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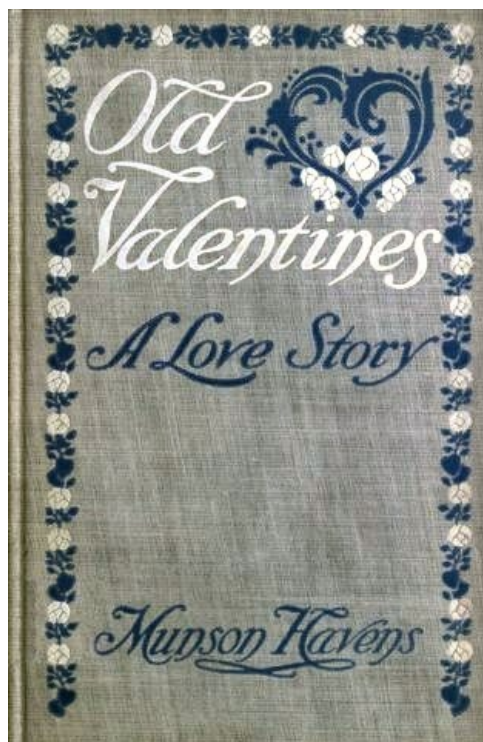
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OLD VALENTINES

A LOVE STORY

BY MUNSON HAVENS

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS

BOSTON AND NEW YORK
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1914

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TO MY WIFE

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ILLUSTRATIONS

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OLD VALENTINES

I

You might enter this story by the stage door. You remember beautiful Valentine Germain—the actress? She married Robert Oglebay, the painter, brother of Sir Peter Oglebay, the great engineer. Their baby Phyllis—

But, after all, the main entrance is more dignified.

Sir Peter Oglebay's passion is for Construction: to watch massive machinery slowly hoisting materials more massive into positions of incredible height with calculated accuracy. Wherever construction is in progress you are likely to see him, standing at a little distance, holding his silk hat on his white head with one hand as he looks upward, and leaning, a little heavily, on his stick with the other. And whenever or wherever you see him, you will see an English gentleman.

His portrait, in the lobby of the Engineering Society, is by Sargent. His erect bearing, white mustache, and something about the cut of his clothes suggest the soldier. But he is one of the great engineers; his father and grandfather were engineers. You observe the red ribbon in his lapel; France honors him.

Sir Peter's big house is in Armytage Street, near the park. You may remember the house by its

walled garden and the imposing wrought-iron grille through which one has access to the flagged walk, the wide steps, and the great doorway.

In his house, the library defines his chief interest in life. The shelves are filled with somber sets of the "Transactions" and "Proceedings" of several learned societies. Sir Peter is himself a Fellow of these societies. Mr. Rowlandson, his bookseller, has a standing advertisement in "The Athenaeum" for certain missing volumes. One in particular, the "Proceedings of the British Engineering Society for the year 1848," he would tell you, was the very devil to find; it seems there was a fire at the printer's. Sir Peter's monograph on the "Egyptian Pyramids Considered in their Relation to Modern Engineering" was dedicated to this society. He presided over its grave deliberations for several years. "With dignity and impartiality," said his successor, when Sir Peter surrendered the gavel.

He serves on boards of directors. His name is seen on subscription lists headed by the Right People. Late afternoon should find him at the Carlton Club.

Many years ago, Sir Peter brought together a number of fine pictures. They hang in the drawing-room, but the collection is not a notable one in these days. Each year, however, the Oglebay Prize speeds some talented English lad to Paris. But that endowment was his brother Robert's suggestion. Sir Peter's calls at the Christie Galleries ceased when Robert married beautiful Valentine Germain, the actress. Perhaps half of the cruel things Sir Peter said of her were true. But the quarrel was irreparable; the brothers never met afterward.

Robert Oglebay was a painter of distinction, if not of genius. His few finished pictures enriched the world. His impulses were noble, but they were impulses only; the will to complete the undertaken task was lacking. For patient work he substituted high talk of Art in the studios of his friends. The gay little suppers in their own rooms were famous; nine at table, mostly men, entranced by Valentine's beauty and her wit. Charming were their afternoons among the curio shops, and their return, laden with loot too precious to wait over night for delivery. Glorious were their holidays in Paris and Vienna; wonderful nights in Venice! Always together! To their sudden migration to Egypt, whence he returned with a portfolio of exciting promise. Alas, the slender fulfilment! for then was the time for work,—the sobering thought of Baby Phyllis.

But to Valentine and Robert Oglebay, Baby Phyllis soon meant a new frolic. Nurse Farquharson's were the competent hands. Their life went on unchanged.

At five, Baby Phyllis, in her white nightie, her blue eyes shining, and her curls crowned with roses, danced among the wine-glasses at her mother's birthday party, and enraptured the guests by singing, in various keys, the song with which beautiful Valentine herself had captivated London,—*"If I could wear trousers, I know what I should do."* If you knew your way about town in the early eighties, you may remember the song. The encore was uproarious: three times Baby Phyllis had to lift her little leg and strike the match on her nightie. They drank her health standing, as she disappeared, smiling at them over Nurse Farquharson's shoulder.

Upstairs, having cuddled Phyllis in bed, Valentine caught the expression on the nurse's face. She put her arms around Farquharson appealingly.

"Don't be cross with me on my birthday," she pleaded.

Farquharson patted the pretty upraised hands, glittering with diamonds.

"You mustn't look cross at my mamma, Farkson," cooed Baby Phyllis.

Careless, happy days and sparkling nights! Robert and Valentine were always together, their honeymoon endless; in Paris, in Buda-Pesth, in Rome, in Constantinople, in Holland. You should have seen Valentine in the Dutch costume she brought home. Each of the inseparable trio of artists, Mr. Singleton, Mr. Leonard, and Mr. Knowles, painted her portrait, and made love to her, and was laughed at and scolded. It is little enough to say of her that she idolized Robert.

When they returned from their first trip to Norway, in 1897, Robert Oglebay, now forty and growing stout, told his friends he had found what he was looking for at last. The strong, deep sentiment of the North had clutched at him and held him fast. And indeed those shimmering, moonlit studies of the little fishing village, where they spent that summer and autumn, are his best.

Early in the following summer they flitted northward again, with joyful eagerness. They took nine-year-old Phyllis with them.

While her father painted, and her mother read, Phyllis explored crannies in which the receding tide had left tiny, helpless creatures which she examined curiously, and then carried tenderly to the water, lest they perish before the friendly waves came again to cover them.

Their boatman sang songs to her,—strange songs that thrilled her, though she did not understand the words.

At night, in the best room of the little inn, by a bright fire, her father told tales of the vikings; of their high-prowed ships, and the long-haired sailors, with fierce eyes; of their adventurous voyages over unknown seas. The stories ended when the golden head drooped, drowsily.

The portfolio of sketches grew steadily during the weeks that followed.

"Your best work, Robert," said Valentine

"I have found what I have been seeking," was his answer.

They were happy days. Robert painted, early and late, in all weathers. Valentine's joy was in him. Phyllis found hers in a closer companionship with them than she had ever known.

Remembering their eager joy, how tragic the end! Drowned, under the sail of an overturned boat, —together.

Their little Phyllis, saved by the boatman recovered from the shock of icy water and horrible fright before her clothing was dry. She was spared immediate knowledge of her loss. The rough, weatherworn faces she saw in the firelight of the fisherman's cottage, to which she had been carried, were kindly and compassionate. The gloom of early evening, the glow of the firelight, the smell of the sea, the full-rigged ship on a rude wall-bracket, and the moaning wind outside were memories of after years. At the moment, wrapped in a blanket, Phyllis was conscious only of security and warmth. She smiled up at the big fisherman who had rescued her, and made friendly advances to the cluster of ragged little ones who gathered around her, with scared faces and brown, bare legs and feet. When the fisherman's wife tucked her into a warm bed, she inquired sleepily for her mamma. A reassuring caress was the response: the language of motherhood is universal, and requires no words.

The patrol of the rocky inlet ended at dawn. When the burdened groups of booted men tramped past the cottage on their way to the inn, the fisherman's wife, peering through the window in the gray morning light, muttered to herself that both had been found.

Some hours afterward came the innkeeper and the postmaster, the one proud of his English, the other of his responsibilities as first citizen of the village. A large-eyed, terror-stricken Phyllis learned of her loneliness and sobbed on the good woman's broad bosom. The innkeeper and the postmaster smoked their pipes outside until the first outburst of childish grief had spent itself.

It appeared then that the little Miss must tell them to whom they should send a telegram. How painful and new to be obliged to think; how choking were the vague thoughts. But at last a ray of comfort; they should telegraph Farquharson, her dear, dear nurse. The name was slowly spelled. And the address? Perfectly, Phyllis knew the street and number of that fascinating home of hers, but she now remembered that Farquharson would not be there; that Farquharson had gone to visit her brother in a little town in the south of England; a little town of which Phyllis had heard the most wonderful, true stories; but she did not know its name. "Couldn't the telegraph find out?" she asked; and then, overcome with rushing thoughts, abandoned herself again to grief.

"There are Mr. Knowles, Mr. Leonard, and Mr. Singleton," she bethought her. "But they are painting in Algiers."

There was a lady her mamma called Molly, too, whom Phyllis liked very much, who came often to tea, accompanied by a tiny brown dog; but the patient innkeeper could learn no more of her than that mamma always called her Molly; the tiny brown dog's name, Phyllis remembered, was Tip.

How might this poor innkeeper's meager vocabulary convey the idea of relatives to Phyllis's mind? But somehow, at last, it was done.

"Yes," said Phyllis, struck suddenly with the thought. "There is Uncle Peter. But my papa and mamma never went to see him, and he never came to see them." A half-forgotten word occurred to her,— "They were es-tranged."

The innkeeper eyed her doubtfully; but Uncle Peter's last name she knew, of course; was it not her own? And his title, too. The innkeeper, impressed, communicated his intelligence to the postmaster; they made their good-byes awkwardly and left the room.

Two days must elapse before the steamer arrived; ample time for composition. It grieved the innkeeper that another name than the author's must be signed to his telegram; but intellect yielded to rank; the postmaster signed alone.

And so, on a day when the dreary churchyard on a bleak hillside, near the little fishing village, received the poor remains of Robert Oglebay and Valentine, his wife, Sir Peter, in the paneled library of his great London house, read these words:—

VALFJELDET, NORWAY, August 18th, 1898.

Your niece, Phyllis Oglebay, robbed of her parents by the remorseless sea, awaits the directions of her uncle.

OLAF ULVESAKKER, *Postmaster.*

Ten days later, Sir Peter Oglebay, with a drawn face, rode homeward through fog-enveloped streets, with a small girl in his arms. One of Phyllis's hands held Sir Peter's tightly, and her tired, little head rested upon his shoulder.

There was a sale, of course, of the thousand luxurious trifles with which improvident Robert Oglebay and his beautiful, spirited, improvident wife had surrounded themselves; trifles which had helped to create the artistic atmosphere that was the breath of life to them. Half a hundred creditors divided the proceeds.

When Sir Peter asked Phyllis what he should save from the wreck for her (not in those words, however) she asked him to send for all the valentines her papa had given her mamma.

"Her name was Valentine, you know, Uncle Peter," explained Phyllis. "I think it is the beautifullest name there is. Long before I was born, and long before they were married, my papa gave my mamma valentines, new ones and old ones too but mostly old ones. They were the prettiest. Some of them are a hundred years old. They are ever so pretty, Uncle Peter, and she let me play with them, whole boxes full of them. I loved them best of all my playthings. Sometimes my papa called me his little Valentine, but they named me Phyllis, after my grandmamma, my papa's mamma. Why, Uncle Peter, she was your mamma, too, wasn't she?" Phyllis, sitting on Sir Peter's lap, regarded him gravely, with new interest. In the end, however, she returned to the subject. All the valentines—boxes and boxes of them—were to be brought to her, if Uncle Peter pleased.



SHE WAS YOUR MAMMA, TOO, WASN'T SHE?

His bookseller bought in the valentines for Sir Peter.

"God bless my soul!" exclaimed Mr. Rowlandson, when he read the order.

The sale catalogue described it as one of the most remarkable collections ever brought together, and intimated that the Museum should take advantage of a rare opportunity.

Another dealer was commissioned to buy one of Robert's pictures.

"Any one,—the best. Use your own judgment," said Sir Peter.

It was a charming study, unfinished, of course, that came the next afternoon: a boat, rolling heavily in gray water; and seen through mist, the great brown sail, looming, shadowy; one sailor, in a red jersey, at the tiller. In the corner Robert had scrawled his careless signature and the words,—"*Valfjeldet, Norway, 1897.*" Sir Peter gently laid the picture upon the glowing coals of the grate.

"There are six boxes come from Mr. Rowlandson's shop, sir," said his housekeeper standing quietly behind him.

"Have the screws removed and send them up to Miss Phyllis's room," he replied. "They are old valentines, Burbage, old valentines that belonged to her m—for which she has a childish fondness."

II

"Doesn't it seem to you that the windows let in more sunlight of late, ma'am?" asked a housemaid. She had just finished cleaning those in the octagonal dining-room. Burbage inspected the windows.

"There is no change in the windows that I can see," she replied. "But there's more sunlight in the house than in many a year."

This comment of his old housekeeper, six weeks after Sir Peter brought Phyllis home, might be

accepted as the epitome of her life there for ten long years. Sir Peter was as grim as ever to the servants; but, bless your heart, hadn't they caught him at his pranks on the floor? Hadn't they seen his haggard face when the doctor pronounced it diphtheria? Hadn't they seen him carry her downstairs in his own arms on the first day it was allowed? Hadn't they seen him helping her with her lessons, at night,—solving her complex problems in his head while she struggled over columns of figures, and waiting at the end of that tortuous road with a smile on his gaunt face, and the right answer, to prove hers right or wrong? But in languages, Sir Peter was left at the post. Her master in French was astonished until he learned her mother's name,—by accident, for it was rarely spoken in that house. The dead languages were alive to her, too. The shelves in her study-room, upstairs, contained Sir Peter's old "classics," prettily rebound. The commission went to Mr. Rowlandson; the execution was Rivière's. Sir Peter had scarcely looked into them since the old days at Cambridge.

Sunlight in the house, indeed. Her sweet voice, in sudden song, might be heard at any moment of the day; or the ripple of her piano; or her gay laughter, musical as the joyous notes of a bird.

She had her intent of them all. Even the determined mind of Burbage, stern-featured and steel-spectacled, she moulded to a plastic acquiescence with her own sweet will. In extreme urgency, when Burbage was very firm, indeed, Phyllis had a way of referring to dear Farquharson. Burbage learned to anticipate this by yielding in the nick of time.

By the way, they had not found a trace of Farquharson.

Several short, sharp battles she had with Sir Peter; the cause, in each instance, the same. He did not try to disguise his desire that she should forget her mother. The first encounter between them took place within a year of her home-coming.

"If I cannot remember my darling, darling mamma in your house, Uncle Peter, I shall not stay here," she declared. "I will go away and never, never come back any more. And then you would be sorry."

Sir Peter compromised with irrelevant sweets. But he saw she was terribly in earnest, for such a little girl.

From time to time a similar incident disturbed the loving relationship between them; a relationship that was perfect otherwise, in confidence, sincerity and affection.

When she was eighteen, some one told her she began to look like her mother.

"God forbid!" said Sir Peter, when she told him.

Phyllis went white.

"Uncle Peter, my mother was an angel. She was my father's——"

"Ruin," interposed Sir Peter, his brows darkening.

"She was his dream of Heaven. I heard him tell her so. She was a dear, sweet woman."

Sir Peter growled; but Phyllis always had the last word on these occasions.

"I love her memory and I always shall, as I should have dearly loved her if—if she could have stayed with me. You must never speak or even think unkindly of her if you want me to love you, or if you want me to live with you. She was my mother and——" Then she fled to her room. Burbage could have been heard murmuring, "There, there, my pretty."

It was true. As she grew older it became apparent she had inherited her mother's marvelous beauty. She was a tall girl; a mass of golden coils surmounted the proud head, set so well on her neck and shoulders; her eyes were the deepest blue; you might have thought her expression sad, but her sensitive mouth was mirthful as well as tender; in merriment her eyes danced. When she talked earnestly she caught her breath in the prettiest way; she had indescribable charm. Her hands were long and slender, unadorned with rings; she simply didn't care for them. She usually wore white, and the larger the hat the better she liked it.

By the time Phyllis was twenty, she had read all that was good for her, and was ready to look at life itself with frankness, and judge it by standards of her own. The windows of the Carlton Club knew Sir Peter no more. She led him everywhere. You might have seen them at the Abbey one day; on another in the Temple Gardens or looking up at Dr. Johnson's house, in Gough Square. Sir Peter gloomed in the doorways of shops while she made leisurely purchases within. He pointed out the best pictures in the National Gallery; and could tell her why they were the best. They motored through England and France; Sir Peter absorbed in old fortifications, Phyllis regardful of the babies tumbling through cottage doorways. In London one often saw them walking in the park, her face aglow with animation, her movements as free from constraint as a young deer; her flow of conversation never failing. Sir Peter, keeping step, regarded her, idolatrous. Unconsciously she showed him her soul, and looking therein he found his eyes blurred with unexpected tears.

Soft but imperious Phyllis! The theater bored Sir Peter beyond expression. But on First Nights you might be certain he would have a box. Radiant Phyllis, in white silk, leaning forward eagerly to catch every word, was tremulous with excitement at the end of the play. During the drive homeward Sir Peter endeavored, artfully, to conceal that he had slept through half an act.

You may be sure that mothers with eligible sons invited him to dine; grumbling, but facing the inevitable, he accepted. His hawk's eyes glowered at the young men: from Cambridge and Oxford, but he invited them to his house. Coaxed by their mothers they called the first time, and thereafter were with difficulty restrained. Phyllis was kind to each, and interested in all; but Sir Peter observed with satisfaction that she was most pleased when they came in pairs. He chuckled over his magazine, under a reading-lamp, at the far end of the library many times, while Phyllis entertained her admirers; but at times he scowled. "Too fast, too fast, you young fool," he muttered to his white mustache.

They were thoroughly agreeable young men, and Phyllis enjoyed it all hugely. She approached the consideration of the sex from a perfectly fresh and candid point of view. Sir Peter had the benefit of her impressions each morning with his egg and toast and tea. "The Times" had long since been banished from breakfast.

One morning she was spiritless.

"Uncle Peter, I have something very, very important to tell you."

