble when we put a man in a position so that he needn't say."

"Yes," said Lyman, "the greatest justice you can confer on a man, at times, is to permit him to be silent."

Nancy came hastily into the room and from the broad mantel-piece took down two beflowered tea-cups, kept there as ornaments. She smiled at Warren and brushed out with a mischievous toss of her comely head.

"We not only put them to extra trouble, but compel them to take down their decorations," Lyman remarked.

"But can't you see how she likes it?" Warren spoke up. "Probably it has been six months since they have had a chance to use those cups. We are doing them a favor, I tell you." He shook his head and sighed. "If she comes in here again and looks at me that way I'll know where I stand. Oh, I'm not slow, but I want to be certain."

They heard the old man talking in the kitchen, and then came his heavy tread on the loose and flapping boards of the passage-way. The door was cut so low that he had to duck his head. He came in with a stoop, but straightening himself in the majesty of conscious hospitality, he bowed and said: "Gentlemen, you will please walk out to supper."

Lyman began to offer an apology for putting the household to so much trouble. The old man bowed again and said: "We didn't bring no trouble home with us from church, but ruther a pleasure, sir."

CHAPTER XXVI.

OUT IN THE DARK.

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Warren argued, the old man urged and the old lady pleaded as she fanned her hot face with her apron, catching it up by the corners, but Lyman was determined to go home. Warren went out with him and together they walked down the dark road, in the cool air of the night and the hot air that lagged over from the heat of the day. There was no moon, but in the sky, which the slowly-

moving boughs of over-hanging trees seemed to keep in motion, there was a blizzard of stars. From the dust-covered thickets along the road arose the chirrup of insects, the strange noises that make night lonesome; and a small stream, which in the light has flowed without noise over the slick, blue rocks, was rushing now with a loud gurgle, as if to hurry out of the dark.

"Well, I turn back here," said Warren. "It is a piece of foolishness for you to go. There's no need of it. You haven't anything to do tomorrow that you can't do next day."

"No, but, alone in the woods, I can do a piece of work that would never come within range of me in town."

"I understand. You want to shake everybody and be absolutely alone."

"Yes, absolutely."

"But stay here over night, and if you must, walk in tomorrow. You would be just as much alone then, wouldn't you?"

"No, I am never perfectly alone except in the dark."

"Well, I have worked with you the best I know how; and you see how I'm fixed—got to find out how I stand. But I hate to see you go off in this way alone. Just look how dark it is down yonder. And I am to go back to the light and to sit there and think of you trudging along in the dark. Just think of the light I am going into—the light of that smile."

"And from away out in the woods I may turn to see you blinking in the glare. But I am keeping you. Good night."

"Wait a moment. Now, you won't think hard of me, will you?"

"Hard of you? Not if you go back."

"All right, then. Good night."

Pitt had given Lyman minute directions as to the road he should take, a pathway through the woods and across fields, and leading to the county road at a point not far from the ruined dam. The path was not straight, and in the dark woods he kept it with difficulty, having to pat with his foot to find the hard ground, but in the turned-out fields the way was well-defined and he walked rapidly. Once he crossed a stretch of ripening oats, and in a dip-down where the growth was rank he heard voices and a song—hired men lying out to wear off the effect of a visit to the distillery. He came to the dam much sooner than he had expected, and near the trickling water he sat down upon a rock to rest. An island of willows had grown up in the broad shallow pond. Out from this dark thicket, a great bird flew and with its wings slapped the face of the quiet water, and the frogs hushed and the world was still, save the trickling from the dam, till the frogs began again. For days, there had been in his mind the vague form of a story, and he strove to summon it now, but the forms that came were shadows with no light in their eyes. Throughout all the dark woods this dim web of a plot had not come to him, though he had thought to ponder over it before setting out, but had forgotten it when once on the road. He sent his mind back over the course he had followed, to pick up any little suggestions that might have come to him to be held for a moment and dropped, but there was none. Instead, everywhere in the spread of his mind there was an illuminated spot, shifting, and in the bright spot sat a figure on a rock, a brown head, a face with one freckle, and an impetuous, graceful foot that sometimes stamped in impatience. Into the light there came another figure, strong, ruddy, and with a calico skirt tucked up. One was refinement, the other strength; one nerves, the other muscle. Onward he strode, the road damp from its nearness to the creek. Out upon the higher land he turned, the shale clicking under his feet. He had the feeling that some one was walking slowly behind him, stealing the noise of his footsteps to conceal a stealthier tread, and he smiled at his fear, but he halted to listen. He thought of a poem, "The Stab," and he repeated it as he walked along, and the swift falling of the knife, "Like a splinter of daylight downward thrown," found an echo in his footsteps. He came to the creek wherein the old horse had stood to cool his hot knees; he crossed the foot-log and was about to step down again into the road when he heard the furious galloping of horses and the rattle of a buggy. The team plunged into the creek, not directly at the ford; the buggy struck a rock and flew into fragments; the horses came plunging on, leaving a man in the water. Lyman rushed forward as the horses dashed past him. By the light of the stars he saw the flying fragments of the buggy—saw the water splash where the man fell. The man made no effort to get up, and Lyman thought that surely he must have been killed. But when Lyman reached him he was trying to crawl against the shallow but swift current. Lyman seized him, dragged him to the shore, stretched him upon the ground.

"Are you hurt?" he asked, feeling for his heart. The man muttered something. Lyman struck a match, looked at the man's face, blew out the match, tossed the burnt stem into the road and said to himself: "Of course I had to be the one to find him. Are you hurt, Sawyer?"

"You fling me 'n creek?" he muttered, filling the air with the fumes of whisky. "Fling me 'n creek, got me to whip. Tell you that, hah? Hear what I said? Got me to whip."

"Blackguard, I don't know but I ought to have let you drown."

"Good man to drown me, tell you that," he said, sitting up. "Horses gone?"

"Yes, and your buggy is smashed all to pieces."

"I believe it is. Bring me the pieces, won't you." He leaned over and laughed like an idiot. "Stopped at a distillery, and stopped too long. Don't take a man long to stop too long at a distillery. What's your name? You ain't Jim, are you? What's your name, anyway; why don't you talk to a feller."

"It won't do to leave him here," said Lyman, looking about as if searching for the light from a house. "Do you think you can walk?" he asked.

"Walk a thousand miles. Hear what I said? Thousand miles. Where do you want to go, Jim?"

"I want to take you to a house."

"Oh, I'm all right. But don't leave me, Jim. Whatever you do, don't leave me. I couldn't get along without you. Hit Bob a crack over the head and addled him so he ain't at himself yet. They took him away round here to his uncle's to keep him out of the way, and I drove out there to see him and stopped at distillery and stayed too long. Ever stay too long, Jim?"

"Do the doctors think that Bob will get well?"

"Yes, in a measure; he won't go round White-Capping any more, though. But I'll make that all right. I'll meet that feller Lyman and put up his shutters. Sit down."

"No, there's a house up yonder and I'll take you there. You may be injured in some way. Let's see if you can walk. Lean on me. That's it."

"I can't walk fast, Jim. Believe I am hurt some. I'd a drownded out there if it hadn't been for you, Jim. Ah—h. I don't believe I can go on. I'm sick."

"Here, let me get my arm around you so I can hold you up better. Now you're all right. It's only a little way."

They soon came to the house. The barking of dogs brought a man out to the fence. In a few words Lyman told him what had happened. Sawyer was unable to walk further and they took him into the house and put him upon a bed. An excited woman bathed his face, and a barefoot boy, as fleet as a deer, was sent across the creek for a doctor. Lyman waited until he came. He said that Sawyer was badly bruised, but added that he did not appear to be fatally hurt. While they were talking, Sawyer opened his eyes. "Where's Jim?" he inquired.

"Here," said Lyman, stepping forward.

"Merciful God," the wounded man moaned, and covered his face with his hands. Lyman stepped back, and Sawyer, putting out his hand, with his eyes closed, said to him: "Please don't leave me."

"I will stay until daylight," said Lyman.

"Thank you, sir. Don't leave me."

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE REVENGE.

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Early the next morning Pitt and his daughter drove to town with Warren. The promise of government seeds had greatly excited the old fellow, and, three times before the breaking of day, did he get up and look out, impatient of the darkness that still lay in the east. Warren gave him the seeds and had gone down to see them off for home before he happened to realize that Lyman was not in the office. He went up stairs and inquired after him. The boy said that he had not come. He sat down in a fear that his friend was lost in the woods, and was thinking of setting out to look for him when Lyman walked in, looking worn and tired.

"Why, what's the matter?" Warren cried. "You look like a whipped rooster."

"I am," said Lyman sitting down. "A prop has been knocked from under me and I have fallen down. For several days I have been nursing a sweet revenge. I said nothing about it, but I was going to knock a man down, tie him and horse-whip him."

"Well, why don't you? Is he gone?"

"Yes, beyond my reach. I thought that for once in my life I would act the part of a very natural man, but it has been denied me. I will tell you."

He narrated his adventure. Warren sat staring at him. "It's just your luck, Lyman. But, why didn't you throw him back into the creek? Why didn't you stamp him into the ground? And you have spoiled another piece of news. What do you expect will become of you if you keep on this way?"

