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Title: The Eye of Dread

Author: Payne Erskine

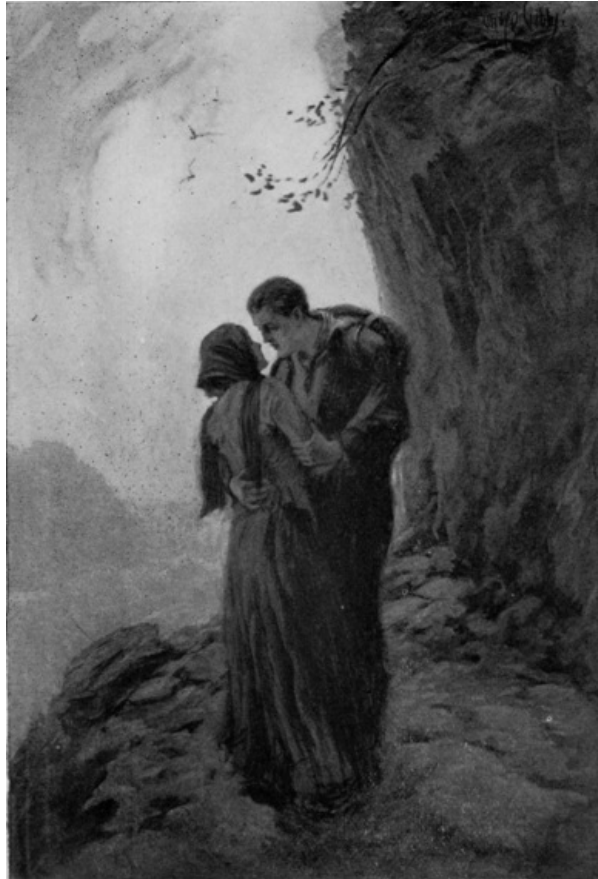
Illustrator: George Gibbs

Release Date: September 19, 2009 [EBook #30031]

Language: English

Credits: Produced by Roger Frank and the Online Distributed Proofreading Team at <https://www.pgdp.net>

*** START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK THE EYE OF DREAD ***



"Listen. Go with the love in your heart--for me."
FRONTISPIECE. *See Page 329.*

The Eye of Dread

By PAYNE ERSKINE

Author of "The Mountain Girl," "Joyful Heatherby,"
Etc.



With Frontispiece by
GEORGE GIBBS

A. L. BURT COMPANY, PUBLISHERS
114-120 East Twenty-third Street - - New York
PUBLISHED BY ARRANGEMENT WITH LITTLE, BROWN & COMPANY

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Published, October, 1913
Reprinted, October, 1913

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THE EYE OF DREAD

BOOK ONE

CHAPTER I

BETTY

Two whip-poor-wills were uttering their insistent note, hidden somewhere among the thick foliage of the maple and basswood trees that towered above the spring down behind the house where the Ballards lived. The sky in the west still glowed with amber light, and the crescent moon floated like a golden boat above the horizon's edge. The day had been unusually warm, and the family were all gathered on the front porch in the dusk. The lamps within were unlighted, and the evening wind blew the white muslin curtains out and in through the opened windows. The porch was low,--only a step from the ground,--and the grass of the dooryard felt soft and cool to the bare feet of the children.

In front and all around lay the garden--flowers and fruit quaintly intermingled. Down the long path to the gate, where three roads met, great bunches of peonies lifted white blossoms--luminously white in the moonlight; and on either side rows of currant bushes cast low, dark shadows, and here and there dwarf crab-apple trees tossed pale, scented flowers above them. In the dusky evening light the iris flowers showed frail and iridescent against the dark shadows under the bushes.

The children chattered quietly at their play, as if they felt a mystery around them, and small Betty was sure she saw fairies dancing on the iris flowers when the light breeze stirred them; but of this she said nothing, lest her practical older sister should drop a scornful word of unbelief, a thing Betty shrank from and instinctively avoided. Why should she be told there were no such things as fairies and goblins and pigwidgeons, when one might be at that very moment dancing at her elbow and hear it all?

So Betty wagged her curly golden head, wise with the wisdom of childhood, and went her own ways and thought her own thoughts. As for the strange creatures of wondrous power that peopled the earth, and the sky, and the streams, she knew they were there. She could almost see them, could almost feel them and hear them, even though they were hidden from mortal sight.

Did she not often go when the sun was setting and climb the fence behind the barn under the great locust and silver-leaf poplar trees, where none could see her, and watch the fiery griffins in the west? Could she not see them flame and flash, their wings spreading far out across the sky in fantastic flight, or drawn close and folded about them in hues of purple and crimson and gold? Could she not see the flying mist-women flinging their floating robes of softest pink and palest green around their slender limbs, and trailing them delicately across the deepening sky?

Had she not heard the giants--nay, seen them--driving their terrible steeds over the tumbled clouds, and rolling them smooth with noise of thunder, under huge rolling machines a thousand times bigger than that Farmer Hopkins used to crush the clods in his wheat field in the spring? Had she not seen the flashes of fire dart through the heavens, struck by the hoofs of the giants' huge beasts? Ah! She knew! If Martha would only listen to her, she could show her some of these true things and stop her scoffing.

Lured by these mysteries, Betty made short excursions into the garden away from the others, peering among the shadows, and gazing wide-eyed into the clusters of iris flowers above which night moths fluttered softly and silently. Maybe there were fairies there. Three could ride at once on the back of a devil's riding horse, she knew, and in the daytime they rode the dragon flies, two at a time; they were so light it was nothing for the great green and gold, big-eyed dragon flies to carry two.

Betty knew a place below the spring where the maidenhair fern grew thick and spread out wide, perfect fronds on slender brown stems, shading fairy bowers; and where taller ferns grew high and leaned over like a delicate fairy forest; and where the wild violets grew so thick you could not see the ground beneath them, and the grass was lush and long like fine green hair, and crept up the hillside and over the roots of the maple and basswood trees. Here lived the elves; she knew them well, and often lay with her head among the violets, listening for the thin sound of their elfin fiddles. Often she had drowsed the summer noon in the coolness, unheeding the dinner call, until busy Martha roused her with the sisterly scolding she knew she deserved and took in good part.

Now as Betty crept cautiously about, peering and hoping with a half-fearing expectation, a sweet, threadlike wail trembled out toward her across the moonlit and shadowed space. Her father was tuning his violin. Her mother sat at his side, hushing Bobby in her arms. Betty could hear the sound of her rockers on the porch floor. Now the plaintive call of the violin came

stronger, and she hastened back to curl up at her father's feet and listen. She closed her vision-seeing eyes and leaned against her father's knee. He felt the gentle pressure of his little daughter's head and liked it.

All the long summer day Betty's small feet had carried her on numberless errands for young and old, and as the season advanced she would be busier still. This Betty well knew, for she was old enough to remember other summers, several of them, each bringing an advancing crescendo of work. But oh, the happy days! For Betty lived in a world all her own, wherein her play was as real as her work, and labor was turned by her imaginative little mind into new forms of play, and although night often found her weary--too tired to lie quietly in her bed sometimes--the line between the two was never in her thoughts distinctly drawn.

To-night Betty's conscience was troubling her a little, for she had done two naughty things, and the pathetic quality of her father's music made her wish with all the intensity of her sensitive soul that she might confess to some one what she had done, but it was all too peaceful and sweet now to tell her mother of naughty things, and, anyway, she could not confess before the whole family, so she tried to repent very hard and tell God all about it. Somehow it was always easier to tell God about things; for she reasoned, if God was everywhere and knew everything, then he knew she had been bad, and had seen her all the time, and all she need do was to own up to it, without explaining everything in words, as she would have to do to her mother.

Brother Bobby's bare feet swung close to her cheek as they dangled from her mother's knee, and she turned and kissed them, first one and then the other, with eager kisses. He stirred and kicked out at her fretfully.

"Don't wake him, dear," said her mother.

Then Betty drew up her knees and clasped them about with her arms, and hid her face on them while she repented very hard. Mother had said that very day that she never felt troubled about the baby when Betty had care of him, and that very day she had recklessly taken him up into the barn loft, climbing behind him and guiding his little feet from one rung of the perpendicular ladder to another, teaching him to cling with clenched hands to the rounds until she had landed him in the loft. There she had persuaded him he was a swallow in his nest, while she had taken her fill of the delight of leaping from the loft down into the bay, where she had first tossed enough hay to make a soft lighting place for the twelve-foot leap.

Oh, the joy of it--flying through the air! If she could only fly up instead of down! Every time she climbed back into the loft she would stop and cuddle the little brother and toss hay over him and tell him he was a baby bird, and she was the mother bird, and must fly away and bring him nice worms. She bade him look up to the rafters above and see the mother birds flying out and in, while the little birds just sat still in their nests and opened their mouths. So Bobby sat still, and when she returned, obediently opened his mouth; but alas! he wearied of his rôle in the play, and at last crept to the very edge of the loft at a place where there was no hay spread beneath to break his fall; and when Betty looked up and saw his sweet baby face peering down at her over the edge, her heart stopped beating. How wildly she called for him to wait for her to come to him! She promised him all the dearest of her treasures if he would wait until "sister" got there.

Now, as she sat clasping her knees, her little body grew all trembling and weak again as she lived over the terrible moment when she had reached him just in time to drag him back from the edge, and to cuddle and caress him, until he lifted up his voice and wept, not because he was in the least troubled or hurt, but because it seemed to be the right thing to do.

Then she gave him the pretty round comb that held back her hair, and he promptly straightened it and broke it; and when she reluctantly brought him back to dinner--how she had succeeded in getting him down from the loft would make a chapter of diplomacy--her mother reproved her for allowing him to take it, and lapped the two pieces and wound them about with thread, and told her she must wear the broken comb after this. She was glad--glad it was broken--and she had treasured it so--and glad that her mother had scolded her; she wished she had scolded harder instead of speaking words of praise that cut her to the heart. Oh, oh, oh! If he had fallen over, he would be dead now, and she would have killed him! Thus she tortured herself, and repented very hard.

The other sin she had that day committed she felt to be a double sin, because she knew all the time it was wrong and did it deliberately. When she went out with the corn meal to feed the little chicks and fetch in the new-laid eggs, she carried, concealed under her skirt, a small, squat book of Robert Burns' poems. These poems she loved; not that she understood them, but that the rhythm pleased her, and the odd words and half-comprehended phrases stirred her imagination.

So, after feeding the chicks and gathering the eggs, she did not return to the house, but climbed instead up into the top of the silver-leaf poplar behind the barn, and sat there long, swaying with the swaying tree top and reading the lines that most fascinated her and stirred her soul, until she forgot she must help Martha with the breakfast dishes--forgot she must carry milk to the neighbor's--forgot she must mind the baby and peel the potatoes for dinner. It was so delightful to sway and swing and chant the rhythmic lines over and over that almost she forgot she was being bad, and Martha had done the things she ought to have done, and the baby cried himself to sleep without her, and lay with the pathetic tear marks still on his cheeks, but her tired mother had only looked reproachfully at her and had not said one word. Oh, dear! If she could only be a good girl! If only she might pass one day being good all day long with nothing to

regret!

Now with the wailing of the violin her soul grew hungry and sad, and a strange, unchildish fear crept over her, a fear of the years to come--so long and endless they would be, always coming, coming, one after another; and here she was, never to stop living, and every day doing something that she ought not and every evening repenting it--and her father might stop loving her, and her sister might stop loving her, and her little brother might stop loving her, and Bobby might die--and even her mother might die or stop loving her, and she might grow up and marry a man who forgot after a while to love her--and she might be very poor--even poorer than they were now, and have to wash dishes every day and no one to help her--until at last she could bear the sadness no longer, and could not repent as hard as she ought, there where she could not go down on her knees and just cry and cry. So she slipped away and crept in the darkness to her own room, where her mother found her half an hour later on her knees beside the bed fast asleep. She lovingly undressed the limp, weary little girl, lifted her tenderly and laid her curly head on the pillow, and kissed her cheek with a repentant sigh of her own, regretting that she must lay so many tasks on so small a child.

CHAPTER II

WATCHING THE BEES

Father Ballard walked slowly up the path from the garden, wiping his brow, for the heat was oppressive. "Mary, my dear, I see signs of swarming. The bees are hanging out on that hive under the Tolman Sweet. Where's Betty?"

"She's down cellar churning, but she can leave. Bobby's getting fretful, anyway, and she can take him under the trees and watch the bees and amuse him. Betty!" Mary Ballard went to the short flight of steps leading to the paved basement, dark and cool: "Betty, father wants you to watch the bees, dear. Find Bobby. He's so still I'm afraid he's out at the currant bushes again, and he'll make himself sick. Keep an eye on the hive under the Tolman Sweet particularly, dear."

Gladly Betty bounded up the steps and darted away to find the baby who was still called the baby by reason of his being the last arrival, although he was nearly three, and an active little tyrant at that. Watching the bees was Betty's delight. Minding the baby, lolling under the trees reading her books, gazing up into the great branches, and all the time keeping an eye on the hives scattered about in the garden,--nothing could be pleasanter.

Naturally Betty could not understand all she read in the books she carried out from the library, for purely children's books were very few in those days. The children of the present day would be dismayed were they asked to read what Betty pondered over with avidity and loved. Her father's library was his one extravagance, even though the purchase of books was always a serious matter, each volume being discussed and debated about, and only obtained after due preparation by sundry small economies.

As for worldly possessions, the Ballards had started out with nothing at all but their own two hands, and, as assets, well-equipped brains, their love for each other, a fair amount of thrift, and a large share of what Mary Ballard's old Grannie Sherman used to designate as "gumption." Exactly what she intended should be understood by the word it would be hard to say, unless it might be the faculty with which, when one thing proved to be no longer feasible as a shift toward progress and the making of a living for an increasing family, they were enabled to discover other means and work them out to a productive conclusion.

Thus, when times grew hard under the stress of the Civil War, and the works of art representing many hours of Bertrand Ballard's keenest effort lay in his studio unpurchased, and even carefully created portraits, ordered and painstakingly painted, were left on his hands, unclaimed and unpaid for, he quietly turned his attention to his garden, saying, "People can live without pictures, but they must eat."

So he obtained a few of the choicest of the quickly produced small fruits and vegetables and flowers, and soon had rare and beautiful things to sell. His clever hands, which before had made his own stretchers for his canvases, and had fashioned and gilded with gold leaf the frames for his own paintings, now made trellises for his vines and boxes for his fruits, and when the price of sugar climbed to the very top of the gamut, he created beehives on new models, and bought a book on bee culture; ere long he had combs of delicious honey to tempt the lovers of sweets.

But how came Bertrand Ballard away out in Wisconsin in a country home, painting pictures for people who knew little or nothing of art, and cared not to know more, raising fruits and keeping bees for the means to live? Ah, that is another story, and to tell it would make another book; suffice it to say that for love of a beautiful woman, strong and wise and sweet, he had followed her farmer father out into the newer west from old New York State.

There, frail in health and delicate and choice in his tastes, but brave in spirit, he took up the battle of the weak with life, and fought it like a strong man, valiantly and well. And where got he

his strength? How are the weak ever made strong? Through strength of love--the inward fire that makes great the soul, while consuming the dross of false values and foolish estimates--from the merry heart that could laugh through any failure, and most of all from the beautiful hand, supple and workful, and gentle and forceful, that lay in his.

But this is not the story of Bertrand Ballard, except incidentally as he and his family play their part in the drama that centers in the lives of two lads, one of whom--Peter Craigmile, Junior--comes now swinging up the path from the front gate, where three roads meet, brave in his new uniform of blue, with lifted head, and eyes grave and shining with a kind of solemn elation.

"Bertrand, here comes Peter Junior in a new uniform," Mary Ballard called to her husband, who was working at a box in which he meant to fit glass sides for an aquarium for the edification of the little ones. He came quickly out from his workroom, and Mary rose from her seat and pushed her mending basket one side, and together they walked down the path to meet the youth.

"Peter Junior, have you done it? Oh, I'm sorry!"

"Why, Mary! why, Mary! I'm astonished! Not sorry?" Bertrand took the boy's hand in both his own and looked up in his eyes, for the lad was tall, much taller than his friend. "I would go myself if I only had the strength and were not near-sighted."

"Thank the Lord!" said his wife, fervently.

"Why, Mary--Mary--I'm astonished!" he said again. "Our country--"

"Yes, 'Our Country' is being bled to death," she said, taking the boy's hand in hers for a moment; and, turning, they walked back to the house with the young volunteer between them. "No, I'm not reconciled to having our young men go down there and die by the thousands from disease and bullets and in prisons. It's wrong! I say war is iniquitous, and the issues, North or South, are not worth it. Peter, I had hoped you were too young. Why did you?"

"I couldn't help it, Mrs. Ballard. The call for fifty thousand more came, and father gave his consent; and, anyway, they are taking a younger set now than at first."

"Yes, and soon they'll take an older set, and then they'll take the small and frail and near-sighted ones, and then--" She stopped suddenly, with a contrite glance at her husband's face. He hated to be small and frail and near-sighted. She stepped round to his side and put her hand in his. "I'm thankful you are, Bertrand," she said quietly. "You'll stay to tea with us, won't you, Peter? We'll have it out of doors."

"Yes, I'll stay--thank you. It may be the last time, and mother--I came to see if you'd go up home and see mother, Mrs. Ballard. I kind of thought you'd think as father and Mr. Ballard do about it, and I thought you might be able to help mother to see it that way, too. You see, mother--she--I always thought you were kind of strong and would see things sort of--well--big, you know, more--as we men do." He held his head high and looked off as he spoke.

She exchanged a half-smiling glance with her husband, and their hands clasped tighter. "Maybe, though--if you feel this way--you can't help mother--but what shall I do?" The big boy looked wistfully down at her.

"I may not be able to help her to see things you want, Peter Junior. Maybe she would be happier in seeing things her own way; but I can sympathize with her. Perhaps I can help her to hope for the best, and anyway--we can--just talk it over."

"Thank you, Mrs. Ballard, thank you. I don't care how she sees it, if--if--she'll only be happier--and--give her consent. I can't bear to go away without that; but if she won't give it, I must go anyway,--you know."

"Yes," she said, smiling, "I suppose we women have to be forced sometimes, or we never would allow some things to be done. You enlisted first and then went to her for her consent? Yes, you are a man, Peter Junior. But I tell you, if you were my son, I would never give my consent--nor have it forced from me--still--I would love you better for doing this."

"My love, your inconsistency is my joy," said her husband, as she passed into the house and left them together.

The sun still shone hotly down, but the shadows were growing longer, and Betty left baby asleep under the Harvest apple tree where she had been staying patiently during the long, warm hours, and sat at her father's feet on the edge of the porch, where apparently she was wholly occupied in tracing patterns with her bare toes in the sand of the path. Now and then she ran out to the Harvest apple tree and back, her golden head darting among the green shrubbery like a sunbeam. She wished to do her full duty by the bees and the baby, and at the same time hear all the talk of the older ones, and watch the fascinating young soldier in his new uniform.

As bright as the sunbeam, and as silent, she watched and listened. Her heart beat fast with excitement, as it often did these days, when she heard them talk of the war and the men who went away, perhaps never to return, or to return with great glory. Now here was Peter Junior going. He already had his beautiful new uniform, and he would march and drill and carry a gun, and halt and present arms, along with the older men she had seen in the great camp out on the high bluffs which overlooked the wide, sweeping, rushing, willful Wisconsin River.

Oh, if she were only a man and as old as Peter Junior, she would go with him; but it was very grand to know him even. Why was she a girl? If God had only asked her which she would rather be when he had made her out of dust, she would have told him to make her a man, so she might

be a soldier. It was not fair. There was Bobby; he would be a man some day, and he could ride on a large black horse like the knights of old, and go to wars, and rescue people, and do deeds of arms. What deeds of arms were, she little knew, but it was something very strong and wonderful that only knights and soldiers did.

Betty heaved a deep sigh, and put out her hand and softly touched Peter Junior's trousers. He thought it was the kitten purring about. No, God had not treated her fairly. Now she must grow up and be only a woman, and wash dishes, and sweep and dust, and get very tired, and wear dresses--and oh, dear! But then perhaps God had to do that way, for if he had given everybody a choice, everybody would choose to be men, and there would be no women to mind the home and take care of the little children, and it would be a very sad kind of world, as she had often heard her father say. Perhaps God had to do with them as Peter Junior had done with his mother when he enlisted first and asked her consent afterwards; just make them girls, and then try to convince them afterwards that it was a fine thing to be a girl. She wished she were Bobby instead of Betty--but then--Bobby might not have liked that.

She glanced wistfully at the sleeping child and saw him toss his arms about, and knew she ought to be there to sway a green branch over him to keep the little gnats and flies from bothering him and waking him; and the bees might swarm and no one see them.

"Father, is it three o'clock yet?"

"Yes, deary, why?"

"Goody! The bees won't swarm now, will they? Will you bring Bobby in, father?"

"He is very well there; we won't disturb him."

Peter Junior looked down on the little girl, so full of vitality and life and inspiration, so vibrant with enthusiasm, and saw her vaguely as a slightly disturbing element, but otherwise of little moment in the world's economy. His thoughts were on greater things.

Betty accepted her father's decision without protest, as she accepted most things,--a finality to be endured and made the best of,--so she continued to run back and forth between the sleeping child and the porch, thereby losing much interesting dialogue,--all about camps and fighting and scout duty,--until at last her mother returned and with a glance at her small daughter's face said:--

"Father, will you bring baby in now and put him in his cradle? Betty has had him nearly all day." And father went. Oh, beautiful mother! How did she know!

Then Betty settled herself at Peter Junior's feet and looked up in his eyes gravely. "What will you be, now you are a soldier?" she asked.

"Why, a soldier."

"No, I mean, will you be a general--or a flag carrier--or will you drum? I'd be a general if I were you--or else a drummer. I think you would be very handsome for a general."

Peter Junior threw back his head and laughed. It was the first time he had laughed that day, and yet he was both proud and happy. "Would you like to be a soldier?"

"Yes."

"But you might be killed, or have your leg shot off--or--"

"I know. So might you--but you would go, anyway--wouldn't you?"

"Certainly."

"Well, then you understand how I feel. I'd like to be a man, and go to war, and 'Have a part to tear a cat in,' too."

"What's that? What's that? Mary, do you hear that?" said her father, resuming his seat at Peter's side, and hearing her remark.

"Why, father, wouldn't you? You know you'd like to go to war. I heard what you said to mother, and, anyway--I'd just like to be a man and 'Have a part to tear a cat in,' the way men have."

Bertrand Ballard looked down and patted his little daughter's head, then caught her up and placed her on his knee. He realized suddenly that his child was an entity unfathomed, separate from himself, working out her own individuality almost without guidance, except such as he and his Mary were unconsciously giving to her by their daily acts and words.

"What books are those you have there? Don't you know you mustn't take father's Shakespeare out and leave it on the grass?"

Betty laughed. "How did you know I had Shakespeare?"

"Didn't you say you 'Would like a part to tear a cat in'?"

"Oh, have you read 'Midsummer Night's Dream'?" She lifted her head from his bosom and eyed him gravely a moment, then snuggled comfortably down again. "But then, I suppose you have read everything." Her father and Peter both laughed.

"Were you reading 'Midsummer Night's Dream' out there?"

"No, I've read that lots of times--long ago. I'm reading 'The Merry Wives of Windsor' now."

"Mary, Mary, do you hear this? I think it's time our Betty had a little supervision in her reading."

Mary Ballard came to the door from the tea table where she had been arranging her little set of delicate china, her one rare treasure and inheritance. "Yes, I knew she was reading--whatever she fancied, but I thought I wouldn't interfere--not yet. I have so little time, for one thing, and, anyway, I thought she might browse a bit. She's like a calf in rare pastures, and I don't think she understands enough to do her harm--or much good, either. Those things slide off from her like water off a duck's back."

Betty looked anxiously up at her mother. What things was she missing? She must read them all over again.

"What else have you out there, Betty?" asked her father.

Betty dropped her head shamefacedly. She never knew when she was in the right and when wrong. Sometimes the very things which seemed most right to her were most wrong. "That's 'Paradise Lost.' It was an old book, father. There was a tear in the back when I took it down. I like to read about Satan. I like to read about the mighty hosts and the angels and the burning lake. Is that hell? I was pretending if the bees swarmed that they would be the mighty host of bad angels falling out of heaven."

Again Peter flung back his head and laughed. He looked at the child with new interest, but Betty did not smile back at him. She did not like being laughed at.

"It's true," she said; "they did fall out of heaven in a swarm, and it was like over at High Knob on the river bank, only a million times higher, because they were so long falling. 'From morn till noon they fell, from noon till dewy eve.'" Betty looked off into space with half-closed eyes. She was seeing them fall. "It was a long time to be in suspense, wasn't it, father?" Then every one laughed. Even mother joined in. She was putting the last touches to the tea table.

"Mary, my dear, I think we'd better take a little supervision of the child's reading--I do, really."

The gate at the end of the long path to the house clicked, and another lad came swinging up the walk, slightly taller than Peter Junior, but otherwise enough like him in appearance to be his own brother. He was not as grave as Peter, but smiled as he hailed them, waving his cap above his head. He also wore the blue uniform, and it was new.

"Hallo, Peter! You here?"

"Of course I'm here. I thought you were never coming."

"You did?"

Betty sprang from her father's lap and ran to meet him. She slipped her hand in his and hopped along at his side. "Oh, Rich! Are you going, too? I wish I were you."

He lifted the child to a level with his face and kissed her, then set her on her feet again. "Never wish that, Betty. It would spoil a nice little girl."

"I'm not such a nice little girl. I--I--love Satan--and they're going to--to--supervise my reading." She clung to his hand and nodded her head with finality. He swung her along, making her take long leaps as they walked.

"You love Satan? I thought you loved me!"

"It's the same thing, Rich," said Peter Junior, with a grin.

Bertrand had gone to the kitchen door. "Mary, my love, here's Richard Kildene." She entered the living room, carrying a plate of light, hot biscuit, and hurried out to Richard, greeting him warmly--even lovingly.

"Bertrand, won't you and the boys carry the table out to the garden?" she suggested. "Open both doors and take it carefully. It will be pleasanter here in the shade."

The young men sprang to do her bidding, and the small table was borne out under the trees, the lads enumerating with joy the articles of Mary Ballard's simple menu.

"Hot biscuits and honey! My golly! Won't we wish for this in about two months from now?" said Richard.

"Cream and caraway cookies!" shouted Peter Junior, turning back to the porch to help Bertrand carry the chairs. "Of course we'll be wishing for this before long, but that's part of soldiering."

"We're not looking forward to a well-fed, easy time of it, so we'll just make the best of this to-night, and eat everything in sight," said Richard.

Bertrand preferred to change the subject. "This is some of our new white clover honey," he said. "I took it from that hive over there last evening, and they've been working all day as if they had had new life given them. All bees want is a lot of empty space for storing honey."

Richard followed Mrs. Ballard into the kitchen for the tea. "Where are the other children?" he asked.

"Martha and Jamie are spending a week with my mother and father. They love to go there, and mother--and father, also, seem never to have enough of them. Baby is still asleep, and I must waken him, too, or he won't sleep to-night. I hung a pail of milk over the spring to keep it cool, and the butter is there also--and the Dutch cheese in a tin box. Can you--wait, I'd better go with you. We'll leave the tea to steep a minute."

They passed through the house and down toward the spring house under the maple and basswood trees at the back, walking between rows of currant bushes where the fruit hung red.

"I hate to leave all this--maybe forever," said the boy. The corners of his mouth drooped a little, and he looked down at Mary Ballard with a tender glint in his deep blue eyes. His eyes were as blue as the lake on a summer's evening, and they were shaded by heavy dark brown lashes, almost black. His brows and hair were the same deep brown. Peter Junior's were a shade lighter, and his hair more curling. It was often a matter of discussion in the village as to which of the boys was the handsomer. That they were both fine-looking lads was always conceded.

Mary Ballard turned toward him impulsively. "Why did you do this, Richard? Why? I can't feel that this fever for war is right. It is terrible. We are losing the best blood in the land in a wicked war." She took his two hands in hers, and her eyes filled. "When we first came here, your mother was my dearest friend. You never knew her, but I loved her--and her loss was much to me. Richard, why didn't you consult us?"

"I hadn't any one but you and your husband to care. Oh, Aunt Hester loves me, of course, and is awfully good to me--but the Elder--I always feel somehow as if he expects me to go to the bad. He never had any use for my father, I guess. Was my father--was--he no good? Don't mind telling me the truth: I ought to know."

"Your father was not so well known here, but he was, in Bertrand's estimation, a royal Irish gentleman. We both liked him; no one could help it. Never think hardily of him."

"Why has he never cared for me? Why have I never known him?"

"There was a quarrel--or--some unpleasantness between your uncle and him; it's an old thing."

Richard's lip quivered an instant, then he drew himself up and smiled on her, then he stooped and kissed her. "Some of us must go; we can't let this nation be broken up. Some men must give their lives for it; and I'm one of those who ought to go, for I have no one to mourn for me. Half the class has enlisted."

"I venture to say you suggested it, too?"

"Well--yes."

"And Peter Junior was the first to follow you?"

"Well, yes! I'm sorry--because of Aunt Hester--but we always do pull together, you know. See here, let's not think of it in this way. There are other ways. Perhaps I'll come back with straps on my shoulders and marry Betty some day."

"God grant you may; that is, if you come back as you left us. You understand me? The same boy?"

"I do and I will," he said gravely.

That was a happy hour they spent at the evening meal, and many an evening afterwards, when hardship and weariness had made the lads seem more rugged and years older, they spoke of it and lived it over.

CHAPTER III

A MOTHER'S STRUGGLE

"Come, Lady, come. You're slow this morning." Mary Ballard drove a steady, well-bred, chestnut mare with whom she was on most friendly terms. Usually her carryall was filled with children, for she kept no help, and when she went abroad, she must perforce take the children with her or spend an unquiet hour or two while leaving them behind. This morning she had left the children at home, and carried in their stead a basket of fruit and flowers on the seat beside her. "Come, Lady, come; just hurry a little." She touched the mare with the whip, a delicate reminder to haste, which Lady assumed to be a fly and treated as such with a switch of her tail.

The way seemed long to Mary Ballard this morning, and the sun beating down on the parched fields made the air quiver with heat. The unpaved road was heavy with dust, and the mare seemed to drag her feet through it unnecessarily as she jogged along. Mary was anxious and dreaded the visit she must make. She would be glad when it was over. What could she say to the stricken woman who spent her time behind closed blinds? Presently she left the dust behind and drove along under the maple trees that lined the village street, over cool roads that were kept well sprinkled.

The Craigmiles lived on the main street of the town in the most dignified of the well-built homes of cream-colored brick, with a wide front stoop and white columns at the entrance. Mary was shown into the parlor by a neat serving maid, who stepped softly as if she were afraid of waking some one. The room was dark and cool, but the air seemed heavy with a lingering musky odor. The dark furniture was set stiffly back against the walls, the floor was covered with a velvet carpet of rich, dark colors, and oil portraits were hung about in heavy gold frames.

Mary looked up at two of these portraits with pride, and rebelled that the light was so shut out that they must always be seen in the obscurity, for Bertrand had painted them, and she

considered them her husband's best work. In the painting of them and the long sittings required the intimacy between the two families had begun. Really it had begun before that, for there were other paintings in that home--portraits, old and fine, which Elder Craigmile's father had brought over from Scotland when he came to the new world to establish a new home. These paintings were the pride of Elder Craigmile's heart, and the delight of Bertrand Ballard's artist soul.

To Bertrand they were a discovery--an oasis in a desert. One day the banker had called him in to look at a canvas that was falling to pieces with age, in the hope that the artist might have the skill to restore it. From that day the intimacy began, and a warm friendship sprang up between the two families, founded on Bertrand's love for the old works of art, wherein the ancestors of Peter Craigmile, Senior, looked out from their frames with a dignity and warmth and grace rarely to be met with in this new western land.

Bertrand's heart leaped with joy as he gazed on one of them, the one he had been called on to save if possible. "This must be a genuine Reynolds. Ah! They could paint, those old fellows!" he cried.

"Genuine Reynolds? Why, man, it is! it is! You are a true artist. You knew it in a moment." Peter Senior's heart was immediately filled with admiration for the younger man. "Yes, they were a good family--the Craigmiles of Aberdeen. My father brought all the old portraits coming to him to this country to keep the family traditions alive. It's a good thing--a good thing!"

"She was a beautiful woman, the original of that portrait."

"She was a great beauty, indeed. Her husband took her to London to have it done by the great painter. Ah, the Scotch lasses were fine! Look at that color! You don't see that here, no?"

"Our American women are too pale, for the most part; but then again, your men are too red."

"Ah! Beef and red wine! Beef and red wine! With us in Scotland it was good oatcakes and home-brew--and the air. The air of the Scotch hills and the sea. You don't have such air here, I've often heard my father say. I've spent the greater part of my life here, so it's mostly the traditions I have--they and the portraits."

Thus it came about that owing to his desire to keep up the line of family portraits, Peter Craigmile engaged the artist to paint the picture of his gentle, sweet-faced wife. She was painted seated, a little son on either side of her; and now in the dimness she looked out from the heavy gold frame, a half smile playing about her lips, on her lap an open book, and about the low-cut crimson velvet bodice rare old lace pinned at the bosom with a large brooch of wrought gold, framing a delicately cut cameo.

As Mary Ballard sat in the parlor waiting, she looked up in the dusky light at this picture. Ah, yes! Her Bertrand also was a great painter. If only he could be where he might become known and appreciated! She sighed for another reason, also, as she regarded it: because the two little sons clasped by the mother's arms were both gone. Sunny-haired Scotch laddies they were, with fair, wide brows, each in kilt and plaid, with bare knees and ruddy cheeks. What delight her husband had taken in painting it! And now the mother mourned unceasingly the loss of those little sons, and of one other whom Mary had never seen, and of whom they had no likeness. It was indeed hard that the one son left them,--their firstborn,--their hope and pride, should now be going away to leave them, going perhaps to his death.

The door opened and a shadow swept slowly across the room. Always pale and in black--wrapped in her mourning the shadow of sorrow never left this mother; and now it seemed to envelop even Mary Ballard, bright and warm of nature as she was.

Hester Craigmile barely smiled as she held out her slender, blue-veined hand.

"It is very good of you to come to me, Mary Ballard, but you can't make me think I should be reconciled to this. No! It is hard enough to be reconciled to the blows God has dealt me, without accepting what my husband and son see fit to give me in this." Her hand was cold and passive, and her voice was restrained and low.

Mary Ballard's hands were warm, and her tones were rich and full. She took the proffered hand in both her own and drew the shadow down to sit at her side.

"No, no. I'm not going to try to make you reconciled, or anything. I've just come to tell you that I understand, and that I think you are justified in withholding your consent to Peter Junior's going off in this way."

"If he were killed, I should feel as if I had consented to his death."

"Of course you would. I should feel just the same. Naturally you can't forbid his going,--now,--for it's too late, and he would have to go with the feeling of disobedience in his heart, and that would be cruel to him, and worse for you."

"I know. His father has consented; they think I am wrong. My son thinks I am wrong. But I can't! I can't!" In her suppressed tones sounded the ancient wail of women--mothers crying for their sons sacrificed in war. For a few moments neither of them spoke. It was hard for Mary to break the silence. Her friend sat at her side withdrawn and still; then she lifted her eyes to the picture of herself and the children and spoke again, only breathing the words: "Peter Junior--my beautiful oldest boy--he is the last--the others are all gone--three of them."

"Peter Junior is splendid. I thought so last evening as I saw him coming up the path. I took it home to myself--what I should feel, and what I would think if he were my son. Somehow we

women are so inconsistent and foolish. I knew if he were my son, I never could give my consent to his going, never in the world,--but there! I would be so proud of him for doing just what your boy has done; I would look up to him in admiration, and be so glad that he was just that kind of a man!"

Hester Craigmile turned and looked steadily in her friend's eyes, but did not open her lips, and after a moment Mary continued:--

"To have one's sons taken like these--is--is different. We know they are safe with the One who loved little children; we know they are safe and waiting for us. But to have a boy grow into a young man like Peter Junior--so straight and fine and beautiful--and then to have him come and say: 'I'm going to help save our country and will die for it if I must!' Why, my heart would grow big with thanksgiving that I had brought such an one into the world and reared him. I--What would I do! I couldn't tell him he might go,--no,--but I'd just take him in my arms and bless him and love him a thousand times more for it, so he could go away with that warm feeling all about his heart; and then--I'd just pray and hope the war might end soon and that he might come back to me rewarded, and--and--still good."

"That's it. If he would,--I don't distrust my son,--but there are always things to tempt, and if--if he were changed in that way, or if he never came back,--I would die."

"I know. We can't help thinking about ourselves and how we are left--or how we feel--" Mary hesitated and was loath to go on with that train of thought, but her friend caught her meaning and rose in silence and paced the room a moment, then returned.

"It is easy to talk in that way when one has not lost," she said.

"I know it seems so, but it is not easy, Hester Craigmile. It is hard--so hard that I came near staying at home this morning. It seemed as if I could not--could not--"

"Yes, what I said was bitter, and it wasn't honest. You were good to come to me--and what you have said is true. It has helped me; I think it will help me."

"Then good-by. I'll go now, but I'll come again soon." She left the shadow sitting there with the basket of fruit and flowers at her side unnoticed and forgotten, and stepped quietly out of the darkened room into the sunlight and fresh air.

"I do wish I could induce her to go out a little--or open up her house. I wish--" Mary Ballard said no more, but shut her lips tightly on her thoughts, untied the mare, and drove slowly away.

Hester Craigmile stood for a moment gazing on the picture of her little sons, then for an hour or more wandered up and down over her spacious home, going from room to room, mechanically arranging and rearranging the chairs and small articles on the mantels and tables. Nothing was out of place. No dust or disorder anywhere, and there was the pity of it. If only a boy's cap could be found lying about, or books left carelessly where they ought not to be! One closed door she passed again and again. Once she laid her hand on the knob, but passed on, leaving it still unopened. At last she turned, and, walking swiftly down the long hall, entered the room.

There the blinds were closed and the curtains drawn, and everything set in as perfect order as in the parlor below. She sat down in a chair placed back against the wall and folded her hands in her lap. No, it was not so hard for Mary Ballard. It would not be, even if she had a son old enough to go. Mary had work to do.

On the wall above Hester's head was one of the portraits which helped to establish the family dignity of the Craigmiles. If the blinds had been open, one could have seen it in sharp contrast to the pale moth of a woman who sat beneath it. The painting, warm and rich in tone, was of a dame in a long-bodied dress. She held a fan in her hand and wore feathers in her powdered hair. Her eyes gazed straight across the room into those of a red-coated soldier who wore a sword at his side and gold on his shoulders. Yes, there had been soldiers in the family before Peter Junior's time.

This was Peter Junior's room, but the boy was there no longer. He had come home from college one day and had entered it a boy, and then he came out of it and down to his mother, dressed in his new uniform--a man. Now he entered it no more, for he stayed at the camp over on the high bluff of the Wisconsin River. He was wholly taken up with his new duties there, and his room had been set in order and closed as if he were dead.

Sitting there, Hester heard the church clock peal out the hour of twelve, and started. Soon she would hear the front door open and shut, and a heavy tread along the lower hall, and she would go down and sit silently at the table opposite her husband, they two alone. There would be silence, because there would be nothing to say. He loved her and was tender of her, but his word was law, and in all matters he was dictator, lawmaker, and judge, and from his decisions there was no appeal. It never occurred to him that there ever need be. So Hester Craigmile, reserved and intense, closed her lips on her own thoughts, which it seemed to her to be useless to utter, and let them eat her heart out in silence.

At the moment expected she heard the step on the floor of the vestibule, and the door opened, but it was not her husband's step alone that she heard. Surely it was Peter Junior's and his cousin's. Were they coming to dinner? But no word had been sent. Hester stepped out of the room and stood at the head of the stairs waiting. She did not wish to go down and meet her son before the others, and if he did not find her below, he would know where to look for her.

Peter Senior was an Elder in the Presbyterian Church, and he was always addressed as Elder, even by his wife and son. On the street he was always Elder Craigmile. She heard the men enter

the dining room and the door close after them, but still she waited. The maid would have to be told to put two more places at the table, but Hester did not move. The Elder might attend to that. Presently she heard quick steps returning and knew her son was coming. She went to meet him and was clasped in his arms, close and hard.

"You were waiting for me here? Come, mother, come." He stroked her smooth, dark hair, and put his cheek to hers. It was what she needed, what her heart was breaking for. She could even let him go easier after this. Sometimes her husband kissed her, but only when he went a journey or when he returned, a grave kiss of farewell or greeting; but in her son's clasp there was something of her own soul's pent-up longing.

"You'll come down, mother? Rich came home with me."

"Yes, I heard his voice. I am glad he came."

"See here, mother! I know what you are doing. This won't do. Every one who goes to war doesn't get killed or go to the bad. Look at that old redcoat up in my room. He wasn't killed, or where would I be now? I'm coming back, just as he did. We are born to fight, we Craigmiles, and father feels it or he never would have given his consent."

Slowly they went down the long winding flight of stairs--a flight with a smooth banister down which it had once been Peter Junior's delight to slide when there was no one nigh to reprove. Now he went down with his arm around his slender mother's waist, and now and then he kissed her cheek like a lover.

The Elder looked up as they entered, with a slight wince of disapproval, the only demonstration of reproof he ever gave his wife, which changed instantly to a slight smile, as he noticed the faint color in her cheek, and a brighter light in her eyes than there was at breakfast. He and Richard were both seated as they entered, but they rose instantly, and the Elder placed her chair with all the manner of his forefathers, a courtesy he never neglected.

Hester Craigmile forced herself to converse, and tried to smile as if there were no impending gloom. It was here Mary Ballard's influence was felt by them all. She had helped her friend more than she knew.

"I'm glad to see you, Richard; I was afraid I might not."

"Oh, no, Aunt Hester. I'd never leave without seeing you. I went into the bank and the Elder asked me to dinner and I jumped at the chance."

"This is your home always, you know."

"And it's good to think of, too, Aunt Hester."

She looked at her son and then her nephew. "You are so like in your uniforms I would not know you apart on the street in the dark," she said. Richard shot a merry glance in his uncle's eyes, then only smiled decorously with him and Peter Junior.

"I wish you'd visit the camp and see us drill. We go like clockwork, Peter and I. They call us the twins."

"There is a very good reason for that, for your mother and I were twins, and you resemble her, while Peter Junior resembles me," said the Elder.

"Yes," said Hester, "Peter Junior looks like his father;" but as she glanced at her son she knew his soul was hers.

Thus the meal passed in quiet, decorous talk, touching on nothing vital, but holding a smoldering fire underneath. The young men said nothing about the fact that the regiment had been called to duty, and soon the camp on the bluff would be breaking up. They dared not touch on the past, and they as little dared touch on the future--indeed there might be no future. So they talked of indifferent things, and Hester parted with her nephew as if they were to meet again soon, except that she called him back when he was halfway down the steps and kissed him again. As for her son, she took him up to his room and there they stayed for an hour, and then he came out and she was left in the house alone.

CHAPTER IV

LEAVE-TAKING

Early in the morning, while the earth was still a mass of gray shadow and mist, and the sky had only begun to show faint signs of the flush of dawn, Betty, awake and alert, crept softly out of bed, not to awaken Martha, who slept the sleep of utter weariness at her side. Martha had returned only the day before from her visit to her grandfather's, a long carriage ride away from Leauvite.

Betty bathed hurriedly, giving a perfunctory brushing to the tangled mass of curls, and getting into her clothing swiftly and silently. She had been cautioned the night before by her mother not

to awaken her sister by getting up at too early an hour, for she would be called in plenty of time to drive over with the rest to see the soldiers off. But what if her mother should forget! So she put on her new white dress and gathered a few small parcels which she had carefully tied up the night before, and her hat and little white linen cape, and taking her shoes in her hand, softly descended the stairs.

"Betty, Betty," her mother spoke in a sleepy voice from her own room as the child crept past her door; "why, my dear, it isn't time to get up yet. We shan't start for hours."

"I heard Peter Junior say they were going to strike camp at daybreak, and I want to see them strike it. You don't need to get up. I can go over there alone."

"Why, no, child! Mother couldn't let you do that. They don't want little girls there. Go back to bed, dear. Did you wake Martha?"

"Oh, mother. Can't I go downstairs? I don't want to go to bed again. I'll be very still."

"Will you lie on the lounge and try to go to sleep again?"

"Yes, mother."

Mary Ballard turned with a sigh and presently fell asleep, and Betty softly continued her way and obediently lay down in the darkened room below; but sleep she could not. At last, having satisfied her conscience by lying quietly for a while, she stole to the open door, for in that peaceful spot the Ballards slept with doors and windows wide open all through the warm nights. Oh, but the world was cool and mysterious, and the air was sweet! Little rustling noises made her feel as if strange beings were stirring; above her head were soft chirpings, and somewhere a bird was calling an undulating, long-drawn note, low and sweet, like a tone drawn from her father's violin.

Betty sat on the edge of the porch and put on her shoes, and then walked down the path to the gate. The white peonies and the iris flowers were long since gone, and on the Harvest apple trees and the Sweet Boughs the fruit hung ripening. All Betty's life long she never forgot this wonderful moment of the breaking of day. She listened for sounds to come to her from the camp far away on the river bluff, but none were heard, only the restless moving of her grandfather's team taking their early feed in the small pasture lot near by.

How fresh everything smelled! And the sky! Surely it must be like this in heaven! It must be heaven showing through, while the world slept. She was glad she had awakened early so she might see it,—she and God and the angels, and all the wild things of earth.

Slowly everything around her grew plainer, and long rays of color, faintly pink, streamed up into the sky from the eastern horizon; then suddenly some pale gray, floating clouds above her head blossomed into a wonderful rose laid upon a sea of gold, then gradually turned shell-pink, then faded through changing shades to daytime clouds of white. She wondered if the soldiers saw it, too. They were breaking camp now, surely, for it was day. Still she swung on the gate and dreamed, until a voice roused her.

"So Betty sleeps all night on the gate like a chicken on the fence." A pair of long arms seized her and lifted her high in the air to a pair of strong shoulders. Then she was tossed about and her cheeks rubbed red against grandfather Clide's stubby beard, until she laughed aloud. "What are you doing here on the gate?"

"I was watching the sky. I think God looked through and smiled, for all at once it blossomed. Now the colors are gone."

Grandfather Clide set her gently on her feet and stood looking gravely down on her for a moment. "So?" he said.

"The soldiers are striking camp over there, and then they are going to march to the square, and then every one is to see them form and salute—and then they are to march to the station, and—and—then—and then I don't know what will be—I think glory."

Her grandfather shook his head, his thoughtful face half smiling and half grave. He took her hand. "Come, we'll see what Jack and Jill are up to." He led her to the pasture lot and the horses came and thrust their heads over the fence and whinnied. "See? They want their oats." Then Betty was lifted to old Jack's bare back and grandfather led him by the forelock to the barn, while Jill followed after.

"Did Jack ever 'fall down and break his crown,' grandfather?"

"No, but he ran away once on a time."

"Oh, did Jill come running after?"

"That she did."

The sun had but just cast his first glance at High Knob, where the camp was, and Mary Ballard was hastily whipping up batter for pancakes, the simplest thing she could get for breakfast, as they were to go early enough to see the "boys" at the camp before they formed for their march to the town square. The children were to ride over in the great carriage with grandfather and grandmother Clide, while father and mother would take Bobby with them in the carryall. It was an arrangement liked equally by the three small children and the well-content grandparents.

Betty came to the house, clinging to her grandfather's hand. He drew the large rocking-chair from the kitchen—where winter and summer it occupied a place by the window, that Bertrand in his moments of rest and leisure might sit and read the war news aloud to his wife as she

worked--out to a cool grass plot by the door, so that he might still be near enough to chat with his daughter, while enjoying the morning air.

Betty found tidy little Martha, fresh and clean as a rosebud, stepping busily about, setting the table with extra places and putting the chairs around. Filled with self-condemnation at the sight of her sister's helpfulness, she dashed upstairs to do her part in getting all neat for the day. First she coaxed naughty little Jamie, who, in his nightshirt, was out on the porch roof fishing, dangling his shoe over the edge by its strings tied to his father's cane, to return and be hustled into his trousers--funny little garments that came almost to his shoe tops--and to stand still while "sister" washed his face and brushed his curly red hair into a state of semi-orderliness.

Then there was Bobby to be kissed and coaxed, and washed and dressed, and told marvelous tales to beguile him into listening submission. "Mother, mayn't I put Bobby's Sunday dress on him?" called Betty, from the head of the stairs.

"Yes, dear, anything you like, but hurry. Breakfast is almost ready;" then to Martha, "Leave the sweeping, deary, and run down to the spring for the cream." To her father, Mary explained: "The little girls are a great help. Betty manages to do for the boys without irritating them. Now we'll eat while the cakes are hot. Come, Bertrand."

It was a grave mission and a sorrowful one, that early morning ride to say good-by to those youthful volunteers. The breakfast conversation turned on the subject with subdued intensity. Mary Ballard did not explain herself,--she was too busy serving,--but denounced the war in broad terms as "unnecessary and iniquitous," thus eliciting from her husband his usual exclamation, when an aphorism of more than ordinary daring burst from her lips: "Mary! why, Mary! I'm astonished!"

"Every one regards it from a different point of view," said his wife, "and this is my point." It was conclusive.

Grandfather Clide turned sideways, leaned one elbow on the table in a meditative way he had, and spoke slowly. Betty gazed up at him in wide-eyed attention, while Mary poured the coffee and Martha helped her mother by passing the cakes. Bobby sat close to his comfortable grandmother, who seemed to be giving him all her attention, but who heard everything, and was ready to drop a quiet word of significance when applicable.

"If we bring the question down to its primal cause," said grandfather, "if we bring it down to its primal cause, Mary is right; for the cause being iniquitous, of course, the war is the same."

"What is 'primal cause,' grandfather?" asked Betty.

"The thing that began it all," said grandfather, regarding her quizzically.

"I don't agree with your conclusion," said Bertrand, pausing to put sirup on Jamie's cakes, after repeated demands therefor. "If the cause be evil, it follows that to annihilate the cause--wipe it out of existence--must be righteous."

"In God's good time," said grandmother Clide, quietly.

"God's good time, in my opinion, seems to be when we are forced to a thing." Grandfather lifted one shaggy eyebrow in her direction.

"At any rate, and whatever happens," said Bertrand, "the Union must be preserved, a nation, whole and undivided. My father left England for love of its magnificent ideals of government by the people. Here is to be the vast open ground where all nations may come and realize their highest possibilities, and consequently this nation must be held together and developed as a whole in all its resources, and not cut up into small, ineffective, quarrelsome factions. To allow that would mean the ruin of a colossal scheme for universal progress."

Mary brought her husband's coffee and put it beside his plate, as he was too absorbed to take it, and as she did so placed her hand on his shoulder with gentle pressure and their eyes met for an instant. Then grandfather Clide took up the thread.

"Speaking of your father makes me think of my father, your old grandfather Clide, Mary. He fought with his father in the Revolutionary War when he was a lad no more than Peter Junior's age--or less. He lived through it and came to be a judge of the supreme court of New York, and helped to frame the constitution of that State, too. I used to hear him say, when I was a mere boy,--and he would bring his fist down on the table with an emphasis that made the dishes rattle, for all he averred that he never used gesticulation to aid his oratory,--he used to say,--I remember his words, as if it were but yesterday,--'Slavery is a crime which we, the whole nation, are accountable for, and for which we will be held accountable. If we as a nation will not do away with it by legislation or mutual compact justly, then the Lord will take it into his own hands and wipe it out with blood. He may be patient for a long while, and give us a good chance, but if we wait too long,--it may not be in my day--it may not be in yours,--he will wipe it out with blood!' and here was where he used to make the dishes rattle."

"Maybe, then, this is the Lord's good time," said grandmother.

"I believe in preserving the Union at any cost, slavery or no slavery," said Bertrand.

"The bigger and grander the nation, the more rottenness, if it's rotten at heart. I believe it better--even at the cost of war--to wipe out a national crime,--or let those who want slavery take themselves out of it."

Betty began to quiver through all her little system of high-strung nerves and sympathies. The talk was growing heated, and she hated to listen to excited arguments; yet she gazed and

listened with fascinated attention.

Bertrand looked up at his father-in-law. "Why, father! why, father! I'm astonished! I fail to see how permitting one tremendous evil can possibly further any good purpose. To my mind the most tremendous evil that could be perpetrated on this globe--the thing that would do more to set all progress back for hundreds of years, maybe--would be to break up this Union. Here in this country now we are advancing at a pace that covers the centuries of the past in leaps of a hundred years in one. Now cut this land up into little, caviling factions, and where are we? Why, the very motto of the republic would be done away with--'In Union there is strength.' I tell you slavery is a sort of Delilah, and the nation--if it is divided--will be like Sampson with his locks shorn."

"Well, war is here," said Mary, "and we must send off our young men to the shambles, and later on fill up our country with the refuse of Europe in their stead. It will be a terrible blood-letting for both North and South, and it will be the best blood on both sides. I'm as sorry for the mothers down there as I am for ourselves. Did you get the apples, Bertrand? We'd better start, to be there at eight."

"I put them in the carryall, my dear, Sweet Boughs and Harvest apples. The boys will have one more taste before they leave."

"Father, we want to carry some. Put some in the carriage too," said Martha.

"Yes, father. We want to eat some while we are on the way."

"Why, Jamie, they are for the soldiers; they're not for us," cried Betty, in horror. To eat even one, it seemed to her, would be greed and robbery.

In spite of the gravity of the hour to the older ones, the occasion took on an air of festivity to the children. In grandfather's dignified old family carriage Martha sat with demure elation on the back seat at her grandmother's side, wearing her white linen cape, and a wide-brimmed, low-crowned hat of Neapolitan straw, with a blue ribbon around the crown, and a narrow one attached to the front, the end of which she held in her hand to pull the brim down to shade her eyes as was the fashion for little girls of the day. She felt well pleased with the hat, and held the ribbon daintily in her shapely little hand.

At her feet was the basket of apples, and with her other hand she guarded three small packages. Grandmother wore a gray, changeable silk. The round waist fitted her plump figure smoothly, and the skirt was full and flowing. Her bonnet was made of the same silk shirred on rattan, and was not perched on the top of her head, but covered it well and framed her sweet face with a full, white tulle ruching set close under the brim.

Grandfather, up in front, drove Jack and Jill, who, he said, were "feeling their oats." Betty did not wonder, for oats are sharp and must prick their stomachs. She sat with grandfather,--he had promised she should the night before,--and Jamie was tucked in between them. He ought to have been in behind with grandmother, but his scream of rebellion as he was lifted in brought instant yielding from Betty, when grandfather interfered and took them both. But when Jamie insisted on holding the reins, grandfather grew firm, and when screams again began, his young majesty was lifted down and placed in the road to remain until instant obedience was promised, after which he was restored to the coveted place and away they went.

Betty's white linen cape blew out behind and her ribbons flew like blue butterflies all about her hat. She forgot to hold down the brim, as polite little girls did who knew how to wear their Sunday clothes. She, too, held three small packages in her lap. For days, ever since Peter Junior and Richard Kildene had taken tea with them in their new uniforms, the little girls had patiently sewed to make the articles which filled these packages.

Mary Ballard had planned them. In each was a needle-book filled with needles large enough to be used by clumsy fingers, a pin ball, a good-sized iron thimble, and a case of thread and yarn for mending, buttons of various sizes, and a bit of beeswax, molded in Mary Ballard's thimble, to wax their linen thread. All were neatly packed in a case of bronzed leather bound about with firm braid, and tucked under the strap of the leather on the inside was a small pair of scissors. It was all very compact and tied about with the braid. Mother had done some of the hardest of the sewing, but for the most part the stitches had been painstakingly put in by the children's own fingers.

The morning was cool, and the dust had been laid by a heavy shower in the night. The horses held up their heads and went swiftly, in spite of their long journey the day before. Soon they heard in the distance the sound of the drum, and the merry note of a fife. Again a pang shot through Betty's heart that she had not been a boy of Peter Junior's age that she might go to war. She heaved a deep sigh and looked up in her grandfather's face. It was a grizzled face, with blue eyes that shot a kindly glance sideways at her as if he understood.

When they drew near, the horses danced to the merry tune, as if they would like to go, too. All the camp seemed alive. How splendid the soldiers looked in their blue uniforms, their guns flashing in the sun! Betty watched how their legs with the stripes on them seemed to twinkle as they moved all together, marching in companies. Back and forth, back and forth, they went, and the orders came to the children short and abrupt, as the men went through their maneuvers. They saw the sentinel pacing up and down, and wondered why he did it instead of marching with the other men. All these questions were saved up to ask of grandfather when they got home. They were too interested to do anything but watch now.

At last, very suddenly it seemed, the soldiers broke ranks and scattered over the greensward,

running hither and thither like ants. Betty again drew a long breath. Now they were coming, the soldiers in whom they were particularly interested.

"Can they do what they please now?" she asked her grandfather.

"Yes, for a while."

All along the sentry line carriages were drawn up, for this hour from eight till nine was given to the "boys" to see their friends for the last time in many months, maybe years, maybe forever. As they had come from all over the State, some had no friends to meet them, but guests were there in crowds, and every man might receive a handshake whether he was known or not. All were friends to these young volunteers.

Bertrand Ballard was known and loved by all the youths. Some from the village, and others from the country around, had been in the way of coming to the Ballard home simply because the place was made an enjoyable center for them. Some came to practice the violin and others to sing. Some came to try their hand at sketching and painting and some just to hear Bertrand talk. All was done for them quite gratuitously on his part, and no laugh was merrier than his. Even the chore boy came in for a share of the Ballards' kindly help, sitting at Mary Ballard's side in the long winter evenings, and conning lessons to patch up an education snatched haphazard and hardly come by.

Here comes one of them now, head up, smiling, and happy-go-lucky. "Bertrand, here comes Johnnie. Give him the apples and let him distribute them. Poor boy! I'm sorry he's going; he's too easily led," said Mary.

"Oh! Johnnie, Johnnie Cooper! I've got something for you. We made them. Mother helped us," cried Martha. Now the children were out of the carriage and running about among their friends.

Johnnie Cooper snatched Jamie from the ground and threw him up over his head, then set him down again and took the parcel. Then he caught Martha up and set her on his shoulder while he peeped into the package.

"Stop, Johnnie. Set me down. I'm too big now for you to toss me up." Her arms were clasped tightly under his chin as he held her by the feet. Slowly he let her slide to the ground and thrust the little case in his pocket, and stooping, kissed the child.

"I'll think of you and your mother when I use this," he said.

"And you'll write to us, won't you, Johnnie?" said Mary. "If you don't, I shall think something is gone wrong with you." He knew what she meant, and she knew he knew. "There are worse things than bullets, Johnnie."

"Never you worry for me, Mrs. Ballard. We're going down for business, and you won't see me again until we've licked the 'rebs.'" He held her hand awkwardly for a minute, then relieved the tension by carrying off the two baskets of apples. "I know the trees these came from," he said, and soon a hundred boys in blue were eating Bertrand's choicest apples.

"Here come the twins!" said some one, as Peter Junior and Richard Kildene came toward them across the sward. Betty ran to meet them and caught Richard by the hand. She loved to have him swing her in long leaps from the ground as he walked.

"See, Richard, I made this for you all myself--almost. I put C in the corner so it wouldn't get mixed with the others, because this I made especially for you."

"Did you? Why didn't you put R in the corner if you meant it for me? I think you meant this for Charley Crabbe."

"No, I didnt." Betty spoke most emphatically. "Martha has one for him. I put C because--you'll see when you open it. Everything's bound all round with my very best cherry-colored hair ribbon, to make it very special, and that is what C is for. All the rest are brown, and this is prettier, and it won't get mixed with Peter Junior's."

"Ah, yes. C is for cherry--Betty's hair ribbon; and the gold-brown leather is for Betty's hair. Is that it?"

"Yep."

"Haven't I one, too?" asked Peter Junior.

"Yep. We made them just alike, and you can sew on buttons and everything."

Thus the children made the leave-taking less somber, to the relief of every one.

Grandfather and grandmother Clide had friends of their own whom they had come all the forty miles to see,--neighbor boys from many of the farms around their home, and their daughter-in-law's own brother, who was like a son to them. There he stood, lithe and strong and genial, and, alas! too easy-going to be safe among the temptations of the camp.

Quickly the hour passed and the call came to form ranks for the march to the town square, where speeches were to be made and prayers were to be read before the march to the station.

Our little party waited until the last company had left the camp ground and the excited children had seen them all and heard the sound of the fife and drum to their last note and beat as the "boys in blue" filed past them and off down the winding country road among the trees. Nothing was said by the older ones of what might be in the future for those gallant youths--yes, and for the few men of greater years with them--as they wound out of sight. It was better so. Bobby fell asleep in Mary Ballard's arms as they drove back, and a bright tear fell from her wide-open, far-

seeing eyes down on his baby cheek.

It was no lack of love for his son that kept Elder Craigmile away at the departure of the boys from their camp on the bluff. He had virtually said his say and parted from his son when he gave his consent to his going in the first place. To him war meant sacrifice, and the parting with sons, at no matter what cost. The dominant idea with him was ever the preservation of the Union. At nine o'clock as usual that morning he had entered the bank, and a few minutes later, when the troops formed on the square, he came out and took his appointed place on the platform, as one of the speakers, and offered a closing prayer for the confounding of the enemy after the manner of David of old--then he descended and took his son's hand, as he stood in the ranks, with his arm across the boy's shoulder, looked a moment in his eyes; then, without a word, he turned and reentered the bank.

CHAPTER V

THE PASSING OF TIME

It was winter. The snow was blowing past the windows in blinding drifts, and the road in front of the Ballards' home was fast filling to the tops of the fences. A bright wood-fire was burning in the great cookstove, which had been brought into the living room for warmth and to economize steps, as all the work of the household devolved on Mary and little Betty, since Martha spent the week days at the Deans in the village in order to attend the high school.

Mary gazed anxiously now and then through the fast-frosting window panes on the opaque whiteness of the storm without, where the trees tossed their bare branches weirdly, like threatening gray phantoms, grotesque and dimly seen through the driving snow. It was Friday afternoon and still early, and brave, busy little Martha always came home on Fridays after school to help her mother on Saturdays.

"Oh, I hope Martha hasn't started," said Mary. "Look out, Bertrand. This is the wildest storm we have had this year."

"Mrs. Dean would never allow her to set out in this storm, I'm sure," said Bertrand. "I cautioned her yesterday when I was there never to start when the weather seemed like a blizzard."

Bertrand had painted in his studio above as long as the light remained, and now he was washing his brushes, carefully swishing the water out of them and drawing each one between his lips to shape it properly before laying it down. Mary laid the babe in her arms in its crib, and rocked it a moment while she and Bertrand chatted.

A long winter and summer had passed since the troops marched away from Leauvite, and now another winter was passing. For a year and a bit more, little Janey, the babe now being hushed to sleep, had been a member of the family circle. Thus it was that Mary Ballard seldom went to the village, and Betty learned her lessons at home as best she could, and tended the baby and helped her mother. But Bertrand and his wife had plenty to talk about; for he went out and saw their friends in the village, led the choir on Sundays, taught the Bible class, heard all the news, and talked it over with Mary.

Thus, in one way or another, all the new books found their way into the Ballards' home, were read and commented on, even though books were not written so much for commercial purposes then as now, and their writers were looked up to with more respect than criticism. The *Atlantic Monthly* and *Littell's Living Age*, *Harper's Magazine*, and the *New York Tribune* also brought up a variety of subjects for discussion. Now and then a new poem by Whittier, or Bryant, or some other of the small galaxy of poets who justly were becoming the nation's pride, would appear and be read aloud to Mary as she prepared their meals, or washed the dishes or ironed small garments, while Betty listened with intent eyes and ears, as she helped her mother or tended the baby.

That afternoon, while the storm souged without, the cow and horse were comfortably quartered in their small stable, which was banked with straw to keep out the cold. Indoors, Jamie was whittling behind the warm cookstove over a newspaper spread to catch the chips, while Bobby played quietly in a corner with two gray kittens and a worsted ball. Janey was asleep in the crib which Betty jogged now and then while she knit on a sock for the soldiers--Mary and the two little girls were always knitting socks for the soldiers these days in their spare moments and during the long winter evenings--Mary was kneading white loaves of bread with floury hands, and Bertrand sat close beside the window to catch the last rays of daylight by which to read the war news.

Bertrand always read the war news first--news of battles and lists of wounded and slain and imprisoned, and saddest of all, lists of the missing--following closely the movements of their own company of "boys" from Leauvite. Mary listened always with a thought of the shadow in the banker's home, and the mother there, watching and waiting for the return of her boy. Although their own home was safe, the sorrow of other homes, devastated and mourning, weighed heavily upon Mary Ballard, and she needed to listen to the stirring editorials of the *Tribune*, which

Bertrand read with dramatic intensity, to bolster up her faith in the rightness of this war between men who ought to be brothers in their hopes and ambitions for the national life of their great country.

"I suppose it is too great a thing to ask--that such a tremendous and mixed nation as ours should be knit together for the good of all men in a spirit of brotherly love--but what a thing to ask for! What a thing to try for! If I were a man, I would pray that I might gain influence over my fellows just for that--just--for that," said Mary.

"Ah," replied her husband, with fond optimism, "you need not say 'If I were a man,' for that. It is the women who have the influence; don't you know that, Mary?"

Mary looked down at her work, an incredulous smile playing about her lips.

"Well, my dear?" Bertrand loved a response.

"Well, Bertrand? Men do like to talk about our 'sweet influence,' don't they?" Then she laughed outright.

"But, Mary--but, Mary, it is true. Women do more with their influence than men can do with their guns," and Bertrand really meant what he said. Dusky shadows filled the room, but if the light had been stronger, he would have seen that little ironical smile still playing about his wife's lips.

"Did you see Judge Logan again about those Waupaca lots?"

Bertrand wondered what the lots had to do with the subject, but suffered the digression patiently, for the feminine mind was not supposed to be coherent. "Yes, my love; I saw him yesterday."

"What did you do about them? I hope you refused."

"No, my dear. I thought best not. He showed me very conclusively that in time they will be worth more--much more--than the debt."

"Then why did he offer them to you for the debt? The portrait you painted for him will be worth more, too, in time, than the debt. You remember when you asked me what I thought, I said we needed the money more now."

"Yes, I remember; but this plan is a looking toward the future. I didn't think it wise to refuse."

Mary said nothing, but went out, returning presently with two lighted candles. Bertrand was replenishing the fire. Had he been looking at her face with the light of the candles on it as she carried them, he would have noticed that little smile about her lips.

"I'm very glad we brought the bees in yesterday," he said. "This storm would have made it impossible to do it to-day, and we should have lost them."

