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**A PESSIMIST;**  
**IN**  
**THEORY AND PRACTICE**  
**BY**  
**ROBERT TIMSOL.**

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## A PESSIMIST.

[7]

### I.

#### WISDOM IN THE WOODS.

I HAD seen and heard little of Hartman since our college days. There he was counted a youth of eminent promise: after that I knew that he had traveled, written something or other, and practised law—or professed it, and not too eagerly: then he had disappeared. Last May I stumbled on him in a secluded region where I had gone to fish and rest, after a year of too close attention to business. We came face to face in the woods, stared at each other, and then our hands met in the old grip. He took me home with him, to a comfortable enough bachelor establishment, and we made a night—or more than an evening—of it. He did not seem curious, but I was.

"What have you been doing with yourself!" I began; "withdrawing from the world?"

"To some extent," he said. "You can't do that entirely, you know. The world is in you as well as around you, unluckily. It is too much with us, as the poet observed. Do you remember the time you had in class over that sonnet?"

"Pass that," I said. "I've given up poetry." ("I should have thought that impossible," he put in, in

his nasty nagging fashion; but I took no notice.) "Where have you been all the time?"

"Here, mostly. It's not much of a place, but that is its merit."

He was getting too deep now, as he often did of old; so I said, "But it's so far away."

"That's its other merit. You always had a direct and ingenuous mind, Bob. Here you've hit both bull's-eyes in two shots." [8]

"None of your chaff," said I. "Who do you practice your wits on, up here?"

"My dogs. And there are some hens in the neighborhood, and a few small farmers. Or if my bosom cries too loudly to be eased of its perilous stuff, I can chaff myself, which is more profitable."

"You were always too clever for me. What else do you do?"

"As the Baroness used to say in *The Danicheffs*, in our days of vanity, 'Do you think that is much of a compliment?' I read, and fish, and climb, and ride several hobbies, and meditate on Man, on Nature, and on Human Fate."

"What's the good of that?" I was growing impatient of all this nonsense.

"Well, not much, perhaps," said he. "For you, very little indeed. But intrinsically it is about as profitable as more popular avocations."

"Now look here, Hartman," I said. "You're a better man any day than I—or you were. But here you are, hidden in the backwoods with owls (one of them was making a horrid noise outside), and nothing to show. Now I've got a wife—"

"And seven children," he interposed.

"No, only three. But I have a good business, and a house on the avenue, and a decent social position, and I'm making money. And I don't like to see you throw yourself away like this."

"Old man," said Hartman, "we are just of an age, and you would pass for five years the elder. Your hair is getting gray, and thin on top. You look fagged. And you owed to me that you came here to pick up."

He had me there a little. "Yes, I've been working hard. But I'm in the swim. I do as others do. I help to make the wheels go round." I thought I had him there; but you never can count on Hartman, except for an answer of some kind. [9]

"Wouldn't they go round without your help? And why should they go around, anyway? It might be a variety to have them stop. What's the good of it?"

I stared at him; but his eye looked more rational than his talk sounded. "The good of it is that I am in things generally, while you are out."

"Exactly so. I am out, while you are in. As to things generally, I prefer to be with the outs. It is a matter of taste, no doubt."

"Well, you are beyond me. But I brought myself in merely as an example—not that I set up to be much of that—or an illustration, say. I want to know about you." It may have been foolish, but somehow I felt the old affection coming back as we talked. "What does it all mean, Harty?"

He looked at me. "Do you really want to know, Bob?"

"Of course I do. Do you suppose I've forgotten the larks we used to have, and the scrapes you got me out of, and how you coached me through that exam, in Calculus? It's long ago, Jim; but I took it rather hard, the way you dropped me."

He began to look as he used to: he wasn't a selfish fellow in those days. "I never meant to be hard on you, Bob, nor supposed you'd take it so: and I doubt if you did, though you think so at this moment. It was part of a system; and systems are poor things, though we can't do without them. I'll tell you how it was."

"Wait till I fill up.—Now go ahead."

"You don't smoke as you used to, Bob. Does the Madam object?"

"She doesn't like tobacco about the house, of course. And I'm not sure it's good for me."

"Ah. Sorry to be leading you astray. There is no one to interfere with my little vices. Well, Bob, I got tired of it. Not that that alone would matter: one could stand being bored in a good cause. But I couldn't see that it was a good cause." [10]

"Would you mind explaining?" said I. "What cause?"

"Helping to make the wheels go round. Being in the swim. Doing as others do. Trying to make a little money and a little name, and following the fashions of a carnal-minded generation. I could see no point to it, Bob; the game never seemed worth the candle."

"And so you came out in the woods, like what's his name—that Concord fellow. Do you find this any better?"

"Negatively. I am not so much a part of the things I despise. The pomps and vanities are conspicuous chiefly by their absence. It is a simpler life, comparatively laudable for there being less of it."

"And don't you get bored, out here? A week or so of it is well enough in a way; but take it the year round, I should think you'd find it worse than civilization."

"I get bored, of course: that is incidental to life, and chronic with one who has looked beneath the surface and sifted values. But it's not so oppressive as in town. There are no shams here, to speak of. Having no business and no society, we don't pretend to be very different from what we are."

"O, if you come to that, the women still improve on nature, and the street has its little tricks and methods; but you could keep out of them. You were in the law."

"It's all the same, Bob. The law now is worked much more as a business than as a science. Look at Jones, and Brown, and Jenkins: they are getting on, I hear. I don't want to get on in that way."

"But you might have taken the scientific side of it. With your head piece, and your high and mighty notions, there was a field for you." [11]

"So is theology a field, or physic, or Greek roots, or chiropody—for him, who believes in them. I was not able to see that one line of thought has a right to crowd out all the rest, or to sink my whole soul in a profession. That's what they want of you now—to make a little clearing, and put up palings all round it, and see things outside only through the chinks of your blessed fence. Be a narrow specialist: know one thing, and care for nothing else. I suppose you can do that with oil."

I thought there was some uncalled-for bitterness in this; but the poor fellow can't be contented, with his lonesome and aimless life. "We're not talking about me, Jim. You're the topic. Stick to your text, and preach away: my soul is not so immersed in oil that I can't listen. But I don't blame you for going back on the law; a beast of a business, I always thought it. Why didn't you go for a Professorship?"

"My poor friend, you were at college four years, and graduated—without honors, it is true. Don't you remember how little we cared for the Profs. and their eminent attainments? We took it for granted that it was all right, and they understood what they were at; but it was a grind, to them and to us. If a man was an enthusiast for his branch, we rather laughed at him; or if his name was well up, we were willing to be proud of him—at a distance—as an honor to Alma Mater; but we kicked all the same, if he tried to put extra work on us. It was all fashion, routine, tradition. The student mind doesn't begin to look into things for itself till about the senior year, and then it's full of what lies ahead, in the great world outside—poor innocents! With those of us who had anything in us, it took most of the time to knock the nonsense out.—And then if a man wants a chair, he must take it in a western concern, where he'll be expected to lead in prayer-meeting, and to have no views of geology that conflict with the Catechism." [12]

"Well then, why not go on with literature? That was in your line: you might have made a good thing of it."

"Yes, by 'unremitting application,' much the same as at law, and taking it seriously as a profession, I might in time possibly have made five hundred a year off the magazines, and won an humble place among our seven hundred rising authors. What's the good of that, when one is not a transcendent genius, destined for posterity? The crowd seems to be thickest just there: too many books, too many writers, and by far too many anxious aspirants. Why should I swell the number? The community was not especially pining to hear what I might have to say; and I did not pine so much as some to be heard."

"I fear you lacked ambition, Harty. You would have made a pretty good preacher; but I suppose you weren't sanctified enough."

"Thanks: scarcely. I prefer to retain some vestiges of self-respect. That will do for the youths on the beneficiary list, who are taken in and done for from infancy, to whom it is an object to get a free education and into a gentlemanly profession. That's the kind they mostly make parsons of now, I hear. My boy, to do anything really in that line, a man ought to have notions different from mine—rather. Why don't you advise me to set up a kindergarten? That would suit as well as chronicling ecclesiastical small beer. Cudgel your brains, and start something more plausible."

This did not surprise me at all; but my suggestion-box was getting low. Then I made a rally. "How about the philanthropic dodge? Robinson is on the Associated Charities in town. I saw in the paper that he made a speech the other night." [13]

"If he does nothing better than speech-making, he might as well drop it. There might be something in benevolent efforts, if one had just the temperament and talents for them. But as it is, I fear most of it is humbug; mutual admiration, seeing your name in the paper, and all that. And how they get imposed on! How they pauperize and debauch those they try to raise! It's a law of nature, Bob, that every tub must stand on its own bottom: you can't reform a man from without. Natural selection will have its way: the shiftless and the lazy must go to the wall. If you could kill them off, now, that might do some good. The class that needs help is not like us—not that we are anything to brag of: they've not had our chance. It's very well to say, give 'em a chance; but that's no use unless they take it, which they won't. 'Who would be free, themselves must strike the blow.' If they wouldn't, you are bound to respect their right of choice. Your

drunken ruffian will keep on breaking the furniture, till another like him breaks his skull. His wife, the washerwoman with six small children, will continue getting more and making things worse. This part of it at least ought to be regulated by law: but that would be a restriction of personal liberty, which is the idol of this age, and not without reason. We're between two millstones, and I see no way out."

"How would you like politics? The gentleman is supposed to have an opening there now."

"A doubtful and difficult one. If it had come in my time I might have tried it. But it would be uphill work, a sort of Sisyphus affair: you may get the stone to the top, but the chances are against it. And which party is one to join, when he sees nothing in either but selfish greed and stale traditions? Viewed as a missionary field, Bob, it's just like the ministry: you are weighed down with a lot of dead conventions which you must pretend to believe have life and juice in them yet. Before you can do anything you must be a partisan, and that requires a mediæval state of mind. Mine, unluckily if you like, is modern. It wouldn't go, Bob. Try again, if you have more on your list."

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"Well, there's pure Science: you wouldn't care for the applied, I know. But you used to like beetles and things. Truth for Truth's sake is a fine motto, now?"

"Yes, if they lived by it. There was Bumpus, old Chlorum's favorite student—in the laboratory, you remember. The old man died, and Bumpus stole all his discoveries, and published them as his own; made quite a pretty reputation, and is one of our leading chemists. You know how the books on Astronomy are made? A man finds out a thing or two for himself, cribs the rest from other books, changes the wording, and brings it all out with a blare of trumpets as original research. Those methods are approved, or at least tolerated, in the best scientific circles, and other folks don't know the difference. O, I belong to a few societies yet, and once in an age go to their meetings, when I get tired up here."

"So the outside world still has charms, eh? Have to go back to it now and then, to keep alive, do you?"

"Yes, when I need to be reconciled to solitude; much as you go to hear Ingersoll when your orthodoxy wants confirming, or Dr. Deadcreed if your liberalism is to be stirred up. Let us spice the insipid dish with some small variety. The lesser evil needs the greater for its foil."

"Look here, Harty; this sounds like pure perverseness; opposition for its own sake, you know. I believe your money has been the ruin of you. It's not an original remark, but if you'd had nothing you'd have done something; gone into business like the rest of us, and made your way."

[15]

"Of course, if I had been obliged to; but I should have loved it none the better. Poor Bayard Taylor said a man could serve God and mammon both, but only by hating the mammon which he served from sheer necessity. Say I got my living by a certain craft, would that make the craft noble? 'Great is Diana of the Ephesians,' because we sell her images! Why should I desire to supply the confiding public with shoes, or sugar, or sealing-wax? Plenty of others can do that better, and find it more amusing, than I should."

"If it's amusement you're after, most men find it in Society. You're not too old for that yet."

"Blind guide, I have been there. So long ago, you say, that I've forgotten what it's like? Not quite. Last winter I had to attend an execution: couldn't get out of it, you know. My cousin married a Washington belle, and I had to be there a week, and take it all in. Ah well, this is a threadbare theme; but I could understand how men fifteen hundred years ago fled from Alexandrian ball-rooms to Nitrian deserts. The emptiness of it—the eternal simper, the godless and harrowing routine! If a man has brains or a soul about him, what can he do with them in such a crowd? Better leave them at home with his pocket-book, or he might lose them—less suddenly, but more certainly, I fancy. No, the clubs are not much better; I don't care for horse-talk or the price of shares. See human nature? not in its best clothes—and you may read that remark either way you like. Why man, you can get all this in *Punch* and the novels, with far less fatigue, and lay them down when you have had enough. An hour on Broadway sickens me for the wild-flowers, the brooks, the free breeze or the mountain side."

[16]

He was getting violent now, and I thought I had better calm him down. "Oho! the rhyme and reason of a rural life, is it? Soothing effect of Nature on a world-worn bosom, and all that? So you do believe in something, after all?"

"I told you it was but a choice of evils, and this is the less. Nature has neither heart nor conscience, and she sets us a bad example. She has no continuity, no reliableness, no self-control. I can see none of the fabled sublimity in a storm; only the pettishness of a spoiled child, or of an angry man bent on breaking things. The sunset is better to look at, but it has no more moral meaning than a peep-show. Yet this is a return to primitive conditions, in a way. I can throw off here the peddler's pack of artificialities that Vanity Fair imposes, and carry only the inevitable burden of manhood. The air is less poisonous to body and mind than in the cities. The groves were God's first temples, and may be the last."

"See here, Hartman. Suppose people in general were to take up with these cheerful notions of yours, and go away from each other and out in the backwoods—what then?"

"It might be the best thing they could do. But don't be alarmed, Bob: I am not a Nihilist agent. Preserve your faith in the Oil Exchange and the general order. I speak only for myself, and I'm

not proselyting to any great extent. We'll have a week's fishing, and then I'll send you back to your wife in good shape. Or if you find yourself getting demoralized, you can skip earlier, either home or to a place further up that I'll tell you of, where the few inhabitants are as harmless as your youngest baby."

But I was not to be bluffed off in this way. "Jim," I said, "there is something behind all this. Was it that girl you met at Newport and afterwards in Naples? You told me once—"

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"Never mind the girl," he said. "You are a married man, and I an old bachelor. Leave girls to those who have use for them. If we are to get any trout to-morrow, it's time we turned in. And if you won't stay, I'll go with you to the tavern and knock up old Hodge: he's been asleep these four hours." I thought he had talked enough for one night, so I said no more, but got back to bed.

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## II.

### WORSE YET.

HARTMAN had asked me to stay with him, but there is no use of overloading friendship, and I like to be my own master as well as he does. I might get tired of him, or he of me; and it's not well to be chained to your best friend for a solid week. Not that I am afraid of Hartman; he is not a lunatic, only a monomaniac; but I can cheer him up better when I have a good line of retreat open. He took me next morning to some superior pools, where the trout were fat and fierce; but I had not my usual skill. The truth is, Jim was on my mind; and after missing several big fish and taking a good deal of his chaff, I begged off—said I had letters to write—and so got to the tavern in time for dinner, which they have at the pagan hour of half-past eleven. Then I set to work thinking. I am not quite so dull as I may seem, but Hartman always had the ascendancy at college, and last night I fell into the old way of playing chorus to his high tragedy. This will not do, and I must assert myself. He was much the better student of course, but I have knocked about and seen more of the world than he has, shut up in these woods like a toad in a tree. He is too good a sort to go to seed with his confounded whimsies; so I determined to take a different tone with him. And I wrote to my wife about it: Mabel is a competent woman, and sometimes has very good ideas where mine fail—though of course I seldom let her see that. That evening I took him in hand.

[18]

"Jim," I said, "I've been thinking—about you."

"Ah," said he. "Large results may be expected from such unusual exertion. Impart them by all means."

"James Hartman, you are lazy, and selfish, and unprincipled."

"Yes?" said he, in an inquiring tone. "That is your thesis. Prove it."

I went on. "A man should be doing something: you are doing nothing. A man should have a stake in the community. What have you got? Three dogs and an old cow. A man should be in connection and sympathy with the great tides of life. Here you are with nobody but yokels to talk to, and the pulse of the region about two to the minute."

"Twin brother of my soul, companion of the palmy days of youth, methinks—as they say in the wild and wondrous West—you hit me where I live. But none of these things move me. I am lost in admiration of your oratory: really, Bob, I didn't think it was in you. But you said all this, in simpler language, last night."

I saw I had overshot the mark: when he takes that tone, you are nowhere. "Jim," I said, "let's be serious. Begin where we left off, then. Granted that you don't care for making money, and the ends most of us are after. By character and fortune you are above the usual selfish motives. Still you are a man, a member of the community: you have duties to your fellows. Let the nobler motives come in. Do something to make the world happier, wiser, better. You have the power, if you had the will. Are not private talents a public trust? You used to berate the hogs of Epicurus' sty. It seems to me you've fallen back on mere self-indulgence. Your life here is a huge egoism. Cut loose from these withering notions: there is a better side to things than the one you see. Come back to the world, and be a man again."

[19]

His eye was very bright now—not that it was ever dull—but I could not quite make out what it meant; perhaps mere curiosity. "Robert," he said, "I should believe that somebody had been coaching you, but there's no one in range who could do it except myself. It's not like you to have brought books along; and you've not had time to hear from home. What put you up to this?"

"Hartman," I said, "look me in the eye and see whether I mean what I say. Go back with me next week. Make your home at my house till you can look round. I'll introduce you to some men who are not shams—and women, if you like. I know a few who have souls and consciences, though they do go to parties. I'll help you all I'm worth. You can make a new start. Something went wrong before. Better luck this time."

"Bob," said he, "I'll take your word for it. Deeply touched by such unexpected and undeserved consideration—no, I won't chaff. You're not half a bad lot. But, my dear boy, you see the thing

from your standpoint; mine is different. I'll try to explain. But what would you have me do?"

"Whatever is best for you. Anything, so you get an object in life."

"Do you remember what De Senancour says, in *Obermann*?"

"Not I. Put it in your own English, please: no French morals in mine."

"What is there to be done that is worth doing? It seems to me that everything is overdone. I go into a town, big or little: ten stores where one is needed. How do all these poor creatures live? Do you see anything noble in this petty struggle for existence? I can't. I serve my kind best by getting out of their way: that makes one less in the scramble."

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"I shouldn't expect you to sell tape or taffy, Jim. You could deal in a higher line of goods, and do it in your own way."

"They don't want my goods, Bob, and I can't do it in my own way. I have tried—not much, but enough to see. There is no market for my wares: and I'm not sure they are worth marketing—or that any man's are. Truth as I see it is the last article to be in demand."

"As you think you see it just now, very likely. Your eye is jaundiced, and sees all things yellow. Get well, and you can find a market. Fit your mind to the facts, and receive a true impression."

"Exactly what I have done—so far as any impression is true. That's the point I've been waiting for you to come to. 'The Universe is change, and Life is opinion.' As a man thinketh in his heart, so is he; and as he thinks of things outside himself, so are they to him. One can do no more than use his eyes and brains, and then rule himself by what he sees. I have looked at matters more carefully and dispassionately than some do, and seen a little deeper into them: the prospect is not edifying, Bob. I am prejudiced, you say? No, I have cast aside prejudice. Most of you are misled by the love of life: you want to give a favorable account of your own belongings, and the wish is father to the thought: so you blink what is before you, and won't own the truth. Perhaps you are wise in your way: you gain such bliss as is in ignorance. Keep it if you can: I have no desire to disturb it."

"Jim, mayn't there be a little conceit of superior wisdom here?"

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"Very possibly: as the lamented Bedott observed, we are all poor creatures. 'I do not speak as one that is exempt:' doubtless I have my full share of infirmity."

"Then why not take the benefit of it, with the rest of us? There's a better as well as a worse side. Take things as they are, and make the best of them."

"I do. The best is the least, and I get away from things as much as possible. To minimize life is to make the best of it."

"Now you're at it again; begging the question, and dodging the argument—you'd say, summing it up, I suppose. I tell you, it's all mental, and your mind's diseased. You think you're injured by the scheme of things. Well, change your opinion, and the injury is gone. Didn't one of your old philosophers say something like that?"

"He didn't give it quite the application you do, Bob. How can I change an opinion that is based accurately on facts? I don't make the facts: if I did, my opinion of myself would be yet worse than it is. I have a brain—such as it is—and a conscience: I can keep them clean and awake, even on Crusoe's island. Nothing better than that, my boy. 'What is the good of man? Rectitude of will, and to understand the appearances of things.'"

"Well, Hartman, if you had two or three kids, as I have, you'd see things differently. They would give you an interest in life."

"A tragically solemn one, no doubt. That responsibility at least can't be forced on a man. He can let his part of the curse die out with him."

"Jim, you *are* selfish. You were made to gladden some woman's eye and fill her heart. You were the strongest man of the nine, and the best oar in the crew. We all envied your looks, and there's more of them now. You could outshine all the gilded youth I know, and hold your own with the best. I remember a girl that thought so, a dozen years ago. Somewhere a woman is waiting for you to come and claim her. Why will you rob her and the world? This wilful waste is selfish wickedness, that's what it is."

[22]

"Think so if you must: it's a free country. But you sugar the pill too much. Who misses me—or what if some few did for a while? They've forgotten me long ago. I tell you, I served society by deserting it."

"It's all very well now, Jim, while your youth and strength last. But after you turn forty, or fifty say, these woods and whims will lose their charm; you'll get bored as you've never been yet. The emptiness and dreariness that you theorize about will become stern realities: you'll pine, when it's too late, for human affection and some hold on life. My lad, you are storing up for yourself a sad old age."

I thought I had him at last. His surface lightness was all gone: he looked intent and solemn. "No doubt of it, Bob; not the least in life. I am human, and the worst is yet to come. But do you think me such a cad as to go back on my principles in search of so poor a shadow as happiness? Shall I,

in base hope of easing my own burden, throw it on somebody else who but for me might go through existence lightly? Should I call sentient beings out of the blessed gulf of nothingness, that they may pay a duty to my weakness by and by, and curse me in their hearts? That would be somewhat too high a price to pay for broth when I am toothless, and the coddling comforts of one who has lived too long."

I am not thin-skinned, but his tone shocked me. "Dear boy," I said, "they wouldn't look at it in that light. They would be your wife and your children."

"Yes," he said, still savagely, "they would be my wife and children—supposing your un-supposable case. Grant that my notions are as false and monstrous as you think them: a pleasant lot for my wife, wouldn't it, to be in constant contact with them? And my children would have my blood in them—the taint of eccentricity, perhaps of madness: O, I've seen it in your eye. Others would think so too—most, no doubt. No, Bob; better let it die out with me."

[23]

"Jim, you make me tired. I'll go back to the tavern." I was disappointed, and he saw it.

"Don't make yourself wretched about me, old man. Let this thing go—you can't mend it. Follow your own doctrine, and take what you find. We have the May weather, good legs, and our tackle, and the brooks are full of trout. I kill nothing bigger than fish, but if you want a change I'll show you where you can have a chance for deer. And for the evenings, there are other topics besides ourselves—or rather myself. You can tell me about your children; they are likely to be healthier than mine would be. Good night, my boy: sound sleep, and no dreams of me."

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### III.

[24]

#### COMPLICATIONS.

AFTER that I found it best to do as Hartman had said. The sport was good, but I failed to enjoy it. I suppose I was a fool, for each of us makes or mars his own life, and it is no use moping over your neighbor's blunders; but I could not get that poor devil out of my mind. He talks as well on one subject as on another: it was I, not he, had brought him under discussion; but the evenings dragged. Then came a letter from home: the distance is considerable, and the mails slow. "Dear Robert," my wife wrote, "I am glad to know you are so comfortable. Keep your flannels on, and change your clothing when you have been in the wet. The children are well: Herbert fell over the banisters yesterday, but fortunately without injury. Bring your friend Mr. H. back with you; he seems to be presentable, and evidently all he needs is a little cheering feminine society." [Hum: feminine society puts a higher estimate on its own powers than I do, then.] "Clarice has returned. You know how enterprising she is, not to say wilful, and how fond she is of you. She has taken a fancy to try your retreat, and learn to catch trout." [She has, eh? Well, let's get on with this.] "Jane will go with her, of course: they start on Thursday. Secure rooms for them, and have a vehicle to meet them."

Here was a nice situation. To make Mabel easy about me, I had enlarged too much on the accommodations here; they are a long way from what she supposes. I called the landlord. "Hodge, here are two ladies coming from the city. Where can you put them?"

"Wall, I d'no, Square. Ain't much used to city gals. Hope they don't bring no sarrytogys. There ain't nothin but your room, an mine, an old Poll's, and the gerrit. Me and you might go out in the hayloft like, or sleep on the pyazzer if the nights is warm."

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While he was maundering on, the whole truth flashed upon me. Why can't I see things at once, like Hartman? If I had his sharpness, and he my slow common sense, there would be two men fit for this world's uses—which neither of us appears to be, as the case stands. I had rashly said too much about Jim and his attractions. Mabel is a born manager and matchmaker—can't endure to see an eligible man uncaught. She has put the girls up to this game: 'cheering feminine society,' indeed! My sister Jane is a sensible woman enough, and not much younger than I; but Clarice is a beauty with six years' experience, and irresistible, some think. 'Enterprising'—well, I should say so: cheeky, you might call it. Women do take such stunning liberties nowadays. My wife would reprove me for slang; but weaker words fail to express the fact, and my feelings about it. I might stand these girls coming up here after me—Clarice is a sort of eighth cousin of Mabel's and looks on me as a brother. But Jim—no. She must be pining for more worlds to conquer, and it would just suit her book to bring a romantic hermit to her feet. I should like well enough to see her try it, when I was not responsible, but not under present circumstances. Great Cæsar! Jim will think I have put up this job on him, and never forgive me: nor would I, in his place. This field is getting too thick with missionaries.—"Hodge, it won't do. Harness your old nag, and drive me to the station. I must telegraph. And while I'm there, I may as well put for home. We can catch the night train if you hurry."

"Wall, Square, I don't cotton to suddint changes: like to move when I git a good ready. Ye put a man off his base, Darn—."

I checked his incipient profanity. "My friend, whether you like it or not is in this case immaterial. I'll pay you for the time I meant to stay, and all you like for the fifteen miles. But be quick, now."

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While he was hunting strings for his broken buckboard, I threw my traps together, and scratched a line to Jim: called home by sudden press of business, I said—and so it was, in a way. It is a long ride, but I had enough to think of. At the depot I wired, "Hold the girls. I am coming back." As I straightened up from this exercise, there was the old sinner grinning malignantly over my shoulder. "Hodge," I said, "not a word about the ladies to Mr. Hartman, mind," and I gave him an extra dollar. This was another mistake, I suppose.

"Never you mind, Square: tain't me as goes back on my friends." What could the old fool be thinking of? I would have given him some more cautions, but the train came, and I was off.

You may imagine the reception at home. I tried to take a high hand, but what can a man do against three women? "I really think, Robert," said Mabel, "that since the girls had set their hearts on this excursion, you might have indulged them." "The conceit of men!" cried Clarice; "what had our coming to do with Mr. Hartman? Is he lord of the manor, that no one may trespass on his demesne?" Jane too turned on me. "It was not very kind of you, brother, to prefer a mere acquaintance above your own sister, and suspect her motives in order to save his peace, forsooth!" I knew it was humbug; but I had to eat no end of humble pie, all the same. You may believe me or not—if you are a family man you will, without difficulty—but I had to get those women apart, and explain things to them one at a time, before I could have peace in the house. My own flesh and blood were soon mollified; but Clarice has not forgiven me yet. I have been on my knees to her, so to speak—most men do it, and she expects it—but it is of no use. "My dear Clarice," said I, "you know I would do anything in the world for you." "Yes," said she contemptuously, "I've just had experience of it." "But you don't know Hartman." "Then why couldn't you let me know him?" "But it wouldn't have done, under these circumstances. He—I—" "Unhappy man," she said, with her tragedy queen air, "is it possible you imagined that you were a better judge of the proprieties than I?" And that's the way it goes. I am coming to believe Hartman was right about the fate of philanthropic efforts, at least.

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In the midst of all this came a note from Jim himself. "Dear Bob, I enclose something which Hodge says you left behind." [O thrice-accursed idiot, did I leave Mabel's letter lying around loose?] "Of course I have not looked into it, but I fear he has." [You may bet on that: the only chance was that he could not read her fine Italian hand.] "He says one of your children fell down stairs: I trust the results were not serious. Sorry you left in such haste, and hindered the ladies from coming. Hodge's quarters are not palatial, but you could bunk with me, as I at first proposed; and since they were willing to rough it, we would have managed somehow. You could surely rely on my humble aid toward making their sojourn in the wilderness endurable. And *per contra*, a little cheering feminine society might have assisted your benevolent efforts toward my reclamation. Was it not selfish to leave me thus unconsolated and unconverted?"

Well, the business is done now, with neatness and dispatch. That beast Hodge has told Jim all he knew or suspected, even to that fatal phrase of my wife's: so there's an end of his faith in me, and of any chance I might have had to set him straight. That was a fortnight ago, and I have not the face to answer him. When I have any more doctrinaire anchorites to convert, I shall not call a family council. But alas, poor Hartman!

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#### IV.

#### A WILFUL PRINCESS.

I WAS wrong about Hartman after all. He has written me again, and this is what he says:

"Do you want to confirm the heretical opinions you argued against so manfully? You had revived my faith in friendship, Bob: I believed, and would like still to believe, that one man can be true and kind to another. And perhaps in general you had stirred and shaken me up more than you knew. Socrates outranks Pyrrho, and I am open to conviction. Possibly I have been too sweeping; I don't wish to dogmatize. It may be that I have lived alone too long, shut up in a narrow space, where light could enter only through my perversely colored glasses. At any rate, your coming was like opening a door and letting in a wholesome breeze. Have I offended you? I thought I was past asking favors from my kind: but do let me hear from you."

Of course I had to answer that, and worse, to show it to the girls. Some men, now, would keep it to themselves, and preserve their dignity; but such is not my style. Let them crow over me if they must.

They did. "Well, Robert," said Mabel, "you see now how absurdly mistaken you were. Perhaps hereafter you will allow us to manage our own affairs, and not complicate them with your bungling masculine attempts at superior wisdom." "I am glad to know, brother," said Jane, "that your friend is a gentleman, incapable of the base suspicions you would have attributed to him. You did your best to prevent our knowing him and carrying out your ideas for his improvement: now we shall be able to meet him cordially, and try to cheer him a little. But probably he is not at all as dark as you have painted him."

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Clarice would say nothing: she was in one of her high and mighty moods. Her soul is like a star, and sits up aloft; sometimes it twinkles, but more generally it does not. I often want to tell her that she is a creature too bright and good to come to breakfast like other folks; but somehow she

has a way of keeping people at a distance, and even of repressing my pleasantries. We call her the Princess: She has to be approached with bated breath, and you must whisper your compliments if you want to fire them off at her; rear them as gently as a sucking child, in fact—and then they are very seldom appreciated.

"Clarice," I said, "I want to get Hartman down here. Do treat him kindly, please; won't you, now?"

She looked at me with her Juno air. "Why should I treat him kindly?"

"O well, I won't say for my sake, because you wouldn't care for that. But the poor devil has lived in the woods so long."

"He might have been well enough in his woods; but why should you bring your poor devils into civilized society, and expect me to bear with their gaucheries, in addition to your own?"

There it is: she'll not forgive me in a year for upsetting her fine plan of going up there to beard the hermit in his den. She rarely takes these fancies, I must own; and when she does, she is not accustomed to be balked of them. As it has turned out, I might as well have let her have her way that time; there was no harm in it. "Princess, haven't you trampled on me enough? I was wrong, and I'm very sorry: what more can a man say? But Hartman had no hand in that." [30]

"Yes, that is clear now, no thanks to you. Small merit in confessing after you are proved guilty."

"Well, you are pretty hard on a fellow. But you needn't punish Hartman for my fault. Thrash me all you like, but give him a chance. I give you my word of honor, Clarice, he is a finished gentleman, and very different from me. You needn't fear awkwardness in him. I knew you would like him."

"How do *you* know what I would like? If this Mr. Hartman wants to see a little of the world, I have no desire to prevent his being reclaimed from barbarism. Mabel and Jane can do that, without my aid. To tell you the truth, Robert, I don't care to meet the man, after the disgusting complications which you have introduced."

I groaned—I couldn't help it. "Princess, please God, I will never interfere with you again. You shall be safe from any meddling of mine. If you will kindly say what you want, and say it slow, so that my limited faculties can take it in, I will try to act accordingly. But, if I may make so bold as to inquire, what are you up to now?"

"I shall go away. O, you need not feel so badly about it, Bob: I am not tied to you and Mabel. I was in the South all winter, you know, and only returned while you were at your fishing. I have a dozen invitations for the summer: I think I will join Constance."

"Not if I can help it, you won't. This is your natural home, Clarice, and you shall not be driven from it. Nobody shall enter here who is not acceptable to you: if anything about the house don't suit you, name it and it shall be corrected. You know Jane and Mabel worship you; so do the children, if you count them. I'll not have Hartman; or I can entertain him at the club while you are all at Newport." [31]

"That will be hospitality indeed. Would you desert your friend for me?"

"I would not desert you for all the friends under the canopy. You have always ruled the house when you deigned to be in it, and you always will. I may be low in your books, but it does not follow that you are not high in mine. We can't do without you, Princess; you must stay. Name your price, and I'll pay it if it breaks me."

"Very well then; I will remain, and meet your Mr. Hartman. But one thing must be distinctly understood: there must be no more crossing of my will. I must be absolutely free and unhampered, to plan and carry out what I see fit. I may possibly be wrong at times; but you will not know when, and it is not for you to judge. No more interference or opposition, remember. Do the terms suit you?"

"O Lord, yes. I'll have a throne set up in the drawing-room, and everybody shall approach you Siamese fashion. And perhaps I had better come to you to see if my tie is right before dinner, and to practice what I shall say when we have company."

"It might improve you. But Mabel should be competent to attend to those trifles. On one point I must instruct you, though. I shall doubtless do things that appear to you strange, perverse, incomprehensible. In such cases it will be best for you to walk by faith. No meddling nor espionage, mind."