"He mistook me for some one else—he called me Jim. I couldn't abuse his drunken mistake and show him that I was not his friend Jim. It would have been cruel. And when he recognized me he threw himself on my mercy and begged me not to leave him. In a vague way, this morning, he remembered all that had taken place. He is not much hurt, but the doctor will keep him in bed for a day or two. He is completely cowed and I felt sorry for him. He hung to my hand when I bade

him good-bye and tears ran out of his eyes. He declared that I had whipped him more severely than if I had used a raw-hide, and I believe I have; so, after all, I had my revenge."

"Lyman, I guess your sort of punishment lasts longer. But I confess that I am not strong enough to indulge that sort of revenge. It takes too much time. Well, if you haven't turned things over since you came to this place I don't want a cent. Old Ebenezer didn't know what novelty was until you struck it. We had a great time last night," he went on, after a few moments of silence. "Nancy sang a song, a come-all-ye about a girl that hanged herself because she had cause to think that a fellow didn't love her. And you bet she can sing. She brought tears to my eyes, and a woman has to get up early and sing with the birds before she can do that."

"Did you find out how you stand?" Lyman inquired, smiling at him.

"Oh, yes; that's settled. I know how I stand, and now I've got to find out how she stands. It takes time, I tell you. I don't want to hurry her, so I thought I'd wait till tomorrow and go out there and ask her about it."

"Oh, no, I wouldn't hurry her," said Lyman, laughing. "I'd wait till noon-time tomorrow, anyway."

"Yes, along about there. What are you laughing at me for? This thing is serious with me. I went out with her this morning to milk the cows. Talk about milking." He leaned back and shut his eyes as if to reproduce the scene. "I don't want to draw any comparisons, old fellow, but do you suppose Miss Eva could milk? Do you suppose she could grab a calf and make him feel ashamed of himself?"

"I don't know as to her handling of calves, I'm sure; but I know that she can throw a light into dark places; that white clover springs up where she walks; that if she were to sit asleep in a garden the bees would fight over the sweetness of her lips; that her mind is as fresh, as full of bright images as a stream of pure water; that her foot as I saw it upon a rock has grace enough to redeem an awkward world; and that in comparison with the notes of her voice all earthly music is flat and dull."

"Lyman, I guess you know where you stand. But have you found out where she stands? Have you asked her to define her position?"

"Her position defines itself. I am to protect her from the man whose life I saved last night."

"Yes, I know, but after you have protected her—what then?"

"I am to present her with a certificate of freedom."

"But don't you suppose she'd rather have a partnership than freedom?"

"Not with me. I am something of a novelty to her as a protector, but I am afraid that to propose a closer relationship would make me appear commonplace enough."

"Well, you know your own business, and it's not worth while to give you advice; but you are a strange sort of a contradiction. As a general thing a fellow that's easy with man is severe with woman, but you are disposed to let them all get away. They don't get away from me, I'll give you a pointer on that. By the way, here's a package that I found here for you. Came by express, pre-paid, mind you. Think of that."

In Lyman's eyes there was the soft light of a sad victory as he opened the package and displayed a dozen copies of his novel, fresh from the publisher. He took a volume upon his knee, as if it were a child; he opened the leaves, carefully separating them as if tenderly parting curly hair. Warren snatched up a book with a cry of delight; he swore that its fame was assured; he knew that it would sell as fast as it came from the press; but Lyman sat in silence, his eyes growing sadder. It was so small a thing to have cost so many anxious days and nights. He had worked on it so intently that often when he had stepped out, the real world seemed unreal; and now it appeared so simple as to lie within the range of any man's ability. Here was a place where there had been a kink, and he had worried with it day after day, carrying the sentences about in his mind; and now at a glance he saw where the wording might have been improved. He was afraid that he had been too simple, too close to the soil; in seeking the natural he was almost sure that he had found the tiresome. He got up.

"Where are you going?" Warren asked.

"Oh, out somewhere, to get away from this poor hunch-back." He smiled sadly at the book.

"Hunch-back? Why, it's a giant. Look, here's a jolt like a wagon running over a root. It's all right. And I want to take one out to Nancy, and when she reflects that a friend of mine wrote it, her position will be defined. She can't help it. It makes no difference whether a woman can read or not, a book catches her. Ain't you going to send one to Miss Eva?"

"Yes, I believe I will."

"Well, scribble in one and I'll send it right now, by the boy. It's not right to let such things get cold. Is that all?" he asked when Lyman had written his name on the fly leaf.

"Yes, that's enough."

"It may do for her, but I want you to spread out a whole page for Nancy. Say, go and lie down."

You look like a ghost—going up and down the creek at night, pulling fellows out. But wait. Give Nancy's book a whirl first."

Lyman covered the fly-leaf with a memory of Mt. Zion. With brightening eyes Warren read the lines. "This will fetch her," he said. "She can't hold out against it. Let me see. I don't know but the old man ought to have one. It would stimulate him mightily. But never mind. The seeds are enough for him. It won't do to stimulate him too much at once."

"Old boy," said Lyman, "I admire your enterprise, it is a bright picture, but don't go out there so soon. Wait at least a week. If she finds that you are too anxious it might prejudice her against you."

"I don't know but you are right. I'll send the book anyway. But say, she's got a cousin Jerry and I don't like that very much. I never saw a fellow named Jerry that wasn't dangerous. But if you say wait, I will."

"I say wait."

"All right, then wait it is, but I don't like that Jerry idea. What sounds more devilish than 'Cousin Jerry.' Sort of an insinuating, raspberry jam sound. But I'll wait. Go on and lie down."

CHAPTER XXVIII.

A GENTLEMAN MULE-BUYER.

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Two days later Lyman was sitting in his office, musing over a pink note from Eva, thanking him for the book, when Zeb Sawyer tapped at the door. Lyman bade him enter and he stepped forward with a limp. He sat down before saying a word, took out a handkerchief and wiped his face.

"Haven't you got out of bed rather soon?" Lyman asked.

"No, I reckon not, though the doctor told me to lie there awhile longer. But I couldn't—I wanted to come to see you. I am not much of a writer," he added, looking about, "but I want to write an article for your paper. I want to tell the public what a wolf I've been. And it was mostly owing to liquor. I shot a man once when I was about half drunk, and nearly every mean thing I ever did I can trace to whisky. I don't often get what you might call drunk, but I generally go about with a few drinks and that makes me mean. Will you print the article?"

"No; let it all go. We all do wrong at times; we all have little meannesses, like rheumatic pains in bad weather."

"Well, is there anything I can do to prove—to prove—you know what I mean."

"Yes, you can be gentler toward man, remembering that there is something good in every one."

"I believe that more than I used to," said Sawyer, mopping his perspiring face. "I have laughed at preachers, and I hated you, but you came along and showed me that, whether a man professes it or not, there is something in the doctrine of mercy and forgiveness. I don't think I ever prayed with my heart till this morning, and then I prayed to be forgiven for my meanness; and it seemed to me that if you would forgive me, the Higher Power would. I drove over to mother's before I came here and I told her how mean I had been, and it struck her to the heart with grief, but when I told her that I was going to be a better man and follow in my father's footsteps, she cried for joy. She is so shaken with palsy that she can't write, but she managed to write this and she told me to give it to you." He handed Lyman a piece of paper, and on it were the words: "God will bless you."

"She didn't think it would disturb you so, or I am sure she wouldn't have sent it," he said, looking at Lyman.

"Tell her," said Lyman, "that her blessing alone is more—give her my kindest regards," he added, with an effort.

Sawyer wiped his eyes. "I went to another place before coming here," he said. "I went over to the bank and waited till McElwin came, and I had a talk with him. I told him that his daughter could never care for me, and that even if you should sign the petition I would refuse to recognize his authority in trying to compel her to marry me. She is in every way above me, so far beyond my reach that I don't love her. I have to go to another place—the court house. I am going to surrender myself to the law and be punished for that White Cap affair. I am going to acknowledge the whole thing."

"No," said Lyman. "The law knows well enough what was done and who did it. And, besides, your old mother—"

"Yes," Sawyer broke in, "but I thought it might be kept from her."

"No, some one would tell her, some over-zealous friend. Let it drop."

"Your word is law with me. And now I hope you won't feel hurt if I ask you something?"

"The time for you and me to hurt each other is passed," said Lyman.

"I thank you for saying that. You are a man if I ever met one. And how did you get the name of being desperate?"

"I simply punished an over-bearing bully and my act was exaggerated."

"They always exaggerate such things in this country. But that's not what I wanted to ask you. It's this: Do you need any money? now don't feel hurt; do you need any, and, if you do, won't you let me lend it to you for a year or so without interest?"

"My dear fellow," said Lyman, "my affairs have prospered wonderfully of late. It's a singular position for me to be in, but I don't need money."

"I was in hopes you did. I told McElwin just now that your check would be good as long as I had any money at his bank, and it made him wink, but before I went out he acknowledged that you were about the truest sort of a man he ever ran against. You have educated us all. And now as to a more delicate matter. I don't know what Eva thinks of you, or what you think of her, but I believe that the old man would be willing to recognize the law as young Bostic administered it. But we won't talk about that, and I ought not to have mentioned it. Is Mr. Warren out there? I want to see him a moment."