"How about those lectures, dear? The 'boys' are all gone now, and you won't have them to take up your time evenings, so you can easily prepare them. They will take you into the city now and then, and that will keep you in touch with the world outside this village." Bertrand had been requested to give a series of lectures on art in one of the colleges in the city. He had been well pleased and had accepted, but later had refused because of certain dictatorship exercised by the Board, which he felt infringed on his province of a suitable selection of subjects. He was silent for a moment. Again Mary had irrelevantly and abruptly changed the subject of conversation. Where was the connection between bees and lectures? "I really wish you would, dear," urged Mary.

"You still wish it after the affront the Board has given me?"

"I know, but what do they know about art? I would give the lectures if it was only to be able--incidentally--to teach them something. Be a little conciliatory, dear."

"I will make no concessions. If I give the lectures, I must be allowed to select my courses. It is my province."

"Did you see Elder Craigmile about it?"

"I did."

"And what did he say?"

"He seemed to think the Board was right."

"I knew he would. You remember I asked you not to go to him about it, and that was why."

"Why did you think so? He assumes to be my friend."

"Because people who don't know anything about art always are satisfied with their own opinions. They don't know anything to upset them. He knows more than some of them, but how much is that? Enough to know that he owns some fine paintings; but you taught him their value, now, didn't you?" Bertrand smiled, but said nothing, and his wife continued. "Prepare the lectures, dear, for my sake. I love to know that you are doing such work."

"I can't. The action of the Board is an insult to my intelligence. What are you smiling about?"

"About you, dear."

"Mary, why, Mary! I--"

But Mary only smiled the more. "You love my irrelevance and inconsistency, you say,--"

"I love any weakness that is yours, Mary. What are you keeping back from me?"

"The weakness that is mine, dear." Again Mary laughed outright. "It would be useless to tell you--or to try to explain. I love you, isn't that enough?"

Bertrand thought it ought to be, but was not sure, and said so. Then Mary laughed again, and he kissed her, shaking his head dubiously, and took up his violin for solace. Thus an hour passed; then Betty set the table for supper, and the long evening followed like many another evening, filled with the companionship only comfortably married people know, while Bertrand read from the poets.

Since, with a man's helplessness in such matters, he could not do the family mending, or knit for the soldiers, or remodel old garments into new, it behooved him to render such tasks pleasant for the busy hand and brain that must devise and create and make much out of little for economy's sake; and this Bertrand did to Mary's complete satisfaction.

Evenings like these were Betty's school, and they seemed all the schooling she was likely to get, for the family funds were barely sufficient to cover the expenses of one child at a time. But, as Mary said, "It's not so bad for Betty to be kept at home, for she will read and study, anyway, because she likes it, and it won't hurt her to learn to be practical as well;" and no doubt Mary was right.

Bertrand was himself a poet in his appreciation and fineness of choice, and he read for Mary with all the effectiveness and warmth of color that he would put into a recitation for a large audience, carried on solely by his one sympathetic listener and his love for what he read; while Betty, in her corner close to the lamp behind her father's chair, listened unnoticed, with eager soul, rapt and uplifted.

As Bertrand read he commented. "These men who are writing like this are doing for this country what the Lake Poets did for England. They are making true literature for the nation, and saving it from banality. They are going to live. They will be classed some day with Wordsworth and all the rest of the best. Hear this from James Russell Lowell. It's about a violin, and is called 'In the Twilight.' It's worthy of Shelley." And Bertrand read the poem through, while Mary let her knitting fall in her lap and listened. He loved to see her listen in that way.

"Read again the verse that begins: 'O my life.' I seem to like it best." And he read it over:--

"O my life, have we not had seasons
That only said, Live and rejoice?
That asked not for causes and reasons,
But made us all feeling and voice?
When we went with the winds in their blowing,
When Nature and we were peers,
And we seemed to share in the flowing
Of the inexhaustible years?
Have we not from the earth drawn juices
Too fine for earth's sordid uses?
Have I heard, have I seen
All I feel, all I know?
Doth my heart overween?
Or could it have been
Long ago?"

"And the next, Bertrand. I love to hear them over again." And he read:--

"Sometimes a breath floats by me,
An odor from Dreamland sent,
That makes the ghost seem nigh me
Of a splendor that came and went,
Of a life lived somewhere, I know not
In what diviner sphere,
Of memories that stay not and go not,
Like music heard once by an ear
That cannot forget or reclaim it,
A something so shy, it would shame it
To make it a show,
A something too vague, could I name it,
For others to know,
As if I had lived it or dreamed it,
As if I had acted or schemed it,
Long ago!"

"And the last verse, father. I like the last best," cried Betty, suddenly.

"Why, my deary. I thought you were gone to bed."

"No, mother lets me sit up a little while longer when you're reading. I like to hear you." And he read for her the last verse:--

"And yet, could I live it over,
This life that stirs my brain,
Could I be both maiden and lover,

Moon and tide, bee and clover,
As I seem to have been, once again,
Could I but speak it and show it,
This pleasure more sharp than pain,
That baffles and lures me so,
The world should once more have a poet,
Such as it had
In the ages glad,
Long ago!"

Then, wishing to know more of the secret springs of his little daughter's life, he asked: "Why do you love that stanza best, Betty, my dear?"

Betty blushed crimson to the roots of her hair, for what she carried in her heart was too precious to tell, but she meant to be a poet. Even then, in the pocket of her calico dress lay a little book and a stubbed lead pencil, and in the book was already the beginning of her great epic. Her father had said the epic was a thing of the past, that in the future none would be written, for that it was a form of expressions that belonged to the world's youth, and that age brought philosophy and introspection, but not epics.

She meant to surprise her father some day with this poem. The great world was so full of mystery--of seductive beauty and terror and of strange, enticing charm! She saw and felt it always. Even now, in the driving, whirling storm without, in the darkness of her chamber, or when she looked through the frosted panes into the starry skies at midnight, always it was there all about her,--a something unexpressed, unseen, but close--close to her,--the mystery which throbbled through all her small being, and which she was one day to find out and understand and put into her great epic.

She thought over her father's question, hardly knowing why she liked that last stanza best. She slowly wound up her ball of yarn and thrust the needles through it, and dropped it into her mother's workbasket before she replied; then, taking up her candle, she looked shyly in her father's eyes.

"Because I like where it says: 'This pleasure more sharp than pain, That baffles and lures me so.'" Then she was gone, hurrying away lest they should question her further and learn about the little book in her pocket.

Thus time passed with the Ballards, many days swiftly flying, laden with a fair share of sweetness and pleasure, and much of harassment and toil, but in the main bringing happiness.

CHAPTER VI

THE END OF THE WAR

It was three years after the troops marched away from High Knob encampment before either Peter Junior or Richard Kildene were again in Leavite, and then only Peter returned, because he was wounded, and not that he was unwilling to enlist again, as did Richard and many of the boys, when their first term of service was ended. He returned with the brevet of a captain, for gallant conduct in the encounter in which he received his wound, but only a shadow of the healthy, earnest boy who had stood in the ranks on the town square of Leavite three years before; yet this very fact brought life and hope to his waiting mother, now that she had the blessed privilege of nursing him back to strength.

It seemed as though her long period of mourning ended when Peter Junior, pallid in his blue uniform, his hair darkened and matted with the dampness caused by weakness and pain, was borne in between the white columns of his father's house. When the news reached him that his son was lying wounded in a southern hospital, the Elder had, for the first time in many, many years, followed an impulse without pausing to consider his act beforehand. He left the bank on the instant and started for the scene of battles, only hurrying home to break the news first to his wife. Yielding to a rare tenderness, he touched her hair as he kissed her, and enjoined on her to remember that their son was not slain, but by a merciful Providence was only wounded and might be spared to them. She must thank the Lord and be ready to nurse him back to life.

Why Providence should be thus merciful to their son rather than to many another son, the good Elder did not pause to consider. Possibly he thought it no more than just that the prayers of the righteous should be answered by a supernatural intervention between their sons and the bullets of the enemy. His ideas on this point were no doubt vague at the best, but certain it is that he returned from his long and difficult journey to the seat of strife after his boy, with a clearer notion of what war really was, and a more human sympathy for those who go and suffer, and, as might be anticipated with those of his temperament, an added bitterness against those whom he felt were to blame for the conflict.

When Peter Junior left his home, his father had enjoined on him to go, not in the spirit of bitterness and enmity, but as an act of duty, to teach a needed lesson; for surely the Lord was

on the side of the right, and was using the men of the North to teach this needed lesson to those laboring in error. Ah! it is a very different point of view we take when we suffer, instead of merely moralizing on the suffering of others; especially we who feel that we know what is right, and lack in great part the imagination to comprehend the other man's viewpoint. To us of that cast of mind there is only one viewpoint and that is our own, and only a bodily departure to the other man's hilltop or valley, as the case may be, will open the eyes and enlarge the understanding to the extent of even allowing our fellows to see things in another light from our own.

In this instance, while the Elder's understanding had been decidedly enlarged, it had been in but one direction, and the effect had not been to his spiritual benefit, for he had seen only the suffering of his own side, and, being deficient in power to imagine what might be, he had taken no charitable thought for the other side. Instead, a feeling of hatred had been stirred within him,—a feeling he felt himself justified in and therefore indulged and named: "Righteous Indignation."

The Elder's face was stern and hard as he directed the men who bore his boy on the litter where to turn, and how to lift it above the banister in going up the stair so as not to jar the young man, who was too weak after the long journey to do more than turn his eyes on his mother's face.

But that mother's face! It seemed to him he had never seen it so radiant and charming, for all that her hair had grown silvery white in the three years since he had last kissed her. He could not take his eyes from it, and besought her not to leave his side, even when the Elder bade her go and not excite him, but allow him to rest.

No sooner was her son laid on his own bed in his old room than she began a series of gentle ministrations most sweet to the boy and to herself. But the Elder had been told that all he needed now was rest and absolute quiet, and the surgeon's orders must be carried out regardless of all else. Hester Craigmile yielded, as always, to the Elder's will, and remained without, seated close beside her son's door, her hands, that ached to serve, lying idle in her lap, while the Elder brought him his warm milk and held it to his lips, lifting his head to drink it, and then left him with the command to sleep.

"Don't go in for an hour at least," he enjoined on his wife as he passed her and took his way to the bank, for it was too early for closing, and there would still be time for him to look into his affairs a bit. Thus for the banker the usual routine began.

Not so for Hester Craigmile. Joy and life had begun for her. She had her boy again—quite to herself when the Elder was away, and the tears for very happiness came to her eyes and dropped on her hands unchecked. Had the Elder been there he would have enjoined upon her to be controlled and she would have obeyed, but now there was no need, and she wept deliciously for joy while she still sat outside the door and listened. Intense—eager—it seemed almost as if she could hear him breathe.

"Mother!" Hark! Did he speak? "Mother!" It was merely a breath, but she heard and went swiftly to him. Kneeling, she clasped him, and her tears wet his cheek, but at the same time they soothed him, and he slept. It was thus the Elder found them when he returned from the bank, both sweetly sleeping. He did not take his wife away for fear of waking his son, nevertheless he was displeased with her, and when they met at table that evening, she knew it.

The whole order of the house was changed because of Peter Junior's return. Blinds, windows, and doors were thrown open at the direction of the physician, that he might be given all the air and sunlight it was possible to admit; else he would never gain strength, for so long had he lived in the open air, in rain and sun, that he had need now of every help nature could give.

A bullet had struck him in the hip and glanced off at a peculiar angle, rendering his recovery precarious and long delayed, and causing the old doctor to shake his head with the fear that he must pass the rest of his life a cripple. Still, normal youth is buoyant and vigorous and mocks at physicians' fears, and after a time, what with heart at rest, with loving and unceasing care on his mother's part, and rigorous supervision on his father's, Peter Junior did at length recover sufficiently to be taken out to drive, and began to get back the good red blood in his veins.

During this long period of convalescence, Peter Junior's one anxiety was for his cousin Richard. Rumors had reached him that his comrade had been wounded and taken prisoner, yet nothing definite had been heard, until at last, after much writing, he learned Richard's whereabouts, and later that he had been exchanged. Then, too ill and prison-worn to go back to his regiment, he appeared one day, slowly walking up the village street toward the banker's house.

There he was welcomed and made much of, and the two young men spent a while together happily, the best of friends and comrades, still filled with enthusiasm, but with a wider knowledge of life and the meaning of war. These weeks were few and short, and soon Richard was back in the army. Peter Junior, envying him, still lay convalescing and only able with much difficulty to crawl to the carriage for his daily drive.

His mother always accompanied him on these drives, and the very first of them was to the home of the Ballards. It was early spring, the air was biting and cool, and Peter was unable to alight, but Mary and her husband came to them where they waited at the gate and stood long, talking happily. Jamie and Bobby followed at their heels and peered up curiously at the wounded soldier, but Betty was seized with a rare moment of shyness that held her back.

Dear little Betty! She had grown taller since Peter Junior had taken that last tea at the Ballards. No longer care free, the oldest but one, she had taken many of her mother's burdens upon her

young shoulders, albeit not knowing that they were burdens, since they were wholly acts of love and joyously done. She was fully conscious of her advancing years, and took them very seriously, regarding her acts with a grave and serene sense of their importance. She had put back the wild hair that used to fly about her face until her father called her "An owl in an ivy bush" and her mother admonished her that her "head was like a mop." Now, being in her teens, she wore her dresses longer and never ran about barefooted, paddling in the brook below the spring, although she would like to do so; still she was child enough to run when she should walk, and to laugh when some would sigh.

Her thoughts had been romantically active regarding Peter Junior, how he would look, and how splendid and great he was to have been a real soldier and come home wounded--to have suffered and bled for his country. And Richard, too, was brave and splendid. He must have been in the very front of the battle to have been taken prisoner. She wondered a little if he remembered her, but not much, for how could men with great work to do, like fighting and dying for their country, stop to think of a little girl who was still in short dresses when they had seen her last?

Then, when the war was ended at last, there was Richard returned and stopping at his uncle's. In the few short visits he made at the Ballards' he greeted Betty as of old, as he would greet a little sister of whom he was fond, and she accepted his frank, old-time brotherliness in the same spirit, gayly and happily, revealing but little of herself, and holding a slight reserve in her manner which seemed to him quite delightful and maidenly. Then, all too suddenly, he was gone again, but in his heart he carried a memory of her that made a continual undercurrent in his thoughts.

And now Betty's father and mother were actually talking with Peter Junior at their very gate. Impulse would have sent her flying to meet him, but that new, self-conscious shyness stayed her feet, for he was one to be approached with reverence. He was afflicted with no romantic shyness with regard to her, however. He quite forgot her, indeed, although he did ask in a general way after the children and even mentioned Martha in particular, as, being the eldest, she was best remembered. So Betty did not see Peter Junior this time, but she stood where she could see the top of the carriage from her bedroom window, whither she had fled, and she could see the blue sleeve of his coat as he put out his arm to take her mother's hand at parting. That was something, and she listened with beating heart for the sound of his voice. Ah, little he dreamed what a tumult he had raised in the heart of that young being whose imagination had been so stirred by all that she had read and heard of war, and the part taken in it by their own young men of Leauvite. That Peter Junior had come home brevetted a captain for his bravery crowned him with glory. All that day Betty went about with dreams in her head, and coursing through them was the voice of the wounded young soldier.

At last, with the slow march of time, came the proclamation of peace, and the nation so long held prostrate--a giant struggling against fetters of its own forging, blinded and strangling in its own blood--reared its head and cried out for the return of Hope, groping on all sides to gather the divine youth to its arms, when, as a last blow, dealt by a wanton hand, came the death of Lincoln.

Then it was that the nation recoiled and bowed itself for a time, beaten and crushed--both North and South--and vultures gathered at the seat of conflict and tore at its vitals and wrangled over the spoils. Then it was that they who had sowed discord stooped to reap the Devil's own harvest,--a woeful, bitter, desperate time, when more enmity and deep rancor was bred and treasured up for future sorrow than during all the years of the honest and active strife of the war.

In the very beginning that first news of the firing on Fort Sumter flew through the North like a tragic cry, and men felt a sense of doom hanging over the nation. Bertrand Ballard heard it and walked sorrowfully home to his wife, and sat long with bowed head, brooding and silent. Neighbor Wilcox heard it, and, leaving his business, entered his home and called his household together with the servants and held family worship--a service which it was his custom to hold only on the Sabbath--and earnestly prayed for the salvation of the country, and that wisdom might be granted its rulers, after which he sent his oldest son to fight for the cause. Elder Craigmile heard it, and consented that his last and only son should enter the ranks and give his life, if need be, for the saving of the nation. Still, tempering all this sorrow and anxiety was the chance for action, and the hope of victory.

But now, in this later time, when the strength of the nation had been wasted, when victory itself was dark with mourning for sons slain, the loss of the one wise leader to whom all turned with uplifted hearts seemed the signal for annihilation; and then, indeed, it appeared that the prophecy of Mary Ballard's old grandfather had been fulfilled and the curse of slavery had not only been wiped out with blood, but that the greater curse of anarchy and misrule had taken its place to still further scourge the nation.

Mary Ballard's mother, while scarcely past her prime, was taken ill with fever and died, and immediately upon this blow to the dear old father who was not yet old enough by many years to be beyond his usefulness to those who loved and depended on him, came the tragic death of Lincoln, whom he revered and in whom all his hopes for the right adjustment of the nation's affairs rested. Under the weight of the double calamity he gave up hope, and left the world where all looked so dark to him, almost before the touch of his wife's hand had grown cold in his.

"Father died of a broken heart," said Mary, and turned to her husband and children with even

more intensity of devotion. "For," she said, "after all, the only thing in life of which we can be perfectly sure is our love for each other. A grave may open at our feet anywhere at any time, and only love oversteps it."

With such an animating spirit as this, no family can be wholly sad, and though poverty pinched them at times, and sorrow had bitterly visited them, with years and thrift things changed. Bertrand painted more pictures and sold them; the children were gay and vigorous and brought life and good times to the home, and the girls grew up to be womanly, winsome lasses, light-hearted and good to look upon.

Enough of the war and the evils thereof has been said and written and sung. Animosity is dead, and brotherhood and mutual service between the two opposing factions of one great family have taken the place of strife. Useless now to say what might have been, or how otherwise that terrible time of devastation and sorrow could have been avoided. Enough to know that at last as a nation, whole and undivided, we may pull together in the tremendous force of our united strength, and that now we may take up the "White Man's Burden" and bear it to its magnificent conclusion to the service of all mankind and the glory of God.

CHAPTER VII

A NEW ERA BEGINS

Bertrand Ballard's studio was at the top of his house, with a high north window and roughly plastered walls of uncolored sand, left as Bertrand himself had put the plaster on, with his trowel marks over the surface as they happened to come, and the angles and projections thereof draped with cobwebs.

When Peter Junior was able to leave his home and get about a little on his crutches, he loved to come there and rest and spend his idle hours, and Bertrand found pleasure in his companionship. They read together, and sang together, and laughed together, and no sound was more pleasant to Mary Ballard's ears than this same happy laughter. Peter had sorely missed the companionship of his cousin, for, at the close of the war, no longer a boy and unwilling to be dependent and drifting, Richard had sought out a place for himself in the work of the world.

First he had gone to Scotland to visit his mother's aunts. There he found the two dear old ladies, sweetly observant of him, willing to tell him much of his mother, who had been scarcely younger than the youngest of them, but discreetly reticent about his father. From this he gathered that for some reason his father was under a cloud. Yet he did not shrink from trying to learn from them all they knew about him, and for what reason they spoke as if to even mention his name was an indiscretion. It was really little they knew, only that he had gravely displeased their nephew, Peter Craigmile, who had brought Richard up, and who was his mother's twin brother.

"But why did Uncle Peter have to bring me up? You say he quarreled with my father?"

"Weel, ye see, ye'r mither was dead." It was Aunt Ellen, the elder by twenty years, who told him most about it, she who spoke with the broadest Scotch.

"Was my father a bad man, that Uncle 'Elder' disliked him so?"

"Weel now, I'd no say that; he was far from that to be right fair to them both--for ye see--ye'r mither would never have loved him if he'd been that--but he--he was an Irishman, and ye'r Uncle Peter could never thole an Irishman, and he--he--fair stole ye'r mither from us a'--an--" she hesitated to continue, then blurted out the real horror. "Your Uncle Peter kenned he had ance been in the theayter, a sort o' an actor body an' he couldna thole that."

But little was to be gained with all his questioning, and what he could learn seemed no more than that his father had done what any man might be expected to do if some one stood between him and the girl he loved; so Richard felt that there must be something unknown to any one but his uncle that had turned them all against his father. Why had his father never appeared to claim his son? Why had he left his boy to be reared by a man who hated the boy's father? It was a strange thing to do, and it must be that his father was dead.

At this time Richard was filled with ambitions,--fired by his early companionship with Bertrand Ballard,--and thought he would go to France and become an artist;--to France, the Mecca of Bertrand's dreams--he desired of all things to go there for study. But of all this he said nothing to any one, for where was the money? He would never ask his uncle for it, and now that he had learned that he had been all his young life really a dependent on the bounty of his Uncle Peter, he could no longer accept his help. He would hereafter make his own way, asking no favors.

The old aunts guessed at his predicament, and offered to give him for his mother's sake enough to carry him through the first year, but he would not allow them to take from their income to pay his bills. No, he would take his way back to America, and find a place for himself in the new world; seek some active, stirring work, and save money, and sometime--sometime he would do the things his heart loved. He often thought of Betty, the little Betty who used to run to meet

him and say such quaint things; some day he would go to her and take her with him. He would work first and do something worthy of so choice a little mortal.

Thus dreaming, after the manner of youth, he went to Ireland, to his father's boyhood home. He found only distant relatives there, and learned that his father had disposed of all he ever owned of Irish soil to an Englishman. A cousin much older than himself owned and still lived on the estate that had been his grandfather Kildene's, and Richard was welcomed and treated with openhearted hospitality. But there, also, little was known of his father, only that the peasants on the estate remembered him lovingly as a free-hearted gentleman.

Even that little was a relief to Richard's sore heart. Yes, his father must be dead. He was sorry. He was a lonely man, and to have a relative who was his very own, as near as a father, would be a great deal. His cousin, Peter Junior, was good as a friend, but from now on they must take paths that diverged, and that old intimacy must naturally change. His sweet Aunt Hester he loved, and she would fill the mother's place if she could, but it was not to be. It would mean help from his Uncle Peter, and that would mean taking a place in his uncle's bank, which had already been offered him, but which he did not want, which he would not accept if he did want it.

So, after a long and happy visit at his cousin Kildene's, in Ireland, he at last left for America again, and plunged into a new, interesting, and vigorous life, one that suited well his energetic nature. He found work on the great railway that was being built across the plains to the Pacific Coast. He started as an engineer's assistant, but soon his talent for managing men caused his employers to put him in charge of gangs of workmen who were often difficult and lawless. He did not object; indeed he liked the new job better than that he began with. He was more interested in men than materials.

The life was hard and rough, but he came to love it. He loved the wide, sweeping prairies, and, later on, the desert. He liked to lie out under the stars,—often when the men slept under tents,—his gun at his side and his thoughts back on the river bluffs at Leauvite. He did a lot of dreaming and thinking, and he never forgot Betty. He thought of her as still a child, although he was expecting her to grow up and be ready for him when he should return to her. He had a vague sort of feeling that all was understood between them, and that she was quietly becoming womanly, and waiting for him.

Peter Junior might have found other friends in Leauvite had he sought them out, but he did not care for them. His nature called for what he found in Bertrand's studio, and he followed the desire of his heart regardless of anything else, spending all the time he could reasonably filch from his home. And what wonder! Richard would have done the same and was even then envying Peter the opportunity, as Peter well knew from his cousin's letters. There was no place in the village so fascinating and delightful as this little country home on its outskirts, no conversation more hopeful and helpful than Bertrand's, and no welcome sweeter or kinder than Mary Ballard's.

One day, after Richard had gone out on the plains with the engineers of the projected road, Peter lay stretched on a long divan in the studio, his head supported by his hand as he half reclined on his elbow, and his one crutch—he had long since discarded the other—within reach of his arm. His violin also lay within reach, for he had been playing there by himself, as Bertrand had gone on one of his rare visits to the city a hundred miles away.

Betty Ballard had heard the wail of his violin from the garden, where she had been gathering pears. That was how she knew where to find him when she quickly appeared before him, rosy and flushed from her run to the house and up the long flight of stairs.

As Peter lay there, he was gazing at the half-finished copy he had been making of the head of an old man, for Peter had decided, since in all probability he would be good for no active work such as Richard had taken up, that he too would become an artist, like Bertrand Ballard. To have followed his cousin would have delighted his heart, for he had all the Scotchman's love of adventure, but, since that was impossible, nothing was more alluring than the thought of fame and success as an artist. He would not tie himself to Leauvite to get it. He would go to Paris, and there he would do the things Bertrand had been prevented from doing. Poor Bertrand! How he would have loved the chance Peter Junior was planning for himself as he lay there dreaming and studying the half-finished copy.

Suddenly he beheld Betty, standing directly in front of the work, extending to him a folded bit of paper. "Here's a note from your father," she cried.

Looking upon her thus, with eyes that had been filled with the aged, rugged face on the canvas, Betty appealed to Peter as a lovely vision. He had never noticed before, in just this way, her curious charm, but these months of companionship and study with Bertrand had taught him to see beauty understandingly, and now, as she stood panting a little, with breath coming through parted lips and hair flying almost in the wild way of her childhood, Peter saw, as if it were a revelation, that she was lovely. He raised himself slowly and reached for the note without taking his eyes from her face.

He did not open the letter, but continued to look in her eyes, at which she turned about half shyly. "I heard your violin; that's how I knew you were up here. Oh! Have you been painting on it again?"

"On my violin? No, I've been playing on it."

"No! Painting on the picture of your old man. I think you have it too drawn out and thin. He's too hollow there under the cheek bone."

"Is he, Miss Critic? Well, thank your stars you're not."

"I know. I'm too fat." She rubbed her cheek until it was redder than ever.

"What are you painting your cheeks for? There's color enough on them as they are."

She made a little mouth at him. "I could paint your old man as well as that, I know."

"I know you could. You could paint him far better than that."

She laughed, quickly repentant. "I didn't say that to be horrid. I only said it for fun. I couldn't."

"And I know you could." He rose and stood without his crutch, looking down on her. "And you're not 'too long drawn out,' are you? See? You only come up to--about--here on me." He measured with his hand a little below his chin.

"I don't care. You're not so awfully tall."

"Very well, have it so. That only makes you the shorter."

"I tell you I don't care. You'd better stop staring at me, if I'm so little, and read your letter. The man's waiting for it. That's why I ran all the way up here." By this it may be seen that Betty had lost all her awe of the young soldier. Maybe it left her when he doffed his uniform. "Here's your crutch. Doesn't it hurt you to stand alone?" She reached him the despised prop.

"Hurt me to stand alone? No! I'm not a baby. Do you think I'm likely to grow up bow-legged?" he thundered, taking it from her hand without a thank you, and glaring down on her humorously. "You're a bit cruel to remind me of it. I'm going to walk with a cane hereafter, and next thing you know you'll see me stalking around without either."

"Why, Peter Junior! I'd be so proud of that crutch I wouldn't leave it off for anything! I'd always limp a little, even if I didn't use it. Cruel? I was complimenting you."

"Complimenting me? How?"

"By reminding you that you had been brave--and had been a soldier--and had been wounded for your country--and had been promoted--and--"

But Peter drowned her voice with uproarious laughter, and suddenly surprised himself as well as her by slipping his arm around her waist and stopping her lips with a kiss.

Betty was surprised but not shocked. She knew of no reason why Peter should not kiss her even though it was not his custom to treat her thus. In Betty's home, demonstrative expressions of affection were as natural as sunlight, and why should not Peter like her? Therefore it was Peter who was shocked, and embarrassed her with his sudden apology.

"I don't care if you did kiss me. You're just like my big brother--the same as Richard is--and he often used to kiss me." She was trying to set Peter at his ease. "And, anyway, I like you. Why, I supposed of course you liked me--only naturally not as much as I liked you."

"Oh, more! Much more!" he stammered tremblingly. He knew in his heart that there was a subtle difference, and that what he felt was not what she meant when she said, "I like you." "I'm sure it is I who like you the most."

"Oh, no, it isn't! Why, you never even used to see me. And I--I used to gaze on you--and be so romantic! It was Richard who always saw me and played with me. He used to toss me up, and I would run away down the road to meet him. I wonder when he's coming back! I wish he'd come. Why don't you read your father's letter? The man's waiting, you know."

"Ah, yes. And I suppose Dad's waiting, too. I wonder why he wrote me when he can see me every day!"

"Well, read it. Don't stand there looking at it and staring at me. Do you know how you look? You look as if it were a message from the king, saying: 'You are remanded to the tower, and are to have your head struck off at sundown.' That's the way they did things in the olden days." She turned to go.

"Stay here until I see if you are right." He dropped on the divan and made room for her at his side.

"All right! That's what I wanted to do, but I thought it wouldn't be polite to be curious."

"But you wouldn't be polite anyway, you know, so you might as well stay. M-m-m. I'm remanded to the tower, sure enough. Father wants me to meet him in the director's room as soon as banking hours are over. Fine old Dad! He wouldn't think of infringing on banking hours for any private reasons unless the sky were falling, and even then he would save the bank papers first. See here--Betty--er--never mind. I'll tell you another time."

"Please tell me now! What is it? Something dreadful, Peter Junior?"

"I wasn't thinking about this; it--it's something else--"

"About what?"

"About you."

"Oh, then it is no consequence. I want to hear what's in the letter. Why did you tell me to stay if you weren't going to tell me what's in it?"

"Nothing. We have had a little difference of opinion, my father and I, and he evidently wants to settle it out of hand his way, by summoning me in this official manner to appear before him at

the bank."

"I know. He thinks you are idling away your time here trying to paint pictures, and he wishes to make a respectable banker of you." She reached over and began picking the strings of his violin.

"You musn't finger the strings of a violin that way."

"Why not? I want to see if I can pick out 'The Star Spangled Banner' on it. I can on the flute, father's old one; he lets me."

"Because you'll get them oily."

She spread out her two firm little hands. "My fingers aren't greasy!" she cried indignantly; "that's pear juice on them."

Peter Junior's gravity turned to laughter. "Well, I don't want pear juice on my strings. Wait, you rogue, I'm going to kiss you again."

"No, you're not, you old hobble-de-hoy. You can't catch me." When she was halfway down the stairs, she called back, "The man's waiting."

"Coward! Coward!" he called after her, "to run away from a poor old cripple and then call him names." He thrust the letter into his pocket, and seizing his crutch began deliberately and carefully to descend the stairs, with grave, set face, not unlike his father's.

"Catch, Peter Junior," called Betty from the top of the pear tree as he passed down the garden path, and tossed him a pear which he caught, then another and another. "There! No, don't eat them now. Put them in your desk, and next month they'll be just as sweet!"

"Will they? Just like you? I'll be even with you yet--when I catch you."

"You'll get pear juice on your strings. There are lots of nice girls in the village for you to kiss. They'll do just as well as me."

"Good girl. Good grammar. Good-by." He waved his hand toward Betty, and turned to the waiting servant. "You go on and tell the Elder I'm coming right along," he said, and hopped off down the road. It was only lately he had begun to take long walks or hops like this, with but one crutch, but he was growing frantic to be fairly on his two feet again. The doctor had told him he never would be, but he set his square chin, and decided that the doctor was wrong. More than ever to-day, with the new touch of little pear-stained fingers on his heart, he wanted to walk off like other men.

Now he tried to use his lame leg as much as possible. If only he might throw away the crutch and walk with a cane, it would be something gained. With one hand in his pocket he crushed his father's letter into a small wad, then tossed it in the air and caught it awhile, then put it back in his pocket and hobbled on.

The atmosphere had the smoky appearance of the fall, and the sweet haze of Indian summer lay over the landscape, the horizon only faintly outlined through it. Peter Junior sniffed the air. He wondered if the forests in the north were afire. Golden maple leaves danced along on the path before him, whirled hither and thither by the light breeze, and the wild asters and goldenrod powdered his dark trousers with pollen as he brushed them in passing. All the world was lovely, and he appreciated it as he had never been able to do before. Bertrand's influence had permeated his thoughts and widened thus his reach of happiness.

He entered the bank just at the closing hour, and the staid, faithful old clerks nodded to him as he passed through to the inner room, where he found his father awaiting him. He dropped wearily into a swivel chair before the great table and placed his crutch at his feet; wiping the perspiration from his forehead, he leaned forward, and rested his elbows on the table.

The young man's wan look, for the walk had taxed his strength, reminded his father of the day he had brought the boy home wounded, and his face relaxed.

"You are tired, my son."

"Oh, no. Not very. I have been more so." Peter Junior smiled a disarming smile as he looked in his father's face. "I've tramped many a mile on two sound feet when they were so numb from sheer weariness that I could not feel them or know what they were doing. What did you want to say to me, father?"

"Well, my son, we have different opinions, as you know, regarding your future."

"I know, indeed."

"And a father's counsel is not to be lightly disposed of."

"I have no intention of doing so, father."

"No, no. But wait. You have been loitering the day at Mr. Ballard's? Yes."

"I have nothing else to do, father,--and--" Peter Junior's smile again came to the rescue. "It isn't as though I were in doubtful company--I--there are worse places here in the village where I might--where idle men waste their time."

"Ah, yes. But they are not for you--not for you, my son." The Elder smiled in his turn, and lifted his brows, then drew them down and looked keenly at his son. The afternoon sunlight streamed through the high western window and fell on the older man's face, bringing it into strong relief against the dark oak paneling behind him, and as Peter Junior looked on his father he received his second revelation that day. He had not known before what a strong, fine old face his father's

was, and for the second time he surprised himself, when he cried out:--

"I tell you, father, you have a magnificent head! I'm going to make a portrait of you just as you are--some day."

The Elder rose with an indignant, despairing downward motion of the hands and began pacing the floor, while Peter Junior threw off restraint and laughed aloud. The laughter freed his soul, but it sadly irritated the Elder. He did not like unusual or unprecedented things, and Peter Junior was certainly not like himself, and was acting in an unprecedented manner.

"You have now regained a fair amount of strength and have reached an age when you should think seriously of what you are to do in life. As you know, it has always been my intention that you should take a place here and fit yourself for the responsibilities that are now mine, but which will some day devolve on you."

Peter Junior raised his hand in protest, then dropped it. "I mean to be an artist, father."

"Faugh! An artist? Look at your friend, Bertrand Ballard. What has he to live on? What will he have laid by for his old age? How has he managed to live all these years--he and his wife? Miserable hand-to-mouth existence! I'll see my son trying to emulate him! You'll be an artist? And how will you support a wife if you ever have one? You mean to marry some day?"

"I mean to marry Betty Ballard," said Peter Junior, with a rugged set of his jaw.

Again the Elder made that despairing downward thrust with his open hands. "Take a wife who has nothing, and a career which brings in nothing, and live on what your father has amassed for you, and leave your sons nothing--a pretty way for you to carry on the work I have begun for you--to--establish an honorable family--"

"Father, father, I mean to do all I can to please you. I'll be always dutiful--and honorable--but you must leave me my manhood. You must allow me to choose my own path in life."

The Elder paced the floor a few moments longer, then resumed his chair opposite his son, and, leaning back, looked across the table at his boy, meditatively, with half-closed eyes. At last he said, "We'll take this matter to the Lord, and leave it in his hands."

Then Peter Junior cried out upon him: "No, no, father; spare me that. It only means that you'll state to the Lord what is your own way, and pray to have it, and then be more than ever convinced that it is the Lord's way."

"My son, my son!"

"It's so, father. I'm willing to ask for guidance of the Lord, but I'm not willing to have you dictate to the Lord what--what I must do, and so whip me in line with the scourge of prayer." Peter Junior paused, as he looked in his father's face and saw the shocked and sorrowful expression there instead of the passionate retort he expected. "I am wrong to talk so, father; forgive me; but--have patience a little. God gave to man the power of choice, didn't he?"

"Certainly. Through it all manner of evil came into the world."

"And all manner of good, too. I--a man ought not to be merely an automaton, letting some one else always exercise that right for him. Surely the right of choice would never have been given us if it were not intended that each man should exercise it for himself. One who does not is good for nothing."

"There is the command you forget; that of obedience to parents."

"But how long--how long, father? Am I not man enough to choose for myself? Let me choose."

Then the Elder leaned forward and faced his son as his son was facing him, both resting their elbows on the table and gazing straight into each other's eyes; and the old man spoke first.

"My father founded this bank before I was born. He came from Scotland when he was but a lad, with his parents, and went to school and profited by his opportunities. He was of good family, as you know. When he was still a very young man, he entered a bank in the city as clerk, and received only ten dollars a week for his services, but he was a steady, good lad, and ambitious, and soon he moved higher--and higher. His father had taken up farming, and at his death, being an only son, he converted the farm, all but the homestead, which we still own, and which will be yours, into capital, and came to town and started this bank. When I was younger than you, my son, I went into the bank and stood at my father's right hand, as I wish you--for your own sake--to do by me. We are a set race--a determined race, but we are not an insubordinate race, my son."

Peter Junior was silent for a while; he felt himself being beaten. Then he made one more plea. "It is not that I am insubordinate father, but, as I see it, into each generation something enters, different from the preceding one. New elements are combined. In me there is that which my mother gave me."

"Your mother has always been a sweet woman, yielding to the judgment of her husband, as is the duty of a good wife."

"I know she was brought up and trained to think that her duty, but I doubt if you really know her heart. Did you ever try to know it? I don't believe you understood what I meant by the scourge of prayer. She would have known. She has lived all these years under that lash, even though it has been wielded by the hand of one she loves--by one who loves her." He paused a second time, arrested by his father's expression. At first it was that of one who is stunned, then it slowly changed to one of rage. For once the boy had broken through that wall of self-control

in which the Elder encased himself. Slowly the Elder rose and leaned towering over his son across the table.

"I tell you that is a lie!" he shouted. "Your mother has never rebelled. She has been an obedient, docile woman. It is a lie!"

Peter Junior made no reply. He also rose, and taking up his crutch, turned toward the door. There he paused and looked back, with flashing eyes. His lip quivered, but he held himself quiet.

"Come back!" shouted his father.

"I have told you the truth, father." He still stood with his hand on the door.

"Has--has--your mother ever said anything to you to give you reason to insult me this way?"

"No, never. We can't talk reasonably now. Let me go, and I'll try to explain some other time."

"Explain now. There is no other time."

"Mother is sacred to me, father. I ought not to have dragged her into this discussion."

The Elder's lips trembled. He turned and walked to the window and stood a moment, silently looking out. At last he said in a low voice: "She is sacred to me also, my son."

Peter Junior went back to his seat, and waited a while, with his head in his hands; then he lifted his eyes to his father's face. "I can't help it. Now I've begun, I might as well tell the truth. I meant what I said when I spoke of the different element in me, and that it is from my mother. You gave me that mother. I know you love her, and you know that your will is her law, as you feel that it ought to be. But when I am with her, I feel something of a nature in her that is not yours. And why not? Why not, father? There is that of her in me that makes me know this, and that of you in me that makes me understand you. Even now, though you are not willing to give me my own way, it makes me understand that you are insisting on your way because you think it is for my good. But nothing can alter the fact that I have inherited from my mother tastes that are not yours, and that entitle me to my manhood's right of choice."

"Well, what is your choice, now that you know my wish?"

"I can't tell you yet, father. I must have more time. I only know what I think I would like to do."

"You wish to talk it over with your mother?"

"Yes."

"She will agree with me."

"Yes, no doubt; but it's only fair to tell her and ask her advice, especially if I decide to leave home."

The Elder caught his breath inwardly, but said no more. He recognized in the boy enough of himself to know that he had met in him a power of resistance equal to his own. He also knew what Peter Junior did not know, that his grandfather's removal to this country was an act of rebellion against the wishes of his father. It was a matter of family history he had thought best not to divulge.

CHAPTER VIII

MARY BALLARD'S DISCOVERY

Peter Junior's mind was quite made up to go his own way and leave home to study abroad, but first he would try to convert his father to his way of thinking. Then there was another thing to be done. Not to marry, of course; that, under present conditions, would never do; but to make sure of Betty, lest some one come and steal into her heart before his return.

After his talk with his father in the bank he lay long into the night, gazing at the shadowed tracery on his wall cast by the full harvest moon shining through the maple branches outside his window. The leaves had not all fallen, and in the light breeze they danced and quivered, and the branches swayed, and the shadows also swayed and danced delicately over the soft gray wall paper and the red-coated old soldier standing stiffly in his gold frame. Often in his waking dreams in after life he saw the moving shadows silently swaying and dancing over gray and red and gold, and often he tried to call them out from the past to banish things he would forget.

Long this night he lay planning and thinking. Should he speak to Betty and tell her he loved her? Should he only teach her to think of him, not with the frank liking of her girlhood, so well expressed to him that very day, but with the warm feeling which would cause her cheeks to redden when he spoke? Could he be sure of himself--to do this discreetly, or would he overstep the mark? He would wait and see what the next day would bring forth.

In the morning he discarded his crutch, as he had threatened, and walked out to the studio, using only a stout old blackthorn stick he had found one day when rummaging among a collection of odds and ends in the attic. He thought the stick was his father's and wondered why

so interesting a walking stick--or staff; it could hardly be called a cane, he thought, because it was so large and oddly shaped--should be hidden away there. Had his father seen it he would have recognized it instantly as one that had belonged to his brother-in-law, Larry Kildene, and it would have been cut up and used for lighting fires. But it had been many years since the Elder had laid eyes on that knobbed and sturdy stick, which Larry had treasured as a rare thing in the new world, and a fine antique specimen of a genuine blackthorn. It had belonged to his great-grandfather in Ireland, and no doubt had done its part in cracking crowns.

Betty, kneading bread at a table before the kitchen window, spied Peter Junior limping wearily up the walk without his crutch, and ran to him, dusting the flour from her hands as she came.

"Lean on me. I won't get flour on your coat. What did you go without your crutch for? It's very silly of you."

He essayed a laugh, but it was a self-conscious one. "I'm not going to use a crutch all my lifetime; don't you think it. I'm very well off without, and almost myself again. I don't need to lean on you--but I will--just for fun." He put his arm about her and drew her to him.

"Stop, Peter Junior. Don't you see you're getting flour all over your clothes?"

"I like flour on my clothes. It will do for stiffening." He raised her hand and kissed her wrist where there was no flour.

"You're not leaning on me. You're just acting silly, and you can hardly walk, you're so tired! Coming all this way without your crutch. I think you're foolish."

"If you say anything more about that crutch, I'll throw away my cane too." He dropped down on the piazza and drew her to the step beside him.

"I must finish kneading the bread; I can't sit here. You rest in the rocker awhile before you go up to the studio. Father's up there. He came home late last night after we were all in bed." She returned to her work, and after a moment called to him through the open window. "There's going to be a nutting party to-morrow, and we want you to go. We're going out to Carter's grove; we've got permission. Every one's going."

Peter Junior rubbed the moisture from his hair and shook his head. He must get nearer her, but it was always the same thing; just a happy game, with no touch of sentiment--no more, he thought gloomily, than if she were his sister.

"What are you all going there for?"

"Why, nuts, goosey; didn't I say we were going nutting?"

"I don't happen to want nuts." No, he wanted her to urge and coax him to go for her sake, but what could he say?

He left his seat, took the side path around to the kitchen door, and drew up a chair to the end of the table where she deftly manipulated the sweet-smelling dough, patting it, and pulling it, and turning it about until she was ready to put the shapely balls in the pans, holding them in her two firm little hands with a slight rolling motion as she slipped each loaf in its place. It had never occurred to Peter Junior that bread making was such an interesting process.

"Why do you fuss with it so? Why don't you just dump it in the pan any old way? That's the way I'd do." But he loved to watch her pink-tipped fingers carefully shaping the loaves, nevertheless.

"Oh--because."

"Good reason."

"Well--the more you work it the better it is, just like everything else; and then--if you don't make good-looking loaves, you'll never have a handsome husband. Mother says so." She tossed a stray lock from her eyes, and opening the oven door thrust in her arm. "My, but it's hot! Why do you sit here in the heat? It's a lot nicer on the porch in the rocker. Mother's gone to town--and--"

"I'd rather sit here with you--thank you." He spoke stiffly and waited. What could he say; what could he do next? She left him a moment and quickly returned with a cup of butter.

"You know--I'd stop and go out in the cool with you, Peter, but I must work this dough I have left into raised biscuit; and then I have to make a cake for to-morrow--and cookies--there's something to do in this house, I tell you! How about to-morrow?"

"I don't believe I'd better go. All the rest of the world will be there, and--"

"Only our little crowd. When I said everybody, you didn't think I meant everybody in the whole world, did you? You know us all."

"Do you want me to go? There'll be enough others--"

She tossed her head and gave him a sidelong glance. "I always ask people to go when I don't want them to."

He rose at that and stood close to her side, and, stooping, looked in her eyes; and for the first time the color flamed up in her face because of him. "I say--do you want me to go?"

"No, I don't."

But the red he had brought into her cheeks intoxicated him with delight. Now he knew a thing to do. He seized her wrists and turned her away from the table and continued to look into her eyes. She twisted about, looking away from him, but the burning blush made even the little ear

she turned toward him pink, and he loved it. His discretion was all gone. He loved her, and he would tell her now--now! She must hear it, and slipping his arm around her, he drew her away and out to the seat under the old silver-leaf poplar tree.

"You're acting silly, Peter Junior,--and my bread will all spoil and get too light,--and my hands are all covered with flour, and--"

"And you'll sit right here while I talk to you a bit, if the bread spoils and gets too light and everything burns to a cinder." She started to run away from him, and his peremptory tone changed to pleading. "Please, Betty, dear! just hear me this far. I'm going away, Betty, and I love you. No, sit close and be my sweetheart. Dear, it isn't the old thing. It's love, and it's what I want you to feel for me. I woke up yesterday, and found I loved you." He held her closer and lifted her face to his. "You must wake up, too, Betty; we can't play always. Say you'll love me and be my wife--some day--won't you, Betty?"

She drooped in his arms, hanging her head and looking down on her floury hands.

"Say it, Betty dear, won't you?"

Her lip quivered. "I don't want to be anybody's wife--and, anyway--I liked you better the other way."

"Why, Betty? Tell me why."

"Because--lots of reasons. I must help mother--and I'm only seventeen, and--"

"Most eighteen, I know, because--"

"Well, anyway, mother says no girl of hers shall marry before she's of age, and she says that means twenty-one, and--"

"That's all right. I can wait. Kiss me, Betty." But she was silent, with face turned from him. Again he lifted her face to his. "I say, kiss me, Betty. Just one? That was a stingy little kiss. You know I'm going away, and that is why I spoke to you now. I didn't dare go without telling you this first. You're so sweet, Betty, some one might find you out and love you--just as I have--only not so deeply in love with you--no one could--but some one might come and win you away from me, and so I must make sure that you will marry me when you are of age and I come back for you. Promise me."

"Where?--why--Peter Junior! Where are you going?" Betty removed his arm from around her waist and slipped to her own end of the seat. There, with hands folded decorously in her lap, with heightened color and serious eyes, she looked shyly up at him. He had never seen her shy before. Always she had been merry and teasing, and his heart was proud that he had wrought such a miracle in her.

"I am going to Paris. I mean to be an artist." He leaned toward her and would have taken her in his arms again, but she put his hands away.

"Will your father let you do that?" Her eyes widened with surprise, and the surprise nettled him.

"I don't know. He's thinking about it. Anyway, a man must decide for himself what his career will be, and if he won't let me, I'll earn the money and go without his letting me."

"Wouldn't that be the best way, anyway?"

"What do you mean? To go without his consent?"

"Of course not--goosey." She laughed and was herself again, but he liked her better the other way. "To earn the money and then go. It--it--would be more--more as if you were in earnest."

"My soul! Do you think I'm not in earnest? Do you think I'm not in love with you?"

Instantly she was serious and shy again. His heart leaped. He loved to feel his power over her thus. Still she tantalized him. "I'm not meaning about loving me. That's not the question. I mean it would look more as if you were in earnest about becoming an artist."

"No. The real question is, Do you love me? Will you marry me when I come back?" She was silent and he came nearer. "Say it. Say it. I must hear you say it before I leave." Her lips trembled as if she were trying to form the words, and their eyes met.

"Yes--if--if--"

Then he caught her to him, and stopped her mouth with kisses. He did not know himself. He was a man he had never met the like of, and he gloried in himself. It seemed as if he heard bells ringing out in joy. Then he looked up and saw Mary Ballard's eyes fixed on him.

"Peter Junior--what are you doing?" Her voice shook.

"I--I'm kissing Betty."

"I see that."

"We are to be married some day--and--"

"You are precipitate, Peter Junior."

Then Betty did what every woman does when her lover is blamed, no matter how earnestly she may have resisted him before. She went completely over to his side and took his part.

"He's going away, mother. He's going away to be gone--perhaps for years; and I've--I've told him yes, mother,--so it isn't his fault." Then she turned and fled to her own room, and hid her

flaming face in the pillow and wept.

"Sit here with me awhile, Peter Junior, and we'll talk it all over," said Mary.

He obeyed her, and looking squarely in her eyes, manfully told her his plans, and tried to make her feel as he felt, that no love like his had ever filled a man's heart before. At last she sent him up to the studio to tell her husband, and she went in and finished Betty's task, putting the bread--alas! too light by this time--in the oven, and shaping the raised biscuit which Betty had left half-finished.

Then she paused a moment to look out of the window down the path where the boys and little Janey would soon come tumbling home from school, hot and hungry. A tear slowly coursed down her cheek, and, following the curves, trembled on the tip of her chin. She brushed it away impatiently. Of course it had to come--that was what life must bring--but ah! not so soon--not so soon. Then she set about preparations for dinner without Betty's help. That, too, was what it would mean--sometime--to go on doing things without Betty. She gave a little sigh, and at the instant an arm was slipped about her waist, and she turned to look in Bertrand's eyes.

"Is it all right, Mary?"

"Why--yes--that is--if they'll always love each other as we have. I think it ought not to be too definite an engagement, though, until his plans are more settled. What do you think?"

"You are right, no doubt. I'll speak to him about that." Then he kissed her warm, flushed cheek. "I declare, it makes me feel as Peter Junior feels again, to have this happen."

"Ah, Bertrand! You never grew up--thank the Lord!" Then Mary laughed. After all, they had been happy, and why not Betty and Peter? Surely the young had their rights.

Bertrand climbed back to the studio where Peter Junior was pacing restlessly back and forth, and again they talked it all over, until the call came for dinner, when Peter was urged to stay, but would not. No, he would not see Betty again until he could have her quite to himself. So he limped away, feeling as if he were walking on air in spite of his halting gait, and Betty from her window watched him pass down the path and off along the grassy roadside. Then she went down to dinner, flushed and grave, but with shining eyes. Her father kissed her, but nothing was said, and the children thought nothing of it, for it was quite natural in the family to kiss Betty.

CHAPTER IX

THE BANKER'S POINT OF VIEW

There was no picnic and nutting party the next day, owing to a downpour of rain. Betty had time to think quietly over what had happened the day before and her mind misgave her. What was it that so filled her heart and mind? That so stirred her imagination? Was it romance or love? She wished she knew how other girls felt who had lovers. Was it easy or hard for them to say yes? Should a girl let her lover kiss her the way Peter Junior had done? Some of the questions which perplexed her she would have liked to ask her mother, but in spite of their charming intimacy she could not bring herself to speak of them. She wished she had a friend with a lover, and could talk it all over with her, but although she had girl friends, none of them had lovers, and to have one herself made her feel much older than any of them.

So Betty thought matters out for herself. Of course she liked Peter Junior--she had always liked him--and he was masterful--and she had always known she would marry a soldier--and one who had been wounded and been brave--that was the kind of a soldier to love. But she was more subdued than usual and sewed steadily on gingham aprons for Janey, making the buttonholes and binding them about the neck with contrasting stuff.

"Anyway, I'm glad there is no picnic to-day. The boys may eat up the cookies, and I didn't get the cake made after all," she said to her mother, as she lingered a moment in the kitchen and looked out of the window at the pouring rain. But she did not see the rain; she saw again a gray-clad youth limping down the path between the lilacs and away along the grassy roadside.

Well, what if she had said yes? It was all as it should be, according to her dreams, only--only--he had not allowed her to say what she had meant to say. She wished her mother had not happened to come just then before she could explain to Peter Junior; that it was "yes" only if when he came back he still wanted her and still loved her, and was sure he had not made a mistake about it. It was often so in books. Men went away, and when they returned, they found they no longer loved their sweethearts. If such a terrible thing should happen to her! Oh, dear! Or maybe he would be too honorable to say he no longer loved her, and would marry her in spite of it; and she would find out afterward, when it was too late, that he loved some one else; that would be very terrible, and they would be miserable all their lives.

"I don't think I would let the boys eat up the cookies, dear; it may clear off by sundown, and be fine to-morrow, and they'll be all as glad as to go to-day. You make your cake."

"But Martha's coming home to-morrow night, and I'd rather wait now until Saturday; that will

be only one day longer, and it will be more fun with her along." Betty spoke brightly and tried to make herself feel that no momentous thing had happened. She hated the constraint of it. "By that time Peter Junior will think that he can go, too. He's so funny!" She laughed self-consciously, and carried the gingham aprons back to her room.

"Bless her dear little heart." Mary Ballard understood.

Peter Junior also profited by the rainy morning. He had a long hour alone with his mother to tell her of his wish to go to Paris; and her way of receiving his news was a surprise to him. He had thought it would be a struggle and that he would have to argue with her, setting forth his hopes and plans, bringing her slowly to think with quiescence of their long separation: but no. She rose and began to pace the floor, and her eyes grew bright with eagerness.

"Oh, Peter, Peter!" She came and placed her two hands on his shoulders and gazed into his eyes. "Peter Junior, you are a boy after my own heart. You are going to be something worth while. I always knew you would. It is Bertrand Ballard who has waked you up, who has taught you to see that there is much outside of Leauvite for a man to do. I'm not objecting to those who live here and have found their work here; it is only that you are different. Go! Go!--It is--has your father--have you asked his consent?"

"Oh, yes."

"Has he given it?"

"I think he is considering it seriously."

"Peter Junior, I hope you won't go without it--as you went once, without mine." Never before had she mentioned it to him, or recalled to his mind that terrible parting.

"Why not, mother? It would be as fair to him now as it was then to you. It would be fairer; for this is a question of progress, and then it was a matter of life and death."

"Ah, that was different, I admit. But I never could retaliate, or seem to, even in the smallest thing. I don't want him to suffer as I suffered."

It was almost a cry for pity, and Peter Junior wondered in his heart at the depth of anguish she must have endured in those days, when he had thrust the thought of her opposition to one side as merely an obstacle overcome, and had felt the triumph of winning out in the contest, as one step toward independent manhood. Now, indeed, their viewpoints had changed. He felt almost a sense of pique that she had yielded so joyously and so suddenly, although confronted with the prospect of a long separation from him. Did she love him less than in the past? Had his former disregard of her wishes lessened even a trifle her mother love for him?

"I'm glad you can take the thought of my going as you do, mother." He spoke coldly, as an only son may, but he was to be excused. He was less spoiled than most only sons.

"In what way, my son?"

"Why--in being glad to have me go--instead of feeling as you did then."

"Glad? Glad to have you go? It isn't that, dear. Understand me. I'm sorry I spoke of that old time. It was only to spare your father. You see we look at things differently. He loves to have us follow out his plans. It is almost--death to him to have to give up; and with me--it was not then as it is now. I don't like to think or speak of that time."

"Don't, mother, don't!" cried Peter, contritely.

"But I must to make you see this as you should. It was love for you then that made me cling to you, and want to hold you back from going; just the same it is love for you now that makes me want you to go out and find your right place in the world. I was letting you go then to be shot at--to suffer fatigue, and cold, and imprisonment, who could know, perhaps to be cruelly killed--and I did not believe in war. I suppose your father was the nobler in his way of thinking, but I could not see it his way. Angels from heaven couldn't have made me believe it right; but it's over. Now I know your life will be made broader by going, and you'll have scope, at least, to know what you really wish to do with yourself and what you are worth, as you would not have, to sit down in your father's bank, although you would be safer there, no doubt. But you went through all the temptations of the army safely, and I have no fear for you now, dear, no fear."

Peter Junior's heart melted. He took his mother in his arms and stroked her beautiful white hair. "I love you, mother, dear," was all he could say. Should he tell her of Betty now? The question died in his heart. It was too much. He would be all hers for a little, nor intrude the new love that she might think divided his heart. He returned to the question of his father's consent. "Mother, what shall I do if he will not give it?"

"Wait. Try to be patient and do what he wishes. It may help him to yield in the end."

"Never! I know Dad better than that. He will only think all the more that he is in the right, and that I have come to my senses. He never takes any viewpoint but his own." His mother was silent. Never would she open her lips against her husband. "I say, mother, naturally I would rather go with his consent, but if he won't give it--How long must a man be obedient just for the sake of obedience? Does such bondage never end? Am I not of age?"

"I will speak to him. Wait and see. Talk it over with him again to-day after banking hours."

"I--I--have something I must--must do to-day." He was thinking he would go out to the Ballards' in spite of the rain.

The dinner hour passed without constraint. In these days Peter Junior would not allow the long silences to occur that used often to cast a gloom over the meals in his boyhood. He knew that in this way his mother would sadly miss him. It was the Elder's way to keep his thoughts for the most part to himself, and especially when there was an issue of importance before him. It was supposed that his wife could not take an interest in matters of business, or in things of interest to men, so silence was the rule when they were alone.

This time Peter Junior mentioned the topic of the wonderful new railroad that was being pushed across the plains and through the unexplored desert to the Pacific.

"The mere thought of it is inspiring," said Hester.

"How so?" queried the Elder, with a lift of his brows. He deprecated any thought connecting sentiment with achievement. Sentiment was of the heart and only hindered achievement, which was purely of the brain.

"It's just the wonder of it. Think of the two great oceans being brought so near together! Only two weeks apart! Don't they estimate that the time to cross will be only two weeks?"

"Yes, mother, and we have those splendid old pioneers who made the first trail across the desert to thank for its being possible. It isn't the capitalists who have done this. It's the ones who had faith in themselves and dared the dangers and the hardships. They are the ones I honor."

"They never went for love of humanity. It was mere love of wandering and migratory instinct," said his father, grimly.

Peter Junior laughed merrily. "What did old grandfather Craigmile pull up and come over to this country for? They had to cross in sailing vessels then and take weeks for the journey."

"Progress, my son, progress. Your grandfather had the idea of establishing his family in honorable business over here, and he did it."

"Well, I say these people who have been crossing the plains and crawling over the desert behind ox teams in 'prairie schooners' for the last twenty or thirty years, braving all the dangers of the unknown, have really paved the way for progress and civilization. The railroad is being laid along the trail they made. Do you know Richard's out there at the end of the line--nearly?"

"He would be likely to be. Roving boy! What's he doing there?"

"Poor boy! He almost died in that terrible southern prison. He was the mere shadow of himself when he came home," said Hester.

"The young men of the present day have little use for beaten paths and safe ways. I offered him a position in the bank, but no--he must go to Scotland first to make the acquaintance of our aunts. If he had been satisfied with that! But no, again, he must go to Ireland on a fool's errand to learn something of his father." The Elder paused and bit his lip, and a vein stood out on his forehead. "He's never seen fit to write me of late."

"Of course such a big scheme as this road across the plains would appeal to a man like Richard. He's doing very well, father. I wouldn't be disturbed about him."

"Humph! I might as well be disturbed about the course of the Wisconsin River. I might as well worry over the rush of a cataract. The lad has no stability."

"He never fails to write to me, and I must say that he was considered the most dependable man in the regiment."

"What is he doing? I should like to see the boy again." Hester looked across at her son with a warm, loving light in her eyes.

"I don't know exactly, but it's something worth while, and calls for lots of energy. He says they are striking out into the dust and alkali now--right into the desert."

"And doesn't he say a word about when he is coming back?"

"Not a word, mother. He really has no home, you know. He says Scotland has no opening for him, and he has no one to depend on but himself."

"He has relatives who are fairly well to do in Ireland."

The Elder frowned. "So I've heard, and my aunts in Scotland talked of making him their heir, when I was last there."

"He knows that, father, but he says he's not one to stand round waiting for two old women to die. He says they're fine, decorous old ladies, too, who made a lot of him. I warrant they'd hold up their hands in horror if they knew what a rough life he's leading now."

"How rough, my son? I wish he'd make up his mind to come home."

"There! I told him this is his home; just as much as it is mine. I'll write him you said that, mother."

"Indeed, yes. Bless the boy!"

The Elder looked at his wife and lifted his brows, a sign that it was time the meal should close, and she rose instantly. It was her habit never to rise until the Elder gave the sign. Peter Junior walked down the length of the hall at his father's side.

"What Richard really wished to do was what I mentioned to you yesterday for myself. He wanted to go to Paris and study, but after visiting his great-aunts he saw that it would be too much. He

would not allow them to take from their small income to help him through, so he gave it up for the time being; but if he keeps on as he is, it is my opinion he may go yet. He's making good money. Then we could be there together."

The Elder made no reply, but stooped and drew on his india-rubber overshoes,--stamping into them,--and then got himself into his raincoat with sundry liftings and hunchings of his shoulders. Peter Junior stood by waiting, if haply some sort of sign might be given that his remark had been heeded, but his father only carefully adjusted his hat and walked away in the rain, setting his feet down stubbornly at each step, and holding his umbrella as if it were a banner of righteousness. The younger man's face flushed, and he turned from the door angrily; then he looked to see his mother's eyes fixed on him sadly.

"At least he might treat me with common decency. He need not be rude, even if I am his son." He thought he detected accusation of himself in his mother's gaze and resented it.

"Be patient, dear."

"Oh, mother! Patient, patient! What have you got by being patient all these years?"

"Peace of mind, my son."

"Mother--"

"Try to take your father's view of this matter. Have you any idea how hard he has worked all his life, and always with the thought of you and your advancement, and welfare? Why, Peter Junior, he is bound up in you. He expected you would one day stand at his side, his mainstay and help and comfort in his business."

"Then it wasn't for me; it was for himself that he has worked and built up the bank. It's his bank, and his wife, and his son, and his 'Tower of Babel that he has builded,' and now he wants me to bury myself in it and worship at his idolatry."

"Hush, Peter. I don't like to rebuke you, but I must. You can twist facts about and see them in a wrong light, but the truth remains that he has loved you tenderly--always. I know his heart better than you--better than he. It is only that he thinks the line he has taken a lifetime to lay out for you is the best. He is as sure of it as that the days follow each other. He sees only futility in the way you would go. I have no doubt his heart is sore over it at this moment, and that he is grieving in a way that would shock you, could you comprehend it."

"Enough said, mother, enough said. I'll try to be fair."

He went to his room and stood looking out at the rain-washed earth and the falling leaves. The sky was heavy and drab. He thought of Betty and her picnic and of how gay and sweet she was, and how altogether desirable, and the thought wrought a change in his spirit. He went downstairs and kissed his mother; then he, too, put on his rubber overshoes and shook himself into his raincoat and carefully adjusted his hat and his umbrella. Then with the assistance of the old blackthorn stick he walked away in the rain, limping, it is true, but nevertheless a younger, sturdier edition of the man who had passed out before him.

He found Betty alone as he had hoped, for Mary Ballard had gone to drive her husband to the station. Bertrand was thinking of opening a studio in the city, at his wife's earnest solicitation, for she thought him buried there in their village. As for the children--they were still in school.

Thus it came about that Peter Junior spent the rest of that day with Betty in her father's studio. He told Betty all his plans. He made love to her and cajoled her, and was happy indeed. He had a winsome way, and he made her say she loved him--more than once or twice--and his heart was satisfied.

"We'll be married just as soon as I return from Paris, and you'll not miss me so much until then?"

"Oh, no."

"Ah--but--but I hope you will--you know."

"Of course I shall! What would you suppose?"

"But you said no."

"Naturally! Didn't you wish me to say that?"

"I wanted you to tell the truth."

"Well, I did."

"There it is again! I'm afraid you don't really love me."

She tilted her head on one side and looked at him a moment. "Would you like me to say I don't want you to go to Paris?"

"Not that, exactly; but all the time I'm gone I shall be longing for you."

"I should hope so! It would be pretty bad if you didn't."

"Now you see what I mean about you. I want you to be longing for me all the time, until I return."

"All right. I'll cry my eyes out, and I'll keep writing for you to come home."

"Oh, come now! Tell me what you will do all the time."

"Oh, lots of things. I'll paint pictures, too, and--I'll write--and help mother just as I do now; and I'll study art without going to Paris."

"Will you, you rogue! I'd marry you first and take you with me if it were possible, and you should study in Paris, too--that is, if you wished to."

"Wouldn't it be wonderful! But I don't know--I believe I'd rather write than paint."

"I believe I'd rather have you. They say there are no really great women artists. It isn't in the woman's nature. They haven't the strength. Oh, they have the delicacy and all that; it's something else they lack."

"Humph! It's rather nice to have us lacking in one thing and another, isn't it? It gives you men something to do to discover and fill in the lacks."

"I know one little lady who lacks in nothing but years."

Betty looked out of the window and down into the yard. "There is mother driving in. Let's go down and have cookies and milk. I'm sure you need cookies and milk."

"I'll need anything you say."

"Very well, then, you'll need patience if ever you marry me."

"I know that well enough. Stop a moment. Kiss me before we go down." He caught her in his arms, but she slipped away.

"No, I won't. You've had enough kisses. I'll always give you one when you come, hereafter, and one when you go away, but no more."

"Then I shall come very often." He laughed and leaned upon her instead of using his stick, as they slowly descended.

Mary Ballard was chilled after her long drive in the rain, and Betty made her tea. Then, after a pleasant hour of chat and encouragement from the two sweet women, Peter Junior left them, promising to go to the picnic and nutting party on Saturday. It would surely be pleasant, for the sky was already clearing. Yes, truly a glad heart brings pleasant prognostications.

CHAPTER X

THE NUTTING PARTY

Peter Junior made no attempt the next day to speak further to his father about his plans. It seemed to him better that he should wait until his wise mother had talked the matter over with the Elder. Although he put in most of the day at the studio, painting, he saw very little of Betty and thought she was avoiding him out of girlish coquetry, but she was only very busy. Martha was coming home and everything must be as clean as wax. Martha was such a tidy housekeeper that she would see the least lack and set to work to remedy it, and that Betty could not abide. In these days Martha's coming marked a semimonthly event in the home, for since completing her course at the high school she had been teaching in the city. Bertrand would return with her, and then all would have to be talked over,--just what he had decided to do, and why.

In the evening a surprise awaited the whole household, for Martha came, accompanied not only by her father, but also by a young professor in the same school where she taught. Mary Ballard greeted him most kindly, but she felt things were happening too rapidly in her family. Jamie and Bobby watched the young man covertly yet eagerly, taking note of his every movement and intonation. Was he one to be emulated or avoided? Only little Janey was quite unabashed by him, and this lightened his embarrassment greatly and helped him to the ease of manner he strove to establish.

She led him out to the sweet-apple tree, and introduced him to the calf and the bantams, and invited him to go with them nutting the next day. "We're all going in a great, big picnic wagon. Everybody's going and we'll have just lots of fun." And he accepted, provided she would sit beside him all the way.