"Clarice, you don't think me capable of playing the spy on you?"

"Not that exactly, but you sometimes indulge in little tricks and stratagems: you like to think that you hoodwink your wife—not that it ever succeeds—in small unimportant matters. Mabel and Jane may endure your attempts, if they like; but don't try them on me. They would never deceive me for a moment, of course; but I can't waste time in explaining that to you in detail. Besides, your fancied success would unsettle your mind, and so tend to disturb the domestic equilibrium." [32]

"Good heavens, Clarice! would I lie to you?"

"No: you dare not. But let me have no subterfuges, no concealments, and no criticisms. What I

may do you cannot expect to understand, nor is it necessary that you should."

"Well, thought has been hitherto supposed to be free. When I see you at those little games of which you are to enjoy a monopoly, can't I have an opinion of them?"

"O yes. The opinion will be of small value, but your poor mind must be amused and occupied somehow, I suppose. But you will be carrying your opinions about the house, and introducing an element of confusion. If you could keep your own counsel, now—but that is hopeless."

"When you are operating on Hartman, for instance, it might confuse the programme if I were to say anything to him, eh?"

"When I take Mr. Hartman up, it will be very much better for his welfare and yours for you to leave him in my hands."

"O, he would rather be left there, no doubt, though they grind him to powder. But what the deuce am I to do? If I mayn't talk to anybody else, can't I come to you with my opinions—in odd moments, when your serene highness has nothing better on hand?"

"You may bring your valuable ideas to me, and I will hear them, when I have leisure and inclination. Yes, that will be best. But no concealments, mind. When you think you know anything that affects me, come to me with it at once: otherwise you will be blurting it out to somebody else. You promise?"

"I swear, by all my hopes of your royal favor. Anything else? I mean, has your majesty any further commands? You'll have to give me audience about three times a day, you know, to keep me in mind of all these rules, or I'll be safe to forget some of them." [33]

"You had better try to remember. I'll keep an eye on you. And now do you want any more, or have you learnt your lesson?"

"I'll trust so. Henceforth I shall not call my soul my own. The humblest of your slaves craves permission to kiss the royal hand. I say, Clarice, you won't be rough on poor Hartman, will you? He's had hard lines: you could easily break him to pieces, what is left of him."

"If there is so little left of him, there would be small credit in breaking him to pieces, as you elegantly express it. I shall probably let him alone."

"Scarcely. There is a good deal left of him yet: he is as handsome a fellow, and as fine a fellow, as you'd be apt to find. You're tired of the regulation article, dancing man and such, that you meet every night: I don't wonder. This is something out of the common. He needs a little looking after, too. I wish now I had let you get at him in May, as you proposed."

"Robert, if you fling that odious and vulgar figment of your debased imagination at me again, I will go away and never come back. You make me sick of the man's name. If you ever breathe a hint of this disgusting slander to him I will never forgive either of you, nor speak to you."

"God forbid, Princess dear. Don't you know that your good name is as sacred to me as Mabel's? Wasn't I to come to you with notions that I couldn't put in words to anybody else?"

"Let them have some shadow of reason and decency about them, then. Cannot a girl plan a rural excursion, in company with your sister and under your escort, without being accused of designs on a strange man who chances to be in the neighborhood? You try my patience sorely, Robert. I wonder how Mabel can endure you." [34]

"Well, he that is down can't fall any lower, as it says in Pilgrim's Progress. Walk over me some more, and then maybe you'll feel better. What the d—There, I'm at it again. Clarice, it might improve me if you would mix a little kindness with your corrections; handle me as if you loved me, like the old fisherman with his worms, you know. It discourages a fellow to get all kicks and no kisses."

"Robert, look me in the eye and swear to purge your mind of that vile thought, and never to admit another that dishonors me."

"O, I swear it. Bring me the Thirty-nine Articles and the Westminster Catechism and the Ten Tables, and I'll subscribe to all of 'em. I'll think anything you tell me to: I signed my soul away an hour ago." Here I saw that I had gone too far, and she was really angry. She's right; I must learn to check my confounded tongue, if I am to keep on any terms with the Princess. So I changed my tune, just in time. "Don't go, Clarice. Honestly, I beg your pardon; upon my soul, I do. Your word is all the evidence I want of any fact under heaven, of course. Princess dear, I've been fond of you since you were a baby, and it has grown with your growth—it has, really. I'll prove it some day: you wait and see. Forgive me this once, won't you? Don't speak, if you are tired, but just give me your hand, as they did in the Old Testament, in token of forgiveness."

She gave it. I am not good at descriptions, but a man might go barefoot and fasting for a week, and be paid by touching such a hand as that. The queer thing is that I've known Clarice for over twenty years—I told you she had been in society for six—and practically lived with her most of that time, and yet she grows more surprising every day. It seems to be generally supposed that familiarity breeds contempt in such cases; that sisters, and wives, and the like, get to be an old story to the men who belong to them. Clarice is not that kind: possibly I am not. To be sure, she is neither my wife nor any blood relation; but I don't see that that makes any difference. They took [35]

out a patent for her up above, and reserved all rights, with no power of duplication. She might care for me a little more; but then I don't suppose I've ever given her any reason to. I am well enough in my way, but I'm not such an original and striking specimen of my 'sect' as she is of hers—not by a long shot. She was exhausted now, and that is how I got a chance to put in all this wisdom just here. I might talk to Mabel for a week, and it would produce no effect: but a little thing upsets the Princess, her organization is so delicate and sensitive. She is all alive and on fire, or else languid and disdainful: she can't take life easily, as people of coarser grain do, like me. Her brain weighs too much and works too hard; that uses her up. I don't doubt she has a heart to match; but it has never yet waked up to any great extent, so far as I have seen or heard. No matter; people will care for you all the same, Beauty, whether you care for them or not. Don't fancy that I am the only one—far from it: but I have the luck to be her adopted brother from infancy, and to have access to her when others have not. She is not always kind—very seldom, in fact, up to date: but it is a privilege to look at her, and any treatment from her is good enough for me. She used to tyrannize over me in this way when she was ten and I twenty, and so it will be, no doubt, to the end of the chapter. Outside, I sometimes take on a man-of-the-world air, and fancy that I can think of you lightly, my Princess—that is the correct society tone, and it does not pay to display the finer feelings of our nature to the general world: but when I come under the spell of your presence, I know that that is all humbug, and that you are Fair Inez of the ballad, God bless you. You and Hartman ought to get on together: it might be a good thing for you both—him especially. Mabel and Jane are women too, but they are as devoted to you as I am, according to their lights, and more jealous for you: jealousy seems to be no part of me, luckily. Well, between us we ought to be able to keep all harm from you, if you will let us.

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Of course I didn't say all this out loud, but only thought it. Then she opened her eyes and yawned a little.

"Have I been asleep, Bob? I must have been: you tired me so. O yes, I know you think a good deal of me: that is an old story. Well, anything more?"

"Only about poor Hartman, dear: you didn't promise yet."

"Well, when he comes I will look him over and see what is to be done with him. I must go upstairs and dress now." And with this I had to be content.

This conversation occurred of a Sunday afternoon, when Mabel and Jane had gone to Church, and taken Herbert with them: the infants were out for an airing with their nurse. Fortunately there was a long missionary sermon, and a big collection, to which I must send five dollars extra: the occasion was worth that much to me. As the Princess left the room, they came in. They looked at her, then at me. "What have you been doing to Clarice, Robert?"

"Only preparing her to receive Hartman."

"Preparing her! you great goose, what does she want with your preparation? You'll only prejudice her against him, and spoil any chances he might have. Let her alone, do. Haven't you made mischief enough between them already?"

[37]

That is all they know about it. Churchgoing sometimes fails to bring the female mind into a proper frame. But you see they are ready to scratch out even my eyes at the thought that I have been rubbing her down the wrong way. No matter: I know what I know, and they need not try to make me believe that these things will go right without proper management.

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## V.

### CONSULTATION.

WE usually go to Newport for the summer. As Mrs. Fishhawk says, the bathing is so fine, and the cliffs are such a safe place for children to play. Not that we care so much for the society: the Princess has seen the vanity of that and been bored with it, and the rest of us are very domestic people. After much persuasion through the mail, Hartman agreed to join us there: I was to pick him up in New York and take him down. A night or two before this, Clarice took me out on the aforesaid cliffs, which afford a fine walk in the moonlight with the right kind of company, but somewhat dangerous if you get spoony and forget to look where you are going. The Princess, it is needless to say, never commits this folly: she always has her wits about her, and wits of a high order they are, as not a few men have found to their cost, myself included,—many and many a time. She opened the ball.

"Robert, do you remember our compact?"

"I'm not likely to forget it. Your words are my law, more sacred and peremptory than the Ten Commandments, or those of the old codger who wrote 'em in blood because his ink had given out. As a servant looks to the hand of his mistress, so am I to watch your dark blue eye for direction and approval. Deign to cast a sweet smile, however faint, in this direction occasionally: it won't cost you much, and will encourage me. If the devotion of a lifetime—"

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"Yes, I know all that: at least you've said it often enough. Now you will have an opportunity to put it in practice. Drop generalities, and come to business."

"My heart's queen, I am all attention. Speak, and thy slave obeys. Bid me leap from yon beetling crag into the billows' angry roar—"

"Will you stop that, or shall I go into the house? We are not rehearsing private theatricals now."

"Ah, indeed? I thought we might be. I expect to see some next week."

"You will see my place at table vacant if you don't keep quiet, and listen to what I have to say. I can join Constance yet. You talk about your affection for me and anxiety to serve me, and when I want something definite of you, you go off into the Byronic, or the Platonic, or what you would perhaps call the humorous: it is not easy to discriminate them. Once for all, will you do as I bid you, or not?"

When the Princess wants to bring a man to book, he has to come there, and stay there till he sees a favorable opening for a break: there was none such just now. So I called in the white-winged coursers of my too exuberant fancy, locked them up in the barn, begged the lady's pardon as usual, and composed myself into an attitude of respectful and devout attention, as if I were in church. It was not long after dinner: I wanted to have some more fun, but that did not seem to be just the time and place for it. My preceptress eyed me sternly, and waxed anew the thread of her discourse.

"I told you that my actions might appear strange to your ignorance. I will tell you now what my plan is, so far as is necessary for your guidance: then perhaps you will have sense enough not to go gaping about, but to fall into line and do what is required of you. I have determined to see very little of this Mr. Hartman—"

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"O now, Clarice! After you promised! I relied on you—"

"Be still, stupid, and hear me out. I shall see but little of him at first. You have made such an ado about the man, I am disposed to be interested in him, for your sake. There, that will do; let my hand be."—I was merely pressing it a little, I assure you, to testify my gratitude for this unusual consideration: I don't know when she ever owned to doing a thing for my sake before. "For your sake first, you great baby, and then, if he is worth it, for his own. But at the start, as I told you, I must look him over; and that I can do best at a little distance."

"And then you mean to take him in and do for him? You can, of course; but, Princess dear, be merciful—for my sake first, and then, if he is worth it, for his own. Don't grind him up too fine: leave pieces of him big enough to be recognized and collected by his weeping friends."

"Robert, you really ought to try to restrain your native coarseness. What can a man like you know of the motives and intentions of a woman like me? Poor child, if I were to put them before you in the plainest terms the facts and the dictionary allow, you could not understand them."

As a quartz-crusher the Princess could have won fame and fortune. I hope she may not pulverize Hartman as effectually as she does me: he might not take it so kindly. To eliminate the metaphor, she is a master at the wholesome process of taking a man down: not that I don't often deserve it, or that it is not good for me. In fact, I've given her occasion, from her youth up, to get her hand in; and admiration of her skill binds up the wounds, so to speak, with which my whole moral nature is scarred at least sixteen deep. In case you should not follow my imaginative style, let me say in simpler language that I am used to it; but another man might not understand it. I consumed some more humble pie—these desserts occur frequently in the symposia of our conversations—and she resumed.

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"So I will leave him to Jane at first. She will be very sisterly and gracious, and will make the first stages of his return to the world easy and pleasant. This may last two days, or two weeks."

"O, don't overdo it. He talked of staying but a week or ten days."

"Dear Robert, you are so innocent. He will stay as long as I want him to."

"What, whether you notice him or not?"

"Of course. Are you six years old? Have you never seen me in action before?"

"Body of Venus and soul of Sappho, I give it up. Of course you can do anything you like, but I never realized that you could do it without seeming to take a hand in the game. I strew ashes on my head like what's-his-name, and sit down in the dust at your feet. Forgive a penitent devotee for forming such lame and inadequate conceptions of your power. But what part do you want me to dress for in this improving moral drama?"

"Your part is very simple. Of course I must be occupied. I should hardly shine as a wall-flower."

"You would shine anywhere. If you were a violet by an old stone, you couldn't be half or a quarter hidden from the eye. But the supposition is impossible. If you were free, no other girl in the room would have a chance."

"That is very passable, though not wholly new. You are improving, Bob. If you would give your mind to it, I could mould you into tolerable manners yet.—Well, I might get plenty of men from the houses around. But they are tiresome—staler than you, my Robert, though I see less of them—and I can't take the same liberties with them I do with you. You are to belong to me as long as I may want you."

[41]

"That is not new at all, Princess. It has been so for years. Everybody about the house knows that, even the servants—and all our friends."

"Yes, of course. But I am to make special use of my property for the next few days. You will have to be in constant attendance. You ought to enjoy the prospect, and the reality when it comes."

"I do; I shall: bet your boots on that. O confound it, I've got my lines mixed already."

"Rather. If you startle the audience with such a speech as that, what will Mr. Hartman think? You must put on your prettiest behavior, Bob. Make a desperate effort, and try to keep it up—for my sake, now."

"For your sake I can be Bayard and Crichton and Brummell and all those dudes rolled into one. I'll order some new clothes when I go down. And you will have to be very gracious to me, you know."

"Am I not gracious enough now, pet? How is this for a rehearsal?"

"Beyond my wildest dreams, Empress. When you treat me thus for an hour, I can bear your ill usage for a year."

"There will be no ill usage at present, if you behave. Now don't forget, and spoil the play. Understand, you are to pair off with me, as Mr. Hartman with Jane. Mabel is mostly occupied with the children; we will all look after her, of course. And there will be mixing and change of partners, but not much. You must watch, and obey my slightest hint—the turn of an eyelid, the flutter of a fan. I'll teach you all that." [42]

"I know a lot of it already: when it comes to watching you, I am a dabster. I'll behave as if I was at school to Plato and Confucius, and in training to succeed them both. Do you know, Princess, if you were to treat a stranger for half a day as you are treating me now, he would want to die for you?"

"He might die for want of me before the day was over, if he grew lackadaisical over his wants. All men are not so chivalrous as you, my poor Robert. You may have to do that sort of dying before long. You must be ready to be dropped when the time comes to change the figures. No growling or moping, mind: you must submit sweetly, and take your place in the background with Jane, while the rest of the play goes on."

"I know: I've been there before. I can find consolation in seeing you carry the leading part. One set of men passes away, and another set comes on; but the Princess goes on conquering, regardless of the moans of her victims as they writhe on the bloody battlefield. O, I'm used to being shoved aside, and feeding on my woes in silent patience. The flowret fades when day is done, and so does every mother's son Who thinks his course is just begun, And knows not that his race is run—How does it go on, Clarice? I forget the rest of it."

"It is a pity you didn't forget the whole of it. I would if I were you, and quickly, lest you horrify some one else with it. You are too big to pose as a flowret, Bob."

"Polestar of my faith, see here. I'll have to be around with Hartman, smoking and so on, nights, after you and the rest have turned in, and often in the daylight. You and Jane can't attend to his case in person all the time, you know, and I'm his host. What shall I say about you?"

"Anything you like. Praise me to the skies, of course. That will be in keeping with your part as my cavalier; and he will see how things are between us—on your side, I mean. Tell him about my few faults, if you can bring yourself to mention them. Yes, you must; they will set off my many virtues. Be perfectly natural about it: you have known and cherished me from infancy, and so forth. Not a word, of course, about our compact, and these rehearsals, and my coaching you—O you great booby, were you capable of blurting that out? If you do, you'll spoil all, and I'll never forgive you. Remember now: you profess to dread my anger, and you have reason; you've felt it before. If you want me ever to trust you again, keep to yourself what is between us; regard it as sacred. O, I know you profess to look at all that belongs to me in that light; but show your faith by your works. Swear it to me now." [43]

I swore. That is a ceremony which has to be gone through rather frequently with the Princess, and somehow I don't mind it. But how the deuce is one to remember all these rules and regulations? I'll have to get Clarice to write them out for me, by chapter and verse, with big headings; then I'll get the thing printed, and carry it about with me, and study it nights and mornings. But Mabel might find it in my clothes: she is welcome to my secrets, but this is not mine. I might have it printed in cipher; but then I should be sure to lose the key. O, confound it all, I'll have to chance it: I'll be sure to slip up somewhere, and then there'll be a row. Well, why borrow trouble? Let's gather the flowers while we may: only there are none just here, and it is too dark to find them. Then a thought suddenly struck me: why not head off the difficulty by improving my position beforehand? "Princess dearest, do you like me better than you used to, or is this only part of the play, the excitement of practicing for a newcomer? Tell me, please—there's a dear." [44]

We were near the house now, and she darted away from me. "If you tells me no questions, I asks you no lies," she sang gaily as she ran in. O shades of Juliet and Cleopatra, what a woman that is—or what an idiot I am: I can't be sure which till I get an outside opinion. I'd give odds that

within a fortnight Hartman will be far gone. It will be life or death for him, poor old man. But he's nigh dead now, inwardly speaking, and so has not much to lose. Anyway, he'll see that a world with Clarice in it is not as blank and chilly as he thinks it now—not by several thousand degrees. I fancy his thermometer will begin to go up pretty soon. He needs shaking up and turning inside out and upside down—a general ventilating, in fact, and I rather think Miss Elliston will administer it to him.

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## VI.

### PREPARATION.

I was mighty glad that Clarice felt this way about Hartman's coming; she has not waked up so, or come down from her Olympian clouds of indifference, in a long time. But still I thought it best to go around and make some more preparations. When I have a secret to carry, it oppresses my frank and open nature more than you would think; and I find that I can conceal it best by inquiring concerning the matter of it of persons who know nothing about it. Naturally I began with the head of the house. That is myself, I suppose, nominally; but every decent man allows his wife to fill the position, and get what comfort she can out of it.

"Mabel," I said, "I hope that Hartman will enjoy himself here."

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"You told us he was not given to enjoying himself; on the contrary, quite the reverse. No doubt he will take us as he finds us. He will hardly want to go out to dinner every day, and meet the Vanderdeck's and the foreign princess."

"But, Mabel, I trust you are all prepared to meet him in the right spirit."

"What absurd questions you ask, Robert. You talk as if he were a bishop, come to convert us: I thought we were to convert him. I hope I do not need to be instructed how to receive my husband's friends. And Jane is ready to take an interest in him: she can be very nice, you know."

"And Clarice: will she do her part?"

"Nobody knows what Clarice will do on any occasion. She would be more apt to do what you wish if you would not trouble her about Mr. Hartman. We are not three little maids from school, to be taught our manners. Why can you not learn that matters would move just as well, yes, and better, without your continual interference, dear? Your blunders only complicate them, and disturb the harmony."

Now that is a nice way for the wife of one's bosom to talk, isn't it? How often, O how often, would I remove the clouds of care from her placid brow, and smooth her path through life by graceful persiflage and appropriate witticisms: but she does not seem to appreciate them. I fear she must have had some Scottish ancestors. Sometimes I think she does not appreciate *me*. It is a cold world; a cold, heartless, unfeeling, unresponsive world, in which the sensitive spirit may fly around promiscuously like Noah's dove, and have to stay out in a low temperature. Wisely and beneficently is it arranged that Virtue should be her own reward, since she gets no other. I will try Jane next.

"My dear sister, you know I go to town to-night, and expect to bring Hartman back. You will receive him kindly, for my sake, will you not?"

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Jane is a little prim at times, and I have to arrange my sentences carefully, when I am with her.

"I will do that, of course: why so many words about it? Have you not been preparing me, and all of us, for this visit, for the last month? We know what is right, Robert: *your* behavior is the only doubtful part."

"But Clarice, sister? She is always so doubtful, as Mabel says; so capricious, so haughty, so unapproachable. You have great influence with her. Dear Jane, can you not persuade her to treat my poor friend kindly?"

"Now, brother, why will you be such an unconscionable humbug? We all know that you are in her confidence, when any one is. What were you two talking about all last evening? Hatching some plot, no doubt. But it was not intended to be practiced on me—not on her part; that is your unauthorized addition to her text." And the maiden assumed the part of Pallas, and gazed at me with severity, as if she would read my inmost soul. But she can't beat Clarice at that. See here, young lady, you are too sharp; you are getting dangerously near the truth. I came near saying this out, but did not. Instead I took an injured tone.

"You are a pretty sister, Jane, to go about suspecting me this way, and accusing me of intrigue and hypocrisy, and all kinds of black-hearted wickedness. What would I want to deceive you for? You know we all have to consider Clarice, and humor her: she is an orphan, and we are her nearest friends. She amuses herself with me sometimes, for want of another man at hand, and then throws me aside when the fit is over."

"O yes, we all know that, of course. Well, brother, you can go to town with an easy mind. Leave Mr. Hartman to Clarice and me; when she is not in the humor to attend to him, I will."

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Now how does Jane come to know so much? Has the Princess been taking her into the plan too, as well as me? That I don't believe. Clarice would expect Jane to take her cue by intuition, and not bother to coach her as she has me: perhaps she can trust Jane farther. That must be it: one woman can see into another's mind where a man couldn't. I must put a mark on that for future reference. They do beat us at some minor points. Well, I didn't exactly get the best of that encounter: it seems to me I owe Jane one, which I must try and remember to pay.

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## VII.

### INITIATION.

HARTMAN arrived on schedule time, and was duly taken home with me. "Old man," I said, "welcome back to the amenities of life; to the tender charities of man and woman; to the ties, too long neglected, which bind your being to the world's glad heart. You are the prodigal returning from sowing his wild oats in the backwoods: the fatted calf shall be killed for you, in moderation, as per contract, and the home brewed ale drawn mild. We are quiet people, and live mostly by ourselves: that will suit your book. The giddy crowd, in its frivolous pursuit of amusement and fashion, surges by in the immediate vicinity, and old Ocean, in his storm-tost fury, dashes his restless waves upon our good back door, or adjacent thereto. But we give small heed to either one of them. The sea views and feminine costumes are supposed to be of the highest order, and there is polo at stated intervals, if you care for such; but these vanities have little to do with the calm current of our daily life. You will shortly have in front of you a christian family, united in bonds of long-trying affection and confidence. The earthly paradise, James, must be sought in the peaceful bosom of one's Home. After tossing on the angry billows of Water Street, how sweet to return to this haven of rest! And you too, world-worn and weary man of woes, shall receive attention. The furrows of care shall be smoothed out of your manly brow: gentle hands will bind up your wounds—even the one you got from that girl a dozen years ago, if it isn't healed yet. The shadows of gloomy and soul-debasing Theory will flit away from your bewildered brain, and in this healthful atmosphere your spirit will regain its long-lost tone, and embrace once more the ethereal images of Hope and Joy and Faith. Probably you will yet find some one to love in this wide world of sorrow; anyway, we hope to send you forth clothed and in your right mind."

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"I hope I'm properly clothed now, or will be with what I've got in my trunk; and I need to be in my right mind to take in all this eloquence. I was mistaken about you, Bob; you should have been a preacher. The only drawback is, you don't stick to one key long enough: these sudden changes in your woodnotes wild might confuse a congregation."

"The church lacks vivacity and sense of humor, Jim: she's all for a dull monotone. Old Fuller is dead: his mantle descended on me, but they don't appreciate that style nowadays. To return to our topic, and deal with the duty that lies nearest. In an humble and pottering way, we are a happy family, James. We envy not the rich and great: seek elsewhere their gilded saloons, and tinsel trappings of pride; but you will find things pretty comfortable. I regret to say we'll have to do our smoking out of doors; but it is generally warm enough for that. If we are noted for anything, it is for modest contentment, unassuming virtue, and cheerful candor—just as you see them in me. Each face reflects the genuine emotions and guileless innocence of the heart connected therewith; more than that, they reflect one another, as in a glass. You can look at Mabel, and see all that is passing in my capacious bosom. We share each other's woes, each other's burdens bear, and if we don't drop the sympathizing tear frequently, it is because there is very seldom any call for it. We have no secrets from one another: limpid and pure flows the confidential stream—but it flows no further than the fence. You can say what you like to any of us, and it will not go out of the house—unless the servants overhear it; you'll have to look out for that, of course."

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"See here, Bob; judging by you, I had no idea I was coming among such apostolic manners, or I'd have taken a course of A Kempis. Are there any prayer-meetings near by, where I can go to freshen up?"

"Within a mile or two, no doubt. Jane can tell you about them; she can lend you a prayer-book, anyway. But I was not meaning to discourage you: they will make allowances. My wife is an exemplary woman; if you want to get on with her, you'll have to take an interest in Herbert's bruises when he falls over the banisters. He is the only one of the children who will trouble you much; the others are small yet, happily. My sister is a pattern of propriety, but of rather an inquiring mind, and sympathetic if you take her the right way: she can talk with you about philosophy and science and your dried-up old doxies. Not that she knows anything about Schopenhauer, and Darwin, and Diogenes, of course; but she's heard their names, and she'll pretend to be posted—you know how women are. And when you need a mental tonic—the companionship of a robust intellect, the stimulus of wide acquaintance with the great world of men and things, a manly comprehension of any difficulties that you may meet, or sound and wise advice how to steer your way through the pitfalls and intricacies of the female character—in such cases, which will no doubt often arise, you have only to come to me. I know all about these matters, of which you have had no experience. I'll be at home as much as possible while you are there, and I'll stand by you, Jim."

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"Thanks, awfully—as I believe they say where we are going. Yes, you will be an invaluable mentor, Bob. Well, I'll try not to disgrace you. It is late: let us turn in."

This important conversation took place on the boat. You see, when I was with Hartman in May, he took the lead; but in my own house, or on the way to it, I like to be cock of the walk. Besides, as I had prepared the women for his coming, so now it was necessary to prepare his mind to meet them. In my picture of our domestic felicity, I may have laid on some tints too heavily, as about our mutual confidence. But he will soon see how that is. You may notice that I said nothing about the Princess. There was a deep design in that omission. When the orb of day in all his glory bursts from his liquid bed upon the astonished gaze of some lonely wanderer on the Andes, or the Alps,—or our own Rockies, say,—the spectacle is all the more effective if the wanderer was not expecting anything of the kind; didn't suppose it was time yet, or, still better, didn't know there was any sun. That is the way Jim will feel when he sees Clarice. If he has forgotten about her wanting to go up there in the woods in May, O. K.; that will meet her views, and he'll be reminded of her existence soon enough.

This is one of those delicate ideas which might not occur to the male mind unassisted: in fact, left to my native nothingness, I should probably have enlarged on her charms most of the evening. But she laid special stress on this point, that I was to say as little as possible about her beforehand, and fortunately I remembered it. Hartman thinks he is going to have a safe and easy time with me and two highly respectable ladies of sedate minds and settled habits. Sleep on, deluded James, while I finish my cigar here on deck: dream of the forest and the trout brooks, and your neighbor Hodge and your old tomcat. By to-morrow night your mental horizon will be enlarged, and when you return to your castle in the wilderness there will be some new sensations tugging at your vitals. It will be a change for you, old man, and you needed one. Well, I've given you enough to think of for now, and you'll get more before you are a week older. I hope he will come through it right: it is like taking one's friend to the surgeon to undergo an operation, when he doesn't know that anything ails him or is going to be done. Poor old Jim, I wouldn't have put up such a job on you if I didn't believe it was for your good. I am not a pessimist like you: I believe in God and the Princess.

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## VIII.

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### INTRODUCTION.

THE drive from the wharf is too long: I often think that the older part of the town ought to be submerged, or removed to one of the adjacent islands. We met the family at breakfast, and I said, "Ladies, you see before you a wild man of the woods, brought hither to be subdued and civilized by your gentle ministrations. By the way, Mabel, there was a corner in oil yesterday. I made fourteen thousand, and Simpkins went under; so you can have that new gown now." They paid no attention whatever to these pleasantries. Clarice was not there, or the sparkling fount of humor would have flowed less freely.

Hartman has very good manners when he chooses, and in my house he would naturally choose; so he got on well enough. The children took to him at once, and he seemed to take to them. After breakfast I led him out for a walk, to show him the points of interest. Several very creditable cottages have been put up since he was here last: in fact, this is quite a growing place, for the country. As we went back he suddenly said, "Bob, who is this Clarice that your sister mentioned at the table? Fancy name, isn't it?"

"O no," I said as indifferently as I could. He ought not to go springing her on me in that way: it makes a man nervous. "She's an orphan; a sort of cousin of Mrs. T. Got no brothers or sisters, and all that sort of thing; so we look after her a good deal. Sometimes she's with us, sometimes she's not. Was south all winter: got back while I was up there with you."

Now what the deuce did I say that for? It'll brush up his rusty mental machinery, and help him to recall what she wants forgotten. Just so; of course.

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"Yes, I remember. She thought of joining you with Miss Jane. I wish you had let them come."

"Well, you see, you don't know what these girls are used to; I do. There were no fit quarters for them at Hodge's. I had gone and written my wife a lot of rot, pretending his place was much better than it is."

"With your usual unassuming virtue and cheerful candor; yes. We have no secrets from one another: the limpid stream of confidence flows unchecked and unpolluted. Just so. But see here, you old hypocrite, if there is another young woman in the family, you ought to have told me about her last night, when you were preparing my mind, you know, and pretending to explain the whole domestic situation.—Great heavens, who's that?"

We had turned a corner, and come plump on the house; and there on the piazza, two rods away, sat a rare and radiant maiden, playing cat's cradle with my eldest son and heir. I can't tell you how she was dressed; but she was a phantom of delight when thus she broke upon our sight; a lovely apparition, sent to be Jim Hartman's blandishment. At least so it seemed, for he stood there and stared like a noble savage. As when the lightning descends on the giant oak in its

primeval solitude—but I must stop this; she is too near, though she pretends not to see us yet. So I whispered in low and warning tones:

"Brace up, Jim. She's not the one you met here twelve years ago, who jilted you at Naples: this one wasn't out of her Fourth Reader then. Don't get them mixed, or be deceived by a chance resemblance." I thought it was better to lay his embarrassment on that old affair, you see. But that was all nonsense: he never saw anybody like Clarice before—how should he?

"Confound you, Bob," he muttered between his teeth, "so you've been practising your openhearted innocence on me. Get on with it now, and finish it up." [54]

He pulled himself together, and I went through the introduction with due decorum; then I got away as soon as I could. You see, I was unmanned by the spectacle of so much young emotion, and somewhat exhausted by my own recent exertions. I found a cool corner in the library; and presently Jane had to come in. "What is the matter with you, Robert? Why do you sit there grinning like an idiot?" Perhaps a smile of benevolence had overspread my striking countenance; and that's the way she distorts it. I could not tell her what pleased me, so I said I had been reading a comic paper. "You write your own comic papers, I suspect; and bad enough they are. If you go on at this rate, you will end by editing the *Texas Siftings*. Do try to be decent, brother, while you have a guest in the house." I suppose she thinks that is a crushing rebuke, now. I said I would try, and told her she had better join Clarice and Hartman, who would probably be tired of each other by this time. Here again I have played into the Princess' hands. She doesn't want Jim to see too much of her at first, but to get used to the blinding glare by degrees, and take his physic in small doses, until he can bear it in larger. At least I hope so: if I've made a mistake and spoiled the procession, I'll learn it soon enough. But Jane wouldn't go unless it was right: that's the good of being a woman. You don't catch me interrupting them, or going near the Princess when she has any of her procedures on foot, unless I am called.

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## IX.

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### AT NEWPORT.