He shook hands with Lyman and they parted friends. Shortly after Sawyer went out, Warren came running into the room. "Old Billy Fate is trying himself," he cried. "What do you think has happened? That fellow Sawyer has subscribed for fifty copies of the paper, for one year, and has paid for them in advance. He has put down uncles, aunts, cousins—but there's one thing about it I don't like. That fellow Jerry, Nancy's cousin, is a sort of tenth rate cousin to Sawyer, and he has put him down. Jerry Dabbs. Think of that poor girl becoming Nancy Dabbs. There ought to be a law against such outrages. And now he'll read your stuff and commit the odd phrases to memory and give them to her. I don't see how I can keep away from there for a week. I'm going out there Friday. Well, after all, I guess it was better that you didn't drown that fellow. Fifty subscribers are not picked up every day. I don't know but sometimes it pays to let revenge go."

"It pays the heart," Lyman replied. "Did you ever think that when the heart was paid the whole world is out of debt?"

"I never thought of it, but I guess you are right. I met the express agent this morning and he tipped his hat to me. And it's all owing to you. Everybody is talking about you. Where are you going?" he asked as Lyman got up.

"One day, while walking about aimlessly," said Lyman, "I stopped in front of a house down the street not far from here, and saw a boy digging in the yard. At the window I saw the pale face of a man. He lay there to catch the last rays of the world, slowly fanning himself. I asked the boy what he was doing and he said that he was digging a grave for his father. The pale face at the window haunted me. I made inquiry and found that a very poor family inhabited the house, and I have called there several times to talk with the man. I am going there now."

"I know, he's a fellow named Hillit. He's got consumption. I send him the paper free. Give him my regards, please, and tell him that I have put him down as a life subscriber."

"It won't be for long," said Lyman, as he turned away.

The sun had baked the ground and the strange child had suspended his labor, but heaps of earth beneath the bushes showed that he had continued his work as long as his rude spade was adequate to a disturbance of the soil. The boy looked up as the gate latch clicked, and stood surveying Lyman with his feet far apart and his hands in his pockets. Lyman spoke to him, and bringing a nail out of his pocket he held it out to the visitor as an offering of his hospitality. Lyman tossed him a piece of money; he caught it up and with a shout he disappeared in the shrubbery. The visitor's knock at the door was attended by a frail, tired woman. She stood with her hand on the door as if meekly to tell the comer that he had doubtless made a mistake in the house. He bowed and asked if she were Mrs. Hillit, and when she had nodded an acknowledgment, with no word, though her thin lips moved, he informed her that he desired to see her husband. She preceded him into the sick man's room.

"A gentleman wishes to see you," she said.

The sufferer turned his wasted face toward Lyman and asked him to sit down. Then followed a few words of explanation.

"I am very glad you came," said Hillit, speaking slowly and with effort. "We have been getting your paper for some time and it has been great company for us. The neighbors have been very kind, but when a man hangs on this way he wears everybody out."

The woman had left the room, and Lyman was relieved to find that she had not remained to hear her husband's hopeless words. "You ought not to feel that way," he said.

The consumptive withdrew his wistful gaze from the bar of sunlight that lay across the window sill, and looked at Lyman. "I am in a position to say what I think, and that's what I do think," he answered. "But I do hope it won't be much longer. I see by the paper that the farmers have been

praying for rain. I have been praying for light, light, light—all the time praying for light. When a passing cloud hides the sun my heart grows heavier, and when the night comes I feel the shadow of eternity resting cold upon me."

In reply to this Lyman could say nothing; he simply said: "You haven't lived here long, I understand."

"Not long. I came from the city to look for a place where I could die cheap. I lost my place—my brethren lost their place—we were swept away by the machine. I am a compositor."

"Oh, are you? Then I am more than glad I came."

"And I am more than glad to see you. I have seen you stop at the fence, and I managed one day to learn your name. You are making a name for yourself; I have read your work at night and there is sunlight in it. Ah, the old craft is gone," he said. "We sang like crickets, laughing at the idea that a frost might come in the shape of a machine to set type; we worked three days a week and spent our money, with no thought of the destroyer slowly forming fingers of steel under the lamp light. But the machine came. It was like the bursting of a shell, and our army, the most intelligent body of craftsmen ever known, was scattered over the face of the land. Once in a while I had a serious moment, and I kept up my life insurance, but what is to become of the other women and children the Lord only knows."

"The picturesque old philosopher known as the tramp printer is only a memory now," said Lyman. "I have seen him strolling along the road, sore of foot, stubble-faced, almost ragged, hungry, but with a cynical head full of contempt for the man of regular habits. I recall one particularly—Barney Caldwell."

"What?" cried Hillit, raising upon his elbows, "did you know old Barney? He was once foreman of an office in Cincinnati where I was a cub. He was comparatively young then, but they called him the old man. And what a disciplinarian! He used to say, 'Boys, if you get drunk with me it is your own look out, and if you don't walk the chalk line that's my look out. Don't expect favors, because you happen to be a good fellow.' One day, he came into the office, and after starting to put on his apron he hesitated, and turning to a fellow named Hicks, he said: 'Charley, I've a notion to be a gentleman once more.' Then I heard a man standing near me say: 'There'll be a vacant foremanship in this office within five minutes. The old man is going to take to the road.' And he did. He resigned his position and walked out. Life was worth living in those days, Mr. Lyman."

Just at this moment Mrs. Hillit appeared at the door. "The young lady who brought the flowers has come again," she said. Lyman looked up and his heart leaped, for, in the hall-way, stood Eva with her hands full of roses. She turned pale at seeing him, but with the color returning she came forward and held out her hand. Hillit's wasted eye, slow in movement but quick in conception, divined the meaning of the changing color of her face, and when his wife had brought a vase for the roses, he said: "I hope you two will talk just as if I wasn't here. And I won't be here long, you know."

"William," his wife spoke up, turning from the table whereon she had placed the young woman's contribution, "you promised me that you wouldn't talk that way any more."

"I forgot this time," he replied.

"Mr. Lyman," said Eva, "I want to thank you again for the book. I have read it twice, and I hope you won't think I gush when I say it is charming. One idea was uppermost in my mind as I read it—that I had never before heard the beating of so many hearts; and the atmosphere is so sweet that, more than once, I fancied that the paper must have been scented."

"Oh, come now," Lyman cried, "you are guying me."

"It does sound like it, I admit, but really I am not. And I don't bring you my opinion alone. Last night I induced father to read a chapter. He read chapter after chapter, and when I asked him what he thought, he simply said, 'Beautiful.' Wasn't that a conquest?"

"It was a great kindness."

"But why should you be surprised? Haven't you worked year after year and now should a just reward come as an astonishment?"

"It's all luck," said the consumptive, looking at his thin hands lying on the counterpane. "If a man has luck early in life, he's likely to pay for it later; and if he has bad luck till along toward middle life, the chances are that he will pick up. I had my luck early; I sang my song and finished it." His wife looked at him beseechingly. "I'm not complaining," he added. "It's no more than just. You and the young lady were speaking about a book, Mr. Lyman. How long did it take you to write it?"

"It seems now that I had to live it," Lyman answered. "The actual work did not take long, but the dreams, the night-mares, were continued year after year. To be condemned to write a conscientious book is a severe trial, almost a cruel punishment, and I am not surprised that the critics, sentenced to read it, should look upon it as an additional pain thrust into their lives."

The talk wandered into the discussion of books in general. The young woman told of the great libraries she had visited abroad. The printer had helped to set up a Bible and he gave an amusing account of the mistakes that had crept into the proof-sheets. A careless fellow had made one of the Prophets stricken with grip instead of grief, and another one had the type declare that Moses

lifted up the sea serpent in the wilderness. The bar of sunlight passed beyond the window ledge and the sick man fell into silence. Eva rose to go. Lyman said that he would walk a part of the way with her. She smiled but said nothing. They bade the invalid and his wife good-bye and passed out into the shaded thoroughfare. A man stared at them, but a woman passed with merely a glance.



"Even in a village a wonder wears away after awhile," said Lyman. "Yes," she laughed, "our strange relationship has almost ceased to be an oddity."

They turned into a lane. He helped her across a rivulet and felt her hand grow warm in his grasp. She looked up at him and his blood tingled. He felt a sense of gladness and then remembered that she had praised his book. It was a victory to know that it had broken through her father's hauberk of prejudice. He spoke of Sawyer. She had heard of his narrow escape from drowning; indeed, he had called at the house.

"He did not hesitate to acknowledge everything," she said, "and I never liked him half so well as I did today."

"But you couldn't like him well enough to marry him," Lyman was weak enough to say.

"Oh, no; I liked him because he acknowledged your generosity," she frankly confessed. Lyman had weaknesses, and one of them was an under-appraisal of self. At times and in some men this is a virtue, but more often it is a crime committed against one's own chance of prosperity. The people's candidate is the man who loudest avows his fitness for the office.

"You remember last Sunday as you were driving away from the church—" he said.

"Yes—" she answered, walking close beside him.

"I thought I saw your mother reprimand you for urging her to stay."

"Yes. She was half inclined to yield and she was really scolding herself for her weakness."

"You went away without congratulating the preacher."

"That was thoughtless. We have sent him a letter of congratulation."