"I am listening most attentively, my dear."

"Uncle Peter, you know Mr. Holroyd,—Mr. Mark Holroyd, I mean, not his brother Dick."

"I can't say I know him very well, my dear. He has called several times, to be sure, and dined with us once. We have dined at General Holroyd's twice, I think, when Mark was present. I believe he has made three remarks to me: first, that Cambridge was slow; second, that he liked a Doherty racket best,—I think it was a Doherty he preferred; and third, that the Halls, this month, were —'rather.'"

Phyllis's smile comprehended and confirmed

"But he is very nice, Uncle Peter."

"I have no doubt of it," said Sir Peter. "His father is one of the finest men I have ever known; his mother was a Churchill. Is Mark to read for the Bar?"

"Y-e-es," said Phyllis doubtfully. "I hope so. Oh! Uncle Peter, last night, in the hall——"

"In the hall, eh?" interrupted Sir Peter.

"Yes, dear, in the hall. He—he proposed to me. I told him I had never thought of him in that way at all. And——"

"I should hope not," said Sir Peter. He liked Mark well enough, but there was plenty of time. And he made a mental memorandum to keep his eye on the hall thereafter.

"And, oh! Uncle Peter, he said the light had gone out of his life, and that he could never get over such a crushing blow, and that he wished he was—Uncle Peter, they—they always do get over it, don't they?"

"In no time at all," replied Sir Peter briskly, and helped himself to toast. There was a pause.

"Still, I doubt if Mr. Holroyd will get over it as quickly as that," said Phyllis thoughtfully.

"Haberdashers are a very present help in time of trouble," Sir Peter assured her. "They are a great comfort to young men in Mark's situation."

When she kissed him good-bye for the day, he said:—

"My little girl must wait a long while and meet many young men before she finally—er—finally—you know,—eh?"

But on that very afternoon she went with her friend, the Hon. Margaret Neville, to visit Saint Ruth's Social Settlement, in Whitechapel. And there she met John Landless. The Honorable Margaret introduced them.

"Hullo, Mr. Landless—oh! Miss Oglebay—Mr. Landless. It's her first time here. Show her about a bit like a good chap, will you, while I look for to see what my angel children's sewing-class is doing so blithely, blithely?"

John Landless looked at Phyllis, and Phyllis looked at John. If there is ever love at first sight! Perhaps it never happens in this prosy old twentieth century. But, if it ever does, then—there you are.

"It will be a pleasure to show you through the house," said John. "I wish Dr. Thorpe, the warden, were here, though? you should meet him; he's great. That is Mrs. Thorpe—over there, talking to the woman who is crying. She will have her straightened out before you can say Jack Robinson,—and no nonsense either."

It took a little longer than that, but in a few minutes the woman went away smiling; and then Phyllis met Mrs. Thorpe, who won her at once.

"I leave you in good hands, Miss Oglebay," she said, when she was called away. "You will hear Saint Ruth's praises sung. We shall hope to see you here often."

"I am so glad I came," said Phyllis, "and you are very kind, Mr. Landless, to explain things to me. Are you certain I am not taking too much of your time?"

"Oh, we will glance at my boys as we go along," replied John. "The afternoons are not especially busy. The evenings are full, though, with classes, and clubs, and games, and all that,—you know."

They walked through the rooms devoted to social amelioration; to the mental, physical and spiritual redemption of sordid lives. To these rooms men from the universities, impelled by a new conscience, bring their learning and their refinement. In these rooms men from the docks—the flotsam and jetsam of humanity—receive their first glimpse of

"Plato and the swing of Pleiades."

While John explained the theory and practice of such social settlements as Toynbee Hall, and Mansfield House, and Saint Ruth's, Phyllis found time to study his face. His black hair was cut short, but it curled for all that; his dark eyes were fine, the eyebrows very thick. His mouth closed tightly, a little too tightly, perhaps. But his chin! "He will have his way," thought Phyllis. She noticed that he stood very straight, that his shoulders were broad, and that his light gray suit became him well.

In the room to which the Hon. Margaret Neville consecrated ten hours a week were a number of very small girls, trying to use needles without pricking their fingers, and not succeeding very well. John and Phyllis stood just outside the door, waiting for the dismissal of the class.

Now, John Landless had a test for new acquaintances, a test evolved of trying experience. If she laughed now!—or said, "How odd!"

"I find this work tremendously absorbing" said John, "and I hope I am helpful, a little, you know. But besides all that I think the work helps me in my profession."

"Your profession," repeated Phyllis, turning toward him the sweet, interested face he was watching so intently. "May I ask what is your profession?"

"I am a poet," said John simply, and awaited results.

"That is a noble profession," said Phyllis "I am glad you have chosen it. I hope you will succeed in it." She colored. "And I believe you will," she added. She was looking at his chin.

Then, for the first time, Phyllis saw John's smile. He had a wonderful smile; the most winning; he should have smiled oftener; but life is a serious business to poets, especially at twenty-four.

"It is good of you to say that," said John. "Almost every one roars. That is—the men. The girls giggle, or say, 'How curious!' I think you are the first girl who has ever taken it quite as a matter of course that a man might make poetry his profession. I am prepared to defend the profession of poetry against the world, if need be; but I don't like to be stared at while I am doing it."

"I understand," replied Phyllis warmly. "If you said the Army, or the Church, or Engineering, no one would be surprised or unsympathetic. But they think one should be a little ashamed of owning himself a poet. So much the worse for them," she concluded, nodding her pretty head and catching her breath in that quick way of hers.

"You're very kind to say so, but——" John was about to ask her if she was sure she meant it. Looking into Phyllis's candid eyes he thought better of it.

"Are any of your—that is—have you——?" she stammered, partly because the form of her question puzzled her; partly because she was aware of John's ardent eyes.

"Yes, I have been in the magazines three or four times," he replied. He knew that question. "But I hope to bring out a little book of poems in the spring."

"I shall be eager to see it," said Phyllis.

"Really?" asked John.

"Of course," she replied, coloring again. Mark Holroyd had looked at her like that; but how different it had been.

"You shall have one of the first copies off the press," said John, in a low voice, "because you were one of the first to encourage me in all this great London. And I shall write that in the book, if you will let me."

Phyllis looked at him earnestly.

"You must never be discouraged," she said slowly. "There will be difficulties, of course, and obstacles, and—and hard places to get over. All the poets I have read about had a hard time at first. But there will be friends to believe in you, many of them, who will wish you success in your profession."

"If I could know there was one, at least," said John, his dark eyes glowing.

Phyllis smiled at him. "There will be many," she repeated.

The Honorable Margaret joined them, having delivered her closing remarks to her class; remarks

somewhat pointed on the subject of noses and handkerchiefs, but inclusive of cleanliness and godliness generally.

"Splendid place, isn't it, Phil?" she remarked with enthusiasm. "Did you see the dispensary, and the nursery, and the gymnasium and the laundry, and all around the shop?"

"Yes, I think we saw everything," replied Phyllis. "Mr. Landless has explained it all in the most interesting way."

"Will you come again?" asked John, as he stood at the curb, while they stepped into the Neville motor.

"She's sure to," replied the Honorable Margaret promptly. "Saint Ruth's eats 'em alive. I came to scoff and remained to thread needles myself. Phyllis will be minding the babies in a month,—eh, Phil?"

"I should love to come again," said Phyllis.

"To-morrow?" asked John.

"No," said the Honorable Margaret. "To-morrow's not my day. I come on Thursday next."

"I think it *would* be convenient for me to come to-morrow," said Phyllis. "Perhaps that nice Mrs. Thorpe, to whom you introduced me, could find something for me to do. I am afraid I shall have to be taught how myself first, though."

"Great Scott!" cried the Honorable Margaret, leaning back in the car. "Saint Ruth has made one mouthful of you."

"Good-bye, Mr. Landless. Thank you again," said Phyllis, extending a cordial hand.

"Until to-morrow," said John.

He stood at the curb watching the receding car. When he reëntered the house, his smile lighted his face wonderfully.

"What do you think, Phyllis!" whispered the Honorable Margaret, her eye on the chauffeur. "Mark Holroyd telephoned me at the Settlement. He told me he needed bucking up a bit, and was coming to me to be comforted. He's to be at the house at nine. Isn't he the dearest fellow?"

Phyllis opened her eyes wide; and then half closed them.

"He is one of the dearest, Peggy," she said softly.

III

"Lady Neville is a most estimable woman," observed Sir Peter, at breakfast the next morning, "and your friend Margaret is a very nice girl, as I have observed. But these places, my dear, these social settlements, as they call them, Saint Ruth's, and—er—the rest of them, are the breeding-places of discontent, of unrest hotbeds of socialism. I can't approve of your going there often."

"Well, of course, Uncle Peter, you know far more about it than I do. But I should think that Saint Ruth's would make the poor people more contented. If there were no such clean, bright, cheery places to go to, and to leave their babies in, and to hear music on summer nights, and see the motion-pictures which make them forget their hard, drudging, colorless lives for a little while,"—here Phyllis caught her breath in that fascinating way she has—"if there were no such helpful places, I should think they might be more hopeless and bitter. But when they know that Lady Neville, and you, and other rich people care something for them,—enough to want to give them some happy hours; when they see Peggy Neville teaching their little girls to sew,—don't you think they may feel less like throwing a stone through the windows of her motor?"

"Perhaps, my dear child, perhaps. I do not say you are wrong. I am inclined to think, however, that they suppose these—er—social settlements are maintained by the County Council, and supported by the rates. And I rather think," added Sir Peter, lighting his cigar, "I rather think they believe they pay the rates themselves."

"Have you ever visited Saint Ruth's, Uncle Peter? But I am sure you haven't, or I should have known it. Now, how can you sit in your library here and analyze the thoughts and motives of those poor people? What must Saint Ruth's seem to them, compared with their miserable dwellings?"

"I can't say I have ever been there," owned Sir Peter, "but I am one of the Board of Trustees, in charge of the funds of several philanthropic institutions, and I hear these things discussed. But, my dear child, I do not wish to offer any objection to your going there if you are interested. Good idea; see the other side. Of course, you won't ever go alone, though. Those East End streets, you know—better take the car and have Thompson wait. I will make an inquiry or two of Sir Charles Anstruther at the Club; he takes a deep interest in—er—these social settlements,—Toynbee Hall and—Ten o'clock! I shall be late. Good-bye, my dear. Have a good time in your own way."

Phyllis may have confused inclination with duty a little; in any event, Mrs. Thorpe, whose kind face might have served for a likeness of Saint Ruth herself, found plenty of work for her. And Phyllis did love the babies; they did not all look alike to her, as they did to John. The Honorable Margaret found her quite at home when Thursday rolled around.

"Good for you, Phil!" was her salutation "My word! Don't they get dirty over-night!"

When a month had passed, it was Phyllis's custom to go to Saint Ruth's nearly every day. The work was engrossing; Dr. Thorpe warned her against overdoing it; his experience of volunteer workers was large.

"Oh! she will stay with us," laughed Mrs. Thorpe, to whom his misgivings were clear. "Miss Oglebay and I are to make calls in the neighborhood this afternoon."

"You will see sad sights," said the doctor; "but lots of funny ones, too."

To the Christmas ceremonies she brought Sir Peter, determined to be pleased, against his better judgment. He liked Dr. Thorpe at once; Sir Peter knew a man when he saw one. Mrs. Thorpe made him chuckle; so he liked her, too. The place was crowded; mostly with the very poor, in their best and at their best; but Sir Peter was surprised to meet a number of his acquaintances; not so surprised as they were, however.

There were two adjoining houses to be leased and connected with Saint Ruth's; a matter of arrangement was submitted by Dr. Thorpe. Sir Peter paced off the rooms for himself and gave his opinion. Dr. Thorpe consulted strangers on problems of obvious solution; the hard ones he and Mrs. Thorpe thought out after they went to bed.

They occupied front seats for the entertainment and Phyllis pointed people out to him.

"There is Father Carroll," she said, indicating direction with her programme. "Dr. Thorpe and Father Carroll and Mr. Landless are the committee. Father Carroll will give the address later; Mr. Landless arranged the songs. I helped him with that."

The entertainment was a success. Such proud mothers and fathers when the prizes were distributed! Every child had honorable mention, at least. Father Carroll told the funniest stories; how the crowd laughed. And when he talked seriously to them—you could have heard a pin drop.

When John was introduced to Sir Peter, he stood very straight; one stood at attention instinctively, before Sir Peter.

"Very pleased, indeed, to meet you, sir," said Sir Peter. "You don't happen to be of the Sussex Landlesses, do you; I knew a Hugh Landless at Cambridge."

"Yes, sir. They are my people. He was my father."

"Really. Let me see: he took orders, did he not? I hope I am not to infer——"

"He died last June, sir."

"I beg your pardon. I didn't know. I am sorry not to have seen more of him after he left the University. He was a most likeable fellow. We shall see more of you, I trust? Have you been long in London?"

"I came after—at once. There was nothing to keep me there, and I felt I must begin work in my profession immediately."

If John had been looking at Phyllis, he would have seen her face flush slightly; an anxious look came into her eyes. But he was looking at Sir Peter.

"What is it to be?" asked Sir Peter. "Not the Church?"

"No, sir." John's chin was noticeable now. "I follow the profession of poetry."

"Upon my word!" exclaimed Sir Peter, and would have said more.

"Isn't it fine, Uncle Peter!" Phyllis interrupted, her cheeks rosy, and her eyes starry pleaders for a lost cause. "Mr. Landless means to be a poet. That is his chosen profession. Don't you think it fine to make such a choice,—when one has the talent, of course?" Her earnest voice fell before Sir Peter's stony gaze.

"But poetry isn't a profession," declared Sir Peter roundly. He gave a short, hard laugh. "A pastime, perhaps; a recreation; but not a profession, Mr. Landless. But, pshaw! You don't expect me to take you seriously?"

There was an awkward moment. When Phyllis ventured a look at John, she was surprised to see him smiling.

"I assure you I am quite serious," he answered easily. "But I am accustomed to the other view. Thank you cordially for your willingness to see something of me. My father would have been pleased. When I was going through his papers I fancy I ran across your name in one of his old diaries. You won't think me disrespectful if I tell you that the diary spoke of you as 'Top' Oglebay."

"Good Gad!" said Sir Peter; "I have not heard that name in thirty years. Yes, I was 'Top' Oglebay."

Phyllis was glad to see Mark Holroyd and her dear Peggy Neville coming toward them. Mark was sheepish, at first, but Phyllis put him at his ease in no time. The Honorable Margaret and John Landless were sworn friends. John had applied the test to her. "Perfectly smashing!" was her expressed opinion of his profession; the foresight of Phyllis had smoothed the way.

"Well, well," said Sir Peter, as they drove homeward, "that was all very interesting and new. You will help me to remember to send a check to Thorpe in the morning, won't you, my dear?"

Phyllis, snuggled in furs, wondered if she dared to make a remark, ever so casually, about Mr. Landless; concluded she daren't, and resigned herself to think of him in silence.

A week later John presented himself, in evening dress. Sir Peter chatted with them for a while, and then buried himself in the "Engineering Review." Over this he nodded, oblivious, while John recited his verses to Phyllis at the other end of the long library. They were pretty verses; Phyllis thought them beautiful. You should have seen John's smile. He tried to screw his courage up to recite his "Lines to Phyllis," but at ten he hadn't, and Sir Peter awoke then, and reëntered the conversation.

John said good-night to Sir Peter in the library. He would have to Phyllis, also, but she went with him into the hall. Sir Peter followed them there, and said good-night again, in the friendliest way.

Phyllis called on Saint Ruth's neighbors often in the weeks that followed. Mindful of her uncle's command, she was never alone. Sometimes Mrs. Thorpe, at others Peggy Neville, and quite often John Landless went with her. The squalor and misery all about them was shocking to every sense; hideous at its worst; but the sharp, sweet, bitter-sweet memories of those winter afternoons will linger in Phyllis's mind as long as she lives. Sad memories and joyous ones! And one more lovely than all the rest.

There came a day when, long in advance of its arrival, there was a sudden hint of spring. Carrying a parcel, John walked beside Phyllis. The soft air was filled with magic. The mildness of it brought the tenement dwellers to windows and doors.

"Warm, isn't it?" remarked John, trying to fan himself with the parcel, and failing "Please don't walk so fast? I have something to tell you."

"Tell away, Mr. Landless, tell away," said Phyllis, gayly, and slackened her pace. "Is there good news of your book? Do the flinty-hearted publishers at last see their opportunity?"

"No, they don't," said John. "In fact—well, I am glad my opinion of my poetry isn't governed by theirs."

Phyllis stole a quick look at his face; but the chin was uplifted, confident as ever.

"Is the boys' club making progress?" she asked.

"Splendid! But I want to talk about you and me."

"You and me——" three little words. The subtle spring air wafted odors of Arcady.

For a few moments they walked on silently John was preparing his sentences, and he could never be hurried at that.

Phyllis knew what was coming; she knew, she knew! Ah! the rapture of it, the loveliness of it all! the poignant beauty of the still unspoken words. Phyllis was willing to wait; he had nothing to tell her she didn't know; but she wanted to hear it said, and remember each word to dream over afterward.

Slowly they walked, in the mean little street, past dark passages, leading into tenements; past knots of lounging men; little mothers with heavy babies struggling in their thin arms; rowdies with vacuous eyes; and girls flaunting cheap finery.

"May I call you Phyllis?" asked John, breaking the silence suddenly.



MAY I CALL YOU PHYLLIS?

"Why, yes; if you wish—and if you think you ought, you know."

"Well, then,—Phyllis. Your name has become to me the one name worth saying in the world. Ever since I met you for the first time, four months ago, I have been saying it, Phyllis; but I wanted to say it to you. So with your face: I know every mood of you by the lights and shadows of it. I can see it in your absence, almost as well as when I am with you. Your dear, sweet face, Phyllis, and your crown of gold, and your loyal eyes, I know by heart, as well as your name. Dear Phyllis. And I know, too, your quick and beautiful mind; its clear, wise judgment of the true and the false. I know its freedom from selfishness, and all littleness. I know its purity and its steadfastness. I know your capable hands, Phyllis, and your eager, pitying heart,—for I have seen them at work day after day, and week after week. I love you, my dearest, and I must tell you so. I think I have loved you longer than I have known you, but I know I have loved you as long. Perhaps you can care for me, and perhaps you can't. Sometimes I have dared to hope you might, but almost always I have known it was too high a hope. For I am only a poor poet, with nothing but faith in myself and love for you to offer. I know you have everything; a beautiful home, and beautiful clothes, and beautiful jewels, probably, though I haven't seen them. Every wish of yours is answered almost before you know it is yours. Life's promise to you is the earth and the fullness thereof; and I offer you only love. But in the end I shall win, Phyllis, I am perfectly certain of that. I shall never, never be rich; possibly never even well-to-do; but I love you, Phyllis; I love you. I want to ask you to wait for me—and be my wife."