I COULD not tell you all that occurred that week; but it went exactly as Clarice intended and had foretold. She was gracious and equable and gentle, a model young lady of the social-domestic type; but Hartman did not see much of her. I on my part was kept steadily occupied, what with boats, and horses, and parasols, and fans, and wools, and wide hats, and more things than you could think of. It was, "Robert, come out on the cliffs," or "Robert, get my garden gloves, please; they are in the sitting-room, or somewhere else;" or "Robert, take me to town; I must telegraph to Constance;" or "Bob dear, would you mind running over to Miss Bliffson's, and telling her that I can't go to the Society this afternoon; and on your way back, stop at the milliner's and see if my hat is done." I usually attended to these commissions promptly; when you have women about, your generous heart will rejoice to protect and indulge their helplessness. They are the clinging vine, you are the sturdy oak; and then, as I said, Clarice is an orphan. Hartman at first showed an inclination to relieve me of the lighter part of these useful avocations, such as taking her about over the rocks and in the bay; but she very quietly, and without the least discourtesy, made him understand that no foreigners need apply for that situation. Other men were coming after her every day, but she avoided them or sent them to the right about: she can do that in a way to make you feel that you have received a favor. She kept reminding me that it was my business to wait on her: if these things were paid for in cash, I should want high wages, for the duties are far from light. But I can stand it: within the bosom of Robert T. glows a spark of warm and pure philanthropy. When I see my fellow-creatures in need, and this good right arm refuses to extend its friendly aid, may my hand cleave to the roof of my mouth—O well, you know what I mean. I used to retire to my meagre and philosophic cot-bedstead with aching limbs and an approving conscience: I never was worked so hard before. Some of these errands were perfectly needless, I knew. She can't want to get me out of the way for an hour or two, for I am never *in* the way; nor simply to show what she can do, for that is an old story, familiar to all concerned. Doubtless she has some high moral end in view; perhaps to teach Hartman what are the true relations of man and woman, and how the nobler animal can be trained to be a helpmeet and boy-of-all-work to the weaker. Whether this will suit his views I doubt; but she knows what she is about. It is mine not to question why, mine not to make reply, mine simply to go on doing what my hand finds to do—of which there is quite enough at present. Meanwhile, everybody else is having a nice easy time, while I am laboring like six dray-horses for the general good. Hartman sits about with Jane, and they seem to be getting on finely. Mabel also appears to enjoy his society. Sometimes she looks at me and at Clarice, and then at Jim, in a way which might indicate a notion that things are too much mixed, and that the Princess ought to be giving her attention to Hartman's case. I think so too, but it is not for me to suggest it. I feel like asking Mrs. T. what all these complications mean, and why she does not straighten them out: she is Clarice's relative and hostess, and head of the house when I am away. But it will straighten itself pretty soon now, and a new tangle will begin for the predestined victim. Wild man of the woods, your hour will soon strike, and the grim executioner in the black mask will prepare to take your head off. You will see a hand not clearly visible to the outside world—a very beautiful hand it is too, as I ought to know—that will beckon you to your doom: you will hear a voice whose silvery music will drown all fears, all scruples, all world-sick longings for your woman-hating moods, all memories of your lost Lenore of long ago,

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and tell you that resistance and delay are vain. What the details of the process may be, and whether joy or woe will tip the scales for one who takes things as seriously as you do, I cannot tell; but it is coming, and it is coming presently. You may not like it: you are not used to it as I am; but you cannot help yourself. Farewell to the old life, the old delusions, the old fancied knowledge: you will find yourself a small boy in primary school, beginning the world anew. You think you are locked up in steel, defended by your indifference, your disgust, your unbelief in Life. These glittering generalities will fall into dust before the wand of a magician who has some eminently particular business with you. You have sounded the depths, and found them shallow; you have tested values, and they are less than nothing, and vanity; you have emptied the pincushion, and only bran is there. My skeptical friend, a sharp needle is there yet, and it will prick your finger: there are depths that you know nothing about, and heights too, it may be: there are thrills of life that will go through all your veins, and show you that you are not as near dead as you supposed. You were but a boy when that girl gave you your quietus, as you imagined; you are a man now, with more in you than you fancy, and another girl may bring you to life. Still in your ashes live their ancient fires, and I'm mistaken if they don't start a superior blaze before long. Well, well, I hope it will make a man of you.

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## X.

### ON THE CLIFFS.

I WAS betrayed into the above apostrophe by the violence of my sympathies; but the lucid and graphic sentences which precede this moralizing ably sum up the situation during the first week of Hartman's visit. A good deal of wisdom was in circulation: I said some things myself which deserve to be remembered, and the others occasionally dropt a remark which showed how the ball was moving. You will want the chief of these outpourings in order of time, as landmarks in this history.

Clarice took me apart the first day and began to cross-examine me: that is, she told me to go outside and wait for her, and by the time she came it was dusk. Why is it that the garish day seems to freeze our finer emotions, and reduce us to the monotonous level of a dull cold practicality? It is under the calm light of moon and stars that soul speaks to soul, and we gain those subtler experiences, those deeper views of our own nature and that of our nearest and dearest, which so far transcend the plodding sciences of the laboratory, the useless learning of the pedant, and the empty wisdom of the children of this world.

"Come, Robert, wake up; don't sit mooning there like a calf. Make your report."

"Report?" said I, thus rudely startled from a train of thought which might have borne rich fruit for coming generations. "What about?"

"What about? You forget yourself. Whose employ are you in?"

"Well, on Water Street I am supposed to be carrying on business for myself, and at home I am the envied husband and father of a happy and admiring family. Clarice, I was meditating on subjects of much moment; and the duties of hospitality claim my valuable time. Did you wish to speak to me particularly?"

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"None of your nonsense, now. What did you talk about last night on the boat?"

"All sorts of things. My conversation is always improving. I explained to Jim that his reëtrance on society could not be made under fairer auspices; that models of deportment and of all the virtues would be about him on every hand; that a pure atmosphere of love and peace pervaded this modest mansion; that joy was unconfined; that we could lay our weary heads on each other's bosoms in the repose of perfect trust, knowing that not a thought entered any one of them which the angels above might not look into with satisfaction, and—"

"You talk too much about bosoms, Robert: it is not in good taste. What did you say about me?"

"Divil a word, bedad. Wasn't that right? Didn't you tell me to keep dark, and not mention you?"

"Not unnecessarily. But didn't he ask?"

"He'd forgotten all about you. Now, Princess, don't be offended; there was next to nothing to forget, you know. It's not as if he had ever seen you, or really heard anything about you. O, I'll talk you up to him whenever you say so; to-night, if you like. But I thought his forgetting was what you wanted. Didn't I manage it well? Do own that now, please. Let those cerulean orbs shed one ray of gentle light upon the path of a weary wayfarer—yes, that's better. Have I merited your approval, Serene Highness?"

"You've done very well—for you. But was it necessary to tell so many lies, Bob?"

"Now *that* is not in good taste, if I am a judge—to put such ugly names upon the graceful fancies with which I decorate the plain, rude facts of everyday life. What are we without Imagination, that glorious gift which causes the desert to rejoice and blossom like your little flower-bed in the back yard at home? You know, Clarice, that my mind is a deep clear well of

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Truth, and my lips merely the bucket that draws it up. Where will you get candor and veracity, those priceless pearls, if not from me?"

"Robert, you have fallen into this way of practising your little tricks and deceptions on everybody. O, I know you mean no harm; it is merely for your own amusement. But Mabel and Jane don't quite understand it."

"Couldn't you explain it to them, Clarice? Some people have no sense of humor. I can't well go around saying, This is a joke; please take it in the spirit in which it is offered."

"O, it does no great harm: they are very seldom deceived, and perhaps they will learn to make allowances for you by and by. But you may be tempted to try your games on me: if I ever catch you at that—Remember, I am not to be trifled with."

"Perish the thought, and perish the caitiff base who would harbor it. Princess, you are sharper than I. Do you think I would be fool enough to try any tricks on you, when I should be found out at once?"

"People generally find you out at once, but that doesn't seem to stop you. How can I tell whether I can trust you? I don't believe you know yourself when you are serious—if you ever are."

"There is one subject on which I am serious—deeply so, and always. Clarice, when I die, if you will see that the autopsy is properly performed, you will find your initials, as the poet says, neatly engraven on my blighted heart."

"Robert, sometimes I fear you have incipient softening of the brain."

"And if I have, is not that a reason why I should be watched and guarded tenderly—why loving arms should enfold my tottering frame, and sweet smiles cheer my declining path, and a strong firm brain like yours support my failing intellect? Clarice, be gentle with me. I am an orphan like yourself; soon, if you read the future aright, to be laid beneath the cold clods of the valley. When I am sleeping under the daisies in the lonely churchyard, you will say to yourself, He was my friend, my more than brother: he loved me with a loyal and self-oblivious devotion. And then, in those sad hours of vain remembrance, every unkind word that you have spoken, all the coldness and cruelty which have pierced my patient breast, will return to torture yours. Be warned in time, Clarice, and make it easy for me while you have the chance."

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"Robert, if you have a talent, it is for shirking a subject you are afraid of. When you go off like this, I know you are hiding something from me. What is it this time?"

I saw things were getting serious. She was bound to get it out of me, and I might as well give in. "Princess, I will confess, and throw myself on your mercy. Strike, but hear me. It won't pay you to be cross now, for you've got to be with me till you conclude to take Hartman up; we can't be quarrelling all the time, you know. He asked me about you this morning; Jane had spoken of you at breakfast. I put him off with general remarks about your being down south last winter, and the like of that; then suddenly my brain slipped—it *is* softening, you see—and I said you had come back when I was in the woods with him. That started him, and he recalled your notion of going up there."

"You are sure you didn't mention it yourself? What did he say?"

"Merely that he wished I had let you and Jane come. He likes Jane. Upon my honor now, he had no suspicion of anything."

"You goose, how often have I told you there was nothing to suspect? But men are so coarse. Well, is that all? What else are you trying to conceal?"

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"On my soul, Princess, that's all. I explained it all right, and he was commencing to berate me for not preparing him to meet you as well as the others, when we suddenly came on you, and you struck him deaf and dumb and blind. He swore at me under his breath just before I introduced him." Here my feelings overcame me again.

"Well, there's no harm done. But you really must be more careful, Bob. Try and make your poor mind work better while it lasts; don't forget my instructions again, and when you have made a blunder, tell me at once. You are so light, so devoted to your frivolous amusements; you seem to be drifting into second childhood, thirty years too soon. If you had an object, now, a serious purpose in life: if you really cared for anything—even for me!"

She cuts me when she talks like that. "Clarice, my regard for you is so undemonstrative that you fail to appreciate its depth. If I were to make a fuss over it, now, and use a lot of endearing epithets and big professions, perhaps you would believe me. Some time you will know whether I care for you or not; whether I've got anything in me, and am capable of acting like a man. You wait and see. But I wish I knew what you are going to do with poor Jim."

"Some time you will know: you wait and see. You can go and comfort him now. Good night, poor Bob."

## EXPLANATIONS.

I WENT and comforted him. "Well, old man," I said with a cheerful air, "how do you get on?"

"Robert," said he, "do you suppose I would have come here if I had known what an atrocious humbug you are? Do you imagine for a moment that my relatives, if I had any, would have subjected my innocence to such insidious guardianship? Have you brought me here to destroy my faith, and pollute my morals, and poison my young life with the spectacle of your turpitude?"

"You're improving already, Jim. When I saw you last you hadn't any faith, nor much morals; your youth was away back in the past, and your strength was dried up like railroad doughnuts; you were ready to fall with the first leaves of autumn. Well, since you are here, you can stay till you see how you like us. What do you think of Clarice?"

"She has given me no basis on which to think of her, beyond her looks; they rather take one's breath away. You beast, what do you mean by springing a face like that on me without warning, after all your humbugging talk last night, pretending to post me on every one I was to meet? And I say, do you always stand guard over her when anybody comes near?"

"Well, you see, you were so overcome by the first sight of her this morning, that it seemed no more than fair to let you recover your breath, as you say, and get used to her by degrees. But, James, this is unseemly levity on your part. What have we to do with girls? Let us leave them to the baser spirits who have use for them. The world's a bubble, and the life of man of no account at all. We have tried it, and it is empty; hark, it sounds. Vain pomp and glory of it all, we hate ye. Ye tinsel gauds, ye base embroideries, ye female fripperies, have but our scorn. What are flashing eyes, and tossing ringlets, and rosy lips, and jewelled fingers, to minds like ours? Let us go off to the Nitrian desert, Jim, away from this eternal simper, this harrowing routine."

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"You must have been reading up lately, my boy. I left all that in the woods, Bob, and came down here in good faith for a change of air, prepared to learn anything you might have to teach me. If you've got any more traps and masked batteries, let them loose on me; practice on me to your heart's content. You've undertaken to convert me, and I'm here to give you a chance: a fine old apostle you are. But I don't quite understand Miss Elliston's position here, Bob."

"Her position here, or anywhere else, is that she does about as she pleases, and makes everybody else do it too, as you will see before your hair is gray, my learned friend. As I may have told you, we are her nearest relatives: she is an orphan."

"Parents been dead long?"

"About seventeen years. What's that got to do with it?"

"O, not much; don't be so suspicious. Do you think I'm trying to play some trick on you, after your model? How should I, a helpless stranger in a strange land, betrayed by the friend in whom I trusted? I'm an orphan myself too. So that Miss Elliston is in a measure dependent on your kindness?"

"O, don't fancy that she's a poor relation, or anything of that sort. She's got more cash than she wants, and loads of friends: had twenty invitations for the summer. If you don't behave to suit her, she's liable to go off any day to Bar Harbor, or Saratoga, or the Yosemite, or Kamtchatka."

"Very good of her, to stay here with you, then."

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"Well, Mabel is deeply attached to her; so is Jane, and the children of course. Her parents and mine were close friends in the country—where I came from, you know. She and I were brought up together; that is, she was—I was mostly brought up before her appearance on this mundane sphere. We used to play in the haymow, and fall from the apple trees together, and all that. O, Clarice is quite a sister to me—a pretty good sister too, all things considered."

"And you are quite a brother to her, as I see. Strange, that it never occurred to mention her, when you were describing the various members of your family. Does her mind match her personal attractions?"

"She's got as good a head as you have, old man, or any other male specimen I've struck. I myself meet her on almost equal terms. O, hang that; I don't either. This is no subject for profane jesting. Talk about the inferiority of women! If the moralists and stump-speakers had one like her at home, they'd change their tune. But there are no more like her."

"You speak warmly, Bob. To Clarice every virtue under heaven. Beautiful, brilliant, accomplished, amiable; you are a happy man to have such an annex to your household—even if she wasn't worth naming at the start."

"Amiable—who said she was amiable? Leave that to commonplace women and plain everyday fellows like me. You can't expect that of her sort, Jim. She can be very nice when she pleases. I suppose she has a heart; it has never waked up yet. When it does, it will be a big one. We don't expect the plebeian virtues of her."

"She has a conscience, I hope? If not, it might be better to go away, and stay away. You ought not to keep dangerous compounds about the house, Bob."

"She won't explode—though others may. A conscience? I think so. She couldn't do a mean

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thing. She keeps a promise: she has more sense of justice than most women. But you can't apply ordinary rules to her. She is of the blood royal: the Princess, we call her. Can't you see, Jim? You are man enough to take her measure, so far as any one can."

"I see her outside; it is worth coming here to see, if I were an artist or an æsthete. She has deigned to show me no more as yet."

"It is all of a piece: the rest matches that, as you will see in time. There is but one Clarice."

"Bob, you are different from last night. I believe you are telling the truth now."

"She sobers you. When you have been with her, when you think of her, it is as if you were in church—only a good deal more so."

"Very convenient and edifying, to have such a private chapel in one's house. Bob, in this mood I can trust you. Tell me one thing: why did you never mention her to me?"

"She doesn't wish me to talk of her to strangers."

"And now the prohibition is removed?"

"You are not a stranger now. She knows you, and you have seen her."

"Well, you are loyal. Does she appreciate such fidelity?"

"We are very good friends. From childhood we have been more together than most brothers and sisters. More or less, I have always been to her as I am now. She is used to me. I do not ask too much of her. Don't fancy that I am in her confidence, or any one: she has a royal reserve. See here, Jim; I am making you one of the family."

"I understand. I must ask you one thing: why did you bring me here, to expose me to all this?"

"You needed a change, Jim, as you half owned just now; almost any change would be for the better. I wanted you to see the world again: there is in it nothing fairer or richer than Clarice." [67]

"You go on as if she were a saint; and yet you say she's not."

"You can answer that yourself, Jim. She's far from it: you and I are not saint-worshippers. But she has it in her to be a saint, if her attention and her latent force were turned that way. She can be anything, or do anything. She hasn't found her life yet. She bides her time, and I wait with her. Her wings will sprout some day. I like her well enough as she is."

"Evidently. Do you know, old man, that you are talking very freely?"

"Am I the first? or do you suppose I would say all this to any chance comer? You opened your soul to me in May, as far as you knew it: you are welcome to see into mine now."

"There is a difference. I cared for nothing, and believed in nothing; so my soul was worth little. Yours is that of a prosperous and happy man."

"Externals are not the measure of the soul, Jim, nor yet creeds. I know a gentleman when I see him, and so do you. Your soul will get its food yet, and assume its full stature; you've been trying to starve it partly, that's all."

"Do you talk this way to your Princess, Bob?"

"No. She is younger than we: why should I bore her? You and I are on equal terms: she and I are not."

"This humility is very chivalric, but I don't quite understand it in you, Bob."

"You can't: you've been so long unused to women, and you never knew one like her. If you had, it would have been too early; what does a boy of twenty know of himself, or of the girls he thinks he is in love with, or of the true relations that should exist between him and them? Call it quixotic if you like; I don't mind. Any gentleman, that is, any spiritual man, has it in him to be a Quixote. When you come to know Clarice, you will understand." [68]

"Do you call yourself and me spiritual men, Bob?"

"Yes; why not? Spirituality does not depend on the opinions one chances to hold, but on the view he takes of his own part in Life, and on the inherent nature of his soul. We are not worshippers of mammon, or fashion, or any of the idols of the tribe. I live in the world, and you out of it; but that makes little difference. You were in danger of becoming a dogmatist, but you are too much of a man for that. We both live to learn, and we can spend ourselves on an adequate object when we find it."

"Bob, if you don't talk to her like this, she doesn't know you as I do."

"No human being knows another exactly as a third does. We strike fire at different points—when we do at all, which is seldom—and show different sides of ourselves to such few as can see at all. She does not care especially for me: why should she? But she has great penetration—more than you have, far more than I. She sees my follies and faults as you don't; she is a sort of a confessor. At present she is a Sunday-school teacher, and I am her class."

"What *do* you talk of, all the time?"

"It's not all the time, by any means. That is as she pleases; just now it may be a good deal. By and by it may be your turn: then you'll know some things you don't now. There is nothing I say to her which the world might not overhear, if the world could understand it; and nothing that I can repeat. Jim, I am done: we are up very late."

"Two things I must say yet, or ask, old man. You would stand by this girl against the world; and yet you have charged yourself with me. It may be idle to formulate remote and improbable contingencies, but it is in our line. Would you take her part against me, and be my enemy—you who are my only friend?" [69]

"I would stand by her against the world, assuredly. I would stand by you against all the world but her, I think. You two might quarrel, but neither of you would be wrong: I know you both, and you don't know each other. So I take the risk; it is none. When that time comes, neither of you will find me wanting."

"I believe it. The other thing is this—forgive me if I go too far. Do you know what even intelligent and charitable people would say of all this? That it was very queer, very mixed, very dubious."

"They are not our judges, nor we theirs. What would they say of your theories, and your way of life? To be sure, these concern yourself alone. So is this inwardly my affair; it binds, it holds no other. Must a man live in the woods, to form his own ethical code? Here too one may keep clean hands and a pure heart, and do his own thinking. Life is very queer, very mixed, very dubious; I take it as it comes. O, I see truth here and there in your notions of it, though it has done well by me. If I find in it something unique and precious, shall I thrust that aside, because the statutes have not provided for such a case? But one thing I can reject, so that for me it is not: the baser element. Gross selfishness and vulgar passions are no more in my scheme than in yours: if their suggestions were to rise, it would be easy to disown them. The human beasts who let their lower nature rule, the animals who care for themselves and call it caring for another, are not of our society. O yes, in common things one must get and keep his own—the body must have its food; but one's private temple is kept for worship, and owns a different law. It is not always, nor often, that one can build his shrine on earth, and enter it every day: when a man has that exceptional privilege, he must and may keep his standards high enough to fit. You understand?" [70]

"I do: I am learning. I knew all this in theory, but supposed it ended there. And your Princess, you think is of our society?"

"No root of nobleness is lacking in her; when the season comes, the plants will spring and the garden bloom. But we cannot expect to understand her fully; she is of finer clay than we."

"One thing more, and then I will let you go. There is more of you than I thought, my boy. In May I knew you had a heart; but one who heard you in the woods would have set you down just for a kindly, practical man of the world. Last night, and most of the time to-day, you were the trifler, the incorrigible jester. Why do you belie yourself so and hide your inmost self from all but me?"

"Because I've got to convert you, old man. It is a poor instrument that has but a single string; and David's harp of solemn sound would bore me as much as it would other folks, if I tried to play on it all the time. How many people would sit out this talk of ours, or read it if we put it in print? Taken all in all, the light fantastic measure suits me much better. To see all sides, we must take all tones. The varying moods within fit the varying facts without; to get at truth we must give each its turn. But in the main it is best to take Life lightly. Your error was that you were too serious about it: it's not worth that. Most things are chiefly fit to laugh at. The highgrand style will do once in a way: we've worked it too hard now. Let's come down to earth. I wanted to show you that I could do the legitimate drama as well as you, and yet wear a tall hat and dress for dinner. See?" [71]

"That's all very well, Bob, but I can discriminate between your seriousness and your farce. Perhaps it is well to mix them, or to take them as they are mixed for us. You may be right in that; I'll think it over. Yes, I can see now that Heraclitus overdoes it, and that I used to. Well, my lad, you are a queer professor of ethics; but I'm not sure you've brought me to the wrong school."

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## XII.

### AWAKENING.

THE next day Clarice took me off as usual. "Well, have you made any more blunders?"

"Not one. You have nothing to reproach me with this time, Czarina."

"You kept Mr. Hartman up dreadfully late. What were you talking about so long?"

"O, he is prepared to find you wonderful, and to come to time whenever you want him. I told him your wings weren't grown yet: you were the Sleeping Beauty in the Enchanted Palace; the hour and the man hadn't arrived. You dwelt in maiden meditation, and the rest of it."

"You did not cheapen me, surely, Robert?"

"God forbid: do I hold you cheap, that I should rate you so to others? He may tell you every word I said, when you begin to turn him inside out; there was none of it that you or I need be ashamed of. He knows, both by his own observation and from my clear and impressive narrative, that you are remote and inaccessible—the edelweiss growing high up in its solitude, where only the daring and the elect can find its haunt."

"That is very neat. Did it take you three hours to tell him that? I heard you come in as it struck two." [72]

"Too bad to disturb your slumbers, Princess: we will take our boots off outside, next time. Naturally you were the most important topic we could discuss; but I also explained his advantages in being thrown so much into my own society. O, he is getting on. He said—"

"I don't want to know what he said. The man is here, and I can see—and hear, when I choose—for myself. Do you think I would tempt you to violate what might be a confidence, Robert?"

"But if I repeat to you what I said, why not what he said?—except that his observations would not be so powerful and suggestive as mine, of course. Otherwise I don't see the difference."

"Now that is stupid, Bob. The difference is that you belong to me, and he doesn't—as yet."

I can't tell you how she says these things. If I could put on paper the tone, the toss of that lovely head, the smile, the sparkle of eyes and lips, that go with what you might call these little audacities, then you would know how they not only accent and punctuate the text, but supply whole commentaries on it. If you get a notion that the Princess is capable of boldness, or vulgar coquetry, or any of the faults of her sex or of ours, you are away off the track, and my engineering must have gone wrong. But I must stop this and get back to my report.

"One thing I must repeat, Princess. I got off a lot of wisdom for Jim's benefit. You wouldn't think how wise it was; deep principles of human nature, and rules for the conduct of life, and such. It did him no end of good: and then he said that if I didn't talk to you that way, you couldn't know me as well as he does."

"He must know you remarkably well then. Just like a man's conceit. Poor Bob, who should know you through and through if I don't?—Why don't you talk to me that way then, and improve me too?" [73]

"As the Scotchwoman said when they asked her if she understood the sermon, Wad I hae the presumption? When you catch me taking on airs and trying to improve you, make a note of it. No, no, Princess dear; the lecturing and improving between us had better remain where they are."

"But, Robert, perhaps I would like to have you vary this continual incense-burning with snatches of something else."

"I dare say. Do you know, Clarice, sometimes I think I am an awful fool about you."

"That is what the doctors call a congenital infirmity, my dear. No use lamenting over what you can't help. Worship me as much as you like; it keeps you out of mischief. But you might change the tune now and then, and give me some of your alleged wisdom."

"Shall I becloud that pure and youthful brow with metaphysic fumes? Should I soil your dainty muslins with the antique dust of folios, and oil from the midnight lamp? You wait till you take up Hartman; perhaps you can stand it from him. But if I were to hold forth to you in the style he prefers, you would get sick of me in twenty minutes. Let it suffice that my lonely vigils are spent in severe studies and profound meditations, the fruit whereof, in a somewhat indirect and roundabout way, may make smooth and safe the path that is traversed by your fairy feet. In the expressive language of the poet, Be happy; tend thy flowers; be tended by my blessing."

"I know about your lonely vigils, Bob; they are spent on cigars, and making up jokes to use next morning. But you are not as bad as usual to-day. Do you know, I like you better when you are comparatively serious."

"Then let me be ever thus, my Queen! It is the solemnizing influence of being so much with you. If you keep it up for another week, you'll have to send me off to New York to get secularized. I say, Clarice, how long do you mean to go on in this way? It's all very nice for me, but how about Hartman? *He's* not frivolous; he takes Life in awful earnest. What do you propose to do with him after you've got him—I should say, after the fatal dart has transfixed his manly form, and he falls pierced and bleeding at your feet?" [74]

"My dear child, let me tell you a pretty little tale. Once upon a time there was a friend of mine, who thought a good deal of me, and of whom I thought more than he knew, poor man—enough to make you jealous, Bob."—Now who the devil was that, confound him? I never heard of him before. It must have been that winter she spent in Boston, just after she came out. That's over five years ago; he's probably dead or married before this. Well, get on with your pretty little tale: not that I see much prettiness about it.—"And when I would tease him to tell me some secret, he would answer, in his own well-chosen language. Some day you will know: you wait and see. By-by, baby!"—and away she dashed.

My tongue went too fast last night. Her heart *is* waking; her wings are sprouting. She must be getting interested in Jim. The hour is at hand, and the man: the horn at the castle-gate will soon be sounded, and presto! the transformation scene. That will be a spectacle for gods and men,



now; but no tickets will be sold at the doors—admittance only by private card, and that to a very select few. I don't want any change in you, Princess; but I suppose the angels would like to see the depths in you that you haven't sounded, the fairer and wider chambers of your soul opened to the light. God grant that light may need no darkness to come before it, no storm-tossed, doubtful daybreak. If the change is for your happiness, no matter about us. You are moving toward a land where I cannot follow you; a land of mystery and wonder and awakening, of new beauties and glories and perils, and possibilities unknown and infinite—a journey wherein you can have no guide but your own pure instincts, no adviser but your own untried heart. God be with you, for Jane and Mabel can do no more than I. We shall hear no word from you till all be over, and then the Clarice of old will return to us no more. Transfigured she may be and beatified, but not the one we knew and loved so long. Little sister, all these years I have been at your side or ready at your call, and now you will not call and I cannot come to help you; for in these matters the heart knoweth its own bitterness, and a stranger doth not intermeddle with its joy. May it be joy and not the other! God be with them both, for it is a dangerous country where they are going; a region of mists and pitfalls and morasses, where closest friends may be rudely severed, and those whom Heaven hath joined be put asunder by their own most innocent errors—and the finest spirits run the heaviest risk. Ah well, if I were the Grand Duke of Gerolstein, maybe things would be better managed in my dominions.

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### XIII.

#### DOMESTIC CRITICISMS.

HARTMAN has made a first-rate impression here. It would please you to see this stern ascetic, this despiser of Life and Humanity, with two toddlers on his lap, and Herbert at his knee, all listening open-mouthed to tales of the animal and vegetable kingdoms. The boy thinks that one who lives in the woods must be a great hunter, and clamors for bears and wildcats: Jane, in her usual unfeeling way, insists that I put him up to this. But though I am a family man—and you could not easily find one more exemplary—I do not propose to drag the nursery into the cold glare of public comment, or favor you with a chapter on the Management of Children.

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I would like to know why it is that women are so ready to take up with any chance stranger who comes along, when they cannot see the true greatness of their own nearest and dearest. Mabel pronounces Hartman a perfect gentleman and a safe companion for me; as if it were I, not he, that needed looking after. Jane seems to regard him as the rock which withstands the tempest, the oak round which the vine may safely cling, and that sort of thing. He is a good-looking fellow yet, and he has a stalwart kind of bearing, adapted to deceive persons who do not know him as well as I do. They would almost side with him against Clarice—but not quite: in their hearts, they think her perfect.

One evening we were all together in the parlor. The Princess had gone somewhere with one of her numerous adorers, whom she had failed to bluff off as she generally does: the young man was going to cast himself into the sea, I believe, and I told her she had better let him and be done with it, but she said he had a widowed mother and several sisters, and ought to live long enough to leave them comfortably provided for; so I let her go. I was trying to direct the conversation into improving channels, but the frivolous female mind is too much for me.

"Mr. Hartman," Jane began, "we rely on you to exercise a good influence upon Robert. He is so light-minded, and so deceitful."

"Yes," Mabel added; "no one can restrain him but Clarice, and she cannot spend her whole time upon him, she has so much else to do."

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"See here," said I; "this is a put-up job: I will have you all indicted for conspiracy. Have you no proper respect for the head of the house?"

"We would like to," my spouse replied: "we make every effort: but it is so difficult! Mr. Hartman, he wants to manage every little matter, particularly those which pertain exclusively to women, and which he cannot understand at all."

"Yes," said Jane; "would you believe it, Mr. Hartman, he attempted to instruct us as to the proper manner of receiving you! But that is not the worst of it. He is utterly unable to keep a secret—not that any one would entrust him with secrets of the least importance, of course. And when he thinks he knows something that we do not know, he goes about looking so solemn that even Herbert can detect him at once. And in such cases he actually comes to us, and questions us about the matter, with a view to throwing us off the scent, and keeping dark, as he calls it. Did you ever hear of such absurdity?"

"Ladies and gentleman," I said with dignity, "would you mind excusing me for a few moments? I would like to retire to the rocks outside, and swear a bit."

"Robert!" my wife cried, "I am ashamed of you. What will Mr. Hartman think of your morals? You see, they think Jim is a very correct young man."

"O, I know him of old," he said. "Never mind, Bob, I will stand by you. Really, you are a little

hard on him. He has improved; I assure you he has. Why, he was quite a cub at college. Your softening influences have done a great deal for him; everything, in fact."

"It is very nice in you to say so, Mr. Hartman, and very polite, and very loyal; but I know Robert. Clarice does him a little good: she would do very much more, if he were not so stiff-necked. He thinks he is a man, and we are only women."

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"Well," I asked, "are you going to dispute that proposition? If so, I will leave Hartman to argue it out with you."

"Mr. Hartman," said Jane, "he thinks he knows everything, and women are inferior creatures. O, such a superior being as he is!"

"This is getting monotonous," I remarked. "Suppose, for a change, we abuse Clarice, as she is not here; that will be pleasanter all round, and less unconventional. Now that girl does a great deal of harm, turning the heads of so many foolish young men. She spends more on her dress than you and I do together, Hartman. What an aim in life for a rational being! Simply to look pretty, and produce an occasional piece of perfectly idle and useless embroidery: tidies even, now and then—just think of it! Of all the—"

My wife stopped me here, and I was glad of it, for I really did not know what to say next.

"You ought to be ashamed of yourself, Robert. To speak in that way of my cousin, and your own adopted sister! Don't believe a word of it, Mr. Hartman. She is sweet girl, though reserved with strangers: I am sorry you have seen so little of her. A high-minded, pure-hearted, dear, sweet, lovely girl; she is, and you know it, Robert." Well, perhaps I do; but there is no need of my saying so just now. Jane has to put in her oar again, of course.

"Yes, Mr. Hartman, and that is a sample of his hypocrisy. He thinks as highly of Clarice as we do, and is almost as fond of her; and yet he pretends to criticize her, just to draw away attention from his own shortcomings."

"Well, let's drop Clarice then, and go on discussing the present company, if you insist. We'll take them up one by one: I've had my turn, and my native modesty shrinks from further praise. You see Mrs. T., Hartman? She sits there looking so calm and placid, like a mother in Israel; you would think her a model spouse. Yet no one knows what I suffer. Mabel, I had not been with him ten minutes last May when he noticed my premature baldness, and general fagged-out and jaded look; and to hide the secrets of my prison-house, I had to pretend that I had been working too hard in Water Street. You all know how painful deception is to my candid nature; but I did it for your sake, Mabel. When did I ever return aught but good for evil? Yet O, the curtain lectures, the manifold ways in which the iron has entered into my soul! But we brought Hartman here to reconcile him to civilized and domestic life, and I will say no more. Now there is Jane. She naturally puts her best foot foremost in company; you think she is all she seems: but I could a tale unfold. Now mark my magnanimity: I won't do it. She is my sister, and with all her faults I love her still. Well, if you are tired you'd better go to bed: Hartman wants to smoke."

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#### XIV.

#### OVER TWO CIGARS.

WHEN we got out under the pure breezes of heaven, Hartman turned to me and said, "So you call this reconciling me to domestic life, do you?"

"Well, I want you to see things as they are. They are not as bad as your fancy used to paint them, or as a duller man might suppose from recent appearances. Women haven't our sense of humor, Jim: their humble efforts at jocosity are apt to be exaggerated, or flat—generally both; but they mean no harm."

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"Well, Bob, your preparations to instruct my ignorance are highly successful. All this is as good as a play. You see you are found out, old humbug; everybody sees through you. You can't delude any of us any more."

"I don't quite see what you're driving at, my christian friend; but I'm glad you like us, and I hope you'll like us better before you are done with us." When he talks like this, I am content to see the hand of Fate snatch at his scalp, as it will before long. Gibe on, ungrateful mocker: retribution will soon overtake you in your mad career. Where then will be your gibes, your quips, your quiddities? You'll want my sympathy by and by, and I'll see about giving it.

"You needn't be so much cast down, Bob. Perhaps you are building me up better than you know. Your struggles with your womankind give a flavor to what I used to suppose must be insipid. You are pretty well satisfied with each other, or you wouldn't pretend to quarrel so. What I saw of you before did something toward reconciling me to human nature at large, and your quaint efforts at shrewdness and finesse set off your real character. You might take in outsiders, but not me."

"This is too much, my friend—a blanked sight too much. Crushed to earth by such unmerited

compliments, I can only repeat my gratification that we meet with your approval. You settle down, and you'll see how insipid it is: then you'll be making some quaint efforts at shrewdness and finesse yourself. Invite me then, and I'll get even with you, old man. But I say, what did you mean about my being a cub at college?"

"Well, you were, you know. Barmaids and ballet-dancers, and that sort of thing."

"Confound you, Hartman, what do you go bringing them up for? There was only one of each, or thereabouts, and they were generally old enough to be my mothers. I was but a child, Jim—a guileless, merry, high-hearted boy, and innocent as the lamb unshorn."

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"You were that, and the shearing did you a lot of good. O, you can be easy; I'll not bring up the sins of your youth."