Bobby decided at this point that he also would befriend the young man. "If you're going to sit beside her all the way, you'll have to be lively. She never sits in one place more than two minutes. You'll have to sit on papa's other knee for a while, and then you'll have to sit on Peter Junior's."

"That will be interesting, anyway. Who's Peter Junior?"

"Oh, he's a man. He comes to see us a lot."

"He's the son of Elder Craigmile," explained Martha.

"Is he going, too, Betty?"

"Yes. The whole crowd are going. It will be fun. I'm glad now it rained Thursday, for the Deans didn't want to postpone it till to-morrow, and then, when it rained, Mrs. Dean said it would be

too wet to try to have it yesterday; and now we have you. I wanted all the time to wait until you came home."

That night, when Martha went to their room, Betty followed her, and after closing the door tightly she threw her arms around her sister's neck.

"Oh, Martha, Martha, dear! Tell me all about him. Why didn't you let us know? I came near having on my old blue gingham. What if I had? He's awfully nice looking. Is he in love with you? Tell me all about it. Does he make love to you? Oh, Martha! It's so romantic for you to have a lover!"

"Hush, Betty, some one will hear you. Of course he doesn't make love to me!"

"Why?"

"I wouldn't let him."

"Martha! Why not? Do you think it's bad to let a young man make love to you?"

"Betty! You mustn't talk so loud. Everything sounds so through this house. It would mortify me to death."

"What would mortify you to death: to have him make love to you or to have someone hear me?"

"Betty, dear!"

"Well, tell me all about him--please! Why did he come out with you?"

"You shouldn't always be thinking about love-making--and--such things, Betty, dear. He just came out in the most natural way, just because he--he loves the country, and he was talking to me about it one day and said he'd like to come out some Friday with me--just about asked me to invite him. So when father called at the school yesterday for me, I introduced them, and he said the same thing to father, and of course father invited him over again, and--and--so he's here. That's all there is to it."

"I bet it isn't. How long have you known him?"

"Why, ever since I've been in the school, naturally."

"What does he teach?"

"He has higher Latin and beginners' Greek, and then he has charge of the main room when the principal goes out."

Betty pondered a little, sitting on the floor in front of her sister. "You have such a lovely way of doing your hair. Is that the way to do hair nowadays--with two long curls hanging down from one side of the coil? You wind one side around the back knot, and then you pin the other up and let the ends hang down in two long curls, don't you? I'm going to try mine that way; may I?"

"Of course, darling! I'll help you."

"What's his name, Martha? I couldn't quite catch it, and I did not want to let him know I thought it queer, so wouldn't ask over."

"His name is Lucien Thurbyfil. It's not so queer, Betty."

"Oh, you pronounce it T'urbyfil, just as if there were no 'h' in it. You know I thought father said Mr. Tubfull--or something like that, when he introduced him to mother, and that was why mother looked at him in such an odd way."

The two girls laughed merrily. "Betty, what if you hadn't been a dear, and had called him that! And he's so very correct!"

"Oh, is he? Then I'll try it to-morrow and we'll see what he'll do."

"Don't you dare! I'd be so ashamed I'd sink right through the floor. He'd think we'd been making fun of him."

"Then I'll wait until we are out in the woods, for I'd hate to have you make a hole in the floor by sinking through it."

"Betty! You'll be good to-morrow, won't you, dear?"

"Good? Am I not always good? Didn't I scrub and bake and put flowers all over the ugly what-not in the corner of the parlor, and get the grease spot out of the dining room rug that Jamie stepped butter into--and all for you--without any thought of any Mr. Tubfull or any one but you? All day long I've been doing it."

"Of course you did, and it was perfectly sweet; and the flowers and mother looked so dear--and Janey's hands were clean--I looked to see. You know usually they are so dirty. I knew you'd been busy; but Betty, dear, you won't be mischievous to-morrow, will you? He's our guest, you know, and you never were bashful, not as much as you really ought to be, and we can't treat strangers just as we do--well--people we have always known, like Peter Junior. They wouldn't understand it."

But the admonition seemed to be lost, for Betty's thoughts were wandering from the point. "Hasn't he ever--ever--made love to you?" Martha was washing her face and neck at the washstand in the corner, and now she turned a face very rosy, possibly with scrubbing, and threw water over her naughty little sister. "Well, hasn't he ever put his arm around you or--or anything?"

"I wouldn't let a man do that."

"Not if you were engaged?"

"Of course not! That wouldn't be a nice way to do."

"Shouldn't you let a man kiss you or--or--put his arm around you--or anything--even when he's trying to get engaged to you?"

"Of course not, Betty, dear. You're asking very silly questions. I'm going to bed."

"Well, but they do in books. He did in 'Jane Eyre,' don't you remember? And she was proud of it--and pretended not to be--and very much touched, and treasured his every look in her heart. And in the books they always kiss their lovers. How can Mr. Thurbyfil ever be your lover, if you never let him even put his arm around you?"

"Betty, Betty, come to bed. He isn't my lover and he doesn't want to be and we aren't in books, and you are getting too old to be so silly."

Then Betty slowly disrobed and bathed her sweet limbs and at last crept in beside her sister. Surely she had not done right. She had let Peter Junior put his arm around her and kiss her, and that even before they were engaged; and all yesterday afternoon he had held her hand whenever she came near, and he had followed her about and had kissed her a great many times. Her cheeks burned with shame in the darkness, not that she had allowed this, but that she had not been as bashful as she ought. But how could she be bashful without pretending?

"Martha," she said at last, "you are so sweet and pretty, if I were Mr. Thurbyfil, I'd put my arm around you anyway, and make love to you."

Then Martha drew Betty close and gave her a sleepy kiss. "No you wouldn't, dear," she murmured, and soon the two were peacefully sleeping, Betty's troubles quite forgotten. Still, when morning came, she did not confide to her sister anything about Peter Junior, and she even whispered to her mother not to mention a word of the affair to any one.

At breakfast Jamie and Bobby were turbulent with delight. All outings were a joy to them, no matter how often they came. Martha was neat and rosy and gay. Lucien Thurbyfil wanted to help her by wiping the dishes, but she sent him out to the sweet-apple tree with a basket, enjoining him to bring only the mellow ones. "Be sure to get enough. We're all going, father and mother and all."

"It's very nice of your people to make room for me on the wagon."

"And it's nice of you to go."

"I see Peter Junior. He's coming," shouted Bobby, from the top of the sweet-apple tree.

"Who does he go with?" asked Martha.

"With us. He always does," said Betty. "I wonder why his mother and the Elder never go out for any fun, the way you and father do!"

"The Elder always has to be at the bank, I suppose," said Mary Ballard, "and she wouldn't go without him. Did you put in the salt and pepper for the eggs, dear?"

"Yes, mother. I'm glad father isn't a banker."

"It takes a man of more ability than I to be a banker," said Bertrand, laughing, albeit with concealed pride.

"We don't care if it does, Dad," said Jamie, patronizingly. "When I get through the high school, I'm going to hire out to the bank." He seized the lunch basket and marched manfully out to the wagon.

"I thought Peter Junior always went with Clara Dean. He did when I left," said Martha, in a low voice to Betty, as they filled bottles with raspberry shrub, and with cream for the coffee. "Did you tie strings on the spoons, dear? They'll get mixed with the Walters' if you don't. You remember theirs are just like ours."

"Oh, I forgot. Why, he likes Clara a lot, of course, but I guess they just naturally expected him to go with us. They and the Walters have a wagon together, anyway, and they wouldn't have room. We have one all to ourselves. Hello, Peter Junior! Mr. Thurbyfil, this is Mr. Junior."

"Happy to meet you, Mr. Junior," said the correct Mr. Thurbyfil. The boys laughed uproariously, and the rest all smiled, except Betty, who was grave and really seemed somewhat embarrassed.

"What is it?" she asked.

"Mr. Thurbyfil, this is Mr. Craigmile," said Martha. "You introduced him as Mr. Junior, Betty."

"I didn't! Well, that's because I'm bashful. Come on, everybody, mother's in." So they all climbed into the wagon and began to find their places.

"Oh, father, have you the matches? The bottles are on the kitchen table," exclaimed Martha.

"Don't get down, Mr. Ballard," said Lucien. "I'll get them. It would never do to forget the bottles. Now, where's the little girl who was to ride beside me?" and Janey crawled across the hay and settled herself at her new friend's side. "Now I think we are beautifully arranged," for Martha was on his other side.

"Very well, we're off," and Bertrand gathered up the reins and they started.

"There they are. There's the other wagon," shouted Bobby. "We ought to have a flag to wave."

Then Lucien, the correct, startled the party by putting his two fingers in his mouth and whistling shrilly.

"They have such a load I wish Clara could ride with us," said Betty. "Peter Junior, won't you get out and fetch her?"

So they all stopped and there were greetings and introductions and much laughing and joking, and Peter Junior obediently helped Clara Dean down and into the Ballards' wagon.

"Clara, Mr. Thurbyfil can whistle as loud as a train, through his fingers, he can. Do it, Mr. Thurbyfil," said Bobby.

"Oh, I can do that," said Peter Junior, not to be outdone by the stranger, and they all tried it. Bertrand and his wife, settled comfortably on the high seat in front, had their own pleasure together and paid no heed to the noisy crew behind them.

What a day! Autumn leaves and hazy distances, soft breezes and sunlight, and miles of level road skirting woods and open fields where the pumpkins lay yellow among the shocks of corn, and where the fence corners were filled with flaming sumac, with goldenrod and purple asters adding their softer coloring.

It was a good eight miles to Carter's woods, but they bordered the river where the bluffs were not so high, and it would be possible to build a fire on the river bank with perfect safety. Bertrand had brought roasting ears from his patch of sweet corn, and as soon as they arrived at their chosen grove, he and Mary leisurely turned their attention to the preparing of the lunch with Mrs. Dean and Mrs. Walters, leaving to the young people the gathering of the nuts.

Mrs. Dean, a slight, wiry woman, who acted and talked easily and unceasingly, spread out a fresh linen cloth and laid a stone on each corner to hold it down, and then looked into each lunch basket in turn, to acquaint herself with its contents.

"I see you brought cake and cookies and jam, Mrs. Ballard, besides all the corn and cream--you always do too much, and all your own work to look after, too. Well, I brought a lot of ham sandwiches and that brown bread your husband likes so much. I always feel so proud when Mr. Ballard praises anything I do; he's so clever it makes me feel as if I were really able to do something. And you're so clever too. I don't know how it is some folks seem to have all the brains, and then there's others--good enough--but there! As I tell Mr. Dean, you can't tell why it is. Now where are the spoons? Every one brings their own, of course; yes, here are yours, Mrs. Walters. It's good of you to think of that sweet corn, Mr. Ballard.--Oh, he's gone away; well, anyway, we're having a lot more than we can eat, and all so good and tempting. I hope Mr. Dean won't overeat himself; he's just a boy at a picnic, I always have to remind him--How?"

"Did you bring the cups for the coffee?" It was Mrs. Walters who interrupted the flow of Mrs. Dean's eloquence. She was portly and inclined to brevity, which made her a good companion for Mrs. Dean.

"I had such a time with my jell this summer, and now this fall my grape jell's just as bad. This is all running over the glasses. There, I'll set it on this paper. I do hate to see a clean cloth all spotted with jell, even if it is a picnic when people think it doesn't make any difference. I see Martha has a friend. Well, that's nice. I wish Clara cared more for company; but, there, as I tell Mr. Dean--Oh, yes! the cups. Clara, where are the cups? Oh, she's gone. Well, I'm sure they're in that willow basket. I told Clara to pack towels around them good. I do hate to see cups all nicked up; yes, here they are. It's good of you to always tend the coffee, Mrs. Walters; you know just how to make it. I tell Mr. Dean nobody ever makes coffee like you can at a picnic. Now, if it's ready, I think everything else is; well, it soon will be with such a fire, and the corn's not done, anyway. Do you think the sun'll get round so as to shine on the table? I see it's creeping this way pretty fast, and they're all so scattered over the woods there's no telling when we will get every one here to eat. I see another tablecloth in your basket, Mrs. Ballard. If you'll be good enough to just hold that corner, we can cover everything up good, so, and then I'll walk about a bit and call them all together." And the kindly lady stepped briskly off through the woods, still talking, while Mrs. Ballard and Mrs. Walters sat themselves down in the shade and quietly watched the coffee and chatted.

It was past the noon hour, and the air was drowsy and still. The voices and laughter of the nut gatherers came back to them from the deeper woods in the distance, and the crackling of the fire where Bertrand attended to the roasting of the corn near by, and the gentle sound of the lapping water on the river bank came to them out of the stillness.

"I wonder if Mr. Walters tied the horses good!" said his wife. "Seems as if one's got loose. Don't you hear a horse galloping?"

"They're all there eating," said Mary, rising and looking about. "Some one's coming, away off there over the bluff; see?"

"I wonder, now! My, but he rides well. He must be coming here. I hope there's nothing the matter. It looks like--it might be Peter Junior, only he's here already."

"It's--it's--no, it can't be--it is! It's--Bertrand, Bertrand! Why, it's Richard!" cried Mary Ballard, as the horseman came toward them, loping smoothly along under the trees, now in the sunlight and now in the shadow. He leaped from the saddle, and, throwing the rein over a knotted limb, walked rapidly toward them, holding out a hand to each, as Bertrand and Mary hurried forward.

"I couldn't let you good folks have one of these fine old times without me."

"Why, when did you come? Oh, Richard! It's good to see you again," said Mary.

"I came this morning. I went up to my uncle's and then to your house and found you all away, and learned that you were here and my twin with you, so here I am. How are the children? All grown up?"

"Almost. Come and sit down and give an account of yourself to Mary, while I try to get hold of the rest," said Bertrand.

"Mrs. Dean has gone for them, father. Mrs. Walters, the coffee's all right; come and sit down here and let's visit until the others come. You remember Richard Kildene, Mrs. Walters?"

"Since he was a baby, but it's been so long since I've seen you, Richard. I don't believe I'd have known you unless for your likeness to Peter Junior. You look stronger than he now. Redder and browner."

"I ought to. I've been in the open air and sun for weeks. I'm only here now by chance."

"A happy chance for us, Richard. Where have you been of late?" asked Bertrand.

"Out on the plains--riding and keeping a gang of men under control, for the most part, and pushing the work as rapidly as possible." He tossed back his hair with the old movement Mary remembered so well. "Tell me about the children, Martha and Betty; both grown up? Or still ready to play with a comrade?"

"They're all here to-day. Martha's teaching in the city, but Betty's at home helping me, as always. The boys are getting such big fellows, and little Janey's as sweet as all the rest."

"There! That's Betty's laugh, I know. I'd recognize it if I heard it out on the plains. I have, sometimes--when a homesick fit gets hold of me out under the stars, when the noise of the camp has subsided. A good deal of that work is done by the very refuse of humanity, you know, a mighty tough lot."

"And you like that sort of thing, Richard?" asked Mary. "I thought when you went to your people in Scotland, you might be leading a very different kind of life by now."

"I thought so, too, then; but I guess for some reasons this is best. Still, I couldn't resist stealing a couple of days to run up here and see you all. I got off a carload of supplies yesterday from Chicago, and then I wired back to the end of the line that I'd be two days later myself. No wonder I followed you out here. I couldn't afford to waste the precious hours. I say! That's Betty again! I'll find them and say you're hungry, shall I?"

"Oh, they're coming now. I see Martha's pink dress, and there's Betty in green over there."

But Richard was gone, striding over the fallen leaves toward the spot of green which was Betty's gingham dress. And Betty, spying him, forgot she was grown up. She ran toward him with outstretched arms, as of old--only--just as he reached her, she drew back and a wave of red suffused her face. She gave him one hand instead of both, and called to Peter Junior to hurry.

"Well, Betty Ballard! I can't jump you along now over stocks and stones as I used to. And here's everybody! Why, Jamie, what a great man you are! I'll have to take you back with me to help build the new road. And here's Bobby; and this little girl--I wonder if she remembers me well enough to give me a kiss? I have nobody to kiss me now, when I come back. That's right. That's what Betty used to do. Why, hello! here's Clara Dean, and who's this? John Walters? So you're a man, too! Mr. Dean, how are you? And Mrs. Dean! You don't grow any older anyway, so I'll walk with you. Wait until I've pounded this old chap a minute. Why didn't I write I was coming? Man, I didn't know it myself. I'm under orders nowadays. To get here at all I had to steal time. So you're graduated from a crutch to a cane? Good!"

Every one exclaimed at once, while Richard talked right on, until they reached the riverside where the lunch was spread; and then the babble was complete.

That night, as they all drove home in the moonlight, Richard tied his horse to the rear of the Ballards' wagon and rode home seated on the hay with the rest. He placed himself where Betty sat on his right, and the two boys crowded as close to him as possible on his left. Little Janey, cuddled at Betty's side, was soon fast asleep with her head in her sister's lap, while Lucien Thurbyfil was well pleased to have Martha in the corner to himself. Peter Junior sat near Betty and listened with interest to his cousin, who entertained them all with tales of the plains and the Indians, and the game that supplied them with many a fine meal in camp.

"Say, did you ever see a real herd of wild buffalo just tearing over the ground and kicking up a great dust and stampeding and everything?" said Jamie.

"Oh, yes. And if you are out there all alone on your pony, you'd better keep away from in front of them, too, or you'd be trampled to death in a jiffy."

"What's stampeding?" said Bobby.

So Richard explained it, and much more that elicited long breaths of interest. He told them of the miles and miles of land without a single tree or hill, and only a sea of grass as far as the eye could reach, as level as Lake Michigan, and far vaster. And how the great railway was now approaching the desert, and how he had seen the bones of men and cattle and horses bleaching white, lying beside their broken-down wagons half buried in the drifting sand. He told them how the trail that such people had made with so much difficulty stretched far, far away into the

desert along the very route, for the most part, that the railroad was taking, and answered their questions so interestingly that the boys were sorry when they reached home at last and they had to bid good-night to Peter Junior's fascinating cousin, Richard.

CHAPTER XI

BETTY BALLARD'S AWAKENING

Mary and Bertrand always went early to church, for Bertrand led the choir, and it was often necessary for him to gather the singers together and try over the anthem before the service. Sometimes the rector would change the hymns, and then the choir must have one little rehearsal of them. Martha and Mr. Thurbyfil accompanied them this morning, and Betty and the boys were to walk, for four grown-ups with little Janey sandwiched in between more than filled the carryall.

In these days Betty no longer had to wash and dress her brothers, but there were numerous attentions required of her, such as only growing boys can originate, and "sister" was as kind and gay in helping them over their difficulties as of old. So, now, as she stepped out of her room all dressed for church in her white muslin with green rose sprigs over it, with her green parasol, and her prayer book in her hand, Bobby called her.

"Oh, Sis! I've broken my shoe string and it's time to start."

"I have a new one in my everyday shoes, Bobby, dear; run upstairs and take it out. They're just inside the closet door. Wait a minute, Jamie; that lock stands straight up on the back of your head. Can't you make it lie down? Bring me the brush. You look splendid in your new trousers. Now, you hurry on ahead and leave this at the Deans'. It's Clara's sash bow. I found it in the wagon after they left last night. Run, she may want to wear it to church.--Yes, Bobby, dear, I sent him on, but you can catch up. Have you a handkerchief? Yes, I'll follow in a minute."

And the boys rushed off, looking very clean in their Sunday clothing, and very old and mannish in their long trousers and stiff hats. Betty looked after them with pride, then she bethought her that the cat had not had her saucer of milk, and ran down to the spring to get it, leaving the doors wide open behind her. The day was quite warm enough for her to wear the summer gown, and she was very winsome and pretty in her starched muslin, with the delicate green buds sprayed over it. She wore a green belt, too, and the parasol she was very proud of, for she had bought it with her own chicken money. It was her heart's delight. Betty's skirt reached nearly to the ground, for she was quite in long dresses, and two little ruffles rippled about her feet as she ran down the path to the spring. But, alas! As she turned away after carefully fastening the spring-house door, the cat darted under her feet; and Betty stumbled and the milk streamed down the front of her dress and spattered her shoes--and if there was anything Betty liked, it was to have her shoes very neat.

"Oh, Kitty! I hate your running under my feet that way all the time." Betty was almost in tears. She set the saucer down and tried to wipe off the milk, while the cat crouched before the dish and began drinking eagerly and unthankfully, after the manner of cats.

Some one stood silently watching her from the kitchen steps as she walked slowly up the path, gazing down on the ruin of the pretty starched ruffles.

"Why, Richard!" was all she said, for something came up in her throat and choked her. She waited where she stood, and in his eyes, her aspect seemed that of despair. Was it all for the spilled milk?

"Why, Betty dear!" He caught her and kissed her and laughed at her and comforted her all at once. "Not tears, dear? Tears to greet me? You didn't half greet me last evening, and I came only to see you. Now you will, where there's no one to see and no one to hear? Yes. Never mind the spilled milk, you know better than that." But Betty lay in his arms, a little crumpled wisp of sorrow, white and still.

"Away off there in Cheyenne I got to thinking of you, and I went to headquarters and asked to be sent on this commission just to get the chance to run up here and tell you I have been waiting all these years for you to grow up. You have haunted me ever since I left Leauvite. You darling, your laughing face was always with me, on the march--in prison--and wherever I've been since. I've been trying to keep myself right--for you--so I might dare some day to take you in my arms like this and tell you--so I need not be ashamed before your--"

"Oh, Richard, wait!" wailed Betty, but he would not wait.

"I've waited long enough. I see you are grown up before I even dreamed you could be. Thank heaven I came now! You are so sweet some one would surely have won you away from me--but no one can now--no one."

"Richard, why didn't you tell me this when you first came home from the war--before you went to Scotland? I would--"

"Not then, sweetheart; I couldn't. I didn't even know then I would ever be worth the love of any woman; and--you were such a child then--I couldn't intrude my weariness--my worn-out self on you. I was sick at heart when I got out of that terrible prison; but now it is all changed. I am my own man now, dependent on no one, and able to marry you out of hand, Betty, dear. After you've told me something, I'll do whatever you say, wait as long as you say. No, no! Listen! Don't break away from me. You don't hate me as you do the cat. I haven't been running under your feet all the time, have I, dear? Listen. See here, my arms are strong now. They can hold you forever, just like this. I've been thinking of you and dreaming of you and loving you through these years. You have never been out of my mind nor out of my heart. I've kept the little housewife you made me and bound with your cherry-colored hair ribbon until it is in rags, but I love it still. I love it. They took everything I had about me at the prison; but this--they gave back to me. It was the only thing I begged them to leave me."

Poor little Betty! She tried to speak and tried again, but she could not utter a word. Her mouth grew dry and her knees would not support her. Richard was so big and strong he did not feel her weight, and only delighted in the thought that she resigned herself to him. "Darling little Betty! Darling little Betty! You do understand, don't you? Won't you tell me you do?"

But she only closed her eyes and lay quite still. She longed to lift her arms and put them about his neck, and the effort not to do so only crushed her spirit the more. Now she knew she was bad, and unworthy such a great love as this. She had let Peter Junior kiss her, and she had told him she loved him--and it was nothing to this. She was not good; she was unworthy, and all the angels in heaven could never bring her comfort any more. She was so still he put his cheek to hers, and it seemed as if she moaned, and that without a sound.

"Have I hurt you, Betty, dear?"

"Oh, no, Richard, no."

"Do you love me, sweet?"

"Yes, Richard, yes. I love you so I could die of loving you, and I can't help it. Oh, Richard, I can't help it."

"It's asking too much that you should love me so, and yet that's what my selfish, hungry heart wants and came here for."

"Take your face away, Richard; stop. I must talk if it kills me. I have been so bad and wicked. Oh, Richard, I can't tell you how wicked. Let me stand by myself now. I can." She fought back the tears and turned her face away from him, but when he let go of her, in her weakness she swayed, and he caught her to him again, with many repeated words of tenderness.

"If you will take me to the steps, Richard, and bring me a glass of water, I think I can talk to you then. You remember where things are in this house?"

Did he remember? Was there anything he had forgotten about this beloved place? He brought her the water and she made him sit beside her, but not near, only that she need not look in his eyes.

"Richard, I thought something was love--that was not--I didn't know. It was only liking--and--and now I--I've been so wrong--and I want to die--Oh, I want to die! No, don't. Do you want to make me sin again? Oh, Richard, Richard! If you had only come before! Now it is too late." She began sobbing bitterly, and her small frame shook with her grief.

He seized her wrists and his hand trembled. She tried to cover her face with her hands, but he took them down and held them.

"Betty, what have you done? Tell me--tell me quick."

Then she turned her face toward him, wet with tears. "Have pity on me, Richard. Have pity on me, Richard, for my heart is broken, and the thing that hurts me most is that it will hurt you."

"But it wasn't yesterday when I came to you out there in the woods. I heard you laughing, and you ran to meet me as happy as ever--"

"You did not hear me laugh once again after you came and looked in my eyes there in the grove. It was in that instant that my heart began to break, and now I know why. Go back to Cheyenne. Go far away and never think of me any more. I am not worthy of you, anyway. I have let you hold me in your arms and kiss me when I ought not. Oh, I have been so bad--so bad! Let me hide my face. I can't look in your eyes any more."

But he was cruel. He made her look in his eyes and tell him all the sorrowful truth. Then at last he grew pitiful again and tried brokenly to comfort her, to make her feel that something would intervene to help them, but in his heart he knew that his cause was lost, and his hopes burned within him, a heap of smoldering coals dying in their own ashes.

He had always loved Peter Junior too well to blame him especially as Peter could not have known what havoc he was making of his cousin's hopes. It had all been a terrible mischance, and now they must make the best of it and be brave. Yet a feeling of resentment would creep into his heart in spite of his manful resolve to be fair to his cousin, and let nothing interfere with their lifelong friendship. In vain he told himself that Peter had the same right as he to seek Betty's love. Why not? Why should he think himself the only one to be considered? But there was Betty! And when he thought of her, his soul seemed to go out of him. Too late! Too late! And so he rose and walked sorrowfully away.

When Mary Ballard came home from church, she found her little daughter up in her room on

her knees beside her bed, her arms stretched out over the white counterpane, asleep. She had suffered until nature had taken her into her own soothing arms and put her to sleep through sheer weakness. Her cheeks were still burning and her eyelids red from weeping. Mary thought her in a fever, and gently helped her to remove the pretty muslin dress and got her to bed.

Betty drew a long sigh as her head sank back into the pillow. "My head aches; don't worry, mother, dear." She thought her heart was closed forever on her terrible secret.

"Mother'll bring you something for it, dear. You must have eaten something at the picnic that didn't agree with you." She kissed Betty's cheek, and at the door paused to look back on her, and a strange misgiving smote her.

"I can't think what ails her," she said to Martha. "She seems to be in a high fever. Did she sleep well last night?"

"Perfectly, but we talked a good while before we went to sleep. Perhaps she got too tired yesterday. I thought she seemed excited, too. Mrs. Walters always makes her coffee so strong."

Peter Junior came in to dinner, buoyant and happy. He was disappointed not to see Betty, and frankly avowed it. He followed Mary into the kitchen and begged to be allowed to go up and speak to Betty for only a minute, but Mary thought sleep would be the best remedy and he would better leave her alone. He had been to church with his father, and all through the morning service as he sat at his father's side he had meditated how he could persuade the Elder to look on his plans with some degree of favor--enough at least to warrant him in going on with them and trust to his father's coming around in time.

Neither he nor Richard were at the Elder's at dinner, and the meal passed in silence, except for a word now and then in regard to the sermon. Hester thought continually of her son and his hopes, but as she glanced from time to time in her husband's face she realized that silence on her part was still best. Whenever the Elder cleared his throat and looked off out of the window, as was his wont when about to speak of any matter of importance, her heart leaped and her eyes gazed intently at her plate, to hide the emotion she could not restrain. Her hands grew cold and her lips tremulous, but still she waited.

It was the Elder's custom to sleep after the Sunday's dinner, which was always a hearty one, lying down on the sofa in the large parlor, where the closed blinds made a pleasant somberness. Hester passed the door and looked in on him, as he lay apparently asleep, his long, bony frame stretched out and the muscles of his strong face relaxing to a softness they sometimes assumed when sleeping. Her heart went out to him. Oh, if he only knew! If she only dared! His boy ought to love him, and understand him. If they would only understand!

Then she went up into Peter Junior's room and sat there where she had sat seven years before--where she had often sat since--gazing across at the red-coated old ancestor, her hands in her lap, her thoughts busy with her son's future even as then. If all the others had lived, would the quandary and the struggle between opposing wills have been as great for each one as for this sole survivor? Where were those little ones now? Playing in happy fields and waiting for her and the stern old man who also suffered, but knew not how to reveal his heart? Again and again the words repeated themselves in her heart mechanically: "Wait on the Lord--Wait on the Lord," and then, again, "Oh, Lord, how long?"

Peter Junior returned early from the Ballards', since he could not see Betty, leaving the field open for Martha and her guest, much to the guest's satisfaction. He went straight to the room occupied by Richard whenever he was with them, but no Richard was there. His valise was all packed ready for his start on the morrow, but there was no line pinned to the frame of the mirror telling Peter Junior where to find him, as was Richard's way in the past. With a fleeting glance around to see if any bit of paper had been blown away, he went to his own room and there he found his mother, waiting. In an instant that long ago morning came to his mind, and as then he went swiftly to her, and, kneeling, clasped her in his arms.

"Are you worried, mother mine? It's all right. I will be careful and restrained. Don't be troubled."

Hester clasped her boy's head to her bosom and rested her face against his soft hair. For a while the silence was deep and the moments burned themselves into the young man's soul with a purifying fire never to be forgotten. Presently she began speaking to him in low, murmuring tones: "Your father is getting to be an old man, Peter, dear, and I--I am no longer young. Our boy is dear to us--the dearest. In our different ways we long only for what is best for you. If only it might be revealed to you and us alike! Many paths are good paths to walk in, and the way may be happy in any one of them, for happiness is of the spirit. It is in you--not made for you by circumstances. We have been so happy here, since you came home wounded, and to be wounded is not a happy thing, as you well know; but it seemed to bring you and me happiness, nevertheless. Did it not, dear?"

"Indeed yes, mother. Yes. It gave me a chance to have you to myself a lot, and that ought to make any man happy, with a mother like you. And now--a new happiness came to me, the other day, that I meant to speak of yesterday and couldn't after getting so angry with father. It seemed like sacrilege to speak of it then, and, besides, there was another feeling that made me hesitate."

"So you are in love with some one, Peter?"

"Yes, mother. How did you guess it?"

"Because only love is a feeling that would make you say you could not speak of it when your heart is full of anger. Is it Betty, dear?"

"Yes, mother. You are uncanny to read me so."

She laughed softly and held him closer. "I love Betty, too, Peter. You will always be gentle and kind? You will never be hard and stern with her?"

"Mother! Have I ever been so? Can't you tell by the way I have always acted toward you that I would be tender and kind? She will be myself--my very own. How could I be otherwise?"

Again Hester smiled her slow, wise smile. "You have always been tender, Peter, but you have always gone right along and done your own way, absolutely. The only reason there has not been more friction between you and your father has been that you have been tactful; also you have never seemed to desire unworthy things. You have been a good son, dear: I am not complaining. And the only reason why I have never--or seldom--felt hurt by your taking your own way has been that my likings have usually responded to yours, and the thing I most desired was that you should be allowed to take your own way. It is good for a man to be decided and to have a way of his own: I have liked it in you. But the matter still stands that it has always been your way and never any one's else that you have taken. I can see you being stern even with a wife you thought you wholly loved if her will once crossed yours."

Peter Junior was silent and a little hurt. He rose and paced the room. "I can't think I could ever cross Betty, or be unkind. It seems preposterous," he said at last.

"Perhaps it might never seem to you necessary. Peter, boy, listen. You say: 'She will be myself--my very own.' Now what does that mean? Does it mean that when you are married, her personality will be merged in yours, and so you two will be one? If so, you will not be completed and rounded out, and she will be lost in you. A man does not reach his full manhood to completion until he has loved greatly and truly, and has found the one who is to complete him. At best, by ourselves, we are never wholly man or wholly woman until this great soul completion has taken place in us. Then children come to us, and our very souls are knit in one, and still the mystery goes on and on; never are we completed by being lost--either one--in the will or nature of the other; but to make the whole and perfect creature, each must retain the individuality belonging to himself or herself, each to each the perfect and equal other half."

Peter Junior paused in his walk and stood for a moment looking down on his mother, awed by what she revealed to him of her inner nature. "I believe you have done this, mother. You have kept your own individuality complete, and father doesn't know it."

"Not yet, but my hand will always be in his, and some day he will know. You are very like him, and yet you understand me as he never has, so you see how our oneness is wrought out in you. That which you have in you of your father is good and strong: never lose it. The day may come when you will be glad to have had such a father. Out in the world men need such traits; but you must not forget that sometimes it takes more strength to yield than to hold your own way. Yes, it takes strength and courage sometimes to give up--and tremendous faith in God. There! I hear him walking about. Go down and have your talk with him. Remember what I say, dear, and don't get angry with your father. He loves you, too."

"Have you said anything to him yet about--me--mother?"

"No. I have decided that it will be better for you to deal with him yourself--courageously. You'll remember?"

Peter Junior took her again in his arms as she rose and stood beside him, and kissed her tenderly. "Yes, mother. Dear, good, wise mother! I'll try to remember all. It would have been easier for you, maybe, if ever father's mother had said to him the things you have just said to me."

"Life teaches us these things. If we keep an open mind, so God fills it."

She stood still in the middle of the room, listening to his rapid steps in the direction of the parlor. Then Hester did a thing very unusual for her to do of a Sunday. She put on her shawl and bonnet and walked out to see Mary Ballard.

No one ever knew what passed between Peter Junior and his father in that parlor. The Elder did not open his lips about it either at home or at the bank.

That Sunday evening some one saw Peter Junior and his cousin walking together up the bluff where the old camp had stood, toward the sunset. The path had many windings, and the bluff was dark and brown, and the two figures stood out clear and strong against the sky of gold. That was the last seen of either of the young men in the village. The one who saw them told later that he knew they were "the twins" because one of them walked with a stick and limped a little, and that the other was talking as if he were very much in earnest about something, for he was moving his arm up and down and gesticulating.

Monday morning Elder Craigmile walked to the bank with the stubborn straightening of the knees at each step that always betokened irritation with him. Neither of the young men had appeared at breakfast, a matter peculiarly annoying to him. Peter Junior he had not expected to see, as, owing to his long period of recovery, he had naturally been excused from rigorous rules, but his nephew surely might have done that much out of courtesy, where he had always been treated as a son, to promote the orderliness of the household. It was unpardonable in the young man to lie abed in the morning thus when a guest in that home. It was a mistake of his wife to allow Peter Junior a night key. It induced late hours. He would take it from him. And as for Richard--there was no telling what habits he had fallen into during these years of wandering. What if he had come home to them with a clear skin and laughing eye! Was not the "heart of man deceitful above all things and desperately wicked"? And was not Satan abroad in the world laying snares for the feet of wandering youths?

It was still early enough for many of the workmen to be on their way to their day of labor with their tin dinner pails, and among them Mr. Walters passed him, swinging his pail with the rest, although he was master of his own foundry and employed fifty men. He had always gone early to work, and carried his tin pail when he was one of the workmen, and he still did it from choice. He, too, was a Scotchman of a slightly different class from the Elder, it is true, but he was a trustee of the church, and a man well respected in the community.

He touched his hat to the Elder, and the Elder nodded in return, but neither spoke a word. Mr. Walters smiled after he was well past. "The man has a touch of the indigestion," he said.

When the Elder entered his front door at noon, his first glance was at the rack in the corner of the hall, where, on the left-hand hook, Peter Junior's coat and hat had hung when he was at home, ever since he was a boy. They were not there. The Elder lifted his bushy brows one higher than the other, then drew them down to their usual straight line, and walked on into the dining room. His wife was not there, but in a moment she entered, looking white and perturbed.

"Peter!" she said, going up to her husband instead of taking her place opposite him, "Peter!" She laid a trembling hand on his arm. "I haven't seen the boys this morning. Their beds have not been slept in."

"Quiet yourself, lass, quiet yourself. Sit and eat in peace. 'Evil communications corrupt good manners,' but when doom strikes him, he'll maybe experience a change of heart." The Elder spoke in a tone not unkindly. He seated himself heavily.

Then his wife silently took her place at the table and he bowed his head and repeated the grace to which she had listened three times a day for nearly thirty years, only that this time he added the request that the Lord would, in his "merciful kindness, strike terror to the hearts of all evildoers and turn them from their way."

When the silent meal was ended, Hester followed her husband to the door and laid a detaining hand on his arm. He stood and looked down on that slender white hand as if it were something that too sudden a movement would joggle off, and she did not know that it was as if she had laid her hand on his very heart. "Peter, tell me what happened yesterday afternoon. You should tell me, Peter."

Then the Elder did an unwonted thing. He placed his hand over hers and pressed it harder on his arm, and after an instant's pause he stooped and kissed her on the forehead.

"I spoke the lad fair, Hester, and made him an offer, but he would none of it. He thinks he is his own master, but I have put him in the Lord's hands."

"Has he gone, Peter?"

"Maybe, but the offer I made him was a good one. Comfort your heart, lass. If he's gone, he will return. When the Devil holds the whip, he makes a hard bargain, and drives fast. When the boy is hard pressed, he will be glad to return to his father's house."

"Richard's valise is gone. The maid says he came late yesterday after I was gone, and took it away with him."

"They are likely gone together."

"But Peter's things are all here. No, they would never go like that and not bid me good-by."

The Elder threw out his hands with his characteristic downward gesture of impatience. "I have no way of knowing, more than you. It is no doubt that Richard has become a ne'er-do-weel. He felt shame to tell us he was going a journey on the Sabbath day."

"Oh, Peter, I think not. Peter, be just. You know your son was never one to let the Devil drive; he is like yourself, Peter. And as for Richard, Peter Junior would never think so much of him if he were a ne'er-do-weel."

"Women are foolish and fond. It is their nature, and perhaps that is how we love them most, but the men should rule, for their own good. A man should be master in his own house. When the lad returns, the door is open to him. That is enough."

With a sorrowful heart he left her, and truth to tell, the sorrow was more for his wife's hurt than for his own. The one great tenderness of his life was his feeling for her, and this she felt rather than knew; but he believed himself absolutely right and that the hurt was inevitable, and for her

was intensified by her weakness and fondness.

As for Hester, she turned away from the door and went quietly about her well-ordered house, directing the maidservant and looking carefully over her husband's wardrobe. Then she did the same for Peter Junior's, and at last, taking her basket of mending, she sat in the large, lace-curtained window looking out toward the west--the direction from which Peter Junior would be likely to come. For how long she would sit there during the days to come--waiting--she little knew.

She was comforted by the thought of the talk she had had with him the day before. She knew he was upright, and she felt that this quarrel--if it had been a quarrel--with his father would surely be healed; and then, there was Betty to call him back. The love of a girl was a good thing for a man. It would be stronger to draw him and hold him than love of home or of mother; it was the divine way for humanity, and it was a good way, and she must be patient and wait.

She was glad she had gone without delay to Mary Ballard. The two women were fond of each other, and the visit had been most satisfactory. Betty she had not seen, for the maiden was still sleeping the long, heavy sleep which saves a normal healthy body from wreck after severe emotion. Betty was so young--it might be best that matters should wait awhile as they were.

If Peter Junior went to Paris now, he would have to earn his own way, of course, and possibly he had gone west with Richard where he could earn faster than at home. Maybe that had been the grounds of the quarrel. Surely she would hear from him soon. Perhaps he had taken their talk on Sunday afternoon as a good-by to her; or he might yet come to her and tell her his plans. So she comforted herself in the most wholesome and natural way.

Richard's action in taking his valise away during her absence and leaving no word of farewell for her was more of a surprise to her. But then--he might have resented the Elder's attitude and sided with his cousin. Or, he might have feared he would say things he would afterwards regret, if he appeared, and so have taken himself quietly away. Still, these reasons did not wholly appeal to her, and she was filled with misgivings for him even more than for her son.

Peter Junior she trusted absolutely and Richard she loved as a son; but there was much of his father in him, and the Irish nature was erratic and wild, as the Elder said. Where was that father now? No one knew. It was one of the causes for anxiety she had for the boy that his father had been lost to them all ever since Richard's birth and his wife's death. He had gone out of their lives as completely as a candle in a gale of wind. She had mothered the boy, and the Elder had always been kind to him for his own dead sister's sake, but of the father they never spoke.

It was while Hester Craigmile sat in her western window, thinking her thoughts, that two lads came hurrying down the bluff from the old camp ground, breathless and awed. One carried a straw hat, and the other a stout stick--a stick with an irregular knob at the end. It was Larry Kildene's old blackthorn that Peter Junior had been carrying. The Ballards' home was on the way between the bluff and the village, and Mary Ballard was standing at their gate watching for the children from school. She wished Jamie to go on an errand for her.

Mary noticed the agitation of the boys. They were John Walters and Charlie Dean--two chums who were always first to be around when there was anything unusual going on, or to be found. It was they who discovered the fire in the foundry in time to have it put out. It was they who knew where the tramps were hiding who had been stealing from the village stores, and now Mary wondered what they had discovered. She left the gate swinging open and walked down to meet them.

"What is it, boys?"

"We--we--found these--and--there's something happened," panted the boys, both speaking at once.

She took the hat of white straw from John's hand. "Why! This is Peter Junior's hat! Where did you find it?" She turned it about and saw dark red stains, as if it had been grasped by a bloody hand--finger marks of blood plainly imprinted on the rim.

"And this, Mrs. Ballard," said Charlie, putting Peter Junior's stick in her hand, and pointing to the same red stains sunken into the knob. "We think there's been a fight and some one's been hit with this."

She took it and looked at it in a dazed way. "Yes. He was carrying this in the place of his crutch," she said, as if to herself.

"We think somebody's been pushed over the bluff into the river, Mrs. Ballard, for they's a hunk been tore out as big as a man, from the edge, and it's gone clean over, and down into the river. We can see where it is gone. And it's an awful swift place."

She handed the articles back to the boys.

"Sit down in the shade here, and I'll bring you some sweet apples, and if any one comes by, don't say anything about it until I have time to consult with Mr. Ballard."

She hurried back and passed quickly around the house, and on to her husband, who was repairing the garden fence.

"Bertrand, come with me quickly. Something serious has happened. I don't want Betty to hear of it until we know what it is."

They hastened to the waiting boys, and together they slowly climbed the long path leading to the old camping place. Bertrand carried the stick and the hat carefully, for they were matters of

great moment.

"This looks grave," he said, when the boys had told him their story.

"Perhaps we ought to have brought some one with us--if anything--" said Mary.

"No, no; better wait and see, before making a stir."

It was a good half hour's walk up the hill, and every moment of the time seemed heavily freighted with foreboding. They said no more until they reached the spot where the boys had found the edge of the bluff torn away. There, for a space of about two feet only, back from the brink, the sparse grass was trampled, and the earth showed marks of heels and in places the sod was freshly torn up.

"There's been something happened here, you see," said Charlie Dean.

"Here is where a foot has been braced to keep from being pushed over; see, Mary? And here again."

"I see indeed." Mary looked, and stooping, picked something from the ground that glinted through the loosened earth. She held it on her open palm toward Bertrand, and the two boys looked intently at it. Her husband did not touch it, but glanced quickly into her eyes and then at the boys. Then her fingers closed over it, and taking her handkerchief she tied it in one corner securely.

"Did you ever see anything like it, boys?" she asked.

"No, ma'am. It's a watch charm, isn't it? Or what?"

"I suppose it must be."

"I guess the fellah that was being pushed over must 'a' grabbed for the other fellah's watch. Maybe he was trying to rob him."

"Let's see whether we can find anything else," said John Walters, peering over the bluff.

"Don't, John, don't. You may fall over. It might have been a fall, and one of them might have been trying to save the other, you know. He might have caught at him and pulled this off. There's no reason why we should surmise the worst."

"They might ha' been playing--you know--wrestling--and it might 'a' happened so," said Charlie.

"Naw! They'd been big fools to wrestle so near the edge of the bluff as this," said the practical John. "I see something white way down there, Mrs. Ballard. I can get it, I guess."

"But take care, John. Go further round by the path."

Both boys ran along the bluff until they came to a path that led down to the river. "Do be careful, boys!" called Mary.

"Now, let me see that again, my dear," and Mary untied the handkerchief. "Yes, it is what I thought. That belonged to Larry Kildene. He got it in India, although he said it was Chinese. He was a year in the British service in India. I've often examined it. I should have known it anywhere. He must have left it with Hester for the boy."

"Poor Larry! And it has come to this. I remember it on Richard's chain when he came out there to meet us in the grove. Bertrand, what shall we do? They must have been here--and have quarreled--and what has happened! I'm going back to ask Betty."

"Ask Betty! My dear! What can Betty know about it?"

"Something upset her terribly yesterday morning. She was ill and with no cause that I could see, and I believe she had had a nervous shock."

"But she seemed all right this morning,--a little pale, but otherwise quite herself." Bertrand turned the little charm over in his hand. "He thought it was Chinese because it is jade, but this carving is Egyptian. I don't think it is jade, and I don't think it is Chinese."

"But whatever it is, it was on Richard's chain Saturday," said Mary, sadly. "And now, what can we do? On second thought I'll say nothing to Betty. If a tragedy has come upon the Craigmiles, it will also fall on her now, and we must spare her all of it we can, until we know."

A call came to them from below, and Bertrand hastily handed the charm back to his wife, and she tied it again in her handkerchief.

"Oh, Bertrand, don't go near that terrible brink. It might give way. I'm sure this has been an accident."

"But the stick, Mary, and the marks of blood on Peter Junior's hat. I'm afraid--afraid."

"But they were always fond of each other. They have been like brothers."

"And quarrels between brothers are often the bitterest."

"But we have never heard of their quarreling, and they were so glad to see each other Saturday. And you know Peter Junior was always possessed to do whatever Richard planned. They were that way about enlisting, you remember, and everything else. What cause could Richard have against Peter Junior?"

"We can't say it was Richard against Peter. You see the stick was bloody, and it was Peter's. We must offer no opinion, no matter what we think, for the world may turn against the wrong one,

and only time will tell."

They both were silent as the boys came panting up the bank. "Here's a handkerchief. It was what I saw. It was caught on a thorn bush, and here--here's Peter Junior's little notebook, with his name--"

"This is Peter's handkerchief. P. C. J. Hester Craigmile embroidered those letters." Mary's eyes filled with tears. "Bertrand, we must go to her. She may hear in some terrible way."

"And the book, where was that, John?"

"It was lying on that flat rock. John had to crawl along the ledge on his belly to get it; and here, I found this lead pencil," cried Charlie, excited and important.

"'Faber No. 2.' Yes, this was also Peter's." Bertrand shut it in the notebook. "Mary, this looks sinister. We'd better go down. There's nothing more to learn here."

"Maybe we'll find the young men both safely at home."

"Richard was to leave early this morning."

"I remember."

Sadly they returned, and the two boys walked with them, gravely and earnestly propounding one explanation after another.

"You'd better go back to the house, Mary, and I'll go on to the village with the boys. We'll consult with your father, John; he's a thoughtful man, and--"

"And he's a coroner, too--" said John.

"Yes, but if there's nobody found, who's he goin' to sit on?"

"They don't sit on the body, they sit on the jury," said John, with contempt.

"Don't I know that? But they've got to find the body, haven't they, before they can sit on anything? Guess I know that much."

"Now, boys," said Bertrand, "this may turn out to be a very grave matter, and you must keep silent about it. It won't do to get the town all stirred up about it and all manner of rumors afloat. It must be looked into quietly first, by responsible people, and you must keep all your opinions and surmises to yourselves until the truth can be learned."

"Don't walk, Bertrand; take the carryall, and these can be put under the seat. Boys, if you'll go back there in the garden, you'll find some more apples, and I'll fetch you out some cookies to go with them." The boys briskly departed. "I don't want Betty to see them, and we'll be silent until we know what to tell her," Mary added, as they walked slowly up the front path.

Bertrand turned off to the stable, carrying the sad trophies with him, and Mary entered the house. She looked first for Betty, but no Betty was to be found, and the children were at home clamoring for something to eat. They always came home from school ravenously hungry. Mary hastily packed them a basket of fruit and cookies and sent them to play picnic down by the brook. Still no Betty appeared.

"Where is she?" asked Bertrand, as he entered the kitchen after bringing up the carryall.

"I don't know. She may have gone over to Clara Dean's. She spoke of going there to-day. I'm glad--rather."

"Yes, yes."

A little later in the day, almost closing time at the bank, James Walters and Bertrand Ballard entered and asked to see the Elder. They were shown into the director's room, and found him seated alone at the great table in the center. He pushed his papers one side and rose, greeting them with his grave courtesy, as usual.

Mr. Walters, a shy man of few words, looked silently at Mr. Ballard to speak, while the Elder urged them to be seated. "A warm day for the season, and very pleasant to have it so. We'll hope the winter may come late this year."

"Yes, yes. We wish to inquire after your son, Elder Craigmile. Is he at home to-day?"

"Ah, yes. He was not at home--not when I left this noon." The Elder cleared his throat and looked keenly at his friend. "Is it--ahem--a matter of business, Mr. Ballard?"

"Unfortunately, no. We have come to inquire if he--when he was last at home--or if his cousin--has been with you?"

"Not Richard, no. He came unexpectedly and has gone with as little ceremony, but my son was here on the Sabbath--ahem--He dined that day with you, Mr. Ballard?"

"He did--but--Elder, will you come with us? A matter with regard to him and his cousin should be looked into."

"It is not necessary for me to interfere in matters regarding my son any longer. He has taken the ordering of his life in his own hands hereafter. As for Richard, he has long been his own master."

"Elder, I beg you to come with us. We fear foul play of some sort. It is not a question now of family differences of opinion."

The Elder's face remained immovable, and Bertrand reluctantly added, "We fear either your son

or his cousin, possibly both of them, have met with disaster--maybe murder."

A pallor crept over the Elder's face, and without a word further he took his hat from a hook in the corner of the room, paused, and then carefully arranged the papers he had pushed aside at their entrance and placing them in his desk, turned the key, still without a word. At the door he waited a moment with his hand on the knob, and with the characteristic lift of his brows, asked: "Has anything been said to my wife?"

"No, no. We thought best to do nothing until under your direction."

"Thank you. That's well. Whatever comes, I would spare her all I can."

The three then drove slowly back to the top of the bluff, and on the way Bertrand explained to the Elder all that had transpired. "It seemed best to Mary and me that you should look the ground over yourself, before any action be taken. We hoped appearances might be deceptive, and that you would have information that would set our fears at rest before news of a mystery should reach the town."

"Where are the boys who found these things?"

Mr. Walters spoke, "My son was one of them, and he is now at home. They are forbidden to speak to any one until we know more about it."

Arrived at the top of the bluff the three men went carefully over the ground, even descending the steep path to the margin of the river.

"There," said Bertrand, "the notebook was picked up on that flat rock which juts out from that narrow ledge. John Walters crawled along the ledge to get it. The handkerchief was caught on that thorn shrub, halfway up, see? And the pencil was picked up down here, somewhere."

The Elder looked up to the top of the bluff and down at the rushing river beneath, and as he looked he seemed visibly to shrink and become in the instant an old man--older by twenty years. As they climbed back again, his shoulders drooped and his breath came hard. As they neared the top, Bertrand turned and gave him his aid to gain a firm footing above.

"Don't forget that we can't always trust to appearances," he urged.

"Some heavy body--heavier than a clod of earth, has gone down there," said the Elder, and his voice sounded weak and thin.

"Yes, yes. But even so, a stone may have been dislodged. You can't be sure."

"Ay, the lads might have been wrestling in play--or the like--and sent a rock over; it's like lads, that," hazarded Mr. Walters.

"Wrestling on the Sabbath evening! They are men, not lads."

Mr. Walters looked down in embarrassment, and the old man continued. "Would a stone leave a handkerchief clinging to a thorn? Would it leave a notebook thrown down on yonder rock?" The Elder lifted his head and looked to the sky: holding one hand above his head he shook it toward heaven. "Would a stone leave a hat marked with a bloody hand--my son's hat? There has been foul play here. May the curse of God fall on him who has robbed me of my son, be he stranger or my own kin."

His voice broke and he reeled backward and would have fallen over the brink but for Bertrand's quickness. Then, trembling and bowed, his two friends led him back to the carryall and no further word was spoken until they reached the village, when the Elder said:--

"Will you kindly drive me to the bank, Mr. Ballard?"

They did so. No one was there, and the Elder quietly unlocked the door and carried the articles found on the bluff into the room beyond and locked them away. Bertrand followed him, loath to leave him thus, and anxious to make a suggestion. The Elder opened the door of a cupboard recessed into the wall and laid the hat on a high shelf. Then he took the stick and looked at it with a sudden awakening in his eyes as if he saw it for the first time.

"This stick--this blackthorn stick--accursed! How came it here? I thought it had been burned. It was left years ago in my front hall by--Richard's father. I condemned it to be burned."

"Peter Junior was using that in place of his crutch, no doubt because of its strength. He had it at my house, and I recognize it now as one Larry brought over with him--"

"Peter was using it! My God! My God! The blow was struck with this. It is my son who is the murderer, and I have called down the curse of God on him? It falls--it falls on me!" He sank in his chair--the same in which he had sat when he talked with Peter Junior--and bowed his head in his arms. "It is enough, Mr. Ballard. Will you leave me?"

"I can't leave you, sir: there is more to be said. We must not be hasty in forming conclusions. If any one was thrown over the bluff, it must have been your son, for he was lame and could not have saved himself. If he struck any one, he could not have killed him; for evidently he got away, unless he also went over the brink. If he got away, he must be found. There is something for you to do, Elder Craigmile."

The old man lifted his head and looked in Bertrand's face, pitifully seeking there for help. "You are a good man, Mr. Ballard. I need your counsel and help."

"First, we will go below the rapids and search; the sooner the better, for in the strong current there is no telling how far--"

"Yes, we will search." The Elder lifted himself to his full height, inspired by the thought of action. "We'll go now." He looked down on his shorter friend, and Bertrand looked up to him, his genial face saddened with sympathy, yet glowing with kindness.

"Wait a little, Elder; let us consider further. Mr. Walters--sit down, Elder Craigmile, for a moment--Mr. Walters is capable, and he can organize the search; for if you keep this from your wife, you must be discreet. Here is something I haven't shown you before. It is the charm from Richard's watch. It was almost covered with earth where they had been struggling, and Mary found it. You see there is a mystery--and let us hope whatever happened was an accident. The evidences are so--so--mingled, that no one may know whom to blame."

The Elder looked down on the charm without touching it, as it lay on Bertrand's palm. "That belonged--" his lips twitched--"that belonged to the man who took from me my twin sister. The shadow--forever the shadow of Larry Kildene hangs over me." He was silent for some moments, then he said: "Mr. Ballard, if, after the search, my son is found to be murdered, I will put a detective on the trail of the man who did the deed, and be he whom he may, he shall hang."

"Hush, Elder Craigmile; in Wisconsin men are not hanged."

"I tell you--be he whom he may--he shall suffer what is worse than to be hanged, he shall enter the living grave of a life imprisonment."

CHAPTER XIII

CONFESSION

By Monday evening there were only two people in all the small town of Leauvite who had not heard of the tragedy, and these were Hester Craigmile and Betty Ballard. Mary doubted if it was wise to keep Hester thus in ignorance, but it was the Elder's wish, and at his request she went to spend the evening and if necessary the night with his wife, to fend off any officious neighbor, while he personally directed the search.

It was the Elder's firm belief that his son had been murdered, yet he thought if no traces should be found of Peter Junior, he might be able to spare Hester the agony of that belief. He preferred her to think her son had gone off in anger and would sometime return. He felt himself justified in this concealment, fearing that if she knew the truth, she might grieve herself into her grave, and his request to Mary to help him had been made so pitifully and humbly that her heart melted at the sight of the old man's sorrow, and she went to spend those weary hours with his wife.

As the Elder sometimes had meetings of importance to take him away of an evening, Hester did not feel surprise at his absence, and she accepted Mary's visit as one of sweet friendliness and courtesy because of Peter's engagement to Betty. Nor did she wonder that the visit was made without Bertrand, as Mary said he and the Elder had business together, and she thought she would spend the time with her friend until their return.

That was all quite as it should be and very pleasant, and Hester filled the moments with cheerful chat, showing Mary certain pieces of cloth from which she proposed to make dainty garments for Betty, to help Mary with the girl's wedding outfit. To Mary it all seemed like a dream as she locked the sad secret in her heart and listened. Her friend's sorrow over Peter Junior's disagreement with his father and his sudden departure from the home was tempered by the glad hope that after all the years of anxiety, she was some time to have a daughter to love, and that her boy and his wife would live near them, and her home might again know the sound of happy children's voices. The sweet thoughts brought her gladness and peace of mind, and Mary's visit made the dream more sure of ultimate fulfillment.

Mary felt the Elder's wish lie upon her with the imperative force of a law, and she did not dare disregard his request that on no account was Hester to be told the truth. So she gathered all her fortitude and courage to carry her through this ordeal. She examined the fine linen that had been brought to Hester years ago from Scotland by Richard's mother, and while she praised it she listened for steps without; the heavy tread of men bringing a sorrowful and terrible burden. But the minutes wore on, and no such sounds came, and the hour grew late.

"They may have gone out of town. Bertrand said something about it, and told me to stay until he called for me, if I stayed all night." Mary tried to laugh over it, and Hester seized the thought gayly.

"We'll go to bed, anyway, and your husband may just go home without you when he comes."

And after a little longer wait they went to bed, and Hester slept, but Mary lay wakeful and fearing, until in the early morning, while it was yet dark, she heard the Elder slowly climb the stairs and go to his room. Then she also slept, hoping against hope, that they had found nothing.

Betty's pride and shame had caused her to keep her trouble to herself. She knew Richard had gone forever, and she dreaded Peter Junior's next visit. What should she do! Oh, what should

she do! Should she tell Peter she did not love him, and that all had been a mistake? She must humble herself before him, and what excuse had she to make for all the hours she had given him, and the caresses she had accepted? Ah! If only she could make the last week as if it had never been! She was shamed before her mother, who had seen him kiss her. She was ashamed even in her own room in the darkness to think of all Peter Junior had said to her, and the love he had lavished on her. Ought she to break her word to him and beg him to forget? Ah! Neither he nor she could ever forget.

Her brothers had been forbidden to tell her a word of the reports that were already abroad in the town, and now they were both in bed and asleep, and little Janey was cuddled in Betty's bed, also in dreamland. At last, when neither her father nor her mother returned and she could bear her own thoughts no longer, she brought drawing materials down from the studio and spread them out on the dining room table.

She had decided she would never marry any one--never. How could she! But she would study in earnest and be an illustrator. If women could never become great artists, as Peter Junior said, at least they might illustrate books; and sometime--maybe--when her heart was not so sad, she might write books, and she could illustrate them herself. Ah, that would almost make up for what she must go without all her life.

For a while she worked painstakingly, but all the time it seemed as though she could hear Richard's voice, and the words he had said to her Sunday morning kept repeating themselves over and over in her mind. Then the tears fell one by one and blurred her work, until at last she put her head down on her arms and wept. Then the door opened very softly and Richard entered. Swiftly he came to her and knelt at her side. He put his head on her knee, and his whole body shook with tearless sobs he could not restrain. He was faint and weak. She could not know the whole cause of his grief, and thought he suffered because of her. She must comfort him--but alas! What could she say? How could she comfort him?

She put her trembling hand on his head and found the hair matted and stiff. Then she saw a wound above his temple, and knew he was hurt, and cried out: "You are hurt--you are hurt! Oh, Richard! Let me do something for you."

He clasped her in his arms, but still did not look up at her, and Betty forgot all her shame, and her lessons in propriety. She lifted his head to her bosom and laid her cheek upon his and said all the comforting things that came into her heart. She begged him to let her wash his wound and to tell her how he came by it. She forgot everything, except that she loved him and told him over and over the sweet confession.

At last he found strength to speak to her brokenly. "Never love me any more, Betty. I've committed a terrible crime--Oh, my God! And you will hear of it Give me a little milk. I've eaten nothing since yesterday morning, when I saw you. Then I'll try to tell you what you must know--what all the world will tell you soon."

He rose and staggered to a chair and she brought him milk and bread and meat, but she would not let him talk to her until he had allowed her to wash the wound on his head and bind it up. As she worked the touch of her hands seemed to bring him sane thoughts in spite of the horror of himself that possessed him, and he was enabled to speak more coherently.

"If I had not been crazed when I looked through the window and saw you crying, Betty, I would never have let you see me or touch me again. It's only adding one crime to another to come near you. I meant just to look in and see if I could catch one glimpse of you, and then was going to lose myself to all the world, or else give myself up to be hung." Then he was silent, and she began to question him.

"Don't! Richard. Hung? What have you done? What do you mean? When was it?"

"Sunday night."

"But you had to start for Cheyenne early this morning. Where have you been all day? I thought you were gone forever, dear."

"I hid myself down by the river. I lay there all day, and heard them talking, but I couldn't see them nor they me. It was a hiding place we knew of when our camp was there--Peter Junior and I. He's gone. I did it--I did it with murder in my heart--Oh, my God!"

"Don't, Richard. You must tell me nothing except as I ask you. It is not as if we did not love each other. What you have done I must help you bear--as--as wives help their husbands--for I will never marry; but all my life my heart will be married to yours." He reached for her hands and covered them with kisses and moaned. "No, Richard, don't. Eat the bread and meat I have brought you. You've eaten nothing for two days, and everything may seem worse to you than it is."

"No, no!"

"Richard, I'll go away from you and leave you here alone if you don't eat."

"Yes, I must eat--not only now--but all the rest of my life, I must eat to live and repent. He was my dearest friend. I taunted him and said bitter things. I goaded him. I was insane with rage and at last so was he. He struck me--and--and I--I was trying to push him over the bluff--"

Slowly it dawned on Betty what Richard's talk really meant.

"Not Peter? Oh, Richard--not Peter!" She shrank from him, wide-eyed in terror.

"He would have killed me--for I know what was in his heart as well as I knew what was in my

own--and we were both seeing red. I've felt it sometimes in battle, and the feeling makes a man drunken. A man will do anything then. We'd been always friends--and yet we were drunken with hate; and now--he--he is better off than I. I must live. Unless for the disgrace to my relatives, I would give myself up to be hanged. It would be better to take the punishment than to live in such torture as this."

The tears coursed fast down Betty's cheeks. Slowly she drew nearer him, and bent down to him as he sat, until she could look into his eyes. "What were you quarreling about, Richard?"

"Don't ask me, darling Betty."

"What was it, Richard?"

"All my life you will be the sweet help to me--the help that may keep me from death in life. To carry in my soul the remembrance of last night will need all the help God will let me have. If I had gone away quietly, you and Peter Junior would have been married and have been happy--but--"

"No, no. Oh, Richard, no. I knew in a moment when you came--"

"Yes, Betty, dear, Peter Junior was good and faithful; and he might have been able to undo all the harm I had done. He could have taught you to love him. I have done the devil's work--and then I killed him--Oh, my God! My God!"

"How do you know you pushed him over? He may have fallen over. You don't know it. He may have--"

"Hush, dearest. I did it. When I came to myself, it was in the night; and it must have been late, for the moon was set. I could only see faintly that something white lay near me. I felt of it, and it was Peter Junior's hat. Then I felt all about for him--and he was gone and I crawled to the edge of the bluff--but although I knew he was gone over there and washed by the terrible current far down the river by that time, I couldn't follow him, whether from cowardice or weakness. I tried to get on my feet and could not. Then I must have fainted again, for all the world faded away, and I thought maybe the blow had done for me and I might not have to leap over there, after all. I could feel myself slipping away.

"When I awoke, the sun was shining and a bird was singing just as if nothing had happened, and I thought I had been dreaming an awful dream--but there was the wound on my head and I was alive. Then I went farther down the river and came back to the hiding place and crept in there to wait and think. Then, after a long while, the boys came, and I was terrified for fear they were searching for me. That is the shameful truth, Betty. I feared. I never knew what fear was before. Betty, fear is shameful. There I have been all day--waiting--for what, I do not know; but it seemed that if I could only have one little glimpse of you I could go bravely and give myself up. I will now--"

"No, Richard; it would do no good for you to die such a death. It would undo nothing, and change nothing. Peter was angry, too, and he struck you, and if he could have his way he would not want you to die. I say maybe he is living now. He may not have gone over."

"It's no use, Betty. He went down. I pushed him into that terrible river. I did it. I--I--I!" Richard only moaned the words in a whisper of despair, and the horror of it all began to deepen and crush down upon Betty. She retreated, step by step, until she backed against the door leading to her chamber, and there she stood gazing at him with her hand pressed over her lips to keep herself from crying out. Then she saw him rise and turn toward the door without looking at her again, his head bowed in grief, and the sight roused her. As the door closed between them she ran and threw it open and followed him out into the darkness.

"I can't, Richard. I can't let you go like this!" She clung to him, sobbing her heart out on his bosom, and he clasped her and held her warm little body close.

"I'm like a drowning man pulling you under with me. Your tears drown me. I would not have entered the house if I had not seen you crying. Never cry again for me, Betty, never."

"I will cry. I tell you I will cry. I will. I don't believe you are a murderer."

"You must believe it. I am."

"I loved Peter Junior and you loved him. You did not mean to do it."

"I did it."

"If you did it, it is as if I did it, too. We both killed him--and I am a murderer, too. It was because of me you did it, and if you give yourself up to be hung, I will give myself up. Poor Peter--Oh, Richard--I don't believe he fell over." For a long moment she sobbed thus. "Where are you going, Richard?" she asked, lifting her head.

"I don't know, Betty. I may be taken and can go nowhere."

"Yes, you must go--quick--quick--now. Some one may come and find you here."

"No one will find me. Cain was a wanderer over the face of the earth."

"Will you let me know where you are, after you are gone?"

"No, Betty. You must never think of me, nor let me darken your life."

"Then must I live all the rest of the years without even knowing where you are?"

"Yes, love. Put me out of your life from now on, and it will be enough for me that you loved me

once.”

“I will help you atone, Richard. I will try to be brave--and help Peter’s mother to bear it. I will love her for Peter and for you.”

“God’s blessing on you forever, Betty.” He was gone, striding away in the darkness, and Betty, with trembling steps, entered the house.

Carefully she removed every sign of his having been there. The bowl of water, and the cloth from which she had torn strips to bind his head she carried away, and the glass from which he had taken his milk, she washed, and even the crumbs of bread which had fallen to the floor she picked up one by one, so that not a trace remained. Then she took her drawing materials back to the studio, and after kneeling long at her bedside, and only saying: “God, help Richard, help him,” over and over, she crept in beside her little sister, and still weeping and praying chokingly clasped the sleeping child in her arms.