With a pretty impulse she took one of his hands and raised it to her lips.

People were passing almost constantly. They were forced to separate, to pass a group of children, playing noisily on the pavement.

"I know I should have spoken to your uncle, first," he said, "but I knew he would say no, unless—unless you asked him, too."

"Ah! but I am so glad you told me to-day," said Phyllis. "I am so glad, so glad! Of all the days in the year I should have chosen to-day. You don't know why, do you? Because to-day is the fourteenth of February,—Saint Valentine's Day."

In a rush of words she told him of her mother's name, and of her mother, and of her valentines.

"You haven't told me you love me yet," said John.

"Can't you hear my heart singing it?" asked Phyllis.

"But I want to hear you say the words," he urged.

"I love you, John," said Phyllis softly.

"And you will promise to marry me—some day?" he asked.

"Yes—some day," she repeated shyly.

"And you are not afraid of the future?"

"Not a bit," said Phyllis. She smiled up at him. "You must take me home, now, and we will tell Uncle Peter."

They rode home on the top of a motor-bus. He tucked her hand into his greatcoat pocket, and held it there. Their mood was exalted. The streets were glorified; the gloomy buildings had become wonderful castles; their fellow-passengers were surrounded with the mystery of romance.

It grew colder rapidly; at the terminus they clambered down stiffly. Twilight had fallen when they reached the great gates of the park. John stopped and laid a detaining hand on Phyllis's arm. They kissed for the first time. Moment of ecstasy!

It is doubtful if they would ever have got past the park gates except for the warning whistle of a hurrying messenger boy, on a bicycle.

"My eye! What a smack!" he yelled, as he shot past. John glared, but Phyllis laughed happily.

He would have lingered as they walked down the long street to the house; but Phyllis had no doubt of the outcome; Sir Peter's frown was without terrors for her, but to John—how formidable. His footsteps lagged as they climbed the wide steps to the door.

"Sir Peter was called out of town by a telegram," said Burbage, in the hall. "He said he would be home by a late train. Thompson's to meet the twelve-thirty."

John clutched at this reprieve.

"I have a class at Saint Ruth's at seven," he said. "I must hurry away, Miss Oglebay." Burbage was helping Phyllis with her furs.

It was arranged he should call early the following morning. They exchanged significant looks, and he was gone. A ring, set with old-fashioned garnets, was left in the hand he had pressed; one of his mother's rings, worn on his watch-chain. Phyllis seized Burbage and danced her up and down the hall and back again, demoralizing the rugs. Then, having picked up her muff and thrown it at her, Phyllis raced up the stairs.

IV

Sir Peter was gruff at the breakfast table. The hurriedly written telegram, or his hasty reading of it, had led him a wild-goose chase. To find your host concealing surprise as he shakes hands, and to learn, at the end of ten minutes of feverish cordiality, that you were invited to dine the following night, is never comfortable, even at the home of an old friend. When two hours on a train each way are involved, and loss of one's sleep as well—! A bleak east wind, this morning, too, and Sir Peter was Jarndyced as to that quarter.

Worst of all, Phyllis looked like her mother, with her hair over her ears, like that; the likeness always irritated Sir Peter, but this morning it was particularly striking.

He accepted her morning endearments graciously, but Phyllis was glad the toast wasn't cold. She recognized unpropitious portents.

John was shown into the library at ten, sharp; his chin had come to his rescue. He gave Phyllis a bright look, and led up to the business in hand promptly.

Sir Peter, savoring his cigar, "The Times" spread over his knees, invited the young man to be seated; the young man preferred to stand, and did, very straight, his back to the fireplace. His eyes were large and serious his color high; his hands were behind him and the nervous fingers couldn't be seen. Phyllis viewed her champion with approving eyes, and sat on the edge of her chair.

"I am afraid my errand won't be an agreeable one to you, sir," John began. "I am sure it wouldn't be to me if—if I were you. But I must tell you my story from the beginning, if you are willing. You knew my father and something of my family. The people of his parish were tremendously fond of him. He gave them all of himself. He died poor, of course, and left me a good name and two hundred pounds a year. The countryside came to his funeral. The faces of the men were streaked with tears, as they stood by his grave, and women wept openly. I had letters of sympathy from every county in England, from Canada, and from far-away India. His spirit was as gentle as a child's; but he welded men and women to him as with bonds of steel. Yet he had never tried a cause, nor built a bridge, nor saved a life as a physician, nor laid one down as a soldier. He hasn't even left a sermon in print, for he never wrote one."

John hesitated. Sir Peter rustled "The Times" uneasily. Phyllis sat perfectly still, waiting.

"My father taught me more than I learned at Magdalene, and he gave me my ideals. Perhaps they are unusual, but I believe they are true. They may be told in a few words,—to face life fearlessly, live it cleanly and fully, and use it to what end one's conscience and one's talents direct without too much regard for the careless opinion of the world. I haven't anything behind me that I am ashamed of. I am far from being ashamed of my profession though I admit it has seemed to require defense rather often since I came to London. My father encouraged me to adopt it when I suggested the idea to him. I will tell you what he said to me. It was this: 'All work is fine. Of course, I think labor in the Church of God is the finest. But every profession offers opportunities for useful service; and trade is honorable to honorable men. But, John,' said he, 'one imperishable poem is worth more to mankind than all the gold and silver stored in the stronghold of the Bank of England. You may never write one, but a lifetime devoted to trying will not be wasted.' That was what my father said, sir."

"That would be like him as I recall him," said Sir Peter shortly. He had no inkling yet of John's errand. He was disposed to be generous to this quixotic young man for his father's sake.

Phyllis wondered how any one could look at John or hear him speak, and not love him; but she had momentary pangs of foreboding; a vague presentiment of impending unhappiness.

"I settled his few affairs,—he did not owe a penny,—and I came to London. There had been some correspondence between Dr. Thorpe and my father, and I called at Saint Ruth's. I thought I saw a chance of touching a larger life and of doing a little good; I have given some of my afternoons and all of my evenings there ever since. Dr. Thorpe is a brick, as you know, sir; he and his wife have been very kind to me. I was rather lonely at first, and—all that. My mornings I devote to my profession. I think I have made some progress, if only in finding the wrong ways of putting words together." John smiled. "There are a great many wrong ways and I am finding them all, one by one."

Sir Peter concealed his impatience; the dull ache in Phyllis's heart continued, she knew not why.

"I met Miss Oglebay at Saint Ruth's some months ago. I think I must tell you, sir, that from the very first moment I loved her."

Sir Peter half rose from his chair, in his sudden astonishment.

"The devil you say!" he gasped. "Upon my word, this is effrontery. You amaze me, Landless. You must have lost your senses. My niece"—he turned to Phyllis. Something he saw in her face diverted the torrent "Has Landless spoken of this to you?" he asked grimly.

"Yes, Uncle Peter. He told me yesterday that he—he cared for me, and we both hurried home to tell you, but you were——"

Sir Peter was out of his chair, and on his feet, now.

"You spoke to my niece before you came to me, Landless; knowing that I had met you—not more than three times, at most; that you had been in my house but once?" His voice was raised, his scowl threatening.

"I am sorry to have seen so little of you, sir," said John. "But I have seen a great deal of Phyllis."

"Where, sir?" demanded Sir Peter.

"At Saint Ruth's, and in its neighborhood," John answered evenly. "We have worked there together."

"How long has this been going on?" Sir Peter had regained control of himself, but his fine face was distorted. Phyllis's hands were clenched tightly in her lap. She was very pale.

"If you mean how long have we been meeting each other there, and going about in the neighborhood together——"

"I think my meaning is clear, sir."

"About four months, then. It seems a short time, but we have seen each other almost every day."

"Landless, you are a sneak," said Sir Peter quietly. "You are a damned sneak."

John's face flamed; he started as if struck by a whip.

"Oh, no! Uncle Peter!" cried Phyllis. "Oh, no, no! Uncle Peter."

"Leave the house, Landless."

"But Mr. Landless is my guest!" She was as pale as death, now, and breathing hurriedly; her eyes were unnaturally large, and there was a stricken look in them.

"You heard what I said, Landless." The voice was unyielding.

John moved toward the door, chin up and shoulders squared. Phyllis intercepted him swiftly, and put both hands appealingly on his arm.

"Wait a moment, John. Oh, wait a moment for my sake, John," she pleaded.

"I can't," said John. "You know that I can't."

"Ah, but you must, John, for my sake; for my sake."

She linked her hands closely about his arm and turned to her uncle. John, facing the door, moved slowly toward it, trying gently to disengage her hands, and forcing her to walk a step or two backward as she spoke.

"I must ask you to apologize to Mr. Landless, Uncle Peter," she said earnestly. "Whatever fault there has been, if there has been any, is mine. I have often spoken to you of meeting Mr.—of meeting John at Saint Ruth's. But I see now you didn't realize how often I went there, nor that I was with him so many of the times. I should have told you, Uncle Peter; the fault was mine, not John's. I am sorry, Uncle Peter, and I ask you to forgive me. But you must apologize to John." She looked at the stern face entreatingly; the doorway was very near.

"Oh, John," she implored, "I beg you to wait a moment; just a tiny second. Uncle Peter will tell you he didn't understand."

John stopped, and stood facing the doorway his back turned to Sir Peter.

They waited in silence; the slow ticking of the tall clock could be heard.

"I love him dearly, Uncle Peter," whispered Phyllis.

Ah! Valentine Germain; pretty, dead Valentine Germain; your daughter is wonderfully like you now.

"I ask you to wait, Landless," said Sir Peter.

His next words were calmly spoken; deliberate passionless; the more awful for that.

"I have known one reckless marriage, Landless, and one is enough for a lifetime. There is a taint in all of this of which you know nothing. This unhappy child's father was a fool. Her mother was a shallow, soulless, shameless creature—and worse. Her——"

"It is a lie!" cried Phyllis. "A cruel, cruel lie! God pity you, Uncle Peter, and forgive you. I am sorry for you; I am sorry for you. You have nursed those bitter, black thoughts in your heart for so many years that they have poisoned your life. But you have soiled my mother's memory for the last time in my presence. Never, never again!" A great sob choked her. "I am going to leave you, Uncle Peter. I am grateful to you for many years of generous, loving kindness. Indeed, I do not forget them; indeed, I am grateful. But I cannot stay here any longer. I should be miserable—wretched if I stayed. I cannot breathe in this room—in this house." She rocked her body as if in pain. She would have said more, but——

"Go, then!" said Sir Peter, through set teeth.

Phyllis ran from the room and out of the house, bareheaded; John snatched his hat and stick in the hall and overtook her as she fled through the iron grille. They ran together a short distance. Then Phyllis slackened the pace to a rapid walk. She was breathless, her hands pressed to her heart; a maid distraught. Pitiful, inarticulate little cries escaped her from time to time. John walked beside her, silently. They passed through the gates of the park, and she walked more slowly. Slowly, and still more slowly they wandered, aimlessly, under the leafless trees. She turned to him at last, her lips blue with the cold.

"You must take care of me now, John. I have no one else," she said quietly.

V

Was it Dr. Johnson who remarked that one great charm of London is that you may walk in a crowded street, eating a twopenny bun, without attracting a second glance? Or was it Benjamin Franklin? Not that it matters.

On a wintry morning, in a public conveyance a hatless and coatless young woman of unusual beauty, and a very self-conscious young man, sitting beside her, were not annoyed by more than a curious stare or two.

John had suggested a cab.

"We must economize from the very beginning," said Phyllis, with a wan smile.

She blushed deliciously when John handed her money, and she hurried into a shop. Such a simple, brown hat she found, a little shopworn; the long, warm coat she bought matched perfectly. Standing at the street corner, waiting for her, John counted the money in his pockets; enough for luncheon, fares, and even contingencies, he was glad to find. But he thought with satisfaction of the full quarter's income at his lodgings. When she rejoined him, John looked her over critically.

"I suppose that is a terribly cheap coat," he said, trying to remember other coats he had seen on her pretty figure.

"It is a lovely coat. I like it very much," replied Phyllis, stroking the flaps of the pockets.

"Well, it really is becoming," John assured her. "So is the hat."

"I think so, too," said Phyllis. "And I am particular about hats."

"I would be willing to wager five shillings you never had such an inexpensive one before," said John. Phyllis didn't answer that; and John added, "Your uncle will send your pretty clothes to—to—wherever you go," he ended lamely.

Phyllis held up two slender fingers.

"Two things I didn't like in one sentence" she admonished him. "First, Uncle Peter will send me nothing. Oh, John, I couldn't, couldn't take anything from him now. I really could not." She stopped suddenly "I must have my valentines, though. They were my mother's. They will go with

me wherever—That reminds me of the second thing you said I didn't like. You should not have said—'Wherever you go,' but 'Wherever we go!'"

She smiled at him bravely.

"Well, we will go to lunch now," said John, smiling, too, and making the most of the pronoun. "It is early, but we can sit and talk it all over."

"Where?" she asked, almost gayly. Her heart was bruised, but she meant to forget all that, and the thought of a lunch with John was a very good place to begin.

John took his bearings as to restaurants.

"If you could walk a short distance, there is Mildmay's," he suggested.

"I can walk miles," she answered; but she thought ruefully of her thin soles.

A white table between them, a waitress with rolls, and something hot in prospect; John thought the time had come.

"But, seriously, my darling, what shall we do? What is the best for you? Shall I take you to the Nevilles'?"

Phyllis looked blank.

"To be sent home in their car, bound hand and foot, and lectured besides!" she remonstrated.

"Well, Mrs. Thorpe could certainly put you up for the night. Odd I didn't think of her first."

"John, dear," began Phyllis, and then blushed, for the word had popped out of itself. However, after a moment she went on courageously—"Did you hear me say 'we,' a little while ago? We are going together wherever we go." She hesitated. "Don't you want me, John?" A swift look at his face, and hers glowed.

"My dearest, dearest girl." John's voice expressed his earnest sincerity. "I won't pretend to misunderstand your meaning, and I do so long to believe it possible that my head swims. But—"

"I perfectly hate 'buts,'" she interrupted. She put her elbows on the table, and flashed a smile at him, through her arched fingers.

"But, dearest, you must consider this seriously I want you to think for a moment. Need I tell you I love you more than life! Only yesterday I scarcely dared hope that you might be willing to wait years for me to—to earn enough with my pen to ask you to share my lot. To-day—the doors of Paradise are opened wide. Ah! my dear, my dear, I am eager to enter, but I fear for you. I should be taking advantage of your helplessness—"

"Listen, John," said Phyllis. "I am not the least bit helpless. There are dozens of houses to which I can go and dozens of friends who would be glad to have me come to them. But at every open door there is also a finger pointing inevitably back to Uncle Peter's house. And there I shall never, never go. So far as your lot is concerned—it is mine. For better or for worse John, dear. But I trust you, and believe in you, and think perhaps there is a high destiny for you. I want to share in that, too, if you will let me, please. And I can't do so fully unless we go, hand in hand, all the way, together. I am not dismayed by the thought of doing without a great many unnecessary things. And the really vital things I hope to have more of than ever—with you. And so, John, if you don't mind, please, we will eat our lunch like sensible young people, and afterward—and afterward—Now, John, I simply cannot say that. You must say that, you know. I haven't left much of it for you to say, but that little I insist upon your saying for yourself."

Ah! Valentine Germain! pretty, dead Valentine Germain! your daughter is wonderfully like you now.

John looked steadily into her trustful eyes; a long, long look.

"Then I ask you to marry me this afternoon my dearest," he said solemnly. "And—oh! Phyllis, I pray God you may never reproach me."

"I never shall, John," she answered. "For I honestly believe I am to be the happiest and the proudest girl in England."

"Wich of you gets the chocolate, and wich the tea?" asked the waitress.

They were married before three; it was amazing how short, how simple, so marvelous an event could be. John spent ten minutes at the telephone. A quarter of an hour was passed in the coldly official precincts of Doctors' Commons. In the Faculty Office, through an open doorway, Phyllis caught glimpses of the formalities incident to securing a license. A clerk filled up a printed form; John made affidavit to the clerk's accuracy of transcription; a stamp was affixed; a document was blotted, examined; the dotting of an *i* was attended to, and the dot blotted; a bank-note changed hands. The license in his pocket, John rejoined her.

"We must hurry now, darling," said he.

"Oh, dear!" said Phyllis. "I am glad to hurry away from here. That clerk's face was so unsympathetic."

Half an hour after they entered the dark, quiet church, the clergyman, with a cold in his head, had pronounced them "bad ad wife."

They were on top of a motor-bus, jolting cityward, and John was gayly addressing her as Mrs. Landless, before Phyllis realized that it was really all over—that the irrevocable step was taken—that they were married. The whirl of her thoughts then!

At the terminus, John bought a newspaper and scanned its advertisements. They started on their search for lodgings. His room was in Whitechapel, near Saint Ruth's.

"It is up under the roof, and looks over the week's washing of the submerged tenth; it won't do at all!" he had declared.

The idea of a hotel impressed Phyllis unpleasantly.

"Well, then," said John, "we must look for a new tree in which to build our nest."

How many dissonant bells jangled to their touch; how many dreary hallways they entered and stood waiting in; how many steep staircases they climbed; how many rooms they peeped into—one look enough; how many others they viewed at greater length, but with no more satisfaction in the end; a few, John thought, had possibilities, but Phyllis could not bear the sight of them!

The curious questions they were asked; as though the lodgers instead of the lodgings were undergoing inspection. Most of the lodging-house keepers asked John where he was employed; some of them wanted to know if he could give references.

"How cime you to leave your last plice?" was one shrill question.

In utter weariness Phyllis at last consented to John's suggestion; he would make a preliminary survey and she should be called into counsel only in promising cases. They were few enough. She walked up and down monotonous streets while John was indoors; to be told, time after time, that was not the place they sought.

Even John might have been discouraged; on the contrary, that young man's chin rose to his difficulties. But Phyllis's eyes grew more and more troubled when darkness fell, and the lights in windows reminded them that they were still homeless.

Seeking new bills, "To Let," they found themselves in a small square, surrounded by houses; a fine neighborhood in its day.