"How stately your house looks from here; how cool and restful."

"I used to take great pride in the fact that I lived there, as I looked at the humbler homes scattered about, but I haven't been so foolishly proud since I came to know you."

"Then that is where we must have fallen apart. I have been prouder since I knew you."

"I said foolishly proud," she replied, laughing.

They came to the wooden bridge. "Well, I turn back here," he said, halting and leaning against the rail.

"Surely there would be no harm in your coming to the house," she replied. "You are my protector," she added, with a smile. He was beginning to dislike the word, and now he felt a heaviness settle upon his heart.

"When your father has invited me as a friend of the family, I will come," he said, leaning over and looking down into the water. He looked up and in her eyes he thought he saw a gentle rebuke, but it was gone in a moment. She must have had it in her mind to tell him that he ought to be bolder, but another feeling seemed swiftly to come, and she said: "Your instinct is right." She held out her hand. He grasped it, looked into her eyes, turned about and hastened toward the town.

CHAPTER XXIX.

GONE AWAY.

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A few days later, at the breakfast table, Mrs. Staggs remarked that Mrs. McElwin and her daughter were gone on a visit to friends and would be absent several weeks. Lyman did not think to disguise his concern. With an abruptness that made the cups totter in the saucers he shoved himself back from the table and fell into a deep muse. Why should the girl have gone away just at that particular time? Was it a blow aimed at him? He had wanted to tell her something. It was in the nature of a confession, not startling, not, as he now viewed it, beyond a commonplace acknowledgment, and he wondered why he should have suppressed it. He wanted simply to tell her that, at the time when the joking ceremony had been performed, he had looked at her, with his mind reverting to the sick man whose face he had seen that day at the window, and had thought of the charm she could throw upon the gloom-weighted scene should she step into the room. This had come to pass; he had beheld it, and his mind had been sweetened by it; he had walked nearly all the way home with her and had not mentioned it. He had been too talkative as a protector and too silent as a man. And, all day, there was a bitter taste in his mouth, and, at evening, as he sat alone in the office he cut himself with a cynical smile. Warren came in, bright and brusque.

"Well, I've just got back from old man Pitt's," said he. "I couldn't wait any longer, so I went. The old man was at work in the field and I went out and told him not to disturb himself. The old lady was weaving a rag carpet, and I told her not to let the loom fall into silence. The girl was churning and I told her to keep at it. Ah, what a picture, that girl at the churn. Her red calico dress was tucked up, and her sleeves were rolled, and her hair had been grabbed in a hurry and fastened with a thorn. She blushed and put her hand to her hair as if she wanted to fix it, but I cried to her not to tamper with it. I said that she might have gold pins, but couldn't improve on that thorn; I swore that the finest hairdresser in the world would spoil it; and she laughed and I saw the inside of her mouth—"

"A rose with the bud pinched out," said Lyman.

"How did you know? Did you ever see the inside of her mouth? You've hit it all right. Yes, sir, that's what you have. Well, I took hold of the churn dasher and helped her, and she pretended to be afraid that we might turn the churn over, and our hands came together and I felt like throwing up my hat and dancing right there."

"Did you find out as to how she stands?"

"Lyman, would you believe that I weakened? I put both my hands on her hair and I snatched a kiss from her, but she looked up at me and I weakened; I couldn't ask her. She wasn't scared; she was astonished; and when she looked down, I kissed the back of her neck, standing there in full view of the world, and she shivered as if she was cold, but her face was scarlet."

"Do you call it weakening when you grab a woman and kiss her? I should think that was rather strengthening."

"I didn't find out how she stood, that is, I did not get it in words, so I must have weakened. But I think it's all right. After dinner, while we were in the 'big room,' she showed me a photograph of a yap and said that it was Cousin Jerry. 'Permit me,' said I, bowing, and I sailed the picture out into the yard where the dog lay asleep in the sun. And there it lay, with the June bugs buzzing about it, till I relented and went after it. I weakened in going after it, but she pouted and I gave in. I reckon that after all, it's better not to be so headlong. Many a fellow would have rushed the thing and spoiled it right there. I am learning patience from you, Lyman."

"Well, don't keep on learning, or you'll get the worst of it. A woman will pardon a thing that's rash where she would look with scorn upon a gentle stupidity. You bite like a black bass and I'm a sucker; you leap up into the sunshine, and I lie under a rotting log. I am inclined to think, old boy, that there is a good deal of what they call the chump about me. You have gone to Pitt's and said more than you intended to say. And look at me: I have not said half of what I ought to have said.

You know where to find your girl, but I have let mine go away. And I know now that she went away in disgust. However, I ought not to say that. It might imply that she was impatient with me and that would mean that she was waiting for me to say something, when in fact I don't believe she thinks of me at all, except as her protector and friend."

Warren sat nibbling at the stem of a corn-cob pipe. He stretched forth his legs and chewed upon the stem till it cracked between his teeth.

"This disposition to under-estimate yourself is where the whole trouble lies," said Warren. "It is the only weakness I have ever been able to find in your character. Don't you think it must be on account of some sort of work you have done? Haven't you at some time been in a position where everybody could come along and boss you?"

"I waited in a dining-room to pay my way through college. And you have struck it. Yes, sir, you've struck it on the top of the head. If a man has once stood as a servant, he is, if at all sensitive, ever afterward afflicted with a sort of self-repression. It is a sense of independence that makes the cow-boy aggressive; it is the wear of discipline that makes the regular soldier, long after quitting the army, appear humble. To wear a white apron and to carry a bowl of soup across a dining-room, one must not have had a high spirit or must have stabbed it. I stabbed mine."

"And yet you are as proud as the devil," said Warren.

"Yes, and I am not afraid of a pistol, but I fancy that anyone could drive me with a teaspoon. If I am ever the father of a boy I will teach him to work, to cut down trees, to dig ditches, to do anything rather than to wait on another man."

"But you don't regret having made the sacrifice to get the education, do you?"

"You over-rate my learning. I don't know anything thoroughly. I sailed through with the class and put myself in a position to learn, that's about all. But I have acquired one great piece of knowledge, which, had I not received a regular training, might have seemed to me as the arrogance of ignorance, and that is the fact that profound knowledge hurts the imagination. Of course I had read this—but ascribed it to prejudice. I know now, however, that it is true; and I would take care not to over-educate the boy with an instinct for art. His technique would destroy his creation. And take it in the matter of writing. I believe in correctness, but it is a fact that when a writer becomes a purist he conforms but does not create. After all, I believe that what's within a man will come out regardless of his training. There may be mute, inglorious Miltons, but Art struggles for expression. The German woman worked in a field and had no books, but she brought tears to the eyes of the Empress, with a little poem, dug up out of the ground."

"That sounds all right enough," said Warren, "but I don't know about its truth. It strikes me—and I like to think about it—that, if Nancy had been schooled and all that, she could have written about the sweetest poetry that ever was sent out."

Lyman smiled at his friend. "Education would undoubtedly assist her in the writing of verses," said he. "The log school-house would have given her the expression for poetry."

"May be so. But I don't want her to write. She'd fill up the paper and hurt the circulation. Sad day for a newspaper man when his wife fills up the paper. By the way, I forgot to tell you that I had a talk with the old man. I went out to the field with him after dinner; he was cutting oak sprouts from among the young corn and we had quite a chat. I reminded him of the fact that I hadn't known his daughter long, but I gave him to understand that I was all right. I told him that the express company had a high regard for me, and this made him open his eyes. He gradually caught my drift, and then he leaned on his hoe and laughed till the tears ran down his face; and I didn't have anything to lean on, so I took hold of the hoe handle and laughed too. After awhile the absurdity of the situation struck him, both of us leaning on a hoe, laughing fit to kill ourselves, and then he shook me off. But I wasn't to be put off this way. I told him I guessed I had to have some place to laugh, and I grabbed the hoe-handle again, and went on with my tittering. 'Young fellow,' he said, 'you just about suit me. You won't stay shuck off, and that's the sort of a man that gets next to me.' So we shook hands and without another word on the tender subject we went on talking about something else. Oh, he's all right, and the girl is too, I think. I don't know about the mother, but she is blue-eyed and tender-looking and I think she'll give in. Have you seen the banker lately?"

"I met him in the street this morning and spoke to him, and he bowed very politely. I've been thinking. Suppose my serial story should be accepted and they should send me a check. How could I get it cashed without going to his bank? And if any royalties should come from the sale of my book, what then? There's no other way open and I'll have to do business through his bank."

"That will be all right, if the check should happen to be large enough. Anyway, we don't do business with a bank because we like the owner of the concern. Oh, I didn't tell you that we have an account there already. We have about two hundred and fifty dollars over there and we don't owe a cent."

"Good!" Lyman cried, not because of the money, but that Warren had broken the ice.

"Good; I should say it is. I call it glorious. And it has come mainly through you. Why, when you came in I was still bleeding under the heel, you know."

"It has been your business management and economy, Warren. I have done nothing but scribble

at odd times—I have played and you have worked."

"That's all right."

"No, it isn't all right. Whatever success may come to this paper belongs to you. What there is already has flowed through the channel of your energy, and I am not going to claim half the profits. The plant is yours, not mine. Without you the paper could not have lived a week."