From that time, it seemed to Bertrand and Mary that a strange and subtle change had taken place in their beloved little daughter; for which they tried to account as the result of the mysterious disappearance of Peter Junior. He was not found, and Richard also was gone, and the matter after being for a long time the wonder of the village, became a thing of the past. Only the Elder cherished the thought that his son had been murdered, and quietly set a detective at work to find the guilty man--whom he would bring back to vengeance.

Her parents were forced to acquaint Betty with the suspicious nature of Peter’s disappearance, knowing she might hear of it soon and be more shocked than if told by themselves. Mary wondered not a little at her dry-eyed and silent reception of it, but that was a part of the change in Betty.

BOOK TWO

CHAPTER XIV

OUT OF THE DESERT

"Good horse. Good horse. Good boy. Goldbug--go it! I know you're dying, but so am I. Keep it up a little while longer--Good boy."

The young man encouraged his horse, while half asleep from utter weariness and faint with hunger and thirst. The poor beast scrambled over the rocks up a steep trail that seemed to have been long unused, or indeed it might be no trail at all, but only a channel worn by fierce, narrow torrents during the rainy season, now sun-baked and dry.

The fall rains were late this year, and the yellow plains below furnished neither food nor drink for either man or beast. The herds of buffalo had long since wandered to fresher spaces nearer the river beds. The young man's flask was empty, and it was twenty-seven hours since either he or his horse had tasted anything. Now they had reached the mountains he hoped to find water and game if he could only hold out a little longer. Up and still up the lean horse scrambled with nose to earth and quivering flanks, and the young man, leaning forward and clinging to his seat as he reeled like one drunken, still murmured words of encouragement. "Good boy--Goldbug, go it. Good horse, keep it up."

All at once the way opened out on a jutting crest and made a sharp turn to the right, and the horse paused on the verge so suddenly that his rider lost his hold and fell headlong over into a scrub oak that caught him and held him suspended in its tough and twisted branches above a chasm so deep that the buzzards sailed on widespread wings round and round in the blue air beneath him.

He lay there still and white as death, mercifully unconscious, while an eagle with a wild scream circled about and perched on a lightning-blasted tree far above and looked down on him.

For a moment the yellow horse swayed weakly on the brink, then feeling himself relieved of his burden, he stiffened himself to a last great effort and held on along the path which turned abruptly away from the edge of the cliff and broadened out among low bushes and stunted trees. Here again the horse paused and stretched his neck and bit off the tips of the dry twigs near him, then turned his head and whinnied to call his master, and pricked his ears to listen; but he only heard the scream of the eagle overhead, and again he walked on, guided by an instinct as mysterious and unerring as the call of conscience to a human soul.

Good old beast! He had not much farther to go. Soon there was a sound of water in the air--a continuous roar, muffled and deep. The path wound upward, then descended gradually until it led him to an open, grassy space, bordered by green trees. Again he turned his head and gave his intelligent call. Why did not his master respond? Why did he linger behind when here was grass and water--surely water, for the smell of it was fresh and sweet. But it was well he called, for his friendly nicker fell on human ears.

A man of stalwart frame, well built and spare, hairy and grizzled, but ruddy with health, sat in a cabin hidden among the trees not forty paces away, and prepared his meal of roasting quail suspended over the fire in his chimney and potatoes baking in the ashes.

He lifted his head with a jerk, and swung the quail away from the heat, leaving it still suspended, and taking his rifle from its pegs stood for a moment in his door listening. For months he had not heard the sound of a human voice, nor the nicker of any horse other than his own. He called a word of greeting, "Hello, stranger!" but receiving no response he ventured farther from his door.

Goldbug was eagerly grazing--too eagerly for his own good. The man recognized the signs of starvation and led him to a tree, where he brought him a little water in his own great tin dipper. Then he relieved him of saddle and bridle and left him tied while he hastily stowed a few hard-tack and a flask of whisky in his pocket, and taking a lasso over his arm, started up the trail on his own horse.

"Some poor guy has lost his way and gone over the cliff," he muttered.

The young man still lay as he had fallen, but now his eyes were open and staring at the sky. Had he not been too weak to move he would have gone down; as it was, he waited, not knowing if he were dead or in a dream, seeing only the blue above him, and hearing only the scream of the eagle.

"Lie still. Don't ye move. Don't ye stir a hair. I'll get ye. Still now--still."

The big man's voice came to him as out of a great chasm, scarcely heard for the roaring in his head, although he was quite near. His arms hung down and one leg swung free, but his body rested easily balanced in the branches. Presently he felt something fall lightly across his chest,

slip down to his hand, and then crawl slowly up his arm to the shoulder, where it tightened and gripped. A vague hope awoke in him.

"Now, wait. I'll get ye; don't move. I'll have a noose around ye'r leg next,--so." The voice had grown clearer, and seemed nearer, but the young man could make no response with his parched throat.

"Now if I hurt ye a bit, try to stand it." The man carried the long loop of his lasso around the cliff and wound it securely around another scrub oak, and then began slowly and steadily to pull, until the young man moaned with pain,--to cry out was impossible.

"I'll have ye in a minute--I'll have ye--there! Catch at my hand. Poor boy, poor boy, ye can't. Hold on--just a little more--there!" Strong arms reached for him. Strong hands gripped his clothing and lifted him from the terrible chasm's edge.

"He's more dead than alive," said the big man, as he strove to pour a little whisky between the stranger's set teeth. "Well, I'll pack him home and do for him there."

He lifted his weight easily, and placing him on his horse, led the animal to the cabin where he laid him in his own bunk. There, with cool water, and whisky carefully administered, the big man restored him enough to know that he was conscious.

"There now, you'll come out of this all right. You've got a good body and a good head, young man,--lie by a little and I'll give ye some broth."

The man took a small stone jar from a shelf and putting in a little water, took the half-cooked quail from the fire, and putting it in the jar set it on the coals among the ashes, and covered it. From time to time he lifted the cover and stirred it about, sprinkling in a little corn meal, and when the steam began to rise with savory odor, he did not wait for it to be wholly done, but taking a very little of the broth in a tin cup, he cooled it and fed it to his patient drop by drop until the young man's eyes looked gratefully into his.

Then, while the young man dozed, he returned to his own uneaten meal, and dined on dried venison and roasted potatoes and salt. The big man was a good housekeeper. He washed his few utensils and swept the hearth with a broom worn almost to the handle. Then he removed the jar containing the quail and broth from the embers, and set it aside in reserve for his guest. Whenever the young man stirred he fed him again with the broth, until at last he seemed to sleep naturally.

Seeing his patient quietly sleeping, the big man went out to the starving horse and gave him another taste of water, and allowed him to graze a few minutes, then tied him again, and returned to the cabin. He stood for a while looking down at the pallid face of the sleeping stranger, then he lighted his pipe and busied himself about the cabin, returning from time to time to study the young man's countenance. His pipe went out. He lighted it again and then sat down with his back to the stranger and smoked and gazed in the embers.

The expression of his face was peculiarly gentle as he gazed. Perhaps the thought of having rescued a human being worked on his spirit kindly, or what not, but something brought him a vision of a pale face with soft, dark hair waving back from the temples, and large gray eyes looking up into his. It came and was gone, and came again, even as he summoned it, and he smoked on. One watching him might have thought that it was his custom to smoke and gaze and dream thus.

At last he became aware that the stranger was trying to speak to him in husky whispers. He turned quickly.

"Feeling more fit, are you? Well, take another sup of broth. Can't let you eat anything solid for a bit, but you can have all of the broth now if you want it."

As he stooped over him the young man's fingers caught at his shirt sleeve and pulled him down to listen to his whispered words.

"Pull me out of this--quickly--quickly--there's a--party--down the--mountain--dying of thirst. Is this Higgins' Camp? I--I--tried to get there for--for help." He panted and could say no more.

The big man whistled softly. "Thought you'd get to Higgins' Camp? You're sixty miles out of the way--or more,--twice that, way you've come. You took the wrong trail and you've gone forty miles one way when you should have gone as far on the other. I did it myself once, and never undid it."

The patient looked hungrily at the tin cup from which he had been taking the broth. "Can you give me a little more?"

"Yes, drink it all. It won't hurt ye."

"I've got to get up. They'll die." He struggled and succeeded in lifting himself to his elbow and with the effort he spoke more strongly. "May I have another taste of the whisky? I'm coming stronger now. I left them yesterday with all the food--only a bit--and a little water--not enough to keep them alive much longer. Yesterday--God help them--was it yesterday--or days ago?"

The older man had a slow, meditative manner of speech as if he had long been in the way of speaking only to himself, unhurried, and at peace. "It's no use your trying to think that out, young man, and I can't tell you. Nor you won't be able to go for them in a while. No."

"I must. I must if I die. I don't care if I die--but they--I must go." He tried again to raise himself, but fell back. Great drops stood out on his forehead and into his eyes crept a look of horror. "It's

there!" he said, and pointed with his finger.

"What's there, man?"

"The eye. See! It's gone. Never mind, it's gone." He relaxed, and his face turned gray and his eyes closed for a moment, then he said again, "I must go to them."

"You can't go. You're delirious, man."

Then the stranger's lips twitched and he almost smiled. "Because I saw it? I saw it watching me. It often is, and it's not delirium. I can go. I am quite myself."

That half smile on the young man's face was reassuring and appealing. The big man could not resist it.

"See here, are you enough yourself to take care of yourself, if I leave you and go after them--whoever they are?"

"Yes, oh, yes."

"Will you be prudent--stay right here, eat very sparingly? Are they back on the plain? If so, there is a long ride ahead of me, but my horse is fresh. If they are not off the trail by which you came, I can reach them."

"I did not once leave the trail after--there was no other way I could take."

"Would they likely stay right where you left them?"

"They couldn't move if they tried. Oh, my God--if I were only myself again!"

"Never waste words wishing, young man. I'll get them. But you must give me your promise to wait here. Will you be prudent and wait?"

"Yes, yes."

"You'll be stronger before you know it, and then you'll want to leave, you know, and go for them yourself. Don't do that. I'll give your horse a bit more to eat and drink, and tie him again, then there'll be no need for you to leave this bunk until to-morrow. I'm to follow the trail you came up by, and not leave it until I come to--whoever it is? Right. Do you give me your word, no matter how long gone I may be, not to leave my place here until I return, or send?"

"Oh, yes, yes."

"Good. I'll trust you. There's a better reason than I care to give you for this promise, young man. It's not a bad one."

The big man then made his preparations rapidly, pausing now and then to give the stranger instructions as to where to find provisions and how to manage there by himself, and inquiring carefully as to the party he was to find. He packed saddlebags with supplies, and water flasks, and, as he moved about, continued to question and admonish.

"By the time I get back you'll be as well as ever you were. A couple of days--and you'll be fuming round instead of waiting in patience--that's what I tell you. I'll fetch them--do you hear? I'll do it. Now what's your name? Harry King? Harry King--very well, I have it. And the party? Father and mother and daughter. Family party. I see. Big fools, no doubt. No description needed, I guess. Bird? Name Bird? No. McBride,--very good. Any name with a Mac to it goes on this mountain--that means me. I'm the mountain. Any one I don't want here I pack off down the trail, and *vice versa*."

Harry King lay still and heard the big man ride away. He heard his own horse stamping and nickering, and heaving a great sigh of relief his muscles relaxed, and he slept soundly on his hard bed. For hours he had fought off this terrible languor with a desperation born of terror for those he had left behind him, who looked to him as their only hope. Now he resigned their fate to the big man whose eyes had looked so kindly into his, with a childlike feeling of rest and content. He lay thus until the sun rose high in the heavens the next morning, when he was awakened by the insistent neighing of his horse which had risen almost to a cry of fear.

"Poor beast. Poor beast," he muttered. His vocal chords seemed to have stiffened and dried, and his attempt to call out to reassure the animal resulted only in a hoarse croak. He devoured the meat of the little quail left in the jar and drank the few remaining drops of broth, then crawled out to look after the needs of his horse before making further search for food for himself. He gathered all his little strength to hold the frantic creature, maddened with hunger, and tethered him where he could graze for half an hour, then fetched him water as the big man had done, a little at a time in the great dipper.

After these efforts he rested, sitting in the doorway in the sun, and then searched out a meal for himself. The big man's larder was well stocked, and although Harry King did not appear to be a western man, he was a good camper, and could bake a corn dodger or toss a flapjack with a fair amount of skill. As he worked, everything seemed like a dream to him. The murmuring of the trees far up the mountain side, the distant roar of falling water that made him feel as if a little way off he might find the sea, filled his senses with an impression of unseen forces at work all about him, and the peculiar clearness and lightness of the atmosphere made him feel as if he were swaying over the ground and barely touching his feet to the earth, instead of walking. He might indeed be in an enchanted land, were it not for his hunger and the reality of his still hungry horse.

After eating, he again stretched himself on the earth and again slept until his horse awakened

him. It was well. The sun was setting in the golden notch of the hills, and once more he set himself to the same task of laboriously giving his horse water and tethering him where the grass was lush and green, then preparing food for himself, then sitting in the doorway and letting the peace of the place sink into his soul.

The horror of his situation when the big man found him had made no impression, for he had mercifully been unconscious and too stupefied with weariness to realize it. He had even no idea of how he had come to the cabin, or from which direction. Inertly he thought over it. A trail seemed to lead away to the southwest. He supposed he must have come by it, but he had not. It was only the path made by his rescuer in going to and fro between his garden patch and his cabin.

In the loneliness and peace of the dusk he looked up and saw the dome above filled with stars, and all things were so vast and inexplicable that he was minded to pray. The longing and the necessity of prayer was upon him, and he stood with arms uplifted and eyes fixed on the stars,—then his head sank on his breast and he turned slowly into the cabin and lay down on the bunk with his hands pressed over his eyes, and moaned. Far into the night he lay thus, unsleeping, now and again uttering that low moan. Toward morning he again slept until far into the day, and thus passed the first two days of his stay.

Strength came to him rapidly as the big man had said, and soon he was restlessly searching the short paths all about for a way by which he might find the plain below. He did not forget the promise which had been exacted from him to remain, no matter how long, until the big man's return, but he wished to discover whence he might arrive, and perhaps journey to meet him on the way.

The first trail he followed led him to the fall that ever roared in his ears. He stood amazed at its height and volume, and its wonderful beauty. It lured him and drew him again and again to the spot from which he first viewed it. Midway of its height he stood where every now and then a little stronger breeze carried the fine mist of the fall in his face. Behind him lay the garden, ever watered thus by the wind-blown spray. Smoothly the water fell over a notch worn by its never ceasing motion in what seemed the very crest of the mountain far above him. Smoothly it fell into the rainbow mists that lost its base in a wonderful iridescence of shadows and quivering, never resting lights as far below him.

He caught his breath, and remembered the big man's words. "You missed the trail to Higgins' Camp a long way back. It's easily done. I did it myself once, and never undid it." He could not choose but return over and over to that spot. A wonderful ending to a lost trail for a lost soul.

The next path he followed took him to a living spring, where the big man was wont to lead his own horse to water, and from whence he led the water to his cabin in a small flume to always drip and trickle past his door. It was at the end of this flume that Harry King had filled the large dipper for his horse. Now he went back and washed that utensil carefully, and hung it beside the door.

The next trail he followed led by a bare and more forbidding route to the place where the big man had rescued him, and he knew it must be the one by which he had come. A sense of what had happened came over him terrifyingly, and he shrank from the abyss, his body quivering and his head reeling. He would not look down into the blue depth, knowing that if he did so, by that way his sanity would leave him, but he crawled cautiously around the projecting cliff and wandered down the stony trail. Now and again he called, "Whoopee! Whoopee!" but only his own voice came back to him many times repeated.

Again and again he called and listened, "Whoopee! Whoopee!" and was regretful at the thought that he did not even know the name of the man who had saved him. Could he also save the others? The wild trail drew him and fascinated him. Each day he followed a little farther, and morning and evening he called his lonely cry, "Whoopee! Whoopee!" and still was answered by the echo in diminuendo of his own voice. He tried to resist the lure of that narrow, sun-baked, and stony descent, which he felt led to the nethermost hell of hunger and burning thirst, but always it seemed to him as if a cry came up for help, and if it were not that he knew himself bound by a promise, he would have taken his horse and returned to the horror below.

Each evening he reasoned with himself, and repeated the big man's words for reassurance: "I'll fetch them, do you hear? I'll fetch them," and again: "I'm the mountain. Any one I don't want here I pack off down the trail." Perhaps he had taken them off to Higgins' Camp instead of bringing them back with him--what then? Harry King bowed his head at the thought. Then he understood the lure of the trail. What then? Why, then--he would follow--follow--follow--until he found again the woman for whom he had dared the unknown and to whom he had given all but a few drops of water that were needed to keep him alive long enough to find more for her. He would follow her back into that hell below the heights. But how long should he wait? How long should he trust the man to whom he had given his promise?

He decided to wait a reasonable time, long enough to allow for the big man's going, and slow returning--long enough indeed for them to use up all the provisions he had packed down to them, and then he would break his promise and go. In the meantime he tried to keep himself sane by doing what he found to do. He gathered the ripe corn in the big man's garden patch and husked it and stored it in the shed which was built against the cabin. Then he stored the fodder in a sort of stable built of logs, one side of which was formed by a huge boulder, or projecting part of the mountain itself, not far from the spring, where evidently it had been stored in the past, and where he supposed the man kept his horse in winter. He judged the winters must be

very severe for the care with which this shed was covered and the wind holes stopped. And all the time he worked each day seemed a month of days, instead of a day of hours.

At last he felt he was justified in trying to learn the cause of the delay at least, and he baked many cakes of yellow corn meal and browned them well on the hearth, and roasted a side of bacon whole as it was, and packed strips of dried venison, and filled his water flask at the spring. After a long hunt he found empty bottles which he wrapped round with husks and filled also with water. These he purposed to hang at the sides of his saddle. He had carefully washed and mended his clothing, and searching among the big man's effects, he found a razor, dull and long unused. He sharpened and polished and stropped it, and removed a vigorous growth of beard from his face, before a little framed mirror. To-morrow he would take the trail down into the horror from which he had come.

Now it only remained for him to look well to the good yellow horse and sleep one more night in the friendly big man's bunk, then up before the sun and go.

The nights were cold, and he thought he would replenish the fire on his hearth, for he always had the feeling that at any moment they might come wearily climbing up the trail, famished and cold. Any night he might hear the "Halloo" of the big man's voice. In the shed where he had piled the husked corn lay wood cut in lengths for the fireplace, and taking a pine torch he stooped to collect a few sticks, when, by the glare of the light he held, he saw what he had never seen in the dim daylight of the windowless place. A heavy iron ring lay at his feet, and as he kicked at it he discovered that it was attached to something covered with earth beneath.

Impelled by curiosity he thrust the torch between the logs and removed the earth, and found a huge bin of hewn logs carefully fitted and smoothed on the inside. The cover was not fastened, but only held in place by the weight of stones and earth piled above it. This bin was half filled with finely broken ore, and as he lifted it in his hands yellow dust sifted through his fingers.

Quivering with a strange excitement he delved deeper, lifting the precious particles by handfuls, feeling of it, sifting it between his fingers, and holding the torch close to the mass to catch the dull glow of it. For a long time he knelt there, wondering at it, dreaming over it, and feeling of it. Then he covered it all as he had found it, and taking the wood for which he had come, he replenished the fire and laid himself down to sleep.

What was gold to him? What were all the riches of the earth and of the caves of the earth? Only one thought absorbed him,--the woman whom he had left waiting for him on the burning plain, and a haunting memory that would never leave him--never be stilled.

CHAPTER XV

THE BIG MAN'S RETURN

The night was bitter cold after a day of fierce heat. Three people climbed the long winding trail from the plains beneath, slowly, carefully, and silently. A huge mountaineer walked ahead, leading a lean brown horse. Seated on the horse was a woman with long, pale face, and deeply sunken dark eyes that looked out from under arched, dark brows with a steady gaze that never wandered from some point just ahead of her, not as if they perceived anything beyond, but more as if they looked backward upon some terror.

Behind them on a sorrel horse--a horse slenderer and evidently of better stock than the brown--rode another woman, also with dark eyes, now heavy lidded from weariness, and pale skin, but younger and stronger and more alert to the way they were taking. Her face was built on different lines: a smooth, delicately modeled oval, wide at the temples and level of brow, with heavy dark hair growing low over the sides of the forehead, leaving the center high, and the arch of the head perfect. Trailing along in the rear a small mule followed, bearing a pack.

Sometimes the big man walking in front looked back and spoke a word of encouragement, to which the younger of the two women replied in low tones, as if the words were spoken under her breath.

"We'll stop and rest awhile now," he said at last, and led the horse to one side, where a level space made it possible for them to dismount and stretch themselves on the ground to give their weary limbs the needed relaxation.

The younger woman slipped to the ground and led her horse forward to where the elder sat rigidly stiff, declining to move.

"It is better we rest, mother. The kind man asks us."

"Non, Amalia, non. We go on. It is best that we not wait."

Then the daughter spoke rapidly in their own tongue, and the mother bowed her head and allowed herself to be lifted from the saddle. Her daughter then unrolled her blanket and, speaking still in her own tongue, with difficulty persuaded her mother to lie down on the mountain side, as they were directed, and the girl lay beside her, covering her tenderly and

pillowing her mother's head on her arm. The big man led the animals farther on and sat down with his back against a great rock, and waited.

They lay thus until the mother slept the sleep of exhaustion; then Amalia rose cautiously, not to awaken her, and went over to him. Her teeth chattered with the cold, and she drew a little shawl closer across her chest.

"This is a very hard way--so warm in the day and so cold in the night. It is not possible that I sleep. The cold drives me to move."

"You ought to have put part of that blanket over yourself. It's going to be a long pull up the mountain, and you ought to sleep a little. Walk about a bit to warm yourself and then try again to sleep."

"Yes. I try."

She turned docilely and walked back and forth, then very quietly crept under the blanket beside her mother. He watched them a while, and when he deemed she also must be sleeping, he removed his coat and gently laid it over the girl. By that time darkness had settled heavily over the mountain. The horses ceased browsing among the chaparral and lay down, and the big man stretched himself for warmth close beside his sorrel horse, on the stony ground. Thus in the stillness they all slept; at last, over the mountain top the moon rose.

Higher and higher it crept up in the sky, and the stars waned before its brilliant whiteness. The big man roused himself then, and looked at the blanket under which the two women slept, and with a muttered word of pity began gathering weeds and brush with which to build a fire. It should be a very small fire, hidden by chaparral from the plains below, and would be well stamped out and the charred place covered with stones and brush when they left it. Soon he had steeped a pot of coffee and fried some bacon, then he quickly put out his fire and woke the two women. The younger sprang up, and, finding his coat over her, took it to him and thanked him with rapid utterance.

"Oh, you are too kind. I am sorry you have deprive yourself of your coat to put it over me. That is why I have been so warm."

The mother rose and shook out her skirt and glanced furtively about her. "It is not the morning? It is the moon. That is well we go early." She drank the coffee hurriedly and scarcely tasted the bacon and hard biscuit. "It is no toilet we have here to make. So we go more quickly. So is good."

"But you must eat the food, mother. You will be stronger for the long, hard ride. You have not here to hurry. No one follows us here."

"Your father may be already by the camp, Amalia--to bring us help--yes. But of those men 'rouge'--if they follow and rob us--"

The two women spoke English out of deference to the big man, and only dropped into their own language or into fluent French when necessity compelled them, or they thought themselves alone.

"Ah, but those red men, mother, they do not come here, so the kind man told us, for now they are also kind. Sit here and eat the biscuit. I will ask him."

She went over to where he stood by the animals, pouring a very little water from the cans carried by the pack mule for each one. "They'll have to hold out on this for the day, but they may only have half of it now," he said.

"What shall I do?" Amalia looked with wide, distressed eyes in his face. "She believes it yet, that my father lives and has gone to the camp for help. She thinks we go to him,--to the camp. How can I tell her? I cannot--I dare not."

"Let her think what satisfies her most. We can tell her as much as is best for her to know, a little at a time, and there will be plenty of time to do it in. We'll be snowed up on this mountain all winter." The young woman did not reply, but stood perfectly still, gazing off into the moonlit wilderness. "When people get locoed this way, the only thing is to humor them and give them a chance to rest satisfied in something--no matter what, much,--only so they are not hectored. No mind can get well when it is being hectored."

"Hectored? That is to mean--tortured? Yes, I understand. It is that we not suffer the mind to be tortured?"

"About that, yes."

"Thank you. I try to comfort her. But it is to lie to her? It is not a sin, when it is for the healing?"

"I'm not authority on that, Miss, but I know lying's a blessing sometimes."

"If I could make her see the marvelous beauty of this way we go, but she will not look. Me, I can hardly breathe for the wonder--yet--I do not forget my father is dead."

"I'm starting you off now, because it will not be so hard on either you or the horses to travel by night, as long as it is light enough to see the way. Then when the sun comes out hot, we can lie by a bit, as we did yesterday."

"Then is no fear of the red men we met on the plains?"

"They're not likely to follow us up here--not at this season, and now the railroad's going through, they're attracted by that."

"Do they never come to you, at your home?"

"Not often. They think I'm a sort of white 'medicine man'--kind of a hoodoo, and leave me alone."

She looked at him with mystification in her eyes, but did not ask what he meant, and returned to her mother.

"I have eaten. Now we go, is not?"

"Yes, mother. The kind man says we go on, and the red men will not follow us."

"Good. I have afraid of the men 'rouge.' Your father knows not fear; only I know it."

Soon they were mounted and traveling up the trail as before, the little pack mule following in the rear. No breeze stirred to make the frosty air bite more keenly, and the women rode in comparative comfort, with their hands wrapped in their shawls to keep them warm. They did not try to converse, or only uttered a word now and then in their own tongue. Amalia's spirit was enrapt in the beauty around and above and below her, so that she could not have spoken more than the merest word for a reply had she tried.

The moonlight brought all the immediate surroundings into sharp relief, and the distant hills in receding gradations seemed to be created out of molten silver touched with palest gold. Above, the vault of the heavens was almost black, and the stars were few, but clear. Even the stones that impeded the horses' feet seemed to be made of silver. The depths below them seemed as vast and black as the vault above, except for the silver bath of light that touched the tops of the gigantic trees at the bottom of the cañon around which they were climbing.

The silence of this vastness was as fraught with mystery as the scene, and was broken only by the scrambling of the horses over the stones and their heavy breathing. Thus throughout the rest of the night they wended steadily upward, only pausing now and then to allow the animals to breathe, and then on. At last a thing occurred to break the stillness and strike terror to Amalia's heart. It had occurred once the day before when the silence was most profound. A piercing cry rent the air, that began in a scream of terror and ended in a long-drawn wail of despair.

Amalia slipped from her horse and stumbled over the rough ground to her mother's side and poured forth a stream of words in her own tongue, and clasped her arms about the rigid form that did not bend toward her, but only sat staring into the white night as if her eye perceived a sight from which she could not turn away.

"Look at me, mother. Oh, try to make her look at me!" The big man lifted her from the horse, and she relaxed into trembling. "There, it is gone now. Walk with me, mother;" and the two walked for a while, holding hands, and Amalia talked unceasingly in low, soothing tones.

After a little time longer the moon paled and the stars disappeared, and soon the sky became overspread with the changing coloring and the splendor of dawn. Then the sun rose out of the glory, but still they kept on their way until the heat began to overcome them. Then they halted where some pines and high rocks made a shelter, but this time the big man did not build a fire. He gave them a little coffee which he had saved for them from what he had steeped during the night, and they ate and rested, and the mother fell quickly into the sleep of exhaustion, as before.

Thus during the middle of the day they rested, Amalia and the big man sometimes sleeping and sometimes conversing quietly.

"I don't know why mother does this. I never knew her to until yesterday. Father never used to let her look straight ahead of her as she does now. She has always been very brave and strong. She has done wonderful things--but I was not there. When troubles came on my father, I was put in a convent--I know now it was to keep me from harm. I did not know then why I was sent away from them, for my father was not of the religion of the good sisters at the convent,--but now I know--it was to save me."

"Why did troubles come on your father?"

"What he did I do not know, but I am very sure it was nothing wrong. In my country sometimes men have to break the law to do right; my mother has told me so. He was in prison a long time when I was living in the convent, sheltered and cared for,--and mother--mother was working all alone to get him out--all alone suffering."

"How could they keep you there if she had to work so hard?"

"My father had a friend. He was not of our country, and he was most kind and good. I think he was of Scotland--or maybe of Ireland; I was so little I do not know. He saved for my mother some of her money so the government did not get it. I think my mother gave it to him, once--before the trouble came. Maybe she knew it would come,--anyway, so it was. I do not know if he was Irish, or of Scotland--but he must have been a good man."

"Been? Is he dead?"

"Yes. It was of a fever he died. My mother told me. He gave us his name, and to my father his papers to leave our country, for he knew he would die, or my father never could have got out of the country. I never saw him but once. When I saw you, I thought of him. He was grand and good, as are you. My mother came for me at the convent in Paris, and in the night we went to my father, and in the morning we went to the great ship. We said McBride, and all was well. If we had said Manovska when we took the ship, we would have been sent back and my father

would have been killed. In the prison we would have died. It was hard to get on the ship, but when we got to this country, nobody cared who got off."

"How long ago was that?"

"It was at the time of your great war we came. My mother wore the dress of our peasant women, and I did the same."

"And were you quite safe in this country?"

"For a long time we lived very quietly, and we thought we were. But after a time some one came, and father took him in, and then others came, and went away again, and came again--I don't know why--they did not tell me,--but this I know. Some one had a great enmity against my father, and at last mother took me in the night to a strange place where we knew no one, and then we went to another place--and to still another. It was very wearisome."

"What was your father's business?"

"My father had no business. He was what you call a nobleman. He had very much land, but he was generous and gave it nearly all away to his poor people. My father was very learned and studied much. He made much music--very beautiful--not for money--never for that. Only after we came to this country did he so, to live. Once he played in a great orchestra. It was then those men found him and came so often that he had again to go away and hide. I think they brought him papers--very important--to be sacredly guarded until a right time should come to reveal them."

"And you have no knowledge why he was followed and persecuted?"

"I was so little at the beginning I do not know. If it was that in his religion he was different,--or if he was trying to change in the government the laws,--for we are not of Russia,--I know that when he gave away his land, the other noblemen were very angry with him, and at the court--where my father was sent by his people for reasons--there was a prince,--I think it was about my mother he hated my father so,--but for what--that I never heard. But he had my father imprisoned, and there in the prison they--What was that word,--hected? Yes. In the prison they hected him greatly--so greatly that never more was he straight. It was very sad."

"I don't think we would say hected, for that. I think we would say tortured."

"Oh, yes. I see. To hector is of the mind, but torture is of the body. It is that I mean--for they were very terrible to him. My mother was there, and they made her look at it to bring him the more quickly to tell for her sake what he would not for his own. I think when she looks long before her at nothing, she is seeing again the tortures of my father, and so she cries out in that terrible way. I think so."

"What were they trying to get out of him?"

Amalia looked up in his face with a puzzled expression for a moment. "Get--out--of--him?" she asked.

"I mean, what did they want him to tell?"

"Ah, that I know not. It was never told. If they could find him, I think they would try again to learn of him something which he only can tell. I think if they could find my mother, they would now try to learn from her what my father knew, but her lips are like the grave. At that time he had told her nothing, but since then--when we were far out in the wilderness--I do not know. I hope my mother will never be found. Is it a very secret place to which we go?"

"I might call it that--yes. I've lived there for twenty years and no white man has found me yet, until the young man, Harry King, was pitched over the edge of eternity and only saved by a--well--a chance--likely."

The young woman gazed at him wide-eyed, and drew in her breath. "You saved him."

"If he obeyed me--I did."

"And all the twenty years were you alone?"

"I always had a horse."

"But for a companion--had you never one?"

"Never."

"Are you, too, a good man who has done a deed against the law of your land?"

The big man looked off a moment, then down at her with a little smile playing about his lips. "I never did a deed against the law of any land that I know of, but as for the good part--that's another thing. I may be fairly good as goodness goes."

"Goodnessgoes!" She repeated after him as if it were one word from which she was trying to extract a meaning. "Was it then to flee from the wicked world that you lived all the twenty years thus alone?"

"Hardly that, either. To tell the truth, it may be only a habit with me."

"Will you forgive me that I asked? It was only that to me it has been terrible to live always in hiding and fear. I love people, and desire greatly to have kind people near me,--but of the world where my father and mother lived, and at the court--and of the nobles, of all these I am afraid."

"Yes, yes. I fancy you were." A grim look settled about his mouth, although his eyes twinkled

kindly. He marveled to think how trustingly they accompanied him into this wilderness--but then--poor babes! What else could they do? "You'll be safe from all the courts and nobles in the world where I'm taking you."

"That is why my eyes do not weep for my father. He is now gone where none can find him but God. It is very terrible that a good man should always hide--hide and live in fear--always--even from his own kinsmen. I understand some of the sorrows of the world."

"You'll forget it all up there."

"I will try if my mother recovers." She drew in her breath with a little quivering catch.

"We'll wake her now, and start on. It won't do to waste daylight any longer." Secretly he was afraid that they might be followed by Indians, and was sorry he had made the fire in the night, but he reasoned that he could never have brought them on without such refreshment. Women are different from men. He could eat raw bacon and hard-tack and go without coffee, when necessary, but to ask women to do so was quite another thing.

For long hours now they traveled on, even after the moon had set, in the darkness. It was just before the dawn, where the trail wound and doubled on itself, that the sorrel horse was startled by a small rolling stone that had been loosened on the trail above them. Instantly the big man halted where they were.

"Are you brave enough to wait here a bit by your mother's horse while I go on? That stone did not loosen itself. It may be nothing but some little beast,--if it were a bear, the horses would have made a fuss."

He mounted the sorrel and went forward, leaving her standing on the trail, holding the leading strap of her mother's horse, which tossed its head and stepped about restlessly, trying to follow. She petted and soothed the animal and talked in low tones to her mother. Then with beating heart she listened. Two men's voices came down to her--one, the big man's--and the other--yes, she had heard it before.

"It is 'Arry King, mother. Surely he has come down to meet us," she said joyfully. She would have hurried on, but bethought herself she would better wait as she had been directed. Soon the big man returned, looking displeased and grim.

"Young chap couldn't wait. He gave me his promise, but he didn't keep it."

"It was 'Arry King?" He made no reply, and they resumed their way as before. "It was long to wait, and nothing to do," she pleaded, divining his mood.

"I had good reasons, Miss. No matter. I sent him back. No need of him here. We'll make it before morning now, and he will have the cabin warm and hot coffee for us, if you can stand to go on for a goodish long pull."

A goodish long pull it surely was, in the darkness, but the women bore up with courage, and their guide led them safely. The horse Amalia rode, being his own horse, knew the way well.

"Don't try to guide him; he'll take you quite safely," he called back to her. "Let the reins hang." And in the dusk of early morning they safely turned the curve where Harry King had fallen, never knowing the danger.

Harry King, standing in the doorway of the cabin, with the firelight bright behind him, saw them winding down the trail and hurried forward. They were almost stupefied with fatigue. He lifted the mother in his arms without a word and carried her into the cabin and laid her in the bunk, which he had prepared to receive her. He greeted Amalia with a quiet word as the big man led her in, and went out to the horses, relieved them of their burdens, and led them away to the shed by the spring. Soon the big man joined him, and began rubbing down the animals.

"I will do this. You must rest," said Harry.

"I need none of your help," he said, not surlily, as the words might sound, but colorlessly.

"I needed yours when I came here--or you saved me and brought me here, and now whatever you wish I'll do, but for to-night you must take my help. I'm not apologizing for what I did, because I thought it right, but--"

"Peace, man, peace. I've lived a long time with no man to gainsay me. I'll take what comes now and thank the Lord it's no worse. We'll leave the cabin to the women, after I see that they have no fright about it, and we'll sleep in the fodder. There have been worse beds."

"I have coffee on the hearth, hot, and corn dodgers--such as we used to make in the army. I've made them often before."

"Turn the beasts free; there isn't room for them all in the shed, and I'll go get a bite and join you soon."

So Harry King did not return to the cabin that night, much as he desired to see Amalia again, but lay down on the fodder and tried to sleep. His heart throbbed gladly at the thought of her safety. He had not dared to inquire after her father. Although he had seen so little of the big man he understood his mood, and having received such great kindness at his hands, he was truly sorry at the invasion of his peace. Undoubtedly he did not like to have a family, gathered from the Lord only knew where, suddenly quartered on him for none knew how long.

The cabin was only meant for a hermit of a man, and little suited to women and their needs. A mixed household required more rooms. He tried to think the matter through and to plan, but the

effort brought drowsiness, and before the big man returned he was asleep.

CHAPTER XVI

A PECULIAR POSITION

"Well, young man, we find ourselves in what I call a peculiar position."

A smile that would have been sardonic, were it not for a few lines around the corners of his eyes which belied any sinister suspicion, spread grimly across the big man's face as he stood looking down on Harry King in the dusk of the unlighted shed. The younger man rose quickly from the fodder where he had slept heavily after the fatigues of the past day and night, and stood respectfully looking into the big man's face.

"I--I--realize the situation. I thought about it after I turned in here--before you came down--or up--to this--ahem--bedroom. I can take myself off, sir. And if there were any way--of relieving you of--the--whole--embarrassment,--I--I--would do so."

"Everything's quiet down at the cabin. I've been there and looked about a bit. They had need of sleep. You go back to your bunk, and I'll take mine, and we'll talk the thing over before we see them again. As for your taking yourself off, that remains to be seen. I'm not crabbed, that's not the secret of my life alone,--though you might think it. I--ahem--ahem." The big man cleared his throat and stretched his spare frame full length on the fodder where he had slept. With his elbow on the bed of corn stalks he lifted his head on his hand and gazed at Harry King, not dreamily as when he first saw him, but with covert keenness.

"Lie down in your place--a bit--lie down. We'll talk until we've arrived at a conclusion, and it may be a long talk, so we may as well be comfortable."

Harry King went back to his own bunk and lay prone, his forehead resting on his folded arms and his face hidden. "Very well, sir; I'll do my best. We have to accept each other for the best there is in us, I take it. You've saved my life and the life of those two women, and we all owe you our grat--"

"Go to, go to. It's not of that I'm wishing to speak. Let's begin at the beginning, or, as near the beginning as we can. I've been standing here looking at you while you were sleeping,--and last night--I mean early this morning when I came up here, I--with a torch I studied your face well and long. A man betrays his true nature when he is sleeping. The lines of what he has been thinking and feeling show then when he cannot disguise them by smiles or words. I'm old enough to be your father--yes--so it might have been--and with your permission I'll talk to you straight."

Harry King lifted his head and looked at the other, then resumed his former position. "Thank you," was all he said.

"You've been well bred. You're in trouble. I ask you what is your true name and what you have done?"

The young man did not speak. He lay still as if he had heard nothing, but the other saw his hands clinch into knotted fists and the muscles of his arms grow rigid. His heart beat heavily and the blood roared in his ears. At last he lifted his head and looked back at the big man and spoke monotonously.

"I gave you my name--all the name I have." His face was white in the dim light and the lids drew close over his gray eyes.

"You prefer to lie to me? I ask in good faith."

"All the name I have is the one I gave you, Harry King."

"And you will hold to the lie?" They looked steadily into each other's eyes. The young man nodded. "And there was more I asked of you."

Then the young man turned away from the keen eyes that had held him and sat up in the fodder and clasped his knees with his hands and looked straight out before him, regarding nothing--nothing but his own thoughts. A strange expression crept over his face,--was it fear--or was it an inward terror? Suddenly he put out his hand with a frantic gesture toward the darkest corner of the place, "It's there," he cried in a voice scarcely above a whisper, then hid his eyes and moaned. At the sight, the big man's face softened.

"Lad, lad, ye're in trouble. I saved your body as it hung over the cliff--and the Lord only knows how ye were saved. I took ye home and laid ye in my own bunk,--and looked on your face--and there my heart cried on the Lord for the first time in many years. I had forsworn the company of men, and of all women,--and the faith of my fathers had died in me,--but there, as I looked on your face--the lost years came back. And now--ye're only Harry King. Only Harry King."

"That's all." The young man's lips set tightly and the cords of his neck stood out. Nothing was lost to the eyes that watched him so intently.

"I had a son--once. I held him in my arms--for an hour--and then left him forever. You have a face that reminds me of one--one I hated--and it minds me of one I--I--loved,--of one I loved better than I loved life."

Then Harry King turned and gazed in the big man's eyes, and as he gazed, the withdrawn, inward look left his own. He still sat clasping his knees. "I can more easily tell you what I have done than I can tell you my name. I have sworn never to utter it again." He was weeping, but he hid his tears for very shame of them.

The older man shook his head. "I've known sorrow, boy, but the lesson of it, never. Men say there is a thing to be learned from sorrow, but to me it has brought only rebellion and bitterness. So I've missed the good of it because it came upon me through arrogance and injustice--not my own. So now I say to you--if it was at the expense of your soul I saved your life, it were better I had let you go down. Lad,--you've brought me a softness,--it's like what a man feels for a woman. I'm glad it's come back to me. It is good to feel. I'd make a son of you,--but--for the truth's sake tell me a bit more."

"I had a friend and I killed him. I was angry and killed him. I have left my name in his grave." Harry King rose and walked away and stood shivering in the entrance of the shed. Then he came back and spoke humbly. "Do with me what you will, but call me Harry King. I have nothing on earth but the clothes on my body, and they are in rags. If you have work for me to do, let me do it, in mercy. If not, let me go back to the plains and die there."

"How long ago was this?"

"More--more than two years ago--yes, three--perhaps."

"And where have you been?"

"Knocking about--hiding. For a while I had work on the road they are building--"

"Road? What road?"

"The new railroad across the continent."

"Where, young man, where?"

"From Chicago on. They got it as far as Cheyenne, but that was the very place of all others where they would be apt to hunt for me. I got news of a detective hanging about the camp, and I was sure he had come there to track me. I had my wages and my clothes, and when I found they had traced me there, I spent all I had for my horse and took my pack and struck out over the plains." He paused and wiped the cold drops from his forehead, then lifted his head with gathered courage. "One day,--I found these people, nigh starving for both water and food, and without strength to go where they could be provided for. They, too, were refugees, I learned, and so I cast my lot with theirs, and served them as best I could."

"And now they have fallen to the two of us to provide for. You say, give you work? I've lived here these twenty years and found work for no man but myself. I've found plenty of that--just to keep alive, part of the time. It's bad here in the winter--if the stores give out. Tell me what you know of these women."

"Where is the man?"

"Dead. I found him dead before I reached them. I left him lying where I found him, and pushed on--got there just in time. He wasn't three hours away from them as a man walks. I made them as comfortable as I could and saw that no Indians were about, nor had been, they said; so I ventured back and made a grave for him as best I could, and told the daughter only, for the old lady seemed out of her head. I don't know what we can do with her if she gets worse. I don't know." As the big man talked he noticed the younger one growing calmer and listening intently.

"Before I buried him I searched him and found a few papers--just letters in a strange language, and from the feeling of his coat I judged others were hid--sewed in it, so I fetched it back to her--the young one. You thought I was long gone, and there was where you made the blunder. How did you suppose I came by the pack mule and the other horse?"

"When I saw them, I knew you must have gone to Higgins' Camp and back, but how could I know it before? You might have been in need of me, and of food."

"We'll say no more of it. Those men at the camp are beasts. I bought those animals and paid gold for them. They wanted to know where I got the gold. I told them where they'd never get it. They asked me ten prices for those beasts, and then tried to keep me there until they could clean me out and get hold of my knowledge. But I skipped away in the night when they were all drunk and asleep. Then I had to make a long detour to put them off the track if they should try to follow me, and all that took time."

The big man paused to fill and light his pipe. "And what next?" asked Harry King.

"Except for enough food and water to last us up the trail you came, I packed nothing back to the wagon, and so had room to bring a few of their things up here, and there may be some of your own among them--they said something about it. We hauled the wagon as far as a good place to hide it, in a wash, could be found, and we covered it--and our tracks. But there was nothing left in it but a few of their utensils, unless the box they did not open contained something. It was left in the wagon. That was the best I could do with only the help of the young woman, and she was too weak to do much. It may lie there untouched for ten years unless a rain scoops it out, and that's not likely."

"I showed the young woman as we came along where her father lay, and as we came to a halt a bit farther on, she went back, while her mother slept, and knelt there praying for an hour. I doubt any good it did him, but it comforted her heart. It's a good religion for a woman, where she does not have to think things out for herself, but takes a priest's word for it all. And now they're here, and you're here, and my home is invaded, and my peace is gone, and may the Lord help me--I can't."

Harry King looked at him a moment in silence. "Nor can I--help--but to take myself off."

"Take yourself off! And leave me alone with two women? I who have foresworn them forever! How do you know but that they may each be possessed by seven devils? But there! It isn't so bad. As long as they stay you'll stay. It was through you they are here, and close on to winter,--and if it was summer, it would be as bad to send them away where they would have no place to stay and no way to live. Lad, the world's hard on women. I've seen much."

Harry King went again and stood in the open entrance of the shed and waited. The big man saw that he had succeeded in taking the other's mind off himself, and had led him to think of others, and now he followed up the advantage toward confidence that he had thus gained. He also came to the entrance and laid his kindly hand on the younger man's shoulder, and there in the pale light of that cloudy fall morning, standing in the cool, invigorating air, with the sound of falling water in their ears, the two men made a compact, and the end was this.

"Harry King, if you'll be my son, I'll be your father. My boy would be about your age--if he lives,--but if he does, he has been taught to look down on me--on the very thought of me." He cast a wistful glance at the young man's face as he spoke. "From the time I held him in my arms, a day-old baby, I've never seen him, and it may be he has never heard of me. He was in good hands and was given over for good reasons, to one who hated my name and my race--and me. For love of his mother I did this. It was all I could do for her; I would have gone down into the grave for her.

"I, too, have been a wanderer over the face of the earth. At first I lived in India--in China--anywhere to be as far on the other side of the earth from her grave and my boy, as I vowed I would, but I've kept the memory of her sweet in my heart. You need not fear I'll ask again for your name. Until you choose to give it I will respect your wish,--and for the rest--speak of it when you must--but not before. I have no more to ask. You've been well bred, as I said, and that's enough for me. You're more than of age--I can see that--but it's my opinion you need a father. Will you take me?"

The young man drew in his breath sharply through quivering lips, and made answer with averted head: "Cain! Cain and the curse of Cain! Can I allow another to share it?"

"Another shares it and you have no choice."

"I will be more than a son. Sons hurt their fathers and accept all from them and give little. You lifted me out of the abyss and brought me back to life. You took on yourself the burden laid on me, to save those who trusted me, knowing nothing of my crime,--and now you drag my very soul from hell. I will do more than be your son--I will give you the life you saved. Who are you?"

Then the big man gave his name, making no reciprocal demand. What mattered a name? It was the man, by whatever name, he wanted.

"I am an Irishman by birth, and my name is Larry Kildene. If you'll go to a little county not so far from Dublin, but to the north, you'll find my people."

He was looking away toward the top of the mountain as he spoke, and was seeing his grandfather's house as he had seen it when a boy, and so he did not see the countenance of the young man at his side. Had he done so, he would not have missed knowing what the young man from that moment knew, and from that moment, out of the love now awakened in his heart for the big man, carefully concealed, giving thanks that he had not told his name.

For a long minute they stood thus looking away from each other, while Harry King, by a mighty effort, gained control of his features, and his voice. Then although white to the lips, he spoke quietly: "Harry King--the murderer--be the son of Larry Kildene--Larry Kildene--I--to slink away in the hills--forever to hide--"

"No more of that. I'll show you a new life. Give me your hand, Harry King." And the young man extended both hands in a silence through which no words could have been heard.

CHAPTER XVII

ADOPTING A FAMILY

As the two men walked down toward the cabin they saw Amalia standing beside the door in the sunlight which now streamed through a rift in the clouds, gazing up at the towering mountain and listening to the falling water. She spied them and came swiftly to them, extending both hands in a sweet, gracious impulsiveness, and began speaking rapidly even before she reached

them.

"Ah! So beautiful is your home! It is so much that I would say to you of gratitude in my heart--it is like a river flowing swiftly to tell you--Ah! I cannot say it all--and we come and intrude ourselves upon you thus that you have no place where to go for your own sleeping--Is not? Yes, I know it. So must we think quickly how we may unburden you of us--my mother and myself--only that she yet is sleeping that strange sleep that seems still not like sleep. Let me that I serve you, sir?"

Larry Kildene looked on her glowing, upturned face, gathering his slower wits for some response to her swift speech, while she turned to the younger man, grasping his hands in the same manner and not ceasing the flow of her utterance.

"And you, at such severe labor and great danger, have found this noble man, and have sent him to us--to you do we owe what never can we pay--it is thus while we live must we always thank you in our hearts. And to this place--so *won-n-der-ful*--Ah! Beautiful like heaven--Is not? Yes, and the sweet sound always in the air--like heaven and the sound of wings--to stop here even for this night is to make those sorrowful thoughts lie still and for a while speak nothing."

As she turned from one to the other, addressing each in turn, warm lights flashed in her eyes through tears, like stars in a deep pool. Her dark hair rolled back from her smooth oval forehead in heavy coils, and over her head and knotted under her perfect chin, outlining its curve, was a silken peasant handkerchief with a crimson border of the richest hue, while about the neck of her colorless, closely fitted gown was a piece of exquisite hand-wrought lace. She stood before them, a vision from the old world, full of innate ladyhood, simple as a peasant, at once appealing and dominating, impulsive, yet shy. Her beautiful enunciation, her inverted and quaintly turned English, alive with poetry, was typical of her whole personality, a sweet and strange mixture of the high-bred aristocrat and the simple directness and strength of the peasant.

The two men made stumbling and embarrassed replies. That tender and beautiful quality of chivalry toward women, belonging by nature to undefiled manhood, was awakened in them, and as one being, not two, they would have laid their all at her feet. This, indeed, they literally did. The small, one-room cabin, which had so long served for Larry Kildene's palace, was given over entirely to the two women, and the men made their own abode in the shed where they had slept.

This they accomplished by creating a new room, by extending the roof-covered space Larry had used for his stable and the storing of fodder, far enough along under the great overhanging rock to allow of comfortable bunks, a place to walk about, and a fireplace also. The labor involved in the making of this room was a boon to Harry King.

Upon the old stone boat which Larry had used for a similar purpose he hauled stones gathered from the rock ledge and built therewith a chimney, and with the few tools in the big man's store he made seats out of hewn logs, and a rude table. This work was left to him by the older man purposely, while he occupied himself with the gathering in of the garden stuff for themselves and for the animals. A matter that troubled his good heart not a little was that of providing for the coming winter enough food supply for his suddenly acquired family. Of grain and fodder he thought he had enough for animals kept in idleness, as he still had stores gathered in previous years for his own horse. But for these women, he must not allow them to suffer the least privation.

It was not the question of food alone that disturbed him. At last he laid his troubles before Harry King.

"You know, lad, it won't be so long before the snow will be down on us, and I'm thinking what shall we do with them when the long winter days set in." He nodded his head toward the cabin. "It's already getting too cold for them to sit out of doors as they do. I should have windows in my cabin--if I could get the glass up here. They can't live there in the darkness, with the snow banked around them, with nothing to use their fingers on as women like to do. Now, if they had cloth or thread--but what use had I for such things? They're not among my stores. I did not lay out to make it a home for women. The mother will get farther and farther astray with her dreams if she has nothing to do such as women like."

"I think we should ask them--or ask Amalia, she is wise. Have you enough to keep them on--of food?"

"Of food, yes. Such as it is. No flour, but plenty of good wheat and corn. I always pound it up and bake it, but it is coarse fare for women. There's plenty of game for the hunting, and easy got, but it's something to think about we'll need, else we'll all go loony."

"You have lived long here alone and seem sound of mind,--except for--" Harry King smiled, "except for a certain unworldliness that would pass for lunacy in the world below these heights."

"Let alone, son. I've usually had my own way for these years and have formed the habit, but I've had my times. At the best it's a sort of lunacy that takes a man away from his fellows, especially an Irishman. Maybe you'll discover for yourself before we part--but it's not to the point now. I'm asking you how we can keep the mother from brooding and the daughter happy? She's asking to be sent away to earn money for her mother. She thinks she can take her mother with her to the nearest place on that new railroad you tell me of, and so on to some town. I tell her, no. And if she goes, and leaves her mother here--bless you--what would we do with her? Why, the woman would go yonder and jump over the cliff."

"Oh, it would never do to listen to her. It would never do for her to try living in a city earning her bread--not while--" Harry King paused and turned a white, drawn face toward the mountain. Larry watched him. "I can do nothing." He threw out his hands with a sudden downward movement. "I, a criminal in hiding! My manhood is of no avail! My God!"

"Remember, lad, the women have need of you right here. I'm keeping you on this mountain at my valuation, not yours. I have need of you, and your past is not to intrude in this place, and when you go out in the world again, as you will, when the right time comes, you'll know how to meet--and face--your life--or death, as a man should.

"Hold yourself with a firm hand, and do the work of the days as they come. It's all the Lord gives us to do at any time. If I only had books--now,--they would help us,--but where to get them--or how? We'll even go and ask the women, as you advise."

They all ate together in the little cabin, as was their habit, a meal prepared by Amalia, and carefully set out with all the dishes the cabin afforded: so few that there were not enough to serve all at once, but eked out by wooden blocks, and small lace serviettes taken from Amalia's store of linen. At noon one day Larry Kildene spoke his anxieties for their welfare, and cleverly managed to make the theme a gay one.

"Where's the use in adopting a family if you don't get society out of them? The question I ask is, when the winter shuts us in, what are we going to do for sport--work--what you will? It's indoor sport I'm meaning, for Harry and I have the hunting and providing in the daytime. No, never you ask me what I was doing before you came. I was my own master then--"

"And now you are ours? That is good, Sir Kildene. You have to say what to do, and me, I accept to do what you advise. Is not?"

Amalia turned to Larry and smiled, and whenever Amalia smiled, her mother would smile also, and nod her head as if to approve, although she usually sat in silence.

"Yours to command," said Larry, bowing.

"He's master of us all, but it's yours to direct, Lady Amalia."

"Oh, me, Mr. 'Arry. It is better for me I make for you both sufficient to eat, so all goes well. I think I have heard men are always pleased of much that is excellent to eat and drink."

"Now, listen. We have only a short time before the heavy snows will come down on us, and then there will be no chance whatever to get supplies of any sort before spring. How far is the road completed now, Harry?"

"It should be well past Cheyenne by now. They must be working toward Laramie rapidly. If--if--you think best, I will go down and get supplies--whatever can be found there."

"No. I have a plan. There's enough for one man to do here finishing the jobs I have laid out, but one of us can very well be spared, and as you have wakened me from my long sleep, and stirred my old bones to life, and as I know best how to travel in this region, I'll take the mule along, and go myself. I have a fancy for traveling by rail again. You ladies make out a list of all you need, and I'll fill the order, in so far as the stations have the articles. If I can't find the right things at one station, I may at another, even if I go back East for them."

"Ah, but, Sir Kildene, it is that we have no money. If but we could get from the wagon the great box, there have we enough of things to give us labor for all the winter. It is the lovely lace I make. A little of the thread I have here, but not sufficient for long. So, too, there is my father's violin. It made me much heart pain to leave it--for me, I play a little,--and there is also of cloth such as men wear--not of great quantity--but enough that I can make for you--something--a little--maybe, Mr. 'Arry he like well some good shirt of wool--as we make for our peasant--Is not?" Harry looked down on his worn gray shirt sleeves, then into her eyes, and on the instant his own fell. She took it for simple embarrassment, and spoke on.

"Yes. To go with us and help us so long and terrible a way, it has made very torn your apparel."

"It makes that we improve him, could we obtain the box," said the mother, speaking for the first time that day. Her voice was so deep and full that it was almost masculine, but her modulations were refined and most agreeable.

Amalia laughed for very gladness that her mother at last showed enough interest in what was being said to speak.

"Ah, mamma, to improve--it is to make better the mind--the heart--but of this has Mr. 'Arry no need. Is not, Sir Kildene? I call you always Sir as title to nobleness of character. We have, in our country, to inherit title, but here to make it of such character. It is well, I think so."

Poor Larry Kildene had his own moment of embarrassment, but with her swift appreciation of their moods she talked rapidly on, leaving the compliment to fall as it would, and turning their thoughts to the subject in hand. "But the box, mamma, it is heavy, and it is far down on the terrible plain. If that you should try to obtain it, Sir Kildene: Ah, I cannot!--Even to think of the peril is a hurt in my heart. It must even lie there."

"And the men 'rouge'--"

"Yes. Of the red men--those Indian--of them I have great fear."

"The danger from them is past, now. If the road is beyond Cheyenne, it must have reached Laramie or nearly so, and they would hang around the stations, picking up what they can, but the government has them in hand as never before. They would not dare interfere with white

men anywhere near the road. I've dreamed of a railroad to connect the two oceans, but never expected to see it in my lifetime. I've taken a notion to go and see it--just to look at it,--to try to be reconciled to it."

"Reconciled? It is to like it, you mean--Sir Kildene? Is it not *won-n-derful*--the achievement?"

"Oh, yes, the achievement, as you say. But other things will follow, and the plains will no longer keep men at bay. The money grabbers will pour in, and all the scum of creation will flock toward the setting sun. Then, too, I shall hate to see the wild animals that have their own rights killed in unsportsmanlike manner, and annihilated, as they are wherever men can easily reach them. Men are wasteful and bad. I've seen things in the wild places of the earth--and in the places where men flock together in hoards--and where they think they are most civilized, and the result has been what you see here,--a man living alone with a horse for companionship, and the voice of the winds and the falling water to fill his soul. Go to. Go to."

Larry Kildene rose and stood a moment in the cabin door, then sauntered out in the sun, and off toward the fall. He had need to think a while alone. His companions knew this necessity was on him, and said nothing--only looked at each other, and took up the question of their needs for the winter.

"Mr. 'Arry, is it possible to reach with safety a station? I mean is time yet to go and return before the snows? Here are no deadly wolves as in my own country--but is much else to make dangerous the way."

"There must be time or he would not propose it. I don't know about the snows here."

"I have seen that Sir Kildene drinks with most pleasure the coffee, but is little left--or not enough for all--to drink it. My mother and I we drink with more pleasure the tea, and of tea we ourselves have a little. It is possible also I make of things more palatable if I have the sugar, but is very little here. I have searched well, the foods placed here. Is it that Sir Kildene has other places where are such articles?"

"All he has is in the bins against the wall yonder."

"Here is the key he gave me, and I have look well, but is not enough to last but for one through all the months of winter. Ah, poor man! We have come and eat his food like the wolves of the wild country at home, is not? I have make each day of the coffee for him, yes, a good drink, and for you not so good--forgive,--but for me and my mother, only to pretend, that it might last for him. It is right so. We have gone without more than to have no coffee, and this is not privation. To have too much is bad for the soul."

Amalia's mother seemed to have withdrawn herself from them and sat gazing into the smoking logs, apparently not hearing their conversation. Harry King for the second time that day looked in Amalia's eyes. It was a moment of forgetfulness. He had forbidden himself this privilege except when courtesy demanded.

"You forgive--that I put--little coffee in your drink?"

"Forgive? Forgive?"

He murmured questioningly as if he hardly comprehended her meaning, as indeed he did not. His mind was going over the days since first he saw her, toiling to gather enough sagebrush to cook a drop of tea for her father, and striving to conceal from him that she, herself, was taking none, and barely tasting her hard biscuit that there might be enough to keep life in her parents. As she sat before him now, in her worn, mended, dark dress with the wonderful lace at the throat, and her thin hands lying on the crimson-bordered kerchief in her lap,--her fingers playing with the fringe, he still looked in her eyes and murmured, "Forgive?"

"Ah, Mr. 'Arry, your mind is sleeping and has gone to dream. Listen to me. If one goes to the plain, quickly he must go. I make with haste this naming of things to eat. It is sad we must always eat--eat. In heaven maybe is not so." She wandered a moment about the cabin, then laughed for the second time. "Is no paper on which to write."

"There is no need of paper; he'll remember. Just mention them over. Coffee,--is there any tea beside that you have?"

"No, but no need. I name it not."

"Tea is light and easily brought. What else?"

"And paper. I ask for that but for me to write my little romance of all this--forgive--it is for occupation in the long winter. You also must write of your experiences--perhaps--of your history of--of--You like it not? Why, Mr. 'Arry! It is to make work for the mind. The mind must work--work--or die. The hands--well. I make lace with the hands--but for the mind is music--or the books--but here are no books--good--we make them. So, paper I ask, and of crayon--Alas! It is in the box! What to do?"

"Listen. We'll have that box, and bring it here on the mountain. I'll get it."

"Ah, no! No. Will you break my heart?" She seized his arm and looked in his eyes, her own brimming with tears. Then she flung up her arms in her dramatic way, and covered her eyes. "I can see it all so terrible. If you should go there and the Indian strike you dead--or the snow come too soon and kill you with the cold--in the great drift lying white--all the terrible hours never to see you again--Ah, no!"

In that instant his heart leaped toward her and the blood roared in his ears. He would have

clasped her to him, but he only stood rigidly still. "Hands off, murderer!" The words seemed shouted at him by his own conscience. "I would rather die--than that you should not have your box," was all he said, and left the cabin. He, too, had need to think things out alone.

CHAPTER XVIII

LARRY KILDENE'S STORY

"Man, but this is none so bad--none so bad."

Larry Kildene sat on a bench before a roaring fire in the room added on to the fodder shed. The chimney which Harry King had built, although not quite completed to its full height, was being tried for the first time, as the night was too cold for comfort in the long, low shed without fire, and the men had come down early this evening to talk over their plans before Larry should start down the mountain in the morning. They had heaped logs on the women's fire and seen that all was right for them, and with cheerful good-nights had left them to themselves.

Now, as they sat by their own fire, Harry could see Amalia by hers, seated on a low bench of stone, close to the blazing torch of pine, so placed that its smoke would be drawn up the large chimney. It was all the light they had for their work in the evenings, other than the firelight. He could see her fingers moving rapidly and mechanically at some pretty open-work pattern, and now and then grasping deftly at the ball of fine white thread that seemed to be ever taking little leaps, and trying to roll into the fire, or out over the cabin floor. She used a fine, slender needle and seemed to be performing some delicate magic with her fingers. Was she one of the three fates continually drawing out the thread of his life and weaving therewith a charmed web? And if so--when would she cease?

"It's a good job and draws well."

"The chimney? Yes, it seems to." Harry roused himself and tried to close his mind against the warm, glowing picture. "Yes--yes. It draws well. I'm inclined to be a bit proud, although I never could have done it if you had not given me the lessons."

"It's art, my boy. To build a good fireplace is just that. Did you ever think that the whole world--and the welfare of it--centers just around that;--the fireplace and the hearth--or what stands for it in these days--maybe a little hole in the wall with a smudge of coal in it, as they have in the towns--but it's the hearth and the cradle beside it--and--the mother."

Larry's voice died almost to a whisper, and his chin dropped on his breast, and his eyes gazed on the burning logs; and Harry, sitting beside him, gazed also at the same logs, but the pictures wrought in the alchemy of their souls were very different.

To Harry it was a sweet, oval face--a flush from the heat of the fire more on the smooth cheek that was toward it than on the other, and warm flame flashes in the large eyes that looked up at him from time to time, while the slender figure bent a little forward to see the better, as the wonderful hands kept up the never ceasing motion. A white linen cloth spread over her lap cast a clearer, more rosy light under her chin and brought out the strength of it and the delicate curves of it, which Harry longed even to dare to look upon in the rarest stolen intervals, without the clamor and outcry in his heart. It was always the same--the cry of Cain in the wilderness. Would God it might some day cease! What to him might be the hearth fire and the cradle, and the mother, that the big man should dwell on them thus? What had they meant in Larry Kildene's life, he who had lived for twenty years the life of a hermit, and had forsworn women forever, as he said?

"I tell ye, lad, there's a thing I would say to you--before I leave, but it's sore to touch upon." Harry made a deprecating gesture. "No, it's best I tell you. I--I'll come back--never fear--it's my plan to come back, but in this life you may count on nothing for a surety. I've learned that, and to prove it, look at me. I made sure, never would I open my heart again to think on my fellow beings, but as aliens to my life, and I've lived it out for twenty years, and thought to hold out to the end. I held the Indians at bay through their superstitions, and they would no more dare to cross my path with hostile intent than they would dare take their chances over that fall above there. Where did I put my pipe? I can't seem to find things as I did in the cabin."

"Here it is, sir. I placed that stone further out at the end of the chimney on purpose for it, and in this side I've left a hole for your tobacco. I thought I was very clever doing that."

"And we'd be fine and cozy here in the winter--if it wer'n't for the women--a--a--now I'm blundering. I'd never turn them out if they lived there the rest of their days. But to have a lad beside me as I might have had--if you'd said, 'Here it is, father,' but now, it would have been music to me. You see, Harry, I forswore the women harder than I did the men, and it's the longing for the son I held in my arms an hour and then gave up, that has lived in me all these years. The mother--gone--The son I might have had."

"I can't say that--to you. I have a curse on me, and it will stay until I have paid for my crime. But I'll be more to you than sons are to their fathers. I'll be faithful to you as a dog to his

master, and love you more. I'll live for you even with the curse on me, and if need be, I'll die for you."

"It's enough. I'll ask you no more. Have you no curiosity to hear what I have to tell you?"

"I have, indeed I have. But it seems I can't ask it--unless I'm able to return your confidence. To talk of my sorrow only deepens it. It drives me wild."

"You'll have it yet to learn, that nothing helps a sorrow that can't be helped like bearing it. I don't mean to lie down under it like a dumb beast--but just take it up and bear it. That's what you're doing now, and sometime you'll be able to carry it, and still laugh now and again, when it's right to laugh--and even jest, on occasion. It's been done and done well. It's good for a man to do it. The lass down there at the cabin is doing it--and the mother is not. She's living in the past. Maybe she can't help it."

"When I first came on them out there in the desert, she seemed brave and strong. He was a poor, crippled man, with enormous vitality and a leonine head. The two women adored him and lived only for him, and he never knew it. He lived for an ideal and would have died for it. He did not speak English as well as they. I used to wish I could understand him, for he had a poet's soul, and eyes like his daughter's. He seemed to carry some secret with him, and no doubt was followed about the world as he thought he was. Fleeing myself, I could not know, but from things the mother has dropped, they must have seen terrible times together, she and her husband."

"A wonderful deal of poetry and romance always clung to the names of Poland and Hungary for me. When I was young, our part of the world thrilled at the name of Kosciuszko and Kossuth. I'd give a good deal to know what this man's secret was. All those old tales of mystery, like 'The Man with the Iron Mask,' and stories of noblemen spirited away to Siberia, of men locked for many years in dungeons, like the 'Prisoner of Chillon,' which fired the fancy and genius of Byron and sent him to fight for the oppressed, used to fill my dreams." Larry talked on as if to himself. It seemed as if it were a habit formed when he had only himself with whom to visit, and Harry was interested.