"They were no sins, only follies. I had my early Pendennis stage, of course, and invested every woman I met with the hues of imagination. But Mabel and the girls might not understand that."

"I don't think they would. Happily, it is not necessary they should try to, since you have returned to the path of rectitude. Do you think you belonged to Our Society in those days, Bob?"

"Yes, sir: I did, in embryo. I had it in me to develop into the ornament of our species you behold at present. That's all a boy is good for, anyway. He thinks he's somebody, but he isn't. He doesn't amount to anything, except in the fond hopes of his anxious parents. He knows nothing, and he can do nothing, except learn by his blunders; and some of 'em can't do that. But if he has any stuff in him, he grows and ripens with time, as you and I did. What bosh, to put the prime of life at twenty-five. They ought to move it on a bit; about our age, now, a man ought to be at his best."

"I don't know, Bob. I was an egregious ass at twenty-five, and I'm not sure I'm any better now."

"Then there's hope of you, my boy. But one must go on getting experience. You shut the door too soon and too tight, Jim."

"When I had it open, such an infernal stench and dust came in, that it seemed best to close it. But it's open again now, partly, and this seems a healthier and cleaner atmosphere."

"You'll come out all right, Jim; and when you do, you won't seem to have been altogether wrong all these years. You've kept yourself unspotted from the world, more than most of us; and when you come to know a girl like Clarice, you'll want the most and best of you, to be fit for her society. If only one could get the general ripening without some of the dashed details of the process! She makes you wish you could have been brought up in a bandbox, if only you could have come out of it a man and not a mollycoddle."

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"Only 'men-maidens in their purity' are worthy to approach her, no doubt. Apparently I am not. I'll have to be content with your account of Miss Elliston's perfections, Robert. She seems to have no more use for me than the Texans for the Sheriff. But I am doing very nicely, thanks to your sister. I doubt if you appreciate Miss Jane, Bob. She sees further into things than you do. She impresses me as a sound-hearted woman, wise, kind, and gracious."

"Yes, and so sisterly and appreciative. O yes, such a superior person as she is! But see here, Jim; that's not what you're here for. Jane is all very well in her way, but——"

He turned on me suddenly. "What the deuce do you mean now?"

By Jove, now I've done it: he's got me in a corner.—You just wait and see me get out of it. "O well, Jim, I speak only by general analogy, of course. I am not in the Princess's confidence, as I told you. I might be if any one were, but nobody can see into her mind further than she chooses to let them, and that is but a very little way. It would be a fine sight, no doubt; but she has the reticence of a—well, of an angel probably; exceptionally delicate and sensitive nature, and all that, you know. It's not her way to let a good thing go by unnoticed, and she is quite able to appreciate you. Your time is not up yet: you're likely to see more of her before you go—at least, I should suppose so."

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"Well, I am here to see things, as you say, and I may as well see whatever is to be shown me. I am in your hands, old man; make as good a job of it as you can before you send me back to the woods."

It is all very well for him to talk lightly on solemn subjects; he'll change his tone by and by. I have prepared his mind now, as I prepared the others before he came. Perhaps I ought to have done it sooner; perhaps the Princess has been waiting for that. She'll know, without my telling her; she'll see it in his eye.—Nonsense, Robert T.; your zeal outruns your discretion. What does she want of your help in a thing like this? Anyway, he's ready to be operated on, and it seems about time she began to put in her work.

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## XV.

### THE CATASTROPHE.

THIS miscellaneous entertainment, as I have remarked, lasted for about a week: then suddenly the situation changed. I can't tell you how it was done, though I was looking on all the time; but one evening I found myself with Jane, and Hartman had gone off with the Princess. We were all ready to play to her lead, no doubt; but it would have made no difference if it had been otherwise: when she ordains a thing, that thing is done, and without her taking any pains about it either, so far as you can see. I think the predestined victim was pleased and flattered to have the sacrificial chapter placed upon his head, so to speak; he ought to have been, at any rate.

"Jane," I said, "what do you suppose Clarice is up to now?"

"Robert," said she, "I thought I had given you a lesson about practising your absurd hypocrisies on me. Who should know what her plans are, if not you? If you really are not in her confidence—and it would not be far, certainly—surely you know Clarice well enough not to interfere. Let them alone, and keep quiet." That is the way they always talk to me: I wish they would find something new to say. [84]

Things went on in this fashion for another week or more. It was all very quiet: there was really nothing to see. What they talked about I don't know; when the rest of us were by, their conversation was not notable. I can make more original and forcible remarks myself; in fact, I do, every day. But I have no doubt she catechized and cross-examined him in private. It is not Hartman's way to air his theories before ladies, or to obtrude himself as a topic of discussion; but the Princess, when she condescends to notice a man at all, likes to see a good deal further into his soul than he ever gets to see into hers. That is all right in this case; the doctor has to be acquainted with the symptoms before he can cure the patient. When Hartman and I were together at the end of the evenings and at odd hours, he had very little to say: he seemed rather preoccupied and introspective. He is another of your plaguedly reserved people, who when they have anything on hand wrap it up in Egyptian darkness and Cimmerian gloom. That is the correct thing in a woman—in Clarice at least: in a man I don't like it. My soul, now, is as open as the day, and when I have struck any new ideas or discoveries, I would willingly stand on a house-top—if it were flat—and proclaim them for the benefit of the world. Even my uncompleted processes of thought are at the service of any one who can appreciate them; but you can't expect everybody to be like me. Most men are selfish, narrowly engrossed in their small private concerns—no generous public spirit about them. But then Hartman is not used to this kind of thing, and I suppose it knocks the wind out of him. [85]

One evening I was by myself in the shrubbery; it was just dark, but there was a tidy young moon. I wanted to smoke a pipe for a change, and so had gone to the most secluded place I could find, for if Mabel were to hear of this, Hartman might not get reconciled to domestic life. I sat there, meditating on the uncertainty of human affairs: it would do you more good than a little to know what thoughts passed through my mind, but there is no time to go into that. Suddenly two forms came in sight. One was of manly dignity, the other of willowy grace. His frame towered like the noble oak on the hilltop, while hers—but we have had the oak and the vine before, and worked them for all they are worth. Perhaps I ought to have given you a more particular account of the appearance of these two young persons: but you don't care to know their exact height and fighting weight, the color of their hair and eyes, and so forth; what you want is the stature and complexion of their souls. They were a handsome pair, and whene'er they took their walks and drives abroad like Dr. Watts, they attracted much attention. Just now there was nobody but myself to admire them, and I was in ambush. They strolled about in what there was of the moonlight, seeming much absorbed, and I sat still in the shade, and put down my pipe: I couldn't hear their talk, and didn't want to disturb them. Suddenly he raised his voice: matters between them must have come to an interesting stage. "But, Clarice, if you care for me—"

He was too quick. The madness which urged him on can easily be understood and—except by the one concerned—pardoned; but what devil possessed her, who shall say? She drew herself up with superb scorn. "You are beginning at the wrong end, Sir. 'If I care for you!' Why should I?" [86]

"Very good," he said at once. "I was mistaken. I beg your pardon most humbly."

There was as little humility as possible in his look and tone. He stood like a gladiator—and not a wounded one either—with his head thrown back and his chest out. I could fancy, rather than see, the flashing of his eyes.

The flashes were all on his side now; Clarice's brief exhibition of fireworks seemed to be over, and she was drooping. "Mr. Hartman," she began, and could get no further.

In the act to go, he turned and faced her again.

"Miss Elliston, my presumption was doubtless unpardonable; I shall not know how to forgive myself. Do me the undeserved honor, if you can, to forget it—and me. I can only renew my apologies, and relieve you of my presence."

He bowed, and was gone. The proper thing for Clarice to do next was to swoon or shriek; but I knew her too well to expect anything of that sort. Nor did she tear her hair, or beat her breast, or offer to the solitary spectator any performance worth noting. I thought it best to keep remarkably quiet in my corner till she too had gone. In fact, I staid there for an hour or two after, though I did not enjoy that pipe at all; the tobacco was not right, or something. You see, after all the lectures I had had, I did not want to spoil things by mixing myself up with them; the situation looked picturesque enough without me in it.

When I went back to the house I found that Jim had caught the boat and gone. "He came to me," said Mabel, "and told me that he had overstaid his time and found it best to go to-night. He was very friendly, but his tone did not encourage questioning or remonstrance. His parting with Jane was almost affectionate, and he left kind regards for you. But not a word for Clarice."

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"Great Jackson! what is the matter with them?" I often use what my wife considers profane language when I have something to hide.

It had its effect this time. "Robert, be quiet. It is all right. When there is anything for you to know, you shall know it."

She sometimes appears to mistake me for our eldest boy. But I was glad to get off with the secret. Yes, there is something to know, my lady, and I know it, though you don't. But I fear it is a long way from all right.

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## XVI.

### FEMININE COUNSELS.

AFTER this there was general gloom about the place, and I preferred to spend much of the time in New York. But whenever I got there, this confounded business would drive me back: Clarice might want me. Nobody dared question her, till one day at lunch Herbert spoke up. "Mamma, why doesn't Mr. Hartman come back? Cousin Clarice, what have you done to him?" He was promptly suppressed, and the Princess froze his infant veins with a stony stare, while Jane and I looked hard at our plates. But later that day I came upon Clarice and the child together: he was locked in her arms, and begging her not to cry. They did not see me, and I retired in good order.

Within a week came a short note from Jim: apologies for leaving without saying good-bye to me, appreciation of our kindness, regards to my wife and sister—and not a word of Clarice. I took it to Mabel, of course.

"Be very careful how you answer this now, Robert."

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"How will this do? 'Dear Jim, sorry you went off in such a hurry; but after my performance in May I have no right to find fault. We all miss you, I think: the house has grown dull. Herbert continues to fall over the banisters, and at intervals over the rocks: at all hours, but especially when laid up for repairs, he howls for you and bear-stories. Our kindest regards. Keep us posted.' That's about it, eh?"

"Ye-es: you can't ask him to come back, and you can't mention Clarice; so you can say no more, and I don't like you to say any less. That is very well—for you, Robert; though you need not be so unfeeling about your own son."

It is well occasionally to consult your womankind in such cases, because, though they may not know as much of the facts as you do, still they can sometimes give you an inner light on points you would not have thought of. Besides, it compliments and encourages them; whereas, if you appeared to pay no regard to their opinions, they would naturally feel neglected. A little judicious indirect flattery is of great use in managing one's household. So I put on my best air of injured innocence.

"Mabel, I wish you could tell me what is the matter. Here my guest leaves my house suddenly, without a word of explanation. Herbert must be right: what has Clarice done to him?"

"Robert, I told you that all was well; at least I trust it will be, though it may not seem so now. The leaven is working; leave it to Time. Above all, don't meddle; ask no questions; leave the matter to those who understand it."

Now does she mean herself and Jane by that, or only Clarice and Hartman? I wonder if she thinks that I think that she knows anything about it. If she did, I should catch some sign of it. I tried my sister.

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"Jane, don't fly at me now, please. I am in trouble."

"So are we all, brother. Trouble not of our own making—most of us."

"Well then, what does all this secrecy mean? Has Clarice spoken to you? What does Mabel know?"

"She knows no more than you and I, brother. Something has happened: any one may suspect what it is, but Clarice will not tell. I love and respect her too much to ask: so does Mabel; and so, I hope, do you."

"Well, it's confounded hard lines, Jane, to have these things happening in your own house, and such a mystery made of it." I had to grumble to somebody, you see, if only to keep up appearances and help hide my guilty secret; and then I was bored, and worse, with the way things had gone.

"You took that risk, Robert, when you brought them together here. Did you expect that two

such persons as they would agree easily and at once? I think they love each other, or were in a way to it when this occurred, whatever it was."

"Well, I am awfully sorry. Clarice can take care of herself, I suppose; but as for Hartman, he had load enough to carry before. I love that man, Jane."

"So do I, Robert."

"Eh? O, the devil you do!" This came out before I could stop it. It did not please her.

"Brother, you are simply scandalous. Will you never learn a decent respect for women—you with a wife of your own, and boys growing up? Where have you been to acquire such ideas and such manners? You might have lived in the woods instead of Mr. Hartman, and he might have been bred in courts, compared with you.—I mean, of course, that I am interested in him, and sorry for him, as we all are. He is your friend, and he has excellent qualities."

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I was somewhat cast down by all this browbeating. Where shall a man go for gentle sympathy and that sort of thing, if not to his own sister? I suppose she thought of this, for she went on more kindly. "I would say nothing to Clarice if I were you. When she is ready, she will speak—to you."

"To me, eh? What would she do that for?" I put this in as part of the narrative, but I am not proud of it. I had not quite recovered yet from the effect of Jane's previous violence; and then my intellect is not equal to all these feminine convolutions.

"Brother, your head is not as good as your heart. Don't you understand that in some cases a woman goes to a man, if there is one of the right kind at hand, much as a man goes to a woman? You are a man, and Mr. Hartman's nearest friend. After all her recent confidences with you, or intimacy at any rate—of course I don't know what she talked with you about, so many hours—is it surprising that Clarice should turn to you in her trouble, when she can bring herself to break silence at all? When she is ready, she will speak to you, and to no one else. Till she is ready, not all of us together, nor all the world, could draw a word from her. Must I explain all this to you, as if you were Herbert? And when she does speak, brother, I do hope that you will listen with due respect and sympathy, and not disgust and repel her by any more coarse ideas and base interpretations."

I paid no attention to these last remarks, which seemed to me wholly unworthy of Jane. Strange, that one who at times displays so much intelligence and even, as Hartman calls it, discernment, can in other things be so unappreciative and almost low-minded. Coarse ideas, indeed! Well, never mind that now: let me meditate on this prospect which she has opened to my view. So Clarice is coming to me: she knows I am her best friend after all. Little Clarice, how often have I dandled her on my knee in the years that have gone by! Dear little Clarice—BOSH! What an infernal fool a man can make of himself over a pretty woman in trouble! I am sometimes almost tempted to think that, as she delicately hinted, there must be an uncommon soft spot in my upper story. It is bad enough to show it when the girl is by; let me preserve my balance till then. When she wants to talk to me, I will hear what she has to say.

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## XVII.

### CONSOLATION.

SURE enough about a week after this Clarice came to me as I was smoking a surreptitious cigar on the rocks, away from the house, after sundown. She came and sat down close by me, but I pretended not to notice. "Robert," said she. "Well," said I. There is no use in meeting them half way when they are willing to come the whole distance: mostly you have to do it all yourself, and turn about is fair play.

"Robert, are you angry with me?"

I couldn't help looking at her now, and she shot one of her great glances into my face. I melted right down, and so would you have done. "Clarice, you know I never could be angry with you five minutes together—nor five seconds, if you chose to stop it. What have I got to be angry about now?"

"Well, Bob, it wasn't your fault this time."

"No, I trust not. Whose fault was it?"

"Mine, mine. Bob, will you be my friend?" And she put her hand in mine.

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"What have I ever been but your friend? Don't you do as you like with me—and with all of us? Clarice, you know it hurts me to see you like this. And there's poor Hartman."

She pulled away from me. "What has Mr. Hartman to do with it? Who was talking of him?"

"Miss Elliston," I said with dignity, "the First of April is past some time ago. What do you want to be playing these games on me for?"

"O, don't 'Miss Elliston' me, Bob. Don't you understand women yet?"

"No, I'll be shot if I do; and I never expect to. That will do for young beginners, who think they know everything. I've seen too much of you to pretend to understand you. Why don't you speak out and come straight to the point?"

"Why, you goose, that's not our nature. Speaking out and going straight to the point will do for great clumsy things like you and Mr. Hartman."

"Well, I am a great clumsy thing, as you justly observe. It's very pleasant to have you come to me like this, Princess, and I wish you would do it oftener; it's mighty little I've seen of you of late. But though it would meet my views to prolong this session indefinitely, I suppose you want something of me, or you wouldn't be so sweet. It may seem an improbable statement, but I would rather help you out of this scrape than enjoy your society even—that's saying a good deal, but it's true. Yes, I'm fool enough for that."

"I know you are, dear," she said, very low and sweetly. Now what was it she knew? You can take that two ways. All the compliments I get are so ambiguous. But this did not occur to me till afterwards. So I went on with my usual manly simplicity.

"Then you know there's no need of circumlocution and feminine wiles when you want anything of me, Princess. You have but to speak, and, as the Frenchman said, 'If it is possible, it shall be done: if it is impossible, I can only regret that I can't do it.' What do you want me to do now?"

"Nothing, Bob; nothing but to listen to me and be good."

"I am listening, Clarice: I've been listening all this time." This was not quite true, for I had done most of the talking; but then what I said was not of much account. When I am with her I often talk just to fill the gaps.

"You can listen when I am ready to talk, and keep quiet till then. I only want your sympathy."

"You have it, Clarice; you have it most fully. Come rest on this bosom, my own stricken dear—"

"I don't want to rest on your bosom, Bob; your shoulder is big enough. Have you got your best coat on?"

"Well, no; this is not the one I wore at dinner. But I will go to the house and get my clawhammer if you wish."

"No, no. I only want to cry a little."

"You would be perfectly welcome to cry on my best coat every day of the week, Princess, and I would get a new one as often as it might be needed. I don't wish to make capital out of your grief, my dear; I would rather never get a kind word from you than have you suffer. But often it seems as if you didn't care for anybody, you are so high and mighty and offish; and O doth not an hour like this make amends—"

"Drop that, Bob. Don't try to be sentimental: you always get the lines wrong. I've not been here an hour. O, were you joking? You are no more in the humor for jokes than I am, and you know it. Do keep quiet."

I did: I 'dropped it.' Clarice will use slang at times, it is one of her few faults. Where she learns it, I cannot conceive. It is unfeminine, and out of keeping with her whole character; in any one else I should call it vulgar. But I saw she did not wish to be disturbed just then, so I said no more. Instead, I thought of my guilty secret—her secret. It weighs on me heavily; but I can't tell her what I saw and heard. I don't know how she would take it; and I don't care to be exploding any dynamite bombs about my own premises. The situation is bad enough as it is; I'll not make it worse. Poor Clarice! poor Hartman! And yet you can't meddle with such high-strung folks. By and by she spoke.

"Bob, do you know why I come to you, instead of to Jane or Mabel?"

I was on the point of quoting Jane's valuable idea about my being a man, but refrained.

"I could not ask any woman for what you give me. And you are half a woman, Bob; you are so patient and loyal. Nobody else would be that."

"But Mabel and Jane love you too, dear. They would do anything for you."

"Yes, but that is more on equal terms. I am so exacting; I want so much, and give so little. I suppose I was born so; and you have spoiled me—all of you. O, I know I have treated you badly, Robert, often; generally, in fact. I am proud and hateful, and you never resent it. Only a man can be like that—to a woman: and very few men would be so. You are not like other men, Bob: there is nobody like you. You are such a useful domestic animal."

Perhaps I was getting unduly exalted when she let me down thus. I wish Clarice at least would be less mixed—more continuous and consistent, so to speak—when she sets forth my virtues. But one must take the Princess as he finds her, and be content with any crumbs of approval she may drop. Sometimes I think I am a fool about her; but when she talks as she does to-night, I know I am not. There may be more amiable women, and plenty more even-tempered; but there is only one Clarice. I may have made that remark before, but it will bear repeating. It is not of me she is thinking all this time: how should it be? O Hartman, Hartman, if you could know what I know, and see what is before you!

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Presently she spoke again. "Robert, why don't you ask me what I have done? I know you are dying of curiosity."

"I can restrain my curiosity, rather than pry into your affairs, dear. When you see fit, you will tell me. But if you wish it, I will ask you."

"No, it would be of no use. I can't tell you now; perhaps never. Robert, where did you learn to respect a woman so?"

"Jane says I will never learn it. But I do respect you, Princess."

"That must have been when you had vexed her with some of your blunders: you do make blunders, you know? But, Bob, do you know why I love you?"

This moved me so that I had to put myself on guard. She never said so much as that before: it is not her way to talk about feelings or profess much affection for anybody.

"I suppose because we were brought up together, and you are used to me. And, as you say, I am a useful domestic animal. If I can be useful to you, I am proud and thankful. I think more of you than I could easily say: it is very good of you to give me some small return."

"It is because you have a heart, Robert. They may say what they please of your head, but you have a great big heart."

Now was ever the superior male intellect thus disparaged? She must have got this notion from Jane; but I can't quarrel with her now.

"Men are great clumsy things, as you said, dear: we have not your tact, nor your delicate roundabout methods. You are right, I do make blunders; I feel my deficiencies when I am with you. But if my head, such as it is, or my heart, or my hand, can ever serve you, they will be ready." [96]

"Suppose I were to leave you, and go out of your life?"

"You could not go out of my life, though you might go far away. I should be sorry, but I have no right to hold you. But if you ever wanted me, I should always be here."

"Suppose I did something wrong and foolish?"

"I don't want to suppose that, but if I must—it would not be for me to judge you, as you told me once. You might do something that did not accurately represent your mind and character: since I know them, the action would be merely a mistake, a transient incongruity. I don't change easily: I have known you from your cradle. And if it was ever possible for me to fail you, it is not possible after to-night."

"You are very fond of Mr. Hartman, Robert. What if I quarreled with him? Would you take my part against him?"

"I would take your part against the world, Clarice. But he is not of the world. A sad and lonely man, burdened with an inverted conscience and quixotic fancies that turn the waters into blood, who has come for once out of his hermitage to catch a glimpse of the light that never was on sea or land, and then to see it turn into darkness for him. I fear he is sadder and lonelier now than when I brought him from the woods: but I would stake my soul on his honor, as I would on yours. You cannot force me into such a dilemma."

A heavenly glow was on her face now, as she looked long at the stars, and then at me. "Why are you eloquent only when you speak of him, brother?" [97]

"You say I have a heart, Clarice: it is eloquent when I think of you. Shall a stranger be more sacred to me than my sister?—and I don't mean Jane. You would be sacred to a better man than I, dear, if he knew you as I do: you may be so already, for what I can tell. He *could* not mean to sin against you, Princess. If he seemed to fail in respect, or courtesy, or anything that was your due, forgive him, and don't banish him forever. I trusted that you would have enlightened and converted and consoled him: he is worth it."

I longed to say more, but this was as far as I dared go. She sighed.

"Perhaps I need to be converted and consoled myself. But that is ungrateful; with such a comforter at hand I ought not to be miserable. We never knew each other like this before, Robert. Why is it?"

"I don't know, Clarice—or rather I do, of course. It takes the moon, and stars, and a common trouble, to bring people together, even when they see each other every day; and then concurring moods must help. One stands in awe of you, Princess; I always shall. You only tolerated me when you were happy: I was rough, and careless, and stupid, and made bad jokes in the wrong places. I will try to do better after this, so that you need not be repelled when you want me. Hartman, now, is of finer mould than I: if you would let him come back—"

"No more of that now, dear. Let us go in. The moon is going down: it is getting cold and dark." So it was; and damp too—on my shoulder at least. "I am glad you had your old coat on," she said.

Mabel was alone in the parlor. "Well," she began; then she saw our faces, and modified her tone. "The moonlight was very fine, I suppose?"



"You know you never will go out in the evening," said Clarice. "It is later than I thought. Don't scold Robert; he has been a dear good boy." She kissed her, and went upstairs.

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"Mabel," said I, "Clarice is in trouble." I had to say something, and this was perfectly safe. You see, she had told me nothing, and so I could say if asked. But I wasn't.

"I know that, of course, Robert: I have seen it all along. She is a dear girl, for all her flightiness. She will say nothing to me. I hope it will come right. If you can help or comfort her, I shall be glad." Then she too went to bed.

It is unusual for Mabel to be surprised into such candor. I got a cigar, and went out on the porch to meditate. Jane thought that Clarice would tell me things. Yes, I have got a lot of information. Let me see, I am a useful domestic animal, and I have a big heart: that's about the size of it. At this rate, I can soon write a Cyclopædia. Well, cold facts are not all there is in life: there are some things the Cyclopædias fail to tell us about. I don't regard the last few hours as altogether wasted.

After this the Princess and I did not talk much: there seemed to be no need of it. But she was a new and revised edition of the old Clarice, wonderfully sweet, and gracious, and equable; and her look when we met was like the benediction in answer to prayer, as Longfellow says. I went about with a solemn feeling, as if I had just joined the Church. What does a fellow want with slang, and pipes, and beer, and cheating other fellows on the street, when he has such entertainments at home? And yet it cuts me to the soul to look at her: I *must* do something to bring them together. Pretty soon we went back to New York.

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## XVIII.

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### AGAINST EARNESTNESS.

JANE, and even Mabel, have the idea that I am of light and shallow nature; and sometimes I think they are right. It must be so; for your profound and serious characters have a weakness for sorrow, and luxuriate in woe—whereas I object to trouble of any kind, and cannot get used to it. The house has been like a rural cemetery for near two months, and it simply bores me. Hartman now prefers to dwell among the tombs: he has lived these ten years in a graveyard, so to speak, under a canopy of funereal gloom, and he thrives on it. He and Clarice are the most superior persons I know; and they have gone and got themselves into a peck, or rather several bushels, of trouble, about nothing at all. They must like it, or why should they do it? I doubt if I can ever be educated up to that point. I have the rude and simple tastes of a child: sunshine seems to me better than shade (except during the heated term), and pleasure more desirable than pain. I like to be comfortable myself, and to have every one else so. Imagine Mabel getting miffed at me, or I at her, over some little two-penny affair of unadvised expressions! She often says unkind things to me: if I took an earnest view of life, and were full of deep thought and fine feeling, probably I should have to take her criticisms to heart, and go away in a hurry and never come back. I sometimes make blunders worse than that one of Hartman's, and no harm worth mentioning ever comes of them—though I do have to be careful with the Princess. No doubt I am frivolous and superficial; but people of my sort appear to get along more easily, and to make less trouble for themselves and others, than those whose standards are so much higher. If I had the managing of this business, I could set it right inside a week—or in two days, if Jim were not so far away. It is merely to say to him, "Your language was unparliamentary. It is not etiquette to assume that a lady cares for you when you have not asked her to. You have no right to resent her resenting such unconventional behavior. You owe her an apology: go and make it like a man, and withdraw the offensive epithet, term, phrase, clause, or sentence, which ever it might be." Then I would say to her, "He meant no harm. How do you expect a member from Wayback to be posted on all the usages of metropolitan society? You ought not to have come down on him so hard. Let the man say he is sorry, and forgive him. You were mainly to blame yourself; but seeing it is you, we'll pass that." Then I would stand over them like the heavy father in the plays, and say, "You love each other. Take her, Jim: take him, Clarice. Bless you, my children." That is the way it ought to be done, and that is the way I would fix it if it concerned common every-day people like myself, with no pretence to qualities higher than practicability and common sense—supposing such people could have got into such a mess, which I own is improbable. A method that would answer for them is not so easily applied to these superfine specimens, who have taken such pains to build themselves a private Purgatory, and keep it going on a limited supply of fuel. They might resent intrusion on their agreeable demesne, and put up a board with 'No Trespassing' on it; but then they ought to keep the place fenced in better: as it is, the smoke and heat spread too much. They might say, 'If we enjoy our misery, what right have the rest of you to interfere?' Yes, but what right have they to rope in the rest of us, who are not so addicted to the luxury of grief, and make us miserable too? That's what it comes to. 'Each man's life is all men's lesson,' and each woman's too. Now if our high-toned friends had kept this particular part of their lives in manuscript, and not supplied us with copies, but reserved it for spelling out in secret at their own leisure, the case would be different. As it stands, this embroglio is a lesson which I have got by heart and am tired of: I would like to set it aside and turn to something more cheerful. Moreover, as the head of a family I have duties in the matter, for it affects us all. I don't mind so much about Jane: she thinks this is a XX. romance, which the parties chiefly concerned are conducting in the most approved

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manner; if she had one of her own, I suppose this would be her style—her idea of how the thing should be done.<sup>[1]</sup> It is not mine, however; far from it. Shall I sit passive, and see the clouds of care growing heavier about the wife of my bosom, and the furrows deepening in that once marble brow? She looks two years older than she did two months ago, and she owns it. I have three lovely children: how brief a space it is since they played in the abandonment of infant glee! And now their young existence, too, is darkened. Herbert no longer slides down the banisters, with his former recklessness, but sits and looks wistfully at Cousin Clarice. The change involves a saving in lint and arnica, but a loss of muscular development. You see, we are all of the sympathetic—which is the expensive—temperament: we have not sense enough to be content each with his or her own personal affairs, and let the others arrange their private funerals at their own charge. There is more truth than I thought in part of what I told Hartman, that night on the boat.

This thing must stop. I will have to ask the Princess if she wants our humble abode to be a house of mourning much longer. We might accommodate her in that respect for

another month or two, but not permanently. Lovers are so selfish: they don't care if they upset all your domestic arrangements, and spoil your harmonies with the discord of their sweet bells jangled. It ought not to be encouraged, nor yet allowed.

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[1] I was wholly mistaken in this, as will appear by the next chapter. *R. T.*]

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## XIX.

### CONSPIRACY.

THE summer has not done for any of us what it ought; quite the reverse. Even I am not in my usual form, if Mabel and Jane are right. They had let me alone for some time: last night they attacked me together—a preconcerted movement, obviously.

"Robert, you are pale, almost haggard. You need a change."

"Why," said I, "I've just had a change—or rather several of them. We've been back only three weeks."

"You need mountain air: the sea does not agree with you. And Newport is not what it used to be."

"It's a good deal more so, if you mean that; but I don't know that its increased muchness has damaged my health to any great extent."

"You prefer small, remote places, and their way of life; you know you do. They are more of a change from town. You bought the house at Newport for our sakes. I have often feared you were sacrificing yourself to us—with your usual disinterestedness, dear."

"Well, my usual disinterestedness is ready to be worked again, to any reasonable extent, if you will say what you're after. But how can I leave the business now?"

"O, the business!" (It was Jane this time.) "That is all very fine, when you don't want to leave town. But I notice that the business never interferes with any of your junketings. What are your clerks paid for? Can't they attend to the business?"

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"A fine idea you women have of business, and a fine success you'd make of it. Jane, suppose you take charge in Water Street while I am away."

"I don't doubt I could do it quite as well as you, after a little practice. Why, brother, Mr. Pipeline understands it a great deal better than you do. Our father, in his later years, trusted him entirely."

"Yes, Robert," said Mabel, "and how often you have assured me that Mr. Pipeline was absolutely competent and reliable. When we were married, and a hundred times since, you explained your carelessness and indifference about the business by saying that all was right while old Mr. Pipeline was there: he knew everything, and kept the whole force to their work. It was that, you said, which enabled you to be so much more about the house than most men could be, and so attentive and satisfactory as a husband and father."

She had me there: who would expect a woman to remember things and bring them up in this way, so long after? So I tried to turn it off.

"O, well, he hasn't gone to Canada yet: the books seem straight, and the returns are pretty fair. But it is well for the head of the firm to look in occasionally, all the same."

"You do look in occasionally, Robert: no one can accuse you of neglecting that duty. Would I have married a man who neglected duty, and allowed his business to go to ruin, and his family to come to want? Your conscience may rest perfectly easy on that score, dear."

"O, thank you: it does. I've not often allowed the state of the oil market to interfere with sleep or appetite, or with my appreciation of you and the children. Family duties first, my dear; what so

sacred, so primary, as the ties of Home? But such virtue is not always duly prized there. I'm glad you do me justice."

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"I always have, Robert; always. Whatever Jane and others might say about your levity and your untimely jests and so forth, I have steadily maintained that you had a good heart."

"There, Jane, do you hear that? Mabel knows, for she is in a position to know."

"Of course, brother, we are all aware of that. If you had not that one redeeming trait, I should have left you long ago, even if I had had to get married. You admire Artemus Ward: he had a giant mind, you recollect, but not always about him. So with your good heart at times. But we are wandering from the point. Mabel, you were showing him how he could go away for a week or two without neglecting his important duties down town."

"Why yes, Robert. You have been here three weeks now, and I am sure you have been at the store nearly every day. Indeed, when you were not at home, or at the club, or somewhere about town, I doubt not you might be found in Water Street a good part of the time."

"Yes," I said with an air of virtuous complacency, "I believe you are right. I can't deny it, though it may help your side of the argument."

"Well then, you can surely be spared during a brief absence. And when you return, you can continue to look in occasionally, as you say."

"Perhaps I could, though it is not well to be too positive. Where do you think I ought to go?"

"Well, you are fond of fishing and hunting. You might go up and spend a week with Mr. Hartman. You found good sport there, you said."

"O yes, there are trout enough, and deer not far off, he told me. But I was there in May. And it is not very comfortable at Hodge's, if you remember."

"But of course this time you would stay with Mr. Hartman. You refused his invitation before, and it was hardly civil to such an old friend."

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"He has a mere bachelor box, my dear, and I hardly like to thrust myself on him."

"Why, Robert, I am surprised at you. After Mr. Hartman spent a fortnight with us at Newport—and when he has written you twice, urging you to come. Can't you see that the poor man is lonely, and really wants you?"

"Mabel, it would be all very well if it were like last May—only he and I to be considered. But here is that blessed entanglement of his with Clarice—quarrel, or love-making nipped in the bud, or whatever it was—that complicates matters. After all the lectures I've had from you two, I don't want to complicate them any more, nor to meddle in her affairs, nor appear to. Suppose I go up there, and he wants news of her, and anything goes wrong, or it simply doesn't come right as you expect; I'd have your reproaches to bear ever after, and perhaps those of my own conscience. You're not sending me off simply for my health, or for a little fishing. If I go to Hartman, the sport will not be the main item on the programme; and that every one of us knows perfectly well. So I don't move till I see my way straight."

Finding me thus unexpectedly firm, Jane looked at Mabel, and Mabel looked at Jane, and there was a pause. You see, in this last deliverance I had uttered my real mind—or part of it—and it naturally impressed them.