"We'll fix that all right. But say, isn't it terrible to wait. I don't mind work, but I hate to wait, and I ought not to go out yonder again before day after tomorrow."

"What, ought not to go before day after tomorrow! You ought not to go before next week."

"Oh, come, now, old man, don't say that. This thing of waiting is awful. I think I could stand to be hanged if they'd do it at once, but the waiting would put me out. I never could wait. And besides I don't believe in it. One day I saw an old man at a soldier's home and I asked him concerning his prospects and he said that he was waiting, and when I asked him what for, he said, 'to die.' And then I couldn't help but ask him what he was going to do then. I don't believe in waiting for anything; my idea is to go to it at once."

"Yes, that's all very well; but the old soldier was right after all, for life is but waiting for death."

"No," said Warren, "life is a constant fight against death, and we don't wait so long if we are fighting. If I thought as you do, I couldn't wait—I'd have to go out and hunt up death at once. I reckon you are low-spirited today. I'm glad I'm not a writer, Lyman. Writing saps all a man's spirit and leaves him no nourishment."

"I have always regarded the necessity to write as a sad infliction," Lyman replied. "A man steals from himself his most secret beliefs and emotions and puts them in the mouth of his characters. He is a sham."

"You ain't, old fellow."

"I am a fraud. Where are you going?"

"I've got to stir about," Warren answered. "I have to think when I sit still and I don't want to think. The truth is, I want to know how she stands. I wish I had a picture of her as she stood at the churn. It would make the fortune of a painter. Believe I'll get up a prayer-meeting at Mt. Zion."

"What, you get up a prayer-meeting?"

"Yes, so I can go home with her through the woods. I think that after a season of prayer and song she would lean toward me."

"Why not wait for a thunder storm and comfort her between flashes of lightning?"

"I wish I could get up a thunder storm. I'd like for that girl to grab me and choke me half to death. Well, I've got to stir around."

Warren went away, and during all the evening Lyman sat picking a nervous quarrel with himself.

CHAPTER XXX.

THE HOME.

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Lyman saw nothing of Warren the next day, but on the day following he strode into the room, whistling in tuneless good humor.

"It's all right," he said, as he sat down. "I went out there and found her at the churn. I said, 'Look here, you'll drive me mad if you don't let that churn alone—I mean with the charm of the position.' And then she blushed, and I would have grabbed a kiss, but she shied to one side. She scolded me somewhat for coming so soon. She said that people would wonder what brought me out that way so often. I told her that if people had any sense they wouldn't wonder long—they would know that she had brought me there. Then I came out square-toed. I told her that I had discovered early in the action that I loved her, that I had waited long enough to be sure that it was not a passing fancy, but a genuine case of love. I told her that her cousin Jerry might believe in waiting, but that I did not. Then how she did blush and shy. I looked away, to give her a chance to get herself together again, looked out into the field where the old man was at work, and peeped through a crack at the old lady thumping the carpet loom. I didn't wait too long, though; I didn't want the girl to have time to cool off completely, so I said, looking at her. 'I want you to marry me, you understand; with my prospects I could go throughout the country and pick up most any woman who is struck on writing verses and essays, but I don't want one of them—I want you, and I want your promise to tell that fellow Jerry to go to the deuce, as far as you are concerned; and I want you to promise to wait for me a week or two and then be my wife.' Then I thought of how tedious it would be to wait so long and I corrected my statement by telling her that we needn't wait at all. How she did flounce in surprise. She said she had no idea that I cared anything for her. But I stopped her right there. 'That ain't the question,' I said, 'do you care

anything for me? That's the question.' At this she hung her head and said that she didn't know, exactly, but that she would think about it. 'I don't want any thinking,' said I. 'What I want is for you to tell me right now.' Then she said something about that fool cousin. And I told her that I would shoot him on sight and look for him at that. I started to go away and she caught hold of me and said that if I promised not to shoot Jerry she would tell me the next day. 'You tell me now,' said I, 'or that fellow will be a corpse before morning.' Then she agreed that she thought she did love me a little. I told her that a little wouldn't satisfy me—I didn't want a breeze, I wanted a storm. She said I was hard to satisfy. She didn't think she could please me; she knew that she didn't amount to much in the eyes of town people. She had hoped so much to please me, and now she was grieved at her disappointment. She acknowledged that she was afraid to love me, and I told her that she needn't have any fear and that she might let herself out at once. And after a good deal of talk she did. I put her arms around my neck and made her squeeze me, and I called her a divine boa constrictor. She didn't exactly know what I meant, but it tickled her all the same. Then I went over into the field to consult the old man about the time I'd have to wait, and when I mentioned day after tomorrow he snorted. 'Young fellow,' said he, 'I like your pushing ways, but I don't want to be crowded off the face of the earth. You wait awhile. I don't want folks to think that I am anxious to git rid of the best gal that ever lived.' He got next to me when he put it that way, and I agreed to wait a week or so. Yes, sir, it's all right, with the exception that I've got to wait. But I won't wait alone; I'll go out there every once in awhile and make her wait with me."

Lyman caught hold of him and they stood near the window, laughing, but the laughter had more the sound of soft music than of two men in a merry mood. They sat down in the twilight, and their cigars glowed like the eyes of a beast, far apart.

Warren's restlessness was worn away in part, and the next day and for days succeeding he went about his work, humming what he supposed to be a tune. Two weeks dragged along and the time for the marriage was approaching. Every day or so the young fellow would drive out into the country to argue with the old man. He had rented a cottage and had furnished it and he pleaded the crime of permitting it to stand there empty of the two hearts that yearned to inhabit it. The old man acknowledged the logic of the argument, but swore that he could not have it said that he was anxious to get rid of his girl; and Warren always agreed to this, at the time of its emphatic utterance, but when he had driven back to town, and put up his horse, a spirit of rebellion would arise and back he would go the next day to renew the contest.

One night when Lyman went home he found old man Staggs in the sitting-room waiting for him. "I've got something to tell you," said the old man.

Lyman's heart jumped. "Has she returned?" he asked.

"Has who returned?"

"Why, Mrs. McElwin and her daughter?"

"Oh, I reckon not."

"Then what did you want to tell me?"

"I want to tell you that I won't drink any more."

"You told me that some time ago."

"Yes, but under different circumstances. When I told you, I was sick and wouldn't have touched a drop if a barrel full had been under my nose; but I tell you now when I am well. Do you know the reason why I am so strong in the faith now? Of course you don't, and that is what I am going to tell you. I was out in the stable this evening and I found a bottle of liquor. Blast me if I hadn't been wanting it all day. But what did I do? I went out and threw the bottle—and the liquor—as far as I could send it, and I heard it squash in the street. And now I want to ask you if that wasn't nerve."

Lyman summoned his patience and agreed that it was nerve, and the old man continued. "I told my wife about it, but she didn't believe me. And now what I want you to do is to convince her that it is a fact. You can do it with a clear conscience, for I will swear to it. The fact is there's going to be a reunion of the old home guard at Downer's grove, about fifteen miles from here, and I want to go. I went last year and—well, I fell, somewhat. But I wouldn't fall this time, and I want you to tell Tobithy and Annie to let me go."

"And what if you come home drunk?"

"Lyman," said the old man, puffing up, "I have always stood as your friend. I have got out of bed at night to argue in your behalf, and I didn't expect no sich treatment as this. If you want to stab me, why don't you out with your knife and pop it to me right under the ribs. Here," he added, turning toward Lyman and smoothing his shirt tight over his side, "stab me right here and I won't say a word; but, for the Lord's sake, don't question my honor. Let me tell you something: I am a poor man and in debt; I need clothes and sometimes I am out of tobacco, but I wouldn't touch a drop of whiskey for money enough to dam the Mississippi river. That's me, Lyman, and you may wollop it about in your mouth and chew on it. It is no more than natural that I should want to join my old friends. Of course we were not actually in the army, but we would have been soldiers if we hadn't been captured and disarmed, and we have an affection for the old organization. There ain't many of us left and it is cruelty to keep us apart. And I can't go unless Tobithy lets me take the money. It won't require more than five dollars. Will you assure her that I'll come home sober?"

"I don't think I can do that, Uncle Jasper. Understand, now, I believe you think you'll keep sober, but the truth of it is you can't. Why, if you didn't drink, the old fellows wouldn't be your companions."

The "veteran" smoothed his shirt over his side. "Stab me," he said. "Pop your knife under this rib—this one, right here. It will be a mercy to me if you do. When a man out-lives his word of honor, it's time to go and go violently. Pop it."

"Your drinking doesn't amount to much, Uncle Jasper. You don't drink viciously, but reminiscently. However, it is a crime to take money from those women—Hold on; I know you do all you can to earn a living; you work whenever anything comes up, but you haven't earned five dollars in—"

"I earned the money, but the scoundrel didn't pay me," the old fellow broke in. "I've got hundreds of dollars owin' to me, but the rascals laugh at me. I cured old Thompson's sick horse—worked with him all night, nearly, and he gave me a dollar. Haven't earned five dollars! the devil! How can a man earn five dollars when a scoundrel pays him one dollar for fifteen dollars' worth of labor? The shirt ain't very thick. The knife will go in all right. Pop it." He smoothed his shirt and closed his eyes as if expecting the death blow.