"Now, to almost come upon a man of real ideals and a secret,--and just miss it. I ought to have been out in the world doing some work worth while--with my miserable, broken life--Boy! I knew that man McBride! I knew him for sure. We were in college together. He left Oxford to go to Russia, wild with the spirit of adventure and something more. He was a dreamer--with a practical turn, too. There, no doubt, he met these people. I judge this Manovska must have been in the diplomatic service of Poland, from what Amalia told us. Have you any idea whether that woman sitting there all day long rapt in her own thoughts knows her husband's secret? Is it a thing any one now living would care to know?"

"Indeed, yes. They lived in terror of the prince who hounded him over the world. The mother trusted no one, but Amalia told me--enough--all she knows herself. I don't know if the mother has the secret or not, but at least she guesses it. The poor man was trying to live until he could impart his knowledge to the right ones to bring about an upheaval that would astonish the world. It meant revolution, whatever it was. Amalia imagines it was to place a Polish king on the throne of Russia, but she does not know. She told me of stolen records of a Polish descendant of Catherine II of Russia. She thinks they were brought to her father after he came to this country."

"If he had such knowledge or even thought he had, it was enough to set them on his track all his life; the wonder is that he was let to live at all."

"The mother never mentioned it, but Amalia told me. We talked more freely out in the desert. That remarkable woman walked at her husband's side over all the terrible miles to Siberia, and through her he escaped,--and of the horrors of those years she never would speak, even to her daughter. It's not to be wondered at that her mind is astray. It's only a wonder that she is for the most part so calm."

"Well, the grave holds many a mystery, and what a fascination a mystery has for humanity, savage or civilized! I've kept the Indians at bay all this time by that means. They fear--they know not what, and the mystery holds them. Now, for ourselves, I leave you for a little while in charge of--the women--and of all my possessions." Larry, gazing into the blazing logs, smiled. "You may not think so much of them, but it's not so little now. Talk about lunacy--man, I understand it. I've been a lunatic--for--ever since I made a find here in this mountain."

He paused and mused a while, and Harry's thoughts dwelt for the time on his own find in the wing of the cabin, where the firewood was stored. The ring and the chest--he had not forgotten them, but by no means would he mention them.

"You may wonder why I should tell you this, but when I'm through, you'll know. It all came about because of a woman." Larry Kildene cast a sidelong glance at Harry, and the glance was keen and saw more than the younger man dreamed. "It's more often so than any other way--almost always because of a woman. Her name may be anything--Mary--Elizabeth,--but, a woman. This one's name was Katherine. Not like the Katherine of Shakespeare, but the sweetest--the tenderest mother-woman the Lord ever gave to man. I see her there in the fire. I've seen her there these many years. Well, she was twin sister to the man who hated me. He hated me--for why, I don't know--perhaps because he never could influence me. He would make all who cared for him bow before his will.

"When I first saw her, she lived in his home. He was a banker of means,--not wholly of his own

getting, but partly so. His father was a man of thrift and saving--anyway, he came to set too much store by money. Sometimes I think he might have been jealous of me because I had the Oxford training, and wished me to feel that wealth was a greater thing to have. Scotchmen think more of education than we of Ireland. It's a good thing, of course, but I'd never have looked down on him because he went lacking it. But for some indiscretion maybe I would have had money, too. It was spent too lavishly on me in my youth. But no. I had none--only the experience and the knowledge of what it might bring.

"Well, it came about that I came to America to gain the money I lacked, and having learned a bit, in spite of Oxford and the schools, of a practical nature, I took a position in his bank. All was very well until I met her. Now there were the rosy cheeks and the dark hair for you! She looked more like an Irish lass than a Scotch one. But they're not so different, only that the Irish are for the most part comelier.

"Now this banker had a very sweet wife, and she was kind to the Irish lad and welcomed him to her house. I'm thinking she liked me a bit--I liked her at all events. She welcomed me to her house until she was forbid. It was after they forbid me the house that I took to walking with Katherine, when all thought she was at Sunday School or visiting a neighbor, or even--at the last--when no other time could be stolen--when they thought her in bed. We walked there by the river that flows by the town of Leauvite."

Again Larry Kildene paused and shot a swift glance at the young man at his side, and noted the drawn lids and blanched face, but he kept on. "In the moonlight we walked--lad--the ground there is holy now, because she walked upon it. We used to go to a high bluff that made a sheer fall to the river below--and there we used to stand and tell each other--things we dreamed--of the life we should live together--Ah, that life! She has spent it in heaven. I--I--have spent the most of it here." He did not look at Harry King again. His voice shook, but he continued. "After a time her brother got to know about it, and he turned me from the bank, and sent her to live with his father's sisters in Scotland.

"Kind old ladies, but unmarried, and too old for such a lass. How could they know the heart of a girl who loved a man? It was I who knew that. What did her brother know--her own twin brother? Nothing, because he could see only his own thoughts, never hers, and thought his thoughts were enough for wife or girl. I tell you, lad, men err greatly in that, and right there many of the troubles of life step in. The old man, her father, had left all his money to his son, but with the injunction that she was to be provided for, all her days, of his bounty. It's a mean way to treat a woman--because--see? She has no right to her thoughts, and her heart is his to dispose of where he wills--not as she wills--and then comes the trouble.

"I ask you, lad, if you loved a girl as fine as silk and as tender as a flower you could crush in your hand with a touch ungentle, and you saw one holding her with that sort of a touch,--even if it was meant in love,--I'll not be unjust, he loved her as few love their sisters--but he could not grasp her thus; I ask you what would you do?"

"If I were a true man, and had a right to my manhood, I would take her. I'd follow her to the ends of the earth."

"Right, my son--I did that. I took the little money I had from my labor at the bank--all I had saved, and I went bravely to those two old women--her aunts, and they turned me from their door. It was what they had been enjoined to do. They said I was after the money and without conscience or thrift. With the Scotch, often, the confusion is natural between thrift and conscience. Ah, don't I know! If a man is prosperous, he may hold out his hand to a maid and say 'Come,' and all her relatives will cry 'Go,' and the marriage bells will ring. If he is a happy Irishman with a shrunken purse, let his heart be loving and true and open as the day, they will spurn him forth. For food and raiment will they sell a soul, and for household gear will they clip the wings of the little god, and set him out in the cold.

"But the arrow had entered Katherine's heart, and I knew and bided my time. They saw no more of me, but I knew all her goings and comings. I found her one day on the moor, with her collie, and her cheeks had lost their color, and her gray eyes looked in my face with their tears held back, like twin lakes under a cloud before a storm falls. I took her in my arms, and we kissed. The collie looked on and wagged his tail. It was all the approval we ever got from the family, but he was a knowing dog.

"Well, then we walked hand in hand to a village, and it was near nightfall, and we went straight to a magistrate and were married. I had a little coin with me, and we stayed all night at an inn. There was a great hurrying and scurrying all night over the moors for her, but we knew naught of it, for we lay sleeping in each other's arms as care free and happy as birds. If she wept a little, I comforted her. In the morning we went to the great house where the aunts lived in the town, and there, with her hand in mine, I told them, and the storm broke. It was the disgrace of having been married clandestinely by a magistrate that cut them most to the heart; and yet, what did they think a man would do? And they cried upon her: 'We trusted you. We trusted you.' And all the reply she made was: 'You thought I'd never dare, but I love him.' Yes, love makes a woman's heart strong.

"Well, then, nothing would do, but they must have in the minister and see us properly married. After that we stayed never a night in their house, but I took her to Ireland to my grandfather's home. It was a terrible year in Ireland, for the poverty was great, and while my grandfather was well-to-do, as far as that means in Ireland, it was very little they had that year for helping the poor." Larry Kildene glanced no more at Harry King, but looked only in the fire, where the logs

had fallen in a glowing heap. His pipe was out, but he still held it in his hand.

"It was little I could do. I had my education, and could repeat poems and read Latin, but that would not feed hungry peasant children. I went out on the land and labored with the men, and gave of my little patrimony to keep the old folks, but it was too small for them all, so at last I yielded to Katherine's importunities, and she wrote to her brother for help--not for her and me, mind you.

"It was for the poor in Ireland she wrote, and she let me read it. It was a sweet letter, asking forgiveness for her willfulness, yet saying she must even do the same thing again if it were to do over again. She pleaded only for the starving in the name of Christ. She asked only if a little of that portion which should be hers might be sent her, and that because he was her only brother and twin, and like part of her very self--she turned it so lovingly--I never could tell you with what skill--but she had the way--yes. But what did it bring?

"He was a canny, canny Scot, although brought up in America. Only for the times when his mother would take him back to Aberdeen with my Katherine for long visits, he never saw Scotland, but what's in the blood holds fast through life. He was a canny Scot. It takes a time for letters to go and come, and in those days longer than now, when in two weeks one may reach the other side. The reply came as speedily as those days would admit, and it was carefully considered. Ah, Peter was a clever man to bring about his own way. Never a word did he say about forgiveness. It was as if no breach had ever been, but one thing I noticed that she thought must be only an omission, because of the more important things that crowded it out. It was that never once did he mention me any more than if I had never existed. He said he would send her a certain sum of money--and it was a generous one, that is but just to admit--if when she received it she would take another sum, which he would also send, and return to them. He said his home was hers forever if she wished, and that he loved her, and had never had other feeling for her than love. Upon this letter came a long time of pleading with me--and I was ever soft--with her. She won her way.

"We will both go, Larry, dear,' she said. 'I know he forgot to say you might come, too. If he loves me as he says, he would not break my heart by leaving you out.'

"He sends only enough for one--for you,' I said.

"Yes, but he thinks you have enough to come by yourself. He thinks you would not accept it--and would not insult you by sending more.'

"He insults me by sending enough for you, dear. If I have it for me, I have it for you--most of all for you, or I'm no true man. If I have none for you--then we have none.'

"Larry, for love of me, let me go--for the gulf between my twin brother and me will never be passed until I go to him.' And this was true enough. 'I will make them love you. Hester loves you now. She will help me.' Hester was the sweet wife of her brother. So she clung to me, and her hands touched me and caressed me--lad, I feel them now. I put her on the boat, and the money he sent relieved the suffering around me, and I gave thanks with a sore heart. It was for them, our own peasantry, and for her, I parted with her then, but as soon as I could I sold my little holding near my grandfather's house to an Englishman who had long wanted it, and when it was parted with, I took the money and delayed not a day to follow her.

"I wrote to her, telling her when and where to meet me in the little town of Leauvite, and it was on the bluff over the river. I went to a home I knew there--where they thought well of me--I think. In the evening I walked up the long path, and there under the oak trees at the top where we had been used to sit, I waited. She came to me, walking in the golden light. It was spring. The whip-poor-wills called and replied to each other from the woods. A mourning dove spoke to its mate among the thick trees, low and sad, but it is only their way. I was glad, and so were they.

"I held her in my arms, and the river sang to us. She told me all over again the love in her heart for me, as she used to tell it. Lad! There is only one theme in the world that is worth telling. There is only one song in the universe that is worth singing, and when your heart has once sung it aright, you will never sing another. The air was soft and sweet around us, and we stayed until a town clock struck twelve; then I took her back, and, as she was not strong, part of the way I carried her in my arms. I left her at her brother's door, and she went into the shadows there, and I was left outside,--all but my heart. She had been home so short a time--her brother was not yet reconciled, but she said she knew he would be. For me, I vowed I would make money enough to give her a home that would shame him for the poverty of his own--his, which he thought the finest in the town."

For a long time there was silence, and Larry Kildene sat with his head drooped on his breast. At last he took up the thread where he had left it. "Two days later I stood in the heavy parlor of that house,--I stood there with their old portraits looking down on me, and my heart was filled with ice--ice and fire. I took what they placed in my arms, and it was--my--little son, but it might have been a stone. It weighed like lead in my arms, that ached with its weight. Might I see her? No. Was she gone? Yes. I laid the weight on the pillow held out to me for it, and turned away. Then Hester came and laid her hand on my arm, but my flesh was numb. I could not feel her touch.

"Give him to me, Larry,' she was saying. 'I will love him like my own, and he will be a brother to my little son.' And I gave him into her arms, although I knew even then that he would be brought up to know nothing of his father, as if I had never lived. I gave him into her arms because he had no mother and his father's heart had gone out of him. I gave him into her arms,

because I felt it was all I could do to let his mother have the comfort of knowing that he was not adrift with me--if they do know where she is. For her sake most of all and for the lad's sake I left him there.

"Then I knocked about the world a while, and back in Ireland I could not stay, for the haunting thought of her. I could bide nowhere. Then the thought took me that I would get money and take my boy back. A longing for him grew in my heart, and it was all the thought I had, but until I had money I would not return. I went to find a mine of gold. Men were flying West to become rich through the finding of mines of gold, and I joined them. I tried to reach a spot that has since been named Higgins' Camp, for there it was rumored that gold was to be found in plenty, and missed it. I came here, and here I stayed."

Now the big man rose to his feet, and looked down on the younger one. He looked kindly. Then, as if seized and shaken by a torrent of impulses which he was trying to hold in check, he spoke tremulously and in suppressed tones.

"I longed for my son, but I tell you this, because there is a strange thing which grasps a man's soul when he finds gold--as I found it. I came to love it for its own sake. I lived here and stored it up--until I am rich--you may not find many men so rich. I could go back and buy that bank that was Peter Craigmile's pride--" His voice rose, but he again suppressed it. "I could buy that pitiful little bank a hundred times over. And she--is--gone. I tried to keep her and the remembrance of her in my mind above the gold, but it was like a lunacy upon me. At the last--until I found you there on the verge of death--the gold was always first in my mind, and the triumph of having it. I came to glory in it, and I worked day after day, and often in the night by torches, and all I gathered I hid, and when I was too weary to work, I sat and handled it and felt it fall through my fingers.

"A woman in England--Miss Evans, by name, only she writes under the name of a man, George Eliot--has written a tale of a poor weaver who came to love his little horde of gold as if it were alive and human. It's a strong tale, that. A good one. Well, I came to understand what the poor little weaver felt. Summer and winter, day and night, week days and Sundays--and I was brought up to keep the Sunday like a Christian should--all were the same to me, just one long period for the getting together of gold. After a time I even forgot what I wanted the gold for in the first place, and thought only of getting it, more and more and more.

"This is a confession, lad. I tremble to think what would have been on my soul had I done what I first thought of doing when that horse of yours called me. He was calling for you--no doubt, but the call came from heaven itself for me, and the temptation came. It was, to stay where I was and know nothing. I might have done that, too, if it were not for the selfish reasons that flashed through my mind, even as the temptation seized it. It was that there might be those below who were climbing to my home--to find me out and take from me my gold. I knew there were prospectors all over, seeking for what I had found, and how could I dare stay in my cabin and be traced by a stray horse wandering to my door? Three coldblooded, selfish murderers would now be resting on my soul. It's no use for a man to shut his eyes and say 'I didn't know.' It's his business to know. When you speak of the 'Curse of Cain,' think what I might be bearing now, and remember, if a man repents of his act, there's mercy for him. So I was taught, and so I believe.

"When I looked in your face, lying there in my bunk, then I knew that mercy had been shown me, and for this, here is the thing I mean to do. It is to show my gold and the mine from which it came to you--"

"No, no! I can't bear it. I must not know." Harry King threw up his hands as if in fright and rose, trembling in every limb.

"Man, what ails you?"

"Don't. Don't put temptation in my way that I may not be strong enough to resist."

"I say, what ails you? It's a good thing, rightly used. It may help you to a way out of your trouble. If I never return--I will, mind you,--but we never know--if not, my life will surely not have been spent for naught. You, now, are all I have on earth besides the gold. It was to have been my son's, and it is yours. It might as well have been left in the heart of the mountain, else."

"Better. The longer I think on it, the more I see that there is no hope for me, no true repentance,--" Again that expression on Harry King's face filled Larry's heart with deep pity. An inward terror seemed to convulse his features and throw a pallor as of age and years of sorrow into his visage. Then he continued, after a moment of self-mastery: "No true repentance for me but to go back and take the punishment. For this winter I will live here in peace, and do for Madam Manovska and her daughter what I can, and anything I can do for you,--then I must return and give myself up. The gold only holds out a worldly hope to me, and makes what I must do seem harder. I am afraid of it."

"I'll make you a promise that if I return I'll not let you have it, but that it shall be turned to some good work. If I do not return, it will rest on your conscience that before you make your confession, you shall see it well placed for a charity. You'll have to find the charity, I can't say what it should be offhand now, but come with me. I must tell some man living my secret, and you're the only one. Besides--I trust you. Surely I do."

CHAPTER XIX

THE MINE--AND THE DEPARTURE

Larry Kildene went around behind the stall where he kept his own horse and returned with a hollow tube of burnt clay about a foot long. Into this he thrust a pine knot heavy with pitch, and, carrying a bunch of matches in his hand, he led the way back of the fodder.

"I made these clay handles for my torches myself. They are my invention, and I am quite proud of them. You can hold this burning knot until it is quite consumed, and that's a convenience." He stooped and crept under the fodder, and then Harry King saw why he kept more there than his horse could eat, and never let the store run low. It was to conceal the opening of a long, low passage that might at first be taken for a natural cave under the projecting mass of rock above them, which formed one side and part of the roof of the shed. Quivering with excitement, although sad at heart, Harry King followed his guide, who went rapidly forward, talking and explaining as he went. Under his feet the way was rough and made frequent turns, and for the most part seemed to climb upward.

"There you see it. I discovered a vein of ore back there at the place we entered, and assayed it and found it rich, and see how I worked it out! Here it seemed to end, and then I was still sane enough to think I had enough gold for my life; I left the digging for a while, and went to find my boy. I learned that he was living and had gone into the army with his cousin, and I knew we would be of little use to each other then, but reasoned that the time was to come when the war would be over, and then he would have to find a place for himself, and his father's gold would help. However it was--I saw I must wait. Sit here a bit on this ledge, I want to tell you, but not in self-justification, mind you, not that.

"I had been in India, and had had my fill of wars and fighting. I had no mind to it. I went off and bought stores and seed, and thought I would make more of my garden and not show myself again in Leavite until my boy was back. It was in my thought, if the lad survived the army, to send for him and give him gold to hold his head above--well--to start him in life, and let him know his father,--but when I returned, the great madness came on me.

"I had built the shed and stabled my horse there, and purposely located my cabin below. The trail up here from the plain is a blind one, because of the wash from the hills at times, and I didn't fear much from white men,--still I concealed my tracks like this. Gold often turns men into devils."

He was silent for a time, and Harry King wondered much why he had made no further effort to find his son before making to himself the offer he had, but he dared not question him, and preferred to let Larry take his own way of telling what he would. As if divining his thought Larry said quietly: "Something held me back from going down again to find my son. The way is long, and in the old way of traveling over the plains it would take a year or more to make the journey and return here, and somehow a superstition seized me that my boy would set out sometime to find me, and I would make the way easy for him to do it. And here on the mountain the years slip by like a long sleep."

He began moving the torch about to show the walls of the cave in which they sat, and as he did so he threw the light strongly on the young man's face, and scrutinized it sharply. He saw again that terrible look of sadness as if his soul were dying within him. He saw great drops of sweat on his brow, and his eyes narrowed and fixed, and he hurried on with the narrative. He could not bear the sight.

"Now here, look how this hole widens out? Here was where I prospected about to find the vein again, and there is where I took it up. All this overhead is full of gold. Think what it would mean if a man had the right apparatus for getting it out--I mean separating it! I only took what was free; that is, what could be easily freed from the quartz. Sometimes I found it in fine nuggets, and then I would go wild, and work until I was so weak I could hardly crawl back to the entrance. I often lay down here and slept with fatigue before I could get back and cook my supper."

As they went on a strange roaring seemed gradually to fill the passage, and Harry spoke for the first time since they had entered. He feared the sound of his own voice, as though if he began to speak, he might scream out, or reveal something he was determined to hide. He thought the roaring sound might be in his own ears from the surging of blood in his veins and the tumultuous beating of his heart.

"What is it I hear? Is my head right?"

"The roaring? Yes, you're all right. I thought when I was working here and slowly burrowing farther and farther that it might be the lack of air, and tried to contrive some way of getting it from the outside. I thought all the time that I was working farther into the mountain, and that I would have to stop or die here like a rat in a hole. But you just wait. You'll be surprised in a minute."

Then Harry laughed, and the laugh, unexpected to himself, woke him from the trancelike feeling that possessed him, and he walked more steadily. "I've been being more surprised each minute. Am I in Aladdin's cave--or whose is it?"

"Only mine. Just one more turn here and then--! It was not in the night I came here, and it was not all at once, as you are coming--hold on! Let me go in front of you. The hole was made gradually, until, one morning about ten o'clock, a great mass of rock--gold bearing, I tell you--rich in nuggets--I was crazed to lose it--fell out into space, and there I stood on the very verge of eternity."

They rounded the turn as he talked, and Larry Kildene stood forward under the stars and waved the torch over his head and held Harry back from the edge with his other hand. The air over their heads was sweet and pure and cold, and full of the roar of falling water. They could see it in a long, vast ribbon of luminous whiteness against the black abyss--moving--and waving--coming out from nothingness far above them, and reaching down to the nethermost depths--in that weird gloom of night--into nothingness again.

Harry stepped back, and back, into the hole from which they had emerged, and watched his companion stand holding the torch, which lit his features with a deep red light until he looked as if he might be the very alchemist of gold--red gold--and turning all he looked upon into the metal which closes around men's hearts. The red light flashed on the white ribbon of water, and this way and that, as he waved it around, on the sides of the passage behind him, turning each point of projecting rock into red gold.

"Do you know where we are? No. We're right under the fall--right behind it. No one can ever see this hole from the outside. It is as completely hidden as if the hand of the Almighty were stretched over it. The rush of this body of water always in front of it keeps the air in the passage always pure. It's wonderful--wonderful!"

He turned to look at Harry, and saw a wild man crouched in the darkness of the passage, glaring, and preparing to leap. He seized and shook him. "What ails you, man? Hold on. Hold on. Keep your head, I say. There! I've got you. Turn about. Now! It's over now. That's enough. It won't come again."

Harry moaned. "Oh, let me go. Let me get away from it."

The big man still gripped him and held him with his face toward the darkness. "Tell me what you see," he commanded.

Still Harry moaned, and sank upon his knees. "Lord, forgive, forgive!"

"Tell me what you see," Larry still commanded. He would try to break up this vision seeing.

"God! It is the eye. It follows me. It is gone." He heaved a great sigh of relief, but still remained upon his knees, quivering and weak. "Did you see it? You must have seen it."

"I saw nothing, and you saw nothing. It's in your brain, and your brain is sick. You must heal it. You must stop it. Stand now, and conquer it."

Harry stood, shivering. "I wanted to end it. It would have been so easy, and all over so soon," he murmured.

"And you would die a coward, and so add one more crime to the first. You'd shirk a duty, and desert those who need you. You'd leave me in the lurch, and those women dependent on me--wake up--"

"I'm awake. Let's go away." Harry put his hand to his forehead and wiped away the cold drops that stood out like glistening beads of blood in the red light of the torch.

Larry grieved for him, in spite of the harshness of his words and tone, and taking him by the elbow, he led him kindly back into the passage.

"Don't trouble about me now," Harry said at last. "You've given me a thought to clutch to--if you really do need me--if I could believe it."

"Well, you may! Didn't you say you'd do for me more than sons do for their fathers? I ask you to do just that for me. Live for me. It's a hard thing to ask of you, for, as you say, the other would be easier, but it's a coward's way. Don't let it tempt you. Stand to your guns like a man, and if the time comes and you can't see things differently, go back and make your confession and die the death--as a brave man should. Meantime, live to some purpose and do it cheerfully." Larry paused. His words sank in, as he meant they should. He guided Harry slowly back to the place from which they had diverged, his arm across the younger man's shoulder.

"Now I've more to show you. When I saw what I had done, I set myself to find another vein, and see this large room? I groveled all about here, this way and that. A year of this, see. It took patience, and in the meantime I went out into the world--as far as San Francisco, and wasted a year or more; then back I came.

"I tell you there is a lure in the gold, and the mountains are powers of peace to a man. It seemed there was no other place where I could rest in peace of mind. The longing for my son was on me,--but the war still raged, and I had no mind for that,--yet I was glad my boy was taking his part in the world out of which I had dropped. For one thing it seemed as if he were more my own than if he lived in Leauvite on the banker's bounty. I would not go back there and meet the contempt of Peter Craigmile, for he never could forget that I had taken his sister out of hand, and she gone--man--it was all too sad. How did I know how my son had been taught to think on me? I could not go back when I would.

"His name was Richard--my boy's. If he came alive from the army I do not know,--See? Here is where I found another vein, and I have followed it on there to the end of this other branch of the passage, and not exhausted it yet. Here's maybe another twenty years' work for some man.

Now, wasn't it a great work for one man alone, to tunnel through that rock to the fall? No one man needs all that wealth. I've often thought of Ireland and the poverty we left there. If I had my boy to hearten me, I could do something for them now. We'll go back and sleep, for it's the trail for me to-morrow, and to go and come quickly, before the snow falls. Come!"

They returned in silence to the shed. The torch had burned well down into the clay handle, and Larry Kildene extinguished the last sparks before they crept through the fodder to their room in the shed. The fire of logs was almost out, and the place growing cold.

"You'll find the gold in a strong box made of hewn logs, buried in the ground underneath the wood in the addition to the cabin. There's no need to go to it yet, not until you need money. I'll show you how I prepare it for use, in the morning. I do it in the room I made there near the fall. It's the most secret place a man ever had for such work."

Larry stretched himself in his bunk and was soon sleeping soundly. Not so the younger man. He could not compose himself after the excitement of the evening. He tossed and turned until morning found him weary and worn, but with his troubled mind more at rest than it had been for many months. He had fought out his battle, at least for the time being, and was at peace.

Harry King rose and went out into the cold morning air and was refreshed. He brought in a large handful of pine cones and made a roaring fire in the chimney he had built, before Larry roused himself. Then he, too, went out and surveyed the sky with practiced eye.

"Clear and cool--that argues well for me. If it were warm, now, I'd hardly like to start. Sometimes the snow holds off for weeks in this weather."

They stood in the pallid light of the early morning an hour before the sun, and the wind lifted Larry's hair and flapped his shirt sleeves about his arms. It was a tingling, sharp breeze, and when they returned to the cave, where they went for Harry's lesson in smelting, the old man's cheeks were ruddy.

The sun had barely risen when the lesson was over, and they descended for breakfast. Amalia had all ready for them, and greeted Larry from the doorway.

"Good morning, Sir Kildene. You start soon. I have many good things to eat all prepare to put in your bag, and when you sit to your dinner on the long way, it is that you must think of Amalia and know that she says a prayer to the sweet Christ, that he send his good angels to watch over you all the way you go. A prayer to follow you all the way is good, is not?" Amalia's frank and untrammelled way of referring to Divinity always precipitated a shyness on Larry,--a shyness that showed itself in smiles and stammering.

"Good--good--yes. Good, maybe so." Harry had turned back to bring down Larry's horse and pack mule. "Now, while we eat,--Harry will be down soon, we won't wait for him,--while we eat, let me go over the things I'm to find for you down below. I must learn the list well by heart, or you may send me back for the things I've missed bringing."

As they talked Amalia took from her wrist a heavy bracelet of gold, and from a small leather bag hidden in her clothing, a brooch of emeralds, quaintly set and very precious. Her mother sat in one of her trancelike moods, apparently seeing nothing around her, and Amalia took Larry to one side and spoke in low tones.

"Sir Kildene, I have thought much, and at last it seems to me right to part with these. It is little that we have--and no money, only these. What they are worth I have no knowledge. Mother may know, but to her I say nothing. They are a memory of the days when my father was noble and lived at the court. If you can sell them--it is that this brooch should bring much money--my father has told me. It was saved for my dowry, with a few other jewels of less worth. I have no need of dowry. It is that I never will marry. Until my mother is gone I can well care for her with the lace I make,--and then--"

"Lass, I can't take these. I have no knowledge of their worth--or--" He knew he was saying what was not true, for he knew well the value of what she laid so trustingly in his palm, and his hand quivered under the shining jewels. He cleared his throat and began again. "I say, I can't take jewels so valuable over the trail and run the risk of losing them. Never! Put them by as before."

"But how can I ask of you the things I wish? I have no money to return for them, and none for all you have done for my mother and me. Please, Sir Kildene, take of this, then, only enough to buy for our need. It is little to take. Do not be hard with me." She pleaded sweetly, placing one hand under his great one, and the other over the jewels, holding them pressed to his palm. "Will you go away and leave my heart heavy?"

"Look here, now--" Again he cleared his throat. "You put them by until I come back, and then--"

But she would not, and tying them in her handkerchief, she thrust them in the pocket of his flannel shirt.

"There! It is not safe in such a place. Be sure you take care, Sir Kildene. I have many thoughts in my mind. It is not all the money of these you will need now, and of the rest I may take my mother to a large city, where are people who understand the fine lace. There I may sell enough to keep us well. But of money will I need first a little to get us there. It is well for me, you take these--see? Is not?"

"No, it is not well." He spoke gruffly in his effort to overcome his emotion. "Where under heaven can I sell these?"

"You go not to the great city?" she asked sadly. "How must we then so long intrude us upon you! It is very sad." She clasped her hands and looked in his eyes, her own brimming with tears; then he turned away. Tears in a woman's eyes! He could not stand it.

"See here. I'll tell you what I'll do. If that railroad is through anywhere--so--so--I can reach San Francisco--" He thought he knew that to be an impossibility, and that she would be satisfied. "I say--if it's where I can reach San Francisco, I'll see what can be done." He cleared his throat a great many times, and stood awkwardly, hardly daring to move with the precious jewels in his pocket. "See here. They'll joggle out of here. Can't you--"

She turned on him radiantly. "You may have my bag of leather. In that will they be safe."

She removed the string from her neck and by it pulled the small embossed case from her bosom, shook out the few rings and unset stones left in it, and returned the larger jewels to it, and gave it into his hand, still warm from its soft resting place. At the same moment Harry arrived, leading the animals. He lifted his head courageously and his eyes shone as with an inspiration.

"Will you let me accompany you a bit of the way, sir? I'd like to go." Larry accepted gladly. He knew then what he would do with Amalia's dowry. "Then I'll bring Goldbug. Thank you, Amalia, yes. I'll drink my coffee now, and eat as I ride." He ran back for his horse and soon returned, and then drank his coffee and snatched a bite, while Amalia and Larry slung the bags of food and the water on the mule and made all ready for the start. As he ate, he tried to arouse and encourage the mother, but she remained stolid until they were in the saddle, when she rose and followed them a few steps, and said in her deep voice: "Yes, I ask a thing. You will find Paul, my 'usband. Tell him to come to me--it is best--no more--I cannot in English." Then turning to her daughter she spoke volubly in her own tongue, and waved her hand imperiously toward the men.

"Yes, mamma. I tell all you say." Amalia took a step away from the door, and her mother returned to her seat by the fire.

"It is so sad. My mother thinks my father is returned to our own country and that you go there. She thinks you are our friend Sir McBride in disguise, and that you go to help my father. She fears you will be taken and sent to Siberia, and says tell my father it is enough. He must no more try to save our fatherland: that our noblemen are full of ingratitude, and that he must return to her and live hereafter in peace."

"Let be so. It's a saving hallucination. Tell her if I find your father, I will surely deliver the message." And the two men rode away up the trail, conversing earnestly.

Larry Kildene explained to Harry about the jewels, and turned them over to his keeping. "I had to take them, you see. You hide them in that chamber I showed you, along with the gold bars. Hang it around your neck, man, until you get back. It has rested on her bosom, and if I were a young man like you, that fact alone would make it sacred to me. It's her dowry, she said. I'd sooner part with my right hand than take it from her."

"So would I." Harry took the case tenderly, and hid it as directed, and went on to ask the favor he had accompanied Larry to ask. It was that he might go down and bring the box from the wagon.

"Early this morning, before I woke you, I led the brown horse you brought the mother up the mountain on out toward the trail; we'll find him over the ridge, all packed ready, and when I ran back for my horse, I left a letter written in charcoal on the hearth there in the shed--Amalia will be sure to go there and find it, if I don't return now--telling her what I'm after and that I'll only be gone a few days. She's brave, and can get along without us." Larry did not reply at once, and Harry continued.

"It will only take us a day and a half to reach it, and with your help, a sling can be made of the canvas top of the wagon, and the two animals can 'tote it' as the darkies down South say. I can walk back up the trail, or even ride one of the horses. We'll take the tongue and the reach from the wagon and make a sort of affair to hang to the beasts, I know how it can be done. There may not be much of value in the box, but then--there may be. I see Amalia wishes it of all things, and that's enough for--us."

Thus it came that the two women were alone for five days. Madam Manovska did not seem to heed the absence of the two men at first, and waited in a contentment she had not shown before. It would seem that, as Larry had said, there was saving in her hallucination, but Amalia was troubled by it.

"Mother is so sure they will bring my father back," she thought. She tried to forestall any such catastrophe as she feared by explaining that they might not find her father or he might not return, even if he got her message, not surely, for he had always done what he thought his duty before anything else, and he might think it his duty to stay where he could find something to do.

When Harry King did not return that night, Amalia did as he had laughingly suggested to her, when he left, "You'll find a letter out in the shed," was all he said. So she went up to the shed, and there she lighted a torch, and kneeling on the stones of the wide hearth, she read what he had written for her.

"To the Lady Amalia Manovska:

"Mr. Kildene will help me get your box. It will not be hard, for the two of us, and after it is drawn out and loaded I can get up with it myself and he can go on. I will soon be with you again, never fear. Do not be afraid of Indians. If there were any danger, I would not leave you. There is no way

by which they would be likely to reach you except by the trail on which we go, and we will know if they are about before they can possibly get up the trail. I have seen you brave on the plains, and you will be as brave on the mountain top. Good-by for a few days.

“Yours to serve you,
“Harry King.”

The tears ran fast down her cheeks as she read. “Oh, why did I speak of it--why? He may be killed. He may die of this attempt.” She threw the torch from her into the fireplace, and clasping her hands began to pray, first in English her own words, then the prayers for those in peril which she had learned in the convent. Then, lying on her face, she prayed frantically in her own tongue for Harry’s safety. At last, comforted a little, she took up the torch and, flushed and tearful, walked down in the darkness to the cabin and crept into bed.

CHAPTER XX

ALONE ON THE MOUNTAIN

For the first two days of Harry King’s absence Madam Manovska relapsed into a more profound melancholy, and the care of her mother took up Amalia’s time and thoughts so completely as to give her little for indulging her own anxiety for Harry’s safety. Strangely, she felt no fear for themselves, although they were thus alone on the mountain top. She had a sense of security there which she had never felt in the years since she had been taken from the convent to share her parents’ wanderings. She made an earnest effort to divert and arouse her mother and succeeded until Madam Manovska talked much and volubly in Polish, and revealed more of the thoughts that possessed her in the long hours of brooding than she had ever told Amalia before. It seemed that she confidently expected the return of the men with her husband, and that the message she had sent by Larry Kildene would surely bring him. The thought excited her greatly, and Amalia found it necessary to keep continual watch lest she wander off down the trail in the direction they had taken, and be lost.

For a time Amalia tried to prevent Madam Manovska from dwelling on the past, until she became convinced that to do so was not well, since it only induced the fits of brooding. She then decided to encourage her mother to speak freely of her memories, rather than to keep them locked in her own mind. It was in one of these intervals of talkativeness that Amalia learned the cause of that strange cry that had so pierced her heart and startled her on the trail.

They had gone out for a walk, as the only means of inducing her mother to sleep was to let her walk in the clear air until so weary as to bring her to the point of exhaustion. This time they went farther than Amalia really intended, and had left the paths immediately about the cabin, and climbed higher up the mountain. Here there was no trail and the way was rough indeed, but Madam Manovska was in one of her most wayward moods and insisted on going higher and farther.

Her strength was remarkable, but it seemed to be strength of will rather than of body, for all at once she sank down, unable to go forward or to return. Amalia led her to the shade of a great gnarled tree, a species of fir, and made her lie down on a bed of stiff, coarse moss, and there she pillowed her mother’s head on her lap. Whether it was something in the situation in which she found herself or not, her mother began to tell her of a time about which she had hitherto kept silent. It was of the long march through heat and cold, over the wildest ways of the earth to Siberia, at her husband’s side.

She told how she had persisted in going with him, even at the cost of dressing in the garb of the exiles from the prisons and pretending to be one of the condemned. Only one of the officers knew her secret, who for reasons of humanity--or for some other feeling--kept silence. She carried her child in her arms, a boy, five months old, and was allowed to walk at her husband’s side instead of following on with the other women. She told how they carried a few things on their backs, and how one and another of the men would take the little one at intervals to help her, and how long the marches were when the summer was on the wane and they wished to make as much distance as possible before they were delayed by storms and snow.

Then she told how the storms came at last, and how her baby fell ill, and cried and cried--all the time--and how they walked in deep snow, until one and another fell by the way and never walked farther. She told how some of the weaker ones were finally left behind, because they could get on faster without them, but that the place where they were left was a terrible one under a cruel man, and that her child would surely have died there before the winter was over, and that when she persisted in keeping on with her husband, they beat her, but at last consented on condition that she would leave her baby boy. Then how she appealed to the officer who knew well who she was and that she was not one of the condemned, but had followed her husband for love, and to intercede for him when he would have been ill-treated; and that the man had allowed her to have her way, but later had demanded as his reward for yielding to her, that she no longer belong to her husband, but to him.

Looking off at the far ranges of mountains with steady gaze, she told of the mountains they had

crossed, and the rushing, terrible rivers; and how, one day, the officer who had been kind only that he might be more cruel, had determined to force her to obedience, and how he grew very angry--so angry that when they had come to a trail that was well-nigh impassable, winding around the side of a mountain, where was a fearful rushing river far below them, and her baby cried in her arms for cold and hunger, how he had snatched the child from her and hurled it over the precipice into the swift water, and how she had shrieked and struck him and was crazed and remembered no more for days, except to call continually on God to send down curses on that officer's head. She told how after that they were held at a certain station for a long time, but that she was allowed to stay by her husband only because the officer feared the terrible curses she had asked of God to descend on that man, that he dared no more touch her.

Then Amalia understood many things better than ever before, and grew if possible more tender of her mother. She thought how all during that awful time she had been safe and sheltered in the convent, and her life guarded; and moreover, she understood why her father had always treated her mother as if she were higher than the angels and with the courtesy and gentleness of a knight errant. He had bowed to her slightest wish, and no wonder her mother thought that when he received her request to return to her, and give up his hope, he would surely come to her.

More than ever Amalia feared the days to come if she could in no way convince her mother that it was not expedient for her father to return yet. To say again that he was dead she dared not, even if she could persuade Madam Manovska to believe it; for it seemed to her in that event that her mother would give up all interest in life, and die of a broken heart. But from the first she had not accepted the thought of her husband's death, and held stubbornly to the belief that he had joined Harry King to find help. He had, indeed, wandered away from them a few hours after the young man's departure and had been unable to find his way back, and, until Larry Kildene came to them, they had comforted themselves that the two men were together.

Much more Madam Manovska told her daughter that day, before she slept; and Amalia questioned her more closely than she had ever done concerning her father's faith. Thereafter she sat for a long time on the bank of coarse moss and pondered, with her mother's head pillowed on her lap. The sun reached the hour of noon, and still the mother slept and the daughter would not waken her.

She took from the small velvet bag she always carried with her, a crisp cake of corn meal and ate to satisfy her sharp hunger, for the keen air and the long climb gave her the appetite belonging to the vigorous health which was hers. They had climbed that part of the mountain directly behind the cabin, and from the secluded spot where they sat she could look down on it and on the paths leading to it; thankful and happy that at last they were where all was so safe, no fear of intrusion entered her mind. Even her first anxiety about the Indians she had dismissed.

Now, as her eyes wandered absently over the far distance and dropped to the nearer hills, and on down to the cabin and the patch of cultivated ground, what was her horror to see three figures stealing with swift, gliding tread toward the fodder shed from above, where was no trail, only such rough and wild hillside as that by which she and her mother had climbed. The men seemed to be carrying something slung between them on a pole. With long, gliding steps they walked in single file as she had seen the Indians walk on the plains.

She drew in her breath sharply and clasped her hands in supplication. Had those men seen them? Devoutly she prayed that they might not look up toward the heights where she and her mother sat. As they continued to descend she lost sight of them among the pines and the undergrowth which was more vigorous near the fall, and then they appeared again and went into the cabin. She thought they must have been in the fodder shed when she lost sight of them, and now she waited breathlessly to see them emerge from the cabin. For an hour she sat thus, straining her eyes lest she miss seeing them when they came forth, and fearing lest her mother waken. Then she saw smoke issuing from the cabin chimney, and her heart stopped its beating. What! Were they preparing to stay there? How could her mother endure the cold of the mountain all night?

Then she began to consider how she might protect her mother after the sun had gone from the cold that would envelop them. Reasoning that as long as the Indians stayed in the cabin they could not be seen by them, she looked about for some projecting ledge under which they might creep for the night. Gently she lifted her mother's head and placed it on her own folded shawl, and, with an eye ever on the cabin below, she crept further up the side of the mountain until she found a place where a huge rock, warmed by the sun, projected far out, and left a hollow beneath, into which they might creep. Frantically she tore off twigs of the scrubby pines around them, and made a fragrant bed of pine needles and moss on which to rest. Then she woke her mother.

Sane and practical on all subjects but the one, Madam Manovska roused herself to meet this new difficulty with the old courage, and climbed with Amalia's help to their wild resting place without a word of complaint. There she sat looking out over the magnificent scene before her with her great brooding eyes, and ate the coarse corn cake Amalia put in her hands.

She talked, always in Polish or in French, of the men "rouge," and said she did not wonder they came to so good a place to rest, and that she would give thanks to the great God that she and her daughter were on the mountain when they arrived. She reminded Amalia that if she had consented to return when her daughter wished, they would now have been in the cabin with those terrible men, and said that she had been inspired of God to stay long on the mountain.

Contentedly, then, she munched her cake, and remarked that water would give comfort in the eating of it, but she smiled and made the best of the dry food. Then she prayed that her husband might be detained until the men were gone.

Amalia gave her mother the water that was left in the bottle she had brought with her, and lamented that she had saved so little for her. "It was so bad, not to save more for my mamma," she cried, giving the bottle with its lowered contents into her mother's hand. "I go to watch, mamma mine. Soon will I return."

Amalia went back to her point of vantage, where she could see all about the cabin and shed. Still the smoke poured from the chimney, and there was no sign of red men without. It was a mountain sheep they had carried, slung between them, and now they dressed and cooked a portion of it, and were gorging themselves comfortably before the fire, with many grunts of satisfaction at the finding of the formidable owner of the premises absent. They were on their way to Laramie to trade and sell game, and it was their intention to leave a portion of their mutton with Larry Kildene; for never did they dare venture near him without bringing a propitiatory offering.

The sun had set and the cold mists were blowing across from the fall and closing around the cabin like a veil of amethystine dye, when Amalia saw them moving about the cabin door as if preparing to depart. Her heart rose, and she signaled her mother, but no. They went indoors again, and she saw them no more. In truth they had disputed long as to whether it was best to leave before the big man's return, or to remain in their comfortable quarters and start early, before day. It was the conference that drew them out, and they had made ready to start at a moment's notice if he should return in the night. But as the darkness crept on and Larry Kildene did not appear they stretched themselves before the fire and slept, and the two women on the mountain, hungry and cold, crept under the mother's cloak and lay long into the night, shivering and listening, couched on the pine twigs Amalia had spread under the ledge of rock. At last, clasped in each other's arms, they slept, in spite of fear and cold, for very weariness.

Amalia woke next morning to the low murmuring of a voice. It was her mother, kneeling in the pine needles, praying at her side. She waited until the prayer was ended, then she rose and went out from the sheltered hollow where they lay. "I will look a little, mamma. Wait for me."

She gazed down on the cabin, but all was still. The amethystine veil had not lifted, and no smoke came from the chimney. She crept back to her mother's side, and they sat close for warmth, and waited. When the sun rose and the clouds melted away, all the earth smiled up at them, and their fears seemed to melt away with the clouds. Still they did not venture out where they thought they might be spied from below, and time passed while they watched earnestly for the sight of moving figures, and still no smoke appeared from the cabin.

Higher and higher the sun climbed in the sky, yet they could not bring themselves to return. Hunger pressed them, and Amalia begged her mother to let her go a little nearer to listen, but she would not. So they discussed together in their own tongue and neither would allow the other to venture below, and still no smoke issued from the chimney.

At last Amalia started and pressed her hand to her heart. What did she see far along on the trail toward the desert? Surely, a man with two animals, climbing toward the turn. Her eyes danced for gladness as she turned a flushed face toward her mother.

"Look, mamma! Far on,--no--there! It is--mamma mine--it is 'Arry King!" The mere sight of him made her break out in English. "It is that I must go to him and tell him of the Indian in the cabin before he arrive. If he come on them there, and they kill him! Oh, let me go quickly." At the thought of him, and the danger he might meet, all her fears of the men "rouge" returned upon her, and she was gone, passing with incredible swiftness over the rough way, to try to intercept him before he could reach the cabin.

But she need not have feared, for the Indians were long gone. Before daybreak they had passed Harry where he rested in the deep dusk of the morning, without knowing he was near. With swift, silent steps they had passed down the trail, taking as much of Larry Kildene's corn as they could carry, and leaving the bloody pelt of the sheep and a very meager share of the mutton in exchange. Hungry and footsore, yet eager and glad to have come home successfully, Harry King walked forward, leading his good yellow horse, his eyes fixed on the cabin, and wondering not a little; for he, too, saw that no smoke was issuing from the chimney.

He hastened, and all Amalia's swiftness could not bring her to him before he reached his goal. He saw first the bloody pelt hanging beside the door, and his heart stood still. Those two women never could have done that! Where were they? He dropped the leading strap, leaving the weary horses where they stood, and ran forward to enter the cabin and see the evidence of Indians all about. There were the clean-picked bones of their feast and the dirt from their feet on Amalia's carefully kept floor. The disorder smote him, and he ran out again in the sun. Looking this way and that, he called and listened and called again. Why did no answer reach him? Poor Amalia! In her haste she had turned her foot and now, fainting with pain, and with fear for him, she could not find her voice to reply.

He thought he heard a low cry. Was it she? He ran again, and now he saw her, high above him, a dark heap on the ground. Quickly he was by her side, and, kneeling, he gathered her in his arms. He forgot all but that she was living and that he held her, and he kissed her white face and her lips, and said all the tender things in his heart. He did not know what he was saying. He only knew that he could feel her heart beat, and that she was opening her eyes, and that with quivering arms she clasped his neck, and that her tears wet his cheek, and that, over and over,

her lips were repeating his name.

"'Arry--'Arry King! You are come back. Ah, 'Arry King, my heart cry with the great gladness they have not killed you."

All in the same instant he bethought himself that he must not caress her thus. Yet filled with a gladness he could not fathom he still clung to her and still murmured the words he meant never to speak to her. One thing he could do. One thing sweet and right to do. He could carry her to the cabin. How could she reach it else? His heart leaped that he had at least that right.

"No, 'Arry King. You have walk the long, hard way, and are very weary." But still he carried her.

"Put me down, 'Arry King." Then he obeyed her, and set her gently down. "I am too great a burden. See, thus? If you help me a little--it is that I may hop--It is better, is not?"

She smiled in his face, but he only stooped and lifted her again in his arms. "You are not a burden, Amalia. Put your arms around my neck, and lean on me."

She obeyed him, and he could say no more for the beating of his heart. Carefully and slowly he made his way, setting his feet cautiously among the stones that obstructed his path. Madam Manovska from her heights above saw how her daughter was being carried, and, guessing the trouble, snatched up the velvet bag Amalia had dropped in her haste, flung her cloak about her, and began to thread her way down, slowly and carefully; for, as she said to herself, "We must not both break the bones at one time."

To Harry it seemed no sound was ever sweeter than Amalia's low voice as she coaxed him brokenly to set her down and allow her to walk.

"This is great foolishness, 'Arry King, that you carry me. Put me down that you rest a little."

"I can't, Amalia."

"You have walk all the long trail--I saw you walk--and lead those horse, for only to bring our box. How my heart can thank you is not possible. 'Arry King, you are so weary--put me down."

"I can't, Amalia," again was all he said. So he held her, comforting his heart that he had this right, until he drew near the cabin, and there Amalia saw the pelt of the sheep hung upon the wall of the cabin, pitifully dangling, bloody and ragged. Strangely, at the sight quite harmless, yet gruesome, all her fortitude gave way. With a cry of terror she hid her face and clung to him.

"No, no. I cannot go there--not near it--no!"

"Oh, you brave, sweet woman! It is only a skin. Don't look at it, then. You have been frightened. I see how you have suffered. Wait. There--no, don't put your foot to the ground. Sit on this hillock while I take it away."

But she only clung to him the more, and sobbed convulsively. "I am afraid--'Arry King. Oh, if--if--they are there still! Those Indian! Do not go there."

"But they are gone; I have been in and they are not there. I won't take you into that place until I have made it fit for you again. Sit here awhile. Amalia Manovska,--I can't see you weep." So tenderly he spoke her name, with quivering lips, reverently. With all his power he held himself and would dare no more. If only once more he might touch her lips with his--only once in his renunciation--but no. His conscience forbade him. Memory closed upon him like a deadening cloud and drenched his hurt soul with sorrow. He rose from stooping above her and looked back.

"Your mother is coming. She will be here in a moment and then I will set that room in order for you, and--" his voice shook so that he was obliged to pause. He stooped again to her and spoke softly: "Amalia Manovska, stop weeping. Your tears fall on my heart."

"Ah, what have happen, to you--to Amalia--? Those terrible men 'rouge'!" cried Madam Manovska, hurrying forward.

"Oh, Madam, I am glad you have come. The Indians are gone, never fear. Amalia has hurt her foot. It is very painful. You will know what to do for her, and I will leave her while I make things more comfortable in there."

He left them and ran to the cabin, and hastily taking the hideous pelt from the wall, hid it, and then set himself to cleaning the room and burning the litter of bones and scraps left from the feast. It was horrible--yes, horrible, that they should have had such a fright, and alone there. Soon he went back, and again taking her in his arms, unresisted now, he laid her on the bunk, then knelt and removed her worn shoe.

"Little worn shoe! It has walked many a mile, has it not? Did you think to ask Larry Kildene to bring you new ones?"

"No, I forgot my feet." She laughed, and the spell of tears was broken. The long strain of anxiety and fear and then the sudden release had been too much. Moreover, she was faint with hunger. Without explanation Harry King understood. He looked to the mother for help and saw that a change had come over her. Roused from her apathy she was preparing food, and looking from her to Amalia, they exchanged a glance of mutual relief.

"How it is beautiful to see her!" Amalia spoke low. "It is my hurt that is good for her mind. I am glad of the hurt."

He sat with the shoe in his hand. "Will you let me bind your ankle, Amalia? It will grow worse unless something is done quickly." He spoke humbly, as one beseeching a favor.

"Now it is already better, you have remove the shoe." How he loved her quaint, rapid speech! "Mamma will bind it, for you have to do for those horse and the mule. I know--I have seen--to take them to drink and eat, and take from them the load--the burden. It is the box--for that have you risk your life, and the gladness we feel to again have it is--is only one greater--and that is to have you again with us. Oh, what a sorrow and terror--if you had not come--I can never make you know. When I see those Indian come walking after each other so as they go--my heart cease to beat--and my body become like the ice--for the fear. When fearing for myself, it is bad, but when for another it is much--much--more terrible. So have I found it."

Her mother came then to attend to her hurt, interrupting Amalia's flow of speech, and Harry went out to the animals, full of care and misgiving. What now could he do? How endure the days to come with their torture of repression? How shield her from himself and his love--when she so freely gave? What middle course was possible, without making her suffer?

That afternoon all the events of his journey were told to them as they questioned him keenly, and he learned by little words and looks exchanged between them how great had been their anxiety for him, and of their night of terror on the mountain. But now that it was past and they were all unhurt except for Amalia's accident, they made light of it. He dragged in the box, and before he left them that night he prepared Larry's gun, and told Amalia to let nothing frighten her.

"Don't leave the bunk, nor put your foot to the ground. Fire the gun at the slightest disturbance, and I will surely hear. I have another in the shed. Or I will roll myself in my blanket, and sleep outside your door. Yes, I will do that."

Then the mother turned on him and spoke in her deep tones: "Go to your bed, 'Arry King, and sleep well. You have need. We asked of the good God your safety, and our fear is gone. Good night."

"Good-night."

CHAPTER XXI

THE VIOLIN

While Amalia lay recovering from the sprained ankle, which proved to be a serious hurt, Madam Manovska continued to improve. She took up the duties which had before occupied Amalia only, and seemed to grow more cheerful. Still she remained convinced that Larry Kildene would return with her husband, and her daughter's anxiety as to what might be the outcome, when the big man should arrive alone, deepened.

Harry King guardedly and tenderly watched over the two women. Every day he carried Amalia out in the sun to a sheltered place, where she might sit and work at the fascinating lace with which her fingers seemed to be only playing, yet which developed into webs of most intricate design, even while her eyes were not fixed upon it, but were glancing about at whatever interested her, or up in his face, as she talked to him impulsively in her fluent, inverted English.

Amalia was not guarded; she was lavish with her interest in all he said, and in her quick, responsive, and poetic play of fancy--ardent and glowing--glad to give out from her soul its best to this man who had befriended her father in their utmost need and who had saved her own and her mother's life. She knew always when a cloud gathered over his spirit, and made it her duty to dispel such mists of some possible sad memory by turning his thoughts to whatever of beauty she found around them, or in the inspiration of her own rich nature.

To avoid disquieting her by the studied guardedness of his manner, Harry employed himself as much of the time as possible away from the cabin, often in providing game for the winter. Larry Kildene had instructed him how to cure and dry the meat and to store it and also how to care for the skins, but because of the effect of that sight of the bloody sheep's pelt on Amalia, he never showed her a poor little dead creature, or the skin of one. He brought her mother whatever they required of food, carefully prepared, and that was all.

He constructed a chair for her and threw over it furs from Larry Kildene's store, making it soft and comfortable thereby. He made also a footstool for the hurt ankle to rest upon, and found a beautiful lynx skin with which to cover her feet. The back of the chair he made high, and hinged it with leather to the seat, arranging it so that by means of pegs it might be raised or lowered. Without lumber, and with the most simple tools, he sawed and hewed the logs, and lacking nails he set it together with pegs, but what matter? It was comfortable, and in the making of it he eased his heart by expressing his love without sorrowful betrayal.

Amalia laughed as she sat in it, one day, close to the open door, because the air was too pinching cold for her to be out. She laughed as she put her hands in the soft fur and drew her fingers through it, and looked up in Harry's face.

"You are thinking me so foolish, yes, to have about me the skins of poor little killed beasts? Yet I weeped all those tears on your coat because to see the other--yes,--hanging beside the door. It

is so we are--is not?"

"I'm glad enough you're not consistent. It would be a blot on your character."

"But for why, Mr. 'Arry?"

"Oh, I couldn't stand it."

Again she laughed. "How it is very peculiar--that reason you give. Not to stand it! Could you then to sit it?" But Harry only laughed and looked away from her. She laid her face against the soft fur. "Good little animals--to give me your life. But some time you would die--perhaps with sorrow of hunger and age, and the life be for nothing. This is better."

"There you're right. Let me draw you back in the room and close the door. It will freeze to-night, I'm thinking."

"Oh, not yet, please! I have yet to see the glorious sky of the west. Last evening how it was beautiful! To-night it will be more lovely to look upon for the long line of little cloud there on which the red of the sun will burn like fire in the heaven over the mountain."

"You must enjoy the beauty, Amalia, and then pray that there may be no snow. It looks like it, and we want the snow to hold off until Larry comes back."

"We pray, always, my mamma and I. She that he come back quickly, and me--I pray that he come back safely--but to be soon--it is such terror to me."

"Larry will find a way out of the difficulty. He will have an excuse all thought out for your mother. I am more anxious about the snow with a sunset sky like that, but I don't know anything about this region."

"Mr. 'Arry, so very clever you are in making things, can you help me to one more thing? I like very much to have the sticks for lame walking,--what you call--the crutch? Yes. I have for so long time spoken only the Polish that I forget me greatly the English. You must talk to me much, and make me reproof of my mistakes. Do you know for why I like the crutch? It is that I would go each day--many times to see the water fall down. Ah, how that is beautiful! In the sun, or early in the morning, or in the night, always beautiful!"

"You shall have the crutches, Amalia, and until I get them made, I will carry you to the fall each day. Come, I will take you there now. I will wrap these furs around you, and you shall see the fall in the evening light."

"No, 'Arry King. To-morrow I will try to ride on the horse if you will lift me up on him. I will let you do this. But you may not carry me as you have done. I am now so strong. You may make me the crutch, yes." Of all things he wished her to let him carry her to the fall, but her refusal was final, and he set about making the crutches immediately.

Through the evening he worked on them, and at nightfall the next day he brought them to her. As he came down from his shed, carrying the crutches proudly, he heard sweet, quavering tones in the air wafted intermittently. The wind was still, and through the evening hush the tones strengthened as he drew nearer the cabin, until they seemed to wrap him in a net of interwoven cadences and fine-spun threads of quivering melody--a net of sound, inclosing his spirit in its intricate mesh of sweetness.

He paused and breathed deeply, and turned this way and that, as if he would escape but found no way; then he walked slowly on. At the door of the cabin he paused again. The firelight shone through from underneath, and a fine thread of golden light sifted through the latch of the door and fell on the hand that held Amalia's crutches. He looked down on the spot of light dancing over his hand as if he were dazed by it. Very gently he laid the crutches across the threshold, and for a long time stood without, listening, his head bowed as if he were praying.

It was her father's violin, the one she had wept at leaving behind her. What was she playing? Strange, old-world melodies they seemed, tossed into the air, now laughing, now wailing like sorrowing women voices. Oh, the violin in her hands! Oh, the rapture of hearing it, as her soul vibrated through it and called to him--called to him!--But he would not hear the call. He turned sorrowfully and went down again to the shed and there he lay upon his face and clasped his hands above his head and whispered her name. It was as if his heart were beating itself against prison walls and the clasped hands were stained with blood.

He rose next morning, haggard and pale. The snow was falling--falling--softly and silently. It fell like lead upon his heart, so full of anxiety was he for the good friend who might even then be climbing up the trail. Madam Manovska observed his drawn face, and thought he suffered only from anxiety and tried to comfort him. Amalia also attempted to cover her own anxiety by assurances that the good St. Christopher who watches over travelers would protect Larry Kildene, because he knew so well how many dangers there were, and that he, who had carried the Christ with all his burden of sorrows could surely keep "Sir Kildene" even through the snows of winter. In spite of an inherent and trained disbelief in all supposed legends, especially as tenets of faith, Harry felt himself comforted by her talk, yet he could not forbear questioning her as to her own faith in them.

"Do you truly believe all that, Amalia?"

"All--that--? Of what--Mr. 'Arry?" She seemed truly mystified.

"I mean those childish legends of the saints you often quote?"

Amalia laughed. "You think I have learn them of the good sisters in my convent, and is no truth

in them?"

"Why--I guess that's about it. Did your father believe them?"

"Maybe no. But my father was 'devoué'--very--but he had a very wide thought of God and man--a thought reaching far out--to--I find it very hard to explain. If but you understood the French, I could tell you--but for me, I have my father's faith and it makes me glad to play in my heart with these legends--as you call them."

He gave her a quick, appealing glance, then turned his gaze away. "Try to explain. Your English is beautiful."

"If you eat your breakfast, then will I try."

"Yes, yes, I will. You say he had faith reaching far out--to where--to what?"

"He said there would never be rest in all the universe until we find everywhere God,--living--creating--moving forever in the--the--all." She held out her hands and extended her arms in an encompassing movement indescribably full of grace.

"You mean he was a pantheist?"

"Oh, no, no. That is to you a horror, I see, but it was not that." She laughed again, so merrily that Harry laughed, too. But still he persisted, "Amalia--never mind what your father thought; tell me your own faith."

Then she grew grave, "My faith is--just--God. In the all. Seeing--feeling--knowing--with us--for us--never away--in the deep night of sorrow--understanding. In the far wilderness--hearing. In the terror and remorse of the heart--when we weep for sin--loving. It is only one thing in all the world to learn, and that is to learn all things, just to reach out the mind, and touch God--to find his love in the heart and so always live in the perfect music of God. That is the wonderful harmony--and melody--and growth--of each little soul--and of all peoples, all worlds,--Oh, it is the universe of love God gives to us."

For a while they were silent, and Madam Manovska began to move about the cabin, setting the things in order. She did not seem to have taken any interest in their talk. Harry rose to go, but first he looked in Amalia's eyes.

"The perfect Music of God?" He said the words slowly and questioningly.

"You understand my meaning?"

"I can't say. Do you?"

She quickly snatched up her violin which lay within reach of her arm. "I can better show you." She drew a long chord, then from it wandered into a melody, sweet and delicate; then she drew other chords, and on into other melodies, all related; then she began to talk again. "It is only on two strings I am playing--for hear? the others are now souls out of the music of God--listen--" she drew her bow across the discordant strings. "How that is terrible! So God creates great and beautiful laws--" she went back into the harmony and perfect melody, and played on, now changing to the discordant strain, and back, as she talked--"and gives to all people power to understand, but not through weakness--but through longing and searching with big earnestness of purpose, and much desire. Who has no care and desire for the music of God, strikes always those wrong notes, and all suffer as our ears suffer with the bad sounds. So it is, through long desiring, and living, always a little and a little more perceiving, reaching out the hand to touch in love our brothers and sisters on the earth,--always with patience learning to find in our own souls the note that strikes in harmony with the great thought of God--and thus we understand and live in the music of God. Ah, it is hard for me to say it--but it is as if our souls are given wings--wings--that reach--from the gold of the sun--even to the earth at our feet, and we float upon that great harmony of love like upon a wonderful upbearing sea, and never can we sink, and ever all is well--for we live in the thought of God."

"Amalia--Amalia--How about sin, and the one who--kills--and the ones who hate--and the little children brought into the world in sin--" Harry's voice trembled, and he bowed his head in his hands.

"Never is anything lost. They are the ones who have not yet learned--they have not found the key to God's music. Those who find must quickly help and give and teach the little children--the little children find so easily the key--but to all the strings making horrible discord on the earth--we dare not shut our ears and hide--so do the sweet, good sisters in the convent. They do their little to teach the little children, but it is always to shut their ears. But the Christ went out in the world, not with hands over his ears, but outreached to his brothers and sisters on the earth. But my father--my father! He turned away from the church, because he saw they had not found the true key to God's music--or I mean they kept it always hid, and covered with much--how shall I say--with much drapery--and golden coverings, that the truth--that is the key--was lost to sight. It was for this my father quarreled with--all that he thought not the truth. He believed to set his people free both from the world's oppression and from their own ignorance, and give to them a truth uncovered. Oh, it set his old friends in great discord more than ever--for they could not make thus God's music. And so they rose up and threw him in prison, and all the terrible things came upon him--of the world. My mother must have been very able through love to drag him free from them, even if they did pursue. It was the conflict of discord he felt all his life, and now he is free."

Suddenly the mother's deep tones sounded through the cabin with a finality that made them

both start. "Yes. Now he is free--and yet will he bring them to--know. We wait for him here. No more must he go to Poland. It is not the will of God."

Still Harry was not satisfied. "But if you think all these great thoughts--and you do--I can't see how you can quote those legends as if you thought them true."

"I quote them, yes, because I love them, and their poetry. Through all beauty--all sweetness--all strength--God brings to us his thought. This I believe. I believe the saints lived and were holy and good, loving the great brotherhood. Why may not they be given the work of love still to do? It is all in the music of God, that they live, and make happy, and why should I believe that it is now taken from them to do good? Much that I think lies deep in my heart, and I cannot tell it in words."

"Nor can I. But my thoughts--" For an instant Amalia, looking at him, saw in his face the same look of inward fear--or rather of despair that had appalled Larry, but it went as quickly as it appeared, and she wondered afterward if she had really seen it, or if it was a strange trick of the firelight in the windowless cabin.

"And your thoughts, Mr. 'Arry?"

"They are not to be told." Again he rose to go, and stood and looked down on her, smiling. "I see you have already tried the crutches."

"Yes. I found them in the snow, before the door. How I got there? I did hop. It was as if the good angels had come in the night. I wake and something make me all glad--and I go to the door to look at the whiteness, and then I am sorry, because of Sir Kildene, then I see before me--while that I stand on one foot, and hop--hop--hop--so, I see the crutch lie in the snow. Oh, Mr. 'Arry, now so pale you are! It is that you have worked in the night to make them--Is not? That is sorrowful to me. But now will I do for you pleasant things, because I can move to do them on these, where before I must always sit still--still--Ah, how that is hard to do! One good thing comes to me of this hurt. It makes the old shoes to last longer. How is it never to wear out shoes? Never to walk in them."

Harry laughed. "We'll have to make you some moccasins."

"And what is moccasins? Ah, yes, the Indian shoe. I like them well, so soft they must be, and so pretty with the beads. I have seen once such shoes on one little Indian child. Her mother made them."

Then Harry made her try the crutches to be sure they were quite right, and, seeing that they were a little too long, he measured them with care, and carried them back to the shed, and there he shortened them and polished them with sand and a piece of flint, until he succeeded in making a very workmanlike job of them.

At noon he brought them back, and stood in the doorway a moment beside her, looking out through the whiteness upon the transformed world. In spite of what that snow might mean to Larry Kildene, and through him to them, of calamity, maybe death, a certain elation possessed Harry. His body was braced to unusual energy by the keen, pure air, and his spirit enthralled and lifted to unconscious adoration by the vast mystery of a beauty, subtle and ethereal in its hushed eloquence. From the zenith through whiteness to whiteness the flakes sifted from the sky like a filmy bride's veil thrown over the blue of the farthest and highest peaks, and swaying soft folds of lucent whiteness upon the earth--the trees--and upon the cabin, and as they stood there, closing them in together--the very center of mystery, their own souls. Again the passion swept through him, to gather her in his arms, and he held himself sternly and stiffly against it, and would have said something simple and common to break the spell, but he only faltered and looked down on his hands spread out before her, and what he said was: "Do you see blood on them?"

"Ah, no. Did you hurt your hand to cause blood on them, and to make those crutch for me?" she cried in consternation.

"No, no. It's nothing. I have not hurt my hand. See, there's no blood on the crutches." He glanced at them as she leaned her weight on them there at his side, with a feeling of relief. It seemed as if they must show a stain, yet why should it be blood? "Come in. It's too cold for you to stand in the door with no shawl. I mean to put enough wood in here to last you the rest of the day--and go--"

"Mr. 'Arry! Not to leave us? No, it is no need you go--for why?"

Her terror touched him. "No, I would not go again and leave you and your mother alone--not to save my soul. As you say, there is no need--as long as it is so still and the clouds are thin the snow will do little harm. It would be the driving, fine snow and the drifts that would delay him."

"Yes, snow as we have it in the terrible Russia. I know such snow well," said Madam Manovska.