"Oh dear, John, I fear I can walk no farther," said Phyllis. "We must go to a hotel after all, though I detest the idea. My shoes are worn through."

He led her to a bench in the little square, and kneeling before her took off one shoe, and then the other, and carefully fitted each with a new sole, made from a page of "The Daily Chronicle."

"If I fail as a poet I shall be a cobbler," he said to her brightly.

He sat down beside her. "My dearest, I am so sorry. I have blundered through this afternoon, horribly. Perhaps I should have taken you to my own room at once, poor as it is. Perhaps I should have sought advice from Mrs. Thorpe. Perhaps I should have insisted on a hotel, for a few days, until we could look about. At least, we might have had a cab. I have been most inconsiderate. I am so strong in the new hope and strength you have given me that I haven't thought enough for you. My poor, tired Phyllis."

He held her hands; his face contrite. She was too dispirited for words, but she patted his hand softly.

As they sat there, John saw a lighted shop-window, not fifty yards distant.

"Sit here and rest, darling, while I run over there and inquire for any lodgings in this vicinity. If there are none, I will call a cab and we will go to a hotel. Think of the beautiful dinner we shall have. Our wedding dinner, dearest! I warn you I mean to be extravagant." He leaned over her and kissed her, and then ran across the street.

Then she allowed herself to cry for the first time. Poor, sad, tired little bride, whose wedding day had been so different from all her girlish dreams of it. She cried quietly, on the bench, alone, in the darkness. She was cold and tired and lonely.

John came back on the run, from the opposite direction.

"I inquired at the bookseller's shop," said he. "He directed me to the house in which he lodges himself. He recommended it so highly I thought I would leave you alone for a few minutes longer and see the rooms. Phyllis, I really believe I have found what we want. There are three rooms, though one is very small. There is the coziest little sitting-room, with a fireplace and an easy-chair. Adjoining it is a smaller room. But the bedroom is large, and has two windows. The place is spotlessly clean. And the woman who lets the rooms is a wholesome, good-hearted soul; I am sure you will like her. The terms are a little—well, just a little higher; but the woman says, of course, that is to be expected—with the view of the square from our windows."

John looked at Phyllis doubtfully. "Do you think, dearest, that you could see these for yourself? It isn't far, and I will not ask you to look at another place if you don't like this one."

She drew new courage from his hopefulness They walked the length of the little square.

John rang. The door opened, and a motherly looking woman stood aside to let them enter. Phyllis stood directly below a flaring gas-jet, as she turned to wait for their conductress.

The woman screamed and her hands went to her heart.

"Valentine Oglebay!" she exclaimed.

"That was my mother's name," said Phyllis. She was too tired to be surprised, even. The woman took a step forward.

"Your mother! Then you must be little Phyllis. You don't remember—"

"Farquharson!" cried Phyllis. "Farquharson! Oh! dear, dear Farquharson."

They were crying in each other's arms, repeating names endearingly, incredulously.

VI

John stood staring.

Finally, Mrs. Farquharson, tears streaming down her kindly face, held Phyllis away from her and looked at her long and lovingly.

"My dear, my dear, my deary dear. How ever did you come to find me?"

"I didn't," replied Phyllis. "John found you. He—we—we are looking for lodgings. We—we were married this afternoon. We have been hunting for rooms for hours—and this was the last place——" Phyllis faltered. She turned to John, and then to Mrs. Farquharson. "This is Mr. Landless, my—this is my dear, dear old Nurse Farquharson. She knew my mother and father, and she took care of me when I was a little, little girl. Oh, John, you cannot know how glad I am to see her!"

They shook hands.

"I told her she would like you," said John to Mrs. Farquharson.

"And to think of her being married," said Mrs. Farquharson. "And coming to my house with her husband, looking for a place to live, and me with three rooms all ready for them as soon as ever I can get a fire laid in the grate."

She turned to Phyllis again.

"Just you sit down here in the warm hall a minute, my deary dear," she said, "while I get—though maybe you would like to look at them first. Yes, of course. Come straight upstairs, Miss—my dear. If you decide to stay—"

"Oh, Farquharson! How can you suggest that we shouldn't stay!" said Phyllis.

"Never would I hint such a thing," replied Mrs. Farquharson. "But, of course, there are only the three rooms, and one of them small, to be sure, and no others in the house unoccupied. This way,—these are the rooms, Miss—my dear. And as I says to the young gentleman—your husband, that is—the sitting-room is that cozy, with the fire, and the bedroom is airy. The view is something pretty, I do assure you. Oh! my deary dear, my deary dear! How ever did you come to find me?"

It was hard to tell whether Mrs. Farquharson was laughing or crying. Phyllis sank into the easy-chair with a sigh.

"I shall never get up again," she said to John.

"Slippers," said Mrs. Farquharson, and vanished.

John kissed Phyllis and tried, awkwardly, to take off her hat. He managed it finally, and a loose strand of beautiful hair fell over one of her ears. She tucked it away.

"Isn't it too wonderful to be true!" she said. John's heart was too full for speech. He turned away to hide his working mouth.

Mrs. Farquharson was on her knees before Phyllis a moment later. The slippers were too large, but how welcome to her aching feet. One of her shoes, upturned, caught Mrs. Farquharson's eye. She inspected John's handiwork; then gave Phyllis a startled look.

"In February, my dear. And on your wedding day! How ever came it? With newspapers, all wadded in. Whatever's happened?"

"It has all been very sudden, dear Farquharson" said Phyllis. "I will tell you all about it as soon as I have rested a little. Oh! It is good, good, to be with you. I am so glad, so glad. Aren't you glad, John? Just think—if you hadn't tried once more. If you hadn't asked at that little shop."

"Shop?" inquired Mrs. Farquharson.

"The little old bookshop, at the other aid of the square," explained John.

"Oh, Mr. Rowlandson's. He sent you here. He would, to be sure. My oldest lodger, sir, and the easiest to do for—though odd. Here's Genevieve with the tea. Don't put the tray on the sofa, Genevieve On the table, of course. Whenever will you learn? Here, drink this, my deary dear. It will prepare your stomach for something more. I am getting your supper ready now downstairs, and the young gentleman's. There's a chop. Do drink a little of the tea, my dear, even if you don't want it. It's for your best. Do you like apricots as well as ever you did? Oh, whoever has had the bringing of you up, that I should have had! The many times I've thought. And your poor dear mother and father both taken at once, too."

"I went to my Uncle Peter," said Phyllis "I have lived there ever since."

"Sir Peter Oglebay—your father's brother I might have known." Mrs. Farquharson nodded her head vigorously. "Though he was terrible down on you—To think of that now! And so you have been here in London all these many years! And me never to know! Deary me!"

"We—my uncle did everything to find you," Phyllis assured her. "He even advertised for you. I cried for you very often when I was little, dear Farquharson."

"Did you, indeed, my dear?" asked Mrs. Farquharson, smiling, and wiping her eyes with her apron. "And advertised for me. In the papers. Reward offered and no questions asked. I've read them myself, but never did I think."

"Oh, yes. I wanted you very badly," Phyllis assured her again. "I used to tease Burbage when I was naughty, by telling her you were never cross with me."

"And who is Burbage?" asked Mrs. Farquharson.

"She is my uncle's housekeeper. She was very good to me, too. But I missed you dreadfully. You know, John, my mother and father were away from home for weeks at a time, and Farquharson took such care of me."

"Such games as we had," said Mrs. Farquharson reflectively; and then to John,—*"She was everything whatever from Mary, Queen of Scots, to a dromedary, I've beheaded her many's the time, and her humps was the pillows off her little bed. If Genevieve hasn't burned those chops to a cinder, they must be ready, and why ever she doesn't bring them up I do not know."*

What a dainty supper! John did full justice to it.

Mrs. Farquharson brooded over Phyllis; but she could eat nothing.

The kind-hearted woman maintained a constant stream of talk, in which lodgers, rooms, chops, apricots, and toast, and the old times were inextricably intermingled.

The first-floor front and his wife had seen better days; in stocks, they were. The vagaries of Mr. Rowlandson, the bookseller, third-floor front, the walls of his rooms lined with—what do you think? No, not with books, nor pictures, but with glazed cases containing old patch-boxes and old fans. Mrs. Farquharson had seen Mr. Singleton and Mr. Leonard once. But the trio of painters was inseparable no longer. Mr. Knowles had married their favorite model. *"The hussy!"* said Mrs. Farquharson.

One reminiscence followed another.

"Ah, me," she sighed. "Your father and mother was a pair of lovers if ever there was a pair. As long as I knew them, they never had a word—much less words. 'Pard' he called her. 'What shall we do to-day, Pard?' he would ask her of a morning. She would want him to be at his pictures 'On such a sunshiny morning!' he would say. And the next day, maybe, it would rain. 'You know I can't paint these dark days,' says he. And off they would go, on some harum-scarum or other, like a couple of children. Like a couple of children—and so they ever were, too. Do you mind my speaking of them?"

"I love it," Phyllis assured her. "I—you know I have had no one with whom I could talk about my mother and father. Uncle Peter—" She could not finish the sentence.

"Yes, yes, my deary dear, I know," said Mrs. Farquharson soothingly. "Your mother knew what he thought. Often and often she told me she wished she could find a way to make Sir Peter not think so hard of her. 'Oh, Farquharson,' says she, 'he thinks I snared Robert. If he only knew how hard I tried to refuse him.' She was wild for a stage career when first they met. It grieved her sorely that your uncle didn't know the rights of it; but, bless your heart, she couldn't bear the thought of any one, high or low, not being good friends with her. She was that tender-hearted, you wouldn't believe. But along with it as proud as—as—I can't think of his name—that makes the matches. You know, my dear."

Mrs. Farquharson mused over her memories

"Your father was her first love-affair," she resumed. "She was wrapped up in her acting till she met him. Her mother and father were both on the stage. Did you know that? Yes, my deary dear, she told me a costume-trunk was her cradle, and a dressing-room the only nursery that ever she knew. She hated to give it all up, but she did; your mother loved your father beyond all that ever I saw or heard of, and he worshiped the ground she walked on. Strong words, my dear, but true as true."

It was midnight before they knew it. The dark circles under her darling's eyes gave Mrs. Farquharson occasion for concern. Genevieve had visited the bedroom with clean linen in her arms.

"I will take a short walk," whispered John to Phyllis.

Poor Phyllis. She needed her old nurse; the excitement and fatigue had exhausted her completely.

Standing in the square, looking upward at the stars, a white-faced poet, his thoughts unutterable, at last saw the lights in her windows grow dim and disappear.

On the stairs he met Mrs. Farquharson. Her voice was anxious as she bade him good night.

From the little sitting-room John could see into the bedroom. The light shone on the face of Phyllis asleep.

He sat watching the dying fire for a long while. Finally he rose, slowly wound up his watch, turned out the gas, and lay down on the sofa. He soon slumbered peacefully.

In the gray dawn Phyllis awakened. Recollections slowly crowded upon her consciousness. She rose and stood by the window, looking out on the quiet square, and at the houses, opposite, emerging from obscurity with the growing light. She stepped to the door and peeped into the other room. John lay on the sofa, sleeping soundly, one arm flung boyishly over his head.

The rooms were very cold. She took the coverlet from her bed and spread it over him.

He stirred a little. "Thanks, old chap," he murmured sleepily.

Phyllis tiptoed back to bed.

VII

Within a fortnight their rooms were transformed. Mrs. Farquharson declared she would not have known them herself.

John's old room, dismantled, yielded his bookshelves and his books; his father's old desk, a Sheraton, and therefore a beauty and joy forever; and his armchair, which took its place in a corner of the cheery sitting-room and seemed to say—"Come, sit here, and be comfortable," as naturally as though it had been established there for years. Certainly it had this advantage over the other chairs; it was so roomy John and Phyllis could sit in it together; and often did.

There were photographs of his father as a young man; and of his mother, a flower-like creature, who had faded like a flower, leaving a fragrant memory. Phyllis gazed at her picture with wistful eyes; and once, when John was absent, held it to her lips.

But Phyllis's old valentines gave the rooms their charm. A dozen or more, framed in dull gold, hung on the walls, their delicate coloring softened by the passing of many years; their sentiment as fresh and gentle as of yesterday.

On the day after her marriage, Phyllis had written this letter:—

DEAR UNCLE PETER:—

John Landless and I were married yesterday. We have found a pleasant place to live, with Farquharson, my old nurse. I hope you will try to think of me as kindly as you can, and kindly, too, of John, whose heart is pure gold, and all mine, as mine is his. I want you to know I am sorry, even when I am happiest,—and, indeed, Uncle Peter, I am happy,—sorry for the pain my thoughtlessness gave you? sorry for the mischief that was done, unconsciously, because I did not tell you, long ago, that I was learning to love him. It would have been far, far better to have told you? I am truly, truly sorry. Some day, when you want me to, I hope to tell you all this much better than I can write it.

I have a favor to ask of you, Uncle Peter. I want my valentines. Could Burbage put them all in the leather cases, and send them, by Thompson, to Saint Ruth's? And, please, I ask you to send nothing else? just the valentines, please, Uncle Peter.

Always lovingly,
PHYLLIS.

On the following afternoon, John went to Saint Ruth's to tell the news, and announce his unavoidable absence from the Settlement for the month to be devoted to his book.

"And to you," he said, as he kissed Phyllis good-bye.

"Tell Mrs. Thorpe we shall both be back in a month, eager to do more than ever," was her reply to this. "Tell her, please, not to think we are selfish; but the little book is so important just now."

Phyllis listened, smilingly, to Mrs. Farquharson's gossip about her lodgers.

"Never again," he says to me solemnly, and pointing at me with his long finger. "The keys I shall leave in the cases as I ever have, but never again touch dust-cloth to my fans and patch-boxes!" And never have I since that day, which is seven years if it's a minute. He dusts them himself of a Sunday morning. I've caught him at it!" Mrs. Farquharson picked a thread from her skirt, and carefully wound it around her finger.

"Speaking of catching him at it reminds me of that Mrs. Burbage," she continued. She never referred to her save as "that" Mrs. Burbage; the designation expressed anathema. "I have wondered, did ever it occur to you whether Sir Peter asked that Mrs. Burbage to take the advertisements to the papers; it being my belief that if he ever did she never did. And consequently, however could I see them, and know my deary dear wanted her old nurse?"

The whirl of a motor, immediately below the windows, caused Mrs. Farquharson to look out.

"Whoever is that now? A man in leggings and a middle-aged woman in spectacles. I never set eyes on her before. He's beginning to take the little leather trunks out. Whatever is—"

Phyllis's intuition was swift as light. A glimpse from another window, and—

"It is Uncle Peter's car, Farquharson," she exclaimed. "The boxes are the old Valentines you remember so well—that I sent for yesterday. The woman is—"

"That Mrs. Burbage, of course. She found me quick enough when she wanted to!"

Phyllis was in flight down the stairs. Mrs. Farquharson smoothed her hair, and followed majestically. They met in the hall. While Thompson carried the boxes up, Phyllis introduced the rivals. They talked for a few moments constrainedly, surveying each other as though watchful for an opening. When the last of the cases had gone up Phyllis said:—

"I want to hear news of my uncle, and show Burbage our pretty rooms. You will excuse us, Farquharson, won't you?"

"Certainly, my dear," she replied; then, addressing Mrs. Burbage—"Shall I light the gas for you, ma'am? I see your age is beginning to tell on your eyes."

"Oh, no, thank you, ma'am," replied Burbage. "I can see perfectly. Though your hall *is* uncommonly dark."

Both shots told. Phyllis hurried Burbage upstairs.

There was little to learn. Sir Peter had not spoken her name since she had left. He had given her note to Burbage.

"Carry out these directions implicitly," he had said. But Burbage allowed herself latitude; the directory gave Mrs. Farquharson's address—and here, rather than to Saint Ruth's she had brought the valentines—eager to see her darling,—now a bride.

Phyllis chatted happily with her for an hour. She spoke affectionately of her uncle. "It will all come out right in the end," she concluded.

Burbage promised to come often to see her.

"My pretty," she whispered, as she held Phyllis's hand, in parting, "I warn you of this Mrs. Farquharson. A woman with eyes like hers is not to be trusted."

The framed valentines were hung when John came home. Thus they were the first of their Lares and Penates; the first of the pretty things that made a home of lodgings.

"Ah, John, you have no idea how I love my old valentines," said Phyllis that evening, as they looked around the rooms. "I love them dearly for themselves—as well as for their association with my mother. Aren't they sweet and pretty?"

"Indeed, they are," said John warmly. "Don't they light up the rooms, though?"

And so, with John's books and furniture, and Phyllis's valentines, the rooms were transformed. "I wouldn't know them myself" was Mrs. Farquharson's oft-repeated comment.

Of course you have read "Old Valentines, and Other Poems," by John Landless; that is the disadvantage under which this story labors. You know, beforehand, that the little book won instant hearing; you know that "Lyrics" quickly followed, and the favorable verdict of the critics whose good opinion was most worth having. When that wonderful epic—"London: A Poem"—made its appearance, our poet was fairly on the royal road.

But you must pretend you don't know all this; and that "Lyrics" and "London" are not, at this moment, in plain sight on your reading-table. You must forget that you saw John's portrait in the last "Bookman." Unless you are good at make-believe, it is no fun at all. You must know nothing of the rosy glow on the peaks of Parnassus, so that you may struggle with John and Phyllis up the first, heart-breaking, storm-swept steps.

We are back in their pretty rooms now. Are you there? Very well, then; we proceed.

They had lived at Mrs. Farquharson's for a fortnight. John worked steadily at his desk; Phyllis sewed. Poetry reads very smoothly on a printed page; but Phyllis had not realized that ten satisfying lines is a fair morning's stint; nor that a little book of synonyms is first aid in emergency cases; nor that one may talk as much as one pleases at times, but must be quiet as a mouse when the pen is scratching away so busily; she had to learn that when John's eyes were full of anguish he was probably at his best.

"Phyllis," said John, one morning, looking up from his writing.

"Yes, dear."

"That's all—just Phyllis," he replied, smiling.

She beamed at him over her embroidery. The pen resumed its slow progress. Phyllis rocked happily. When the pen paused again, she watched his face. It welcomed speech, so—

"What word from the publishers?" asked Phyllis.

"They will have none of it," replied John. "They all tell me the verses have merit; they all regret the public taste; but—in short, business is business."

Phyllis bit her thread in two. John continued

"If I could get the first little book out,—and reviewed in the papers that count,—I have enough verses for a second, to follow at once, and catch the favoring breeze;—but if there is no first, how can there be a second?"