"You didn't let me get through," said Lyman. "I was going to say that your drinking did no particular harm. To meet your old cronies and to warm up with them is about all that is left to you of real enjoyment. Sooner or later we all live in the past, and there can be no very great evil in bringing the past near. So, now, if you will promise me to come home in as good condition as you can, I will give you five dollars."

The old fellow gulped, wheeled about to hide his eyes and leant forward with his face in his hands. Lyman slipped a bank note between his fingers and without saying a word went up stairs. At breakfast the next morning, which was the day of the reunion of the gallant home guard, old Jasper was full of life and hope, but that night when Lyman came home, he found him leaning on the gate, unable to find the latch. "I'm all right," he said.

"I believe you are," Lyman replied.

"Am, for a fact. I promised to come in good shape. Here, all right."

Lyman managed to get him to bed without disturbing anyone, but later at night he heard the women lashing him with their tongues. He knew that there was justice in the lashing and he dreaded lest they should cut at him for abetting the crime, but they did not, for at breakfast they smiled at him, doubtless not having discovered his complicity. The old man was heart-sick. "I want to see you," he said to Lyman, and leading him into the sitting-room, continued: "I have said it before, I know, but I want to say it now once for all that I'll never touch another drop as long as I live. Why, confound my old hide, don't I know exactly what it will do for me; and do you think I'll deliberately make a brute of myself? I won't, that's all. It's all right to bring the past back, that is, for a man who can do it, but it isn't for me, I tell you that. And I don't want to see those home guards any more. Why, if they had taken my advice, do you suppose they would have surrendered without firing a gun? They wouldn't. I argued with them and swore at them, but they stacked their guns; and then what could I do but surrender? That's neither here nor there, though—I'm never goin' to drink another drop. Oh, I've said it before—I know that, but it sticks, this time."

CHAPTER XXXI.

THERE CAME A CHECK.

Lyman's book met with a favor that no one had ventured to forecast. It did not touch the public's fad-nerve; it was too close to the soil for that. It was so simple, with an art so sly, with a humor that, like an essence, so quietly stole the senses, that the reviewers did not arise in resentment against it. They had expected nothing and were surprised to find much. Worn out with heavy volumes from the pens of the learned and the pretentious, they seemed to find in this little book a rest, a refuge for reverie, cooled with running water and sheltered by leaves from the burning sun. And at night, when the author lay down to rest and to muse upon himself, his heart did not beat with the exultant throb of victory—it was full of a melancholy gratitude. One morning a letter startled him. It came from a great periodical and enclosed a check in payment for a serial story. It represented more money than he had ever hoped to possess; he called Warren, and handed him the piece of paper.

"I can hardly trust my eyes," he said. "What do you make of it?"

Warren flew into a fit of enthusiasm. "Five thousand dollars," he cried. "And it comes from the advertising the newspapers have been giving you. I want to tell you that advertising pays. Five thousand dollars, and it didn't take you more than six months to write the thing. Those fellows don't know whether it's good or not. All they know is that the newspapers have given your other story a send-off. Talk about newspapers; the first thing you know we'll have money enough to paper the town. But this is all yours. No matter, I'm as much interested as if it were mine. Say, let me have this check a minute. I want to go across the street and show it to a fellow and tell him to

go to—He spoke of this office one day as Poverty's Nest. Let me take it over there."

"No," said Lyman, laughing, "but I'll tell you what you may do with it—take it over to the bank and deposit it in my name."

"But you'll have to come along and leave your signature."

"Is that the way they do? All right; but I don't want to see McElwin."

"That won't be necessary. But don't you think we'd better carry the check around town awhile before depositing it?"

"No, that would be silly."

"Silly! It would be business. You let me have it and I'll rake in fifty subscriptions before three o'clock. It's business."

"No, we'll go over and deposit it."

They went over to the bank, laughing like boys as they crossed the street. McElwin had not come down. The ceremony was conducted by the cashier, a humdrum performance to him, but to Lyman and Warren one of marked impressiveness. They returned to the office with the air of capitalists. At the threshold of the "sanctum" they met a man who wanted to subscribe for the paper. Warren took his name and his money, and when he was gone, turned to Lyman with a smile. "It has begun to work already. The news of the deposit has flashed around town and they are coming in for recognition. Oh, we're all right. Do you remember those cigars you brought from the moonlight picnic? I believe I'll go out and get some just like them. Why, helloa, here is our old friend."

Uncle Buckley was standing at the door. Lyman jumped up and seized the old fellow by the hand and led him to a chair. "Look out, Sammy," he said with an air of caution. "Don't shake me or you'll make me spill the things Mother has stuffed me with. These here are harvest apples," he went on, thrusting his hands into the pockets of his brown jeans coat and drawing forth yellow apples. "I'll jest put them here on the table. And here is an Indian peach or two, the earliest ones I ever saw. And look at this, a pone of cracklin' bread. Think of that, this time of year. The fact is we killed a shote the other day. Mother 'lowed you couldn't git any sich bread in town and a feller has to have somethin' to eat once in awhile. Now, I do wonder what this here is," he added, tugging at his pocket. "Well, if it ain't the thighs and the pully-bone of a fried chicken, I'm the biggest liar that ever walked a log. Oh, I'm full up. She got up before day, mother did, and stuffed me for an hour or more. Blamed if a peart youngster didn't yell, 'Hi, there, sausage,' as I come in town. Now, I'm blowed if I know what this is. Yes, sir, it's a pair of socks, knit under the light of a tallow candle without the drappin' of a stitch. Oh, it ain't no laughin' matter, boys; there ain't no fun in gettin' up at four o'clock of a mornin' to be stuffed, I tell you. Well, I reckon I'm reasonably empty now." He leaned back and looked at his cargo, arrayed upon the table.

"I'll hire a wagon and have these things taken over to the house," said Lyman. "You tell her, bless her old heart, that I'm coming out there pretty soon with enough stuff to smother both of you. Warren, get those cigars."

"Sure. Is there anything else we want? Uncle Buckley, don't you want something to drink?"

"Well, if you've got some right good buttermilk handy I mout take a glass. But I don't want no licker, young man. I never touched it but once, and then I swapped a fine young mare for an old mule, and I swore then that I'd never tech it again. Go on and get your segyars and I'll make a shift of burnin' one of 'em."

Warren went out. Lyman feasted his eyes on the old man. "How are they all, Uncle Buckley?"

"Jest about the same. Jimmy killed the biggest black snake yistidy—I think it was yistidy. Let me see. I know in reason it was yistidy, for I was a splittin' some wood when he fotch the thing along, draggin' it by the tail. Though that mout have been day before yistidy. I believe it was day before yistidy. Anyhow it was the biggist black snake ever killed out there since the war, but of course in my day they killed bigger ones. He found him out in a blackberry patch and mauled him to death. Oh, he was a snorter. That's about the biggest piece of news I've got. Let me see. Lige met a pole-cat somewhere in the woods and socity ain't been hankering after Lige since then. I seen him this mornin' as I was comin' in, and I yelled at him to keep his distance, and he did or I would have hit him. Yes, sir, I can't stand a pole-cat. You ricollect Mab Basey, I reckon. She run away with a feller that come to help cut wheat and they ain't seen her sense. Oh, he married her and all that, but they don't know where she is. Luke Brizentine didn't git over it."

"What, Mab's running away?"

"Oh, no, not that. Didn't I tell you? Why, Jeff Sarver filled him so full of shot that his hide looked like a nutmeg grater. Yes, sir. They got into a difficulty over a steer that had been jumpin' into a field, and he tried to stab Jeff and Jeff shot him. Made a good deal of a stir at the time and Luke didn't live but two days, but how he could live that long was more than we could see, and it caused a good deal of surprise. Now, wait a minit. It was day before yistidy that Jimmy killed the snake. Sammy, where is that man that was your partner?"

"He has an office on the other side of the square."

"Yes, but are you sure, Sammy, that he ain't your partner?"

"Absolutely certain, Uncle Buckley."

The old man scratched his head. "Sammy, that man ain't honest."

"I am quite sure of that."

"He has fotch it home to me that he ain't, Sammy. But I don't know that I ought to tell you about it; I reckon I ought to let it go. And still, it wouldn't be treatin' you exactly right. He is a forger, Sammy. Look at this."

He had taken out a pocket-book and from about it was unwinding a string, and when the string came off, he took out a piece of paper and handed it to Lyman. It was a note for one hundred dollars and appended were the names of John Caruthers and Samuel Lyman.

"Understand, Sammy, that I don't want you to pay it; I simply want you to know that the feller has used your name wrong."

"It is a forgery," said Lyman.

"Yes, that's what I have been believing for some time past, but I didn't say anything about it to mother. When you went out that day he comes to me and says, 'We must have a hundred dollars and though we don't like to do it we have to appeal to you. Lyman says that he hasn't the heart to ask, so he has put it off on me.' And so, I snatches out my wallet and lets him have the money. But I don't ask you to pay it, Sammy."

"Why, my dear old friend, do you suppose I would let you lose it? I can pay it without a flinch; more than that, if you are in need of money, I can let you have five times as much." He tucked the note into his pocket and took up his check-book.