They went in and closed the door, and sat down to eat. The meal was lighted only by the dancing flames from the hearth, and their faces glowed in the fitful light. Always the meals were conducted with a certain stately ceremony which made the lack of dishes, other than the shaped slabs of wood sawn from the ends of logs--odd make-shifts invented by Harry, seem merely an accident of the moment, while the bits of lace-edged linen that Amalia provided from their little store seemed quite in harmony with the air of grace and gentleness that surrounded the two women. It was as if they were using a service of silver and Sevres, and to have missed the graciousness of their ministrations, now that he had lived for a little while with them, would have been sorrow indeed.

He even forgot that he was clothed in rags, and wore them as if they were the faultless garments of a prince. It was only when he was alone that he looked down on them and sighed. One day he had come to the cabin to ask if he might take for a little while a needle and thread, but when he got there, the conversation wandered to discussion of the writers and the tragedies of the various nations and of their poets, and the needle and thread were forgotten.

To-day, as the snow fell, it reminded Amalia of his need, and she begged him to stay with them a little to see what the box he had rescued for them contained. He yielded, and, taking up the violin, he held it a moment to his chin as if he would play, then laid it down again without drawing the bow across it.

"Ah, Mr. 'Arry, it is that you play," cried Amalia, in delight. "I know it. No man takes in his hand the violin thus, if he do not play."

"I had a friend once who played. No, I can't." He turned away from it sadly, and she gently laid it back in its box, and caught up a piece of heavy material.

"Look. It is a little of this left. It is for you. My mother has much skill to make garments. Let us sew for you the blouse."

"Yes, I'll do that gladly. I have no other way to keep myself decent before you."

"What would you have? All must serve or we die." Madam Manovska spoke, "It is well, Sir 'Arry King, you carry your head like one prince, for I will make of you one peasant in this blouse."

The two women laughed and measured him, and conferred volubly together in their own tongue, and he went out from their presence feeling that no prince had ever been so honored. They took also from their store warm socks of wool and gave him. Sadly he needed them, as he realized when he stepped out from their door, and the soft snow closed around his feet, chilling them with the cold.

As he looked up in the sky he saw the clouds were breaking, and the sun glowed through them like a great pale gold moon, even though the flakes continued to veil thinly the distance. His heart lightened and he went back to the cabin to tell them the good news, and to ask them to pray for clear skies to-morrow. Having been reared in a rigidly puritanic school of thought, the time was, when first he knew them, that the freedom with which Amalia spoke of the Deity, and of the Christ, and the saints, and her prayers, fell strangely upon his unaccustomed ears. He was reserved religiously, and seemed to think any mention of such topics should be made with bated breath, and the utmost solemnity. Often it had been in his mind to ask her concerning her beliefs, but his shyness on such themes had prevented.

Now that he had asked her he still wondered. He was used to feel that no one could be really devout, and yet speak so freely. Why--he could not have told. But now he began to understand, yet it was but a beginning. Could it be that she belonged to no church? Was it some sect of which he had never heard to which they belonged? If so, it must be a true faith, or it never could have upheld them through all their wanderings and afflictions, and, as he pondered, he found himself filled with a measure of the same trustful peace. During their flight across the plains together he had come to rest in them, and when his heart was too heavy to dare address the Deity in his own words, it was balm to his hurt spirit to hear them at their devotions as if thus God were drawn nearer him.

This time, whether he might lay it to their prayers or no, his hopes were fulfilled. The evening brought a clear sunset, and during the next day the snow melted and soon was gone, and a breeze sprang up and the clouds drifted away, and for several days thereafter the weather continued clear and dry.

Now often he brought his horse to the door, and lifted Amalia to the saddle and walked at her side, fearing she might rest her foot too firmly in the stirrup and so lose control of the horse in her pain. Always their way took them to the falls. And always he listened while Amalia talked. He allowed himself only the most meager liberty of expression. Distant and cold his manner often seemed to her, but intuitively she respected his moods, if moods they might be called: she suspected not.

CHAPTER XXII

THE BEAST ON THE TRAIL

A week after the first snowfall Larry Kildene returned. He had lingered long after he should have taken the trail and had gone farther than he had dreamed of going when he parted from his three companions on the mountain top. All day long the snow had been falling, and for the last few miles he had found it almost impossible to crawl upward. Fortunately there had been no wind, and the snow lay as it had fallen, covering the trail so completely that only Larry Kildene himself could have kept it--he and his horse--yet not impeding his progress with drifts to be tunneled through.

Harry King had been growing more and more uneasy during the day, and had kept the trail from the cabin to the turn of the cliff clear of snow, but below that point he did not think it wise to go: he could not, indeed. There, however, he stationed himself to wait through the night, and just beyond the turn he built a fire, thinking it might send a light into the darkness to greet Larry, should he happen to be toiling through the snow.

He did not arouse the fears of Amalia by telling her he meant to keep watch all night on the cliff, but he asked her for a brew of Larry Kildene's coffee--of which they had been most sparing--when he left them after the evening meal, and it was given him without a thought, as he had been all day working in the snow, and the request seemed natural. He asked that he might have it in the great kettle in which they prepared it, and carried it with him to the fodder shed.

Darkness had settled over the mountain when, after an hour's rest, he returned to the top of the trail and mended his fire and placed his kettle near enough to keep the contents hot. Through half the night he waited thus, sometimes walking about and peering into the obscurity below, sometimes replenishing his fire, and sometimes just patiently sitting, his arms clasped about his knees, gazing into space and brooding.

Many times had Harry King been lonely, but never had the awesomeness of life and its mysterious leadings so impressed him as during this night's vigil. Moses alone on the mountain top, carried there and left where he might see into the promised land--the land toward which he had been aided miraculously to lead his people, but which he might not enter because of one sin,--one only transgression,--Elijah sitting alone in the wilderness waiting for the revealing of God--waiting heartbroken and weary, vicariously bearing in his own spirit regrets and sorrows over the waywardness of his people Israel,--and John, the forerunner--a "Voice crying in the wilderness 'Repent ye!'"--these were not so lonely, for their God was with them and had led them by direct communication and miraculous power; they were not lonely as Cain was lonely, stained with a brother's blood, cast out from among his fellows, hunted and haunted by his own guilt.

Silence profound and indescribable reigned, while the great, soft flakes continued to drift slowly down, silent--silent--as the grave, and above and beneath and on all sides the same absolute neutrality of tint, vague and soft; yet the reality of the rugged mountain even so obscured and covered, remained; its cliffs and crags below, deadly and ragged, and fearful to look down upon, and skirting its sides the long, weary trail, up which at that very moment a man might be toiling, suffering, even to the limit of death--might be giving his life for the two women and the man who had come to him so suddenly out of the unknown; strange, passing strange it all was.

Again and again Harry rose and replenished the fire and stamped about, shaking from his shoulders the little heaps of snow that had collected there. The flames rose high in the still air and stained the snow around his bonfire a rosy red. The redness of the fire-stained snow was not more deep and vital than the red blood pulsing through his heart. With all a strong man's virility and power he loved as only the strong can love, and through all his brooding that undercurrent ran like a swift and mighty river,--love, stronger than hate,--love, triumphing over death,--love, deeper than hell,--love, lifting to the zenith of heaven;--only two things seemed to him verities at that moment, God above, and love within,--two overwhelming truths, terrible in their power, all-consuming in their sweetness, one in their vast, incomprehensible entity of force, beneficent, to be forever sought for and chosen out of all the universe of good.

The true meaning of Amalia's faith, as she had brokenly tried to explain it to him, dawned on his understanding. God,--love, truth, and power,--annihilating evil as light eats up darkness, drawing all into the great "harmony of the music of God."

Sitting there in the red light of the fire with the snow falling around him, he knew what he must do first to come into the harmony. He must take up his burden and declare the truth, and suffer the result, no matter what it might be. Keen were all the impressions and visions of his mind. Even while he could see Amalia sleeping in the cabin, and could feel her soft breath on his cheek, could feel her in his arms,--could hear her prayers for Larry Kildene's safety as at that moment he might be coming to them,--he knew that the mighty river of his love must be held back by a masterful will--must be dammed back until its floods deepened into an ocean of tranquillity while he rose above his loneliness and his fierce longing,--loving her, yet making no avowal,--holding her in his heart, yet never disturbing her peace of spirit by his own heart's tumult,--clinging to her night and day, yet relinquishing her.

And out of this resolution, against which his nature cried and beat itself, he saw, serene, and more lonely than Moses or Elijah,--beautiful, and near to him as his love, the Christ taken to the high places, even the pinnacle of the temple--and the mountain peak, overlooking the worlds and the kingdoms thereof, and turning from them all to look down on him with a countenance of ineffable beauty--the love that dies not.

He lifted his head. The visions were gone. Had he slept? The fire was burning low and a long line was streaked across the eastern sky; a line of gold, while still darkness rested below him and around him. Again he built up the fire, and set the kettle closer. He stood out on the height at the top of the trail and listened, his figure a black silhouette against the dancing flames. He called, he shouted with all his power, then listened. Did he hear a call? Surely it must be. He plunged downward and called again, and again came the faint response. In his hand he carried a long pole, and with it he prodded about in the snow for sure footing and continued to descend, calling from time to time, and rejoicing to hear the answering call. Yes, Larry Kildene was below him in the obscurity, and now his voice came up to Harry, long and clear. He had not far to go ere he saw the big man slowly toiling upward through the dusk of dawn. He had dismounted,

and the weary animals were following behind.

Thus Larry Kildene came back to his mountain. Exhausted, he still made light of his achievement--climbing through day and night to arrive before the snow should embank around him. He stood in the firelight swaying with weariness and tasted the hot coffee and shook his grizzled head and laughed. The animals came slowly on and stood close to him, almost resting their noses on his shoulder, while Harry King gazed on him with admiration.

"Now if it weren't for the poor beasts, I'd lie down here by the fire and sleep rather than take a step farther to-night. To-night? Why--it's morning! Isn't it? I never thought we were so near the end. If I hadn't seen the fire a long way down, I would have risked another bivouac for the rest of the night. We might have lived through it--I don't know, but this is better." He rubbed the nose of his panting horse. "I shall drop to sleep if we don't move on."

A thin blue smoke was rising from the chimney as they passed the cabin, but Amalia, kneeling before the hearth, did not know they were near. Harry wondered if Larry had forgotten the mother's hallucination about her husband, yet forbore to mention it, thinking it best to get him into his bunk first. But he had not forgotten. When Harry came into the shed after stabling the horses, he found Larry sitting before the chimney fire warming his knees and smoking.

"Give me a little more of that coffee, Harry, and let's talk a bit before I turn in for the day. There's the mother, now; she still thinks as she did? I'll not see them until this evening--when I may feel able to meet the question, and, lad, tell them what you please, but--better not let the mother know I'm here until I can see her."

"Then, if you'll go to bed now, I'll bring your food up. I'll tell Amalia, of course."

"I'm not hungry--only weary. Don't bother the women about food. After a day and night of sleep I'll be quite fit again. Man! But it's good to be back into the peace of the hills! I've been down where the waves of civilization roar. Yes, yes; I'll go to my bunk after a bit. The great menace to our tranquillity here for the winter is the mother."

"But she has improved."

"Good, good. How?"

"She thinks of things around her--and--takes care of the cabin since Amalia's hurt."

"Hurt? How's that?"

"She sprained her ankle--only, but enough to lay her up for a while."

"I see. Shook her mother out of her dreams."

"Not entirely. I think the improvement comes more from her firm conviction that you are to bring her husband with you, and Amalia agrees with me. If you have an excuse that will satisfy her--"

"I see. She was satisfied in her mind that he was alive and would come to her--I see. Keep her quiet until I wake up and then we'll find a way out--if the truth is impossible. Now I'll sleep--for a day and a night and a day--as long as I've been on that forced march. It was to go back, or try to push through--or die--and I pushed through."

"Don't sleep until I've brought you some hot broth. I'm sure they have it down there."

"I'll be glad of it, yes."

But he could not keep awake. Before Harry could throw another log on the fire he was asleep. Then Harry gently drew an army blanket over him and went out to the stable. There he saddled his own horse and led him toward the cabin. Before he reached it he saw Amalia coming to meet him, hobbling on her crutch. She was bareheaded and the light of morning was in her eyes.

"Ah, 'Arry, 'Arry King! He has come. I see here marks of feet of horses in the snow--is not? Is well? Is safe? Larry Kildene so noble and kind! Yes. My mother? No, she prepares the food, and me, I shut the door when I run out to see is it sun to-day and the terrible snow no more falling. There I see the marks of horses, yes." She spoke excitedly, and looked up in Harry's face with smiles on her lips and anxious appeal in her eyes.

"Throw down that crutch and lean on me. I'll lift you up--There! Now we'll go back to the cabin and lead Goldbug around a bit, so his tracks will cover the others and account for them. Then after breakfast I'll take you to the top of the trail and tell you."

She leaned down to him from her seat on the horse and put her hand on his shoulder. "Is well? And you--you have not slept? No?"

Looking up in her face so wonderful and beautiful, so filled with tender solicitude for him, and her glowing eyes fixed on his, he was covered with confusion even to scarcely comprehending what she said. He took the hand from his shoulder and kissed the tips of her fingers, then dropped it and walked on ahead, leading the horse.

"I'm well, yes. Tired a bit, but, oh, yes! Larry Kildene? He's all right. We'll go out on the trail and consult--what is best to do about your mother--and say nothing until then."

To Amalia a kiss on the finger tips meant no more than the usual morning greeting in her own country, and she rode on undisturbed by his demonstration, which he felt keenly and for which he would have knelt and begged her pardon. Ever since his first unguarded moment when he returned and found her fainting on the hillside, he had set such rigid watch over his actions that his adoration had been expressed only in service--for the most part silent and with averted

eyes. This aloofness she felt, and with the fineness of her nature respected, letting her own play of imagination hover away from intimate intrusion, merely lightening the somber relationship that would otherwise have existed, like a breeze that stirs only the surface of a deep pool and sets dancing lights at play but leaves the depths undisturbed.

Yet, with all her intuitiveness, she found him difficult and enigmatic. An impenetrable wall seemed to be ever between them, erected by his will, not hers; therefore she would not try by the least suggestion of manner, or even of thought, to know why, nor would she admit to her own spirit the hurt of it. The walled inclosure of his heart was his, and she must remain without. To have attempted by any art to get within the boundaries he had set she felt to be unmaidenly.

In spite of his strength and vigor, Harry was very weary. But less from his long night's vigil than from the emotions that had torn him and left his heart heavy with the necessity of covering always this strong, elemental love that smoldered, waiting in abeyance until it might leap into consuming flame.

During the breakfast Harry sat silent, while the two women talked a little with each other, speculating as to the weather, and rejoicing that the morning was again clear. Then while her mother was occupied, Amalia, unnoticed, gave him the broth to carry up to the shed, and there, as Larry still slept, he set it near the fire that it might be warm and ready for him should he wake during their absence. At the cabin he brought wood and laid it beside the hearth, and looked about to see if there were anything more he could do before he spoke.

"Madam Manovska, Amalia and I are going up the trail a little way, and we may be gone some time, but--I'll take good care of her." He smiled reassuringly: "We mustn't waste the sunny days. When Mr. Kildene returns, you also must ride sometimes."

"Ah, yes. When? When? It is long--very long."

"But, maybe, not so long, mamma. Soon now must he come. I think it."

They left her standing in the door as they went off up the trail, the glistening snow making the world so dazzling in the sunlight, so blinding to her eyes, used to the obscurity of the cabin, that the many tracks past the door were unnoticed by her. In silence they walked until they had almost reached the turn, when Amalia spoke.

"Have you look, how I use but the one crutch, 'Arry King? Soon will I again walk on my foot, very well. I have so many times to thank you. Now of mamma we must speak. She thinks only, every day, every hour, of my father. If we shall speak the truth to her--I do not know. What she will do--we cannot tell. No. And it is well to keep her heart from too much sorrow. For Sir Kildene, he must not be afflicted by us--my mamma and I. We have take from him his house, and he is banish--all for us, to make pleasant, and what we can do is little, so little--and if my mamma sit always silent when we should be gay to each other and make happy the days, is not good, and all his peace will be gone. Now talk to me a little of your thoughts, 'Arry King."

"My thoughts must be like yours, Amalia, if I would have them wise. It's best to leave her as undisturbed as possible until spring. The months will go by rapidly. He will not be troubled. Then we can take her to some place, where I will see to it that you are cared for--"

The horse suddenly stopped and settled back on his haunches and lifted his head, looking wildly about. Harry sprang to the bridle, but he did not try to get away, and only stood quivering and breathing loudly as if in the direst fear, and leaned close to Harry for protection.

"What ails you? Good horse." Harry petted and coaxed, but he refused to move on, and showed every sign of frantic fear. "I can't think what possesses him. He's afraid, but of what?"

"There! There!" cried Amalia, pointing to the top of the trail at the cliff. "It's the beast. I have read of it--so terrible! Ah!"

"Surely. That's a mountain lion; Goldbug scented him before he rounded the cliff. They're cowards; never fear." He shouted and flung his arm in the air, but did not dare let the bridle rein go for fear the horse would bolt with her. For a moment the beast stood regarding them, then turned and trotted off in a leisurely fashion.

"'Arry, take my hand one minute. I am like the horse, afraid. If that animal had come when we were alone on the mountain in that night--it is my heart that will not stand still."

"Don't be afraid now. He's gone. He was hunting there where I was last night, and no doubt he smells the horses that came up the mountain early this morning. It is the snow that has driven him out of the cañon to hunt for food." He let her cling to his hand and stood quietly, petting and soothing the horse.

"All night? 'Arry King, you were there all night? Why?" she shivered, and, bending down, looked steadily in his eyes.

"I had a fire. There was no danger. There is more danger for me in--" he cut his words short. "Shall we go on now? Or would you rather turn back?"

She drew herself up and released his hand; still she trembled. "I will be brave like you are brave. If you so desire, we go on."

"You are really braver than I. Then we'll go a few steps farther." But the horse would not go on. He snorted and quivered and pulled back. Harry looked up at Amalia. She sat calmly waiting, but was very pale. Then he yielded to the horse, and, turning, led him back toward the cabin. She drew a long sigh of relief then, and glanced at him, and they both laughed.

"You see I am the coward, to only make believe I am not afraid. I am very afraid, and now more than always will I be afraid when that you go to hunt. 'Arry King, go no more alone." Her voice was low and pleading. "There is much to do. I will teach you to speak the French, like you have once said you wish to learn. Then is the book to write. Is much to do that is very pleasant. But of those wild lions on the hills, they are not for a man to fight alone." He restrained the horse, and walked slowly at her side, his hand on the pommel of the saddle, but did not speak. "You promise not? All night you stay in the cold, where is danger, and how may I know you will not again do such a thing? All is beautiful here, and great happiness may be if--if that you do no tragedy." So sweetly did she plead he could no longer remain silent.

"There is only one happiness for me in life, Amalia, and that is forbidden me. I have expiation to make before I may ask happiness of heaven. You have been most patient with my silences--always--will you be patient still--and--understand?"

She drew in her breath sharply and turned her face away from him, and for a moment was silent; then she spoke. Her voice was very low, and very sweet. "What is right, that must be. Always."

Then they spoke again of Madam Manovska, and Amalia opened her heart to him as never before. It seemed as if she would turn his thoughts from whatever sorrow might be hanging over him, and impress him with the feeling that no matter what might be the cause of his reserve, or what wrong he might have done, her faith in him remained unshaken. It was a sweet return for his stammered confession.

CHAPTER XXIII

A DISCOURSE ON LYING

All day Larry Kildene slept, hardly waking long enough toward nightfall to drink his broth, but the next day he was refreshed and merry.

"Leave Madam Manovska alone," he admonished Harry. "Take Amalia off for another ride, and I'll go down to the cabin, and if there's a way to set her mind at rest about her husband, I'll find it. I'd not be willing to take an oath on what I may tell her, but it will be satisfying, never fear."

The ride was a short one, for the air was chill, and there were more signs of snow, but when they returned to the cabin, they found Larry seated by the fire, drinking a brew of Madam's tea and conversing with her joyously about his trip and what he had seen of the new railroad. It was curious how he had succeeded in bringing her to take an interest in things quite alien to her. The very atmosphere of the cabin seemed to be cleared by his presence, big, genial, and all-embracing. Certainly nothing of the recluse appeared in his demeanor. Only when they were alone in their own quarters did he show occasionally a longing for the old condition of unmolested tranquillity. To go to his dinner at a set hour, no matter how well prepared it might be, annoyed him.

"There's no reason in life why they should get a meal ready merely because a timepiece says twelve o'clock. Let them wait until a man's hungry," he would grumble. Then, arrived at the cabin, he would be all courtesy and geniality.

When Harry rallied him on his inconsistency, he gravely replied: "An Irish gentleman is an Irish gentleman the world over, no matter where you find him, in court, camp, or wilderness; it's all one to him. Why do you think I brought that mirror you shave by all the way up the mountain? Why, to have a body to look at now and again, and to blarney, just that I might not forget the trick. What was the good of that, do you ask? Look at yourself, man. You're a dour Scotchman, that's what you are, and you keep your humor done up in a wet blanket, and when it glints out of the corner of your eye a bit, you draw down the corners of your mouth to belie it. What's the good of that, now? The world's a rough place to walk in for the most part, especially for women, and if a man carries a smile on his face and a bit of blarney on the tip of his tongue, he smooths the way for them. Now, there's Madam Manovska. What would you and Amalia have done to her? Driven her clean out of her head with your bungling. In a case like hers you must be very discreet, and lead her around, by the way she wants to go, to a place of safety."

Harry smiled. Since his avowal to Amalia of his determination to make expiation for the crime that clouded his life, he had grown more cheerful and less restrained in manner. He would accept the present happiness, and so far as he could without wrong to her, he would fill his hours with the joy of her companionship, and his love should dominate him, and his heart should revel in the thought of her, and her nearness to him; then when the spring should come and melt the snowy barriers between him and the world below, he would go down and make his expiation, drinking the bitter cup to the dregs.

This happy imprisonment on the mountain top with these two refined women and this kindly man with the friendly heart and splendid body and brain, he deemed worth a lifetime spent more sordidly. Here and now, he felt himself able to weigh true values, and learned that the usual ambitions of mortals--houses and gear and places of precedence--could become the end

of existence only to those whose desires had become distorted by the world's estimates. Now he understood how a man might live for a woman's smile, or give his life for the touch of her hand, and how he might hunger for the pressing of children's lips to his own. The warm friendships of life grew to their true proportions in the vast scheme of things, as he looked in the big man's eyes and answered his kindly banter.

"I see. It takes a genius to be a discreet and wise liar. Amalia's lacking there--for me, I might learn. Now pocket your blarney long enough to tell me why you called me a Scotchman."

"How would I know the difference between a broncho and a mule? By the earmarks, boy. I've lived in the world long enough to know men. If there be only a drop of Scotch blood in a man, he shows it. Like the mule he brays at the wrong time, or he settles back and stands when he should go forward. Oh, there's many a sign to enlighten the wise."

He rose and knocked the ashes from his pipe and thrust it in his pocket and began to look over his pack, which had not been opened. Two good-sized sacks hung on either side of the pack mule had held most of his purchases, all carefully tied in separate bundles. The good man had not been sparing of his gold. Since he had so long exiled himself, having no use for what he had accumulated, he had now reveled in spending.

"We're to live like lords and ladies, now, Harry. I've two silver plates, and they're for the ladies. For us, we'll eat off the tin as before. And silver mugs for their drink. See? I would have got them china but it's too likely to break. Now, here's a luxury I've brought, and it was heavy to carry, too. Here's twenty-four panes of glass. I carried them, twelve on each side of my horse, like that, slung so, see? That's two windows of two sash each, and six panes to a sash. Oh, they're small, but see what a luxury for the women to do their pretty work by. And there's work for you, to be making the sash. I've done my share of that sort of thing in building the cabin for you, and then--young man--I'll set you to digging out the gold. That's work that'll put the worth of your body to the test, and the day will come when you'll need it."

"I doubt my ever having much need of gold, but whatever you set me at I'll do to the best of my ability."

"You may have your doubts, but I have none. Men are like bees; they must ever be laying by something, even if they have no use for it." As Larry talked he continued to sort over his purchases, and Harry looked on, astounded at their variety and number.

While apparently oblivious of the younger man's interest, and absorbed in his occupation, whistling, and turning the bundles over in his hands as he tallied them off, he now and then shot a keen glance in his companion's face. He had noticed the change in Harry, and was alert to learn the cause. He found him more talkative, more eager and awake. He suspected Harry had passed through some mental crisis, but of what nature he was at a loss to determine. Certainly it had made him a more agreeable companion than the gloom of his former manner.

"I'll dig for the gold, indeed I will, but I'd like to go on a hunt now and then. I'd like a shot at the beast we saw sniffing over the spot where I sat all night waiting for you to appear. It will no longer be safe for Amalia to wander about alone as she did before she hurt her ankle."

"The creature was after sheep. He'll find his prey growing scarcer now that the railroad is so near. In ten years or less these mountain sheep will be extinct. That's the result of civilization, my boy."

"I'd like to shoot this panther, though."

"We'll have to set a bait for him--and that means a deer or a sheep must go. We'll do it soon, too."

"You've reconciled Madam Manovska to your coming home without her husband! I didn't think it possible. Give me a lesson in diplomacy, will you?"

"Wait till I light my pipe. Now. First, you must know there are several kinds of lying, and you must learn which kinds are permissible--and otherwise." With his pipe between his teeth, Larry stood, a mock gravity about his mouth, and a humorous twinkle in his eyes, while he looked down on Harry, and told off the lies on his fingers.

"First, there's the fool's lie--you'll know it because there's no purpose in it, and there's the rogue's lie,--and as we're neither fools nor rogues we'll class them both as--otherwise; then there's the lie of pride, and, as that goes along with the fool's lie, we'll throw it out with the--otherwise--and the coward's lie also goes with the otherwise." Larry shook his fingers as if he tossed the four lies off from their tips, and began again. "Now. Here's the friend's lie--a man risks his soul to save a friend--good--or to help him out of trouble--very well. And then there's the lover's lie, it's what a lad tells his sweetheart--that goes along with what she tells him--and comes by way of nature--"

"Or you might class it along with your own blarney."

"Let be, lad. I'm teaching you the diplomacy, now. Then there's the lie of shame, and the lie of sorrow, wherein a man puts by, for his own loved one's sake, or his self-respect, what's better covered; that, too, comes by way of nature, even as a dog crawls away to die alone, and we'll accept it. Now comes the lie of the man who would tell a good tale for the amusement of his friends; very well, the nature of man loves it, so we'll count it in, and along with it comes a host of little lies like the sportsman's lie and the traveler's lie--they all help to make life merry, and the world can ill do without them. But now comes the lie of circumspection. You must learn to lie it without lying. See? It's the lie of wisdom, and it's a very subtle thing, and easily abused. If

a man uses it for a selfish cause and merely to pervert the truth, it's a black lie, and one of the very worst. Or he may use it in a good cause, and it's fairly white. It must be used with discrimination. That's the lie I used for the poor Madam down there."

"But what did you say?"

"She says to me, 'And where is my 'usband?' I reply, 'Madam, your husband is in a very safe and secret place,'--and that is true enough--'where his enemies will never find him,'--and for all we know that is also true. 'But I cannot understand why he did not come to me. That is not like my 'usband.' 'No, Madam, it is not. But man must do what he must, and the way was too long and arduous for his strength; he could not take the long, weary climb.' And no more could he, true enough. 'No, Madam, you cannot go to him, nor he come to you, for the danger of the way and the wild beasts that are abroad looking for food.' And what more true than that, for did not her daughter see one hunting for food?"

"So she covers her face with her hand and rocks herself back and forth, and now, lad, here's where the blarney comes in. It's to tell her of the worth of her husband, and what a loss it would be to the world if he were to die on the trail, and what he would suffer if he thought she were unhappy, and then in the ardor of my speech comes the straight lie. I told her that he was writing the story of his life and that it was to be a great work which would bring about a tremendous revolution of justice and would bring confusion to his enemies, until at last she holds up her head proudly and speaks of his wonderful intellect and goodness. Then she says: 'He cannot come to me, very good. He is not strong enough--no. I go to him to-morrow.' Think of that, man! What I had to meet, and it was all to go over again. I would call it very circumspect lying and in a good cause, too, to comfort the poor soul. I told her of the snow, and how surely she would die by the way and make her husband very sad, he who was now happy in the writing of his book, and that to do so would break his heart and cause his own death,--while to wait until spring in peace would be wiser, because she might then descend the mountain in perfect safety. So now she sits sewing and making things no man understands the use of. She showed me the blouse she has made for you. Now, that is the best medicine for her sick brain. They're great women, these two. If we must have women about, we're in luck to have women of their quality."

"We are, indeed."

"I saw the women who follow the road as it creeps across the plains. They're pitiful to see. If these had been like them, we'd have been obliged to take them in just the same, but Lord be merciful to them, I'm glad they're not on my mountain." Larry shook his ponderous, grizzled head and turned again to his packages. "Since they love to sew, they may be making things for themselves next. Look you! Here is silk for gowns, for women love adornment, the best of them."

Harry paused, his arms full of wood with which he was replenishing the fire, and stared in amazement, as Larry unrolled a mass of changeable satin wherein a deep cerise and green coloring shifted and shimmered in the firelight. He held the rich material up to his own waist and looked gravely down on the long folds that dropped to the floor and coiled about his feet. "I told you we're to live like lords and ladies now. Man! I'd like to see Amalia in a gown of this!"

Harry dropped his wood on the fire and threw back his head and laughed. He even lay down on the floor to laugh, and rolled about until his head lay among the folds of satin. Then he sat up, and taking the material between his fingers felt of it, while the big man looked down on him, gravely discomfited.

"And what did you bring for Madam Manovska?"

"Black, man, black. I'm no fool, I tell you. I know what's discreet for an elderly lady." Then they gravely and laboriously folded together the yards of gorgeous satin. "And I'd have been glad of your measure to get you the suit of clothes you're needing. Lacking it, I got one for myself. But for me they're a bit too small. You'll maybe turn tailor and cut them still smaller for yourself. Take them, and if they're no fit, you'll laugh out of the other corner of your mouth." The two men stood a moment sheepishly eying each other, while Harry held the clothes awkwardly in his hands.

"I--I--did need them." He choked a bit, and then laughed again.

"So did I need them--yours and mine, too." Larry held up another suit, "See here. Mine are darker, to keep you from thinking them yours. And here are the buckskins for hunting. I used to make them for myself, but they had these for sale, and I was by way of spending money, so I bought them. Now, with the blouses the women have made for you, we're decent."

All at once it dawned on Harry what a journey the big man had made, and he fairly shouted, "Larry Kildene, where have you been?"

"I rode like the very devil for three days. When once I was started, I was crazed to go--and see--Then I reached the end of the road from the coast this way. Did you know they're building the road from both ways at once? I didn't, for I never went down to get news of the cities, and they might have put the whole thing through without my even knowing of it, if you hadn't tumbled in on me and told me of it.

"It stirred me up a bit. I left my horse in charge of one I thought I might trust, and then took a train and rode over the new rails clean through to San Francisco, and there I groveled around a day or two, taking in the ways of men. They're doing big things. Now that the two oceans are to be united by iron rails, great changes will come like the wind,--the Lord knows when they will

end! Now, the women will be wanting us to eat, I'm thinking, and I'm not ready--but eat we must when the hour comes, and we've done nothing this whole morning but stand here and talk."

Thus Larry grumbled as they tramped down to the cabin through the snow, with the rolls of silk under his arm, and the silver plates in his hand, while Harry carried the sack of coffee and the paper for Amalia. As they neared the cabin the big man paused.

"Take these things in for me, Harry. I--I--left something back in the shed. Drop that coffee and I'll fetch it as I come along."

"Now, what kind of a lie would you call that, sir, since it's your courage you've left?"

"Let be, let be. Can't you see I'm going back after it?"

So Harry carried in the gifts and Larry went back for his "courage" and donned his new suit of clothes to help him carry it, and then came walking in with a jovial swagger, and accepted the mother's thanks and Amalia's embrace with a marvelous ease, especially the embrace, with which he seemed mightily pleased.

CHAPTER XXIV

AMALIA'S FÊTE

The winter was a cold one, and the snows fell heavily, but a way was always kept open between the cabin and the fodder shed, and also by great labor a space was kept cleared around the cabin and a part of the distance toward the fall so that the women might not be walled in their quarters by the snow. With plenty to occupy them all, the weeks sped swiftly and pleasantly. Larry did a little trapping and hunting, but toward midwinter the sport became dangerous, because of the depth of the snow, and with the exception of stalking a deer now and then, for fresh food, he and Harry spent the most of their time burrowing in the mountain for gold.

Amalia's crutches were gradually laid aside, until she ran about as lightly as before, but even had she not been prevented by the snow she would not have been allowed to go far away from the cabin alone. The men baited and lay in wait for the panther, and at last shot him, but Larry knew from long experience that when the snows were deep, panthers often haunted his place, and their tracks were frequently seen higher up the mountain where he was wont to hunt the mountain sheep.

Sometimes Harry King rode with Amalia where the wind had swept the way bare, toward the bend in the trail, and would bring her back glowing and happy from the exercise. Sometimes when the storms were fierce without, and he suspected Larry longed for his old-time seclusion, he sat in the cabin. At these times Amalia redeemed her promise to teach him French. Few indeed were the books she had for help in giving these lessons. One little unbound book of old sonnets and songs and a small pamphlet of more modern poems that her father had loved, were all, except his Bible, which, although it was in Polish, contained copious annotations in her father's hand in French, and between the leaves of which lay loose pages filled with concise and plainly written meditations of his own.

These Amalia loved and handled with reverence, and for Harry King they had such vital interest that he learned the more rapidly that he might know all they contained. He no longer wondered at her power and breadth of thought. As he progressed he found in them a complete system of ethics and religious faith. Their writer seemed to have drawn from all sources intrinsically vital truths, and separated them from their encumbering theologic verbiage and dogma, and had traced them simply through to the great "Sermon on the Mount." In a few pages this great man had comprised the deepest logic, and the sweetest and widest theology, enough for all the world to live by, and enough to guide nations in safety, if only all men might learn it.

It was sufficient. He knew Amalia better, and more deeply he revered and loved her. He no longer quivered when he heard her mention the "Virgin" or when she spoke of the "Sweet Christ." It was not what his old dogmatic ancestry had fled from as "Popery." It was her simple, direct faith in the living Christ, which gave her eyes their clear, far-seeing vision, and her heart its quick, responsive intuition and understanding. She might speak of the convent where she had been protected and loved, and taught many things useful and good, other than legends and doctrines. She had learned how, through her father's understanding and study, to gather out the good, and leave the rest, in all things.

And Harry learned his French. He was an apt scholar, and Larry fell in line, for he had not forgotten the scholastic Latin and French of his college days. He liked, indeed, to air his French occasionally, although his accent was decidedly English, but his grammar was good and a great help to Harry. Madam Manovska also enjoyed his efforts and suggested that when they were all together they should converse in the French alone, not only that they might help Harry, but also that they might have a common language. It was to her and Amalia like their native tongue, and their fluency for a time quite baffled Larry, but he was determined not to be beaten, and when

Harry faltered and refused to go on, he pounded him on the back, and stirred him up to try again.

Although Amalia's convent training had greatly restricted her knowledge of literature other than religious, her later years of intimate companionship with her father, and her mother's truly remarkable knowledge of the classics and fearless investigation of the modern thought of her day, had enlarged Amalia's horizon; while her own vivid imagination and her native geniality caused her to lighten always her mother's more somber thought with a delicate and gracious play of fancy that was at once fascinating and delightful. This, and Harry's determination to live to the utmost in these weeks of respite, made him at times almost gay.

Most of all he reveled in Amalia's music. Certain melodies that she said her father had made he loved especially, and sometimes she would accompany them with a plaintive chant, half singing and half recitation, of the sonnet which had inspired them, and which had been woven through them. It was at these times that Larry listened with his elbows on his knees and his eyes fixed on the fire, and Harry with his eyes on Amalia's face, while the cabin became to him glorified with a light, no longer from the flames, but with a radiance like that which surrounded Dante's Beatrice in Paradise.

Amalia loved to please Larry Kildene. For this reason, knowing the joy he would take in it, and also because she loved color and light and joy, and the giving of joy, she took the gorgeous silk he had brought her, and made it up in a fashion of her own. Down in the cities, she knew, women were wearing their gowns spread out over wide hoops, but she made the dress as she knew they were worn at the time Larry had lived among women and had seen them most.

The bodice she fitted closely and shaped into a long point in front, and the skirt she gathered and allowed to fall in long folds to her feet. The sleeves she fitted only to her elbows, and gathered in them deep lace of her own making--lace to dream about, and the creation of which was one of those choice things she had learned of the good sisters at the convent. About her neck she put a bertha, kerchiefwise, and pinned it with a brooch of curiously wrought gold. Larry, "the discreet and circumspect liar," thought of the emerald brooch she had brought him to sell for her, and knowing how it would glow and blend among the changing tints of the silk, he fetched it to her, explaining that he could not sell it, and that the bracelet had covered all she had asked him to purchase for her, and some to spare.

She thanked him, and fastened it in her bodice, and handed the other to her mother. "There, mamma, when we have made you the dress Sir Kildene have brought you, you must wear this, for it is beautiful with the black. Then we will have a fête. And for the fête, Sir Kildene, you must wear the very fine new clothes you have buy, and Mr. 'Arry will carry on him the fine new clothing, and so will we be all attire most splendid. I will make for you all the music you like the best, and mamma will speak then the great poems she have learned by head, and Sir Kildene will tell the story he can relate so well of strange happenings. Oh, it will be a fine, good concert we will make here--and you, Mr. 'Arry, what will you do?"

"I'll do the refreshments. I'll roast corn and make coffee. I'll be audience and call for more."

"Ah, yes! Encore! Encore! The artists must always be very much praised--very much--so have I heard, to make them content. It is Sir Kildene who will be the great artist, and you must cry 'Encore,' and honor him greatly with such calls. Then will we have the pleasure to hear many stories from him. Ah, I like to hear them."

It was a strange life for Harry King, this odd mixture of finest culture and high-bred delicacy of manner, with what appeared to be a total absence of self-seeking and a simple enjoyment of everyday work. He found Amalia one morning on her knees scrubbing the cabin floor, and for the moment it shocked him. When they were out on the plains camping and living as best they could, he felt it to be the natural consequence of their necessities when he saw her washing their clothes and making the best of their difficulties by doing hard things with her own hands, but now that they were living in a civilized way, he could not bear to see her, or her mother, doing the rough work. Amalia only laughed at him. "See how fine we make all things. If I will not serve for making clean the house, why am I? Is not?"

"It doesn't make any difference what you do, you are always beautiful."

"Ah, Mr. 'Arry, you must say those compliments only in the French. It is no language, the English, for those fine eloquences."

"No, I don't seem to be able to say anything I mean, in French. It's always a sort of make-believe talk with me. Our whole life here seems a sort of dream,--as if we were living in some wonderful bubble that will suddenly burst one day, and leave us floating alone in space, with nothing anywhere to rest on."

"No, no, you are mistake. Here is this floor, very real, and dirt on it to be washed away,--from your boots, also very real, is not? Go away, Mr. 'Arry, but come to-night in your fine clothing, for we have our fête. Mamma has finish her beautiful new dress, and we will be gay. Is good to be sometimes joyful, is not? We have here no care, only to make happy together, and if we cannot do that, all is somber."

And that evening indeed, Amalia had her "fête." Larry told his best stories, and Harry was persuaded to tell them a little of his life as a soldier, and to sing a camp song. More than this he would not do, but he brought out something he had been reserving with pride, a few little nuggets of gold. During the weeks he had worked he had found little, until the last few days, but happening to strike a vein of ore, richer than any Larry had ever found, the two men were

greatly elated, and had determined to interest the women by melting some of it out of the quartz in which it was bedded, and turning out for each a golden bullet in Larry's mold.

They heaped hard wood in the fireplace and the cabin was lighted most gloriously. While they waited for the red coals to melt the gold, Amalia took her violin and played and sang. It was nearly time for the rigor of the winter to abate, but still a high wind was blowing, and the fine snow was piling and drifting about the cabin, and even sifting through the chinks around the window and door, but the storm only made the brightness and warmth within more delightful.

When Larry drew his crucible from the coals and poured the tiny glowing stream into his molds, Amalia cried out with joy. "How that is beautiful! How wonderful to dig such beauty from the dark ground down in the black earth! Ah, mamma, look!"

Then Larry pounded each one flat like a coin, and drilled through a small hole, making thus, for each, a souvenir of the shining metal. "This is from Harry's first mining," he said, "and it represents good, hard labor. He's picked out a lot of worthless dirt and stone to find this."

Amalia held the little disk in her hand and smiled upon it. "I love so this little precious thing. Now, Mr. 'Arry, what shall I play for you? It is yours to ask--for me, to play; it is all I have."

"That sonnet you played me yesterday. The last line is, "Quelle est donc cette femme?" et ne comprenda pas."

"The music of that is not my father's best--but you ask it, yes." Then she began, first playing after her own heart little dancing airs, gay and fantastic, and at last slid into a plaintive strain, and recited the accompaniment of rhythmic words.

"Mon âme a son secret, ma vie a son mystère:
Un amour éternel en un moment conçu.
Le mal est sans espoir, aussi j'ai du le taire
Et celle qui l'a fait n'en a jamais rien su."

One minor note came and went and came again, through the melody, until the last tones fell on that note and were held suspended in a tremulous plaint.

"Elle dira, lisant ces vers tout remplis d'elle:
'Quelle est donc cette femme?' et ne comprendra pas."

Without pause she passed into a quick staccato and then descended to long-drawn tones, deep and full. "This is better, but I have never played it for you because that it is Polish, and to make it in English and so sing it is hard. You have heard of our great and good general Kosciuszko, yes? My father loved well to speak of him and also of one very high officer under him,--I speak his name for you, Julian Niemcewicz. This high officer, I do not know how to say in English his rank, but that is no matter. He was writer, and poet, and soldier--all. At last he was exiled and sorrowful, like my father,--sorrowful most of all because he might no more serve his country. It is to this poet's own words which he wrote for his grave that my father have put in music the cry of his sorrow. In Polish is it more beautiful, but I sing it for you in English for your comprehending."

"O, ye exiles, who so long wander over the world,
Where will ye find a resting place for your weary steps?
The wild dove has its nest, and the worm a clod of earth,
Each man a country, but the Pole a grave!"

It was indeed a cry of sorrow, the wail of a dying nation, and as Amalia played and sang she became oblivious of all else a being inspired by lofty emotion, while the two men sat in silence, wondering and fascinated. The mother's eyes glowed upon her out of the obscurity of her corner, and her voice alone broke the silence.

"I have heard my Paul in the night of the desert where he made that music, I have heard him so play and sing it, that it would seem the stars must fall down out of the heavens with sorrow for it."

Amalia smiled and caught up her violin again. "We will have no more of this sad music this night. I will sing the wild song of the Ukraine, most beautiful of all our country, alas, ours no more--Like that other, the music is my father's, but the poem is written by a son of the Ukraine--Zaliski."

A melody clear and sweet dominated, mounting to a note of triumph. Slender and tall she stood in the middle of the room. The firelight played on the folds of her gown, bringing out its color in brilliant flashes. She seemed to Harry, with her rich complexion and glowing eyes, absorbed thus in her music, a type of human splendor, vigorous, vivid, adorable. Mostly in Polish, but sometimes in English, she again half sang, half chanted, now playing with the voice, and again dropping to accompaniment only, while they listened, the mother in the shadows, Larry gazing in the fire, and Harry upon her.

"Me also has my mother, the Ukraine,
Me her son
Cradled on her bosom,
The enchantress."

She ceased, and with a sigh dropped at her mother's feet and rested her head on her mother's knee.

"Tell us now, mamma, a poem. It is time we finish now our fête with one good, long poem from you."

"You will understand me?" Madam Manovska turned to Harry. "You do well understand what once you have heard--" She always spoke slowly and with difficulty when she undertook English, and now she continued speaking rapidly to Amalia in her own tongue, and her daughter explained.

"Mamma says she will tell you a poem composed by a great poet, French, who is now, for patriotism to his country, in exile. His name is Victor Hugo. You have surely heard of him? Yes. She says she will repeat this which she have by head, and because that it is not familiar to you she asks will I tell it in English--if you so desire?"

Again Madam Manovska addressed her daughter, and Amalia said: "She thinks this high mountain and the plain below, and that we are exile from our own land, makes her think of this; only that the conscience has never for her brought terror, like for Cain, but only to those who have so long persecuted my father with imprisonment, and drive him so far to terrible places. She thinks they must always, with never stopping, see the 'Eye' that regards forever. This also must Victor Hugo know well, since for his country he also is driven in exile--and can see the terrible 'Eye' go to punish his enemies."

Then Madam Manovska began repeating in her strong, deep tones the lines:--

*"Lorsque avec ses enfants vetus de peaux de bêtes,
Echevele, livide au milieu des tempêtes,
Cain se fut enfui de devant Jehovah,*

*"Comme le soir tombait, l'homme sombre arriva
Au bas d'une montagne en une grande plaine;
Sa femme fatiguée et ses fils hors d'haleine;
Lui dire: 'Couchons-nous sur la terre et dormons.'"*

"Oh, mamma, that is so sad, that poem,--but continue--I will make it in English so well as I can, and for the mistakes--errors--of my telling you will forgive?"

"This is the story of the terrible man, Cain, how he go with his children all in the skins of animals dressed. His hairs so wild, his face pale,--he runs in the midst of the storms to hide himself from God,--and, at last, in the night to the foot of a mountain on a great plain he arrive, and his wife and sons, with no breath and very tired, say to him, let us here on the earth lie down and sleep." Thus, as Madam Manovska recited, Amalia told the story in her own words, and Harry King listened rapt and tense to the very end, while the fire burned low and the shadows closed around them.

"But Cain did not sleep, lying there by the mountain, for he saw always in the far shadows the fearful Eye of the condemning power fixed with great sorrow upon him. Then he cried, 'I am too near!' and with trembling he awoke his children and his wife, and began to run furiously into space. So for thirty days and thirty nights he walked, always pale and silent, trembling, and never to see behind him, without rest or sleeping, until they came to the shore of a far country, named Assur.

"'Now rest we here, for we are come to the end of the world and are safe,' but, as he seated himself and looked, there in the same place on the far horizon he saw, in the sorrowful heavens, the Eye. Then Cain called on the darkness to hide him, and Jabal, his son, parent of those who live in tents, extended about him on that side the cloth of his tent, and Tsilla, the little daughter of his son, asked him, 'You see now nothing?' and Cain replied, 'I see the Eye, encore!'

"Then Jubal, his son, father of those who live in towns and blow upon clarions and strike upon tambours, cried, 'I will make one barrier, I will make one wall of bronze and put Cain behind it.' But even still, Cain said, 'The Eye regards me always!'

"Then Henoch said: 'I will make a place of towers so terrible that no one dare approach to him. Build we a city of citadels. Build we a city and there fasten--shut--close.'

"Then Tubal Cain, father of men who make of iron, constructed one city--enormous--superhuman; and while that he labored, his brothers in the plain drove far away the sons of Enos and the children of Seth, and put out the eyes of all who passed that way, and the night came when the walls of covering of tents were not, and in their place were walls of granite, every block immense, fastened with great nails of iron, and the city seemed a city of iron, and the shadow of its towers made night upon the plain, and about the city were walls more high than mountains, and when all was done, they graved upon the door, 'Defense a Dieu d'entrer,' and they put the old father Cain in a tower of stone in the midst of this city, and he sat there somber and haggard.

"'Oh, my father, the Eye has now disappeared?' asked the child, Tsilla, and Cain replied: 'No, it is always there! I will go and live under the earth, as in his sepulcher, a man alone. There nothing can see me more, and I no more can see anything.'

"Then made they for him one--cavern. And Cain said, 'This is well,' and he descended alone under this somber vault and sat upon a seat in the shadows, and when they had shut down the door of the cave, the Eye was there in the tombs regarding him."

Thus, seated at her mother's feet, Amalia rendered the poem as her mother recited, while the firelight played over her face and flashed in the silken folds of her dress. When she had finished,

the fire was low and the cabin almost in darkness. No one spoke. Larry still gazed in the dying embers, and Harry still sat with his eyes fixed on Amalia's face.

"Victor Hugo, he is a very great man, as my 'usband have say," said the mother at last.

"Ah, mamma. For Cain,--maybe,--yes, the Eye never closed, but now have man hope or why was the Christ and the Holy Virgin? It is the forgiving of God they bring--for--for love of the poor human,--and who is sorrowful for his wrong--he is forgive with peace in his heart, is not?"

CHAPTER XXV

HARRY KING LEAVES THE MOUNTAIN

When the two men bade Amalia and her mother good night and took their way to the fodder shed, the snow was whirling and drifting around the cabin, and the pathway was obliterated.

"This'll be the last storm of the year, I'm thinking," said Larry. But the younger man strode on without making a reply. He bent forward, leaning against the wind, and in silence trod a path for his friend through the drifted heaps. At the door of the shed he stood back to let Larry pass.

"I'll not go in yet. I'll tramp about in the snow a bit until--Don't sit up for me--" He turned swiftly away into the night, but Larry caught him by the arm and brought him back.

"Come in with me, lad; I'm lonely. We'll smoke together, then we'll sleep well enough."

Then Harry went in and built up the fire, throwing on logs until the shed was flooded with light and the bare rock wall seemed to leap forward in the brilliance, but he did not smoke; he paced restlessly about and at last crept into his bunk and lay with his face to the wall. Larry sat long before the fire. "It's the music that's got in my blood," he said. "Katherine could sing and lilt the Scotch airs like a bird. She had a touch for the instrument, too."

But Harry could not respond to his friend's attempted confidence in the rare mention of his wife's name. He lay staring at the rough stone wall close to his face, and it seemed to him that his future was bounded by a barrier as implacable and terrible as that. All through the night he heard the deep tones of Madam Manovska's voice, and the visions of the poem passed through his mind. He saw the strange old man, the murderer, Cain, seated in the tomb, bowed and remorseful, and in the darkness still the Eye. But side by side with this somber vision he saw the interior of the cabin, and Amalia, glowing and warm and splendid in her rich gown, with the red firelight playing over her, leaning toward him, her wonderful eyes fixed on his with a regard at once inscrutable and sympathetic. It was as if she were looking into his heart, but did not wish him to know that she saw so deeply.

Towards morning the snow clouds were swept from the sky, and a late moon shone out clear and cold upon a world carved crisply out of molten silver. Unable longer to bear that waking torture, Harry King rose and went out into the night, leaving his friend quietly sleeping. He stood a moment listening to Larry's long, calm breathing; then buttoning his coat warmly across his chest, he closed the shed door softly behind him and floundered off into the drifts, without heeding the direction he was taking, until he found himself on the brink of the chasm where the river, sliding smoothly over the rocks high above his head, was forever tumbling.

There he stood, trembling, but not with cold, nor with cowardice, nor with fatigue. Sanity had come upon him. He would do no untoward act to hurt the three people who would grieve for him. He would bear the hurt of forever loving in silence, and continue to wait for the open road that would lead him to prison and disgrace, or maybe a death of shame. He considered, as often before, all the arguments that continually fretted him and tore his spirit; and, as before, he knew the only course to follow was the hard one which took him back to Amalia, until spring and the melting of the snows released him--to live near her, to see her and hear her voice, even touch her hand, and feel his body grow tense and hard, suffering restraint. If only for one moment he might let himself go! If but once again he might touch her lips with his! Ah, God! If he might say one word of love--only once before leaving her forever!

Standing there looking out upon the world beneath him and above him bathed in the immaculate whiteness of the snow, and the moonlight over all, he perceived how small an atom in the universe is one lone man, yet how overwhelmingly great in his power to love. It seemed to him that his love overtopped the hills and swept to the very throne of God. He was exalted by it, and in this exaltation it was that he trembled. Would it lift him up to triumph over remorse and death?

He turned and plodded back the inevitable way. It was still night--cold and silver-white. He was filled with energy born of great renunciation and despair, and could only calm himself by work. If he could only work until he dropped, or fight with the elements, it would help him. He began clearing the snow from the ground around the cabin and cut the path through to the shed; then he quietly entered and found Larry still calmly sleeping as if but a moment had passed. Finally, he secured one of the torches and made his way through the tunnel to the place where Larry and he had found the quartz which they had smelted in the evening.

There he fastened the torch securely in a crevice, and began to swing his pick and batter recklessly at the overhanging ledge. Never had he worked so furiously, and the earth and stone lay all about him and heaped at his feet. Deeper and deeper he fought and cut into the solid wall, until, grimed with sweat and dirt, he sank exhausted upon the pile of quartz he had loosened. Then he shoveled it to one side and began again dealing erratic blows with his spent strength, until the ledge hung dangerously over him. As it was, he reeled and swayed and struck again, and staggered back to gather strength for another blow, leaning on his pick, and this saved him from death; for, during the instant's pause, the whole mass fell crashing in front of him, and he went down with it, stunned and bleeding, but not crushed.

Larry Kildene breakfasted and worked about the cabin and the shed half the day before he began to wonder at the young man's absence. He fell to grumbling that Harry had not fed and groomed his horse, and did the work himself. Noon came, and Amalia looked in his face anxiously as he entered and Harry not with him.

"How is it that Mr. 'Arry have not arrive all this day?"

"Oh, he's mooning somewhere. Off on a tramp I suppose."

"Has he then his gun? No?"

"No, but he's been about. He cleared away all the snow, and I saw he had been over to the fall." Amalia turned pale as the shrewd old man's eyes rested on her. "He came back early, though, for I saw footprints both ways."

"I hope he comes soon, for we have the good soup to-day, of the kind Mr. 'Arry so well likes."

But he did not come soon, and it was with much misgiving that Larry set out to search for him. Finding no trails leading anywhere except the twice trodden one to the fall, he naturally turned into the mine and followed along the path, torch in hand, hallooing jovially as he went, but his voice only returned to him, reverberating hollowly. Then, remembering the ledge where they had last worked, and how he had meant to put in props before cutting away any more, he ran forward, certain of calamity, and found his young friend lying where he had fallen, the blood still oozing from a cut above the temple, where it had clotted.

For a moment Larry stood aghast, thinking him dead, but quickly seeing the fresh blood, he lifted the limp body and bound up the wound, and then Harry opened his eyes and smiled in Larry's face. The big man in his joy could do nothing but storm and scold.

"Didn't I tell ye to do no more here until we'd the props in? I'm thinking you're a fool, and that's what you are. If I didn't tell ye we needed them here, you could have seen it for yourself--and here you've cut away all underneath. What did you do it for? I say!" Tenderly he gathered Harry in his arms and lifted him from the débris and loosened rock. "Now! Are you hurt anywhere else? Don't try to stand. Bear on me. I say, bear on me."

"Oh, put me down and let me walk. I'm not hurt. Just a cut. How long have you been here?"

"Walk! I say! Yes, walk! Put your arm here, across my shoulder, so. You can walk as well as a week-old baby. You've lost blood enough to kill a man." So Larry carried him in spite of himself, and laid him in his bunk. There he stood, panting, and looking down on him. "You're heavier by a few pounds than when I toted you down that trail last fall."

"This is all foolishness. I could have made it myself--on foot," said Harry, ungratefully, but he smiled up in the older man's face a compensating smile.

"Oh, yes. You can lie there and grin now. And you'll continue to lie there until I let you up. It's no more lessons with Amalia and no more violin and poetry for you, for one while, young man."

"Thank God. It will help me over the time until the trail is open." Larry stood staring foolishly on the drawn face and quivering, sensitive lips.

"You're hungry, that's what you are," he said conclusively.

"Guess I am. I'm wretchedly sorry to make you all this trouble, but--she mustn't come in here--you'll bring me a bite to eat--yes, I'm hungry. That's what ails me." He drew a grimy hand across his eyes and felt the bandage. "Why--you've done me up! I must have had quite a cut."

"I'll wash your face and get your coat off, and your boots, and make you fit to look at, and then--"

"I don't want to see her--or her mother--either. I'm just--I'm a bit faint--I'll eat if--you'll fetch me a bite."

Quickly Larry removed his outer clothing and mended the fire and then left him carefully wrapped in blankets and settled in his bunk. When he returned, he found him light-headed and moaning and talking incoherently. Only a few words could he understand, and these remained in his memory.

"When I'm dead--when I'm dead, I say." And then, "Not yet. I can't tell him yet.--I can't tell him the truth. It's too cruel." And again the refrain: "When I'm dead--when I'm dead." But when Larry bent over him and spoke, Harry looked sanely in his eyes and smiled again.

"Ah, that's good," he said, sipping the soup. "I'll be myself again to-morrow, and save you all this trouble. You know I must have accomplished a good deal, to break off that ledge, and the gold fairly leaped out on me as I worked."

"Did you see it?"

"No, but I knew it--I felt it. Shake my clothes and see if they aren't full of it."

"Was that what put you in such a frenzy and made a fool of you?"

"Yes--no--no. It--it--wasn't that."

"You know you were a fool, don't you?"

"If telling me of it makes me know it--yes."

"Eat a little more. Here are beans and venison. You must eat to make up the loss. Why, man, I found you in a pool of blood."

"Oh, I'll make it up. I'll make it up all too soon. I'm not to die so easily."

"You'll not make it up as soon as you think, young man. You may lose a quart of blood in a minute, but it takes weeks to get it again," and Harry King found his friend was right.

That was the last snow of winter, as Larry had predicted, and when Harry crawled out in the sun, the earth smelled of spring, and the waterfall thundered in its downward plunge, augmented by the melting snows of the still higher mountains. The noise of it was ever in their ears, and the sound seemed fraught with a buoyant impulse and inspiration--the whirl and rush of a tremendous force, giving a sense of superhuman power. Even after he was really able to walk about and help himself, Harry would not allow himself to see Amalia. He forbade Larry to tell them how much he was improved, and still taxed his friend to bring him up his meals, and sit by him, telling him the tales of his life.

"I'll wait on you here no longer, boy," said Larry, at last. "What in life are you hiding in this shed for? The women think it strange of you--the mother does, anyway--you may never quite know what her daughter thinks unless she wishes you to know, but I'm sure she thinks strange of you. She ought to."

"I know. I'm perfectly well and strong. The trail's open now, and I'll go--I'll go back--where I came from. You've been good to me--I can't say any more--now."

"Smoke a pipe, lad, smoke a pipe."

Harry took a pipe and laughed. "You're better than any pipe, but I'll smoke it, and I'll go down, yes, I must, and bid them good-by."

"And will you have nothing to tell me, lad, before you go?"

"Not yet. After I've made my peace with the world--with the law--I'll have a letter sent you--telling all I know. You'll forgive me. You see, when I look back--I wish to see your face--as I see it now--not--not changed towards me."

"My face is not one to change toward you--you who have repented whatever you've done that's wrong."

That evening Harry King went down to the cabin and sat with his three friends and ate with them, and told them he was to depart on the morrow. They chatted and laughed and put restraint away from them, and all walked together to watch the sunset from a crag above the cabin. As they returned Madam Manovska walked at Harry's side, and as she bade him good night she said in her broken English:--

"You think not to return--no? But I say to you--in my soul I know it--yet will you return--we no more to be here--perhaps--but you--yes. You will return."

They stood a moment before the cabin, and the firelight streamed through the open door and fell on Amalia's face. Harry took the mother's hand as he parted from them, but he looked in Amalia's eyes.

In the morning he appeared with his kit strapped on his back equipped for walking. The women protested that he should not go thus, but he said he could not take Goldbug and leave him below. "He is yours, Amalia. Don't beat him. He's a good horse--he saved my life--or tried to."

"You know well it is my custom to beat animals. It is better you take him, or I beat him severely."

"I know it. But you see, I can't take him. Ride him for me, and--don't let him forget me. Good-by!"

He waved his hand and walked lightly away, and all stood in the doorway watching him. At the top of a slight rise he turned again and waved his hand, and was lost to their sight. Then Larry went back to the shed and sat by the fire and smoked a lonely pipe, and the mother began busily to weave at her lace in the cabin, closing the door, for the morning air was chilly, and Amalia--for a moment she stood at the cabin door, her hand pressed to her heart, her head bowed as if in despair. Then she entered the cabin, caught up her silken shawl, and went out.

Throwing the shawl over her head she ran along the trail Harry had taken, until she was out of breath, then she paused, and looked back, hesitating, quivering. Should she go on? Should she return?

"I will go but a little--little way. Maybe he stops a moment, if only to--to--think a little," and she went on, hurrying, then moving more slowly. She thought she might at least catch one more fleeting glimpse of him as he turned the bend in the trail, but she did not. "Ah, he is so quickly gone!" she sighed, but still walked on.

Yes, so quickly gone, but he had stopped as she thought, to think a little, beyond the bend, there

where he had waited the long night in the snow for Larry Kildene, there where he had sat like Elijah of old, despairing, under the juniper tree. He felt weary and old and worn. He thought his youth had gone from him forever, but what matter? What was youth without hope? Youth, love, life, all were to be relinquished. He closed his eyes to the wonder of the hills and the beauty before him, yet he knew they were there with their marvelous appeal, and he sat with bowed head.

"'Arry! 'Arry King!" He raised his head, and there before him were all that he had relinquished--youth, love, life.

He ran and caught her to him, as one who is drowning catches at life.

"You have leave me so coldly, 'Arry King." He pressed her cheek to his. "You did not even speak to me a little." He kissed her lips. "You have break my heart." He held her closer to his own. "Why have you been so cold--like--like the ice--to leave me so hard--like--like--"

"To save you from just this, Amalia. To save you from the touch of my hand--this is the crime I have fought against."

"No. To love is not crime."

"To dare to love--with the curse on my head that I feel as Cain felt it--is crime. In the Eye he saw it always--as I--I--see it. To touch you--it is like bringing the crime and curse on you, and through your beautiful love making you suffer for it. See, Amalia? It was all I could do to go out of your life and say nothing." His voice trembled and his hand quivered as it rested on her hair. "I sat here to fight it. My heart--my heart that I have not yet learned to conquer--was pulling me back to you. I was faint and old. I could walk no farther until the fight was won. Oh, Amalia--Amalia! Leave me alone, with the curse on my head! It is not yours."

"No, and it is not yours. You have repent. I do not believe that poem my mother is thinking so great. It is the terror of the ancient ones, but to-day, no more. Take this. It is for you I bring it. I have wear it always on my bosom, wear it now on yours."

She quickly unclasped from her neck a threadlike chain of gold, and drew from her bosom a small ivory crucifix, to which it was attached. Reaching up, she clasped it around his neck, and thrust the cross in his bosom. Then, thinking he meant to protest, she seized his hands and held them, and her words came with the impetuous rush of her thoughts.

"No charm will help, Amalia. I killed my friend."

"Ah, no, 'Arry King! Take this of me. It is not as you think for one charm I give it. No. It is for the love of Christ--that you remember and think of it. For that I wear it. For that I give it to you. If you have repent, and have the Christ in your heart, so are you high--lifted above the sin, and if they take you--if they put the iron on your hands--Ah, I know, it is there you go to give yourself up,--if they keep you forever in the prison, still forever are you free. If they put you to the death to be satisfied of the law, then quickly are you alive in Paradise with Christ. Listen, it is for the love that you give yourself up--for the sorrowfulness in your heart that you have killed your friend? Is not? Yes. So is good. See. Look to the hills, the high mountains, all far around us? They are beautiful. They are yours. God gives you. And the sky--so clear--and the bright sun and the spring life and the singing of the birds? All are yours--God gives. And the love in your heart--for me? God gives, yes, and for the one you have hurt? Yes. God gives it. And for the Christ who so loves you? Yes. So is the love the great life of God in you. It is yours. Listen. Go with the love in your heart--for me,--it will not hurt. It will be sweet to me. I carry no curse for you, as you say. It is gone. If I see you again in this world--as may be--is joy--great joy. If I see you no more here, yet in Paradise I will see you, and there also it will be joy, for it is the love that is all of life, and all of eternity, and lives--lives!"

Again he held her to his heart in a long embrace, and, when at last he walked down the trail into the desert, he still felt her tears on his cheek, her kisses on his lips, and her heart against his own.

BOOK THREE

CHAPTER XXVI

THE LITTLE SCHOOL-TEACHER

On a warm day in May, a day which opens the crab-apple blossoms and sets the bees humming, and the children longing for a chance to pull off shoes and stockings and go wading in the brook; on such a day the door of the little schoolhouse stood open and the sunlight lay in a long patch across the floor toward the "teacher's desk," and the breeze came in and tossed a stray curl about her forehead, and the children turned their heads often to look at the round clock on the wall, watching for the slowly moving hands to point to the hour of four.

It was a mixed school. Children of all ages were there, from naughty little Johnnie Cole of five to Mary Burt and Hilton Le Moynes of seventeen and nineteen, who were in algebra and the sixth reader. It was well known by the rest of the children why Hilton Le Moynes lingered in the school this year all through May and June, instead of leaving in April, as usual, to help his uncle on the farm. It was "Teacher." He was in love with her, and always waited after school, hoping for a chance to walk home with her.

Poor boy! Black haired, red cheeked, and big hearted, he knew his love was hopeless, for he was younger than she--not so much; but there was Tom Howard who was also in love with her, and he had a span of sorrel horses which he had raised and broken himself, and they were his own, and he could come at any time--when she would let him--and take her out riding.

Ah, that was something to aspire to! Such a team as that, and "Teacher" to sit by his side and drive out with him, all in her pretty flat hat with a pink rose on it and green ribbons flying, and her green parasol over her head--sitting so easily--just leaning forward a bit and turning and laughing at what he was saying, and all the town seeing her with him, and his harness shining and new, making the team look as splendid as the best livery in town, and his buggy all painted so bright and new--well! The time would come when he too would have such an outfit. It would. And Teacher would see that Tom Howard was not the only one who could drive up after her in such style.

Little Teacher was tired to-day. The children had been restless and noisy, and her heart had been heavy with a great disappointment. She had been carefully saving her small salary that she might go when school closed and take a course at the "Art Institute" in "Technique." For a long time she had clung to the idea that she would become an illustrator, and a great man had told her father that "with a little instruction in technique" his daughter had "a fortune at the tips of her fingers." Only technique! Yes, if she could get it!

Father could help her, of course, only father was a painter in oils and not an illustrator--and then--he was so driven, always, and father and mother both thought it would be best for her to take the course of study recommended by the great man. So it was decided, for there was Martha married and settled in her home not far away from the Institute, and Teacher could live with her and study. Ah, the long-coveted chance almost within her reach! Then--one difficulty after another intervened, beginning with a great fire in the fall which swept away Martha's home and all they had accumulated, together with her husband's school, rendering it necessary for the young couple to go back to Leavite for the winter.

"Never mind, Betty, dear," Martha had encouraged her. "We'll return in the spring and start again, and you can take the course just the same."

But now a general financial stringency prevailed all over the country. "It always seems, when there's a 'financial stringency,' that portraits and paintings are the things people economize on first of all," said Betty.