Phyllis shook her head. The idiosyncrasies of the publishing trade were beyond her comprehension. How they could refuse such beautiful—Well!

"I had a proposal from Kendall, Ransome & Company yesterday afternoon that I meant to have told you about—only Miss Neville's and Mark Holroyd's coming to spend the evening knocked it out of my head."

"Wasn't it dear of them! Didn't Peggy look sweet in that blue gown? What was the proposal, John? Any proposal is encouraging isn't it?" asked Phyllis.

"I suppose so," John answered, running his hand through his hair. "But this one couldn't be accepted under the circumstances. They offered to publish the book if I would pay the cost of printing and relinquish copyright."

"The idea!" exclaimed Phyllis.

"I laughed at it myself," replied John. "I had another reason for laughing than the one they knew, though. For, really, I am so sure of my little book that I might have accepted the offer—if I had the money."

"Would it cost a great sum?" inquired Phyllis.

"Something less than fifty pounds for the first edition; a small edition. If there were a second, of course, they would pay the charges, but I should get nothing."

Phyllis sat sewing thoughtfully. Suddenly John saw that her eyes were filled with tears.

"If there weren't me to think of, you might—" she began.

John had her in his arms in the big chair in less time than it takes to tell it. When her troubled heart was comforted, he returned to his desk.

"However, I have been the rounds of the publishers now. I started with the best and I have seen them all. I have condescended to the smallest. I have even tried the Populars. But it has all been of no use. Same story everywhere. 'Marked ability, but we regret.'"

"If you had friends with influence——" Phyllis began, but John interrupted her.

"I wouldn't if I could, and I haven't if I would," said he. "But the fact is there's less of that than you think. 'Pull' isn't required; I can say that even when I am at the end of my rope. Books are published honestly, on their quality; mine simply hasn't the quality the public likes. It may be Art—but will it sell? That's the question."

Having plumbed the depths, John took up his pen again; his chin resolute as ever.

That evening when Mrs. Farquharson tapped at the door, John was teaching Phyllis chess.

"Just in time, Farquharson," said Phyllis. "I am routed horse and foot—by a man without a queen, too."

The chessboard was set aside; a chair brought forward; but Mrs. Farquharson would not sit down; she rarely would when John was present.

"No, my dear, no. I just dropped in for a minute—not to disturb ever. Besides, Genevieve's walking out with her young man, and there's the bell to watch. No, I just dropped in to say that Mr. Rowlandson—the rooms over yours, Mr. Landless—Mr. Rowlandson says, 'Tell the young lady she may like to go up to my rooms some morning when I am not there to bother her,' he says, 'and look at my fans and patch-boxes. They're pretty, too,' says he, 'as pretty as her valentines.'"

And so they are, my deary dear, and you must go up and see them. Oh, yes, he knows all about your valentines. He bought them for your uncle, at your father's sale, and a pretty penny they cost. More than two hundred pounds. It seems your uncle was bidding against some public institution."

Mrs. Farquharson replaced the proffered chair.

"Is the poetry book to be out soon, sir?" she asked. "I hope so, I am sure. I'm that anxious to see your name in gold letters on the cover. Good-night, sir. Good-night, my dear. Are you certain you don't want more coals? Well, then, good-night."

John and Phyllis had their usual good-night talk by the fire.

"And so Mark Holroyd and the Honorable Margaret are engaged," said John, replacing a fallen coal with the tongs.

Phyllis put her feet on the low, brass fender, and tucked in her skirt.

"Yes, they are engaged," she replied. "It is to be announced very soon. Peggy says it shouldn't be called an engagement, but rather a two-year probationary period. She could hardly wait to tell me. The darling! That was why she was so anxious to help me unwrap the rug in the little room."

An old prayer-rug, with a golden tree of life in its deep blue center, was the Honorable Margaret's wedding gift; Mark sent a coffee percolator.

Phyllis sighed.

"She will have a beautiful wedding," she said softly. "Ah, John, you don't know what that means to a girl."

John poked the fire.

Suddenly Phyllis laughed.

"How could I have forgotten to tell you about the cards?" she continued. "It was so funny, and so like Peggy Neville. You see,—her card was fastened to the rug with a bit of ribbon—and on it was written—'With love and sympathy.' When Peggy saw it she shrieked. 'Oh, Phyllis!' she said, 'mother's cousin, Caroline Molesworth, has been at the hospital for a week; day before yesterday she had her surgical operation, and yesterday I sent flowers. I wrote the cards at home,—and they got mixed. On hers is written—"May all your days be as full of joy as these last few days have been!"""

In the night Phyllis found herself wide awake. She lay quietly considering a new thought that had come to her, somehow, while she slept. If she only dared! Oh, no, no! She couldn't ask him. And yet—She fell asleep again wondering whether—perhaps, just possibly—she could do it, if she kept her mind firmly fixed on John's book.

VIII

Bookshops are the most charming of all shops because they relate themselves so intimately to their visitors. Mr. Rowlandson's gained by its setting—at the corner of the green square. Not a very good place for trade, you would say. However, he thrived.

His shop-window does not differ from a score of others one may see, on a morning's walk: a shallow bay-window, with small, square panes of inferior glass; the familiar array of old books turn their mellow title-pages toward the light; a window designed for lingering. Three rows, or four, of books—and a few old prints—may be examined from the front; these whet the appetite. But two other rows are so set in the window as to necessitate sidelong inspection, and tempt the observer to take two steps around the corner. Here, to be at ease, one must stand with one foot on the first of the four stone stairs leading downward to the door; stairs worn by the footfalls of four generations of book-hunters. Just within the door one sees an alluring stack of books, the topmost sustaining a neatly printed sign—"Sixpence—your choice."

In short—the foot once placed upon the first of these descending stairs returns not to its fellow. A little bell rings, and one is inside.

Against the background of his overflowing shelves, with his old-fashioned clothes, his stooping shoulders, his iron-gray hair, and his firm, tender, and melancholy face,—you will never visit Samuel Rowlandson's shop without wishing to frame him as he stands, and set him in the window, among the other rare old prints.

He must have known you a long, long time to intrude a particular book upon your notice; and then with the air of consulting a connoisseur rather than suggesting a purchase. Yet he is a shrewd dealer. Not for Samuel Rowlandson is the fairly marked price on the fly-leaf; nor even hieroglyphics representing cost. A book is worth what it will fetch; and every customer's

purchasing power is appraised with discrimination, concealed, indeed, but most effective.

The shop grows larger as your eyes become accustomed to the gloom of its remoter part. There are four thousand books on those overweighted shelves; all sorts and conditions of books; big folios and little duodecimos, ragged books and books clothed by Rivière and Bedford. Once he thought a Roger Payne binding had found its way to the shop, an inadvertent bargain; but, alas! the encyclopædia dashed his tremulous hopes; years before the date on the title-page that seedy but glorious craftsman had laid down his tools forever.

The shelves are catholic: Samuel Pepys, immortally shameless; Adam Smith, shaken; Beaumont and Fletcher, in folio as they should always be found; Boswell's Johnson, of course, but Blackstone's "Commentaries" also; Plutarch's "Lives" and Increase Mather's witches; all of Fielding in four stately quarto volumes; Sterne, stained and shabby; Congreve, in red morocco, richly gilt; Molière, pocket size, in an English translation; Gibbon in sober gray; Burton's "Anatomy"—

"The only book," says Mr. Rowlandson, "that ever put me to sleep two hours before I wished."

Here is Addison's "Spectator," its near neighbor Steele; the "Gentleman's Magazine," a long run this, but not complete; rare Ben Jonson, rubbed at the joints; Spenser's "Faerie Queen," with marginal notes in a contemporary hand; the "History of the Valorous and Witty Knight Errant," in sable morocco, with armorial decorations; Tacitus in all his atrocity, Herbert, all gentleness.

Overweighted shelves! Overweighted, indeed, for the books stand double-breasted. One must never assume a volume is not in stock because it is not in sight, though Mr. Rowlandson himself does not always know.

"Otway," he ponders, in response to your inquiry; "let me think. H'm. Yes, yes, to be sure, behind the set of 'English Men of Letters.' Not there? H'm. Well, I must have sold him, then. Oh, no. You will find him in that row of old dramatists, behind the—yes, there! A little to the left—Ah! of course. Old Otway, and a very nice, sound copy, too."

Not that all the books in Mr. Rowlandson's shop are old; his clientele is too diversified. The moderns are there, too. Thackeray and Dickens; Meredith and Carlyle; Tennyson; gallant old Sir Walter in various editions.

"Lockhart's 'Life,'" he would say, handling a volume from one hand to the other. "The saddest true story in the world"; and then, brightening, "Two pound, ten."

Mr. Barrie is always handsomely represented on Mr. Rowlandson's shelves. He is one of the few authors Mr. Rowlandson will recommend to casual customers. He suggests "Margaret Ogilvy: A Memoir. By her Son." "But are you sure it is by Barrie?"—they ask. He has sold more than four hundred copies. Once a year for several years he has written a letter to Mr. Barrie's publishers: "Why don't you bring out his Plays?" he pleads. "Think of the thousands of people in the provinces and in America who can't see them on the stage."

Mr. Rowlandson treasures a half-promise from Mr. Hewlett that he will write a novel around the picturesque, if unheroic, figure of François Villon. "I am keeping his letter," says Mr. Rowlandson, "to insert in the book—when it is published."

Of De Morgan he observes, sententiously: "Too late." Joseph Conrad's novels he shelves next to Stevenson's, significantly. He has a high regard for Arthur Christopher Benson's essays. "But does the man think I have as much shelving as the Museum?" he growls.

But these newer books are the minority. The composed, brown calf bindings give the shop its tone,—and its faint odor, too; a cultivated taste, the liking for that odor of old books.

Mr. Rowlandson's desk is in the alcove at the back of the shop; and in its lowest drawer, oftener than elsewhere, his gray cat, Selima, stretches her lazy length.

On a bright, crisp morning, nearly a week after Phyllis had lain awake thinking, Mr. Rowlandson sat at this desk, looking through his post, which consisted chiefly of book-catalogues. Having laid these aside, he opened a bulky parcel the post had brought. It proved to be a thick, square, black volume; a most unattractive book. But Mr. Rowlandson viewed it with interest.

"My me! My me!" he exclaimed, and read the title-page; "'Proceedings of the British Engineering Society for the Year 1848.' So, you have finally come to light, old hide-and-seek! Sir Peter Oglebay will be pleased. From Brussels, of all the unlikely—Well, well, I must remember to cancel the advertisement in the 'Athenaeum.'"

He picked up a blue saucer from the floor and stood, for a moment, watching Selima's quick paw, engaged in ablutions.

"Over your ear it goes," said he. "That means customers."

He began his morning's work with a feather duster. Occasionally he straightened a row of books. The bell tinkled, and Phyllis, in her brown coat and hat, stood, hesitant, at the door. She carried a parcel.

"Mr. Rowlandson?" she asked timidly.

"My name," he replied. "And you are Mrs. Landless. I have seen you before, although you have

not seen me."

"I have heard a great deal about you, though, from Farquharson," said Phyllis. "And yesterday I took advantage of your invitation to see the pretty things in your rooms; I want to thank you for the opportunity; they are lovely old things."

"Mrs. F. took you up, did she? Well, they are pretty, and I am glad they pleased you. A foolish fancy, Mrs. Landless; a foolish fancy for an old man like me. But I am very fond of my fans and patch-boxes."

"I should think you would love them," said Phyllis. "Where in the world did you find them all?"

"Oh, in all sorts of odd nooks. They turn up when one is looking for them. Everything does, Mrs. Landless. That is one of the queer things about collecting. I could tell you some curious stories. Your old valentines, now. My me! The attics of the Continent must have been ransacked for them. It is very interesting. But the scattering of a collection is the sad part; saddest when books are dispersed. Only the other day I saw an autograph letter of De Quincey's,—the opium-eater, you know; it was written to the auctioneer who sold his library. It seems De Quincey had his son buy a few of the books at his own auction. The poor old fellow could not bear the thought of parting with them, I fancy, when it came to the pinch."

Mr. Rowlandson waited for Phyllis to say something. Poor Phyllis! It was even more difficult than she had expected. She was tempted to retreat; but she thought of John's book.

"A remarkable coincidence,—your finding your way to Mrs. F.'s," continued Mr. Rowlandson. "And a very happy one for her."

"For me, too," said Phyllis. "We have you to thank for that."

"Well—in a way." Mr. Rowlandson nodded. "It is strange what fortuitous circumstances seem to direct the current of our lives. I say they seem to, Mrs. Landless, for it may be only seeming. Perhaps all is planned for us, even when our decisions rest on the toss of a penny."

A gentle pressure against her skirt attracted Phyllis's attention. Selima's arched back invited her caress.

"Isn't that an unusual name for a cat?" she asked, when told of it.

Mr. Rowlandson's eyes twinkled and he began to quote, straightway. His voice was pleasant to hear:—

"'Twas on a lofty vase's side
Where China's gayest art had dy'd
The azure flowers, that blow;
Demurest of the tabby kind,
The pensive Selima reclin'd
Gazed on the lake below.

"Thomas Gray, the poet, Mrs. Landless. The cat is historic. She was one of Horace Walpole's pets at Strawberry Hill, his country-seat, when Gray visited him there. Gray's first book was printed privately by Horace, who had ample means and recognized genius. The book is scarce now; it fetches five pounds and upward."

He resumed the quotation:—

"Still had she gaz'd; but midst the tide
Two angel forms were seen to glide,
The Genii of the stream:
Their scaly armour's Tyrian hue
Thro' richest purple to the view
Betray'd a golden gleam.

"The hapless Nymph with wonder saw:
A whisker first and then a claw,
With many an ardent wish,
She stretched in vain to reach the prize.
What female heart can gold despise?
What Cat's averse to fish?"

"Your husband doubtless knows the poem, Mrs. Landless. Mrs. F. tells me he writes poetry himself. Some one once said of Gray that no other poet entered the portals of fame with so slender a volume under his arm. He wrote very little, Mrs. Landless, but he polished every letter of every word until the lines were flawless as the facets of a diamond."

"Did puss get the fish?" asked Phyllis, stooping to stroke Selima's sleek, gray side again.

"No," replied Mr. Rowlandson. "'The slipp'ry verge her feet beguil'd, she tumbled headlong in.' But cats have nine lives, you know.

"Eight times emerging from the flood
She mew'd to ev'ry wat'ry god

Some speedy aid to send.
No Dolphin came, no Nereid stirr'd,
Nor cruel Tom, nor Susan heard.
A Fav'rite has no friend.

"Now comes the moral," he continued. "Poets, in those days realized their obligation to society: to tell it something for its own good."

His eyes twinkled again; bright blue they were; friendly eyes, Phyllis thought.

"From hence, ye Beauties, undeceived,
Know, one false step is ne'er retriev'd,
And be with caution bold.
Not all that tempts your wandering eyes,
And heedless hearts, is lawful prize;
Nor all that glisters, gold."

Mr. Rowlandson concluded, smiling. Phyllis returned his smile. The task before her was still difficult, but she felt she had known this dear old man a long, long time. She took the plunge.

"Mr. Rowlandson, I came in to thank you for letting me see your patch-boxes and fans; and to thank you, also, for having directed Mr. Landless to Farquharson's house. But there was something else,—too." She caught her breath prettily, in that quick way of hers. "It is a—a matter of—of business."

He bowed slightly, and awaited the expression of her wish. "I shall recommend something of Barrie's; or else 'Lorna Doone,'" he reflected.

"May I be seated?" asked Phyllis.

"My me! My me!" exclaimed Mr. Rowlandson. "Here is a chair. I beg your pardon Mrs. Landless." He seated himself on the third step of the convenient ladder, leaning against the high, book-laden shelves.

"You cannot imagine the nature of my errand," began Phyllis. It was dreadfully hard to go on. Her eyes were brimming, but they should not overflow if she could help it.

Mr. Rowlandson looked at the parcel in her lap; and then at her face; and then at the parcel again. She was not the first embarrassed visitor he had seen—nor the twenty-first.

"Shall I untie this for you?" he asked gently.

Phyllis nodded; she could not speak.

About twenty of the prettiest valentines were in the parcel. Mr. Rowlandson laid them on a little table and looked through them quietly, while Phyllis recovered her composure.

"May I see if I can save your feelings a little?" his pleasant voice said finally. "Mrs. Farquharson has told me of your—your quarrel with Sir Peter. A pity; a great pity. And so, perhaps I can guess the rest. The profession of poetry, inspiring as it is, is not—not exactly remunerative; not—not in a large way. No, I fancy the returns are not what you would call—well, say, generous. Things are not going quite so smoothly and easily for you as you—that is, as they should for two young people who have just started life together. And so it occurred to you that these old valentines might be sacri—sold, to help, a little."

He paused; Phyllis's handkerchief was at her eyes.

"Ah, yes," he added, "I feared that was it."

He gazed thoughtfully out of the window before he continued:—

"I am very sorry, my dear young lady. I am really very sorry. But I find it necessary to confine my purchases strictly to books. My me! Yes, strictly to books. If you had a few books, now, that you had ceased to care for, I might allow you something eh?"

"I have only the valentines, Mr. Rowlandson" said Phyllis. "It was very silly and wrong for me to come to you. I can see that now. Of course, you only buy and sell books."

"Except when commissioned by customers," said Mr. Rowlandson. "An invariable rule. If I could break it for any one, I—"

"You have been very kind," said Phyllis, rising. "So kind that I think I cannot leave you under a misapprehension. Mr. Landless's income is quite sufficient for our modest needs." A sudden thought made her heart beat rapidly. "Oh, Mr. Rowlandson! You must not think he knows I am here! Although, of course, I meant to tell him if—if I had been successful."

She hesitated again, and then, with a little appealing gesture, went hurriedly on.

"I think I should be quite frank with you. Mr. Landless has a book of poems—I mean—poems enough to make a book. But, although he has tried everywhere, he cannot find a publisher who is willing to undertake his little book. It is such a very little one, too. One firm of publishers offered to issue it if he would pay the cost, amounting to about fifty pounds. They wanted the copyright,

too, but they have yielded that point. Farquharson told me you said that my uncle paid nearly two hundred pounds for my valentines when—at the time of my father's sale; and I thought, perhaps—perhaps—Do you see? I brought a few of the prettiest ones to show you. I thought you might have forgotten how pretty they are. I want so badly to have John's book published, because he is certain to succeed if only this first little book can be brought out."