My sister's share in the discussion had thus far been confined to the few efforts at sarcasm duly credited to her above—let no one say that I am unjust to Jane. She had been watching me pretty closely, but I hardly think she saw anything she was not meant to see. Now she came to the front, looking very serious—as we all did, in fact.

"Well, brother, some things are better understood than spoken—from our point of view. But if you insist on having all in plain words, and playing, as you call it, with cards on the table—"

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"Just so," said I. "You use your feminine tools: I use mine, which are a man's. If I have to do this piece of work, it must be on my own conditions and after my own fashion, with the least risk of misunderstanding."

"Robert, if this is affectation, you are a better actor than I thought. But if you really know no more than we do—"

This was too much for Mabel. "Now, Jane, you go too far. Robert likes his little joke, but he knows when to be serious. Why do you suspect him so?"

Jane went on. "Of course it is possible he may be no deeper in Clarice's confidence than we: she is very reticent. You mean, brother, that you will do nothing till she authorizes you?"

"Well, as I said, this is her affair. For you, or me, or anybody else, to meddle in it without her direction, or permission—unless in case of obvious extremity—would seem, by all rules alike ethical and prudential, a delicate and doubtful proceeding, to say the least."

"I suppose you are right there. Mabel, you may as well tell him. Robert, don't think, from all this preamble, that it is of more importance than it would otherwise seem. Perhaps we might as well have told you at once; but we are only women, you know. Now at last we are using your tools

—the tools you always use with such manly consistency—candor and open speech. Tell him, Mabel."

"Robert dear, Clarice told me to-day that you were looking badly; she thought you needed a change. 'Is he not going off for his fall fishing?' she said."

"Is that all?"

"It is a good deal for her," said Jane. "If you want more, ask her. Are you less concerned for her happiness than we are? Must we arrange all the preliminaries? Brother, if I could do anything, no fear of consequences or reproaches should tie my hands: I would do what is right, and take the chances. If I stood where you do, I would have this matter settled, or know why it could not be. I would never sit idle, and see two such lives spoiled—and all our hearts broken. O, I know you love them both. But you are so cautious—unnecessarily and absurdly so at times, and wedded to useless diplomacy, when only the plain speech you talk about is needed. You stand in awe of Clarice too much: you may wait too long. Forgive me, Robert; but whatever she may say, you *must* see Mr. Hartman before winter."

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I could have embraced Jane, besides forgiving her slurs on me, which may contain an element of truth. There is more in her than I have supposed; and of course what she insists on is exactly what I have all along meant to do. But it did not come in handy to say so at this point. "I'll think it over. You two had better go to bed: I must go out and smoke."

"Robert," said Mabel, "don't go out to-night. You can smoke in the dining-room."

"No; I'll not take a base advantage of your present amiable mood. But I tell you what it is; if you want to get Hartman here in cold weather you must let us have a snuggery. He can't do without his tobacco."

It was a fine night, and I wanted a walk as well as a smoke. I felt gratified, for this thing had gone just as I desired. I am not quite so impulsive as Jane, and I understand the difficulties as she does not; but my plan has merely waited for events to give it definite shape and make it feasible. Certainly I must see Hartman, and as he can't come here, I must go there. But I wanted the women to suggest my going; that divides the responsibility, and gives them a hand in the game. I would have had to propose it myself within a week or so, if they had not spoken. But the Princess knows what she is about, and what is fit and proper. It may seem strange that she should speak to Mabel instead of to me; but she will say what she has to say to me before I start. In fact, I'll not start till she does—how could I? It is her business I am going on, with just enough of my own to give it a color. I'll write to Jim at once, to ask when he wants me: the mails are slow up there, and it may be a week before his answer comes. That will give me time to get my instructions, and not be in any unseemly haste to seek them either. So far, so good; but there is more to be done, and delicate work too, such as will bear no scamping. It is the biggest contract you ever undertook, R. T., and you must make a neat job of it.

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## XX.

### APOLOGY FOR LYING.

If you do not understand my waiting for Mabel and the girls to prompt this move, and allowing them to urge it against my apparent reluctance, I ascribe this failure on your part to lack of experience, rather than to any deeper deficiency. Some men like to make a parade of independence, and to do—or pretend to do—everything of themselves, without consulting or considering their womankind. But such are not the sort I choose my friends from; for I have been accustomed to regard both brain and heart as desirable appurtenances to a man. There is little Bruteling, at the club, who would like to be considered a man of the world—but I can't waste space or time on him. And I have met family men even—but I don't meet them more than once if I can help it—who regard their wives and sisters as playthings, dolls, upper-class servants, not to be trusted, taken into their confidence, or treated with any real respect. Such heresies have no place under a Christian civilization, which has exalted Woman to her true rank as the equal and helpmeet of Man, the object of his tenderest affections and most loyal services. It is in his domestic life that one's true character is shown; and Home is not only the dearest place on earth to me and to every one whose head is level, but the stage on which his talents and qualities are best brought out.

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You think that I don't practice what I preach; that I introduce within those sacred precincts too much of play-acting and small diplomacy, as Jane says; that even at this moment my thoughts and intentions in a matter which concerns us all are imperfectly revealed to my nearest and dearest? Ah, that is owing to the difference between the sexes, and to the singular lines on which the Sex was constructed, mentally speaking. I don't wish to criticize the Architect's plans, but it seems to me I could suggest improvements which might have simplified relations, and avoided much embarrassment. The difficulty is that women, as a rule, can neither use nor appreciate Frankness. Just after I was married, I thought it was only the fair thing to tell Mabel about several girls I had been sweet on before I knew her. Would you believe it, she burst into tears, and upbraided me with my brutality; and she brings up that ill-advised disclosure against me to this day. I know several ladies who will not lie, under ordinary circumstances—not for the mere

pleasure of it, at least; Clarice, for instance, and Jane, I believe; but not one who will tell the whole truth, or forgive you for telling it. Well, well, we have to take them as they are, and make the best of them: they have other redeeming traits, as Jane says of me. In heaven these inequalities will be done away, and one can afford to speak out—at least I hope so. But meantime you can see how these feminine peculiarities hamper a man, and check his natural candor, and impose on him a wholly new, or at least a hugely modified, ethical code. If I were to follow my original bent, which was uncommonly direct and guileless, I should be in hot water all the time. It is this struggle between nature and—well, I can hardly call it grace; let us say necessity, or environment—which is making me bald, and fat, and aging me so fast. You have seen, in the course of this narrative, what scrapes I have gotten into by speaking before I stopped to think, and blurting out the simple truth. I was once as honest as they are ever made—and for practical and domestic uses nearly an idiot. I have been obliged, actually forced, to deny myself the indulgence of a virtue, and diligently to cultivate the opposite vice. The preachers don't know everything: I could give them points. I don't say I have succeeded remarkably, and the exercise has been deeply painful to me; but it was absolutely essential, if I was to be fit for the family circle, and able to do or get any good in this imperfect world. There is no escape, unless you live in a hermitage like Hartman. You may have noticed that my loved ones sometimes appear to treat me with less than absolute respect and confidence: it is the result of this life-conflict, which has left me with a character mixed, and in one respect wrecked. But they would think much worse of me than they do if I told them the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, on all occasions. Thus I might—and then again I might not—go to our poor Princess, and say, "Clarice, Mabel and Jane think I ought to see Hartman. I think so too, and they report you as concurring in the verdict. This is delicately put under cover of my health and the fall fishing; but we all know that you and Jim want looking after more than I do, and that bigger game than trout is to be caught. Tell me what you want me to say to him and do with him, and I will start at once." Some women might stand that, possibly, but not the ones I am used to: such would be eminently the way not to attain my benevolent end. No, no; you can do nothing in such cases without finesse, as Jim calls it, and strategy, and tact, and management; and if you have not these gifts by nature, you must acquire them, whatever they may cost. I still hold to my principles; but I don't propose to run them into the ground. In morality, as elsewhere, a little too much is apt to be worse than much too little; and theory and practice are very different things, not to be rashly confounded. You want to hold the right theories, and then to live as near them as depraved mundane conditions will allow. The manly weapons of which Jane spoke so scornfully last night are the right ones—when you can use them. In the case in hand, to tell all I know would have been at any time, and would still be, impossible and ruinous. Hartman is not so far out on some points: as he says, we did not arrange the present scheme of things, and could not be proud of it if we had.

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You may say, and I could not deny, that my diplomacy, such as it is, is not always employed for the benefit of women only. Hartman is a luminous and transparent soul—too much so for his own good: why did I practise occasionally on him? I can explain that best on general principles.

In a world a majority of whose inhabitants are female, demoralization has naturally extended far and wide, till strict veracity has become unpractical. The first falsehood (after the serpent's) must have been humiliating to him who uttered it, and a fatal example to those who heard; but mankind soon grew used to the new fashion. I pass over the rude barbarian ages, whose gross and inartistic lying offers no claim to respectful and sympathetic interest, and no excuse but the lame one of selfish depravity, common to the race. But with the inroads of civilization Life became complex, and Truth was found too simple and rigid to fit with all its varied intricacies. That is, when Truth *is* simple. "Don't you think my baby beautiful?" demands a fond parent. "No, I don't: far from it." That is the truth; but its naked and repulsive brutality demands to be clothed with the garb of humane and graceful fiction. "Prisoner at the bar, are you guilty or not guilty?" He is guilty, of course; but if he says so, it is a dead give-away. In this case indeed the interests of Truth are one with those of Society, though not of the prisoner; but often it is different. The basis of ethics, our moralists say, is as largely utilitarian as it is ideal. If so, is there any special sacredness about cold facts, that they should get up on end and demand to be published everywhere continually? Truth ought to be modest, and not claim all the observances and honors, seeing there are so many other deities whom we poor mortals are no less bound to worship. When Grotius' wife lied to the policeman about her husband's whereabouts, the lie was an act of piety, whereas truth-telling would have been murderous infidelity. If the minions of the law were after me, would I thank Mabel and Jane and Herbert for telling them which way I had gone? There is no more aggravated nuisance than he who insists on exposing all he knows at all times and places—as I used to do before I learned these tricks. Look at poor Hartman, ejecting his honest backwoods thought without asking whether it was a wise and decent offering to his small but highly select audience; and see what trouble he has brought on himself and all of us thereby.

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This outspokenness is often mere self-indulgence. Take me, for instance: to this day, in spite of all the lessons I have had, it is far easier and pleasanter for me to tell the truth than not. People of this temperament must learn to put a check on nature. Self-indulgence is bad, all agree, and self-denial useful and necessary. This is the way virtues clash and collide. I say, confound such a world. What is a plain man to do in it? As the poet sings, the *Summum Bonum* belongs in heaven, and you can't expect to get at it here, but must simply do the best you can, which is generally not very good. And then, as another poet puts it, very likely nobody will appreciate your efforts, but you will get cuffed for them: we are punished for our purest deeds, and so forth.—But this is trenching on Hartman's province. It is well that I should think all this out now: I can talk it over with him before we get to business. He will want sympathy with his notions about the depravity of things in general, and that will smooth the way, and make him willing to open up on the

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specific woe that lies nearest.

To return to our mutttons. The guilt of duplicity has lain heavy on my conscience for two months, but how can I help it? I don't so much mind keeping what I know from Mabel and Jane, for it is not their affair. But it is Clarice's affair—most eminently so—and I had promised solemnly to tell her at once when I knew or thought of anything that concerned her. It was obviously impossible to keep my promise in this case—not on my account, but on hers. It will not be easy to tell even Jim that I overheard their last colloquy, and witnessed the tragical parting scene: I'll have to watch my opportunities, and spring that on him just at the right moment, when it will have the best effect. Now any one who knows Clarice must see that to tell her this would be to take the most awful risks, and probably to destroy all chance of reconciling them; that is level to the meanest apprehension, I judge. No sir: it can't be done till I have seen Jim, and got things in train. Properly handled, the secret—that is, my possession of it, which is a second secret, almost as weighty as the original one—may be a tool to manage both these intractable subjects with, and bring them to terms: in a fool's hands, and thrown about promiscuously, it would be an infernal machine to blow us up. No: I'll take whatever guilt there is, rather than hurt Clarice now and hereafter. Do you want to know my opinion of a man who is always and only thinking about keeping his hands clean and his conscience at peace, so that he can't do a little lying—or it might be other sinning—on adequate occasion, to serve his friends or a good cause? I think he is a cad, sir—a low-minded cad; and of such is not the kingdom of heaven. It may not occur every day: it might not do to insert in the text-books as a rule; but once in a while there may be better businesses than saving one's soul and keeping one's conscience void of offense.<sup>[2]</sup>

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I am arguing against my own nature in all this. In my heart I love Truth above all things, and follow and serve her with a devotion that is probably exaggerated. But I can't help seeing that there are two kinds of her. When she is simple and obvious, she seems to reside in bare facts, which we may easily respect too much, for what are they but blackguard carnalities? Preraphaelitism in art, Realism in literature, might be all very well if they would keep their place—which is in the kitchen. Some may want pots and pans, and scullions, and pigs' feet, and ribs of beef described. I don't myself; but it is a free country, and vivid and accurate portraiture of these delicacies may constitute the main charm of literature for some readers, possibly. But Realism wants to take its pots and pans into the parlor: it always overdoes things. "A daisy by the river's brim a yellow daisy was to him, and it was nothing more." Well, what else should it be?—But perhaps I have not got that right. Pass on to our next head.

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Truth is not always simple—by no means always. Often she is highly complex, and as much mixed as I was just now; and then you don't know where she is, or what she is, and it gets to be all guesswork. One says, Here, and another says, There: the philosophers upset each other's schemes in turn, the theologians hurl reciprocal excommunications, the scientists of to-day laugh at those of last year. If Pilate meant it this way, we owe him some sympathy and respect. "Speak the truth and shame the devil," they say. Bah! [I think this expletive ought to be spelt *Baa*.] When you know what the truth is, you are more likely to shame your friends, and become obnoxious and ridiculous. And in most cases you don't know, and if you suppose you do, you are mistaken. I have thought out a way of approximating Truth on a large scale, and more nearly than most succeed in doing; but this is a big topic, and I had better keep it to entertain Hartman with.

O yes; I was to explain why I sometimes use roundabout methods even with him. If you tell all you know to everyone you meet, or disclose your real character, it will generally be a waste of good material which might better be economized. By the way, what *is* my real character? How should I know? One sees one side of it, another another. I see all that have turned up yet, but there may be many more, thus far latent; and how am I to harmonize them all, and take the average of a succession of phenomena? I am complex, like Truth.

But I must not interrupt myself any more. Let us fall back on the utilitarian basis of ethics. You see, if I had talked like this to Jim when we met last May, he would have put himself on guard and begun to study me, whereas I wanted to draw him out—as I did. I have no objection to people studying me when I don't care to study them; but when there is anything to be done for them you have got to understand them first, and to this end it is best to appear simple and not distract their minds from the contemplation and disclosure of their own qualities: you can play on their vanity if your own does not stand in the road. Hartman has a fine mind, but in his innocent rural way he took for granted that I had stood still since we were together at college. So I played to his lead, and pretended, for instance, to know nothing about poetry; whereas, as you must have noticed, I am pretty well read, and my memory is remarkably copious and accurate. (Clarice did indeed say that I sometimes got the lines wrong; but what she meant was that the passages I quoted in my well-meant efforts to console her were of too gay a character for her melancholy mood.)

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In this way I secured Jim's regard and confidence, which I am using for his good: if I had put myself forward, and been anxious to impress him with my importance, he might have looked on me with the cynical indifference which is all the feeling he can afford to most people, and I should never have got him out of the woods. So when I was taking him to Newport, I said what it was desirable to say, and omitted what was not: how else should a rational man talk? And that first night there, I took the tone that he required, as a host is bound to do: sacred are the duties of christian hospitality. Poor Jim is as good as a play; he takes Life in such dead earnest, and expects his friends to be rampant idealists too: so I mounted the high horse for once to gratify him. He will never forget that, nor cease to respect me accordingly: he thinks I was serious then, and joking at all other times. You and I of course understand that Life is but a series of

appearances; and if I seem to contradict myself, to say one thing on one page and its opposite on the next, I am only reporting the various phases assumed by facts without and moods within. 'The shield is gold.' 'No, it is silver.' Well, shall we fight about that? Probably it is both. A thing may be black in one light, and white in another, for what I know. Of all fools the positive philosophers seem to me the worst; and the most abject kind of conceit is that of alleged consistency. Why will you insist on a definiteness which has so little place in nature? The world is a chameleon, and you and I are smaller copies of it.

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I must try to explain all this to Hartman, and make him see that it is time he took on another color. He has been down in the depths all this while; now let him get up on the heights. But he would never do it of himself, nor without the management of a more practical mind. If I took things as he does, I should be tempted to say, "You monumental idiot, to fling a rash word at a girl as proud as Lucifer, and then to take her hasty repartee as a final verdict from doomsday book!" Happily there is one person around with sense enough to see that both these moon-struck babes are forgivable, and therefore capable of such bliss as may be found in a world of which the best to be said is that we are in very small measure responsible for it. They were both foolish, of course; but what proportion does their joint offence bear to their punishment—and ours? That is the Order of Things—this blessed and beautiful Kosmos.

[2] [Note. The unwary reader may possibly need to be reminded that R. T. is not to be taken too seriously, especially in this his Apology for Lying.—*Pub.*]

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## XXI.

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### JANE TO THE RESCUE.

It may seem unfeeling in me to indulge in dissertations like the above at so critical a juncture: but they serve to fill the time while I am waiting for marching orders. I have written to Jim, and that is all I can do at present. Jane thinks differently: she ought to have been a man, she is so fond of action. She got me in a corner to-day.

"Well, brother?"

"Well, Jane?"

"What have you done?"

"Done? what should I do?"

"Use a man's tools, that you are so fond of; plain speech, if no more. Have you spoken to Clarice yet?"

"No: why should I speak to her? She spoke to Mabel, not to me."

"Robert, are you ever sincere in anything? When *I* profess affection for people, I am ready to serve them at their need."

"So am I, and Clarice knows it. She is perfectly aware that I am ready to do this thing, or any other thing within my power, for her at any time. It is easy for her to say what she wants."

"Brother, you are *so* stupid! Don't you know that it is excessively difficult for her to allude, however remotely, to a matter like this? Say what she wants, she would die first. Do you desire to wait for that? She is not like the rest of us; and a woman is not like a man. *You* could talk for a week, and turn your whole mind inside out, with no fatigue—except to your audience; but the faintest reference to what I need not name would cost her a painful effort. I told you it was a great thing for her to say what she did to Mabel. That ought to have been enough for you."

"How could it be enough? Do try to talk sense now, Jane. How can I go off blindly on a fool's errand—in her interest, but without commission or instructions?"

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"Ask her for them, then. It is ungenerous to put on her the burden of opening the subject. She is doubtless waiting for you to speak, and wondering at your slackness."

"Hanged if I can understand that. How many times have you lectured me about showing her proper respect, and restraining my native coarseness, and what not; and now you want me to go to her like a trooper or a grand inquisitor, and ask about the state of her feelings toward Hartman. I can't do it, Jane. When you get into such a scrape, I might try it, if you insisted—though it would go against me, as Sir Lancelot said: then you could see how you liked it. Clarice wouldn't like it at all; and she has deserved better things of me than that."

"She *has* deserved better things of you than she is getting. I thought you loved her as I do. So that was only one of your pretences?"

"I love her too well to harass her; to intrude upon her solitude when she does not want me; to pry into her affairs without her consent, and destroy what chance there is that she may call me when she is ready."

"She will never be ready, unless we, that are her first friends, come to her aid against her own

pride and shyness. You think me intrusive—a meddling old maid, prying into what does not concern me: but, brother, she and Mr. Hartman were made for one another. They were deeply interested, both of them—I could see it plainly: it would have been settled in a few days more, if that wretched misunderstanding had not occurred. *He* may get over it; he is a man, though he did not seem to be that kind. But she—she is of the deep, and silent, and constant type: she will nurse this hurt till it kills her. I love her, Robert; she has nobody but us. She never knew a thing like this before; it is her first experience. Other men to her were playthings, or bores; she had no friend among them but you. You cannot fancy how hard it is for her; harder far than for a younger girl. She is so helpless, for all her pride—her pride makes her more helpless to speak or act. If I could only help her, now—"

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And here, to my amazement, my stately sister broke down in a passion of tears and sobs: I never knew her do such a thing before. I patted, and petted, and soothed her, and did all that a man of humanity and experience does in such cases. I shall apply for the title, Consoler of Feminine Woes, since the business of the office comes to me. It will be Mabel next, I suppose, and then this thing must stop, unless we begin the round afresh. Clarice may naturally want to be comforted once or twice more; but I hope soon to remove all further occasion for that. Jane and I have not been like this since we were children.

"There, there. Sister dear, I would knock any man down, and insult any woman, who said of you what you just said of yourself. You are not an old maid, and you might be a society leader if you cared for it: plenty of women are who have more years and less looks and manners and brains than you. You are as far as possible from a meddler: your fault is that you keep too much to yourself. I am sure Clarice would be touched and flattered by your interest in her: I should, if you took a quarter as much in me. Do you know, I never saw you look so well, or do yourself such credit—till now—as night before last. My heart said amen to every word you uttered, even when you were girding at me; for you thought I deserved it, and in part I did. I will have no more secrets from you—except such as I have no right to impart. If you will, we shall be friends now, and work together in this thing. You always seemed to despise me, Jane; and it is tedious when the affection is all on one side."

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"Yes: you used to have enough of that with Clarice."

She was feeling better now. As I may have said on some previous occasion, a little judicious management will do great things for a woman. I must keep this up if I can, and make appropriate responses to all her remarks. I have been too hard on Jane in the past. After all, the tie between brother and sister is a peculiar one—few more so; and, except for the Princess, who is such only by adoption, each of us is all the other has got in that line. Perhaps I ought to have thought of this earlier.

"Clarice appreciates my virtues better now, as I hope you will. But I was going to tell you: I am of one mind and heart with you about this, dear. I have always meant to see Hartman this fall, of course; but it was better that the suggestion should come from Mabel, you see."

"You do tangle things up so unnecessarily, Robert. Mabel would have approved of anything you proposed, as a matter of course."

"Well, my dear, I have no desire to be a dictator in the house, like some men. You all have interests and rights to be respected, and I want you to have your say."

"We would have it more cheerfully if you would take yours—out plainly, in a man's way, you know. Have you written Mr. Hartman?"

"Certainly: that same night, and asked if he wanted me next week. That was simple enough. I'm not afraid of *him*."

"I can't see why you should be so afraid of Clarice. You've known her all her life, and she is only ten years younger than you. If she were but seventeen, now, and a new acquaintance, I might understand it. You *must* have it out with her, Robert. If I adopt her style, perhaps you will do as I wish. Remember, we are to work together in this thing, and you are of one mind and heart with me about it; so you must let me direct you. Mind, now!"

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I stared: it was an imitation, gentle and subdued indeed, of the Princess as she was in her days of glory—not so long ago, alas!—before the rains descended and the winds blew and the storm beat upon her house of life: the tones were there, and a hint of the arch looks. Where did Jane learn these tricks? And what has come over her? A maiden, even of her years, is hardly warmed to life by a few compliments and caresses from her own mother's son. Can Hartman have waked her up too? She laughed in my face.

"If our plot succeeds, you may be thrown on my society again; and as you are going to be so affectionate, I must fill Clarice's place as well as I can. Meantime, you had better let me guide you; indeed you had."

"That may be; only don't drive me too hard, please. I'm not what I once was: all these emotions are too many for me. Where do you propose to guide me to?"

"To Clarice. Will you come now?"

"Scarcely: a nice reception we should get. This is not a case where two are better far than one. And then it would be three presently, which never answers—when she is one of them. I would



rather go alone, and much rather not at all. Guide me somewhere else, sweet sister: or you can go yourself, if you like. But I don't see why she should stand on ceremony with me."

"Not with you, but with her own heart—a more recent acquaintance, and much more formidable."

"But that is there all the same, whether I go to her or she comes to me."

"Yes, but—can't you see? She dislikes to take the initiative."

"So do I. According to you, she has taken it already."

"Yes, and once is enough. You are so slow, Robert: you require so much teaching."

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"I know. But don't despair: Hartman says you have improved me a heap, between you. You see, the cases are different. None of you are the least afraid of me—I should be sorry if you were. But I am afraid of you: you are such superior beings. You know you are: you look on my masculine dulness with contempt; and so do I. It is my deep and loyal respect for a woman—which you said I would never learn. Jane, you hurt me then; you have hurt me often. I would have been fonder of you—showed it more, I mean; but affection, repulsed, shrank into the shell of indifference. Be kind, now, and I will do anything you say. You see, I *am* getting on."

"I wish you would get on toward the business in hand. A nice time Clarice must have had with you. I can see now why she had to keep so tight a rein on you, and to rule you by fear. Will you speak to her, or will you not?"

"Of course I will, before I go. We can't hear from Jim for several days yet. She will probably come to me before that. If not, I'll have to go to her. Jane, there are some things that you don't understand, and I can't explain."

"Queer things they must be, then. I wonder that a man should be such a coward."

"If you were a man, you wouldn't. I don't care to display my courage at home, sister. You are harder than Clarice. You want me to be all around the circle at once, and whatever I do, you find fault. My dear, ever since you spoke, I have been hanging about, to give her a chance to say what she wants. How can I stride up to her and shout, 'Here, tell me what to say to your runaway lover'? She knows all about it, if you don't. I'll wait to-morrow after breakfast; tell her so, if you will. She has only to look at me, and I'll ask her, if she wishes. Then you can scold me to your heart's content for making a mess of it, and being rough and brutal and stupid. Jane, I am doing the best I can. If I could put myself absolutely into your hands, and be but a voice and body to your mind, it might be an improvement; but unhappily that is not feasible at present. Will what I propose answer?"

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"Perhaps: I will see. I may have been unjust to you, Robert: you are different from most men, and not easy to understand: you like to let part of you pass for the whole. Whether you are so easy to rule as you pretend to be, I am not sure yet. Well, there is time to find out. If you live by your professions, well and good. Kiss me, dear; good-night."

Since Jane has panned out in this unexpected way, I wish I could tell her the Secret: she might give me some points. But that is impossible—unthinkable, as they say at Concord. Clarice would never forgive me: that would be bad, but not the worst. It would be disloyal to her—distinctly so. That I've never been yet, and I'm too old to begin now. There may be cases in which the end justifies the means, but this is not one of them. No: I must dree this weird (if that is the expression), and hoe this row, all by myself. If I had been bred in the east, I should be tempted to say it was a contumelious responsibility. The next time you want to get into difficulties with a lady, James Hartman, you must do it on some other premises than mine.

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## XXII.

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### AN ORDEAL.

NEXT morning I was nosing about in the library, pretending to be looking for a book, when Clarice came to me and said, "I don't think what you want is here. Leave business this afternoon, and take me to the Park."

If she were to say, "Leave business this year, and take me to Europe, or to Madagascar," I should do it: she would have to arrange the matter with Mabel, but that she could do without difficulty, I have not the least doubt. It would be a loss to Water Street, and my departure would be felt in business circles generally; but they would have to stand it as they might. In this case, however, no heavy sacrifice was involved: for a few hours, or days, or weeks, Pipeline, as Mabel says, can conduct the old stand well enough. What it needs is the feeling that a master mind presides over its destinies, though from such a distance as Newport or the Wayback woods.

We agreed on an hour—that is, she told me to be at the door at two—and I went down town, feeling relieved. It is much better for Clarice to take the responsibility of opening communications, and I wish she would conduct the whole interview, like a major-general with his aid-de-camp or a master plumber sending out his apprentices to mend the pipes—leaving me only

to take notes of instructions. But that is too much to expect. It is a delicate task before me, and my talents for such (according to the ladies), are not so eminent that I should be anxious to overwork them. I can manage a man, and some women perhaps; but to catechize and cross-examine her on a subject as to which pride, and honor, and modesty lock a girl's lips—I don't see how I can do it, even with her consent. I would rather smoke my pipe through a powder mill than hurt you, my poor Princess: my clumsy fingers were never made to play about your heartstrings.

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I dropped in at Trinity on my way, and put up a prayer; it was that she might make it easy for herself, and for me, though that is a minor matter—keep the game in her own hands, and tell enough to serve her ambassador's need, without his questioning.

She did not keep me waiting: she never had that vice. The change in her is not for casual eyes to see. Outwardly, I have fallen off more than she has; in fact, I have lost three pounds in these last two months. Many a hat was raised, many an envious glance turned toward me, as we spun up the avenue. The fellows at the club, and elsewhere, used to pester me to introduce them, and I gratified them for a while, till she told me she could not have all my acquaintances coming to call, and made Mabel say I must leave off bringing men home to dinner. She never was a coquette; but what is a girl so endowed to do? They would force themselves on her, by dozens, by scores, by hundreds: they overflowed the house and took up all her time; they crowded her life, until she could stand it no longer and stopped it. That is why we live so quietly of late: it is a great improvement. Now, they gaze on her from afar: yet she never had difficulty with any of them—till August, alas. That was my fault, for bringing in a wild man from the woods, who could not be counted on or ruled like the rest, but would flop around in his uncircumcised way and break things. I should never forgive myself for that, if I did not hope to get matters right—and more so than they ever were, for her.

For a time we drove on silently. Then of a sudden, without looking at me, she said very quietly, "Jane told me you wanted to see me, Robert."

O Lord, is this to be the shape of it after all? Well, what must be must, and I will do my stint as a man may. "Did she say nothing else?"

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"That you were afraid to come to me. Have I been so harsh with you, or so terrible of late?" Her tone was half arch, half reproachful.

"No, no; far from it. But you know how it is, Clarice. Your trouble is ours, and I am a poor surgeon. How can I put a knife into the wound? I wish it were mine, and mine only."

"I have brought trouble on you all, brother. I ought to have gone away."

"Never; do you think Mabel and Jane would allow that, any more than I? We would all rather break our hearts together, if that need be, than have you among strangers now: it would be worse for us, no less than for you. When you are happy you may leave us; not till then."

"I know. You love me, here, and bear with me, and for me—though I don't deserve it."

"Don't say that—anything but that. My Princess deserves everything—and by Jove, she shall have it. If I knew exactly what she wanted, now—"

All this time we had to be smiling and bowing right and left. You can't make pretty speeches under such circumstances, or do delicate work. I had turned from the main drive, but it was only a little better.

"Let us get out of this, Robert. There are too many people: we can't talk here."

We went by streets which you must know, if you are accustomed to have this kind of business on hand. I trust you are not: a little of it goes a long way. At last we got into a quieter, semi-rural region. Find it out for yourself, if you can: I am not going to tell you the exact spots made sacred by these confidences. Meantime I had been thinking what to say, and it came out with a rush. It is a little easier when you put the third person for the second—yes, that is a good idea.

"If I were sure just what she wanted, she should have that thing, if there is any power in the human will. But I am clumsy, and thick-headed, and make blunders—you have often said so, Clarice, and so has Jane, and even Mabel. She I speak of is of finer clay than others. Her nature has its own laws, which I can understand only very imperfectly. Yes, you know it is so: you have told me that too. O, she need not mind me, nor consider me in the least. I am afraid only of offending or hurting her: I only want to help and serve her, if I can. If she could look on me just as a tool to be used, an instrument in case she desired to produce certain sounds—I wish I were more capable of harmony—as a medium possibly—. But she will not speak—perhaps she cannot. And how can I question her, as if from vulgar curiosity? What right have I?"

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Her eyes were wet now, under her veil: I could see it, though nobody else could; and we were on a country road.

"Robert, you are the best and dearest man in the world."

"Hardly that. But I am proud of your approval, and will try to earn it. I have not earned it yet, you know."

"Brother, you rate me too high, and—and her you speak of. What if she had what she wanted within reach, and rudely thrust it away?"

"But she did not do that, dear: she could not. I am sure it is there yet, if she would deign to take it."

"If that were certain, she would have others than herself to think of. So long as it was or might be merely herself, what could she do?"

I began to see light now. "There *are* others; and though they are of less consequence, her generous heart would not let them suffer. Suppose to one of them this meant life or death, hope or despair, use or uselessness. Suppose one not like most of us, but simple, sincere, and noble, unversed in the world's ways and little loving them, with a great heart early clouded and a strong mind warped thereby, had begun to pin his faith to her I speak of, and in her eyes to see reconciliation to earth and heaven; and then for one rash word, one casual misconception such as comes between any of us, had fancied the cup of promise snatched away, and in his misjudging innocence gone back to his cave of gloom, thinking himself doomed to a state worse than that from which he had been nearly rescued. Would she let him stay there forever?"

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"I suppose she ought not—if she could help it. It is well he has better friends than she has proved. But I cannot talk of this: indeed I cannot. It may be weak and foolish, but I cannot. You must do what you have to do in your own way.—No, I will not be such a coward, and so basely ungrateful. O, I understand your position, Robert. You will have to question me: I am sorry, but it is the only way. Ask what you absolutely need to know for your own guidance—I know you will ask no more—and I will try to answer."

I groaned; and then I could have choked myself. Must my despicable selfishness add to her burdens? What are my feelings, my petty reluctance, to her interests? Have I not set myself aside? Are you not man enough, Robert T., to put a few civil queries to a lady, when she has just given you express permission, and even directed you to do so? The less you sneer at cads after this, the better.—I was so long making up my mind to it that the poor girl had to speak again.

"I am very sorry, brother. It is too bad to burden you so. If I could save you the trouble, I would, indeed. O, I appreciate your motives, and your delicacy, and all your efforts to shield and spare me—never fancy that I did not, I have made more trouble than I am worth. If I could only die, and end it all!"

This, as you may imagine, put a speedy end to my shilly-shallying. "That would end it all, with a vengeance. Some other people of my acquaintance would want to die then too—or before. Dearest Clarice, don't talk so. Two things I can't bear—your lowering yourself like this, and your exalting me. I am a hound: if I were half a man, I'd have made it easier for you. It is only that I distrust my own ability, my own penetration, my own judgment. I ought not to need any more instructions—but this business is so important, and I'm afraid of making a mess of it."