"Naturally," said Mary Ballard. "When people need food and clothing--they want them, and not pictures. We'll just have to wait, dear."

"Yes, we'll have to wait, Mary." Saucy Betty had a way of calling her mother "Mary." "Your dress is shabby, and you need a new bonnet; I noticed it in church,--you'd never speak of that, though. You'd wear your winter's bonnet all summer."

Yes, Betty must see to it, even if it took every bit of the fund, that mother and Janey were suitably dressed. "Never mind, Mary, I'll catch up some day. You needn't look sorry. I'm all right about my own clothes, for Martha gave me a rose for my hat, and the new ribbons make it so pretty,--and my green parasol is as good as new for all I've had it three years, and--"

Betty stopped abruptly. Three years!--was it so long since that parasol was new--and she was so happy--and Richard came home--? The family were seated on the piazza as they were wont to be in the evening, and Betty walked quietly into the house, and up to her room.

Bertrand Ballard sighed, and his wife reached out and took his hand in hers. "She's never been

the same since," he said.

"Her character has deepened and she's fine and sweet--"

"Yes, yes. I have three hundred dollars owing me for the Delong portrait. If I had it, she should have her course. I'll make another effort to collect it."

"I would, Bertrand."

Julien Thurbyfil and his wife walked down the flower-bordered path side by side to the gate and stood leaning over it in silence. Practical Martha was the first to break it.

"There will be just as much need for preparatory schools now as there was before the fire, Julien."

"Yes, dear, yes."

"And, meanwhile, we are glad of this sweet haven to come to, aren't we? And it won't be long before things are so you can begin again."

"Yes, dear, and then we'll make it up to Betty, won't we?"

But Julien was distraught and somber, in spite of brave words. He had not inherited Mary Ballard's way of looking at things, nor his father-in-law's buoyancy.

All that night Betty lay wakeful and thinking--thinking as she had many, many a time during the last three years, trying to make plans whereby she might adjust her thoughts to a life of loneliness, as she had decided in her romantic heart was all she would take. How could there be anything else for her since that terrible night when Richard had come to her and confessed his guilt--his love and his renunciation! Was she not sharing it all with him wherever he might be, and whatever he was doing? Oh, where was he? Did he ever think of her and know she was always thinking of him? Did he know she prayed for him, and was the thought a comfort to him? Surely Peter was the happier of the two, for he was not a sorrowing criminal, wandering the earth, hiding and repenting. So all her thoughts went out to Richard, and no wonder she was a weary little wight at the end of the school day.

Four o'clock, and the children went hurrying away, all but Hilton Le Moyne, who lingered awhile at his desk, and then reluctantly departed, seeing Teacher did not look up from her papers except to give him a nod and a fugitive little smile of absent-minded courtesy. Left thus alone, Betty lifted the lid of her desk and put away the school register and the carefully marked papers to be given out the next day, and took from a small portfolio a packet of closely written sheets. These she untied and looked over, tossing them rapidly aside one after another until she found the one for which she searched.

It was a short poem, hastily written with lead pencil, and much crumpled and worn, as if it had been carried about. Now she straightened the torn edges and smoothed it out and began scanning the lines, counting off on her fingers the rhythmic beats; she copied the verses carefully on a fresh white sheet of paper and laid them aside; then, shoving the whole heap of written papers from her, she selected another fresh sheet and began anew, writing and scanning and writing again.

Steadily she worked while an hour slipped by. A great bumblebee flew in at one window and boomed past her head and out at the other window, and a bluebird perched for an instant on the window ledge and was off again. She saw the bee and the bird and paused awhile, gazing with dreamy eyes through the high, uncurtained window at drifting clouds already taking on the tint of the declining sun; then she stretched her arms across her wide desk, and putting her head down on them, was soon fast asleep. Tired little Teacher!

The breeze freshened and tumbled her hair and fanned her flushed cheek, and it did more than that; for, as the drifting clouds betokened, the weather was changing, and now a gust of wind caught at her papers and took some of them out of the window, tossing and whirling them hither and thither. Some were carried along the wayside and lost utterly. One fluttered high over the tree tops and out across the meadow, and then suddenly ceased its flight and drifted slowly down like a dried leaf, past the face of a young man who sat on a stone, moodily gazing in the meadow brook. He reached out a long arm and caught it as it fluttered by, just in time to save it from annihilation in the water.

For a moment he held the scrap of paper absently between his fingers, then glancing down at it he spied faintly written, half-obliterated verses and read them; then, with awakened interest, he read them again, smoothing the torn bit of paper out on his knee. The place where he sat was well screened from the road by a huge basswood tree, which spread great limbs quite across the stream, and swept both its banks with drooping branches and broad leaves. Now he held the scrap on his open palm and studied it closely and thoughtfully. It was the worn piece from which Betty had copied the verses.

"Oh, send me a thought on the winds that blow.
On the wing of a bird send a thought to me;
For the way is so long that I may not know,
And there are no paths on the troubled sea.

"Out of the darkness I saw you go,--
Into the shadows where sorrows be,--
Wounded and bleeding, and sad and slow,--
Into the darkness away from me.

"Out of my life and into the night,
But never out of my heart, my own.
Into the darkness out of the light,
Bleeding and wounded, and walking alone."

Here the words were quite erased and scratched over, and the pathetic bit of paper looked as if it had been tear-stained. Carefully and smoothly he laid it in his long bill book. The book was large and plethoric with bank notes, and there beside them lay the little scrap of paper, worn and soiled, yet tear washed, and as the young man touched it tenderly he smiled and thought that in it was a wealth of something no bank note could buy. With a touch of sentiment unsuspected by himself, he felt it too sacred a thing to be touched by them, and he smoothed it again and laid it in a compartment by itself.

Then he rose, and sauntered across the meadow to the country road, and down it past the schoolhouse standing on its own small rise of ground with the door still wide open, and its shadow, cast by the rays of the now setting sun stretched long across the playground. The young man passed it, paused, turned back, and entered. There at her desk Betty still slept, and as he stepped softly forward and looked down on her she stirred slightly and drew a long breath, but slept on.

For a moment his heart ceased to beat, then it throbbed suffocatingly and his hand went to his breast and clutched the bill book where lay the tender little poem. There at her elbow lay the copy she had so carefully made. The air of the room was warm and drowsy, and the stillness was only broken by the low buzzing of two great bluebottle flies that struggled futilely against the high window panes. Dear little tired Betty! Dreaming,--of whom? The breath came through her parted lips, softly and evenly, and the last ray of the sun fell on her flushed cheek and brought out the touch of gold in her hair.

The young man turned away and crossed the bare floor with light steps and drew the door softly shut after him as he went out. No one might look upon her as she slept, with less reverent eyes. Some distance away, where the road began to ascend toward the river bluff, he seated himself on a stone overlooking the little schoolhouse and the road beyond. There he took up his lonely watch, until he saw Betty come out and walk hurriedly toward the village, carrying a book and swinging her hat by the long ribbon ties; then he went on climbing the winding path to the top of the bluff overlooking the river.

Moodily he paced up and down along the edge of the bluff, and finally followed a zigzag path to the great rocks below, that at this point seemed to have hurled themselves down there to do battle with the eager, dominating flood. For a while he stood gazing into the rushing water, not as though he were fascinated by it, but rather as if he were held to the spot by some inward vision. Presently he seemed to wake with a start and looked back along the narrow, steep path, and up to the overhanging edge of the bluff, scanning it closely.

"Yes, yes. There is the notch where it lay, and this may be the very stone on which I am standing. What an easy thing to fall over there and meet death halfway!" He muttered the words under his breath and began slowly to climb the difficult ascent.

The sun was gone, and down by the water a cold, damp current of air seemed to sweep around the curve of the bluff along with the rush of the river. As he climbed he came to a warmer wave of air, and the dusk closed softly around him, as if nature were casting a friendly curtain over the drowsing earth; and the roar of the river came up to him, no longer angrily, but in a ceaseless, subdued complaint.

Again he paced the top of the bluff, and at last seated himself with his feet hanging over the edge, at the spot from which the stone had fallen. The trees on this wind-swept place were mostly gnarled oaks, old and strong and rugged, standing like a band of weather-beaten life guardsmen overlooking the miles of country around. Not twenty paces from where the young man sat, half reclining on his elbow, stood one of these oaks, and close to its great trunk on its shadowed side a man bent forward intently watching him. Whenever the young man shifted his position restlessly, the figure made a darting movement forward as if to snatch him from the dangerous brink, then recoiled and continued to watch.

Soon the young man seemed to be aware of the presence and watchful eye, and looked behind him, peering into the dusk. Then the man left his place and came toward him, with slow, sauntering step.

"Hullo!" he said, with an insinuating, rising inflection and in the soft voice of the Scandinavian.

"Hallo!" replied the young man.

"Seek?"

"Sick? No." The young man laughed slightly. "What are you doing here?"

"Oh, I just make it leetle valk up here."

"Same with me, and now I'll make it a little walk back to town." The young man rose and stretched himself and turned his steps slowly back along the winding path.

"Vell, I tank I make it leetle valk down town, too," and the figure came sauntering along at the young man's side.

"Oh, you're going my way, are you? All right."

"Yas, I tank I going yust de sam your way."

The young man set the pace more rapidly, and for a time they walked on in silence. At last, "Live here?" he asked.

"Yas, I lif here."

"Been here long?"

"In America? Yes. I guess five--sax--year. Oh, I lak it goot."

"I mean here, in this place."

"Oh, here? Yas, two, t'ree year. I lak it goot too."

"Know any one here?"

"Oh, yas. I know people I vork by yet."

"Who are they?"

"Oh, I vork by many place--make garten--und vork wit' horses, und so. Meesus Craikmile, I vork by her on garten. She iss dere no more."

The young man paused suddenly in his stride. "Gone? Where is she gone?"

"Oh, she iss by ol' country gone. Her man iss gone mit." They walked on.

"What! Is the Elder gone, too?"

"Yas. You know heem, yas?"

"Oh, yes. I know everybody here. I've been away for a good while."

"So? Yas, yust lak me. I was gone too goot wile, bot I coom back too, yust lak you."

Here they came to a turn in the road, and the village lights began to wink out through the darkness, and their ways parted.

"I'm going this way," said the young man. "You turn off here? Well, good night."

"Vell, goot night." The Swede sauntered away down a by-path, and the young man kept on the main road to the village and entered its one hotel where he had engaged a room a few hours before.

CHAPTER XXVII

THE SWEDE'S TELEGRAM

As soon as the shadows hid the young man's retreating form from the Swede's watchful eye, that individual quickened his pace and presently broke into a run. Circling round a few blocks and regaining the main street a little below the hotel, he entered the telegraph office. There his haste seemed to leave him. He stood watching the clerk a few minutes, but the latter paid no attention to him.

"Hullo!" he said at last.

"Hallo, yourself!" said the boy, without looking up or taking his hand from the steadily clicking instrument.

"Say, I lak it you send me somet'ing by telegraph."

"All right. Hold on a minute," and the instrument clicked on.

After a little the Swede grew impatient. He scratched his pale gold head and shuffled his feet.

"Say, I lak it you send me a little somet'ing yet." He reached out and touched the boy on the shoulder.

"Keep out of here. I'll send your message when I'm through with this," and the instrument clicked on. Then the Swede resigned himself, watching sullenly.

"Everybody has to take his turn," said the boy at last. "You can't cut in like that." The boy was newly promoted and felt his importance. He took the soiled scrap of paper held out to him. It was written over in a clear, bold hand. "This isn't signed. Who sends this?"

"You make it yust lak it iss. I send dot."

"Well, sign it." He pushed a pen toward him, and the Swede took it in clumsy fingers and wrote laboriously, "Nels Nelson."

"You didn't write this message?"

"No. I vork by de hotel, und I get a man write it."

"It isn't dated. Been carrying it around in your pocket a good while I guess. Better date it."

"Date it?"

"Yes. Put down the time you send, you know."

"Oh, dat's not'ing. He know putty goot when he get it."

"Very well. 'To Mr. John Thomas,--State Street, Chicago. Job's ready. Come along.' Who's job is it? Yours?"

"No. It's hees yob yet. You mak it go to-night, all right. Goot night. I pay it now, yas. Vell, goot night."

He paid the boy and slipped out into the shadows of the street, and again making the detour so that he came to the hotel from the rear, he passed the stables, and before climbing to his cupboard of a room at the top of the building, he stepped round to the side and looked in at the dining room windows, and there he saw the young man seated at supper.

"All right," he said softly.

The omnibus sent regularly by the hotel management brought only one passenger from the early train next day. Times had been dull of late and travel had greatly fallen off, as the proprietor complained. There was nothing unusual about this passenger,--the ordinary traveling man, representing a well-known New York dry-goods house.

Nels Nelson drove the omnibus. He had done so ever since Elder Craigmile went to Scotland with his wife. The young man he had found on the river bluff was pacing the hotel veranda as he drove up, and Nels Nelson glanced at him, and into the eyes of the traveling man, as he handed down the latter's heavy valise.

Standing at the desk, the newcomer chatted with the clerk as he wrote his name under that of the last arrival the day before.

"Harry King," he read. "Came yesterday. Many stopping here now? Times hard! I guess so! Nothing doing in my line. Nobody wants a thing. Guess I'll leave the road and 'go west, young man,' as old Greeley advises. What line is King in? Do' know? Is that him going into the dining room? Guess I'll follow and fill up. Anything good to eat here?"

In the dining room he indicated to the waiter by a nod of his head the seat opposite Harry King, and immediately entered into a free and easy conversation, giving him a history of his disappointments in the way of trade, and reiterating his determination to "go west, young man."

He hardly glanced at Harry, but ate rapidly, stowing away all within reach, until the meal was half through, then he looked up and asked abruptly, "What line are you in, may I ask?"

"Certainly you may ask, but I can't tell you. I would be glad to do so if I knew myself."

"Ever think of going west?"

"I've just come from there--or almost there--wherever it is."

"Stiles is my name--G. B. Stiles. Good name for a dry-goods salesman, don't you think so? I know the styles all right, for men, and women too. Like it out west?"

"Yes. Very well."

"Been there long?"

"Oh, two or three years."

"Had enough of it, likely?"

"Well, I can scarcely say that."

"Mean to stay east now?"

"I may. I'm not settled yet."

"Better take up my line. If I drop out, there'll be an opening with my firm--good firm, too. Ward, Williams & Co., New York. Been in New York, I suppose?"

"No, never."

"Well, better try it. I mean to 'go west, young man.' Know anybody here? Ever live here?"

"Yes, when I was a boy."

"Come back to the boyhood home. We all do that, you know. There's poetry in it--all do it. 'Old oaken bucket' and all that sort of thing. I mean to do it myself yet,--back to old York state." G. B. Stiles wiped his mouth vigorously and shoved back his chair. "Well, see you again, I hope," he said, and walked off, picking his teeth with a quill pick which he took from his vest pocket.

He walked slowly and meditatively through the office and out on the sidewalk. Here he paused and glanced about, and seeing his companion of the breakfast table was not in sight, he took his way around to the stables. Nels Nelson was stooping in the stable yard, washing a horse's legs. G. B. Stiles came and stood near, looking down on him, and Nels straightened up and stood waiting, with the dripping rags in his hand.

"Vell, I tol' you he coomin' back sometime. I waiting long time all ready, but yust lak I tol' you, he coom."

"I thought I told you not to sign that telegram. But it's no matter,--didn't do any harm, I guess."

"Dot vas a fool, dot boy dere. He ask all tam, 'Vot for? Who write dis? You not? Eh? Who sen' dis?' He make me put my name dere; den I get out putty quvick or he ask yet vat iss it for a yob you got somebody, eh?"

"Oh, well, we've got him now, and he don't seem to care to keep under cover, either." G. B. Stiles seemed to address himself. "Too smart to show a sign. See here, Nelson, are you ready to swear that he's the man? Are you ready to swear to all you told me?"

"It is better you gif me a paper once, vit your name, dot you gif me half dot money."

Nels Nelson stooped deliberately and went on washing the horse's legs. A look of irritation swept over the placid face of G. B. Stiles, and he slipped the toothpick back in his vest pocket and walked away.

"I say," called the Swede after him. "You gif me dot paper. Eh?"

"I can't stand talking to you here. You'll promise to swear to all you told me when I was here the first time. If you do that, you are sure of the money, and if you change it in the least, or show the least sign of backing down, we neither of us get it. Understand?"

Again the Swede arose, and stood looking at him sullenly. "It iss ten t'ousand tallers, und I get it half, eh?"

"Oh, you go to thunder!" The proprietor of the hotel came around the corner of the stable, and G. B. Stiles addressed himself to him. "I'd like the use of a horse to-day, and your man here, if I can get him. I've got to make a trip to Rigg's Corners to sell some dry goods. Got a good buggy?"

"Yes, and a horse you can drive yourself, if you like. Be gone all day?"

"No, don't want to fool with a horse--may want to stay and send the horse back--if I find a place where the grub is better than it is here. See?"

"You'll be back after one meal at any place within a hundred miles of here." The proprietor laughed.

"Might as well drive yourself. You won't want to send the horse back. I'm short of drivers just now. Times are bad and travel light, so I let one go."

"I'll take the Swede there."

"He's my station hand. Maybe Jake can drive you. Nels, where's Jake?"

"He's dere in the stable. Shake!" he shouted, without glancing up, and Jake slouched out into the yard.

"Jake, here's a gentleman wants you to drive him out into the country,--"

"I'll take the Swede. Jake can drive your station wagon for once."

G. B. Stiles laughed good-humoredly and returned to the piazza and sat tilted back with his feet on the rail not far from Harry King, who was intently reading the *New York Tribune*. For a while he eyed the young man covertly, then dropped his feet to the floor and turned upon him with a question on the political situation, and deliberately engaged him in conversation, which Harry King entered into courteously yet reluctantly. Evidently he was preoccupied with affairs of his own.

In the stable yard a discussion was going on. "Dot horse no goot in buggy. Better you sell heem any vay. He yoomp by de cars all tam, und he no goot by buggy."

"Well, you've got to take him by the buggy, if he is no good. I won't let Jake drive him around the trains, and he won't let Jake go with him out to Rigg's Corners, so you'll have to take the gray and the buggy and go." The Swede began a sullen protest, but the proprietor shouted back to him, "You'll do this or leave," and walked in.

Nels went then into the stable, smiling quietly. He was well satisfied with the arrangement. "Shake, you put dot big horse by de buggy. No. Tak' d'oder bridle. I don't drive heem mit ol' bridle; he yoomp too quvick yet. All tam youmping, dot horse."

Presently Nels drove round to the front of the hotel with the gray horse and a high-top buggy. Harry King regarded him closely as he passed, but Nels looked straight ahead. A boy came out carrying Stiles' heavy valise.

"Put that in behind here," said Stiles, as he climbed in and seated himself at Nels Nelson's side. The gray leaped forward on the instant with so sudden a jump that he caught at his hat and missed it. Harry King stepped down and picked it up.

"What ails your horse?" he asked, as he restored it to its owner.

"Oh, not'in'. He lak yoomp a little." And again the horse leaped forward, taking them off at a frantic pace, the high-topped buggy atilt as they turned the corner of the street into the country road. Harry King returned to his seat. Surely it was the Scandinavian who had walked down from the bluff with him the evening before. There was no mistaking that soft, drawling voice.

"See here! You pull your beast down, I want to talk with you. Hi! There goes my hat again. Can't you control him better than that? Let me out." Nels pulled the animal down with a powerful arm, and he stood quietly enough while G. B. Stiles climbed down and walked back for his hat. "Look here! Can you manage the beast, or can't you?" he asked as he stood beside the vehicle and wiped the dust from his soft black felt with his sleeve. "If you can't, I'll walk."

"Oh, yas, I feex heem. I leek heem goot ven ve coom to place nobody see me."

"I guess that's what ails him now. You've done that before."

"Yas, bot if you no lak I leek heem, ust you yoomp in und I lat heem run goot for two, t'ree mile. Dot feex heem all right."

"I don't know about that. Sure you can hold him?"

"Yas, I hol' heem so goot he break hee's yaw off, if he don't stop ven I tol' heem. Now, quvick. Whoa! Yoomp in."

G. B. Stiles scrambled in with unusual agility for him, and again they were off, the gray taking them along with leaps and bounds, but the road was smooth, and the dust laid by frequent showers was like velvet under the horse's feet. Stiles drew himself up, clinging to the side of the buggy and to his hat.

"How long will he keep this up?" he asked.

"Oh, he stop putty quvick. He lak it leetle run. T'ree, four mile he run--das all." And the Swede was right. After a while the horse settled down to a long, swinging trot. "Look at heem now. I make heem go all tam lak dis. Ven I get my money I haf stable of my own und den I buy heem. I know heem. I all tam tol' Meester Decker dot horse no goot--I buy heem sheep. You go'n gif me dot money, eh?"

"I see. You're sharp, but you're asking too much. If it were not for me, you wouldn't get a cent, or me either. See? I've spent a thousand hunting that man up, and you haven't spent a cent. All you've done is to stick here at the hotel and watch. I've been all over the country. Even went to Europe and down in Mexico--everywhere. You haven't really earned a cent of it."

"Vat for you goin' all offer de vorld? Vat you got by dot? Spen' money--dot vot you got. Me, I stay here. I fin' heem; you not got heem all offer de vorld. I tol' you, of a man he keel somebody, he run vay, bot he goin' coom back where he done it. He not know it vot for he do it, bot he do it all right."

"Look here, Nelson; it's outrageous! You can't lay claim to that money. I told you if he was found and you were willing to give in your evidence just as you gave it to me that day, I'd give you your fair share of the reward, as you asked for it, but I never gave you any reason to think you were to take half. I've spent all the money working up this matter, and if I were to go back now and do nothing, as I'm half a mind to do, you'd never get a cent of it. There's no proof that he's the man."

"You no need spen' dot money."

"Can't I get reason into your head? When I set out to get hold of a criminal, do you think I sit down in one place and wait? You didn't find him; he came here, and it's only by an accident you have him, and he may clear out yet, and neither of us be the better off because of your pig-headedness. Here, drive into that grove and tie your horse a minute and we'll come to an understanding. I can't write you out a paper while we're moving along like this."

Then Nels turned into the grove and took the horse from the shafts and tied him some distance away, while G. B. Stiles took writing materials from his valise, and, sitting in the buggy, made a show of drawing up a legal paper.

"I'm going to draw you up a paper as you asked me to. Now how do you know you have the man?"

"It iss ten t'ousand tallers. You make me out dot paper you gif me half yet."

"Damn it! You answer my question. I can't make this out unless I know you're going to come up to the scratch." He made a show of writing, and talked at the same time. "I, G. B. Stiles, detective, in the employ of Peter Craigmile, of the town of Leauvite, for the capture of the murderer of his son, Peter Craigmile, Jr., do hereby promise one Nels Nelson, Swede,--in the employ of Mr Decker, hotel proprietor, as stable man,--for services rendered in the identification of said criminal at such time as he should be found,---Now, what service have you rendered? How much money have you spent in the search?"

"Not'ing. I got heem."

"Nothing. That's just it."

"I got heem."

"No, you haven't got him, and you can't get him without me. Don't you think it. I am the one to get him. You have no warrant and no license. I'm the one to put in the claim and get the reward for you, and you'll have to take what I choose to give, and no more. By rights you would only have your fee as witness, and that's all. That's all the state gives. Whatever else you get is by my kindness in sharing with you. Hear?"

A dangerous light gleamed in the Swede's eyes, and Stiles, by a slight disarrangement of his coat in the search for his handkerchief, displayed a revolver in his hip pocket. Nels' eyes shifted, and he looked away.

"You'd better quit this damned nonsense and say what you'll take and what you'll swear to."

"I'll take half dot money," said Nels, softly and stubbornly.

"I'll take out all I've spent on this case before we divide it in any way, shape, or manner." Stiles figured a moment on the margin of his paper. "Now, what are you going to swear to? You needn't shift round. You'll tell me here just what you're prepared to give in as evidence before I put down a single figure to your name on this paper. See?"

"I done tol' you all dot in Chicago dot time."

"Very well. You'll give that in as evidence, every word of it, and swear to it?"

"Yas."

"I don't more than half believe this is the man. You know it's life imprisonment for him if it's proved on him, and you'd better be sure you have the right one. I'm in for justice, and you're in for the money, that's plain."

"Yas, I tank you lak it money, too."

"I'll not put him in irons to-night unless you give me some better reason for your assertion. Why is he the man?"

"I seen heem dot tam, I know. He got it mark on hees head vere de blud run dot tam, yust de sam, all right. I know heem. He speak lak heem. He move hees arm lak heem. Yas, I know putty good."

"You're sure you remember everything he said--all you told me?"

"Oh, yas. I write it here," and he drew a small book from his pocket, very worn and soiled. "All iss here writed."

"Let's see it." With a smile the Swede put it in Stiles' hand. He regarded it in a puzzled way.

"What's this?" He handed the book back contemptuously. "You'll never be able to make that out,--all dirty and--"

"Yas, I read heem, you not,--dot's Swedish."

"Very well. Perhaps you know what you're about," and the discussion went on, until at last G. B. Stiles, partly by intimidation, partly by assumption of being able to get on without his services, persuaded Nels to modify his demands and accept three thousand for his evidence. Then the gray was put in the shafts again, and they drove to the town quietly, as if they had been to Rigg's Corners and back.

CHAPTER XXVIII

"A RESEMBLANCE SOMEWHERE"

While G. B. Stiles and the big Swede were taking their drive and bargaining away Harry King's liberty, he had loitered about the town, and visited a few places familiar to him. First he went to the home of Elder Craigmile and found it locked, and the key in the care of one of the bank clerks who slept there during the owner's absence. After sitting a while on the front steps, with his elbows on his knees and his head in his hands, he rose and strolled out along the quiet country road on its grassy footpath, past the Ballards' home.

Mary and Bertrand were out in the little orchard at the back of the house, gazing up at the apple blossoms that hung over their heads in great pale pink clouds. A sweet odor came from the lilacs that hung over the garden fence, and the sunlight streamed down on the peaceful home, and on the opening spring flowers--the borders of dwarf purple iris and big clusters of peonies, just beginning to bud,--and on the beehives scattered about with the bees flying out and in. Ah! It was still the same--tempting and inviting.

He paused at the gate, looking wistfully at the open door, but did not enter. No, he must keep his own counsel and hold to his purpose, without stirring these dear old friends to sorrowful sympathy. So he passed on, unseen by them, feeling the old love for the place and all the tender memories connected with it revived and deepened. On he went, strolling toward the little schoolhouse where he had found dear Betty Ballard sleeping at the big school desk the evening before, and passed it by--only looking in curiously at the tousled heads bent over their lessons, and at Betty herself, where she sat at the desk, a class on the long recitation bench before her, and a great boy standing at the blackboard. He saw her rise and take the chalk from the boy's hand and make a few rapid strokes with it on the board.

Little Betty a school-teacher! She had suffered much! How much did she care now? Was it over and her heart healed? Had other loves come to her? All intent now on her work, she stood with her back toward him, and as he passed the open door she turned half about, and he saw her profile sharply against the blackboard. Older? Yes, she looked older, but prettier for that, and slight and trim and neat, dressed in a soft shade of green. She had worn such a dress once at a picnic. Well he remembered it--could he ever forget? Swiftly she turned again to the board and drew the eraser across the work, and he heard her voice distinctly, with its singing quality--how well he remembered that also--"Now, how many of the class can work this problem?"

Ah, little Betty! little Betty! Life is working problems for us all, and you are working yours to a sweet conclusion, helping the children, and taking up your own burdens and bearing them bravely. This was Harry King's thought as he strolled on and seated himself again under the basswood tree by the meadow brook, and took from his pocket the worn scrap of paper the wind

had brought him and read it again.

"Out of my life, and into the night,
But never out of my heart, my own.
Into the darkness, out of the light,
Bleeding and wounded and walking alone."

Such a tender, rhythmic bit of verse--Betty must have written it. It was like her.

After a time he rose and strolled back again past the little schoolhouse, and it was recess. Long before he reached it he heard the voices of the children shouting, "Anty, anty over, anty, anty over." They were divided into two bands, one on either side of the small building, over which they tossed the ball and shouted as they tossed it, "Anty, anty over"; and the band on the other side, warned by the cry, caught the ball on the rebound if they could, and tore around the corner of the building, trying to hit with it any luckless wight on the other side, and so claim him for their own, and thus changing sides, the merry romp went on.

Betty came to the door with the bell in her hand, and stood for a moment looking out in the sunshine. One of the smallest of the boys ran to her and threw his arms around her, and, looking up in her face, screamed in wildest excitement, "I caught it twice, Teacher, I did."

With her hand on his head she looked in his eyes and smiled and tinkled her little bell, and the children, big and little, all came crowding through the door, hustling like a flock of chickens, and every boy snatched off his cap as he rushed by her.

Ah, grave, dignified little Betty! Who was that passing slowly along the road? Like a wild rose by the wayside she seemed to him, with her pink cheeks and in her soft green gown, framed thus by the doorway of the old schoolhouse. Naturally she had no recognition for this bearded man, walking by with stiff, soldierly step, yet something caused her to look again, turning as she entered, and, when he looked back, their eyes met, and hers dropped before his, and she was lost to his sight as she closed the door after her. Of course she could not recognize him disguised thus with the beard on his face, and his dark, tanned skin. She did not recognize him, and he was glad, yet sore at heart.

He had had all he could bear, and for the rest of the morning he wrote letters, sitting in his room at Decker's hotel. Only two letters, but one was a very long one--to Amalia Manovska. Out in the world he dared not use her own name, so he addressed the envelope to Miss McBride, in Larry Kildene's care, at the nearest station to which they had agreed letters should be sent. Before he finished the second letter the gong sounded for dinner. The noon meal was always dinner at the hotel. He thrust his papers and the unfinished letter in his valise and locked it--and went below.

G. B. Stiles was already there, seated in the same place as on the day before, and Harry took his seat opposite him, and they began a conversation in the same facile way, but the manner of the dry-goods salesman towards him seemed to have undergone a change. It had lost its swagger, and was more that of a man who could be a gentleman if he chose, while to the surprise of Stiles the manner of the young man was as disarmingly quiet and unconcerned as before, and as abstracted. He could not believe that any man hovering on the brink of a terrible catastrophe, and one to avert which required concealment of identity, could be so unwary. He half believed the Swede was laboring under an hallucination, and decided to be deliberate, and await developments for the rest of the day.

After dinner they wandered out to the piazza side by side, and there they sat and smoked, and talked over the political situation as they had the evening before, and Stiles was surprised at the young man's ignorance of general public matters. Was it ignorance, or indifference?

"I thought all you army men would stand by Grant to the drop of the hat."

"Yes, I suppose we would."

"You suppose so! Don't you know? I carried a gun under Grant, and I'd swear to any policy he'd go in for, and what I say is, they haven't had quite enough down there. What the South needs is another licking. That's what it needs."

"Oh, no, no, no. I was sick of fighting, long before they laid me up, and I guess a lot of us were."

G. B. Stiles brought his feet to the floor with a stamp of surprise and turned to look full in the young man's face. For a moment he gazed on him thus, then grunted. "Ever feel one of their bullets?"

"Oh, yes."

"That the mark, there over your temple?"

"No, it didn't do any harm to speak of. That's--where something--struck me."

"Oh, you don't say!" Harry King rose. "Leaving?"

"No. I have a few letters to write--and--"

"Sorry to miss you. Staying in town for some time?"

"I hardly know. I may."

"Plans unsettled? Well, times are unsettled and no money stirring. My plans are all upset, too."

The young man returned to his room and continued his writing. One short letter to Betty, inclosing the worn scrap of paper the wind had brought him; he kissed it before he placed it in

the envelope. Then he wrote one to her father and mother jointly, and a long one to Hester Craigmile. Sometimes he would pause in his writing and tear up a page, and begin over again, but at last all were done and inclosed in a letter to the Elder and placed in a heavy envelope and sealed. Only the one to Amalia he did not inclose, but carried it out and mailed it himself.

Passing the bank on the way to the post office, he dropped in and made quite a heavy deposit. It was just before closing time and the clerks were all intent on getting their books straight, preparatory to leaving. How well he remembered that moment of restless turning of ledgers and the slight accession of eagerness in the younger clerks, as they followed the long columns of figures down with the forefinger of the left hand--the pen poised in the right. The whole scene smote him poignantly as he stood at the teller's window waiting. And he might have been doing that, he thought! A whole lifetime spent in doing just that and more like it, year in and year out!

How had his life been better? He had sinned--and failed. Ah! But he had lived and loved--lived terribly and loved greatly. God help him, how he loved! Even for life to end here--either in prison or in death--still he had felt the tremendous passions, and understood the meaning of their power in a human soul. This had life brought him, and a love beyond measure to crown all.

The teller peered at him through the little window behind which he had stood so many years peering at people in this sleepy little bank, this sure, safe, little bank, always doing its conservative business in the same way, and heretofore always making good. He reached out a long, well-shaped hand,--a large-veined hand, slightly hairy at the wrist, to take the bank notes. How often had Harry King seen that hand stretched thus through the little window, drawing bank notes toward him! Almost with a shock he saw it now reach for his own--for the first time. In the old days he had had none to deposit. It was always for others it had been extended. Now it seemed as if he must seize the hand and shake it,--the only hand that had been reached out to him yet, in this town where his boyhood had been spent.

A young man who had preceded Harry King at the teller's window paused near by at the cashier's desk and began asking questions which Harry himself would have been glad to ask, but could not.

He was an alert, bright-eyed young chap with a smiling face. "Good afternoon, Mr. Copeland. Any news for me to-day?"

Mr. Copeland was an elderly man of great dignity, and almost as much of a figure there as the Elder himself. It was an act of great temerity to approach him for items of news for the *Leauvite Mercury*. Of this fact the young reporter seemed to be blithely ignorant. All the clerks were covertly watching the outcome, and thus attention was turned from Harry King; even the teller glanced frequently at the cashier's desk as he counted the bank notes placed in his hand.

"News? No. No news," said Mr. Copeland, without looking up.

"Thank you. It's my business to ask for it, you know. We're making more of a feature of personal items than ever before. We're up to date, you see. 'Find out what people want and then give it to them.' That's our motto." The young man leaned forward over the high railing that corralled the cashier in his pen apart from the public, smilingly oblivious of that dignitary's objections to an interview. "Expecting the return of Elder Craigmile soon?"

At that question, to the surprise of all, the cashier suddenly changed his manner to the suave affability with which he greeted people of consequence. "We are expecting Elder Craigmile shortly. Yes. Indeed he may arrive any day, if the voyage is favorable."

"Thank you. Mrs. Craigmile accompanies him, I suppose?"

"It is not likely, no. Her health demands--ahem--a little longer rest and change."

"Ah! The Elder not called back by--for any particular reason? No. Business going well? Good. I'm told there's a great deal of depression."

"Oh, in a way--there may be,--but we're all of the conservative sort here in Leauvite. We're not likely to feel it if there is. Good afternoon."

No one paid any attention to Harry King as he walked out after the *Leauvite Mercury* reporter, except Mr. Copeland, who glanced at him keenly as he passed his desk. Then, looking at his watch, he came out of his corral and turned the key in the bank door.

"We'll have no more interruptions now," he said, as he paused at the teller's window. "You know the young man who just went out?"

"Sam Carter of the *Mercury*. Old Billings no doubt sent him in to learn how we stand."

"No, no, no. Sam Carter--I know him. Who's the young man who followed him out?"

"I don't know. Here's his signature. He's just made a big deposit on long time--only one thousand on call. Unusual these days."

Mr. Copeland's eyes glittered an instant. "Good. That's something. I decided to give the town people to understand that there is no need for their anxiety. It's the best policy, and when the Elder returns, he may be induced to withdraw his insane offer of reward. Ten thousand dollars! It's ridiculous, when the young men may both be dead, for all the world will ever know."

"If we could do that--but I've known the Elder too long to hope for it. This deposit stands for a year, see? And the ten thousand the Elder has set one side for the reward gives us twenty thousand we could not count on yesterday."

"In all the history of this bank we never were in so tight a place. It's extraordinary, and quite

unnecessary. That's a bright boy--Sam Carter. I never thought of his putting such a construction on it when I admitted the fact that Mrs. Craigmile is to remain. Two big banks closed in Chicago this morning, and twenty small ones all over the country during the last three days. One goes and hauls another down. If we had only cabled across the Atlantic two weeks ago when I sent that letter--he must have the letter by now--and if he has, he's on the ocean."

"This deposit tides us over a few days, and, as I said, if we could only get our hands on that reserve of the Elder's, we'd be safe whatever comes."

"He'll have to bend his will for once. He must be made to see it, and we must get our hands on it. I think he will. He'd cut off his right hand before he'd see this bank go under."

"It's his son's murder that's eating into his heart. He's been losing ground ever since."

The clerks gradually disappeared, quietly slipping out into the sunshine one by one as their books were balanced, and now the two men stood alone. It was a time used by them for taking account of the bank's affairs generally, and they felt the stability of that institution to be quite personal to them.

"I've seen that young man before," said Mr. Copeland. "Now, who is he? Harry King--Harry King,--the Kings moved away from here--twelve years ago--wasn't it? Their son would not be as old as this man."

"Boys grow up fast. You never can tell."

"The Kings were a short, thickset lot."

"He may not be one of them. He said nothing about ever having been here before. I never talk with any one here at the window. It's quite against my rules for the clerks, and has to be so for myself, of course. I leave that sort of thing to you and the Elder."

"I say--I've seen him before--the way he walks--the way he carries his head--there's a resemblance somewhere."

The two men also departed, after looking to the safe, and the last duties devolving on them, seeing that all was locked and double-locked. It was a solemn duty, always attended to solemnly.

CHAPTER XXIX

THE ARREST

Sam Carter loitered down the street after leaving the bank, and when Harry King approached, he turned with his ready smile and accosted him.

"Pleasant day. I see you're a stranger here, and I thought I might get an item from you. Carter's my name, and I'm doing the reporting for the *Mercury*. Be glad to make your acquaintance. Show you round a little."

Harry was nonplussed for a moment. Such things did not use to occur in this old-fashioned place as running about the streets picking up items from people and asking personal questions for the paper to exploit the replies. He looked twice at Sam Carter before responding.

"Thank you, I--I've been here before. I know the place pretty well."

"Very pretty place, don't you think so? Mean to stop for some time?"

"I hardly know as yet." Harry King mused a little, then resolved to break his loneliness by accepting the casual acquaintance, and to avoid personalities about himself by asking questions about the town and those he used to know, but whom he preferred not to see. It was an opportunity. "Yes, it is a pretty place. Have you been here long?"

"I've been here--let's see. About three years--maybe a little less. You must have been away from Leavite longer than that, I judge. I've never left the place since I came and I never saw you before. No wonder I thought you a stranger."

"I may call myself one--yes. A good many changes since you came?"

"Oh, yes. See the new courthouse? It's a beauty,--all solid stone,--cost fifty thousand dollars. The *Mercury* had a great deal to do with bringing it about,--working up enthusiasm and the like,--but there is a great deal of depression just now, and taxes running up. People think government is taking a good deal out of them for such public buildings, but, Lord help us! the government is needing money just now as much as the people. It's hard to be public spirited when taxes are being raised. You have people here?"

"Not now--no. Who's mayor here now?"

"Harding--Harding of the iron works. He makes a good one, too. There's the new courthouse. The jail is underneath at the back. See the barred windows? No breaking out of there. Three prisoners did break out of the old one during the year this building was under construction,--each in a different way, too,--shows how badly they needed a new one. Quite an ornament to

the square, don't you think so?"

"The jail?"

"No, no,--The building as a whole. Better go over it while you're here."

"I may--do so--yes."

"Staying some time, I believe you said."

"Did I? I may have said so."

"Staying at the hotel, I believe?"

"Yes, and here we are." Harry King stood an instant--undecided. Certain things he wished to know, but had not the courage to ask--not on the street--but maybe seated on the veranda he could ask this outsider, in a casual way. "Drop in with me and have a smoke."

"I will, thank you. I often run in,--in the way of business,--but I haven't tried it as a stopping place. Meals pretty good?"

"Very good." They took seats at the end of the piazza where Harry King led the way. The sun was now low, but the air was still warm enough for comfort, and no one was there but themselves, for it lacked an hour to the return of the omnibus and the arrival of the usual loafers who congregated at that time.

"You've made a good many acquaintances since you came, no doubt?"

"Well--a good many--yes."

"Know the Craigmiles?"

"The Craigmiles? There's no one there to know--now--but the Elder. Oh, his wife, of course, but she stays at home so close no one ever sees her. They're away now, if you want to see them."

"And she never goes out--you say?"

"Never since I've been in the town. You see, there was a tragedy in the family. Just before I came it happened, and I remember the town was all stirred up about it. Their son was murdered."

Harry King gave a quick start, then gathered himself up in strong control and tilted his chair back against the wall.

"Their son murdered?" he asked. "Tell me about it. All you know."

"That's just it--nobody knows anything. They know he was murdered, because he disappeared completely. The young man was called Peter Junior, after his father, of course--and he was the one that was murdered. They found every evidence of it. It was there on the bluff, above the wildest part of the river, where the current is so strong no man could live a minute in it. He would be dashed to death in the flood, even if he were not killed in the fall from the brink, and that young man was pushed over right there."

"How did they know he was pushed over?"

"They knew he was. They found his hat there, and it was bloody, as if he had been struck first, and a club there, also bloody,--and it is believed he was killed first and then pushed over, for there is the place yet, after three years, where the earth gave way with the weight of something shoved over the edge. Well, would you believe it--that old man has kept the knowledge of it from his wife all this time. She thinks her son quarreled with his father and went off, and that he will surely return some day."

"And no one in the village ever told her?"

"All the town have helped the old Elder to keep it from her. You'd think such a thing impossible, wouldn't you? But it's the truth. The old man bribed the *Mercury* to keep it out, and, by jiminy, it was done! Here, in a town of this size where every one knows all about every one else's affairs--it was done! It seems people took an especial interest in keeping it from her, yet every one was talking about it, and so I heard all there was to hear. Hallo! What are you doing here?"

This last remark was addressed to Nels Nelson, who appeared just below them and stood peering up at them through the veranda railing.

"I just vaiting for Meestair Stiles. He tol' me vait for heem here."

"Mr. Stiles? Who's he?"

"Dere he coomin'."

As he spoke G. B. Stiles came through the hotel door and walked gravely up to them. Something in his manner, and in the expectant, watchful eye of the Swede, caused them both to rise. At the same moment, Kellar, the sheriff, came up the front steps and approached them, and placing his hand on Harry King's shoulder, drew from his pocket a pair of handcuffs.

"Young man, it is my duty to arrest you. Here is my badge--this is quite straight--for the murder of Peter Craigmile, Jr."

The young man neither moved nor spoke for a moment, and as he stood thus the sheriff took him by the arm, and roused him. "Richard Kildene, you are under arrest for the murder of your cousin, Peter Craigmile, Jr."

With a quick, frantic movement, Harry King sprang back and thrust both men violently from

him. The red of anger mounted to his hair and throbbed in his temples, then swept back to his heart, and left him with a deathlike pallor.

"Keep back. I'm not Richard Kildene. You have the wrong man. Peter Craigmile was never murdered."

The big Swede leaped the piazza railing and stood close to him, while the sheriff held him pinioned, and Sam Carter drew out his notebook.

"You know me, Mr. Kellar,--stand off, I say. I am Peter Craigmile. Look at me. Put away those handcuffs. It is I, alive, Peter Craigmile, Jr."

"That's a very clever plea, but it's no go," said G. B. Stiles, and proceeded to fasten the irons on his wrists.

"Yas, I know you dot man keel heem, all right. I hear you tol' some von you keel heem," said the Swede, slowly, in suppressed excitement.

"You're a very good actor, young man,--mighty clever,--but it's no go. Now you'll walk along with us if you please," said Mr. Kellar.

"But I tell you I don't please. It's a mistake. I am Peter Craigmile, Jr., himself, alive."

"Well, if you are, you'll have a chance to prove it, but evidence is against you. If you are he, why do you come back under an assumed name during your father's absence? A little hitch there you did not take into consideration."

"I had my reasons--good ones--I--came back to confess to the--un--un--witting--killing of my cousin, Richard." He turned from one to the other, panting as if he had been running a race, and threw out his words impetuously. "I tell you I came here for the very purpose of giving myself up--but you have the wrong man."

By this time a crowd had collected, and the servants were running from their work all over the hotel, while the proprietor stood aloof with staring eyes.

"Here, Mr. Decker, you remember me--Elder Craigmile's son? Some of you must remember me."

But the proprietor only wagged his head. He would not be drawn into the thing. "I have no means of knowing who you are--no more than Adam. The name you wrote in my book was Harry King."

"I tell you I had my reasons. I meant to wait here until the Elder's--my father's return and--"

"And in the meantime we'll put you in a quiet little apartment, very private, where you can wait, while we look into things a bit."

"You needn't take me through the streets with these things on; I've no intention of running away. Let me go to my room a minute."

"Yes, and put a bullet through your head. I've no intention of running any risks now we have you," said the detective.

"Now you have who? You have no idea whom you have. Take off these shackles until I pay my bill. You have no objection to that, have you?"

They turned into the hotel, and the handcuffs were removed while the young man took out his pocketbook and paid his reckoning. Then he turned to them.

"I must ask you to accompany me to my room while I gather my toilet necessities together." This they did, G. B. Stiles and the sheriff walking one on either side, while the Swede followed at their heels. "What are you doing here?" he demanded, turning suddenly upon the stable man.

"Oh, I just lookin' a leetle out."

"Mr. Stiles, what does this mean, that you have that man dogging me?"

"It's his affair, not mine. He thinks he has a certain interest in you."

Then he turned in exasperation to the sheriff. "Can you give me a little information, Mr. Kellar? What has that Swede to do with me? Why am I arrested for the murder of my own self--preposterous! I, a man as alive as you are? You can see for yourself that I am Elder Craigmile's son. You know me?"

"I know the Elder fairly well--every one in Leavite knows him, but I can't say as I've ever taken particular notice of his boy, and, anyway, the boy was murdered three years ago--a little over--for it was in the fall of the year--well, that's most four years--and I must say it's a mighty clever dodge, as Mr. Stiles says, for you to play off this on us. It's a matter that will bear looking into. Now you sit down here and hold on to yourself, while I go through your things. You'll get them all, never fear."

Then Harry King sat down and looked off through the open window, and paid no heed to what the men were doing. They might turn his large valise inside out and read every scrap of written paper. There was nothing to give the slightest clew to his identity. He had left the envelope addressed to the Elder, containing the letters he had written, at the bank, to be placed in the safety vault, and not to be delivered until ordered to do so by himself.

As they finished their search and restored the articles to his valise, he asked again that the handcuffs be left off as he walked through the streets.

"I have no desire to escape. It is my wish to go with you. I only wish I might have seen the--my father first. He could not have helped me--but he would have understood--it would have seemed less--"

He could not go on, and the sheriff slipped the handcuffs in his pocket, and they proceeded in silence to the courthouse, where he listened to the reading of the warrant and his indictment in dazed stupefaction, and then walked again in silence between his captors to the jail in the rear.

"No one has ever been in this cell," said Mr. Kellar. "I'm doing the best I can for you."

"How long must I stay here? Who brings accusation?"

"I don't know how long; as this is a murder charge you can't be bailed out, and the trial will take time. The Elder brings accusation--naturally."

"When is he expected home?"

"Can't say. You'll have some one to defend you, and then you can ask all the questions you wish." The sheriff closed the heavy door and the key was turned.

Then began weary days of waiting. If it had been possible to get the trial over with, Harry would have been glad, but it made little difference to him now, since the step had been taken, and a trial in his case would only be a verdict, anyway--and confession was a simple thing, and the hearing also.

The days passed, and he wondered that no one came to him--no friend of the old time. Where were Bertrand Ballard and Mary? Where was little Betty? Did they not know he was in jail? He did not know that others had been arrested on the same charge and released, more than once. True, no one had made the claim of being the Elder's own son and the murdered man himself. As such incidents were always disturbing to Betty, when Bertrand read the notice of the arrest in the *Mercury*, the paper was laid away in his desk and his little daughter was spared the sight of it this time.

But he spoke of the matter to his wife. "Here is another case of arrest for poor Peter Junior's murder, Mary. The man claims to be Peter Junior himself, but as he registered at the hotel under an assumed name it is likely to be only another attempt to get the reward money by some detective. It was very unwise for the Elder to make it so large a sum."

"It can't be. Peter Junior would never be so cruel as to stay away all this time, if he were alive, no matter how deeply he may have quarreled with his father. I believe they both went over the bluff and are both dead."

"It stands to reason that one or the other body would have been found in that case. One might be lost, but hardly both. The search was very thorough, even down to the mill race ten miles below."

"The current is so swift there, they might have been carried over the race, and on, before the search began. I think so, although no one else seems to."

"I wish the Elder would remove that temptation of the reward. It is only an inducement to crime. Time alone will solve the mystery, and as long as he continues to brood over it, he will go on failing in health. It's coming to an obsession with him to live to see Richard Kildene hung, and some one will have to swing for it if he has his way. Now he will return and find this man in jail, and will bend every effort, and give all his thought toward getting him convicted."

"But I thought you said they do not hang in this state."

"True--true. But imprisonment for life is--worse. I'm thinking of what the Elder would like could he have his way."

"Bertrand--I believe the Elder is sure the man will be found and that it will kill his wife, when she comes to know that Peter Junior was murdered, and that is why he took her to Scotland. She told me she was sure her son was there, or would go to see his great aunts there, and that is why she consented to go--but I'm sure the Elder wished to get her out of the way."

"Strange--strange," said Bertrand. "After all, it is better to forgive. No one knows what transpired, and Richard is the real sufferer."

"Do you suppose he'll leave Hester there, Bertrand?"

"I hardly think she would be left, but it is impossible to tell. A son's loss is more than any other--to a mother."

"Do you think so, Bertrand? It would be hardest of all to lose a husband, and the Elder has failed so much since Peter Junior's death."

"Peter Junior seems to be the only one who has escaped suffering in this tragedy. Remorse in Richard's case, and stubborn anger in the Elder's--they are emotions that take large toll out of a man's vitality. If ever Richard is found, he will not be the young man we knew."

"Unless he is innocent. All this may have been an accident."

"Then why is he staying in hiding?"

"He may have felt there was no way to prove his innocence."

"Well, there is another reason why the Elder should withdraw his offer of a reward, and when he comes back, I mean to try what can be done once more. Everything would have to be circumstantial. He will have a hard time to prove his nephew's guilt."

"I can't see why he should try to prove it. It must have been an accident--at the last. Of course it might have been begun in anger, in a moment of misunderstanding, but the nature of the boys would go to show that it never could have been done intentionally. It is impossible."

CHAPTER XXX

THE ARGUMENT

"Mr. Ballard, either my son was murdered, or he was a murderer. The crime falls upon us, and the disgrace of it, no matter how you look at it." The Elder sat in the back room at the bank, where his friend had been arguing with him to withdraw the offer of a reward for the arrest. "It's too late, now--too late. The man's found and he claims to be my son. You're a kindly man, Mr. Ballard, but a blind one."

Bertrand drew his chair closer to the Elder's, as if by so doing he might establish a friendlier thought in the man's heart. "Blind? Blind, Elder Craigmile?"

"I say blind. I see. I see it all." The Elder rose and paced the floor. "The boys fought, there on the bluff, and sought to kill each other, and for the same cause that has wrought most of the evil in the world. Over the love of a woman they fought. Peter carried a blackthorn stick that ought never to have been in my house--you know, for you brought it to me--and struck his cousin with it, and at the same instant was pushed over the brink, as Richard intended."

"How do you know that Richard was not pushed over? How do you know that he did not fall over with his cousin? How can you dare work for a man's conviction on such slight evidence?"

"How do I know? Although you would favor that--that--although--" The Elder paused and struggled for control, then sat weakly down and took up the argument again with trembling voice. "Mr. Ballard, I would spare you--much of this matter which has been brought to my knowledge--but I cannot--because it must come out at the trial. It was over your little daughter, Betty, that they fought. She has known all these years that Richard Kildene murdered her lover."

"Elder--Elder! Your brooding has unbalanced your mind."

"Wait, my friend. This falls on you with but half the burden that I have borne. My son was no murderer. Richard Kildene is not only a murderer, but a coward. He went to your daughter while we were dragging the river for my poor boy's body, and told her he had murdered her lover; that he pushed him over the bluff and that he intended to do so. Now he adds to his crime--by--coming here--and pretending--to be--my son. He shall hang. He shall hang. If he does not, there is no justice in heaven." The Elder looked up and shook his hand above his head as if he defied the whole heavenly host.

Bertrand Ballard sat for a moment stunned. Such a preposterous turn was beyond his comprehension. Strangely enough his first thought was a mere contradiction, and he said: "Men are not hung in this state. You will not have your wish." He leaned forward, with his elbows on the great table and his head in his hands; then, without looking up, he said: "Go on. Go on. How did you come by this astounding information? Was it from Betty?"

"Then may he be shut in the blackest dungeon for the rest of his life. No, it was not from Betty. Never. She has kept this terrible secret well. I have not seen your daughter--not--since--since this was told me. It has been known to the detective and to my attorney, Milton Hibbard, for two years, and to me for one year--just before I offered the increased reward to which you so object. I had reason."

"Then it is as I thought. Your offer of ten thousand dollars reward has incited the crime of attempting to convict an innocent man. Again I ask you, how did you come by this astounding information?"

"By the word of an eyewitness. Sit still, Mr. Ballard, until you hear the whole; then blame me if you can. A few years ago you had a Swede working for you in your garden. You boarded him. He slept in a little room over your summer kitchen; do you remember?"

"Yes."

"He saw Richard Kildene come to the house when we were all away--while you were with me--your wife with mine,--and your little daughter alone. This Swede heard all that was said, and saw all that was done. His testimony alone will--"

"Convict a man? It is greed! What is your detective working for and why does this Swede come forward at this late day with his testimony? Greed! Elder Craigmile, how do you know that this testimony is not all made up between them? I will go home and ask Betty, and learn the truth."

"And why does the young man come here under an assumed name, and when he is discovered, claim to be my son? The only claim he could make that could save him! If he knows anything, he knows that if he pretends he is my son--laboring under the belief that he has killed Richard Kildene--when he knows Richard's death can be disproved by your daughter's statement that

she saw and talked with Richard--he knows that he may be released from the charge of murder and may establish himself here as the man whom he himself threw over the bluff, and who, therefore, can never return to give him the lie. I say--if this is proved on him, he shall suffer the extreme penalty of the law, or there is no justice in the land."

Bertrand rose, sadly shaken. "This is a very terrible accusation, my friend. Let us hope it may not be proved true. I will go home and ask Betty. You will take her testimony before that of the Swede?"

"If you are my friend, why are you willing my son should be proven a murderer? It is a deep-laid scheme, and Richard Kildene walks close in his father's steps. I have always seen his father in him. I tried to save him for my sister's sake. I brought him up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord, and did for him all that fathers do for their sons, and now I have the fool's reward--the reward of the man who warmed the viper in his bosom. He, to come here and sit in my son's place--to eat bread at my table--at my wife's right hand--with her smile in his eyes? Rather he shall--"

"We will find out the truth, and, if possible, you shall be saved from yourself, Elder Craigmile, and your son will not be proven a murderer. Let me still be your friend." Bertrand's voice thrilled with suppressed emotion and the sympathy he could not utter, as he held out his hand, which the Elder took in both his own shaking ones. His voice trembled with suppressed emotion as he spoke.

"Pray God Hester may stay where she is until this thing is over. And pray God you may not be blinded by love of your daughter, who was not true to my son. She was promised to become his wife, but through all these years she protects by her silence the murderer of her lover. Ponder on this thought, Bertrand Ballard, and pray God you may have the strength to be just."

Bertrand walked homeward with bowed head. It was Saturday. The day's baking was in progress, and Mary Ballard was just removing a pan of temptingly browned tea cakes from the oven when he entered. She did not see his face as he asked, "Mary, where can I find Betty?"

"Upstairs in the studio, drawing. Where would you expect to find her?" she said gayly. Something in her husband's voice touched her. She hastily lifted the cakes from the pan and ran after him.

"What is it, dear?"

He was halfway up the stairs and he turned and came back to her. "I've heard something that troubles me, and must see her alone, Mary. I'll talk with you about it later. Don't let us be disturbed until we come down."

"I think Janey is with her now."

"I'll send her down to you."

"Bertrand, it is something terrible! You are trying to spare me--don't do it."

"Ask no questions."

"Tell Janey I want her to help in the kitchen."

Mary went back to her work in silence. If Bertrand wished to be alone with Betty, he had a good reason; and presently Janey skipped in and was set to paring the potatoes for dinner.

Bertrand found Betty bending closely over a drawing for which she had no model, but which was intended to illustrate a fairy story. She was using pen and ink, and trying to imitate the fine strokes of a steel engraving. He stood at her side, looking down at her work a moment, and his artist's sense for the instant crowded back other thoughts.

"You ought to have a model, daughter, and you should work in chalk or charcoal for your designing."

"I know, father, but you see I am trying to make some illustrations that will look like what are in the magazines. I'm making fairies, father, and you know I can't find any models, so I have to make them up."

"Put that away. I have some questions to ask you."

"What's the matter, daddy? You look as if the sky were falling." He had seated himself on the long lounge where she had once sat and chatted with Peter Junior. She recalled that day. It was when he kissed her for the first time. Her cheeks flushed hotly as they always did now when she thought of it, and her eyes were sad. She went over and established herself at her father's side.

"What is it, daddy, dear?"

"Betty,"--he spoke sternly, as she had never heard him before,--"have you been concealing something from your father and mother--and from the world--for the last three years and a half?"

Her head drooped, the red left her cheeks, and she turned white to the lips. She drew away from her father and clasped her hands in her lap, tightly. She was praying for strength to tell the truth. Ah, could she do it? Could she do it! And perhaps cause Richard's condemnation? Had they found him?--that father should ask such a question now, after so long a time?

"Why do you ask me such a question, father?"

"Tell me the truth, child."

"Father! I--I--can't," and her voice died away to a whisper.

"You can and you must, Betty."

She rose and stood trembling before him with clinched hands. "What has happened? Tell me. It is not fair to ask me such a question unless you tell me why." Then she dropped upon her knees and hid her face against his sleeve. "If you don't tell me what has happened, I will never speak again. I will be dumb, even if they kill me."

He put his arm tenderly about the trembling little form, and the act brought the tears and he thought her softened. He knew, as Mary had often said, that "Betty could not be driven, but might be led."

"Tell father all about it, little daughter." But she did not open her lips. He waited patiently, then asked again, kindly and persistently, "What have you been hiding, Betty?" but she only sobbed on. "Betty, if you do not tell me now and here, you will be taken into court and made to tell all you know before all the world! You will be proven to have been untrue to the man you were to marry and who loved you, and to have been shielding his murderer."

"Then it is Richard. They have found him?" She shrank away from her father and her sobs ceased. "It has come at last. Father--if--if--I had--been married to Richard--then would they make me go in court and testify against him?"

"No. A wife is not compelled to give testimony against her husband, nor may she testify for him, either."

Betty rose and straightened herself defiantly; with flaming cheeks and flashing eyes she looked down upon him.

"Then I will tell one great lie--father--and do it even if--if it should drag me down to--hell. I will say I am married to Richard--and will swear to it." Bertrand was silent, aghast. "Father! Where is Richard?"

"He is there in Leauvite, in jail. You must do what is right in the eye of God, my child, and tell the truth."

"If I tell the truth,--they will do what is right in their own eyes. They don't know what is right in the eye of God. If they drag me into court--there before all the world I will lie to them until I drop dead. Has--has--the Elder seen him?"

"Not yet. He refused to see him until the trial."

"He is a cruel, vindictive old man. Does he think it will bring Peter back to life again to hang Richard? Does he think it will save his wife from sorrow, or--or bring any one nearer heaven to do it?"

"If Richard has done the thing he is accused of doing, he deserves the extremest rigor of the law."

"Father! Don't let the Elder make you hard like himself. What is he accused of doing?"

"He is making claim that he is Peter Junior, and that he has come back to Leauvite to give himself up for the murder of his cousin, Richard Kildene. He thinks, no doubt, that you will say that you know Richard is living, and that he has not killed him, and in that way he thinks to escape punishment, by proving that Peter also is living, and is himself. Do you see how it is? He has chosen to live here an impostor rather than to live in hiding as an outcast, and is trading on his likeness to his cousin to bear him out. I had hoped that it was all a detective's lie, got up for the purpose of getting hold of the reward money, but now I see it is true--the most astounding thing a man ever tried."

"Did he send you to me?"

"No, child. I have not seen him."

"Father Bertrand Ballard! Have you taken some detective's word and not even tried to see him?"

"Child, child! He is playing a desperate game, and taking an ignoble part. He is doing a dastardly thing, and the burden is laid on you to confess to the secret you have been hiding and tell the truth."

Bertrand spoke very sadly, and Betty's heart smote her for his sorrow; yet she felt the thing was impossible for Richard to do, and that she must hold the secret a little longer--all the more because even her father seemed now to credit the terrible accusation. She threw her arms about his neck and implored him.

"Oh, father, dear! Take me to the jail to see him, and after that I will try to do what is right. I can think clearer after I have seen him."

"I don't know if that will be allowed--but--"

"It will have to be allowed. How can I say if it is Richard until I see him. It may not be Richard. The Elder is too blinded to even go near him, and dear Mrs. Craigmile is not here. Some one ought to go in fairness to Richard--who loves--" She choked and could say no more.

"I will talk to your mother first. There is another thing that should soften your heart to the Elder. All over the country there is financial trouble. Banks are going to pieces that never were in trouble before, and Elder Craigmile's bank is going, he fears. It will be a terrible crash, and

we fear he may not outlive the blow. I tell you this, even though you may not understand it, to soften your heart toward him. He considers it in the nature of a disgrace."

"Yes. I understand, better than you think." Betty's voice was sad, and she looked weary and spent. "If the bank breaks, it breaks the Elder's heart. All the rest he could stand, but not that. The bank, the bank! He tried to sacrifice Peter Junior to that bank. He would have broken Peter's heart for that bank, as he has his wife's; for if it had not been for Peter's quarrel with his father, first of all, over it, I don't believe all the rest would have happened. Peter told me a lot. I know."

"Betty, did you never love Peter Junior? Tell father."

"I thought I did. I thought I knew I did,--but when Richard came home--then--I--I--knew I had made a terrible mistake; but, father, I meant to stand by Peter--and never let anybody know until--Oh, father, need I tell any more?"

"No, my dear. You would better talk with your mother."

Bertrand Ballard left the studio more confused in his mind, and yet both sadder and wiser than he had ever been in his life. He had seen a little way into his small daughter's soul, and conceived of a power of spirit beyond him, although he considered her both unreasonable and wrong. He grieved for her that she had carried such a great burden so bravely and so long. How great must have been her love, or her infatuation! The pathetic knowledge hardened his heart toward the young man in the jail, and he no longer tried to defend him in his thoughts.

He sent Mary up to talk with Betty, and that afternoon they all walked over to the jail; for Mary could get no nearer her little daughter's confidence, and no deeper into the heart of the matter than Betty had allowed her father to go.

CHAPTER XXXI

ROBERT KATER'S SUCCESS

"Halloo! So it's here!" Robert Kater stood by a much-littered table and looked down on a few papers and envelopes which some one had laid there during his absence. All day long he had been wandering about the streets of Paris, waiting--passing the time as he could in his impatience--hoping for the communication contained in one of these very envelopes. Now that it had come he felt himself struck with a singular weakness, and did not seize it and tear it open. Instead, he stood before the table, his hands in his pockets, and whistled softly.

He made the tour of the studio several times, pausing now and then to turn a canvas about, apparently as if he would criticize it, looking at it but not regarding it, only absently turning one and another as if it were a habit with him to do so; then returning to the table he stirred the envelopes apart with one finger and finally separated one from the rest, bearing an official seal, and with it a small package carefully secured and bearing the same seal, but he did not open either. "Yes, it's here, and that's the one," he said, but he spoke to himself, for there was no one else in the room.

He moved wearily away, keeping the packet in his hand, but leaving the envelope on the table, and hung his hat upon a point of an easel and wiped his damp brow. As he did so, he lifted the dark brown hair from his temple, showing a jagged scar. Quickly, as if with an habitual touch, he rearranged the thick, soft lock so that the scar was covered, and mounting a dais, seated himself on a great thronelike chair covered with a royal tiger skin. The head of the tiger, mounted high, with glittering eyes and fangs showing, rested on the floor between his feet, and there, holding the small packet in his hand, with elbows resting on the arms of the throne, he sat with head dropped forward and shoulders lifted and eyes fixed on the tiger's head.

For a long time he sat thus in the darkening room. At last it grew quite dark. Only the great skylight over his head showed a defined outline. The young man had had no dinner and no supper, for his pockets were empty and his last sou gone. If he had opened the envelopes, he would have found money, and more than money, for he would have learned that the doors of the Salon had opened to him and the highest medal awarded him, and that for which he had toiled and waited and hoped,--for which he had staked his last effort and sacrificed everything, was won. He was recognized, and all Paris would quickly know it, and not Paris only, but all the world. But when he would open the envelope, his hands fell slack, and there it still lay on the table concealed by the darkness.

Down three flights of stairs in the court a strange and motley group were collecting, some bearing candles, all masked, some fantastically dressed and others only concealed by dominoes. The stairs went up on the outer wall of this inner court, past the windows of the basement occupied by the concierge and his wife and pretty daughter, and entered the building on the first floor above. By this arrangement the concierge could always see from his window who mounted them.

"Look, mamma." The pretty daughter stood peering out, her face framed in the white muslin

curtains. "Look. See the students. Ah, but they are droll!"

"Come away, ma fille."

"But the owl and the ape, there, they seem on very good terms. I wonder if they go to the room of Monsieur Kater! I think so; for one--the ghost in white, he is a little lame like the Englishman who goes always to the room of Monsieur.--Ah, bah! Imbecile! Away with you! Pig!"

The ape had suddenly approached his ugly face close to the face framed in the white muslin curtains on the other side of the window, and made exaggerated motions of an embrace. The wife of the concierge snatched her daughter away and drew the curtains close.

"Foolish child! Why do you stand and watch the rude fellows? This is what you get by it. I have told you to keep your eyes within."

"But I love to see them, so droll they are."

Stealthily the fantastic creatures began to climb the stairs, one, two, three flights, traversing a long hall at the end of each flight and turning to climb again. The expense of keeping a light on each floor for the corridors was not allowed in this building, and they moved along in the darkness, but for the flickering light of the few candles carried among them. As they neared the top they grew more stealthy and kept close together on the landing outside the studio door. One stooped and listened at the keyhole, then tried to look through it. "Not there?" whispered another.

"No light," was the whispered reply. They spoke now in French, now in English.

"He has heard us and hid himself. He is a strange man, this Scotchman. He did not attend the 'Vernissage,' nor the presentation of prizes, yet he wins the highest." The owl stretched out an arm, bare and muscular, from under his wing and tried the door very gently. It was not locked, and he thrust his head within, then reached back and took a candle from the ghost. "This will give light enough. Put out the rest of yours and make no noise."