The bookseller made no reply. He sat on the step of the ladder, gazing absently out of the window, over Phyllis's head.

Be careful, Samuel Rowlandson, you old sentimentalist, with your faded old patch-boxes and tattered old fans. You very nearly said something then, quite out of the line of trade. Fortunately you thought it over, for a minute or two, while Phyllis turned her pretty eyes away, to hide the tears that filled them. Be careful, Samuel Rowlandson, or you will say it now, as she tries to smile at you, with the corners of her sweet mouth trembling. Be care—It is of no use; he will say it.

"I have thought of a way I might be of service to you," said Mr. Rowlandson meditatively. "You see—it is not as though I did not know the value of that collection of valentines. They are worth one hundred pounds, at the lowest figure. Now—if you would not take offense, and you should not, I am sure, when no offense is meant; I might offer to lend you—say, fifty pounds, or half their lowest value, accepting the valentines as security, and—"

Phyllis's face lighted eagerly; then clouded again.

"But, Mr. Rowlandson," she objected, "that wouldn't be—quite—you know—businesslike, would it? I shouldn't like to do anything that John would feel was not quite regular and proper."

Mr. Rowlandson swallowed something in his throat.

"I should make it very businesslike, indeed by asking you to sign a note; drawn in the strictest, legal terms," he said gravely. "And I should charge you interest, at the rate of five per cent, payable half-yearly; on the appointed day."

Phyllis considered his face with serious eyes; Mr. Rowlandson slowly repeated:—

"Five percent? payable half-yearly; on the appointed day."

"It really sounds quite—quite businesslike and regular," she said. "Are you certain you can spare so large a sum?—without the slightest inconvenience?"



ARE YOU CERTAIN YOU CAN SPARE SO LARGE A SUM?

"Quite certain," said Mr. Rowlandson; and then added, "I always have a little ready money laid by—waiting for a really safe investment—like this one—at five per cent."

Half an hour later Phyllis shook hands with the old bookseller. She had an afterthought.

"A few of the valentines are framed. Does that make any difference? And, tell me, Mr. Rowlandson, how can they be taken from our rooms and delivered at your shop?"

"Well, now," said Mr. Rowlandson, pondering, "I am so much afraid of fire in the shop it would really be a favor to me if you would let them remain where they are—for the present; for the

present, at least."

Phyllis shook hands again. The little bell tinkled. She was gone. In her purse were five ten-pound notes. In her heart was a glad song.

Through the shop-window, Mr. Rowlandson watched her cross the street swiftly. Then he turned. The valentines lay on the table, where she had left them,—samples of the wares she brought to market. He wrapped them, tied the parcel neatly, and carried it back to his desk. The square, black volume labeled "Proceedings of the British Engineering Society" caught his attention. He stared at it for some moments. Then his blue eyes twinkled.

IX

The copper coffee percolator bubbled genially on the snowy dinner table. John and Phyllis were seated. Mrs. Farquharson set the soup tureen before him, and hovered near. In the small grate a fire blazed cheerfully; the firelight gleamed on the fine mahogany and ivory inlay of the Sheraton desk. There lay John's manuscript,—returned this afternoon from Oxford, with the stereotyped politeness that was so disheartening.

Phyllis's suppressed excitement gave her cheeks their color; John feigned higher spirits than the occasion warranted; he made a point of eating his soup; Phyllis tasted hers.

Mrs. Farquharson served the roast beef and Yorkshire pudding (her specialty), received due plaudits, and withdrew. John attacked the dinner; Phyllis's fork toyed with her greens. The all-important subject was not mentioned until Genevieve had cleared the table. Phyllis passed John a small cup of black coffee.

"Well, Phyllis," he said, "Byrne, the Dublin publisher, remains to us. Oxford declines Cambridge verses."

Then Phyllis, blushing like a rose, laid in his hand the five ten-pound notes. He looked at her with perplexed eyes.

"'"Old Valentines, and Other Poems," by John Landless, will appear shortly,'" she fictitiously quoted. She had read such announcements weekly, in his "Academy."

"Oh, John, those horrid publishers won't retract their offer, will they?"

"My darling girl, where did you get this money?"

"I will tell you all about it, John, dear; but first answer my question? There isn't any doubt, is there? The book can be published now?"

"Why—no; or rather—yes," he said slowly. "If the money is really ours, to do with as we please,—even to embark on so wild an adventure as a book of poems. I can't conceive how you came by it, though, dearest."

John held the ten-pound notes in his hand; he looked at them now, as if half surprised to find them still there.

Then Phyllis told him of her call at Mr. Rowlandson's shop; she remembered every word of the conversation; and came out especially strong on the rigid regularity of the transaction; the signed note, and the five per cent, payable half-yearly, on the appointed day. John's face was a study.

"Oh, Phyllis! Phyllis!" he said softly, when she had finished. "You would have sold your valentines—that you love so dearly! the old valentines that are entwined with your memories of your mother. You would have sold them! For me!"

Phyllis smiled happily at him and gave him both of her hands, across the little dinner table. When he could trust his voice, he said,—

"I am confident of my book. If I were not, of course, I couldn't let you do this, darling; dear as it was of you to think of it,—and to execute it so cleverly—so very cleverly. Old Rowlandson is a brick."

"He is a very shrewd man of business," said Phyllis, looking at John with misgivings "He always has a sum of ready money laid by, for perfectly businesslike investments."

"Of course," he reassured her.

He knew he could meet the interest on Phyllis's note. As to the principal—well, if worst came to worst he would be justified in breaking his promise to his father that he would never borrow on his expectations. Justified! John could almost see his father's smile of approval.

They sat in the big armchair together, and read the poems to be included in the little book.

"If I succeed in my profession I shall owe it all to you," said John to Phyllis; and, when she would have made remonstrance, he added,— "Ah, my dear, I like to have it so."

At the same hour, that evening, Sir Peter sat before his library fire. An open magazine lay on his knee, pages downward. He held an unlighted cigar in his hand. He stared moodily into the glowing coals. There were new, sad lines in his stern face.

Burbage entered. "Mr. Rowlandson to see you, sir. A very particular matter, sir, he says."

Sir Peter rose slowly when Mr. Rowlandson was shown into the room. Under his arm were three parcels.

"Glad to see you, Rowlandson," said Sir Peter. "How have you been since we met last? H'm. It must be two years, or longer."

"Thank you. I have enjoyed very good health, Sir Peter. Yes, it is all of two years. I hope you are quite well, sir."

"Fair; fair," said Sir Peter.

"We do not get younger as we grow older," observed Mr. Rowlandson. He laid two of the parcels on the big table, under the reading-lamp, and proceeded to untie the other.

A smile flickered across Sir Peter's face; he liked the old bookseller's sturdy, independent ways. He had been dealing with him for a quarter of a century.

"My lad failed me to-day," Mr. Rowlandson explained, "and as I had an old print of Charterhouse to be delivered to a customer, not far from here, I thought I would bring you something that came this morning—a book. A book for which you have waited a long time."

Sir Peter drew his eyeglass from his pocket, and straightened the heavy, black silk cord.

"Well, well!" said he, when Mr. Rowlandson handed him the book, opened at the title-page, with a little air of triumph. "The 'Proceedings' for 1848. This volume completes my set. It has given you a good bit of trouble, eh?" He leafed it through, and examined one of the plates with interest.

"Oh, nothing to speak of," replied the bookseller, rubbing his hands together with satisfaction, nevertheless.

Sir Peter drew a check-book from a drawer; the amount was named.

"Take a chair, Rowlandson," said Sir Peter. The check was written. Mr. Rowlandson folded it precisely and put it into his pocketbook. They sat for a moment or two without speaking. If the bookseller was expected to take his departure, Sir Peter was too courteous to say so.

"Will you drink a glass of sherry?" he asked, and touched a button, near the fireplace. The sherry was served. The old bookseller squinted through his glass at the light.

"About the same date as the 'Proceedings,' or thereabouts?" he remarked interrogatively.

Sir Peter nodded. "Fifty-two. A choice year."

"I was growing a great lad, then," commented Mr. Rowlandson. "You have the advantage of me by several years, I fancy."

"I shall not see sixty again," said Sir Peter; after a pause he added,—"I hope your trade is good; but everything is going to the devil, and I assume the bookselling business goes with the rest. The radicals are in the saddle—and driving headlong to destruction."

"I remember an aunt of mine, many years ago, who had fears for her country," was Mr. Rowlandson's rejoinder. "She stopped taking in the county paper, and depended on 'The Religious Weekly' for news, the rest of her days. She said there were no signs of change in that. Old Aunt Deborah! My me! But the bookselling trade does very well, thank you, Sir Peter. The magazines are the only retarding influence."

Mr. Rowlandson moved one of the parcels on the table a little nearer to him and slyly loosened the string.

"Occasionally I do a bit of business a little out of my line," he continued. "This morning, for example, I made a deal that promises a profit—a very pretty profit. Now that I come to think, it might be of interest to you to hear of it. It was a deal in old valentines? I recall you once bought a collection."

Sir Peter started.

"These old valentines were brought to the shop by a young woman in reduced circumstances She did not want to sell them, I fancy. She seemed rather fond of them." Mr. Rowlandson sipped his sherry; he lingered over it. "Yes, I should say she was rather fond of them. Well,—that isn't my affair. I advanced some money on them? just enough to tide over the present difficulty. Of course, she and her young husband—"

Sir Peter looked up quickly; he had been gazing into the fire. Mr. Rowlandson's face was placid.

"She and her young husband will want more money," he continued. "Yes, they will certainly want more money. And when the proper time comes—" He hesitated as though at a loss for the right

words. "Down I come on them—pounce! and sell out the valentines—and take my profit." Mr. Rowlandson took another sip of sherry with evident enjoyment.

Their eyes met. Sir Peter scowled.

"She—was—my niece?" he inquired.

"Well, bless my soul!" pondered Mr. Rowlandson, as though the thought struck him for the first time. "They may have been the same valentines you bought at that sale—whose was it?—so many years ago. Of course, they may have been. I have a few of them with me—" He reached for the parcel with the loosened string.

"You know they are the same," said Sir Peter savagely. "Let this farce end at once. You should be ashamed, Rowlandson, to seek your shabby profit in the helplessness of a misguided child, ignorant of the world—and its hard, rough usage. I am surprised that you would do it—but that you should tell of it—even boast of it, amazes me. However—trade blunts a certain delicacy of feeling that—"

Sir Peter gave the bookseller a sharp look. Then he added,—

"I see your purpose in coming here now. You calculated shrewdly. Well—you were right. I will pay you the sum advanced to her."

Whatever emotion Mr. Rowlandson experienced he concealed.

Sir Peter opened his check-book again, and dipped his pen.

"How much did you say?" he asked.

"The amount advanced was fifty pounds," said Mr. Rowlandson mildly.

"Fifty pounds!" exclaimed Sir Peter.

Mr. Rowlandson held his wine-glass to the light again, and looked through it with half-closed eyes.

"Fifty pounds," he quietly repeated, "and took her note, with interest at five per cent. I could have made it six as well as not, she wanted the money so badly."

Sir Peter turned his back on the bookseller the pen busied itself with the check. A moment later it was offered to him.

"Thank you, Sir Peter. My interest in this transaction is not for sale." Mr. Rowlandson spoke in a low tone, firmly.

"But I say my niece shall not be indebted to you! Not one penny!"

Sir Peter's fist came down on one of the parcels lying on the table. There was a crash of broken glass. Mr. Rowlandson's eyes twinkled merrily.

"That is the Charterhouse print," said he. "My customer will be disappointed. It was promised for this evening."

The trivial incident cooled Sir Peter's wrath.

"I insist on your taking the check, Rowlandson" he said sternly. "You will understand it is an impossible situation. My niece is not under the necessity of seeking aid from strangers. She knows that all I have is hers. That I would—" He stopped abruptly.

"Yes, yes," said Mr. Rowlandson, leaning forward. "Let us talk about her—and her young poet. What an upstanding, fine, frank lad he appears to be. Do you think he has great talent?"

"I do not know that he has any talent whatever!" replied Sir Peter angrily. "I know he stole my niece from me? the puppy!"

"Well, well," said Mr. Rowlandson gently. "That was wrong. Wrong, indeed. And I suppose you had showed him clearly that by proceeding openly he had a fair field to win her, too?"

Sir Peter set his teeth. The old bookseller repeated his question:—

"You did not discourage the lad, I am sure? He knew he had a chance, eh?"

"I must decline to discuss that with you, Rowlandson."

"Chut! Chut!" murmured Mr. Rowlandson. "We are just two old fellows jogging toward the grave together, even if you are a knight, and I am a bookseller. Come, now, Sir Peter, tell me all about it. It will do you good. I will wager you have been eating your heart out, for a month, in this great, lonely house, with no one to whom you could talk of your sorrow. Come, come, Sir Peter." Mr. Rowlandson rose. "Do not twenty-five years of honest dealing with you entitle me to a little of your confidence?"

Sir Peter stood silently by the fireplace, his back turned to the old bookseller. Mr. Rowlandson set his empty wine-glass carefully on the table, and then drew from their paper the valentines Phyllis had left at the shop.

"I read an essay of Mr. Benson's, last night,—and one bit comes to me now," he said. "The essay opens with an old French proverb, 'To make one's self beloved is the best way to be useful.' Then the essayist goes on to say that this is one of the deep sayings which young men, and even young women, ignore; which middle-aged folk hear with a certain troubled surprise? and which old people discover to be true, and think, with a sad regret, of opportunities missed, and of years devoted, how unprofitably, to other kinds of usefulness. We expect, like Joseph in his dreams, says Mr. Benson, that the sun and moon and the eleven stars, to say nothing of the sheaves, will make obeisance to us. And then, as we grow older the visions fade. The eleven stars seem unaware of our existence and we are content if, in a quiet corner, a single sheaf gives us a nod of recognition."

Mr. Rowlandson smiled pleasantly, and patted the old valentines under his hand.

"And then," he continued, "the essayist says, we make further discoveries that give us pain; that when we have seemed to ourselves most impressive, we have only been pretentious; that riches are only a talisman against poverty; that influence comes mostly to people who do not pursue it, and do not even know they possess it; and that the real rewards of life have fallen to simple-minded and unselfish people who have not sought them. I fear I have not quoted the essay quite accurately. I had a wonderful memory, once. It fails—it fails. But it is very prettily put, in the book, and of course it is all quite true."

Mr. Rowlandson smiled again, at Sir Peter's back. He turned the valentines over, one at a time:—

"My me! My me!" he mused, aloud. "Think of all the old loves, of bygone years, these represent. School-boy and schoolgirl loves—most of them, probably; springtime loves. The perfume will always linger in these poor, faded leaves. You never married, Sir Peter, did you? Nor I; nor I. My me! My me! I remember a girl—when I was twenty; in Hertfordshire—my old home. Bessy was her name. She had the softest brown hair—in a thick braid. She wore pink-checked gingham. My me! She married a farrier, fifty years ago."

Mr. Rowlandson bent over one of the valentines, to read the verses, finely engraved, beneath a spray of blue forget-me-nots:—

"Wilt thou be mine?
Dear love, reply,
Sweetly consent, or else deny.
Whisper softly; none shall know.
Wilt thou be mine?
Say aye, or no."

He looked up, smiling still, and went on,—"I fancy, Sir Peter, you, too, have your memories; you can recall some sweet face of your youth, for which you would have thought the world well lost; you can bring back the memory of some fragrant day when you and she looked forward with bright hopes to happy years that never were to be. A golden day; a golden day."

Sir Peter still stood by the fireplace, silent.

"And now this dear girl of yours—your niece—has strayed away from you, with the boy of her heart! But, how willingly,—how gladly, she would come back to you, and be yours again—as well as his, if you only opened your arms for her—and said the right words of welcome to her—and to him. She would come back and renew your faith in youth, and hope, and love, and all the beautiful things of this old earth—which we shall leave so soon; so soon, that every lost day should be mourned. Ah, yes! I am sure she waits only for the welcoming words."

Mr. Rowlandson shook his head, slowly, as he concluded,—

"I am proud for myself, and sad for you, that I should be the one to launch his little book; the little book for which she was willing to sell her precious valentines. The little book may not set the Thames afire, but—ah! how the thought of it has kindled their young hearts."

Sir Peter turned from the fireplace and walked the length of the long library; then, slowly, back to the table again.

"You can take the check now, Rowlandson," he said, brokenly; "I shall go to her—and bring them home to-morrow."

He dropped into his chair, and covered his face with his hands; Mr. Rowlandson turned to the fireplace. He drew from his pocketbook the note Phyllis had signed, and held it in the grate until it blazed. Then he puckered his mouth, curiously, as if trying to whistle. When he faced Sir Peter again, his blue eyes twinkled.

"You owe me a shilling for a new glass for my Charterhouse print," said he.

Ten minutes later, when Mr. Rowlandson left the house, Burbage opened the door. He carried a parcel that clinked, as he stepped out, briskly.

"Will you require anything further, Sir Peter?" asked Burbage.

"Yes. Have Miss Phyllis's little study-room, and the two adjoining bedrooms made ready, Burbage. My niece and her husband are coming home to-morrow."

X

As John lay between sleep and waking, the next morning, he was conscious that in a moment he would capture an elusive, happy thought.

He had it! The book could now be published!

While he dressed he sang an ancient ballad, at the top of his voice, to an air he improvised.

"Phillida was a fair maide
As fresh as any flower;
Whom Harpalus the herd-man praide
To be his paramoure.

"Harpalus and eke Corin,
Were herd-men both ysere;
And Phillida would twist and spinne,
And thereto sing ful clere.

"Phyllis!" cried John. "Can you hear in the bedroom? I sing of thee!"

"I thought her name was Phillida," said Phyllis, setting the bedroom door ajar.

"Phillida is Old English for Phyllis," he explained.

"Oh!" said Phyllis.

"But Phillida was al to coye,
For Harpalus to winne;
For Corin was her only joye,
Who forst her not a pinne.

"How often would she flowers twine!
How often garlants make
Of cowslips and of columbine;
And all for Corin's sake.

"Harpalus prevayled nought,
His labour all was lost;
For he was farthest from her thought,
And yet he loved her most.

"Phyllis! I say, Phyllis!" cried John, working his hairbrushes alternately. "I am Corin. Who was Harpalus?"

"You flatter yourself, sir," replied Phyllis "I am pining for Harpalus."

"Tell me his last name, then, that I may seek and slay him!" said John.