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"Dear Robert, you lay too much stress on the opinion I pretended to have of you, in days when I only half knew you and thought far too much of myself and too little of others. I know better now. You have the insight of sympathy: your heart will help your head. You will not need to ask me many questions; you can read between the lines."

"I will try. You need not answer in words when you don't want to: just move your head a little, and let me see your eyes. You see, in view of my stupidity, the less risks we take the better: I must have some things down in black and white. Well then: you said something to Mabel about my health, and the fall fishing?"

"Yes. You do need a change; I have had you on my conscience all this while. It is all my doing; and you love me so." Her hand stole into mine.

"That is certainly so. Do you know where I would go if left to myself—if these last months were blotted from the calendar?"

"Of course. Is it necessary to go through all these formalities?"

"I think so: forgive me, dear. I must not trust my intuitions too far: they are not as fine as yours.—You know what construction might be put on my going there now?—Not by the outside world; it has nothing to do with this business, happily. But by any of us; and more especially by—ah—by him?"

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Her face was set now, her lips closed tight; but she nodded.

"You have no word to send, I suppose?—No, of course not: how could you? Then if he asks, or if it is necessary to tell him about you, as of course it will be, I am to say merely what I think, so that you are nowise responsible?—Yes, I see. But the main thing to do there is to make observations, and bring my report to you?—Certainly: he must put himself on record before you do, if this is to go on. *If?* Of course it will: it shall be all right, my dear child. Then it follows that I can't bring him back with me?—Why no: he must bide his time, and fulfil his penance. That is all, I believe: the examination—or the operation, I had nearly said—is over, and you have borne it well. Thank you, Princess; and forgive me for troubling you. You won't hate me, will you, for having to be so horrid, and making you go through all this?—Thank you again. Shall we turn homeward now?—Yes, we'll be there by dark."

She sat very still, and paler than I like to see her. As for me, great beads of perspiration were on my forehead, though it was a cool day. I drove as fast now as the law allows. At last she spoke, and her voice trembled. "Brother, how shockingly we have all misjudged you!"

"No, dear: you did not misjudge me at all. But you have been educating me, and it is fit the best there is in me should come to the front for your service—if it never put its head up before, nor should again. Wait till I come back: I've done nothing yet."

"You have done everything. The rest will be easy for you, compared with this."

"By Jove, you are right there: I'm glad we're through this part of it.—One thing more; about Jane. She loves you as I do; she has been berating me for indifference and slackness in the cause. O, she is a trump: she was crying bitterly last night because she could do nothing to help you, and because I was too lazy and cowardly to move; she has egged me on to this. May I tell her what we have agreed on?"

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"O yes, tell her anything you like, and Mabel too. I have made you all such a poor return: any other woman in my place would have trusted you long ago, and been the better for it. But I am so strangely made, Robert: my lips are like a seal to my heart. Excuse me at dinner, won't you? And promise me one thing—that always, after this, you will come to me at once, without scruple, when you want me, on my account or on your own. As if I could be reluctant to talk with you! Tell me when you hear from him, and when you are going, and—anything else. You won't mind my silence, or wait for me to speak? And you must never be afraid of me again."

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### XXIII.

#### PLAN OF CAMPAIGN.

THE Princess was seen no more that night, and I got away till dinner time. Then I said that she was not coming down, and anxious looks were exchanged, and dark ones cast on me. In return I winked at Jane, and frowned severely on Herbert, who intercepted the signal and began to grin. Mabel, who had seen it too, reproved me for setting the boy a bad example; and thus a diversion was effected. While she was seeing after the children, my sister carried me off to the library: I made her kiss me before I would tell her anything.

"Jane, you may scold me as much as you like after this, and I will never say a cross word to you again. Hartman was right: he said you had more penetration than any of us, and all sorts of virtues. O, you needn't mind about blushing; we are alone. It's true, and I shall hold you in honor accordingly."

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"Brother, I hope you have not spoiled your work with careless handling. I always distrust you when you begin your fine speeches."

"That was in the past, which we have put behind us: they come now from the abundance of the heart. We are one, you know, and I am to tell you everything. Jane, I've done exactly as you told me, and given you all credit. She knows it was your move; and it's all right."

"Then you found that your imagination had created, or greatly magnified, the difficulties, and that your fears were unnecessary?"

"Far from it. It was a terrible job for both of us: the mere recollection of it is harrowing. Clarice is laid up, and only my superior physical strength and fortitude, with an hour's recuperation, enabled me to face you all at table."

"Then you must have been rough with her. Brother, how could you?"

"What did I tell you? You drive me, with all your sharp-pointed feminine weapons, to a painful task, and then you blame me because you fancy I've not discharged it as neatly as the angel Gabriel might. She thinks I did, however. Was I rough with you last night? Is it my habit to go around trampling on the finer feelings of our nature? In the hour of woe, when your heartstrings are torn asunder, you will find me a first-class comforter. I thought you knew that already."

"I doubt if Clarice knows it, if you took this tone with her. Can you never be serious, Robert?"

"Good heavens, Jane, what would you have? Have I not been serious through two weary months, and eminently so all this afternoon? I had to be. Let the overstrung bow be relaxed a little now. You remember the Prime Minister, who after an exciting debate used to go home and play with his children?"

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"As exciting debates are usually conducted in the small hours, it was cruel to disturb their infant slumbers. If you want to do that here you will have to get Mabel's consent; it is out of my province. Best play with your children before they go to bed."

"Children of a larger growth will serve. Bear with me, sister. My faculties have been sorely tasked: I am spent and weary—"

"And you must have somebody to play with. Was that why you were so fond of Clarice, because she sometimes humored you? She could hardly serve your turn now: the poor child is in no jesting mood. Nor am I; nor ought you to be."

"Sister, you wrong me. It is my warmth of heart, my fraternal affection, which you have so oft-

repulsed. Mine is a poet's nature. You stare, but it is so: it is only lately that I discovered the fact myself. Like the elder Bulwer, I pine for appreciation, for sympathy—"

"You will continue to pine if you go on like this. I never saw such a man for beating about the bush and talking nonsense. What have you accomplished?—I don't want to pry into her secrets, or ask her to share her confidences, but—"

"Now, Jane, if you have any heart left, I will bring the tear of contrition to your eye. I asked and obtained her permission to tell you all I know, and all we have just arranged."

"Don't be so long about it, then. What are the arrangements?"

So I imparted them with but little modification or reservation; and Mabel coming in presently, I went over the main outlines again. It is not every man who could thus communicate state secrets to his family; but mine never talk about home affairs to outsiders. One point is, they do not attend the Sewing Society: if they did, I should feel less safe. They approved in the main.

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"It hardly seems fair to Mr. Hartman," said Jane; "but no doubt it's as much as you can expect from her."

"I should say it was: why, she is acting nobly. If it were any other man, he should, and would, have all the making up to do, instead of putting it on us. You see, you—that is, we—don't exactly know what the quarrel was. He must have been in the wrong, of course."

"O yes, because you are a man. Now suppose I, being a woman, say, 'She must have been in the wrong, of course.'"

"My dears," said Mabel, "let us compromise. They are both human beings; probably they were both in the wrong."

"Happy thought," said I. "We'll fix it that way: then they have only to kiss and be friends. But still, the man is generally expected to open the ball."

"That is," said Jane, "if all does not go smoothly from the start, which can hardly be expected, poor Mr. Hartman is to be sacrificed."

"I would not put it just that way; though he, or any man, ought to be glad to be sacrificed for Clarice. She is naturally first with me, as I should suppose she would be with you—except that, as you pertinently observe, you also are a woman. But never fear, Jane; I'll attend to Hartman's case too. I hope to act as attorney for both plaintiff and defendant, and speedily to reconcile their conflicting interests. It is true I am on a prospecting tour: I have no retainer from him yet. But I shall soon pocket that, and master his side of the suit. O, I'll take him up tenderly, and handle with care."

"Of course you will, Robert," said Mabel. "If there is any quality for which you are distinguished, it is the even-tempered justice of your mind. You can argue on both sides of a case with equal fluency and force, and that quite independent of your personal predilections."

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"Just so. But I fear Jane has not the same confidence in my fairness and ability with you, my dear. You will have to talk to her privately, and bring her to a proper frame of mind. She is my only and much loved sister, and I can't go till she has faith in me."

"It is you who are not in a proper frame of mind as to Mr. Hartman's side of this affair, brother. A man has no sympathy, no charity, for another man. You can be all tenderness, and consideration, and faith, and loyalty, to a woman—when she has Clarice's looks; but when it is only an old friend who trusts you, you will laugh, and sneer, and amuse yourself at his expense, and either delude him or hopelessly estrange him."

"Did you ever hear the like? Yesterday, and the day before, she insisted on my going; and now, when I am all on fire to go, she throws cold water on my zeal, and—"

Here my wife interrupted me. "Jane, it is you who show undue levity. You forget that Clarice is my cousin; that is why Robert is so fond of her, and espouses her cause so warmly. I think it is very good of him, and very generous."

"Now you have hit it: Jane, hide your diminished head. Mabel, if Hartman can prove affinity with you, I will take just as much pains for him as for Clarice. But, sister, you and I must be one. I tell you what I will do: I will stay at home all next Sunday, and let you preach to me: then, if you can't fill me to the nozzle with your views, whose fault will it be? Or you might go along, as you wanted to in May. Then you could personally superintend the campaign."

"My only hope is that you will sober down before you get there. In this mood you could do no good at all."

"That's where you are mistaken. Jim expects me to brighten him up: *he* is not wholly without a sense of humor. But if you think I am going there for amusement, you are out again. I shall take Young's Night Thoughts, and Hervey's Meditations among the Tombs, and a volume or two of sermons, to read on the way, and get my mind attuned to the atmosphere of the place. My jokes there will be solemn and elaborate offerings, prompted solely by a humane sense of necessity. But, Jane, you are in a minority of one. Clarice has confidence in me: you ask her. And so has Mabel: haven't you, my love?"

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"Yes, certainly. Why, Jane, Robert is the only person who can possibly manage this affair, since you and I can't well go, and Clarice does not like to speak out herself. We could not commit it to a stranger, you know. Robert knew Mr. Hartman before any of us did; they were old friends at college. He is the natural link between them, you might say. If he will only remember not to laugh in the wrong places, as he did that time we took him to church, when the minister thumped his sermon off the pulpit, and not to tell the wrong stories, as he so often does at table, and not to yawn when Mr. Hartman explains how badly he has been feeling since he left us, he will do very well. You can't expect him to take the same interest in Mr. Hartman as in Clarice: would he care for us as he does, if we were men? Jane, he is pointed out by Providence as the means of reconciling them. You must see that he is to be trusted entirely. Under his supervision it will all come right: I said so from the beginning."

After this, there seemed no need of further remarks. Mabel withdrew early, and I went out to smoke. When I came back, I found Jane again in tears.

"Brother, tell me that you were only playing with me, and that you are really in earnest about this matter, and will do your best to set it straight." [138]

"My dear sister, I will tell you anything you like, if you will only believe me; what is the use, if you won't? Do you suppose I care less for Clarice's happiness than you do—or for Jim's either? I wish you would talk to her, and let her clarify your ideas. Faith, as you may have heard in church, is a saving grace, and essential to peace of mind. Within a month or two you will see whether I fail my friends or not, and then perhaps you will learn to trust me. Jane, I believe in you now, even if you don't believe in me; I would do almost anything to please you. You want me to change my nature: I would do even that, but it is so expensive, and then the new one might not fit as well as what I have now. You are very exacting, but you can't quarrel with me, because I will be no party to such proceedings."

"Brother, it all rests with you. If you will bring them together, I will never doubt you again."

"No, my dear, I'll not hold you to that. You shall doubt me as often as you like; but I will keep my promises all the same."

You see, I am trying new tactics with Jane now. Magnanimity, patient forgiveness of injuries, disinterested and persistent affection, will in time soften the most obdurate. After Clarice goes off, there will be so few of us left that I can't afford to be on any but the best terms with such as remain. And then my sister, when she is willing to do herself—and me—justice, has some quite creditable traits.

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## XXIV.

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### TO WAYBACK AGAIN.

I PASS succeeding interviews, of which there were several. Poor Clarice had little to say, but was quite willing to listen to any suggestions of mine. What Jane unkindly calls beating about the bush is necessary with a person of her sensitive organization. She seems to feel that she has fallen from her old estate, and is not yet established in a new one. I am satisfied that she never would have made those admissions, slight as they are, and allowed me to go on this secret embassy, if she had only herself to consider. For the first time duty to others has come into collision with her pride, and shaken the citadel of her reserve. Always hitherto she has had things and people come to her; the exercise has been in keeping them off. To want, to seek, to invite—to lift a finger, unless in the way of small and graceful social management—this is new to her, and she takes it hard. The thing I have to do beyond all others is to preserve her dignity: she knows I can be trusted for that, though Jane does not. I can't blame Jane: she has never seen me conduct an affair like this, nor has any one else, for the simple reason that I never had it to do till now. I am only her brother: she has had experience of all my failings, and is imperfectly acquainted with my resources. Mabel is more satisfactory. She has not figured as much as some others in this chronicle; connubial modesty prevents my making her prominent. But she too possesses some very good traits; especially she has a way of bringing forward and dwelling upon points which nobody else would think of mentioning. She used to scold me sometimes, but that was chiefly when she thought I was not treating Clarice well. She lays great stress on ties of blood, and considers herself natural guardian and defender to the Princess, whom she sometimes forgets that I knew for fifteen years before I ever met her. Clarice talks little with her, and no more with Jane: I really believe that her only confidences—which are not much, if measured by words—have been made to me. But they are very fond of each other all the same. I suppose you can understand that much affection can exist with little intimacy. The Princess was cast in her own peculiar mould: I don't want to see many more like her, for they would be poor imitations. None of us ever attempt to pry into her inner life—or to meddle with her outward life either; when she wants anything of any of us, we are ready, and there it ends. She knows we love her, and that is enough. [140]

Hartman, now, is much less impenetrable; though I suppose he will shut himself up like an oyster over the dubious pearl of his precious secret, and give me no end of trouble to extract his contents. But I possess a knife which is able to open his shell. He has answered my letter

promptly, and expects me presently. Does he think I am going up there merely to fish and hunt, and hear him talk a lot of rubbish about the Vanity of Life? Or does he scent my deeper motives—discern the Ethiopian within the encompassing pale, as they say in Boston? If so, he is apparently as willing to be operated on as he was before. At any rate he is a gentleman, and knows how to respect a woman—when he takes time to think about it. This is a delicate business for him as well as for the lady—and there is where the awkwardness comes in: from his point of view he can't speak out, any more than she. Well, I'll turn him inside out and manipulate him, if it takes the whole week. Happily I don't have to consider him as I did Clarice; as Jane intimates, a man can't expect to have his feelings spared in the process. What are a man's feelings anyway, compared with a woman's? And what rights has he as against hers? No: between man and man all that can be needed is plain speech and manly frankness—aided by a little diplomacy. I'll break you to pieces, James H., if you are fractious; and I've got the weapons to do it with. It is all for your good, and you'll bless me the rest of your life. One thing must be understood: I can't have you coming to my place and practising your wild backwoods manners on my family, and then sneaking off in the night and evading responsibility. The next time you come you will have to behave yourself, and to stay till Somebody has had enough of you.

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Mabel thinks I ought to enliven the account of my trip with descriptions of scenery and the like. But a rock is a rock, and a field is a field, and who wants to know whether a tree is elm or maple? I am not a geological survey, and you can get mountains enough from Craddock. Not that I am insensible to the beauties of Nature—as I have proved before now. How often have I sat upon an eminence, and admiringly gazed at the departing luminary as he sank slowly to rest, flooding hill and valley with tints which a painter might strive in vain to reproduce! I would have to sit there some time to see it all, for I have noticed that with us the Sunset proper does not begin till after the Setting of the Sun is finished. And when the distant mountains assumed a robe of royal purple, and 'the death-smile of the dying day' lingered pathetically on the horizon, my thoughts would soar to the Celestial City, and long to rest themselves upon its pavement of liquid gold. I heard Dr. Chapin say these last words at the first lecture I ever attended, and it struck my infant intelligence that they ought to be preserved. And I too might be a poet if I lived in the country, in constant communion with Nature, abandoning my soul to her maternal caress. But alas, the stir, the scramble, the mad whirl of city life, the debasing contact with low material minds, the daily study of Prices Current, make even of me a muckworm. Still, I might work up a brook or two after I get to the woods, or expatiate on a seven-pound trout: my conscience forbids me to weigh them higher, for I never saw any above three. And yet some men will talk familiarly of ten-pounders!—Or I might analyze the mediæval garments of Hodge and his old Poll. As for the Wayback houses, they are like any other habitations, only less of them, and few and far between: Jim's is the best, and it is nothing to brag of. You can see much better buildings any day on Broadway. The rural parts, as Lord Bacon observed, are but a den of savage men. It is to see one of these, and resume the interrupted process of civilizing him, that I am about starting on this philanthropic journey, leaving my happy home and the advantages of a metropolis. If the savage breast is open to ennobling influences, it shall be soothed and charmed by the music of my discourse. What loftier, more disinterested task than to reclaim the wanderer, and guide the penitent in the way wherein he should go? I began this soul-raising labor some time ago, but an unexpected hitch occurred in the proceeding: there must be no more such now.

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I found Hodge awaiting me at the station: he said that Hartman was arranging the tackle for tomorrow. The fact is, it is one of Jim's notions not to keep a horse, but to depend on Hodge for his communications with the outside world; and another never to see the railroad when he can help it.

"Well, old man," I said as the effete steed began laboriously to get in motion, "how is your valuable health?"

"Pooty tollable. How's them gells o' yourn as wanted to foller ye up here las' time?"

"The ladies are reasonably well, and will be flattered by your inquiries. How is Mr. Hartman?"

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"Wall, Square, I ain't none too satyfried 'bout him. He don't say nothin to nobody, but he seems kinder low in his mind, like. Ever sence you played that durn trick on me and him, he's ben someways diffurrt. He—"

"Look here, my aged friend; why should you accuse me of playing durn tricks on people? To what circumstance do you allude?"

"I ain't alludin' to nothin; I says it out plain. If ye don't know, Id'no as I'm called to tell ye. Me an' Hartman was gittin on fust rate, till ye come and upsot us; we ain't used to bein upsot. So when our commydations wan't good enough for ye an' yer gells, ye went and got Hartman down thar in the city, or wharever 'twas. An' Id'no what ye done to him thar, an' I spose it's no good to ask a feller like ye; but he ain't ben the same man sence. That's how *he* is. He uster be chipper, an' peart, an' clost frens with me; an' now he don't say nothin. Ye can see fur yerself pooty durn soon."

And the native bestowed on me a malign glance. I trotted him out and entertained myself with his paces (which were livelier than those of his nag) for the next three hours. Those who like nature unadorned can find it here. As a specimen of unbridled rancor Hodge deserves a prize. I believe I have got to the bottom of his luminous intellect—not that it was worth the labor, if one had anything else to do. Supposing himself Jim's most intimate friend, he is jealous of me as a rival in that capacity; and he has never forgiven the slight put on his establishment in connection

with the girls' proposed visit. I partly appeased him by suggesting that he supply the shanty with a new signboard labeled 'Palace Hotel.' Fortunately I don't have to put up there this time.

Of course he told me a lot of lies. A casual eye could see no change in the recluse: his head does not hang down on his breast, his locks are not long and matted, his sighs do not resound through the primeval forest and scare away the panthers. When you look closely at him, or have been with him long enough, you can see that he is a little thinner, a little older, a little less inclined to chaff—as well he may be. Chaffing is a bad habit anyway, and was his worst fault when I was here before; so far, his woes have improved him. He met me cordially enough, but with no wild demonstration: he seems no nearer insanity than last May. He asked after Mabel, Jane, and the children, but not after Clarice; nor did I mention her, of course. It was not a very pleasant evening, for each of us was watching the other to see what he would say. He knows as well as I do that the enemy has troops in reserve: he is not so unsuspecting as he was. He did not ventilate his theories to any great extent, nor did I see my way to expound my great scheme for the Ascertainment of Truth: the ground ought to be in good condition before you drop seed of such value upon it.

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If I thought things would go on like this, I should begin to grumble; but we shall probably get broken in to each other in a day or two, and then I can thaw him out. We talked glittering generalities for a while—the weather, and the war prospects abroad, and the chances of getting deer on the other side of a mountain not far away—like any commonplace boobies at a county fair. Then he proposed for next morning a stream I had not seen, some distance off, which would necessitate a start before daybreak: so I pretended to be tired from the journey, and we turned in early.

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## XXV.

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### A WILD BROOK.

NEXT day we went some miles along a lonely road, and then through the fields of an abandoned farm. I don't wonder they abandoned it; I am only sorry for the poor wretch who once cherished the delusive dream of scratching a living there; when he died or went back to Canada, he couldn't well be worse off. Nature had but partially reclaimed the land, and we tramped through weeds and grass up to our middle; one might as well be wading a fair-sized river. You have no idea of the dew up here till you have tried it. After a while we struck into the woods, and such woods you never saw—at least I hope so for your sake. Rocks, big and little, generally of the most unchristian shapes—not picturesque, but sprawling; underbrush wherever it had a chance to grow: you could scarcely find a foot of smooth ground. The worst of it was the way the trees lay around loose. The region had not been burned over, at least not for many years; but it did seem to have been cursed, as if Adam's fall had been enacted there. The monarchs of the forest, for countless generations, had indulged a depraved propensity to fall also, and across each other in all possible directions. It was such an abattis as I trust our men, in the war, never had to fight their way through: here it was bad enough without anybody to shoot at you. I would go rods out of my way to get around a great bowlder, and come upon a conglomeration of big trees which had tumbled about till they made a Virginia fence fifteen feet high. Climbing is all very well in its way, but I don't like this kind. The queer thing was that they had not the sense to decay and crumble; the wood was mostly sound enough to be standing yet. I asked Hartman why they did not haul off all this timber, and he said there was no place to haul it to, nor any way to haul it, nor anybody to do the hauling; that fuel was cheap, and the few inhabitants had plenty nearer home; and besides, that it was most ornamental and useful where it was—it afforded exercise to the bodily and spiritual muscles of any anglers from the city who might come that way like me. "You forget the characteristics of this region, which are its advantages in my view. You can get turnpike roads, and teams, and sawmills, nearer home. You come up here to be away from the busy haunts, you know, and to see Nature in her native purity. This stream that I am taking you to is very seldom visited."

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"I should think it would be, if this is the way to get to it," I said, as I fell over a root and barked my nose and knees. "What the deuce did we come to such a blanked place for?"

"For trout: you said they were what you wanted. The less fishermen, the more fish. This is the best brook in the county, because it is the least accessible. I rarely come here myself: I've been saving it up this year for you."

We went on, our progress marked by frequent delays and accidents; that it was marked by no profanity was due merely to Jim's reticence and to my exceptional manners and principles. After what seemed to me about twenty miles—though he said it was only one and a half—of this singularly forsaken country, he cried, "Look out now, or you'll fall in. Here is the brook."

It made noise enough to be heard a long way off, but I thought that was something else—some kobolds or other abnormal beings, probably, working at their forges underground. The brook itself was well enough, but it did not seem to belong there; you could not see it till you were on the edge of it. I have fished a good many streams, and tramped through all sorts of woods, but I never saw such a place as that before, and I never want to again. We had left our rods at home; high-toned anglers who carry fancy tackle through such regions leave it along the painful way in

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small pieces. So we carried merely our baskets—which were encumbrance enough—and what we had in our pockets. You can cut a pole anywhere, and it does not want to be a long one either: take your fly-book if you like, but worms are as good or better. There was no use of wading: you would be more likely to scare the fish so than by staying on the bank, where they could never see you; the difficulty was to see far enough to throw in five feet of line. It was a superior brook—all but the getting to it, and, as I afterwards found, away from it. If it could be removed from its loathsome surroundings and put down in a decent country, I would go there every year. I was going to say that some of the cascades were forty feet high, till I remembered that trout cannot climb as far as that.

"Don't lose your balance," said Jim; "these fish are fierce." They were, in the wilder parts. They would bite like mad, and then wriggle and wrench themselves off the hook before you could get them up the bank. I never saw or heard of such ferocity, except in the celebrated scaly warrior which chased an equally famous fisherman all over an Adirondack lake, jumped across his boat several times, and, if I remember rightly, bit him on the nose. No such adventure fell to my lot on this occasion, though I thought that some of them, when sufficiently near my face, grinned at me as they parted company. Yet none of them were over half a pound, and most of them much less. You can see that this healthful pastime does not produce its usual demoralizing effect on me. When we reached a flat piece of ground, the water would become quiet and the manners of the fish more humane, so that they would come out like chubs. I stood in one spot under a tree, and took twenty-nine in succession. My sister, looking over these memoirs, suggests that they probably *were* chubs; but Hartman, who was behind me then, came up and saw them, so I have his evidence. He said it was a spawning bed, and I ought to put the twenty-nine back. Who would have thought him capable of such mean jealousy? But he cannot play his tricks on me.

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About two P.M. he said we had better start.

"Why, we don't want to reach home much before dark," said I.

"No danger of it. It's much worse getting out of this than getting in. You saw how much path there is: we can't go straight, and it's all chance where we strike the fields. You'd better eat what you've got, and drink all you can: there's no water between this and the road."

"Didn't you take landmarks? Look at the mountains all round."

"They are like the mountains about the Dark Tower Childe Roland came to. I've been here twice before, and missed the way back both times. Nobody ever got out of here without going a circuit to the right, and taking his chances. The natives are afraid to come here: they say there are ghosts—the ghosts of those who got lost of old, and were eaten by bears. That's how we took so many trout. Look to your belt now, and the straps of your basket. The last time I was here, the other fellow lost his fish in the woods, and I made him go back and hunt them up: it was near night before he found them, and his basket was not much heavier than yours is now. If we should have to camp out, we can build a fire, cook some of the fish, and probably avoid freezing: but we'd better try to get out."

I thought so too, and supposed he was trying to scare me; but the sun was nearly down when we saw the fields. We went four times too far, through that beastly region of rocks and dead trees: I think our course was mainly northwest by south-southeast. At last we got back to the house, tired and hungry; but Jim's old housekeeper is a pretty good cook for a native, and there is no better supper than trout that were in the water the same day.

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## XXVI.

### AN INTRACTABLE PATIENT.

WHEN we were settled down to our pipes, I said, "Is this the way you treat the friends of your youth, when they entrust life and limb to your hospitality?"

"I give 'em the best I've got: sorry if it doesn't suit. There's no Delmonico's round the corner, here. What's the matter with you, old man?"

"O, it's not your housekeeping: that's all right. But why did you lead me such a dance, and get me lost in that unconscionable doghole of a wilderness?"

"Did you ever take so many fish out of a brook in one day before? No, of course you didn't. Well, that's why. I told you it would be a rough expedition; but I thought you came here to rough it. You didn't expect balls and a casino, did you? You were here last May."

"Last May I saw nothing as bad as this to-day. You haven't been playing it on me, I hope? Jim, have you got any grudge against me?"

"What should I have? You're deucedly suspicious and sensitive—far more so than I was with you. I believe I let you play on me to your heart's content, and never complained—did I?"

"Jim, I don't like this. There's a change in you: Hodge said so, and I didn't believe him. You're not the same man."

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"O, we all change—from year to year, and from day to day. But I ought never to have left these woods, Bob, and that's the truth. You should have let me stay here as I was."

"I meant it in all kindness, for your good, Jim. Surely you'll do me the justice to acknowledge that."

"No doubt. But your philanthropic experiments are apt to be damnably expensive to the patient."

"You couldn't be much worse than you were, according to your own account. Any change ought to have been for the better."

"That was your assumption. Do I strike you as being changed for the better?"

"Well, no, you don't—not to put too fine a point upon it."

He certainly does not. His whole manner is altered. His former gentleness has given way to rough harshness. You have seen how he treats me. It may be his best, as he says; if so, his best is far from good. His bitterness used to be, if I may say so, in the abstract, and leveled against abstractions; now it seems to have a painfully concrete character and aim. His estrangement from the scheme of things, or from his kind at least, was purely intellectual, leaving his heart no more affected than the heart usually is by brain-disorders; now it is moral. He is like a man tormented by remorse, or regrets as savage. But I think I know a cure for his complaint.

After a pause he said, "I don't want to blame you, Bob, and I don't propose to whine. Nor was it any great matter what came to me, wherever it might come from. I thought I was done with the world, and had nothing to fear from it, except being bored and disgusted. There was only one thing I cared about, and that I supposed I could keep. I was mistaken. It was my little ewe lamb— all I had; and they took it from me." [151]

"I thought your live stock was confined to dogs, and a cow, and the tomcat—by the way, I don't see him any more. I didn't know you went into sheep. Was Tommy the ewe-lamb, and did the dogs play Nathan and David with him?"

This I said, thinking to cheer him up a bit; but he only scowled. Really, I must remember Mabel's caution about telling the wrong stories and laughing in the wrong places. "Well, Jim, what was 'it' that you valued so, and who were 'they' who took it away?"

"The prince of the power of the air; the spirit that walks in darkness, and rules in the children thereof. The beautiful order of things generally, and their incurable depravity. All these are one, and the name doesn't matter. If you urged me to it, I might say that you had played a very passable David to my Uriah."

"Who—I? I'm not a sheep-stealer. What would I want to hurt you for? Jim, you're joking, and it's a joke of doubtful taste."

"Do I look like it? *You* might find a joke in this: you can find them everywhere. I can't."

"As I told you, you take Life too seriously. If you will be more specific, and tell me what you have lost, perhaps I can help you to find it."

"Some losses are irrecoverable. You'd better let it alone, Bob; you'd better have let me alone before, as I've said. You mean well enough; but it's ill meddling with another man's life. You don't know what responsibility you take, or what effect you may produce. I don't say that it's the worst of all possible worlds, but it is such that each of us had best go his own way, and keep clear of the others. When one forgets that safe rule, and mixes with his kind, only harm seems to come of it."

"If that is so, I might better have staid at home now. Methinks your written hand is different from your spoken. I mean—" [152]

"O yes, when I write I try to come out of myself and be decently civil; and so I should to a chance visitor for five minutes, or an hour maybe. But I can't keep it up all day—not to say for a week. You'll have to see the facts, and bear with them. I don't want to be rough on you; but I'm not myself—or not what I was before, or supposed myself to be. It's all in the plan, no doubt; we are fulfilling the beneficent intentions of Nature. Perhaps I'm breaking down, and the end is not so far off as we thought. If so, so much the better: we'll escape that sad old age you prophesied."

Now I am not lacking in humanity, but it does not afflict me as it did six months ago to hear Jim go on in this way. I know what is the matter with him now, and what he is driving at, though I must assume ignorance for a while yet. The patient must tell his symptoms, and then the doctor will give him the physic he needs, and proceed to make a new man of him. That is what I am after now, and the good work must not be spoiled by undue haste. So I put on a decorous air of sympathy, and said,

"That's all bosh, you know. If anything is the matter with you physically, I ought to hear about it; but I don't believe there is. As for the mind, we are all subject to gloomy moods and periods of depression; but they pass, Jim—they pass. You believed in friendship before; hadn't you better tell me what you think ails you?"

"I can't talk about it, except in this roundabout way: what's the use? Best keep to broad principles: the particular case only illustrates the general law. I knew it of old: what business had I to expose myself again? What would you do with a child who will keep on playing about moving

cars, or mill machinery? Let him fall under the wheels, and rid the earth of an idiot."

"O no: pull him out in time, and he'll learn better. Well, Jim, you might at least tell me what hand I had in this catastrophe."

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"O, none, none whatever: how should you? You never laid any plots for me, and used me for your mirth. You never devised an elaborately concealed ambush, and smoothed it over till I was in the snare. That would be foreign to your open and candid nature. It is very good fun to practice on unsuspecting innocence; but you are far above that."

"See here, Hartman: you talk as if my house were a den of iniquity. If so, I was not aware of it till now. Your ill opinion has not thus far been reciprocated. We entertain none but kind feelings toward you: we all regretted your hasty departure. You were received as a friend, and treated as such, I believe. My wife and sister often speak of you: you could command their fullest sympathy in this, or any trouble, real or imaginary."

"That I never doubted: I owe them nothing but pleasant memories, and thankful good will.—You need not stare at me so: I make no charges, and imply none.—Well, if you must have it, I can say that every member of your family has my absolute respect,—down to the twins; do you understand? If I have any grudge, it is toward you alone."

It was plain that he forced himself to say this—or some of it—as if it were coming perilously near a name he could not utter. He is having his bad time now, as I had mine last week. It is his own fault: he has no need to be so censorious. He *had* to say what he did, or there would be trouble: some things a man cannot stand, and my best friend would be my friend no longer, if he ventured to reflect upon the Princess.

"I'm glad to hear you say so: the difficulty is simple then, and easily settled. You've got no pistols, of course, and I didn't bring mine. I'll take your rifle, and you can borrow Hodge's old shotgun: if it bursts, it won't be much loss—only you mustn't come too near me with it. There's no danger of interference from the police up here, I judge? But I say, what shall we do for a surgeon?"

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"There you go again, turning everything into a jest. Can you never be serious, man?"

"Try to say something original, James: that is stale. Jane asks me that about six times a day, and Mabel frequently, and—and the others. I was serious with you just now, or nearly: had I been entirely so, I might have knocked the top of your head off, and then they would have blamed me at home. You see, they think you are more of a man than you show yourself. To be serious all the time is the most serious mistake one can make in life; and I want no worse example than you. When I go back to town I shall write the Decline and Fall of an Alleged Seeker after Truth, who missed it by taking things too seriously. You are too stiff and narrow and rigid and dogmatic: you take one point of view and stick to it like grim death. You can't get at Truth in that way."

"I suppose you would stand on your head and look at it upside down, and then turn a back somersault and view it from between your legs."