"Why, Sammy, I don't know whuther to laugh or to cry or to holler when you talk like that. But I don't need no money, and especially none that you have raked together."

"But you must take this," said Lyman, handing him a check. "It's the first check I ever made out," he added, laughing.

"Then you ain't been rich very long, Sammy," said the old man, taking the piece of paper. "But you've writ this in jest like you are used to it. You can't write as well, however, as Blake Peel. I reckon he's the finest writer in this country. Why, he can make a bird with a pen, and it looks like it's jest ready to fly—he's teached writin' school all up and down the creek, and I reckon he's the best. But I'm sorry about this thing, and I don't feel like takin' it."

"You've got to take it."

"Then I must. But you know where it is any time you want it," he said, putting the check into his pocket. "And now, Sammy, what are you going to do with that feller? The note wasn't signed as a firm, but your names was put on individual, and as you didn't write your name he forged it. What are you goin' to do with him?"

"I don't know. Here comes Warren. Don't say anything more about it now."

Warren came in. "Uncle Buckley," said he, "here is a cigar that will make you forget your woes."

"Thank you, my son. I don't believe I've got time to smoke jest now. I'll take this thing home and crumble it up and mother and I will smoke it in our pipes."

Warren staggered. "Gracious alive, don't do that!" he cried.

"All right, my son, I'll set out on a stump and burn it in the moonlight, a thinkin' of you and Sammy. Well, I must be movin'. Good-bye, all han's, and ricollect that my latch-string hangs on the outside."

They shook hands affectionately, and then sat in silence, listening to his footsteps as he trod slowly down the stairs.

"Why don't you light your cigar?" Warren asked.

"I don't care to smoke just now," Lyman answered. "I have some business on the other side of the square."

CHAPTER XXXII.

LAUGHED AT HIS WEAKNESS.

Lyman walked slowly across the public square. The lawyers, the clerks, the tradesmen, who had become acquainted with his habits were wont to say, as they saw him strolling about, "There he goes, blind as a bat, with a story in his head." And they commented upon him now, but they could see that he was not in a dreaming mood, for his head was high and his heels fell hard upon the ground. At the edge of the sidewalk he halted for a moment, and his eye ran along the signs over

the doors. Then he stepped up to an open door and entered without pausing at the threshold. Caruthers was sitting with his face toward the door. He flushed as Lyman entered, took his feet off the corner of the table and straightened himself back in his chair. Lyman stepped up to the table and without a word, stood there looking at him.

"Well, you have come at last," said Caruthers, "I have been sitting here day after day, waiting for you."

"You expected me," said Lyman.

"Yes, as I say I have been waiting for you day after day. But where is the constable? You didn't bring him along."

Lyman took out the note. "The fog that settled between us," said he.

Caruthers nodded.

"I would have come sooner," said Lyman, "but the fog was not defined until a few moments ago."

"And I suppose your plan is to send me to the penitentiary. Tell me what you intend to do—don't stand there looking at me that way. Give a man a chance to defend his honor."

"Honor," Lyman repeated, with a cold smile. "You haven't as much honor as a hyena."

"Well, then, let me say name."

"You can say name. A snake has a name. And you want a chance to defend yours."

"Mr. Lyman, I really have no defense—I'm done up. I needed money and I put your name to that note, and if you want to disgrace my family, why you can send me to the penitentiary. I have suffered over it, day and night, and I am going to make the amount good if I live long enough. You can take everything I've got in here. But I suppose you would rather send me to the penitentiary."

Lyman sat down. "When I left my office," said he, "I was angry enough to kill you, but now you appear so contemptible that I am sorry for you."

"And I feel as contemptible as I look."

"I don't think that is quite possible. If you felt as contemptible as you look you'd blow your brains out." He got up and stood looking at Caruthers. He put his hand to his forehead as if a troublesome thought were passing through his mind. "Now that I am here I don't know what to do," said he. "I know that you ought to be punished, but my old weakness comes upon me and I falter." Caruthers brightened and Lyman looked like an abashed criminal.

"Lyman," said Caruthers, "if you have any mercy left, let me throw myself upon it. I know that there ought to be an end to your forgiveness, but why should you draw the line at me?"

"I am a fool," said Lyman, "and it makes me blush to know that I can't hide it from you. But you are so contemptible that I haven't the heart to punish you."

He tore the note into bits and turned toward the door, with his head hung low. He thought that he heard something and looking back he caught Caruthers laughing at him. His head went up; a strange light drove the gentleness out of his eyes.

"Ah, you laugh at my weakness. A moment ago I didn't know what to do. Now I know."

He sprang at Caruthers and seized him by the collar—he shoved him back and struck him in the mouth—he jerked him to his knees, threw him upon the floor and kicked him. The cries of the wretch brought a crowd to the door. A constable rushed in. "Get away," Lyman commanded. "He belongs to me."

"But you don't want to kill him," the officer replied. "Look, you have knocked his teeth out."

"So I have. Well, you may have him now."

Warren sat in the office, smoking. "Why, what's the matter?" he asked, as Lyman entered. "I'll bet you've got another piece of news to suppress."

"No, I haven't—we'll give it two columns. I knocked Brother Caruthers' teeth out and I'm glad of it."

"Good!" Warren cried. And then he called the office boy. "Tom, wet down two hundred extra copies for the next edition. Oh, Samuel, you are coming on first rate. What did he do?"

"He laughed at my weakness."

"Glad of it. Oh, we are prospering. Make a piece of news out of it, and don't think about yourself. Write it in the third person. Talk about hard times when things come this way! Why, the world is on a keen jump. Hold on a moment. Here comes Nancy's dad."

Old man Pitt came walking carefully into the room, looking about to avoid upsetting anything. He shook hands with Lyman and Warren, looked for a place to spit, did not find it and spat on the floor. "I seen your little rumpus over yonder jest now," said he, "and it was powerful entertainin'. You snatched that feller about like he wa'n't nothin' more than a feather pillow. And I'm glad of it,

for if there ever was a scoundrel on the face of the earth he's the man. I drapped in town today to see if there was any news goin' on, an' I bucked up agin it the first off-start. That's what I call keepin' things lively. Mr. Warren, our cousin Jerry was over at the house last night."

"The deuce you say!" Warren exclaimed.

"Yes, sir, last night; and he apologized for havin' been a leetle slow. He 'lowed that it had been in his mind all along to marry Nancy—"

"I'll shoot the top of his head off!" Warren broke in.

"No need of that, my son. I told him that we was much obleeged for his deliberation as the feller says, but that he was too late; and Nancy she up and tells him that she never had thought of marryin' him, and that she wouldn't have had him if he had asked her three years ago. And then she 'lowed that she loved you—"

"Talk about women!" Warren cried. "There's one for your life. And say, I'll be out there tomorrow morning at eight o'clock and the ceremony will be performed at half past eight. Just hold on, now, there's no use in arguing with me. She was born to you, but, by George, she was born for me, and that's all there is to it."

"Young feller," said Mr. Pitt, "the day for me to buck agin you is past. I don't mind markin' yearlin' calves and I don't hold off when it comes to breakin' up a hornet's nest, but I stand ready and willin' to fling up my hands when it comes to pullin' agin you. I have been kept busy many a time in my life; I have been woke up at mornin' and kept on the stretch pretty nigh till midnight, but you can come nearer occupyin' all my time and the time of all my folks than any article I ever come up against. I give in and so do the rest of them. You can jump on a hoss and ride right out there and marry her before I can git home if you want to."

The old fellow bowed his head as if he were exhausted with the strain of a long fight. Lyman sputtered with laughter, and Warren, his eyes shedding the light of victory, thus addressed the old man: "I am glad that you have at last given your consent, and I want to tell you that you shall never regret it."

"That's all right, young feller. I never squeal when a man outwinds me, and I am as much outwinded now as if I'd been wrasselin' with a bear. Nancy saw how the fight was goin', her and her mother, and for the past week or so they have been makin' clothes fitten to kill themselves, and if Nancy ain't got enough yet, why, I'll jest tell her to put on all she's got ready and let it rip at that. Well, I'm goin' now. I expect mebby, young feller, you'll beat me home and be married agin I git there, but I've got nothin' to say. I know when I'm winded. Good day."

They shook hands with him, and when he was gone Warren said: "Well, things are settling down on a fair sort of a basis. I like that old man, Lyman, and I don't believe I'll rush him; believe I'll give them more time to get things ready. I could go out there tonight, but I'll wait till tomorrow morning and let the ceremony be performed at eight o'clock. I'll get up about five and pick up a preacher on the way. He's a poor fellow and needs the job."

"Good!" Lyman cried. "I am really glad that you have decided not to push the old man."

"Yes, I think it best to give him and the girl plenty of time. Don't you?"

"I rather think so. They ought at least to have time enough to wash their faces and comb their hair. But to tell you the truth I don't relish the idea of getting up so early."

"You don't? Why, you've got nothing to do with it. Did you think I was going to let you go? Not much. You'd guy me and that would turn the whole thing into a farce. It's a fact that I don't want you; I may be peculiar, but I can't help it. I tell you what you must do: We'll be in town day after tomorrow night and I want you to come down to the house and take supper with us."

"I'll be there."

"But you mus'n't guy Nancy. She'll be scared anyway."

"I won't guy her. I shall feel more disposed to pronounce a benediction."