Between stanzas, John forgot the air, but he improvised anew, and sang on, regardless.

"Oh, Harpalus!" thus would he say;
Unhappiest under sunne!
The cause of thine unhappy daye,
By love was first begunne.

"But wel-a-way! that nature wrought
Thee, Phillida, so faire:
For I may say that I have bought
Thy beauty al to deare."

"Cheer up, Harpalus!" Phyllis waved her hand through the half-open doorway. "Faint heart never won fair lady!"

"He is too far gone," said John. "Besides, I, Corin, have nine-tenths of the law on him.

"O Cupide, graunt this my request,
And do not stoppe thine eares."

The song ceased while John tugged at his collar. When the button finally slipped in, he muttered:

"There is a musical line for you? 'And do not stoppe thine eares.' I would rather have written that line than take Quebec.

"O Cupide, graunt this my request,
And do not stoppe thine eares,
That she may feel within her breste

The paines of my dispaire."

John ended upon a mournful quaver.

"Phyllida has pangs of a different sort, thank you," said Phyllis, coming into the sitting-room. "Pangs of hunger. Good-morning, Genevieve. Is breakfast served? Yes, indeed, it is a beautiful morning."

"Heartless creature!" said John. He was putting on his coat now.

"Good-morning, fair Genevieve. Wags the world well with you? M-m-m. Doesn't the bacon smell good?"

"Poor Harpalus," said Phyllis, pouring tea. "I was very fond of Harpalus."

John's eyes were mischievous.

"Why didn't you propose to *him*, then?" he asked, accenting the second pronoun.

Phyllis threatened him with a buttered muffin.

"John Landless! I shall not speak to you again for—ten minutes."

It was the jolliest breakfast. Mrs. Farquharson's bacon was always crisp; she could tell a strictly fresh egg as far as she could see it; if you had tossed one of her muffins into the air it would have floated out of the open window. "Tell her I said so," said John to little Genevieve.

It is a pity we know so little of Genevieve. One has an uneasy sense of having neglected her. Well—her young man loved her; and that is enough for Genevieve.

John stuffed the manuscript into his greatcoat pocket.

"Oh, dear, if I could only wish myself invisible for an hour and go with you to the publishers," said Phyllis. "It doesn't seem possible to wait until afternoon to hear what they say."

John reflected.

"You were going to Saint Ruth's this morning, weren't you?" he asked.

"Yes, I shall be there the whole morning. I don't believe one of those blessed babies will remember me. I have a little shopping to do, too."

"Why not do your shopping about eleven; meet me at Mildmay's, for luncheon, at one; and we will 'bus over to Saint Ruth's together, and make an afternoon of it."

Phyllis kissed him.

"What a perfectly delightful plan!" she exclaimed. "How shall I find Mildmay's? Oh! John, dear; how much has happened since then."

"No regrets yet?" he asked, searching her eyes.

She put her hands on the lapels of his coat.

"Not even one tiny, little regret," said Phyllis.

As he ran down the stairs, however, she called after him.

"Oh, John! I forgot. I have one regret."

"What is it?" he asked.

"Harpalus"—whispered Phyllis, leaning over the banister; and kissed her hand to him.

Phyllis's truthful eyes had not hidden from John, this morning, or ever, that her heart was often saddened by thoughts of her uncle. She knew his way of life so well; could tell, at any hour, what he was probably doing. She could picture his lonely evenings. Alas, she knew his pride; and her own; John's, too. She often thought of her letter to him, with its hint of reconciliation; she wondered if she should have said more. Then his cruel words about her mother—As often she concluded she had said all there was to say. And she would turn her thoughts elsewhere, so that the bitter remembrance might not spoil the sweetness of these days.

John waited for her at the entrance to Mildmay's. The moment she saw him she knew all was well.

As they went in she nudged him.

"To the left, John. I want to sit at our little table."

The same waitress, too;—what smiles! Phyllis had chocolate because she liked chocolate; but John must have tea—because he had it before.

He told her of the interview with the publishers; the little book would appear in April; May at the latest.

The top of the motor-bus, of course.

From the crossing where they alighted one should take the street to the right to Saint Ruth's. John turned to the left, at once.

"I should never have forgiven you if you hadn't," said Phyllis, as they started eagerly down the mean street, in which noisy trams threatened the lives of ragged, venturesome children. Here was the very place! How slowly they had walked there, while he told her of his love. How long ago it seemed. Phyllis's hand found its way into John's pocket—and was welcomed there.

They got to Saint Ruth's, finally. Dr. Thorpe's greeting was cordial; Mrs. Thorpe kissed Phyllis affectionately. The men went to the warden's office; Mrs. Thorpe took Phyllis to her room. They had a long talk. Phyllis found Mrs. Thorpe could be plain-spoken as well as kind.

"You did wrong, dear girl," she said, with her arms around her. "I know how hard it was to hear him utter those terrible untruths; but you should have been more patient. Nothing he said could injure any one—least of all your mother, who is now where there is no misunderstanding—and no pain. Your wounded heart impelled you to a mad act, dear girl; but your pride has kept you in the wrong. John Landless is a dear fellow—and Donald thinks he is a true poet. I have laughed at him until he is shy about mentioning his 'profession' to me. It is possible for you to be very happy. Soften your heart, dear girl, and you will find the truest happiness in the happiness of your uncle. Your mother would be the first to tell you to go to him and comfort his loneliness—if she could. The best joys of life come to us through self-surrender."

Phyllis laid her head in Mrs. Thorpe's lap and had a good cry; then she felt better.

"Promise?" asked Mrs. Thorpe, smiling.

"No, I won't promise," said Phyllis. "I couldn't promise now. But I will try."

"And now," said Mrs. Thorpe, "let's go and see the babies. There are some new ones since you were here; but one wee mite is gone, forever."

Phyllis sat on the floor among the babies, and played with them, until her cheeks were rosy and her golden hair disheveled. Between romps she told Mrs. Thorpe that John's book would soon be published.

"Well, that is good news!" exclaimed Mrs. Thorpe. "Donald will be so happy to hear of that. It is remarkable that he should have a book published so soon. Poems, too."

"Yes, it is remarkable," replied Phyllis demurely. "But then, John's talent is remarkable."

Meanwhile, in the warden's office, Dr. Thorpe sat at his desk and John sat on it, and swung his long legs. He told him about the book.

"By Jove! I congratulate you, with all my heart," said Dr. Thorpe warmly. "You will let me know the first day it is on sale. I shall wish to buy a copy."

"Buy a copy!" John demurred. "Well, upon my word! You and Mrs. Thorpe will receive a copy, affectionately inscribed by the author; the first copy off the press—the second, I should say."

Dr. Thorpe grinned.

"Let me buy it, John," he said. "I shall go from one bookshop to another, and in each I shall say, —'What! You haven't a copy of John Landless's book! The sensation of the hour! The book London is so eager to read that the presses can't turn them out fast enough! The book—'"

John threw his cap at him. They looked at each other in the abashed way of men between whom there is deep affection.

"Your publisher's telephone wires would be hot for an hour with orders," Dr. Thorpe concluded.

"You should be a man of business," said John. "If you were a publisher I should have had an easier time."

"Nonsense! You had little or no trouble—" began Dr. Thorpe.

"You are mistaken, Doctor," said John. "I had failed, and then Phyllis pulled the strings. I can't tell you how, though. That is a secret."

"I am prepared to believe anything of her. How buoyant and beautiful she is. By the way—anything from Sir Peter?"

"Not a word. She wrote him a note, asking for her collection of valentines. They were her mother's, and she wanted them. He sent the valentines, but no reply to her note."

"Poor old buffer," said Dr. Thorpe. "Of course, he misses her dreadfully."

"I should think he would; and she misses him, too. I would be glad to see them good friends again if—if I needn't be put in a false position. He is—disgustingly rich, you know." John hesitated. He looked at the floor, and traced the pattern of the carpet with his stick. "He called me a sneak—and ordered me out of the house. But I can afford to forgive that. It was horribly sudden for the poor old chap—and—all that."

Dr. Thorpe's eyes were moist.

"I meant to look into your spiritual state, later," he said. "But I see it isn't necessary."

When the four of them met, in the hall, it was understood that John and Phyllis would resume their work at Saint Ruth's.

"Nothing like it to keep your sense of relative values normal," said Dr. Thorpe to John.

Mrs. Thorpe stood with her arm around Phyllis.

"Saint Ruth's neighbors will be glad to see you again, dear girl. Did I tell you what old Mrs. Lester said to me? You remember her poor hands, all twisted with rheumatism and yet what beautiful needlework she does. She said, 'I should like to make her a pretty handkerchief, for a wedding gift. Do you think she would care for it?'"

Mrs. Thorpe had been looking through the open doorway.

"Here comes trouble, Donald," she said, in a low voice.

John and Phyllis glanced back as they walked out.

Dr. Thorpe was shaking hands, heartily, with a big, sodden fellow, in shabby clothes, his virile face marred by excesses; the frail little woman with him looked up at him with a world of anxious love in her eyes; and then Mrs. Thorpe led her away, talking cheerily.

All the way home John discoursed on Art. Phyllis drank it in. She thought him a wonderful being.

"The trouble with these literary chaps is that they revolve in a circle," he declared, posing securely on his new pedestal. "They have their writing rooms, all strewn with carefully disarranged paraphernalia; and they have their clubs, where they meet only each other and praise each other's work, and damn the work of the absent ones; and they go prowling about looking for a bohemia that never existed, and can never exist for them; for bohemia is simply youth and poverty and high aspirations, combined, and can't be found by search. If these literary chaps are exceptionally fortunate, they are invited to great houses, where they dine with stupid, overfed people who pretend they have read their books, though they haven't, unless they are unfit to read. And so they go on wearily turning that treadmill—and wonder why their work has lost freshness, and convince themselves it has gained style. I am not a literary chap, and I don't wish to be one. I am a poet. Poetry is my profession. And the only way I can succeed in it, the only way it is worth succeeding in, is to relate it to life, real life, the big, elemental struggle for existence that is going on, here in London, and everywhere; to wed Art to Reality, lest the jade saunter the streets, a light o' love, seeking to sell her soul."

As they walked past the bookshop, and through the little square, John said:—

"I should like to live in London eight months of the year, and give most of my time to Saint Ruth's. And the rest of the year I should like to live in a village, like Rosemary, Sussex, where I lived as a boy; on the outskirts of a little village, near the green country; and do my writing there, under the blue sky—with God looking over my shoulder, to see the work well done."

XI

There was a motor-car in front of the house; its blinding lights illuminated the windows at the other end of the square.

Mrs. Farquharson met them at the door.

"He's upstairs in your room. Sir Peter Oglebay—your uncle," she said, in an excited whisper. "Three times he has called this day; once at eleven, once at two; and now again at six. 'Sit down and wait,' I says to him, the last time; 'they will surely be home for dinner; never have they missed since first they came,' says I; and sit down he did—and there he sits; and doesn't he look noble, sitting there! Genevieve's that nervous she drops everything she touches."

John and Phyllis exchanged looks. He smiled as easily as he could.

"Would you like it if I walked about a bit—or dropped in on old Rowlandson, while you talk with your uncle?" he asked.

"I want you with me, John. I need you," said Phyllis.

"Together's the word," he replied, and they mounted the stairs.

So far as Phyllis was concerned, it was all over in a moment.

Sir Peter rose when they entered. She gave one look at his sad, white face, and drawn mouth.

"Oh, Uncle Peter!" she cried; and was in his arms.

He tried to say the words he had humbly learned.

"I have your pardon to ask, my dear—"

That was as far as he got. She put both hands over his mouth; and withdrew them only to kiss him and whispered—

"It is I who should ask your pardon, Uncle Peter. I have been very, very naughty, And I am very, very sorry."

Now, when Sir Peter heard that childish formula, he seemed to hold in his arms the little girl who had repeated it, many times, under the instructions of Mrs. Burbage. The years slipped away. He held her close; the wounds were healed.

When two men have a disagreeable interview before them, each maneuvers for position. The one who gets the fireplace back of him has an advantage. It isn't impregnable, but the other fellow must force the fighting. The place may be carried by storm; but it takes a spirited action. John executed a flank movement, while his ally engaged the enemy. He got the fireplace; it was a small one, but it was his own.

One wishes John well out of this scene; our hopes are high for him; but he is a queer chap; you never know how to take him, nor what he will say, or do. We can only wish him well; and observe that he carries his chin high.

Sir Peter released Phyllis, and then turned to John.

"I wish to apologize to you, Landless," said Sir Peter, and crossed the room; he offered his hand; John took it and they stood for a moment so, neither speaking.

"I hope you can forgive what I said," Sir Peter concluded.

"I did that before we left your house—that morning," said John. "Don't say anything more about it, sir, please. I should have been as angry as you were—under the same circumstances. I am sure there is need of forbearance on both sides."

Sir Peter dropped John's hand, and strode to the window. In a moment he faced about again.

"I can't have it that way," said he. "It was unspeakable——"

John stopped him.

"I beg you to say no more, sir. I assure you there is not an unkind thought in my heart. Let the dead past bury its dead." John hesitated; then stammered out—"Fine weather we are having, sir."

Sir Peter offered his hand again; their grasp was cordial. Each looked straight into the other's eyes.

"Oh, dear," said Phyllis, pushing the big armchair nearer the fire. "Isn't everything lovely!"

She coaxed her uncle into the chair with a pretty gesture, and seated herself in a smaller one, with a happy little sigh.

There was a tap at the door.

John opened to Mrs. Farquharson; she curtsied.

"You were wishful to see me, my d——ma'am?" she asked.

Phyllis laughed gayly. "You are wonderful, Farquharson," she said. "I have been thinking for five minutes how nice it would be if my uncle dined with us; if it were quite convenient for you."

"As ever could be," said Mrs. Farquharson. "I sent Genevieve for another chicken as soon as ever he was in this room. You never saw a plumper."

"Isn't she wonderful?" Phyllis turned to her uncle. "Uncle Peter, you must be formally presented to my dear Farquharson, my old nurse. Farquharson—Sir Peter Oglebay, my uncle."

Mrs. Farquharson curtsied again; Sir Peter rose and bowed gravely.

"A great many years ago I heard how wonderful you were, Farquharson," he said, "from a little girl, who is now grown,—and married,—but is of the same opinion still. It was a piece of good fortune, indeed that brought these children of mine to your house."

"Thank you, sir. Thank you, Sir Peter," replied Mrs. Farquharson, her gray eyes very large. "I should have made your acquaintance years ago if that Mrs.—Well, least said, soonest mended. But sorry I am that never did those advertisements meet my eye if ever they were printed. The expense of them, too, sir, in every paper in London, every day for three months. Not that you minded that!" Mrs. Farquharson had told the story to the first-floor front; the first-floor front who had been in stocks—and seen better days; it had not lost in the telling.

"If you are certain——" said Sir Peter to Mrs. Farquharson. "Very well, I shall be glad to dine."

On the way to the lower regions, Mrs. Farquharson dropped in on the first floor.

"Sir Peter Oglebay's dining with us tonight," she said. "I was frightened of him at first, but, pooh! he's as easy as an old shoe."

John still held the fireplace; he knew the worst was yet to come.

"There are great preparations at home, my dear," said Sir Peter to Phyllis. "Your little study-room has been polished till it shines, and the two adjoining rooms have been rearranged three times since this morning." He looked at John. "Burbage has been told that I hope to have both of you home again. Her efforts are Herculean to anticipate every wish Phyllis may have."

"I hope you won't be hurt, sir," said John, "but I fear that is out of the question I ask you to believe there isn't an iota of unfriendliness in it, but—you see, sir, Phyllis and I must live within our own income; and independence is as necessary to me as air. I am sorry if you are disappointed."

"I appreciate your point of view perfectly," said Sir Peter. "I am coming to that. But first I ask you to sympathize with mine, a little. My house is so large that I am lost in it, unless there are others there. And as one grows older there are so few who care to come. The old friends have new interests; children about them; and the wider circle that means. The house has never seemed so large and so lonely as during the past month. For many years my brother Robert, Phyllis's father, lived with me there. It will be hard for you to believe I was ever gay, but it was really a gay house then. His friends were a light-hearted lot, and they were as welcome there as my own; mine were few by comparison. We talked pictures most of the time; his friends were painters. What dreams for the future I heard from them! The best of them loved Robert—and believed in him. No one could help loving him. I remember a remark Thorburg, the sculptor, made one night, at a dinner in his honor. Thorburg had just done some extraordinary thing—I have forgotten what; his 'Grief,' perhaps. 'Oglebay,' said he to Robert, 'there isn't a man in this room who doesn't envy you. We all have talent; but yours touches the highest mark. I will not say it is genius, but it is near it; we shall bare our heads before one of your pictures, some day.' Little Singleton spoke up then. 'The great god Thor hath said it, Oglebay, but we all think it.' They were all there that night; there must have been twenty of us at the table. I can see their faces now, clearly, and hear little Singleton's piping voice. Singleton, Knowles, and Leonard—the inseparable trio, they called them."

Sir Peter paused.

"As I said, the house was gay then. The Oglebay Prize was the result of just such a dinner. Robert suggested it. Thorburg was one of the trustees until he died; it has helped many a lad through his days in the Latin Quarter. I have had some fine letters from those lads. One or two of them have turned out really good work; good enough to have satisfied Robert that the prize was worth while. Yes,—the Oglebay Prize is one of the few things I look back upon with unalloyed pleasure; my bridge in Natal is another."

Phyllis had moved her chair nearer to her uncle; while he spoke of her father, he held her hand, on the arm of his chair. Now she spoke quickly, with that pretty catch in her breath.

"Oh, Uncle Peter. Tell John about the Natal bridge. It is more interesting and more exciting than the best novel you ever read."

"I should like to hear the story, sir," said John; it was pleasant to see the sincerity of his interest.

"I will tell it to you some day, John," replied Sir Peter. He smiled. "You will probably hear it a great many times. We all have our failings; that story is mine. My cronies at the club tell me I lead up to it so skillfully they cannot always stop me in time."

"Do tell it, Uncle Peter," said Phyllis.

Sir Peter thought for a moment.

"Some time I will, my dear," he said. "But not now. My mind is on something else." He addressed his remarks to John again. "We were talking about the days when there was overflowing life in my old house."

John stood with his back to the fire; his face was attentive, serious, considering; but every line in it expressed determination.

"Those days ended when Robert married," Sir Peter continued. "I quarreled with him and we parted. I never saw him again. And for ten years my house was a mausoleum, haunted by memories; a torture-house of vain regrets and useless longings."