"You express it inelegantly, but you have caught the idea. Truth is not a half pound package done up in brown paper and permanently deposited in one corner of the pantry shelf; she is big and various and active. While you have your head fixed in the iron grip and are staring at the sign 'Terms Cash,' she is off to the other side of the room—and you don't make a good picture at all in that constrained attitude. Your mind has got to be nimble and unbiassed if you want to overtake her, because she is always changing: that is, she appears in new and—to you—unexpected places. I gave you a hint of this in May, and another last summer, but you seem to have forgotten it. O, I could sit here all night and explain it to you, if you were in the right frame of mind."

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"No doubt: happily I am not. What has this to do with your defence of buffoonery, and apotheosis of clowns and pantomimes?"

"A pantomime is a very good thing in its way. But that is your illustration; I would rather say opera bouffe, which is probably the truest copy of Life—if we were limited to one kind. But we are not: I tell you, we must have all sorts. There is tragedy in Life, and comedy—that more especially; a little of the other goes a long way. But they are always mixed—not kept apart, and one alone taken in large and frequent doses, after your fashion. Shakespeare understood his business pretty well; though, if I had been he, I would have put in more of those light and graceful touches which hit us where we live, and make the whole world kin."

"Like the Dromios, or the Carriers in Henry Fourth."

"Or the Gravediggers; they are more to your purpose. I want you to see that Humor is the general solvent and reconciler, the key that opens most locks: a feeling for it, well developed, would be money in your pocket. Things don't go to suit you, and you think your powers of the air are frowning, the universe a vault, and the canopy a funeral pall: perhaps the powers are only laughing at you, and want you to smile with them. If you could do that, it would let in light on your darkness. Any situation, properly viewed, has its amusing elements: if you ignore them, you fail to understand the whole. What did Heine say about his irregular Latin nouns? That his knowledge of them, in many a gloomy hour, supplied much inward consolation and delight. You ought to read him more, Jim."

"And Josh Billings, and Bill Nye. Well, that's enough of your wisdom for to-night. We must

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arrange for to-morrow. Are you up to another scramble?"

"Not like to-day's. Let's take in some decent scenery along with the trout."

"There is a wild gorge ten miles off, with a brook in it. We can take Hodge's mare, put up at a house, and work down the ravine. It's not so bad as the last place, nor so good for fish." I agreed, and we went to bed.

You may think I am humoring Hartman too much, and letting him shirk the subject. But I have a week—more if necessary—and I don't want to be too hard on him. He'll thaw out by degrees: so long as he doesn't blame Clarice, it is all right. He has got my idea about the way to discover Truth now, and it will work in his brain, and soften him. I know Jim: he never seems to take hold at first, but he comes round in time. You just wait, and you will see whether I know what I am about.

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## XXVII.

### SCENERY IMPROVED.

THE next day we drove to a farmhouse which had annexed some rather decent fields for that region. On one side was tolerably level ground, on the other a cut between two savage mountains. Down this we made our way, taking presently the bed of a small brook: woodroad or footpath never can be there. For a while there was room to walk on dry land: soon the cliffs closed in upon us, on the right rising sheer, on the left sloping, but steeper than I would want to climb. At first the stream was very shallow and narrow, and the fish small and scarce; but think of the creatures that must come there to drink at night! It was the only watercourse for miles, Jim said. He pointed out the tracks of a bear or two, and he thought of a panther; but it is not here I should choose to hunt—your game might have you at a disadvantage. He tried to make me believe that even now some of these beasts might catch us; but that was simply to discourage me from going after them, later on: Jim does not like the chase. *My* jokes are in better taste: as he is now, I believe the bears could beat him in manners. Near noon we found a place to sit down, where we could see a little of the crags, and proceeded to assimilate our frugal lunch.

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"Hartman," said I, "I should think you would want to live up to your scenery, as the ladies do to their blue china. Look at this majestic cliff, whose scarred and aged front, frowning upon these lonesome trout since the creation, has never been profaned by mortal foot."

"Probably not. People very seldom come here, and when they do, they wouldn't be fools enough to try to climb up. They couldn't do it, and it wouldn't pay if they could."

"Well, it is grand, anyway, and it ought to quicken your soul to grand thoughts. In such a scene you ought to feel stirring within you noble sympathies and resolves."

"I can't see much grandeur in human nature, Bob, nor any in myself. If you had thought yourself a gentleman, and suddenly awaked to the fact that you were a cad and a scoundrel, you would be apt to change your tune, and drop the high notes."

Oho, I thought, he is coming to the point. While I was meditating how to utilize this confidence, a small piece of rock fell from above upon the edge of my toes: if it had been a large piece, and fallen on my head, you would have missed this moral tale. When I had expressed my sentiments, he said, "I can't insure you against accidents,—any more than you did me. If I had brought you here in spring, you might growl. The rocks are loose then, and it is dangerous. A man was killed once just below here, and his body never found till the year after." This trivial occurrence seemed to turn his thoughts away from the important topic, and I could not get him back to it.

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It was a warm day for the season: once in a while it will be hotter in these sylvan solitudes than it is in New York. While we were in the brook we did not mind that, for we could drop every five minutes and drink. I suppose I consumed some nine gallons of *aqua pura* during the morning: you can do this with impunity, because there is no ice in it, and the bacteria are of the most wholesome kind. But by and by we finished with the gorge: then we had to go across a sort of common, up hill. There was no water now, and it was hot. After more trees, and a steeper ascent, Jim said, "You'll get a view now." We came out on an open place, with steep rocks beneath. Before us lay a wilderness, with clearings here and there, and a background of mountains. The forests were in their early November bloom; the country looked one great flower. In the Alps or the Rockies they can give this odds, and beat it easily, but it was pretty well for eastern America—and an occasion to be improved. "Jim, if the crags don't appeal to you, this might. If you don't feel up to moral grandeur, why not go in for peace? Let your perturbed spirit catch the note of harmony from this landscape, and drink in purity from this air."

"That is all very fine, and you would make a pretty fair exhorter—with practice. But natural theology is not in my line. These hills look nicely now, but it will be different within a month. If I am to learn peace from a fine day, what from a stormy one? Nature changes for the worse like us, and with less shame: she has no regrets for the past, no care to keep up appearances or make a show of consistency."

"I fear you have been learning of Nature on her wrong side then. Half confidences are in bad

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taste, Jim. What is it you keep hinting at? It ought to be murder, from the airs you put on about it."

"Leave that for to-night, when we have nothing better to attend to. There is another brook here we ought to try."

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## XXVIII.

### DIPLOMACY.

WE got back reasonably early, much less tired than the day before. Now, I thought, for some progress. "Well, Jim, you wanted to unfold your tale to-night."

"That is, you wanted to ask me about it. You can't do any good, and I don't find speech a safety-valve: but I suppose it is my duty to supply you with amusement. So get on, and say what is on your mind."

He takes this tone to conceal his morbid yearning to ease his bosom of its perilous stuff: I will have his coil unwound pretty soon. If I were not here, he would probably be whispering her name under the solemn stars, and shouting it in tragic tones on the lonely mountain-top; sighing it under the waterfalls, and expecting the trout to echo it. He talks about fishing the home brook the first rainy day, but he must have scared all the fish away from there with his sentiment. I must remember to notice whether 'C. E.' is carved about the forest. He will pretend to hold back; but I will get it out of him.—I made this pause long enough to let him prepare for the examination on which depends his admission into the civil service, so to speak—he will have to be more civil and serviceable than hitherto if he is to pass it, and follow me back to town—and indeed his whole future.

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"You say you have lost something valuable. All you had, you said it was; but that is nonsense. You have health, and more money than you want, and brains and education, of which you are making very poor use, and friends, whom you are treating badly. I can't think what you have lost—unless it was your heart, perhaps." This I brought in in the way of afterthought, as if it had suddenly occurred to me. He started, but assumed a tone of cynical indifference.

"My heart? Would I sit down and howl over that? What use have I for a heart, any more than for a poodle? And if I had one, what does it matter what may have become of it?"

"Strayed or stolen, probably. Such things have happened, especially when persons of the opposite sex are about. They are apt to attach themselves to poodles, and vice versa. But if you give me your honor that a loss of heart is not the cause of these lamentations—"

"Why will you press that point, Bob? What is done can't be undone, and what is broken can't be mended."

"And what is crooked can't be made straight, and what is wanting can't be supplied; though these things are done every day and every hour. Why any able-bodied lady of my acquaintance, even those at my own house, limited as is their experience of the world's devious ways—Jane, I mean, or Mabel—could tell you how."

"Robert, I am too old for these follies."

"James, you are the youngest man I ever knew. Any boy of eighteen would be apt to know better how to manage such matters, and—if you will pardon the frankness you employ yourself—to exhibit more sense."

He stared a little, and I gave him time to recover. Then he took up his parable, defensively falling back on the abstract, after his manner.

"Of course I have thought of these things, Bob, and the philosophy of them, if they can be said to have any. They seem much like everything else. Taking Life in its unfinancial aspects, men do things, not because the particular things are worth doing, but as an apology for the unwarranted liberty they take in being alive. 'I am: why am I?' said the youth at prayer-meeting, and everybody gave it up. As an effort toward answering his own conundrum, he entered the ministry. Being alive, we have to make a pretense of doing something, which else might better remain undone. That is why books are written, and controversies waged; it explains most of our intellectual and moral activities. So with society: time must be killed, and we go out for an evening, though we are dreadfully bored and gain nothing at all. So, I suppose, with what is called love. The emotional part of our nature, which is the absurdest part of all, finds or fancies itself unemployed: a void craves and aches in the breast, and the man, as an old farmer once expressed it, is 'kinder lovesick for suthin he ain't got and dunno what.' Almost any material of the other sex, if you allow a little for taste and temperament, will fill the void—in a way, and for a time at least. Darby marries Joan and is content, though any other woman would have served his turn as well. With us of the finer feelings and higher standards, the only difference is that we rant more and sophisticate more, as belongs to our wider range. No one ever felt thus before—because the feeling is new to us, and newer each time it comes: so Festus protests to each successive mistress, perjuring himself in all sincerity. Nor was any mistress ever so beautiful and divine as

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this one, appointed to possess and be adored by us. All that is purely a mental exercise: carry the illusion a little farther, and it might be practised as well on a milliner's lay-figure. 'He that loves a coral cheek or a ruby lip admires' is simply a red hot donkey, Bob. Nature provides the imbecile desire, Propinquity furnishes an object at random. Imagination does all the rest."

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"Just so, Jim. I am glad to find you again capable of such lucid and exhaustive analysis. But how about what is called *falling* in love, when the wild ass has not been craving to have his void filled up at all, but is suddenly brought down unawares by an Amazonian arrow?"

"He was no less a donkey that he didn't know it, and it only comes harder for him. The fool ought to have been better acquainted with his own interior condition; then he might have eased his descent to his royal thistle, secured his repast or gone without it, and got back to his stable with a whole skin. Otherwise it is just the same. The heart is an idiot baby, Robert: it feeds on pap and thinks it is guzzling nectar on Olympus."

"Exactly, James; exactly. As you say, it is our fertile fancy that does it all. You and I can conjure up women far more charming than we ever met on brick or carpet. If we only had the raw material and knew how to work it up, we could beat these flesh and blood girls off the field before breakfast. Their merits and attractions are mainly such as we generously invest them with; and often they take a mean advantage of our kindness."

I glanced at him sideways, and he flushed and winced. "I would not derogate from women, nor rate myself so high. I meant only that we imagine—well, monstrous heaps of nonsense. For instance, we often fancy that they care for us when they don't—and whose fault is that but ours? There's a deal of rot talked about lords of creation—when a man isn't able to be lord of himself. O, women are very well in their way: I've nothing against them. They are just as good as we—better, very likely; and wiser, for they don't idealize us as we do them."

"Yes, but this idealizing faculty is a very useful one to have. I see you must have found a Blowsalinda on some of these hill farms:—why, man, you're as red as her father's beets. I congratulate you, Jim: I do, heartily. As you say, the tender passion is merely a spark struck by the flint of Opportunity on the steel of Desire; and for the rest, you can enrich her practical native virtues with the golden hues of your imagination. She'll suit you just as well as any of these proud cityfied damsels—after you've sent her a term or two to boarding school; and she'll be more content to stay up here than the city girl would."

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I paused to view my work, and was satisfied. The shadows of wrath and disgust were chasing each other over my friend's intelligent countenance. You see, I get so browbeaten at home that I must avenge myself on somebody now and then; and of course, it has to be a man. And then it is all for Jim's good, and he deserves all he is getting. So I went on.

"But seeing this is so, Jim, you ought to be content; and what means all your wild talk of last night and this morning, as if you had something on your conscience? You haven't—you wouldn't—No, you're not that kind of a man. Well then, what in thunder have you been making all this fuss about, and pitching into me for?"

He suppressed something with a gulp: I think it was not an expression of gratitude or affection. "Confound you, Bob; one never knows how to take you. In the name of Satan and all the devils, what are you after now?"

"I'm not after anything in the name of the gentlemen you mention; they are no friends of mine, nor objects of my regard. Put a better name on it, and I'm after getting you to say what you mean, as we agreed—though it seems to be hard work. Who's playing tricks upon travellers, and misleading a confiding friend now? I never knew such a man for beating about the bush, and talking nonsense." (I remembered this apothegm of Jane's, which sounded well, and fitted in nicely just here.)

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He appeared to take himself to pieces, shake them well, and put them together carefully, before he spoke. "Perhaps my language was obscure, or even enigmatical; but I thought you might understand. Forgive me if I have been harsh, Bob, not to say uncivil: I have gone through a good deal, until I hardly know myself. It is base enough for a man to be thus at the mercy of mere externals—and I used to think I could practice the Stoic doctrine! But to be human is to be a pitiable, and, if you like, a despicable creature. I knew a case that may serve in a way to explain—not to justify—my treatment of you. Say it was years ago; the man met, in a friend's house, a lady who showed him the utmost kindness. She was used to all deference, till she and every one regarded it as her right—as it was. And he—it's not pleasant to tell—he ended by insulting her. I always understood how that fellow never could bear to mention her name, nor to hear it; how any reminder of her, or contact with the friends through whom he met her, would upset him. He would get confused, and some of his self-reproaches would fall on the wrong heads. I suppose you never knew how that could be, Bob."

"I never was in exactly such a scrape as that; but I've been near enough to imagine, and make allowances. Your friend must have thought a good deal of the lady, in spite of his insulting her. He apologized, of course?"

"Certainly, and then took himself off, and kept out of her way ever after. It was all he could do."

"Just how did he insult her? It could hardly have been intentional."

"O no. He had had misfortunes, or something of the kind, and she took a humane interest in

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him—tried to help him, no doubt. Women often do such things, I believe; it is very creditable to them, but liable to be dangerous in a case like this, for men are sometimes fools enough to misinterpret it. Well, this particular beast took it into his wooden head that she cared for him—in a personal way, you know; and—you wouldn't think a man could be such an infernal ape, would you?—he told her so."

"He planned beforehand to tell her so—thought that was the right card to play, the proper way of wooing?"

"You make him worse than he was. It came out unawares—he was surprised into it. The conversation took a certain turn, and he misunderstood for a moment. That was all, and it was quite enough."

"What did the lady do then?"

"She was naturally and properly indignant and contemptuous; made him see his place. He took it, and took his departure."

"Did it never enter your friend's wise head that he might have mismanaged the affair in some other way than the one you mention; for instance, in going off so speedily?"

"No other course was possible. Enough of this, Bob: he bore the penalty of his offence."

"Excuse me: it's a curious case, and as a student of human nature I like to study such, and master all the facts. You say it never occurred to him that the worst part of his offence might be his levitating in such haste? that it might have been a more appropriate act of penitence to wait a day, or five minutes, and give the lady a chance to forgive him?"

"How can you make such low suggestions? The man was not a scoundrel at heart: at least he had always passed for a gentleman before, and thought himself such."

"For one who goes about insulting ladies, he was a singularly modest youth. So he never thought afterwards that there might have been a basis of fact for the fancy that made the trouble?"

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"Drop the subject, will you? I brought it in merely as an illustration, that you might see how a man can be affected—even his character changed—by the recollection of such a blunder. It would destroy his self-respect."

"Naturally. But self-respect is too good a thing to lose forever, and this illustration of yours may serve to pass the time till you are ready to talk of your own affairs, which you say it somehow illustrates. Did your friend never think that the girl might have led him on, either seriously or for mere amusement? If she did, that would be some excuse for him."

"I tell you he was not that kind of a blackguard. All sorts of thoughts will offer themselves to a man in such a state of mind, I suppose; but he knew her too well to admit any that lowered her. O no, he saw the fault was all his. At the moment he was bewildered, and could not realize the sudden change, nor what he had done; so his apology (if I remember that part of his story) may have been inadequate in manner, however suitable in words. Apart from that, which could not be mended afterwards, he did all he possibly could."

"I beg to differ, Jim. I think this fellow did much worse than you seem to realize. Stare as much as you like: if he is still a friend of yours, I am sorry for him, as for one who has committed a most outrageous blunder and a nearly unpardonable wrong. What right had he to think of himself alone? You say the girl had shown goodness of heart, and a real interest in him? Then suppose the interest went no further than he thought: what business had he to burden her mind with a broken friendship and the feeling that she had helped to spoil his life? Or suppose the interest in him did go further. What do you and he know about a woman's feelings?"

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He was pale now, and wild in the eyes. "Your last supposition is impossible. For the other—you may possibly be right. He never thought she would care—or that he could do anything but what he did."

"A nice lot he is then. If I were you, I would write to him to-morrow and give him a lecture—supposing they are both alive and free. And if this affair was anyway parallel to your own, of which you won't talk, I hope it may be a lesson to you—a warning, if you need one. Do you suppose women, of the high-minded and superior sort, have no hearts, no consciences, no sense of the duties of humanity? They have a blanked sight more than you and your friend seem to have, I can tell you. You'd better sleep on this, and wake with some enlarged ideas. As you decline to tell me anything of yourself, and so I can't help you there, I'm going to bed."

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## XXIX.

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### SUBMISSION.

NEXT day Jim was haggard and restless, and wanted to potter about the house. I took him to the largest stream in those parts, when our rods came in play; and there he did some of the worst

fishing I ever saw—worse than I did in May, when I had him on my mind. He has himself on his mind now, and some one else too. He kept trying to talk, which is impossible when you are wading. After he had lost a two-pounder and fallen into a deep hole, I got out on the bank to avoid a place where the water went down hill too fast—something between rapids and a cascade. He came and sat on a log by me, looking disconsolate.

"Jim," I said, "You're pretty wet. Perhaps you'd better go home and write that letter."

"I don't see my way yet. How can you be so positive?"

"Because I've heard the story before, and know more about it than you do. I had a friend who was there at the time too. O, it caused some talk, I can tell you. Did your hero suppose it would interest nobody but himself?"

"Yes, as I told you. Good heavens! You don't mean—"

"O, no public talk; only the family, and people who knew the facts and could be trusted. They were all sorry for him too; they thought he was such an ass. You see a performance like his can't end where it begins; it has consequences."

"You say, 'for him too.' They couldn't be sorry for the lady—why should they?"

"You are pigheaded, Jim. What did I tell you last night? This thing put its mark on her, in a way no man has a right to mark a woman without her consent. See that trout jump, in the pool down yonder? I must get him." [169]

"Wait a moment. What I told you about could not have been known unless the lady told it; and she was not of that sort. I don't understand."

"Decidedly you don't. I can't waste a day like this on second-hand gossip, Jim; as you said yesterday, the evening is the time for talk. You go home and change your clothes and rest your brain. I know my way here, and I want to fill my basket. I'll get back in time for supper. Here, you can take these."

And so I sent him off. He is biddable and humble now, and will be more so presently; in a kind of transition state, he is. He came back in the afternoon, and sat on the bank while I pulled out the biggest fish yet. I carried home the best basket we've had; not so many specimens, but far finer ones, than from that Devil's Brook in the Land Accursed. In fishing, as in other things, a good deal depends on your state of mind.

That evening I dressed for dinner, as far as I could, like a gentleman; not that any visitors were likely to drop in, but I thought it due to the occasion. Jim, having plenty of leisure at command, and noting my manœuvres, did the same. He ate little, but I paid due attention to the trout and claret, and took my time to it; though we do not have a lot of courses and ceremony at meals up here, nor are such necessary. Then we settled ourselves in easy chairs before the great fireplace, where pine logs were roaring: the nights are cold now, and this is one comfort of these out-of-the-way places, where fuel is plenty.

As soon as he had a chance, he began. "There is some mystery about this, Bob. You wouldn't answer my question this morning."

"Now that I have dined, James, I'll answer any questions you like—provided they are such as may fitly be put to the father of a family. So fire away." [170]

"First then, how do you come to know so much about this?"

"Because I was there. O, not eavesdropping, not as a spy—that is out of my line; but purely, and luckily as it proves, by accident." And I told him all about it. I will not say that his jaw dropped, but his facial apparatus elongated.

"Then Cl—she knows that you know?"

"Not a word. What do you take me for? How could I tell her?"

"But—the others know?"

"Certainly not. You have the most extraordinary notions, Hartman. It was her secret, not theirs. If you had been in my place, perhaps you would have written to the papers, or told the story at family prayers. Can't you see that it was impossible for me to let her know till I had had it out with you?"

"And you have stood by me, knowing all this—you are still my friend?"

"Well, if I had had merely myself to consider, my natural loathing and contempt for the beast, ape, idiot and scoundrel who was capable of such conduct might have led me to extremities. O, I endorse all the compliments you have paid yourself. But there is my interesting family; the twins have quite a regard for you, and Herbert. And so has my wife; she doesn't know you as well as I do. And my sister—a superior person, though too soft-hearted, whom I cherish with a deep fraternal affection—she has been besieging me with intercessions, and melting my obduracy with her tears; and that for one who has made all this coil, and whose qualities have been too well enumerated by himself."

"I will try to be more deserving of her kindness, Bob: I told you she was the right sort. But you



said just now they did not know."

"Only by surmise, and inference from your hasty departure, and from—subsequent developments. Women are not wholly fools, Jim: they are just as good as we; perhaps better, and sometimes wiser. O, they are very well in their way. Let us bear with them, James, and allow for their redeeming traits."

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"Don't hit a man with his own words when he is down, Bob. But—there is Another, whom you've not mentioned."

"So there is: you didn't mention her, either. Come to think of it, there is another member of my household, whom we have overlooked in this discussion, yet to whom I owe some sort of consideration."

"Of course I know who is first with you: I am content to come in a bad second. You haven't—I suppose—any word—from Her?"

"What do you take her for? Ladies can't do that sort of thing. See here, Hartman, don't get on that line again. She is used to due respect."

His face fell. "I know: I mean nothing else. What have you to say to me then?"

"Say? Haven't I said enough? Confound you, it's your turn to say things now."

"I thought I had said a good deal. O, I am ready to make my submission, if it will do any good. Imagine the rest, can't you? Don't be playing your games on me now, Bob."

There was a tone of pathos in this: I took a good look at him, and saw that he was doing the contrite as well as I could expect. He will do it better without a middleman when he gets the chance; he'll hardly lapse into the other style again soon. All I have to do is to secure her position meanwhile.

"Well, what comes next? I believe I am on the witness-stand now."

"Tell me about Her, Bob."

"She is changed. Of old, one never knew what to expect of her. Now she is different. No stale customs about her, my boy."

"Nor custom stale her infinite variety,' I suppose you mean. Yes, so I found—but that was my own fault. Some might prefer your version. But you don't imply—"

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"No, I don't. You must find out for yourself about that. I thought you knew that she is chary of her confidences, and that none of us is given to seeking them. She has mentioned your name once in all this time, and then to say that you and I were great clumsy things—which is true; measurably of me, of you most eminently."

"What chance is there for me then?" He was discouraged again. Jim is so foolish; he gets exalted and depressed on the slightest provocation. Perhaps I was like that once, but it was long ago.

"Well, she knows I am here; do you suppose I would have come if she objected? Make what you can out of that.—You needn't make too much of it either: go slow, now. You see she doesn't like to be thwarted in her benevolent plans; and you were a wild man, to be reclaimed and civilized. Instead of submitting like a decent savage, you broke loose all at once, and left her to feel that she had done you harm instead of good. You are the only fellow who ever gave her any trouble: I can't see how you had the cheek to do it. Why, man, you have got to learn manners if you want to associate with that kind. She could do better than you any day; but a wilful woman must have her way, and a gentleman usually lets her have it.—Now there you go again. I didn't say what her way might be in this case, did I? How should I know what she wants of you? Probably just to smooth you down, and be friends, and see you behave. The other supposition, as you said last night, is too wildly impossible. You ought to be glad to meet her on any terms she may choose to make, and thankful and proud to undergo any penance of her imposing, after your conduct, and the annoyance it has caused her and all of us. Most women, in her place, would let you stay in the woods and eat your heart out. Perhaps she will yet; you needn't look so pleased. All I know is that you owe her reparation. You ought to go on your knees from here to the avenue, even if you have to come back on foot."

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"You have gained in insight since August, Bob. You express my views with accuracy—though one can hardly talk of these matters to another man. I always honored you for holding Her in such esteem. But practically, what am I to do?"

"That is not easy to say, James: it can hardly be plain sailing. If women were not more forgiving than we, bless their little hearts, you would have no chance to do anything. And the finer grain they are of, the more embarrassing it becomes; with her sort it is peculiarly difficult. I know, from long and trying experience; I have to mind my p's and q's, I tell you. If you had taken up with one of these farmers' daughters, as you nearly led me to believe last night—there's nothing to get mad about—it would have been much simpler and easier for you. If it were that other man, I should say to him, Write to the lady, if you think that safe: I don't advise it. But if you had a friend who knew her well, and was a person of capacity and resource and great tact and approved discretion, and willing to employ all these qualities in your service—"

"O, I'll leave the affair in your hands: I don't see what else I can do. I'm everlastingly obliged to you, of course."

"Yes, I should think you would be; a nice mess you'd make of it by yourself. You have no idea how this thing has weighed on my mind ever since you left us at Newport; nor how awkward it is, even for me, to approach a girl of her sensitive pride and highminded delicacy on such a subject. But I'm ready to go on suffering in your cause, James, even if it be for years."

"I hope it won't take as long as that. Hurry it up, old man, now you've got a start. Don't let the injury to Her and the weight on my conscience go on accumulating. What you do, do quickly."

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"So you'd like me to rush off to-morrow? There's gratitude. No, sir; I must think the matter over, and I may have to consult you about details. Besides, they are all exercised about my health, and expect me to make my week out. Your case is not a strong one, James; all depends on the way it is put. I will not ruin it by indecent pressure or undue haste. Leave it to me, and let sweet sleep revisit the weary head whence she has fled so long. In simpler language, keep still and do as I tell you, and don't bother."

I took pen and ink to my room, and indited a home epistle. It informed Mabel that I was progressing toward recovery, and expected to ship some large trout, carefully packed in ice; also that she was a true prophet, and the other business in hand was moving just as she had foretold. I enclosed a brief note to Clarice, which said simply, "O. K. Ever thine," and signed it with my initials and Jim's: and a cartoon for Jane, which I sat up late to design and execute. It represented a small lover, transfixed with a large arrow, prostrating himself before a Haughty Damsel of High Degree. This work of art, with the subjoined effusions, will keep up their spirits till I get home.

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### XXX.

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#### WASTED ADVICE.

I WILL not tell you what more we did that week, nor how many wagonloads of big game we bagged when we sallied forth with guns to make war upon the monarchs of the forest: perhaps their hides and horns are on view in my library, and perhaps not. Nor will you expect any more scenery of me, seeing how I have groaned and sweated to produce the pen-pictures you have already enjoyed: I don't desire to advertise Jim's retreat too much, and spoil its seclusion. He was impatient and restive, but feeling much better than when I came, and ready to do anything I wished—of course. But he wanted to talk all the time, and ask questions: he kept me busy pacifying him, till I was tired. Rational conversation on serious subjects is good, but to be thus forever harping on small personal feelings and relations makes one realize that Silence is Golden. Clarice never acts in that way: I wish Jim would have some occasional flashes of taciturnity, like Macaulay.

The day before I left, while we were burying a calf I had shot by mistake, he said, "Bob, do you remember my asking you once, in a purely suppositious way, what you would do if I were to quarrel with—Her?"

"O yes. But the farmer that owned this late lamented beast ought to be paid for it."

"Never mind that. I'll attend to it after you're gone, and save your feelings. Well, you said you'd stand by both of us."

"Hang my feelings: do you suppose I expend feelings on a misguided heifer? It got in the bushes where you said I might look for a deer, and here's a ten on account; you can write me if it costs more. My sympathies, James, are reserved for nobler animals when they make worse mistakes."

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"Yes, as I have proved. You've kept your word; but you were pretty rough on me."

"Your conduct was pretty rough on all of us. I had to open your eyes; and I don't want you to try those tricks again. If you do, I may have to shoot you by mistake."

"You would have been welcome to shoot me last week. Why did you leave me so long in the dark, Bob?"

"O, the deuce! Were explanations due from our side? It's true you need somebody to take care of you; but, you see, I have others to look after, and so can't devote myself exclusively to you: you'd better get a keeper. It was Jane who urged my coming up here. I always meant to, but I couldn't till Clarice suggested it."

"She suggested it, did she? You never told me that before."

"I ought not to have told you now, if it makes you fly off the handle in this way. She merely said to Mabel, no doubt in all sincerity, that I looked badly and needed a change; she said nothing about my coming here. She has a regard for me; whether you are anybody in her eyes remains to be seen. Don't jump to conclusions, now. The Princess is not a person to take liberties with, as I've learned by repeated lessons."

"I know it, Bob: one lesson is enough for me. I suppose it would hardly do for me to go back with you?"

"Hardly. Personally I should be delighted, and so would some others; but—you know as well as I do. I have got to feel somebody's pulse, and proceed very gingerly. Possess your soul in what patience you can till you hear from me. See here, Hartman; with your views, and your well-grounded aversion to domestic and even social life, a little of this sort of thing ought to go a long way. I should think you'd be unwilling to risk contact with the world again. A child that will play about the cars, you know, after it's once been run over—"

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"O, but you have opened my eyes to a sacred duty. Honor is above self-preservation. I want to purge my conscience, you see."

"Then do that and pause there. It was your vaulting ambition which overleaped all bounds before. If you get into another row, you may have to stay in it. I have full power of attorney, you say; well, I may have to make all sorts of promises for you before I can get you leave to return to duty, and you'll be expected to keep them. You don't know how difficult that will be for your unbridled inexperience; you'll be cabined, cribbed, confined within the dull limits of Propriety. It would be much better for you to be content with a correspondence, if you can get as far as that. You could expound your penitence and changed views by mail, and have time to think what you were saying, and get it in shape; whereas, if you plunge into the cold and heartless world again, you'll probably get into more trouble, and I can't come up here to set you straight again—not before next May. You were right, James: there is nothing in common between you and the world. Why expose yourself to its temptations, its dangers, its hollow and soul-wearying forms? This atmosphere is so much purer; there is less of Vanity and Woe up here. Stay where you are well off. Clarice can write a pretty good letter when she chooses; I'll try to fix it that way for you." But he would not accept this reasonable view, and insisted on my getting permission for him to come down before Christmas, and as much sooner as possible.

So nobody but he could drive me to the cars; he filled the fifteen miles with charges and reminders. As the train moved off, he was waving his hat, his face radiant with hope and pathetic with confidence. He looks ten years younger than he did last week. A pretty fellow he is to call himself a Pessimist.

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## XXXI.

[178]

### RESULTS REPORTED.

I REACHED home in the early evening. The servant told me at the door that Mrs. T. was in attendance on Master Herbert, who had fallen over the banisters and injured his nasal organ. I rushed upstairs: Mabel met me with no demonstrations of grief or anxiety. "I see by your face that it is all right—as I always said it would be. Go to Clarice; she is in the library. O, Herbert? He fell on his nose, of course; he always does. It is not at all serious. The dear child has been feeling better since we heard from you, and taking more exercise. Clarice has the first right to your news."

I found her, and dropped on my knees. She looked at me, not so sweetly as of late. "Get up, Robert, I thought I had cured you of your bad habit of untimely jesting."

"You have. I realize the solemnity of the occasion, if you do not. My name is James—no, that's not it. I am a representative, an envoy. You see before you a banished man who has justly incurred his sovereign's displeasure, and has repented day and night. This posture, perhaps unseemly in the father of a family, expresses the other fellow's state of mind. He's afraid to come himself, and so he sent me."

She looked at me again, and saw that I was serious. You see, these delicate matters have to be managed delicately. I can't do the unmitigated tragedy business as well as Hartman might, and yet I had to meet the requirements of the situation, and the Princess' expectations, which are always high. People who have their own affairs of this kind to conduct might sometimes avoid painful failures by taking a leaf out of my book, and mixing the difficult passages with a little—a very little—chastened and judicious humor; then they would avoid overdoing it, and sending the lady off disgusted.

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"Does he take all the blame?"

"Absolutely: he did from the first moment. He can't come here to say so till he's allowed, and he can't get up till you give him a token of forgiveness."

She gave it: it was inexpensive to her, and soothing to the penitent—or would have been if he had been there to get it in person. I took it simply on his account.

"Keep still now, and let me think."

I kept still. The attitude of prayer, while well suited to the lighter forms of ladies, is inconvenient to a man of my size, and deeply distressing when I am obliged to maintain it for more than five minutes; for that reason I don't go to church as much as I might. But I had to keep

quiet while she did her thinking. May it be recorded to my credit! I would bear a good deal for Clarice, and sometimes I have to.

At last she finished her cogitations. "O, get up, Robert; I forgot. What else have you to tell me? But don't you want some supper?"

I was as hungry as a bison, but that was a secondary consideration.

"The supper can wait while I have your work to do. I'll tell you anything you care to know: he wants to have no secrets from you. But it has all been graphically summed up already. A famous orator of old told a young fellow who went to him to learn how to speak a piece, 'Act it.' That's what I've been doing the last half hour: I didn't think it would take so long."