"I'm glad you feel that way though we don't want the occasion to be solemn. Where are you going?"

"Over to old Jasper's to imprison myself in my room. I want to think."

While Lyman was busy with Caruthers, Eva was tripping along a grass-grown street. She and her mother had just returned. The social relationship between the banker's daughter and the daughter of old Jasper Staggs had not been close; Eva's visits had always been a surprise. And on this day when Annie saw her coming, she got up in a flutter to meet her at the door.

"Why, how do you do?" Annie cried, catching her hand. "I am delighted to see you. When did you get home? We didn't hear that you had come back."

"We returned not more than an hour ago."

"Come in and put your things off."

"I haven't time to stay but a few moments. Is your mother well?"

"Yes, very well. I will call her."

"Oh, no, I'm going to remain so short a time. I was out walking and I thought I'd stop for a moment. Is your father well?"

"Yes, as well as usual. I don't know where he is—out in the garden, I suppose."

"Is Mr. Lyman here yet?"

"You mean is he still in town? Oh, yes, and he boards here, but I suppose he's at his office."

"Somebody told me that he was thinking of leaving town."

"That may be, but he hasn't gone yet."

"Does he do most of his work here?"

"Yes, all but the work for the paper."

"Would you mind showing me the room where he does his work? I'd like so much to see it."

"With pleasure, I'm sure."

She led Eva to the room above. The young woman stood with her hands clasped, looking at the bare walls—she looked at the chair, at every article of meager furniture. She went to the desk and took up a pen. "Is this the pen he writes with?" she asked.

"Yes, I think so. Did you wish to write something?"

"Oh, no," she answered, holding the pen. "And is that where he walks up and down while he's thinking?" she asked, pointing to a thread-bare pathway in the rag carpet.

"It must be," Annie answered. "We hear him walking a good deal and he always seems to be walking up and down in the same place."

Eva put down the pen and turned to go. Annie looked at her narrowly. They went down stairs and Eva did not halt until she had reached the door. "Won't you sit down?"

"Oh, no, thank you. I must be getting back. You must come over to see us. Good-bye."

Annie went out to the dining-room where her mother was ironing. "Eva has just been here," she said. "All she wanted was to go into the room where Mr. Lyman does his work. She's dead in love with him and he's blind as a bat not to see it. I don't believe he wrote the book—I don't believe he could write anything."

CHAPTER XXXIII.

THE PETITION.

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Lyman did not sleep much that night. Annie, cautioned by her discreet mother not to say too much, had simply told him that Eva had called and asked about him. But that was enough to keep him awake nearly all night; and long before the table was set, the next morning, they heard him walking slowly up and down the pathway worn in the carpet. In the office he sat musing. The boy came in to tell him that at five o'clock he had helped Warren on the road to be married, and that he had left strict instructions that Lyman should be told not to forget the supper at the cottage. The boy went out and Lyman stood at the window, looking across at the bank. Presently he saw McElwin bow with dignity to a man whom he met in front of the door and then enter the place. The boy came in again and holding out a piece of "copy" written badly, asked him to read the first line. It was a notice of the meeting of the Chancery court. The boy returned to his work and Lyman continued to gaze at the bank. Suddenly a smile, not altogether soft, but half cynical, lighted up his face; and at the same instant he reached for his hat. Straightway he went to the bank and sent his name into the private office. McElwin came to the door.

"Why, come in, Mr. Lyman," he said cordially, extending his hand. Lyman shook hands with him and entered the room. The great clock began to strike. McElwin looked up at it and then said: "Have a seat, please."

Lyman sat down. McElwin did not permit the silence to become embarrassing. "Mr. Sawyer told me all about it, sir; he kept nothing back, although he must have seen that I could not help honoring you. Mr. Lyman, you have taught us all a lesson, sir, and I am more than pleased to see that you are prospering. It is more than likely," he went on, crossing his legs, "that you may soon seek some sort of investment for your money. Idle money, sir, is like an idle mind—a mischief to the community; and if you should desire to invest—"

"I can't afford to engage in trade," Lyman broke in. "Of course," he added, "trade is a good thing in its way, a sort of necessity, but the English have the right idea of it, after all—drawing a

distinction between the tradesman and the gentleman. I remember a remark old Sam Johnson made concerning a fellow who had grown rich enough to stop buying and selling—"he had lost the servility of the tradesman without having acquired the manners of a gentleman."

McElwin bit his lip. "I didn't mean any offense," he said.

"Oh, surely not, and I have taken none. By the way, Mr. McElwin, Chancery court will meet next Monday."

"Ah! I had quite forgotten it. Time does fly, sir."

"Yes, and circumstances change, and men bow to circumstances."

"You are quite right, Mr. Lyman. And that reminds me that I have been forced through a change concerning Mr. Sawyer. I honor him on some grounds, you understand, but his confession of drunkenness shocked me greatly. In fact, sir, I am glad he did not marry my daughter."

"When I spoke of the meeting of the court," said Lyman, pretending to have paid no attention to McElwin's remark concerning Sawyer, "I wished to remind you of the petition for divorce."

"Yes, quite right," McElwin replied, uncrossing his legs and putting out his hand as if unconsciously feeling for his dignity, to pull it back to him.

"Is the paper which your daughter signed here or at your home?"

"At home, I think; yes, I am quite sure of it."

"Then would you mind walking up there with me so that I may sign it?"

"Why—er, not at all, sir, but we have plenty of time."

"No," Lyman insisted, "it is better to have it over with; and I ask your pardon for not having signed it sooner."

The banker got up, took down his hat, brushed it with the sleeve of his coat and announced his readiness to go. Together they walked out. Lyman assumed an unwonted gaiety. He commented humorously upon the tradesmen standing in their doors. The banker strove to laugh, but his heart was not in the effort. "Yes, sir," said he, "things change and women change, too. And I may make bold to say that my daughter—and my wife, sir—are not exceptions to the—er, rule."

"I don't quite understand," said Lyman.

"I mean, sir, that what at one time might have been distasteful may have become a—er—matter of endearment, you understand."

"I don't know that I do," the cruel tormenter replied.

"A woman's nature is a peculiar thing—a romantic thing, I might almost say. My daughter is strangely influenced by romance, sir. And her peculiar relationship to—ahem—yourself, I might say—"

"You mean that outrageous affair at old Jasper's house," Lyman broke in.

"Well, the odd—you understand—marriage. Yes, it has made quite a different person of her, I might say. Really, I was in hopes—it came upon me latterly, you observe, or I mean you understand—that we might come to some adjustment—"

"We will," Lyman interrupted. "I am more than willing to sign the petition."

"You are very kind, and I thank you—yes, very considerate—but my daughter has changed greatly since then, and I have lately indulged a hope together with my wife that we might throw open our home to you—ahem—you understand."

"We can settle it today," said Lyman. "I believe you told me once that I ought to go away, or sent some word of that sort, I don't remember which, and I am now ready to take your advice."

The banker sighed, and they walked along in silence until they came to the gate of Eva's home.

"Walk in," said McElwin.

They stepped upon the veranda and Lyman saw Eva sitting in the parlor. She came running to meet him, forgetful of everything—came running with her hands held out.

"He has come to sign the petition," said the banker in a dry voice. "Where is your mother?"

She drew back. "In the garden I think," she answered.

"I will go after her," said McElwin.

He walked away, heavy of foot. Eva turned to Lyman and asked him to sit down. He did so, and she remained standing. It reminded him of the night when they had met at the lantern picnic, only their position now were reversed, for then he had remained standing while she sat looking up at him. He took up a volume of Tennyson and opened it, and between the pages in front of him lay a faded clover bloom.

"A memory?" he asked, looking at her.

"Yes, a beautiful memory. Some one plucked it, threw it up and it fell in my lap—one day at the creek."

He looked at her searchingly. They heard McElwin in the garden calling his wife, "Lucy, oh, Lucy. Where are you?"

"Eva, I have not been honorable with you—I have held you not as a protector—I have held you selfishly—I love you."

"Lucy, where are you?" the banker called.

"I have not dared to hope that you could love me—I'm old and ugly. But I worshipped you and I can not set you free. I told your father that I would come to sign the paper, and I spoke sarcastically to him, but I will beg his pardon, for I honor him."

"Lucy, come here, quick!" the banker shouted in the garden.

"You did not think I could love you," she said, looking at him frankly, her eyes full of surprise and happiness; "you did not know me. I told my mother that with you life would be joyous in a shanty. Oh, my husband."

He got up quietly, the tears streaming down his face—he held out his arms.

"Lucy, he has come to sign the paper."

They were standing in the garden walk. She was almost breathless, having run to meet him. "Oh, he must not," she said. "It will kill her."

"He is going to sign it and we must be brave. Wait here till I fetch it," he said when they reached the rear veranda. She waited, tearful, trembling. He came with the paper and they stepped into the parlor. Lyman stood with his back toward them, his arms about Eva, her face hidden in his bosom. Mrs. McElwin held up her hands and then bowed her head with a whispered, "Thank God." The banker stood there, quickly, but without noise, tearing the paper into bits. His wife held her arms out toward him. He opened his hand and the bits of paper fluttered to the floor.

*** END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK OLD EBENEZER ***

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