His voice broke; he rose suddenly and walked to the window again. They were silent until he returned to his chair. Phyllis seated herself on the broad arm of it, and laid a caressing hand on his shoulder. He took the hand and held it.

"Then came the news from the North—that my little girl was motherless—and fatherless; and then came my little girl herself. She was a very little girl then; a sad and lonely little girl; but"—Sir Peter cleared his throat, and spoke huskily and slowly—"but she brought comfort to me. There was something in life for me again—besides my work. My work I always had. I thanked God for that. I need not tell you, John, how this little girl crept into my heart, nor how her small fingers smoothed away the wrinkles from my gloomy old face." Sir Peter looked up at her and pressed the hand he held. "And so the years rolled on—and she grew, and grew, and grew, until she became a young woman. A—a passably good-looking young woman—eh, John? Wouldn't you say so—passably good-looking?"

John smiled.

"I might say so to you, sir—privately," he admitted.

"And when she was certain of her conquest of me," continued Sir Peter, "she looked about, as it were, for other worlds to conquer. And along came a—er—h'm—along came a young prince. Precisely so—along came a young prince upon whom the fairies had bestowed marvelous gifts." Sir Peter fairly chuckled as he completed this unusual imaginative flight. "Marvelous gifts," he repeated. "Eh, Phyllis? Would you say he had marvelous gifts?"

"If we were quite alone, Uncle Peter, I might say so," confessed Phyllis.

"And this passably good-looking young woman and this prince of the marvelous gifts proceeded to fall in love with each other in the most natural way in the world," Sir Peter went on. "Precisely so. In the most natural way in the world; as any one but a grumpy old fellow would have foreseen they would. And having fallen in love with each other, what in the world was there for them to do but to be married at once—eh? And yet, will you believe it?—there was a grumpy old fellow who wished to prevent it. Now, what could you say to an old fellow as grumpy as that?" Sir Peter adjusted his eyeglass and looked first at John, and then at Phyllis, quizzically.

"I should say no one could blame him," said John promptly.

"I shouldn't say anything. I should just hug him," said Phyllis, and carried out the threat with spirit.

"And now we come to the point of this long story," resumed Sir Peter, readjusting his eyeglass, which had fallen during Phyllis's demonstration, "These two having married have no other duty before them than to—er—eh? Of course. Precisely! No other duty than to live happily ever afterward—eh? As they always do in stories. But the question is—where? Precisely! Where shall they live happily ever afterward? Shall they live all by themselves? Or shall they share their happiness—a little of it—with the grumpy old fellow aforesaid? He does not like to base his plea to them on his need of the little girl he has loved so many years; nor on his need of the marvelous gifts of the young prince, though they are especially needed just at this time, as I shall tell you. Now, John," said Sir Peter, in his most engaging way, "advise me about this. What ground should he base his petition upon in order to win his case? Because he is more anxious to win this case than he was to finish the Natal bridge,—and he was terribly anxious about that,—as you will hear, one of these days."

John glanced toward Phyllis; she instantly turned her head, and looked resolutely in the opposite direction. She felt that the answer to Sir Peter's question belonged to John. Sir Peter saw John waver; he caught his glance at Phyllis; and, like a good campaigner, followed up the attack.

"I need your assistance just now, John, very badly," said Sir Peter. "For years my friends in the British Engineering Society have been urging me to prepare and publish my recollections. Some of them went to Allan Robertson's Sons, the publishers, about it and they have given me no peace since I was weak enough to make a promise that they should have the book. 'Recollections of an Engineer, 1874-1910,' it is to be called. Now,—if you would help me I could do it easily. And we would have some good times over it, I hope."

John glanced at Phyllis again; but she would not look at him. It was very hard not to at the time; but Phyllis was so glad afterward that she didn't.

Sir Peter got up from his chair, and stood in front of John, both hands on his shoulders.

"Dear lad," he said. "In a few years you and Phyllis will have all that is mine in the world. You can't prevent that—with all your pride—for which I honor you. In a few years it will all be yours. For those few years will you not share it with me—and let them be peaceful and happy years?"

John turned his face away.

"Very well, sir," he said. "We will go to your home—to-morrow. That is—if Phyllis says so, too."

Phyllis flashed him a radiant look.

"But you must let me contribute my little pittance to the general fund," added John. "It isn't much—but it is all I have."

"With all my heart!" said Sir Peter.

The white tablecloth was laid; the coffee percolator hummed its contented little song. The broiled chicken was delicious; and the browned potatoes. There was a grape jelly; Sir Peter was helped twice to this.

"Do you make it yourself?" he asked Mrs. Farquharson.

"Whoever else?" she answered.

"But you should taste her marmalade at breakfast!" exclaimed John.

"I like a good marmalade; we have the 'Dundee'; which is yours?" asked Sir Peter. He fell into their informal ways so easily.

"We make our own," said Mrs. Farquharson proudly.

"Upon my word," said Sir Peter, as he stirred his coffee with a tiny spoon, and accepted a match

for his cigar—"upon my word, I haven't eaten such a dinner in years. So—er—companionable—you know."

At eleven, when they went with him to the door, Mrs. Farquharson met them in the hall.

"Good-night, Farquharson," said Sir Peter.

"Good-night, sir," said Mrs. Farquharson, and handed him a parcel. "Would you please to slip these glasses into your greatcoat pocket: two of the jelly, and two of the marmalade. Here are the recipes, written on this paper; Genevieve has copied them out very plain and large. That Mrs. Burbage can read them—with her spectacles."

XII

Two happy, eventful years passed.

One evening, as they sat in the long library, John happened to mention Rosemary Sussex,—and the old parsonage, where his boyhood had been spent, untenanted now—in disrepair. Sir Peter asked a casual question or two. For the rest of the evening he schemed in silence.

Shortly thereafter his mysterious absences began. He required an earlier breakfast on certain days; and John and Phyllis sometimes dined alone.

The new parsonage at Rosemary is nearer the church than the old,—but the old parsonage has more land, and its garden slopes gently downward to the little river, slipping murmuringly away to the sea.

So long as Sir Peter tried to keep part of his plan a secret from the vestry, he had one failure after another for his pains. Time after time he returned on the early evening train to London, growling into his white mustache. They would not say no, and they did not say yes; he made no progress. But when he pledged a discreet vestryman to confidence, and told him he sought to buy the old parsonage for the son of its former occupant, the Reverend Hugh Landless, and for his wife, the ways were smoothed at once. A morning came, at last, when he could tell them he had a surprise in store for them, and could place the title-deed in Phyllis's hands.

"It is my belated wedding-gift," said Sir Peter.

Phyllis will never forget her first glimpse of the gray old house. As the motor-car neared the curve in the road which discloses the view John knew and loved so well, he said to her:—

"Now, dearest; in just a moment. There!"

The house is screened from the road by an ivy-covered wall, great trees, and the shrubbery. But Phyllis caught the very view John wished her to have,—a bit of the west gable, and the window from which his mother's handkerchief had fluttered many gay farewells to him.

Sir Peter stood by the sun-dial, in the garden, and listened, well pleased, to John's eager voice, as he pointed out the spots endeared to him by memories of childhood. The sun-dial! How he had pondered over the quatrain, chiseled in the stone:—

"The Moving Finger writes; and having writ
Moves on—nor all your Piety nor Wit
Shall lure it back to cancel half a Line,
Nor all your Tears wash out a Word of it."

"My father used to sit reading aloud to my mother, near that hawthorn," said John, "and if she asked him for the time of day he was whimsical enough to walk over here and consult the sun-dial, rather than his watch."

They loitered in the neglected, overgrown garden,—soon to be bright with flowers again,—a trysting-place for birds.

"My mother planned her garden anew each winter," said John. "She could hardly wait for the soft air of spring to carry out her plans. She loved the flowers. I remember her so clearly, working here, in a broad-brimmed hat, with a pair of my father's gloves on her hands, while I played near by. I had desperate adventures in this garden, and my play often ended in my being half frightened—and seeking safety from imagined terrors, in the refuge of her lap."

They went into every room of the old house; sunny rooms; there was need of repairs, indeed, but Phyllis declared there should be no alteration.

"I want it to be just as it was," she said to Sir Peter.

And so, in June, they were at home there—and the garden was a riot of color.

On a particular afternoon in June, Sir Peter, with his cigar, and John, in flannels, writing, at a table under the trees, both looked up to see Phyllis coming toward them, from the house, with her baby in her arms.

The garden was full of the perfume of roses. They blossomed everywhere. There was a pink bud in John's buttonhole, and a red one in Sir Peter's. Phyllis had a great bunch of white roses at her waist. Her gown was white, too: soft and lacy and clinging. That would have been John's description of it; and he is a poet.

"Hullo, Phyllis," said John.

"S-h-h," said Phyllis.

"S-h-h, John," said Sir Peter.

Phyllis laid her precious burden in the perambulator, near Sir Peter's chair.

"Mark and Peggy will be here in half an hour," she announced. "She telephoned from Whinstead. Isn't it characteristic of Peggy?—a motor-car wedding-journey. They are having the most glorious time, she said. They can't stay, though; just a call."

"Whinstead, eh?" said John. "Well, if Mark is driving, he will cut that thirty minutes to twenty. I shall barely finish this page before they get here."

He was engaged upon the revision of "Old Valentines, and Other Poems," for the second edition. The little book, bound in red, with golden cupids, lay open on the table.

"Uncle Peter, see how beautifully baby is sleeping," said Phyllis.

Sir Peter adjusted his eyeglass, and peeped under the parasol.

"I must speak to Burbage about tea," added Phyllis. "Just keep half an eye—"

"Both eyes, my dear," said Sir Peter. With his foot he drew the perambulator a little nearer to him.

John looked up from his writing.

"Give me a synonym for 'austerity,'" he commanded.

"'Sternness,'" suggested Phyllis.

"'Severity,'" said Sir Peter.

"'Severity' introduces a rhyme, which won't do at all; 'sternness' doesn't convey asceticism, as 'austerity' does. Give me others."

"'Gravity,'" said Phyllis. "Or seriousness."

"'Asperity,'" suggested Sir Peter.

"I have it!" said John. "'His stern simplicity.'"

"Why didn't you say we could have two words?" asked Sir Peter.

John's pen was busy; obviously he did not hear.

"Burbage will serve tea here, Uncle Peter," said Phyllis. "John, you will try to make Mark talk, won't you? He is so shy."

John gazed at nothing, with vacant eyes. Phyllis looked at her uncle, comically.

"Uncle Peter, you tell him about Mark the next time he gives evidence of belonging to the human family."

She walked toward the house, intent on arrangements. At the door she glanced over her shoulder.

"Uncle Peter," she called to him, "you were pushing the perambulator forward and backward with your foot. It isn't allowed."

"They always did it in my day," said Sir Peter.

"Well, they don't now," replied Phyllis.

"Very well, my dear," said Sir Peter meekly.

Phyllis went into the house. Sir Peter observed the windows keenly; when he thought the coast was clear he gently pushed the perambulator forward and backward with his foot.

Twenty minutes later a big gray car deposited three dusty persons on the little porch. Peggy and Phyllis cooed over each other. Mark pointed to Mrs. Farquharson.

"We picked her up," he said. "She had started to walk from the railway station."

Mrs. Farquharson surveyed him with an austerity that required no synonym.

"Never again," said she. "Pony-cart or no pony-cart. A hundred miles an hour, my dear, if ever he went one."

She retired to the rear, where Burbage could be found, with whom she had come to take tea and

pass the afternoon.

"Lead me to the infant!" demanded Peggy. "I haven't seen him for so long I am prepared to find him in knickerbockers, smoking a cigarette."

"Peggy! only two weeks," exclaimed Phyllis.

"Two weeks!" rejoined Peggy. "Oh, in time, of course; but aeons in experience. We have had tire trouble—"

"Oh, cut that, Peg," suggested Mark.

"I will not," retorted Peggy. "We have paid enough for new tires since we started to endow Saint Ruth's. Each time our troubles have occurred in the exact center of population. I have been stared at from front and rear by the entire British people. And Mark has given the recording angel the time of his life. Everything has happened that could wreck our married happiness, but we are now armor-clad against infelicity. We have really had the most beau-ti-ful time! We haven't eaten a meal in an inn except breakfast. Simple life by the wayside for us! Two alcohol stoves—I am starved now, though! Perhaps we had better have tea before I see the baby—I might be tempted beyond my strength."

"And you are well, Mark?" asked Phyllis.

"Finer than a new crank-shaft," he replied, grinning. "I am also in the breadline though."

"One result of our difficulties was the development of Mark's conversational powers," whispered Peggy to Phyllis. "He is almost a self-starter now."

"How well you both look, brown as—"

"Don't say gypsies!" urged Peggy. "We have heard it everywhere."

"Indians, then," said Phyllis.

Tea was served under the trees. The baby awakened as though for Peggy's express benefit. He spluttered and gurgled, and made queer faces in his charming way, selecting Peggy for the most fascinating attentions. After tea, Phyllis and Peggy went into the house to exchange confidences. Peggy carried the baby.

Sir Peter and John did their utmost with Mark. Motoring, cricket, tennis, golf—all had their turn. He was amiability itself, but he would not and could not be made to talk. They were at their wit's end when Phyllis and Peggy rejoined them, and Phyllis took Mark off to the garden.

Peggy sat with the men, chatting volubly. John's eyes followed Mark and Phyllis. When he could do so unobserved, he touched Sir Peter's arm quietly, and directed his attention to them. Mark was talking at full speed; Phyllis was listening, and cutting roses into a basket.

"Yes," said Peggy, "we have had some ripping times. The most ripping was yesterday. We almost robbed England of her greatest living poet, by nearly running Mr. Kipling down, near Pevensy. It was in a narrow lane and he was walking with his chin on his chest. We supposed, of course, he heard us. Mark used the emergency brake; the car slewed around; he wasn't even grazed. And he took it as coolly as you please. John, if we had hit him, would you be next in line for laureate?"

"I hope he was thinking out a sequel to 'Kim,'" said Sir Peter. "I picked that book up in the club library one day when I had a quarter of an hour to kill. I sat there all the afternoon. I have read it three times, since."

"I liked 'Stalky' best. How do the pretty little jingles go, John?" asked Peggy. She took a copy of "The Spectator" from the table, and turned the leaves, idly.

"Oh, jinglewise," answered John.

"My word! Listen to this," exclaimed Peggy; and then read—"We should hesitate to say that Mr. Landless's name will stand higher than the second rank of poets. But so much praise he has fairly wrested from even the most captious reviewer. Indeed his "Lyrics" invite one to the dangerous pastime of prophecy; and prophecy of a bright future for this newest of our versifiers. Certainly, if the more serious work we are promised in "London: A Poem" (which is announced for the autumn) exceeds in dignity and restraint the best of his "Lyrics," we shall throw caution to the winds and predict great things for him. We observe two typographical errors on page—' Oh! who cares about the old typographical errors! Well, well, John. Isn't that splendid! What a happy girl Phil must be!"

"We are all very happy, Margaret," said Sir Peter. "And very proud to be related to him—even by marriage."

"And Phil tells me you have turned author, too," said Peggy to Sir Peter. "A young fellow like you to be writing your 'Recollections'! Think how much more you will have to recollect if you wait a few years."

Sir Peter shook his finger at her.

"If you are not careful, young woman, I will put you into them—as I first remember you, very red and wrinkled."

Mark's and Peggy's stay was short—all too short. Mark settled down behind the wheel. "London, next," said he. Peggy's face was buried in roses as they drove off.

When they were seated again, under the trees, Phyllis regarding the baby with rapt eyes, John's curiosity suggested a question.

"Phyllis, please tell us what you set Mark to talking about. We tried everything."

"Why, about Peggy, of course," said Phyllis. "Silly! Couldn't you think of that?"

Mrs. Farquharson had awaited the departure of the Holroyds, and now, in her best black silk, came out to see the baby, and remained to chat for a few minutes. Her great news was that the first-floor front was in stocks again—with a prospect of seeing better days.

"And how is Mr. Rowlandson?" asked Phyllis.

"Odder than ever," replied Mrs. Farquharson. "He is getting a little childish, I think. The other night he told me the greatest rigmarole about some collector or other in Birmingham. He collected weapons, of all things! He had Mr. Rowlandson buy him swords, and daggers, and spears, and even bows and arrows from America, until his house fairly rattled with them. Finally, says Mr. Rowlandson, he got him the stone that David flung at Goliath, and the jawbone that Samson smote the Philistines with. 'Now,' says he, 'I am looking for the club that Cain slew Abel with, and then he will be complete.' Did ever you hear such a farrago? And his eyes twinkling all the time as though he was as sensible as ever could be! Yesterday I told him I was coming down here to take tea with Mrs. Burbage. 'With Mrs. Burbage!' says he. 'Well, what next?' 'Now, heed my words,' says I. 'That woman is not as black as she's been painted.' And then he laughs. Childish, I say. But he's terrible down on you, Mr. Landless, because the baby's a boy. 'Mr. Landless has disappointed me,' says he. 'He knows her name should be Valentine.' 'But, Mrs. Landless wanted a boy,' says I, 'to call him Peter'; as she has, bless his darling little heart, that knows his old Farquharson! 'Well,' says he, 'Mr. Landless put her up to it.'"

When she had returned to Burbage, John and Sir Peter began work on the proofs of "Recollections of an Engineer." The publishers had wished to call it "Recollections of a Great Engineer." Sir Peter told them quietly there would be no recollections if they insisted on the word.

The story of the Natal bridge would have been the making of this twelfth chapter. But the Natal story has a chapter of its own in the "Recollections" (chapter XXII—p. 227), and as the copyright restrictions are in force you will have to look for it there. Mr. Rowlandson has the book for sale—if you don't find it elsewhere.

The work on the proofs was interrupted when the baby insisted on having the red rose from Sir Peter's buttonhole. Sir Peter cut the thorns from its stem before he gave it into the tiny fingers.



SIR PETER GAVE IT INTO THE TINY FINGERS

Burbage and Farquharson stood by the garden-gate, looking in. The golden glow of late afternoon was over all. The roses nodded their heavy heads all about them. The gentle murmur of the flowing river, lapping the old stairs at the end of the garden, could be faintly heard.

Sir Peter cut the thorns from the rose, and gave it to the baby, leaning forward in its young mother's arms.

"Isn't it a pretty sight?" whispered Burbage.

"The prettiest sight that ever was in the world," said Farquharson, fumbling for her handkerchief.

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