I rubbed my knees, which were still sore: the library carpet is reasonably thick, but it was not built for devotional uses, "I suppose Hartman would be glad to stay down there all night if he had the chance. But he'd be awkward about it—infernally awkward. You see, he has had no practice in this kind of thing; he doesn't know your ways as I do. I wonder if you will ever get him into as good training as you have me." [180]

I put in this light badinage to relieve any embarrassment she might feel—not that she could show any such if she tried, but for what you and I know even she might feel it—and to let her get used to the situation. But she did not seem to care for it. "That's enough for now, Robert. Go and get your supper." She said this in a weary tone. My heart sank.

"Princess dear, have I offended you? I meant it all right. Have I done anything wrong, and made a mess of this as usual?"

She gave me her hand. "O no, Bob. But go now. I'll talk more to you to-morrow."

Now I thought I had done this up in the most superior style, and that she would be pleased for once. But the ways of women are past man's understanding.

Jane awaited me in the dining-room with viands and an anxious brow, and would scarcely let me appease the cravings of exhausted nature. She sent the servant out, and ministered to my wants herself.

"Brother, you look downcast. Have you returned with empty hands?"

"I have brought some of the finest trout you ever saw—not in mere size perhaps, but in flavor, colors, and gaminess. You didn't expect me to carry 'em on a string over my shoulder, did you? And I would have brought some venison, but you don't care for it. You told me once that their eyes were so pretty and plaintive, it was a shame to kill them. I always try to please you, so I thought I would let them live.—Yes, thank you, I have brought back more health than I took away: I may be able now to stand the fatigues of business till Thanksgiving.—O, Hartman? I couldn't bring him along, you know: where is your sense of propriety? I advised him to stay up there where he is safe, and not tempt the shafts and arrows any more. What, I 'haven't done anything then, after all?' O, haven't I! Jane, you are worse than a serpent's tooth: if Lear had been in my place, he would have talked about a thankless sister. It has been a weary, toilsome, painful task, and few men could have carried it through to so happy an end. And when I come back hungering for sympathy—I told you what my nature was—you meet me with cold words and suspicious looks. It is enough to make one weep, and long for the silent grave. If it were Hartman, you would do the weeping, no doubt. Yet that man, whom you thus unnaturally set above your brother—you have no idea of his harshness, his violence, his embittered prejudice and obstinacy; nor of the patience and gentleness and persuasive force with which I expelled the demons that possessed him, and brought him to his right mind. O, he has had an overhauling; he will take care how he does it again. But he is all right now." [181]

"I wonder at that, after his being in your hands for a week. Your tender mercies were cruel, I fear. What does Clarice say to this? Is she satisfied?"

"She ought to be, but she says nothing at all; couldn't take in the magnitude of my news at once, most likely. Yet I took pains to break it to her delicately, and with light touches of humor, to relieve any strain there might be."

"Yes, soothed her nerves as with a nutmeg-grater, no doubt. You will serenade her next with tin pans and fish-horns, and think that a delicate attention. Brother, Clarice does not share your peculiar view of humor, nor do I. Mabel tries to comprehend it and to catch your tone, as is her melancholy duty; but it is hard work for her. Well, what does Mr. Hartman say?—Don't tell me anything that is private, or belongs to Clarice alone."

"O, you may hear most of it. He says all sorts of things—anything you like. You see he can't be trusted, or trust himself, any longer, so I have full power to represent him." [182]

"That is definite, and convenient for you, whatever it may be to others. Of course a man will promise anything when he has an object to gain. I suppose you left him in the depths of despair and on a pinnacle of ecstasy at once."

"That is about it. Let us be thankful that you and I are well beyond these follies.—My dear, I wasn't alluding to your age; upon my honor I wasn't. I only meant that your elevation of mind and dignity of character lift you far above such idiotic transports, and give you a right to despise weak creatures like Jim, and in some degree even myself. No man is worthy of you, Jane: you

know you never would look at any of them. What did I tell you about your looks? Except Clarice, and perhaps I ought to say Mabel, and a few on the cars, you are by far the handsomest woman I've seen since I left home."

"After your week among the belles of Wayback, that compliment seems strained. O, I see: Clarice was not in the right mood just now, and your tide of geniality rolled back upon itself, so that it has to break loose on some one else: or you are to see her again to-morrow, and must practice smooth things meantime to say then.—Ah, it is both, is it?"

"Sister, you are an external conscience—except that you won't approve when I have done the right thing, and done it well. You would be invaluable to Jim. I doubt whether he and Clarice will get on; and he thinks a heap of you. If he don't suit her on further inspection, or makes any more blunders, you might take him in hand and make a man of him."

"So as to keep him in reach as material for you? Robert, if you want me to comfort you when Clarice is gone, you will have to make your light humor much lighter yet, and let me select subjects for its exercise."

"Now, now—do you think I would offer you secondhand goods? If I had known him then as I do to-day, I would have let her go off in June as she proposed, and fixed it the other way. It would have saved no end of bother." [183]

"And deprived you of a source of huge amusement, and an unprecedented field for the display of your peculiar talents. Do you think men and women are mere puppets for you to play with? You would make but a poor tenth-rate Providence—though you may have succeeded in this case. Tell me how you did it."

"I showed him that he was all wrong. He knew that already, but thought she didn't care. I told him she did."

"Robert! You have not betrayed her? Is this your diplomacy?"

"Of course not: how you talk, Jane. I said her interest in him was philanthropic, and he had behaved with brutal ingratitude—like a charity patient in the hospital, or a bad boy at Sunday School; so he ought to yearn to come back—if she will kindly allow—and give her a chance to go on reforming him or not, just as she pleases. I admitted the purely speculative possibility that it might be otherwise—of a more personal and commonplace description—just to encourage him a little; but as he had said at the start that this chance was practically nonexistent, I let him think so and dwelt on the other view, which was new to him, and impressive. O, I preserved her dignity; that was the first necessity. If he is cherishing any hopes of the vulgar, everyday sort, he did not get them from me."

"And did he believe all that? If so, I must have been mistaken in the man."

"He had to believe it. It was the simple truth: I merely arranged the colors properly on his mental canvas. He thinks I am Solon and Rhadamanthus and Nehemiah in one. How would you have done it perhaps, when you had to hook your fish without letting him get the bait—induce him to commit himself, and yet not commit her at all?" [184]

"I don't know, brother. You could not have thrown her on his generosity, of course; she would have killed herself and him and all of us, rather than take happiness at such a price—and I can't blame her. Yet she despises a subterfuge. I would not tell her the details if I were you; she will not ask for them, nor want to hear them. It is a queer world: when such things have to be done—sacrificing your best friend to insure his welfare, deceiving him in the interest of one who abhors deception—your eccentricities may be of more use than I had hitherto supposed possible."

I pretended to be deeply pained at this; but in my heart I knew it was high praise, coming from Jane. She is not like Clarice; she asked all manner of questions, and kept me answering them three mortal hours. Fortunately Mabel has less curiosity, or I should not have got much sleep that night, after all my ill-appreciated labors. But I don't regret what I did for Hartman; *he* believes what you tell him.

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## XXXII.

 [185]

### CONFESSION.

CLARICE was not at breakfast next day; but as I was going out, she met me in the hall. "Robert, can you come back at four?"

"At any hour you wish, Princess; or I will stay now."

"No, that will be early enough. I will be in the library."

Now that is Clarice all over: she is herself again. No eagerness, no petty curiosity, but a grand indifference, a statuesque calm, a goddess-like withdrawal from the affairs and atmosphere of common mortals. Indeed it is not she who will ask for details that any other woman would burn to know: a single question as to the vital point, and then "what else have you to tell me?" The rest

might keep a day, a week, a month. Her taste was always for large outlines, her mind has breadth and grasp and comprehension; when she seemed to care for little things, she was at play. In a matter like this, her secret thoughts are the main element; what others may think or say or do need be noticed only as contributing material for them to work with. What has vexed her all this time has been that the sacrilege of events had put one factor in the problem out of reach, beyond her control: she has been used to having all she wanted of the earth, and deigning to want but little of it and to value that little but lightly. Now that she cares for something at last, and it is at her call again, she will weigh and measure the situation, and all its aspects and possibilities, in the silent council chamber of her soul, and the decision will go forth before any one ventures to ask what it may be. Stay in your cave, hermit of Wayback, and say your *Ave Clarissa* as patiently as you can: when the edict calls you to court, your part will be cast for you, and you will have nothing to do but say the lines. If you break bounds again and stray from your proper posture before the throne, or put in any more of your irreverent gags, I am done with you.

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I have wrought your will, my Princess, and brought back your pretty toy, for you to mend or break: you hardly mean to break it. Yet it is a pity to see you descend to common uses, to ordering a house and taking care of poor old Jim; you were born to shine apart in solitary state, and have men gaze at you wistfully from far below. No man can rate more highly than I the domestic relations, affections, virtues; but I don't like to see you put yourself in the category of mere human beings, as if marriage and a man were good enough for you. You will have your way, now as always, and use me at your will: it is you who have the ordering of this funeral, not I.

As she did not seem to like my style last night, I had better be sober and plain this afternoon; sort of Quaker thee and thou, without artistic embellishments. Yes, by Jove, I'll have to be, for there's the guilty secret to be unloaded. There is no excuse for keeping it to myself any longer, now Jim has it; sooner or later she must know that I've known all along what was not meant for me, and it may as well be done now, whatever the result. It will not please her, but I can't help that. I will not break my word and keep a thing from her, except as there is reason; to tell it can do no great harm now, unless to me—and that is a minor matter.

At the hour appointed I was on deck: no one ever interrupts the Princess, and we were undisturbed. "Robert, I had better hear your report. Cut it short, please; give me a condensed outline merely."

What did I tell you? This was said with an air as if she were discharging an unwelcome duty, so that I might not feel neglected. She evidently resents the impertinence of circumstances in forcing her to allow me to have a hand in her private matters: it will be as much as I can expect if she forgives me for meddling. Obeying orders, I endeavored to be brief and business-like.

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"He has had a bad time of it, Clarice. He was a changed man when I got there—rough and morose and unmanageable; kept hinting at some mysterious crime he had committed. It was a day or two before I could bring him to book, by methods on which I need not dwell. Detective work is not a nice business; the means has to take its justification from the end. He made his confession as if it were another's; said how superior you were, and how basely he had repaid your condescension. He thought that ended the affair, except for his lifelong remorse; hoped he might die soon; impossible to be forgiven, or regarded by you in any light but that of a loathsome object—regular stage part, you know, but perfectly sincere: if you like innocence, he can supply a first-class article. I put a head on him by saying his behavior had been much more flagrant than he realized, and the worst part of it was interfering with your plans and going off in such a hurry; that ladies like to be consulted in such cases, and sometimes to administer divine forgiveness, or at least punish the transgressor in their own way, and not leave it all to him.—You need not look at me like that, Princess. I know nothing of your feelings, and told him so. Of course I maintained your dignity: what else was I there for? And so, to do him justice, did he, as far as he knows how. He is just where you like to have them—or would if you cared enough about them. After I had enlightened him as to his duty, it was all simple. I gave him just sufficient hope—of pardon, I mean—to keep him alive, and turn his despair to active penitence. The game is entirely in your hands now. He was on fire to come back with me, or to write at once. I said he must take no more liberties, but wait for permission. If I may venture a suggestion, you might let me tell him to write you; then you can graciously allow him to come when you are ready for him."

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That I may call a succinct and lucid narrative. She listened to it with clear eyes like Portia, as if she were a judge and had to hear such cases every day. Now for questions: I bet odds there will not be more than three, and those straight to the heart of my discourse—nothing irrelevant, or secondary, or sentimental.

"Did he say what had been his offence?"

"Presumption. He insulted you—though of course he didn't mean to—and you very properly resented it and withered him with contempt. He never understood, till I made him see it, that what he did next was worse than this, as emphasizing the wrong and making it—for a while—irrevocable."

Her eyes were like judgment lightnings now, that might burn through the darkness and bring out all hidden things. Luckily I had nothing to hide; or rather I was about to make a clean breast of it.

"How were you able to speak so positively?"

"That is what he asked me, and therein lay such power as I had to master him; at least it was

the chief weapon in my arsenal. I answer you as I answered him: By knowing more about the matter than he did. Princess, I have deceived you all along, and broken my promise to tell you everything. I saw and overheard the quarrel." And then I told her all about it.

She looked at me silently, with an expression I never saw before. I turned away, as one turns from the sun in his strength. I was sitting on a stool beside her, and I suppose my head went down. Suddenly a hand was on my forehead, pushing it back. "Robert, look at me. What was your motive in keeping this from me?"

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"O, the motives were mixed; they always are. There was my dread of offending you; that was selfish. And more than that, I did not want to hurt you, if it could be avoided. And most, I was not willing to complicate the trouble, and all but certainly make it worse. It seemed to me that you would be shocked, and disgusted, and enraged to know that a third person had intruded on so private a scene, and surprised a secret that belonged to you. Don't fancy that I was blaming you; that was my rough guess at how any woman would feel, most of all you: perhaps I was wrong. I thought that for you to know might widen the breach, and destroy all chance of reconciliation. I had to think of him, as well as of you. Not as well, no; not as much—you know that; but of him too. I could not tell you till I had told him, and made the matter right—if you will have it so. You will not let it turn you against him now—this fact that I was there? It was not his fault: it was an accident, and I am the only one to blame. I did the best I could, after such lights as I had."

Still the great eyes kept burning into mine; but they did not hurt so much as I had expected. "Did you tell Mabel and Jane of this?"

"How could I? It was your secret. What do you take me for, Clarice? I never breathed a word of it, of course, until I had it out with Jim a week ago, and brought him to his senses: after that I thought you ought to know. Mabel and Jane never dreamed that I knew anything beyond what little you might have told me, or let me see."

Her arms were round my neck now. There was a minute or two of silence: I really did not know what to say next. Then she looked up, tears in her eyes, a tone I never could describe in her voice.

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"And you have done all this for me, Robert!"

I made a feeble attempt to unloose her hands and draw myself up. "Don't talk that way, Clarice; it hurts me. You make too much of this; it was a matter of course, and there is nothing new in it. I thought you knew I was always ready to do anything I could for you: that is an old story, as you used to say."

The effort at dignity was not successful, for her head drooped again. Soon she raised it, a smile chasing the tears away.

"You can triumph over Jane now. She used to say you never could keep a secret. Did you enjoy keeping this one, Bob?"

"Not exactly. I will keep some more if you insist on it, but it would be more enjoyable if they were of another sort. No more like this, if it is the same to you."

"You said you used this as a weapon to master him with. Why didn't you use it on me? It might have been good for me to be mastered and overruled."

I had to laugh now. "Jim can try that by and by—if he dares. Other men may overrule other women, perhaps; I know my place too well. Clarice, it is not like you to talk nonsense. If I could have consulted you about this—how to keep the secret, and what to do with it—it would have made things easier for me, but unhappily that was not feasible. You don't mean it would have done good instead of harm if I had told you earlier?"

"I doubt it. No, you were right. Brother, there is so much more of you than any of us thought!"

"So Hartman has found. But I don't want to be unduly exalted. Love is better than pride, and this trouble of yours has brought us all closer together, I believe. There is only one thing to be done yet."

"No; two at least. Robert, you deserve to know everything. I will tell you what we were talking about that wretched day, so that you may see what excuse there was for him, and how wrong I was. And then you can tell Jane and Mabel."

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"I don't want to know, my dear, nor is there any need to tell them anything. None of us desire to pry into your affairs, but only to see them set right. It was plain that something led up to poor Jim's blunder, and that is enough. You can tell Mabel and Jane what you like before he comes back,—though they won't ask it.—I will overrule you for once, as you insist. You want to put a force upon yourself for my sake, and I will not have it; not another word of that. But—and in this case I am not overruling, but only suggesting—Jim is waiting all this time. May I tell him that he can write to you?"

"Not just yet. You have opened my eyes as well as his, Bob; you've revealed so many masculine virtues that I must take them in by degrees. You've been keeping yourself in the background and putting him forward, as if I could be interested in one person only. Now let him wait a day or two, while I think about you."

There may have been more of these exchanges, which I do not care to repeat. What goes on in the domestic circle is essentially of a private nature, too intimate and sacred to be whispered into the general ear. There are persons who will violate these holy confidences, and tell you what he said and she said when the doors were shut. I am not like them. If I appear at times to break my own rule and treat you as a member of the household, it is merely for your improvement, that you may see (as I told Jim last summer) how things are arranged in a christian family: and especially that, when any trouble of this kind invades your own humble roof, you may know how to slay the lion and extract strength and sweetness from his carcass, as I have done. Should these pages instruct but a single brother, whether by nature or adoption, how to unwind his sister's tangled affairs and bring them to a prosperous conclusion, I shall not have penned them in vain.

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### XXXIII.

#### A FAMILY CONCLAVE.

I HAD written to Hartman more than once since my return, telling him to keep up his spirits and bide his time. Before long came the permission to open a correspondence with a more important person than I. What he wrote I know not; he is probably able to do that well enough, whatever blunders he may commit when face to face. I have reason to believe his outpouring was answered, with excessive brevity but to the purpose, in the one word, 'Come.' In fact, the Princess declined (and very properly) to expend a postage-stamp on him, or to gratify him with an envelope of her own inditing, but told me to enclose this minute but inflammatory document in non-explosive wrappings of my own.

He was to arrive on a certain day in late November. The evening previous, as we were sitting together, Clarice—who generally prefers her own society, and I can't blame her—appeared, in our midst (if that expression is allowable), with an aspect of grim determination. I rose to give her a chair in the corner, but she sat down where she could see us and we could look at her. We did so, anxiously expectant, for this was a most unusual proceeding; and I inwardly resolved to make it easier for her than she meant to have it. She began with the air of an orator who reluctantly emerges from seclusion at his country's call, constrained to deliver matter of pith and moment.

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"It is no news that you all have shown me kindness such as passes all acknowledgment—"

She was not allowed to proceed without hindrance. Jane put forth an interrupting hand, which the speaker seized and imprisoned in her own: not that Clarice's is bigger than Jane's, but it possesses some muscular force. Mabel opened her lips, and one of us—I will not say which—was obliged to remind her that Miss Elliston had the floor.

"It is not in me to be demonstrative, and I have seemed cold and thankless—"

"We knew you better than that, dear," came from both.

"—But I knew, I felt it all. Never did a girl without natural protectors—"

"But you can have a natural protector whenever you like," cried Mabel. "You might have had any number of them, for years past."

"Well, with or without, no girl ever had, or could have had, more faithful affection and delicate consideration shown her than I. I have given you a great deal of trouble, and you never complained. I have come between you and friends—"

"My dear," Mabel interposed again, "that is all right. Our friends will come back." And she nodded and looked like a female Solomon, while Jane whispered something and put her disengaged arm around the orator.

"Don't interrupt me any more, please. You know it is not easy for me to talk of these matters—"

"That is so," said I. "It is rarely we get a speech from Clarice on any subject. Do keep quiet, all of you, and let the poor girl go on."

"But now I must tell you something you have no idea of."

Here the female portion of the audience pricked up their ears, and I began to be nervous. "It is about Mr. Hartman's going away in August. That was all my fault."

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"Don't you believe her," said I. "He says it was all his fault."

"Do be quiet, Robert. He is coming to-morrow, and justice must be done him. I treated him very badly, and—"

"She didn't," said I. "Clarice, we don't want to be dragged into all your private squabbles, but if you will tell this disreputable story you have got to tell it straight. Jim says you merely showed a proper spirit, and so you did."

"Why, what do you know about it, Robert?" cried Mabel and Jane together.



"He was there, hidden in the bushes, like a villain in a cloak and slouched hat."

Here came a chorus of exclamations and reproaches, till one of us had to say, "You may as well give it up, Clarice. These women will never let you go on; they don't know how to listen. If you were talking only to me, now—"

"Jane, you can never twit him again with not being able to keep a secret; he kept this one sacredly for three months."

"Of course he did," said Mabel: "I always knew it."

"Why, Robert, you told me—," Clarice exclaimed, and "O no, you didn't, my dear," some one else put in, while Jane looked triumphant.

"No, I didn't know this secret, of course," Mabel admitted: "I only meant that I always knew Robert could keep a secret, if it were of very extraordinary importance, and if he were certain it would ruin everything to let it out. Poor Robert, what a hard time you have had!"

"But how did he come to overhear your conversation?" said Jane. "What business had he there?"

"It was all through his pipe. Mabel, you must never object to his pipe again."

"There now, Mabel," remarked another of the company, "you wouldn't believe that the pipe was good for my health, and now you see it has preserved the whole family." [195]

"I don't see that," said the troublesome Jane: "what was the use of your being there intermeddling?"

"Jane," said one severely, "if you will be still, you will probably learn. How can you expect to hear anything when you keep on interrupting Clarice like this?"

"I am coming to that now, Jane. What he thus saw and heard he most patiently, and heroically, and from the noblest motives—"

"Excuse me, ladies," said I. "My pipe is not handy, but I must go out and smoke a cigar. I want to see a man—"

"Let the man smoke the cigar, and that will provide for both of them. You will sit down, Robert, and hear me out; I am not to be overruled this time."

"It would give me the greatest pleasure to hear you out, my dear, but you know your health is delicate, and you are not accustomed to public speaking. This is the longest oration you ever made: Jane's constant interruptions are trying, and you must be fatigued. If I were you, I would rest now, and finish this up to-morrow."

"Now isn't that exactly like him?" cried the irrepressible Jane. "He is afraid of your exposures, as well he may be. Go on, Clarice, and tell us what other iniquities he has committed, besides deceiving Mabel and me about this, while he was questioning us all the time, and pretending to impart all he knew."

"He deceived me too. Yes, you may well stare; he kept this absolutely to himself, till he could use it for his own deep purposes; and"—she blushed a little—"that is why things are as they are."

I saw she wanted to be helped out, so I said.

"Yes, that is the cause of this thusness. You see, Mabel, what great results may spring from a little pipe. Jane, you will have to admit that I am the guardian angel and protecting genius of you all." [196]

"Well, Clarice," said Jane, "I will own that my estimate of his talents has risen lately; but then my confidence in his moral character has fallen in the same degree. He does tell such dreadful falsehoods."

"It is not quite as if he told them for love of them, simply for the pleasure he takes in falsehood itself. You must allow for his motives."

"Yes," said Mabel, "his motives are always excellent, whatever his words and actions may be. You remember the man in the Bible, who was delivered to Satan for his soul's sake; and I have heard Robert himself say that in ascending a mountain you often have to go down hill."

"She means," I explained, "that on the rare occasions when I employ fiction, I do it purely in the interests of Truth. That goddess is imperfectly provided with garments—excuse me for stating so scandalous a fact, but it is so. Now this might have been well enough in Eden before the fall, but it will not do now; so we have to make the poor creature presentable, and pay her milliner's bills, which are often high. It would have been far more congenial to my candid nature to tell you all at once what I saw and heard that day in August; but such a course might have been attended with unpleasant consequences. If you will all forgive me, I will try not to do it again."

"I do not see my way to forgive you, brother," said Jane with a judicial air, "unless Clarice does; and that appears doubtful. I will be guided entirely by her."

"I have managed my own affairs so well without help, that you will naturally all wish to be

guided by me. It is a good deal for me to do; but since Robert's misconduct has done no great harm, and rather than come between brother and sister, I will—yes, I will forgive him." She rose majestically, signed to me to do the same, and gave me both hands, with the air of a sovereign conferring knighthood; we made an impressive tableau. "And since you are all so quiet at last, I may finish my speech, and state the reason for this act of leniency. As Mr. Hartman's conversion is to be completed this time without fail, it is plainly necessary that he should find us a united family."

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#### XXXIV.

##### TO PERSONS ABOUT TO MARRY.

I WOULD have liked to celebrate Jim's arrival by sundry pleasant and appropriate remarks; but impressive warnings and entreaties had reached me privately from three distinct quarters, urging me to efface myself on this occasion, and keep in the background. I complied with these suggestions, and there were no tumultuous rejoicings over the returning prodigal. Mabel and Jane greeted him with unobtrusive warmth: Clarice was rather stately and very calm; to look at her, you would have thought this was an ordinary call. When they talk about my duplicity, they mean that they want a monopoly of the article themselves. The visitor flushed and trembled like a boy, till I felt sorry for him, and would have offered him something to drink if they had given me a chance. Women are so queer about such matters: instead of letting the poor man go off with me, they pretended not to notice his confusion, and talked about the weather and mountains and trout, as if he wanted to discuss such frivolities. This soon got to be a bore, and I went to the new smoking-room, inviting him to follow when he needed rational conversation. He did not come at all, and I found afterwards that my wife and sister had gone away presently, and left him alone with Clarice—and they such sticklers for Propriety.

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I expected to have some fun watching this tender pair; but I was disappointed. There never is anything sensational to see when the Princess is in action: she carries an atmosphere of quietness about with her, and imposes it on those who come within her circle. Hartman broke rules and bounds once last summer, but he seems unlikely to do it again. The rest of us kept out of the way as much we could, and gave them scope. I said to Jane that we ought to get up a torchlight procession, or a big dinner, or something, in Jim's honor, but she scornfully told me to wait at least till the engagement was announced. When he was with me—which was little, for his time seemed to be much occupied, and his weakness for tobacco nearly cured—he once or twice attempted some drivel about disinterested friendship and undying gratitude; but I stopped that. If there be one thing for which I profess no sympathy, it is puling sentiment. He apparently did not care to discuss the progress of his affair, which was a relief; it is a dreadful nuisance to have to listen to lovers' talk, and I had enough of that at Wayback, when I could not help myself. At our time of life a man ought to be occupied with serious pursuits. But Jim is as if he had been asleep in a cave for ten years, and waked up with his beard well grown and a large stock of emotional aptitudes abnormally developed. I suppose Clarice likes this kind of thing, but I wonder at her taste.

They had been at it a week or so when I stumbled upon them unawares one day in the library. I tried to retreat, but they both called to me to stop.

"Robert," said she, "we have quarrelled again. That is, he has."

"Yes, Bob," said Jim, "and you'll have to straighten it out for us as you did before."

"This is too much," said I. "You had better take the next train for home, and by next May my health will need another change and I'll come up and attend to your case."

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"This needs to be settled right away. Clarice wants to go to the woods and live there the year round, and I can't permit such a sacrifice."

"Robert, he wants to live in the world like other people, just for my sake, and I can't permit such a sacrifice either."

"You must both prepare to be sacrificed, my lambs. Each of you will have to bear and forbear, and get used to the other's repulsive selfishness and hidebound eccentricities, to forego the sweet privacy and freedom of self-indulgence which have marked your innocent lives hitherto. When the glamour of young romance has faded, when the bloom is rubbed off the peach and the juice is crushed out of the strawberry, there will remain only the hard reality of daily duty, which is continual self-immolation. You are wise to commence practising this virtue at once."

"You must instruct us how to do it, Bob. It would be as you say, no doubt—with her—if she had to live at Wayback as she proposes. You have been there enough to know that it is no place for her; tell her so. She has confidence in you, and she won't believe me."

"It would be as you say, Robert—with him—if he had to live among the constraints and shams which his soul abhors. You know it, and you have great influence over him. Tell him so."

"You are both right, and it is clear there is no place where you can live—together. James, she is a fragile flower; transplanted to your sterile soil, she would soon wither and drop from the stalk."

Clarice, he is fastidious, critical, and intense; made a part of the things he despises, the torturing contact with pomps and vanities would soon strike his knell. My little dears, your paths were never meant to unite, and the best thing you can do is to part in peace. James, this is all imagination, and you know it; a milliner's lay-figure, or that rural nymph at Wayback, would do just as well, and be much less exacting and expensive. Clarice, you are pushing philanthropy too far: the picturesqueness of this hermit, and his alleged romantic woes, have misled you as to the nature of your interest in him. I don't think matrimony would suit you at all: you had much better stay with us, whom you can leave whenever you please. You could not do that so easily with a husband, and you don't like divorce. My children, pause: you will soon have had enough of each other, and then you can go your several ways in peace."

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"See here, old man; it is too late for this kind of wisdom, after all the pains you have taken to bring us together when we were parted indeed. You ought to be proud of your work, and ready to give us your blessing."

"Don't mind Robert, James. You must take him as you find him, and it encourages him to go on if you seem to pay attention. All you need is to give him time—generally a great deal of it, to be sure. When you have known him twenty years or so as I have, you will understand that he usually has some tolerably good sense at the bottom of his mind, underneath a mountain of foolishness; he would say it is like the beer after he has blown the froth off.—Get to the sense as soon as you can, dear, for we can't well wait more than a month or two for it: we have to make our plans."

"I was going to say that you had better leave the engagement unlimited as to time and say nothing about it, for then you can get tired of one another at leisure, and part without embarrassment. But if you are in such indecent haste, and seriously bent on ruin, I will assist you over the precipice as gently as may be. You will have to compromise, and humor each other a little. Go abroad for awhile, or to Florida or the Pacific, till you feel less exclusive; then come back to us. The house is big enough, and you can make your winter home here: we can't let you have her on any other terms, Jim. You can enlarge your place when the weather opens, and put in the spring and fall there: some of us will come up, or I will anyway, after trout. Perhaps I'll bring Jane: she wanted to catch some. It would not be safe for Herbert; he is too fond of bears. If you find the whole summer there too much bliss, as you will, you can divide with us at Newport. That is fair to all parties, isn't it?"

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"It will do nicely, for a rough sketch at least, and give us time to think. But there is a more serious difficulty, as you will see. Robert, he wants to give up his well-considered principles of so many years, and just for me—however he may deny it. Now I say he was mainly right. Take Life in the large view, and it is not a grand or beautiful thing. Have we any right to overlook the misery of millions, because a few of us like each other and are outwardly comfortable? I will not have him do so weak a thing as change his standards from no better reason than—well, that you went up to him for the fall fishing."

"My dear Clarice, if you set up as a Pessimist apostle, you will convert all the town, and that will never do.—You hear her, Jim? A wise man sometimes has to take his sentiments from a wiser woman. But seriously, I am ashamed of you. Having used your eyes and brains long ago and received a true impression, what right have you to cast it away, and be misled by a narrow prejudice in behalf of Life—or of some particular section of it? If he that loves a coral cheek and a ruby lip is but a redhot donkey, what shall we say of him who makes these his weathergauge to test the universe by?"

"Well, Bob, perhaps I have received a new impression, which is truer than the other—and deeper. As you told me last summer, a world with Clarice in it is quite different from a world without her. Princess—if I may use his term—Bob thinks a good deal of you too; at least he used to. You entered into his scheme of things as well as mine. Such is his duplicity, perhaps you never suspected the fact."

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"That is strange, when he has taken such pains to get me off his hands. I could hardly believe it of you, Robert, on any less authority; it was an unworthy weakness, in such a philosopher. But really now, are you going to uphold him in this—against me?"

"Far from it: you will make him think what you please—only your own opinion on this point, though so strongly held and stated, is somewhat recent. Let us have a middle ground to start from, on which all parties can meet, as in the other case. When things go to suit us, let us call it a good world: when they don't, of course it is a bad one. O, we can consider the suffering millions too; but then we ourselves are somebody, and have our own point of view. So when you two look at each other, and contemplate your own bliss, you will be optimists; and when you read the suicides in the papers, and think of the Siberian exiles and my labors in Water Street, it will be the other way. Why, I am often a pessimist in the morning, and the reverse at night. It depends on the impression you receive, as Jim says; and there are a good many impressions, and not all alike. Often you can be betwixt and between. Let us fix it that way: I am sure that ought to suit anybody."

Jim agreed that it would do very well, but Clarice seemed undecided. "It seems so frivolous to look at Life in this easy way, just because we—well, are not unhappy, and not without friends. You never do yourself justice, Robert—or very rarely. If we have been favored beyond others, we ought to be earnest and serious."

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"My dear, Time will check your frivolity, and mitigate the morbid bitterness of Jim's gloomy

contempt of life—or vice versa. If I have got you mixed up, I beg pardon: you have changed positions so, it confuses me. But as we are to be earnest and serious, we should seek to communicate our happiness to others. Hadn't I better call them in?"

The lovers consented, and I called. Mabel and Jane came with eager smiles and effusive congratulations. It is curious, the stress which the feminine intellect lays on a mere point of time, or external event, like the celebration of a union between two young people, or the first statement that such a union is to be formed; whereas we all know that the real event is mental, or at most resides in the clash and concurrence of two minds, assisted by the bodies they inhabit. Our friends had probably come to a sufficient understanding the night of Jim's arrival, a week ago: in fact the thing was practically settled when I brought back his submission, and even he must have had sense enough to know it was when she wrote him that one word, 'Come.' So what on earth is the use of making a fuss about it now? But I will not press this view, which may be too rarefied and lofty for the vulgar mind.

There were kisses, and laughter, and tears I believe—but not of the Princess' shedding—just as if something had really happened. I was sorry for Jim, he looked so sheepish. Then he, or Clarice, or both of them, to cover the awkwardness of the moment, began to extol my virtues and services—in which there was no sense at all; for suppose you have done a good thing, you don't want to be everlastingly cackling about it: the thing is done, let it stand on its own merits or demerits. To stop this, I proposed a division of the honors. "There is Herbert, who is unhappily in bed now: he set the ball rolling. He was the only one of us all who dared ask Clarice what she had done to you, Jim. And here is Clarice herself, who discovered that my health was failing and needed the air that blows over troutbrooks; give her a benefit. And here is Jane, who urged me on—drove me, I may say. But for her, I might never have had courage to beard you two dreadful people, and ask you what you meant by such conduct."

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Jane was receiving due attention, when Mabel spoke. "You must not overlook me, as if I had had no hand in it. I approved and encouraged it from the start: you know I did. And when you went away, Mr. Hartman, and they all felt so badly and thought you would never come back, I always said it would be right—always."

## THE END.

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