Thus in the darkness they crept into the studio and gathered around the table. There they saw the unopened envelopes.

"He is not here. He does not know," said one and another.

"Where then can he be?"

"He has taken a panic and fled. I told you so," said the ghost.

"Ah, here he is! Behold! The Hamlet of our ghost! Wake, Hamlet; your father's spirit has arrived," cried one in English with a very French accent.

They now gathered before the dais, shouting and cheering in both English and French. One brought the envelopes on a palette and presented them. The young man gazed at them, stupidly at first, then with a feverish gleam in his eyes, but did not take them.

"Yes, I found them when I came in--but they are--not for me."

"They are addressed to you, Robert Kater, and the news is published and you leave them here unopened."

"He does not know--I told you so."

"You have the packet in your hand. Open it. Take it from him and decorate him. He is in a dream. It is the great medal. We will wake him."

They began to cheer and cheer again, each after the manner of the character he had assumed. The ass brayed, the owl hooted, the ghost groaned. The ape leaped on the back of the throne whereon the young man still sat, and seized him by the hair, chattering idiotically after the manner of apes, and began to wag his head back and forth. In the midst of the uproar Demosthenes stepped forward and took the envelopes from the palette, and, tearing them open, began reading them aloud by the light of a candle held for him by Lady Macbeth, who now and then interrupted with the remark that "her little hand was stained with blood," stretching forth an enormous, hairy hand for their inspection. But as Demosthenes read on the uproar ceased, and all listened with courteous attention. The ape leaped down from the back of the throne, the owl ceased hooting, and all were silent until the second envelope had been opened and the contents made known--that his exhibit had been purchased by the Salon.

"Robert Kater, you are at the top. We congratulate you. To be recognized by the 'Salon des Artistes Francaises' is to be recognized and honored by all the world."

They all came forward with kindly and sincere words, and the young man stood to receive them, but reeling and swaying, weary with emotion, and faint with hunger.

"Were you not going to the mask?"

"I was weary; I had not thought."

"Then wake up and go. We come for you."

"I have no costume."

"Ah, that is nothing. Make one; it is easy."

"He sits there like his own Saul, enveloped in gloom. Come, I will be your David," cried one, and snatched a guitar and began strumming it wildly.

While the company scattered and searched the studio for materials with which to create for him

a costume for the mask, the ghost came limping up to the young man who had seated himself again wearily on the throne, and spoke to him quietly.

"The tide's turned, Kater; wake up to it. You're clear of the breakers. The two pictures you were going to destroy are sold. I brought those Americans here while you were away and showed them. I told you they'd take something as soon as you were admitted. Here's the money."

Robert Kater raised himself, looking in the eyes of his friend, and took the bank notes as if he were not aware what they really might be.

"I say! You've enough to keep you for a year if you don't throw it away. Count it. I doubled your price and they took them at the price I made. Look at these."

Then Robert Kater looked at them with glittering eyes, and his shaking hand shut upon them, crushing the bank notes in a tight grip. "We'll halve it, share and share alike," he whispered, staring at the ghost without counting it. "As for this," his finger touched the decoration on his breast--"it is given to a--You won't take half? Then I'll throw them away."

"I'll take them all until you're sane enough to know what you're doing. Give them to me." He took them back and crept quietly, ghostlike, about the room until he found a receptacle in which he knew they would be safe; then, removing one hundred francs from the amount, he brought it back and thrust it in his friend's pocket. "There--that's enough for you to throw away on us to-night. Why are you taking off your decoration? Leave it where it is. It's yours."

"Yes, I suppose it is." Robert Kater brushed his hand across his eyes and stepped down from the throne. Then lifting his head and shoulders as if he threw off a burden, he leaped from the dais, and with one long howl, began an Indian war dance. He was the center and life of the hilarious crowd from that moment. The selection of materials had been made. A curtain of royal purple hung behind the throne, and this they threw around him as a toga, then crowned him as Mark Antony. They found for him also a tunic of soft wool, and with a strip of gold braid they converted a pair of sheepskin bedroom slippers into sandals, bound on his feet over his short socks.

"I say! Mark Antony never wore things like these," he shouted. "Give me a mask. I'll not wear these things without a mask." He snatched at the head of the owl, who ducked under his arm and escaped. "Go then. This is better. Mark, the illustrious, was an ass." He made a dive for the head of his braying friend and barely missed him.

"Come. We waste time. Cleopatra awaits him at 'la Fourchette d'or'; all our Cleopatras await us there."

"Surely?"

"Surely. Madame la Charne is there and the sisters Lucie and Bertha,--all are there,--and with them one very beautiful blonde whom you have never seen."

"She is for you--you cold Scotchman! That stone within you, which you call heart, to-night it will melt."

"You have everything planned then?"

"Everything is made ready."

"Look here! Wait, my friends! I haven't expressed myself yet." They were preparing to lift him above their heads. "I wish to say that you are all to share my good fortune and allow--"

"Wait for the champagne. You can say it then with more force."

"I say! Hold on! I ask you to--"

"So we do. We hold on. Now, up--so." He was borne in triumph down the stairs and out on the street and away to the sign of the Golden Fork, and seated at the head of the table in a small banquet room opening off from the balcony at one side where the feast which had been ordered and prepared was awaiting them.

A group of masked young women, gathered on the balcony, pelted them with flowers as they passed beneath it, and when the men were all seated, they trooped out, and each slid into her appointed place, still masked.

Then came a confusion of tongues, badinage, repartee, wit undiluted by discretion--and rippling laughter as one mask after another was torn off.

"Ah, how glad I am to be rid of it! I was suffocating," said a soft voice at Robert Kater's side.

He looked down quickly into a pair of clear, red-brown eyes--eyes into which he had never looked before.

"Then we are both content that it is off." He smiled as he spoke. She glanced up at him, then down and away. When she lifted her eyes an instant later again to his face, he was no longer regarding her. She was piqued, and quickly began conversing with the man on her left, the one who had removed her mask.

"It is no use, your smile, mademoiselle. He is impervious, that man. He has no sense or he could not turn his eyes away."

"I like best the impervious ones." With a light ripple of laughter she turned again to her right. "Monsieur has forgotten?"

"Forgotten?" Robert was mystified until he realized in the instant that she was pretending to a

former acquaintance. "Could I forget, mademoiselle? Permit me." He lifted his glass. "To your eyes--and to your--memory," he said, and drank it off.

After that he became the gayest of them all, and the merriment never flagged. He ate heartily, for he was very hungry, but he drank sparingly. His brain seemed supplied with intellectual missiles which he hurled right and left, but when they struck, it was only to send out a rain of sparks like the balls of holiday fireworks that explode in a fountain of brilliance and hurt no one.

"Monsieur is so gay!" said the soft voice of the blonde at his side.

"Are we not here for that, to enjoy ourselves?"

"Ah, if I could but believe that you remember me!"

"Is it possible mademoiselle thinks herself one to be so easily forgotten?"

"Monsieur, tell me the truth." She glanced up archly. "I have one very good reason for asking."

"You are very beautiful."

"But that is so banal--that remark."

"You complain that I tell you the truth when you ask it? You have so often heard it that the telling becomes banal? Shall I continue?"

"But it is of yourself that I would hear."

"So? Then it is as I feared. It is you who have forgotten."

They were interrupted at that moment, for he was called upon for a story, and he related one of his life as a soldier--a little incident, but everything pleased. They called upon him for another and another. The hour grew late, and at last the banqueters rose and began to remask and assume their various characters.

"What are you, monsieur, with that very strange dress that you wear, a Roman or a Greek?" asked his companion.

"I really don't know--a sort of nondescript. I did not choose my costume; it was made up for me by my friends. They called me Mark Antony, but that was because they did not know what else to call me. But they promised me Cleopatra if I would come with them."

"They would have done better to call you Petrarch, for I am Laura."

"But I never could have taken that part. I could make a very decent sort of ass of myself, but not a poet."

"What a very terrible voice your Lady Macbeth has!"

"Yes; but she was a terror, you know. Shall we follow the rest?"

They all trooped out of the café, and fiacres were called to take them to the house where the mask was held. The women were placed in their respective carriages, but the men walked. At the door of the house, as they entered the ballroom, they reunited, but again were soon scattered. Robert Kater wandered about, searching here and there for his very elusive Laura, so slim and elegant in her white and gold draperies, who seemed to be greatly in demand. He saw many whom he recognized; some by their carriage, some by their voices, but Laura baffled him. Had he ever seen her before? He could not remember. He would not have forgotten her--never. No, she was amusing herself with him.

"Monsieur does not dance?" It was a Spanish gypsy with her lace mantilla and the inevitable red rose in her hair. He knew the voice. It was that of a little model he sometimes employed.

"I dance, yes. But I will only take you out on the floor, my little Julie,--ha--ha--I know you, never fear--I will take you out on the floor, but on one condition."

"It is granted before I know it."

"Then tell me, who is she just passing?"

"The one whose clothing is so--so--as if she would pose for the--"

"Hush, Julie. The one in white and gold."

"I asked if it were she. Yes, I know her very well, for I saw a gentleman unmask her on the balcony above there, to kiss her. It is she who dances so wonderfully at the Opéra Comique. You have seen her, Mademoiselle Fée. Ah, come. Let us dance. It is the most perfect waltz."

At the close of the waltz the owl came and took the little gypsy away from Robert, and a moment later he heard the mellifluous voice of his companion of the banquet.

"I am so weary, monsieur. Take me away where we may refresh ourselves."

The red-brown eyes looked pleadingly into his, and the slender fingers rested on his arm, and together they wandered to a corner of palms where he seated her and brought her cool wine jelly and other confections. She thanked him sweetly, and, drooping, she rested her head upon her hand and her arm on the arm of her chair.

"So dull they are, these fêtes, and the people--bah! They are dull to the point of despair."

She was a dream of gold and white as she sat there--the red-gold hair and the red-brown eyes, and the soft gold and white draperies, too clinging, as the little gypsy had indicated, but beautiful as a gold and white lily. He sat beside her and gazed on her dreamily, but in a manner too detached. She was not pleased, and she sighed.

"Take the refreshment, mademoiselle; you will feel better. I will bring you wine. What will you have?"

"Oh, you men, who always think that to eat and drink something alone can refresh! Have you never a sadness?"

"Very often, mademoiselle."

"Then what do you do?"

"I eat and drink, mademoiselle. Try it."

"Oh, you strange man from the cold north! You make me shiver. Touch my hand. See? You have made me cold."

"Cold? You are a flame from the crown of gold on your head to your shoes of gold."

"Now that you are become a success, monsieur, what will you do? To you is given the heart's desire." She toyed with the quivering jelly, merely tasting it. It too was golden in hue, and golden lights danced in the heart of it.

"A great success? I am dreaming. It is so new to me that I do not believe it."

"You are very clever, monsieur. You never tell your thoughts. I asked if you remembered me and you answered in a riddle. I knew you did not, for you never saw me before."

"Did I never see you dance?"

"Ah, there you are again! To see me dance--in a great audience--one of many? That does not count. You but pretended."

He leaned forward, looking steadily in her eyes. "Did I but pretend when I said I never could forget you? Ah, mademoiselle, you are too modest."

She was maddened that she could not pique him to a more ardent manner, but gave no sign by so much as the quiver of an eyelid. She only turned her profile toward him indifferently. He noticed the piquant line of her lips and chin and throat, and the golden tones of her delicate skin.

"Did I not also tell you the truth when you asked me? And you rewarded me by calling me banal."

"And I was right. You, who are so clever, could think of something better to say." She gave him a quick glance, and placed a quivering morsel of jelly between her lips. "But you are so very strange to me. Tell me, were you never in love?"

"That is a question I may not answer." He still smiled, but it was merely the continuation of the smile he had worn before she shot that last arrow. He still looked in her eyes, but she knew he was not seeing her. Then he rallied and laughed. "Come, question for question. Were you never in love--or out of love--let us say?"

"Oh! Me!" She lifted her shoulders delicately. "Me! I am in love now--at this moment. You do not treat me well. You have not danced with me once."

"No. You have been dancing always, and fully occupied. How could I?"

"Ah, you have not learned. To dance with me--you must take me, not stand one side and wait."

"Are you engaged for the next?"

"But, yes. It is no matter. I will dance it with you. He will be consoled." She laughed, showing her beautiful, even teeth. "I make you a confession. I said to him, 'I will dance it with you unless the cold monsieur asks me--then I will dance with him, for it will do him good.'"

Robert Kater rose and stood a moment looking through the palms. The silken folds of his toga fell gracefully around him, and he held his head high. Then he withdrew his eyes from the distance and turned them again on her,--the gold and white being at his feet,--and she seemed to him no longer human, but a phantom from which he must flee, if but he might do so courteously, for he knew her to be no phantom, and he could not be other than courteous.

"Will you accept from me my laurel crown?" He took the chaplet from his head and laid it at her feet. Then, lifting her hand to his lips, he kissed the tips of her pink fingers, bowing low before her. "I go to send you wine. Console your partner. It is better so, for I too am in love." He smiled upon her as he had smiled at first, and was gone, walking out through the crowd--the weird, fantastic, bizarre company, as if he were no part of them. One and another greeted him as he passed, but he did not seem to hear them. He called a waiter and ordered wine to be taken to Mademoiselle Fée, and quickly was gone. They saw him no more.

It was nearly morning. A drizzling rain was falling, and the air was chill after the heat of the crowded ballroom. He drew it into his lungs in deep draughts, glad to be out in the freshness, and to feel the cool rain on his forehead. He threw off his encumbering toga and walked in his tunic, with bare throat and bare knees, and carried the toga over one bare arm, and swung the other bare arm free. He walked with head held high, for he was seeing visions, and hearing a far-distant call. Now at last he might choose his path. He had not failed, but with that call from afar--what should he do? Should he answer it? Was it only a call from out his own heart--a passing, futile call, luring him back?

Of one thing he was sure. There was the painting on which he had labored and staked his all now hanging in the Salon. He could see it, one of his visions realized,--David and Saul. The

deep, rich shadows, the throne, the tiger skin, the sandaled feet of the remorseful king resting on the great fanged and leering head, the eyes of the king looking hungrily out from under his forbidding brows, the cruel lips pressed tightly together, and the lithe, thin hands grasping the carved arms of the throne in fierce restraint,—all this in the deep shadows between the majestic carved columns, their bases concealed by the rich carpet covering the dais and their tops lost in the brooding darkness above—the lowering darkness of purple gloom that only served to reveal the sinister outlines of the somber, sorrowful, suffering king, while he indulged the one pure passion left him—listening—gazing from the shadows out into the light, seeing nothing, only listening.

And before him, standing in the one ray of light, clothed only in his tunic of white and his sandals, a human jewel of radiant color and slender strength, a godlike conception of youth and grace, his harp before him, the lilies crushed under his feet that he had torn from the strings which his fingers touched caressingly, with sunlight in his crown of golden, curling hair and the light of the stars in his eyes—David, the strong, the simple, the trusting, the God-fearing youth, as Robert Kater saw him, looking back through the ages.

Ah, now he could live. Now he could create—work: he had been recognized, and rewarded—Dust and ashes! Dust and ashes! The hope of his life realized, the goblet raised to his lips, and the draft—bitter. The call falling upon his heart—imperative—beseeching—what did it mean?

Slowly and heavily he mounted the stairs to his studio, and there fumbled about in the darkness and the confusion left by his admiring comrades until he found candles and made a light. He was cold, and his light clothing clung to him wet and chilling as grave clothes. He tore them off and got himself into things that were warm and dry, and wrapping himself in an old dressing gown of flannel, sat down to think.

He took the money his friend had brought him and counted it over. Good old Ben Howard! Half of it must go to him, of course. And here were finished canvases quite as good as the ones that had sold. Ben might turn them to as good an account as the others,—yes,—here was enough to carry him through a year and leave him leisure to paint unhampered by the necessity of making pot boilers for a bare living.

“Tell me, were you never in love?” That soft, insinuating voice haunted him against his will. In love? What did she know of love—the divine passion? Love! Fame! Neither were possible to him. He bowed his head upon the table, hiding his face, crushing the bank notes beneath his arms. Deep in his soul the eye of his own conscience regarded him,—an outcast hiding under an assumed name, covering the scar above his temple with a falling lock of hair seldom lifted, and deep in his soul a memory of a love. Oh, God! Dust and ashes! Dust and ashes!

He rose, and, taking his candle with him, opened a door leading from the studio up a short flight of steps to a little cupboard of a sleeping room. Here he cast himself on the bed and closed his eyes. He must sleep: but no, he could not. After a time of restless tossing he got up and drew an old portmanteau from the closet and threw the contents out on the bed. From among them he picked up the thing he sought and sat on the edge of his bed with it in his hands, turning it over and regarding it, tying and untying the worn, frayed, but still bright ribbons, which had once been the cherry-colored hair ribbons of little Betty Ballard.

Suddenly he rose and lifted his head high, in his old, rather imperious way, put out his candle, and looked through the small, dusty panes of his window. It was day—early dawn. He was jaded and weary, but he would try no longer to sleep. He must act, and shake off sentimentalism. Yes, he must act. He bathed and dressed with care, and then in haste, as if life depended on hurry, he packed the portmanteau and stepped briskly into the studio, looking all about, noting everything as if taking stock of it all, then sat down with pen and paper to write.

The letter was a long one. It took time and thought. When he was nearly through with it, Ben Howard lagged wearily in.

“Halloo! Why didn’t you wait for me? What did you clear out for and leave me in the lurch? Fresh as a daisy, you are, old chap, and I’m done for, dead.”

“You’re not scientific in your pleasures.” Robert Kater lifted his eyes and looked at his friend. “Are you alive enough to hear me and remember what I say? Will you do something for me? Shall I tell you now or will you breakfast first?”

“Breakfast? Faugh!” He looked disgustedly around him.

“I’m sorry. You drink too much. Listen, Ben. I’ll tell you what I mean to do and what I wish you to do for me—and—you remember all you can of it, will you? I must do it now, for you’ll be asleep soon, and this will be the last I shall see of you—ever. I’m leaving in two hours—as soon as I’ve breakfasted.”

“What’s that? Hold on!” Ben Howard sprang up, and darting behind a screen where they washed their brushes, he dashed cold water over his head and came back toweling himself. “I’m fit now. I did drink too much champagne, but I’ll sleep it off. Now fire away,—what’s up?”

“In two hours I’ll be en route for the coast, and to-morrow I’ll take passage for home on the first boat.” Robert closed and sealed the long letter he had been writing and tossed it on the table. “I want this mailed one week from to-day. Put it in your pocket so you won’t lose it among the rubbish here. One week from to-day it must be mailed. It’s to my great aunt, Jean Craigmile, who gave me the money to set up here the first year. I’ve paid that up—last week—with my last sou—and with interest. By rights she should have whatever there is here of any value, for, if it were not for her help, there would not have been a thing here anyway, and I’ve no one else to

whom to leave it--so see that this letter is mailed without fail, will you?"

The Englishman stood, now thoroughly awake, gazing at him, unable to make common sense out of Robert's remarks. "B--b--but--what's up? What are you leaving things to anybody for? You're not on your deathbed."

"I'm going home, don't you see?"

"But why don't you take the letter to her yourself--if you're going home?"

"Not there, man; not to Scotland."

"Your home's there."

"I have allowed you to think so." Robert forced himself to talk calmly. "In truth, I have no home, but the place I call home by courtesy is where I was brought up--in America."

"You--you--d--d--don't--"

"Yes--it's time you knew this. I've been leading a double life, and I'm done with it. I committed a crime, and I'm living under an assumed name. There is no such man as Robert Kater that I know of on earth, nor ever was. My name is--no matter--. I'm going back to the place where I killed my best friend--to give myself up--to imprisonment--I do not know to what--maybe death--but it will end my torture of mind. Now you know why I could not go to the Vernissage, to be treated--well, I could not go, that's all. Nor could I accept the honors given me under a name not my own. All the time I've lived in Paris I've been hiding--and this thing has been following me--although my occupation seems to have been the best cover I could have had--yet my soul has known no peace. Always--always--night and day--my own conscience has been watching and accusing me, an eye of dread steadily gazing down into my soul and seeing my sin deep, deep in my heart. I could not hide from it. And I would have given up before only that I wished to make good in something before I stepped down and out. I've done it." He put his hand heavily on Ben Howard's shoulder. "I've had a revelation this night. The lesson of my life is learned at last. It is, that there is but one road to freedom and life for me--and that road leads to a prison. It leads to a prison,--maybe worse,--but it leads me to freedom--from the thing that haunts me, that watches me and drives me. I may write you from that place which I will call home--Were you ever in love?"

The abruptness of the question set Ben Howard stammering again. He seized Robert's hand in both his own and held to it. "I--I--I--old chap--I--n--n--no--were you?"

"Yes; I've heard the call of her voice in my heart--and I'm gone. Now, Ben, stop your--well, I'll not preach to you, you of all men,--but--do something worth while. I've need of part of the money you got for me--to get back on--and pay a bill or two--and the rest I leave to you--there where you put it you'll find it. Will you live here and take care of these things for me until my good aunt, Jean Craigmile, writes you? She'll tell you what to do with them--and more than likely she'll take you under her wing--anyway, work, man, work. The place is yours for the present--perhaps for a good while, and you'll have a chance to make good. If I could live on that money for a year, as you yourself said, you can live on half of it for half a year, and in that time you can get ahead. Work."

He seized his portmanteau and was gone before Ben Howard could gather his scattered senses or make reply.

CHAPTER XXXII

THE PRISONER

Harry King did not at once consult an attorney, for Milton Hibbard, the only one he knew or cared to call upon for his defense, was an old friend of the Elder's and had been retained by him to assist the district attorney at the trial. The other two lawyers in Leavite, one of whom was the district attorney himself, were strangers to him. Twice he sent messages to the Elder after his return, begging him to come to him, never dreaming that they could be unheeded, but to the second only was any reply sent, and then it was but a cursory line. "Legal steps will be taken to secure justice for you, whoever you are."

To his friends he sent no messages. Their sympathy could only mean sorrow for them if they believed in him, and hurt to his own soul if they distrusted him, and he suffered enough. So he lay there in the clean, bare cell, and was glad that it was clean and held no traces of former occupants. The walls smelled of lime in their freshly plastered surfaces, and the floor had the pleasant odor of new pine.

His life passed in review before him from boyhood up. It had been a happy life until the tragedy brought into it by his own anger and violence, but since that time it had been one long nightmare of remorse, heightened by fear, until he had met Amalia, and after that it had been one unremitting strife between love and duty--delight in her mind, in her touch, in her every movement, and in his own soul despair unfathomable. Now at last it was to end in public

exposure, imprisonment, disgrace. A peculiar apathy of peace seemed to envelop him. There was no longer hope to entice, no further struggle to be waged against the terror of fear, or the joy of love, or the horror of remorse; all seemed gone from him, even to the vague interest in things transpiring in the world.

He had only a puzzled feeling concerning his arrest. Things had not proceeded as he had planned. If the Elder would but come to him, all would be right. He tried to analyze his feelings, and the thought that possessed him most was wonder at the strange vacuity of the condition of emotionlessness. Was it that he had so suffered that he was no longer capable of feeling? What was feeling? What was emotion: and life without either emotion, or feeling, or caring to feel,-- what would it be?

Valueless.--Empty space. Nothing left but bodily hunger, bodily thirst, bodily weariness. A lifetime, for his years were not yet half spent,--a lifetime at Waupun, and work for the body, but vacuity for the mind--maybe--sometimes--memories. Even thinking thus he seemed to have lost the power to feel sadness.

Confusion reigned within him, and yet he found himself powerless to correlate his thoughts or suggest reasons for the strange happenings of the last few days. It seemed to him that he was in a dream wherein reason played no part. In the indictment he was arraigned for the murder of Peter Craigmile, Jr.,--as Richard Kildene,--and yet he had seen his cousin lying dead before him, during all the years that had passed since he had fled from that sight. In battle he had seen men clubbed with the butt end of a musket fall dead with wounded temples, even as he had seen his cousin--stark--inert--lifeless. He had felt the strange, insane rage to kill that he had seen in others and marveled at. And now, after he had felt and done it, he was arrested as the man he had slain.

All the morning he paced his cell and tried to force his thoughts to work out the solution, but none presented itself. Was he the victim of some strange form of insanity that caused him to lose his identity and believe himself another man? Drunken men he had seen under the delusion that all the rest of the world were drunken and they alone sober. Oh, madness, madness! At least he was sane and knew himself, and this was a confusion brought about by those who had undertaken his arrest. He would wait for the Elder to come, and in the meantime live in his memories, thinking of Amalia, and so awaken in himself one living emotion, sacred and truly sane. In the sweetness of such thinking alone he seemed to live.

He drew the little ivory crucifix from his bosom and looked at it. "The Christ who bore our sins and griefs"--and again Amalia's words came to him. "If they keep you forever in the prison, still forever are you free." In snatches her words repeated themselves over in his mind as he gazed. "If you have the Christ in your heart--so are you high--lifted above the sin." "If I see you no more here, in Paradise yet will I see you, and there it will be joy--great--joy; for it is the love that is all of life, and all of eternity, and lives--lives."

Bertrand Ballard and his wife and daughter stood in the small room opening off from the corridor that led to the rear of the courthouse where was the jail, waiting for the jailer to bring his keys from his office, and, waiting thus, Betty turned her eyes beseechingly on her father, and for the first time since her talk with her mother in the studio, opened her lips to speak to him. She was very pale, but she did not tremble, and her voice had the quality of determination. Bertrand had yielded the point and had taken her to the jail against his own judgment, taking Mary with him to forestall the chance of Betty's seeing the young man alone. "Surely," he thought, "she will not ask to have her mother excluded from the interview."

"I don't want any one--not even you--or--or--mother, to go in with me."

"My child, be wise--and be guided."

"Yes, father,--but I want to go in alone." She slipped her hand in her mother's, but still looked in her father's eyes. "I must go in alone, father. You don't understand--but mother does."

"This young man may be an impostor. It is almost unmaidenly for you to wish to go in there alone. Mary--"

But Mary hesitated and trusted to her daughter's intuition. "Betty, explain yourself," was all she said.

"Suppose it was father--or you thought it might be father--and a terrible thing were hanging over him and you had not seen him for all this time--and he were in there, and I were you--wouldn't you ask to see him first alone? Would you stop for one moment to think about being proper? What do I care! If he is an impostor, I shall know it. In one moment I shall know it. I--I--just want to see him alone. It is because he has suffered so long--that is why he has come like this--if--they aren't accusing him wrongfully, and I--he will tell me the truth. If he is Richard, I would know it if I came in and stood beside him blindfolded. I will call you in a moment. Stand by the door, and let me see him alone."

The jailer returned, alert and important, shaking the keys in his hand. "This way, please."

In the moment's pause of unlocking, Betty again turned upon her father, her eyes glowing in the dim light of the corridor with wide, sorrowful gaze, large and irresistibly earnest. Bertrand glanced from her to his wife, who slightly nodded her head. Then he said to the surprised jailer: "We will wait here. My daughter may be able to recognize him. Call us quickly, dear, if you have reason to change your mind." The heavy door was closed behind her, and the key turned in the lock.

Harry King loomed large and tall in the small room, standing with his back to the door and his face lifted to the small window, where he could see a patch of the blue sky and white, scudding clouds. For the moment his spirit was not in that cell. It was free and on top of a mountain, looking into the clear eyes of a woman who loved him. He was so rapt in his vision that he did not hear the grating of the key in the lock, and Betty stood abashed, with her back to the door, feeling that she was gazing on a stranger. Relieved against the square of light, his hair looked darker than she remembered Peter's ever to have been,--as dark as Richard's, but that rough, neglected beard,--also dark,--and the tanned skin, did not bring either young man to her mind.

The pause was but for a moment, when he became aware that he was not alone and turned and saw her there.

"Betty! oh, Betty! You have come to help me." He walked toward her slowly, hardly believing his eyes, and held out both hands.

"If--I--can. Who are you?" She took his hands in hers and walked around him, turning his face to the light. Her breath came and went quickly, and a round red spot now burned on one of her cheeks, and her face seemed to be only two great, pathetic eyes.

"Do I need to tell you, Betty? Once we thought we loved each other. Did we, Betty?"

"I don't--don't--know--Peter! Oh, Peter! Oh, you are alive! Peter! Richard didn't kill you!" She did not cry out, but spoke the words with a low intensity that thrilled him, and then she threw her arms about his neck and burst into tears. "He didn't do it! You are alive! Peter, he didn't kill you! I knew he didn't do it. They all thought he did, and--and--your father--he has almost broken his bank just--just--hunting for Richard--to--to--have him hung--and oh! Peter, I have lived in horror,--for--fear he w--w--w--would, and--"

"He never could, Betty. I have come home to atone. I have come home to give myself up. I killed Richard--my cousin--my best friend. I struck him in hate and saw him lying dead: all the time they were hunting him it was I they should have hunted. I can't understand it. Did they take his dead body for mine--or--how was it they did not know he was struck down and murdered? They must have taken his body for mine--or--he must have fallen over--but he didn't, for I saw him lying dead as I had struck him. All these years the eye of vengeance has been upon me, and my crime has haunted me. I have seen him lying so--dead. God! God!"

Betty still clung to him and sobbed incoherently. "No, no, Peter, it was you who were drowned--they found all your things and saw where you had been pushed over, and--but you weren't drowned! They only thought it--they believed it--"

He put his hand to his head as if to brush away the confusion which staggered him. "Yes, Richard lay dead--and they found him,--but why did they hunt for him? And I--I--living--why didn't they hunt me,--and he, dead and lying there--why did they hunt him? But my father would believe the worst of him rather than to see himself disgraced in his son. Don't cry, little Betty, don't cry. You've had too much to bear. Sit here beside me and I'll tell you all about it. That's why I came back."

"B--b--ut if you weren't drowned, why--why didn't you come home and say so? Didn't you ever see the papers and how they were hunting Richard all over the world? I knew you were dead, because I knew you never would be so cruel as to leave every one in doubt and your father in sorrow--just because he had quarreled with you. It might have killed your mother--if the Elder had let her know."

"I can't tell you all my reasons, Betty; mostly they were coward's reasons. I did my best to leave evidence that I had been pushed over the bluff, because it seemed the only way to hide myself. I did my best to make them think me dead, and never thought any one could be harmed by it, because I knew him to be dead; so I just thought we would both be dead so far as the world would know,--and as for you, dear,--I learned on that fatal night that you did not love me--and that was another coward's reason why I wished to be dead to you all." He began pacing the room, and Betty sat on the edge of the narrow jail bedstead and watched him with tearful eyes. "It was true, Betty? You did not really love me?"

"Peter! Didn't you ever see the papers? Didn't you ever know all about the search for you and how he disappeared, too? Oh, Peter! And it was supposed he killed you and pushed you over the bluff and then ran away. Oh, Peter! But it was kept out of the home paper by the Elder so your mother should not know--and Peter--didn't you know Richard lived?"

"Lived? lived?" He lifted his clasped hands above his head, and they trembled. "Lived? Betty, say it again!"

"Yes, Peter. I saw him and I know--"

"Oh, God, make me know it. Make me understand." He fell on his knees beside her and hid his face in the scant jail bedding, and his frame shook with dry sobs. "I was a coward. I told you that. I--I thought myself a murderer, and all this time my terrible thought has driven me--Lived? I never killed him? God! Betty, say it again."

Betty sat still for a moment, shaken at first with a feeling of resentment that he had made them all suffer so, and Richard most of all. Then she was overwhelmed with pity for him, and with a glad tenderness. It was all over. The sorrow had been real, but it had all been needless. She placed her hand on his head, then knelt beside him and put her arm about his neck and drew his head to her bosom, motherwise, for the deep mother heart in her was awakened, and thus she told him all the story, and how Richard had come to her, broken and repentant, and what had

been said between them. When they rose from their knees, it was as if they had been praying and at the same time giving thanks.

"And you thought they would find him lying there dead and know you had killed him and hunt you down for a murderer?"

"Yes."

"Poor Peter! So you pushed that great stone out of the edge of the bluff into the river to make them think you had fallen over and drowned--and threw your things down, too, to make it seem as if you both were dead."

"Yes."

"Oh, Peter! What a terrible mistake! How you must have suffered!"

"Yes, as cowards suffer."

They stood for a moment with clasped hands, looking into each other's eyes. "Then it was true what Richard told me? You did not love me, Betty?" He had grown calmer, and he spoke very tenderly. "We must have all the truth now and conceal nothing."

"Not quite--true. I--I--thought I did. You were so handsome! I was only a child then--and I thought I loved you--or that I ought to--for any girl would--I was so romantic in those days--and you had been wounded--and it was like a romance--"

"And then?"

"And then Richard came, and I knew in one instant that I had done wrong--and that I loved him--and oh, I felt myself so wicked."

"No, Betty, dear. It was all--"

"It was not fair to you. I would have been true to you, Peter; you would have never known--but after Richard came and told me he had killed you,--I felt as if I had killed you, too. I did like you, Peter. I did! I will do whatever is right."

"Then it was not in vain--that we have all suffered. We have been saved from doing each other wrong. Everything will come right now. All that is needed is for father to hear what you have told me, and he will come and take me out of here--Where is Richard?"

"No one knows."

"Not even you, Betty?"

"No; he has dropped out of the world as completely as you did."

"Well, it will be all right, anyway. Father will withdraw his charge and--did you say his bank was going to pieces? He must have help. I can help him. You can help him, Betty."

"How?"

Then Peter told Betty how he had found Richard's father in his mountain retreat and that she must write to him. "If there is any danger of the bank's going, write for me to Larry Kildene. Father never would appeal to him if he lost everything in the world, so we must do it. As soon as I am out of here we can save him." Already he felt himself a new man, and spoke hopefully and cheerfully. He little knew the struggle still before him.

"Peter, father and mother are out there in the corridor waiting. I was to call them. I made them let me come in alone."

"Oh, call them, call them!"

"I don't think they will know you as I did, with that great beard on your face. We'll see."

When Bertrand and Mary entered, they stood for a moment aghast, seeing little likeness to either of the young men in the developed and bronzed specimen of manhood before them. But they greeted him warmly, eager to find him Peter, and in their manner he missed nothing of their old-time kindness.

"You are greatly changed, Peter Junior. You look more like Richard Kildene than you ever did before in your life," said Mary.

"Yes, but when we see Richard, we may find that a change has taken place in him also, and they will stand in their own shoes hereafter."

"Since the burden has been lifted from my soul and I know that he lives, I could sing and shout aloud here in this cell. Imprisonment--even death--means nothing to me now. All will come right before we know it."

"That is just the way Richard would act and speak. No wonder you have been taken for him!" said Bertrand.

"Yes, he was always more buoyant than I. Maybe we have both changed, but I hope he has not. I loved my friend."

As they walked home together Mary Ballard said, "Now, Peter ought to be released right away."

"Certainly he will be as soon as the Elder realizes the truth."

"How he has changed, though! His face shows the mark of sorrow. Those drooping, sensitive lines about his mouth--they were never there before, and they are the lines of suffering. They touched my heart. I wish Hester were at home. She ought to be written to. I'll do it as soon as I

get home."

"Peter is handsomer than he was, in spite of the lines, and, as you say, he does look more like his cousin than he used to--because of them, I think. Richard always had a debonair way with him, but he had that little, sensitive droop to the lips--not so marked as Peter's is now--but you remember, Mary--like his mother's."

"Oh, mother, don't you think Richard could be found?" Betty's voice trailed sorrowfully over the words. She was thinking how he had suffered all this time, and wishing her heart could reach out to him and call him back to her.

"He must be, dear, if he lives."

"Oh, yes. He'll be found. It can be published that Peter Junior has returned, and that will bring him after a while. Peter's physique seems to have changed as well as his face. Did you notice that backward swing of the shoulders, so like his cousin's, when he said, 'I could sing and shout here in this cell'? And the way he lifted his head and smiled? That beard is a horrible disguise. I must send a barber to him. He must be himself again."

"Oh, yes, do. He stands so straight and steps so easily. His lameness seems to have quite gone," said Mary, joyously,--but at that, Bertrand paused in his walk and looked at her, then glancing at Betty walking slowly on before, he laid his finger to his lips and took his wife's arm, and they said no more until they reached home and Betty was in her room.

"I simply can't think it, Bertrand. I see Peter in him. It is Peter. Of course he's like Richard. They were always alike, and that makes him all the more Peter. No other man would have that likeness, and it goes to show that he is Peter."

"My dear, unless the Elder sees him as we see him, the thing will have to be tried out in the courts."

"Unless we can find Richard. Hester ought to be here. She could set them right in a moment. Trust a mother to know her own boy. I'll write her immediately. I'll--"

"But you have no authority, Mary."

"No authority? She is my friend. I have a right to do my duty by her, and I can so put it that it will not be such a shock to her as it inevitably will be if matters go wrong, or Peter should be kept in prison for lack of evidence--or for too much evidence. She'll have to know sooner or later."

Bertrand said no more against this, for was not Mary often quite right? "I'll see to it that he has a barber, and try to persuade the Elder to see him. That may settle it without any trouble. If not, I must see that he has a good lawyer to help in his defense."

"If that savage old man remains stubborn, Hester must be here."

"If the thing goes to a trial, Betty will have to appear against him."

"Well, it mustn't go to a trial, that's all."

That night two letters went out from Leauvite, one to Hester Craigmile at Aberdeen, Scotland, and one to the other end of the earth, where Larry Kildene waited for news of Harry King, there on the mountain top. On the first of each month Larry rode down to the nearest point where letters could be sent, making a three days' trip on horseback. His first trip brought nothing, because Harry had not sent his first letter in time to reach the station before Larry was well on his way back up the mountain. He would not delay his return, for fear of leaving the two women too long alone.

After Harry's departure, Madam Manovska had grown restless, and once had wandered so far away as to cause them great alarm and a long search, when she was found, sitting close to the fall, apparently too weak and too dazed to move. This had so awakened Amalia's fears that she never allowed her mother to leave the cabin alone, but always on one pretext or another accompanied her.

The situation was a difficult one for them all. If Amalia took her mother away to some town, as she wished to do, she feared for Madam Manovska's sanity when she could not find her husband. And still, when she tried to tell her mother of her father's death, she could not convince her of its truth. For a while she would seem to understand and believe it, but after a night's rest she would go back to the old weary repetition of going to her husband and his need of her. Then it was all to go over again, day after day, until at last Amalia gave up, and allowed her mother the comfort of her belief: but all the more she had to invent pretexts for keeping her on the mountain. So she accepted Larry's kindly advice and his earnestly offered hospitality and his comforting companionship, and remained, as, perforce, there was nothing else for her to do.

CHAPTER XXXIII

HESTER CRAIGMILE RECEIVES HER LETTER

The letters reached their opposite destinations at about the same time. The one to Amalia closely buttoned in Larry's pocket, and the short one to himself which he read and reread as his horse slowly climbed the trail, were halfway up the mountain when the postboy delivered Hester Craigmile's at the door of the sedate brick house belonging to the Craigmiles of Aberdeen.

Peter Junior's mother and two elderly women--his grandaunts--were seated in the dignified parlor, taking afternoon tea, when the housemaid brought Hester her letter.

"Is it from Peter, maybe?" asked the elder of the two aunts.

"No, Aunt Ellen; I think it is from a friend."

"It's strange now, that Peter's no written before this," said the younger, leaning forward eagerly. "Will ye read it, dear? We'll be wantin' to know if there's ae word about him intil't."

"There may be, Aunt Jean." Hester set her cup of tea down untasted, and began to open her letter.

"But tak' yer tea first, Hester. Jean's an impatient body. That's too bad of ye, Jean; her toast's gettin' cold."

"Oh, that's no matter at all, Aunt Ellen. I'll take it as soon as I see if he's home all right. Yes, my friend says my husband has been home for three days and is well."

"That's good. Noo ye're satisfied, lay it by and tak' yer tea." And Hester smilingly laid it by and took her tea, for Mary Ballard had said nothing on the first page to startle her friend's serenity.

Jean Craigmile, however, still looked eagerly at the letter as it lay on a chair at Hester's side. She was a sweet-faced old lady, alert, and as young as Peter Junior's father, for all she was his aunt, and now she apologized for her eagerness by saying, as she often did: "Ye mind he's mair like my brither than my nephew, for we all used to play together--Peter, Katherine, and me. We were aye friends. She was like a sister, and he like a brither. Ah, weel, we're auld noo."

Her sister looked at her fondly. "Ye're no so auld, Jean, but ye might be aulder. It's like I might have been the mither of her, for I mind the time when she was laid in my arms and my feyther tell't me I was to aye care for her like my ain, an' but for her I would na' be livin' noo."

"And why for no?" asked Jean, quickly.

"I had ye to care for, child. Do ye no' understand?"

Jean laughed merrily. "She's been callin' me child for saxty-five years," she said.

Both the old ladies wore lace caps, but that of Jean's was a little braver with ribbons than Ellen's. Small lavender bows were set in the frill all about her face, and the long ends of the ribbon were not tied, but fell down on the soft white mull handkerchief that crossed over her bosom.

"I mind when Peter married ye, Hester," said Ellen. "I was fair wild to have him bring ye here on his weddin' journey, and he should have done so, for we'd not seen him since he was a lad, and all these years I've been waitin' to see ye."

"Weel, 'twas good of him to leave ye bide with us a bit, an' go home without ye," said Jean.

"It was good of him, but I ought not to have allowed it." Hester's eyes glistened and her face grew tender and soft. To the world, the Elder might seem harsh, stubborn, and vindictive, but Hester knew the tenderness in which none but she believed. Ever since the disappearance of their son, he had been gentle and most lovingly watchful of her, and his domination had risen from the old critical restraint on her thoughts and actions to a solicitous care for her comfort,--studying her slightest wishes with almost appealing thoughtfulness to gratify them.

"And why for no allow it? There's naething so good for a man as lettin' him be kind to ye, even if he is an Elder in the kirk. I'm thinkin' Peter's ain o' them that such as that is good for--Hester! What ails ye! Are oot of ye're mind? Gi'e her a drap of whuskey, Jean. Hester!"

While they were chatting and sipping their tea, Hester had quietly resumed the reading of her letter, and now she sat staring straight before her, the pages crushed in her hand, leaning forward, pale, with her eyes fixed on space as if they looked on some awful sight.

"Hester! Hester! What is it? Is there a bit o' bad news for ye' in the letter? Here, tak' a sip o' this, dear. Tak' it, Hester; 'twill hairten ye up for whatever's intil't," cried Jean, holding to Hester's lips the ever ready Scotch remedy, which she had snatched from a wall cupboard behind her and poured out in a glass.

Ellen, who was lame and could not rise from her chair without help, did not cease her directions and ejaculations, lapsing into the broader Scotch of her girlhood under excitement, as was the way with both the women. "Tell us what ails ye, dear; maybe it's no so bad. Gie me the letter, Jean, an' I'll see what's intil't. Ring the bell for Tillie an' we'll get her to the couch."

But Hester caught Jean's gown and would not let her go to the bell cord which hung in the far corner of the room. "No, don't call her. I'll lie down a moment, and--and--we'll talk--this--over." She clung to the letter and would not let it out of her hand, but rose and walked wearily to the couch unassisted and lay down, closing her eyes. "After a minute, Aunt Ellen, I'll tell you. I must think, I must think." So she lay quietly, gathering all her force to consider and meet what she must, as her way was, while Jean sat beside, stroking her hand and saying sweet, comforting words in her broad Scotch.

"There's neathin' so guid as a drap of whuskey, dear, for strengthnin' the hairt whan ye hae a

bit shock. It's no yer mon, Peter? No? Weel, thank the Lord for that. Noo, tak ye anither bit sup, for ye ha'e na tasted it. Wull ye no gie Ellen the letter, love? 'Twill save ye tellin' her."

Hester passively took the whisky as she was bid, and presently sat up and finished reading the letter. "Peter has been hiding--something from me for--three years--and now--"

"Yes, an' noo. It's aye the way wi' them that hides--whan the day comes they maun reveal--it's only the mair to their shame," exclaimed Ellen.

"Oh, but it's all mixed up--and my best friend doesn't know the truth. Yes, take the letter, Aunt Ellen, and read it yourself." She held out the pages with a shaking hand, and Jean took them over to her sister, who slowly read them in silence.

"Ah, noo. As I tell't ye, it's no so bad," she said at last.

"Wha's the trouble, Ellen? Don't keep us waitin'."

"Bide ye in patience, child. Ye're always so easily excitet. I maun read the letter again to get the gist o't, but it's like this. The Elder's been of the opeenion noo these three years that his son was most foully murder't, an--"

"He may ha'e been kill't, but he was no' murder't," cried Jean, excitedly. "I tell ye 'twas purely by accident--" she paused and suddenly clapped both hands over her mouth and rocked herself back and forth as if she had made some egregious blunder, then: "Gang on wi' yer tellin'. It's dour to bide waitin'. Gie me the letter an' lat me read it for mysel'."

"Lat me tell't as I maun tell't. Ye maun no keep interruptin'. Jean has no order in her brain. She aye pits the last first an' the first last. This is a hopefu' letter an' a guid ain from yer friend, an' it tells ye yer son's leevin' an' no murder't--"

"Thank the Lord! I ha'e aye said it," ejaculated Jean, fervently.

"Ye ha'e aye said it? Child, what mean ye? Ye ha'e kenned naethin' about it."

But Jean would not be set down. She leaned forward with glistening eyes. "I ha'e aye said it. I ha'e aye said it. Gie me the letter, Ellen."

But Ellen only turned composedly and resumed her interpretation of the letter to Hester, who sat looking with dazed expression from one aunt to the other.

"It all comes about from Peter's bein' a stubborn man, an' he'll no change the opeenion he's held for three years wi'oot a struggle. Here comes his boy back an' says, 'I'm Peter Junior, and yer son.' An' his feyther says till him, 'Ye're no my son, for my son was murder't--an' ye're Richard Kildene wha' murder't him.' And noo, it's for ye to go home, Hester, an' bring Peter to his senses, and show him the truth. A mither knows her ain boy, an' if it's Peter Junior, it's Peter Junior, and Richard Kildene's died."

"I tell ye he's no dead!" cried Jean, springing to her feet.

"Hush, child. He maun be dead, for ain of them's dead, and this is Peter Junior."

"Read it again, Aunt Ellen," said Hester, wearily. "You'll see that the Elder brings a fearful charge against Richard. He thinks Richard is making a false claim that he is--Peter--my boy."

Jean sat back in her chair crying silently and shrinking into herself as if she were afraid to say more, and Ellen went on. "Listen, now, what yer frien' says. 'The Elder is wrong, for Bertrand'--that's her husband, I'm thinkin'--?"

"Yes."

"'Bertrand and Betty,--' Who's Betty, noo?"

"Betty is their daughter. She was to--have--married my son."

"Good. So she would know her lover. 'Betty and I have seen him,' she says, 'and have talked with him, and we know he is Peter Junior,' she says. 'Richard Kildene has disappeared,' she says, 'and yet we know he is living somewhere and he must be found. We fear the Elder will not withdraw the charge until Richard is located'--An' that will be like Peter, too--and meanwhile your son Peter will have to lie in jail, where he is now, unless you can clear matters up here by coming home and identifying him, and that you can surely do.'--An' that's all vera weel. There's neathin' to go distraught over in the like o' that. An' here she says, 'He's a noble, fine-looking man, and you'll be proud of him when you see him.' Oh, 'tis a fine letter, an' it's Peter wi' his stubbornness has been makin' a boggle o' things. If I were na lame, I'd go back wi' ye an' gie Peter a piece o' my mind."

"An' I'll locate Richard for ye!" cried Jean, rising to her feet and wiping away the fast-falling tears, laughing and weeping all in the same moment. "Whish't, Ellen, it's ye'rsel' that kens neathin' about it, an' I'll tell ye the truth the noo--that I've kept to mysel' this lang time till my conscience has nigh whupped me intil my grave."

"Tak' a drap o' whuskey, Jean, ye're flyin' oot o' yer heid. It's the hystiricks she's takin'."

"Ah, no! What is it, Aunt Jean? What is it?" cried Hester, eagerly, drawing her to the seat by her side again.

"It's no the hystiricks," cried Jean, rocking back and forth and patting her hands on her knees and speaking between laughing and crying. "It's the truth at last, that I've been lyin' about these three lang years, thank the Lord!"

"Jean, is it thankin' the Lord ye are, for lyin'?"

"Ellen, ye mind whan ye broke ye'r leg an' lay in the south chamber that lang sax months?"

"Aye, weel do I mind it."

"Lat be wi' ye're interruptin' while I tell't. He came here."

"Who came here?"

"Richard--the poor lad! He tell't me all aboot it. How he had a mad anger on him, an' kill't his cousin Peter Junior whan they'd been like brithers all their lives, an' hoo he pushed him over the brink o' a gre't precipice to his death, an' hoo he must forever flee fra' the law an' his uncle's wrath. Noo it's--"

"Oh, Aunt Jean!" cried Hester, despairingly. "Don't you see that what you say only goes to prove my husband right? Yet how could he claim to be Peter--it--it's not like the boy. Richard never, never would--"

"He may ha' been oot o' his heid thinkin' he pushed him over the brink. I ha'e na much opeenion o' the judgment o' a man ony way. They never know whan to be set, an' whan to gie in. Think shame to yersel', Jean, to be hidin' things fra me the like o' that an' then lyin' to me."

"He was repentit, Ellen. Ye can na' tak the power o' the Lord in yer ain han's an' gie a man up to the law whan he's repentit. If ye'd seen him an' heard the words o' him and seen him greet, ye would ha' hid him in yer hairt an' covered wi' the mantle o' charity, as I did. Moreover, I saved ye from dour lyin' yersel'. Ye mind whan that man that Peter sent here to find Richard came, hoo ye said till him that Richard had never been here? Ye never knew why for that man wanted Richard, but I knew an' I never tell't ye. An' if ye had known what I knew, ye never could ha' tell't him what ye did so roundly an' sent him aboot his business wi' a straight face."

"An' noo whaur is Richard?"

"He's awa' in Paris pentin' pictures. He went there to learn to be a penter."

"An' whaur gat he the money to go wi'? There's whaur the new black silk dress went ye should ha' bought yersel' that year. Ye lat me think it went to the doctor. Child! Child!"

"Yes, sister; I lee'd to ye. It's been a heavy sin on my soul an' ye may well thank the Lord it's no been on yer ain. But hark ye noo. It's all come back to me. Here's the twenty pun' I gave him. It's come back wi' interest." Proudly Jean drew from her bosom an envelope containing forty pounds in bank notes. "Look ye, hoo he's doubl't it?" Again she laughed through her tears.

"And you know where he is--and can find him?"

"Yes, Hester, dear, I know. He took a new name. It was Robert Kater he called himsel'. So, there he's been pentin' pictures. Go, Hester, an' find yer son, an' I'll find Richard. Ellen, ye'll have to do wi' Tillie for a week an' a bit,--I'm going to Paris to find Richard."

"Ye'll do nae sic' thing. Ye'll find him by post."

"I'll trust to nae letter the noo, Ellen. Letters aften gang astray, but I'll no gang astray."

"Oh, child, child! It's a sorrowful thing I'm lame an' can na' gang wi' ye. What are ye doin', Hester?"

"I'm hunting for the newspaper. Don't they put the railroad time-tables in the paper over here, or must I go to the station to inquire about trains?"

"Ye'd better ask at the station. I'll go wi' ye. Ye might boggle it by yersel'. Ring for Tillie, Jean. She can help me oot o' my chair an' get me dressed, while ye're lookin' after yer ain packin', Jean."

So the masterful old lady immediately began to superintend the hasty departure of both Hester and Jean. The whole procedure was unprecedented and wholly out of the normal course of things, but if duty called, they must go, whether she liked the thought of their going or not. So she sent Tillie to call a cab, and contented herself with bewailing the stubbornness of Peter, her nephew.

"It was aye so, whan he was a lad playin' wi' Jean an' Katherine, whiles whan his feyther lat his mither bring Katherine and him back to Scotland on a veesit. Jean and Katherine maun gie in til him if they liket it or no. I've watched them mony's the time, whan he would haud them up in their play by the hour together, arguyin' which should be horse an' which should be driver, an' it was always Peter that won his way wi' them. Is the cab there, Tillie? Then gie me my crutch. Hester, are you ready? Jean, I'll find oot for ye all aboot the trains for Dover. Ye maun gang direc' an' no loiter by the way. Come, Hester. I doot she ought not to be goin' aboot alone. Paris is an' awfu' like place for a woman body to be goin' aboot alone. But it canna' be helpit. What's an old woman like me wi' only one sound leg and a pair o' crutches, to go on sic' like a journey?"

"If I could, I'd take you home with me, Aunt Ellen; if I were only sure of the outcome of this trouble, I would anyway--but to take you there to a home of sorrow--"

"There, Hester, dear. Don't ye greet. It's my opeenion ye're goin' to find yer son an' tak him in yer arms ance mair. Ye were never the right wife for Peter. I can see that. Ye're too saft an' gentle."

"I'm thinking how Peter has borne this trouble alone, all these years, and suffered, trying to keep the sorrow from me."

"Yes, dear, yes. Peter told us all aboot it whan he was here, an' he bade us not to lat ye ken a

word about it, but to keep from ye all knowledge of it. Noo it's come to ye by way of this letter fra yer frien', an' I'm thinkin' it's the best way; for noo, at last ye ha'e it in ye're power to go an' maybe save an innocent man, for it's no like a son of our Katherine would be sic' like a base coward as to try to win oot from justice by lyin' himsel' intil his victim's own home. I'll no think it."

"Nor I, Aunt Ellen. It's unbelievable! And of Richard--no. I loved Richard. He was like my own son to me--and Peter Junior loved him, too. They may have quarreled--and even he might--in a moment of anger, he might have killed my boy,--but surely he would never do a thing like this. They are making some horrible mistake, or Mary Ballard would never have written me."

"Noo ye're talkin' sense. Keep up courage an' never tak an' affliction upo' yersel' until it's thrust upo' ye by Providence."

Thus good Aunt Ellen in her neat black bonnet and shawl and black mits, seated at Hester's side in the cab holding to her crutches, comforted and admonished her niece all the way to the station and back, and the next day she bravely bade Jean and Hester both good-by and settled herself in her armchair to wait patiently for news from them.

CHAPTER XXXIV

JEAN CRAIGMILE'S RETURN

When at last Jean Craigmile returned, a glance at her face was quite enough to convince Ellen that things had not gone well. She held her peace, however, until her sister had had time to remove her bonnet and her shawl and dress herself for the house, before she broke in upon Jean's grim silence. Then she said:--

"Weel, Jean. I'm thinkin' ye'd better oot wi' it."

"Is Tillie no goin' to bring in the tea? It's past the hour. I see she grows slack, wantin' me to look after her."

"Ring for it then, Jean. I'm no for leavin' my chair to ring for it." So Jean pulled the cord and the tea was brought in due time, with hot scones and the unwonted addition of a bowl of roses to grace the tray.

"The posies are a greetin' to ye, Jean; I ordered them mysel'. Weel? An' so ye ha'na' found him?"

"Oh, sister, my hairt's heavy an' sair. I canna' thole to tell ye."

"But ye maun do't, an' the sooner ye tell't the sooner ye'll ha'e it over."

"He was na' there. Oh, Ellen, Ellen! He'd gone to America! I'm afraid the Elder is right an' Hester has gone home to get her death blow. Why were we so precipitate in lettin' her go?"

"Jean, tell me all about it, an' I'll pit my mind to it and help ye think it oot. Don't ye leave oot a thing fra' the time ye left me till the noo."

Slowly Jean poured her sister's tea and handed it to her. "Tak' yer scones while they're hot, Ellen. I went to the place whaur he'd been leevin'. I had the direction all right, but whan I called, I found anither man in possession. The man was an Englishman, so I got on vera weel for the speakin'. It's little I could do with they Frenchmen. He was a dirty like man, an' he was daubin' away at a picture whan I opened the door an' walked in. I said to him, 'Whaur's Richard'--no, no, no. I said to him, calling Richard by the name he's been goin' by, I said, 'Whaur's Robert Kater?' He jumped up an' began figitin' about the room, settin' me a chair an' the like, an' I asked again, 'Is this the pentin' room o' Robert Kater?' an' he said, 'It was his room, yes.' Then he asked me was I any kin to him, an' I told him, did he think I would come walkin' into his place the like o' that if I was no kin to him? An' then he began tellin' me a string o' talk an' I could na' mak' head nor tail o't, so I asked again, 'If ye're a friend o' his, wull ye tell me whaur he's gone?' an' then he said it straight oot, 'To Ameriky,' an' it fair broke my hairt."

For a minute Jean sat and sipped her tea, and wiped the tears from her eyes; then she took up the thread of her story again.

"Then he seemed all at once to bethink himsel' o' something, an' he ran to his coat that was hangin' behind the door on a nail, an' he drew oot a letter fra the pocket, an' here it is.

"'Are ye Robert's Aunt Jean?' he asked, and I tell't him, an', 'Surely,' he said, 'an' I did na' think ye old enough to be his Aunt Jean.' Then he began to excuse himsel' for forgettin' to mail that letter. 'I promised him I would,' he said, 'but ye see, I have na' been wearin' my best coat since he left, an' that's why. We gave him a banket,' he says, 'an' I wore my best coat to the banket, an' he gave me this an' told me to mail it after he was well away,' an' he says, 'I knew I ought not to put it in this coat pocket, for I'd forget it,'--an' so he ran on; but it was no so good a coat, for the lining was a' torn an' it was gray wi' dust, for I took it an' brushed it an' mended it mysel' before I left Paris."

Again Jean paused, and taking out her neatly folded handkerchief wiped away the falling tears,

and sipped a moment at her tea in silence.

"Tak' ye a bit o' the scones, Jean. Ye'll no help matters by goin' wi'oot eatin'. If the lad's done a shameful' like thing, ye'll no help him by greetin'. He maun fall. Ye've done yer best I doot, although mistakenly to try to keep it fra me."

"He was sae bonny, Ellen, and that like his mither 'twould melt the hairt oot o' ye to look on him."

"Ha'e ye no mair to tell me? Surely it never took ye these ten days to find oot what ye ha'e tell't."

"The man was a kind sort o' a body, an' he took me oot to eat wi' him at a cafy, an' he paid it himsel', but I'm thinkin' his purse was sair empty whan he got through wi' it. I could na' help it. Men are vera masterfu' bodies. I made it up to him though, for I bided a day or twa at the hotel, an' went to the room,--the pentin' room whaur I found him--there was whaur he stayed, for he was keepin' things as they were, he said, for the one who was to come into they things--Robert Kater had left there--ye'll find oot aboot them whan ye read the letter--an' I made it as clean as ye'r han' before I left him. He made a dour face whan he came in an' found me at it, but I'm thinkin' he came to like it after a', for I heard him whustlin' to himsel' as I went down the stair after tellin' him good-by.

"Gin ye had seen the dirt I took oot o' that room, Ellen, ye would a' held up ye'r two han's in horror. There were crusts an' bones behind the pictures standin' against the wa' that the rats an' mice had been gnawin' there, an' there were bottles on a shelf, old an' empty an' covered wi' cobwebs an' dust, an' the floor was so thick wi' dirt it had to be scrapit, an' what wi' old papers an' rags I had a great basket full taken awa--let be a bundle o' shirts that needed mendin'. I took the shirts to the hotel, an' there I mended them until they were guid enough to wear, an' sent them back. So there was as guid as the price o' the denner he gave me, an' naethin said. Noo read the letter an' ye'll see why I'm greetin'. Richard's gone to Ameriky to perjure his soul. He says it was to gie himsel' up to the law, but from the letter to Hester it's likely his courage failed him. There's naethin' to mak' o't but that--an' he sae bonny an' sweet, like his mither."

Jean Craigmile threw her apron over her head and rocked herself back and forth, while Ellen set down her cup and reluctantly opened the letter--many pages, in a long business envelope. She sighed as she took them out.

"It's a waefu' thing how much trouble an' sorrow a man body brings intil the world wi' him. Noo there's Richard, trailin' sorrow after him whaever he goes."

"But ye mind it came from Katherine first, marryin' wi' Larry Kildene an' rinnin' awa' wi' him," replied Jean.

"It was Larry huntit her oot whaur she had been brought for safety."

They both sat in silence while Ellen read the letter to the very end. At last, with a long, indrawn sigh, she spoke.

"It's no like a lad that could write sic a letter, to perjure his soul. No won'er ye greet, Jean. He's gi'en ye everything he possesses, wi' one o' the twa pictures in the Salon! Think o't! An' a' he got fra' the ones he sold, except enough to take him to America. Ye canna' tak' it."

"No. I ha'e gi'en them to the Englishman wha' has his room. I could na' tak them." Jean continued to sway back and forth with her apron over her head.

"Ye ha'e gi'en them awa'! All they pictures pented by yer ain niece's son! An' twa' acceptit by the Salon! Child, child! I'd no think it o' ye." Ellen leaned forward in her chair reprovingly, with the letter crushed in her lap.

"I told him to keep them safe, as he was doin', an' if he got no word fra' me after sax months,--he was to bide in the room wi' them--they were his."

"Weel, ye're wiser than I thought ye."

For a long time they sat in silence, until at last Ellen took up the letter to read it again, and began with the date at the head.

"Jean," she cried, holding it out to her sister and pointing to the date with shaking finger. "Wull ye look at that noo! Are we both daft? It's no possible for him to ha' gotten there before that letter was written to Hester. Look ye, Jean! Look ye! Here 'tis the third day o' June it was written by his own hand."

"Count it oot, Ellen, count it oot! Here's the calendar almanac. Noo we'll ha'e it. It's twa weeks since Hester an' I left an' she got the letter the day before that, an' that's fifteen days--"

"An' it takes twa weeks mair for a boat to cross the ocean, an' that gives fourteen days mair before that letter to Hester was written, an' three days fra' Liverpool here, pits it back to seventeen days,--an' fifteen days--mak's thirty-two days,--an' here' it's nearin' the last o' June--"

"Jean! Whan Hester's frien' was writin' that letter to Hester, Richard was just sailin' fra France! Thank the Lord!"

"Thank the Lord!" ejaculated her sister, fervently. "Ellen, it's you for havin' the head to think it oot, thank the Lord!" And now the dear soul wept again for very gladness.

Ellen folded her hands in her lap complaisantly and nodded her head. "Ye've a good head, yersel', Jean, but ye aye let yersel' get excitet. Noo, it's only for us to bide in peace an' quiet an' know that the earth is the Lord's an' the fullness thereof until we hear fra' Hester."

"An' may the Lord pit it in her hairt to write soon!"

While the good Craigmiles of Aberdeen were composing themselves to the hopeful view that Ellen's discovery of the date had given them, Larry Kildene and Amalia were seated in a car, luxurious for that day, speeding eastward over the desert across which Amalia and her father and mother had fled in fear and privation so short a time before. She gazed through the plate-glass windows and watched the quivering heat waves rising from the burning sands. Well she knew those terrible plains! She saw the bleaching bones of animals that had fallen by the way, even as their own had fallen, and her eyes filled. She remembered how Harry King had come to them one day, riding on his yellow horse--riding out of the setting sun toward them, and how his companionship had comforted them and his courage and help had saved them more than once,--and how, had it not been for him, their bones, too, might be lying there now, whitened in the heat. Oh, Harry, Harry King! She who had once crossed those very plains behind a jaded team now felt that the rushing train was crawling like a snail.

Larry Kildene, seated facing her and watching her, leaned forward and touched her hand. "We're going at an awful pace," he said. "To think of ever crossing these plains with the speed of the wind!"

She smiled a wan smile. "Yes, that is so. But it still is very slowly we go when I measure with my thoughts the swiftness. In my thoughts we should fly--fly!"

"It will be only three days to Chicago from here, and then one night at a hotel to rest and clean up, and the next day we are there--in Leauvite--think of it! We're an hour late by the schedule, so better think of something else. We'll reach an eating station soon. Get ready, for there will be a rush, and we'll not have a chance for a good meal again for no one knows how long. Maybe you're not hungry, but I could eat a mule. I like this, do you know, traveling in comfort! To think of me--going home to save Peter's bank!" He chuckled to himself a moment; then resumed: "And that's equivalent to saving the man's life. Well, it's a poor way for a man to go through life, able to see no way but his own way. It narrows his vision and shortens his reach--for, see, let him find his way closed to him, and whoop! he's at an end."

Again Larry sat and watched her, as he silently chuckled over his present situation. Again he reached out and patted her hand, and again she smiled at him, but he knew where her thoughts were. Harry King had been gone but a short time when Madam Manovska, in spite of Amalia's watchfulness, wandered away for the last time. On this occasion she did not go toward the fall, but went along the trail toward the plains below. It was nearly evening when she eluded Amalia and left the cabin. Frantically they searched for her all night, riding through the darkness, carrying torches and calling in all directions, as far as they supposed her feet could have carried her, but did not find her until early morning, lying peacefully under a little scrub pine, far down the trail. By her side lay her husband's worn coat, with the lining torn away, and a small heap of ashes and charred papers. She had been destroying the documents he had guarded so long. She would not leave them to witness against him. Tenderly they took her up and carried her back to the cabin and laid her in her bunk, but she only babbled of "Paul," telling happily that she had seen him, and that he was coming up the trail after her, and that now they would live on the mountain in peace and go no more to Poland--and quickly after that she dropped to sleep again and never woke. She was with "Paul" at last. Then Amalia dressed her in the black silk Larry had brought her, and they carried her down the trail and laid her in a grave beside that of her husband, and there Larry read the prayers of the English church over the two lonely graves, while Amalia knelt at his side. When they went down the trail to take the train, after receiving Betty's letter, they marked the place with a cross which Larry had made.

Truth to tell, as they sat in the car, facing each other, Larry himself was sad, although he tried to keep Amalia's thoughts cheerful. At last she woke to the thought that it was only for her he maintained that forced light-heartedness, and the realization came to her that he also had cause for sorrow on leaving the spot where he had so long lived in peace, to go to a friend in trouble. The thought helped her, and she began to converse with Larry instead of sitting silently, wrapped in her own griefs. Because her heart was with Harry King,--filled with anxiety for him,--she talked mostly of him, and that pleased Larry well; for he, too, had need to speak of Harry.

"Now there is a character for you, as fine and sweet as a woman and strong, too! I've seen enough of men to know the best of them when I find them. I saw it in him the moment I got him up to my cabin and laid him in my bunk. He--he--minded me of one that's gone." His voice dropped to the undertone of reminiscence. "Of one that's long gone--long gone."

"Could you tell me about it, a little--just a very little?" Amalia leaned toward him pleadingly. It was the first time she had ever asked of Larry Kildene or Harry King a question that might seem like seeking to know a thing purposely kept from her. But her intuitive nature told her the time had now come when Larry longed to speak of himself, and the loneliness of his soul pleaded for him.

"It's little indeed I can tell you, for it's little he ever told me,--but it came to me--more than once--more than once--that he might be my own son."

Amalia recoiled with a shock of surprise. She drew in her breath and looked in his eyes eloquently. "Oh! Oh! And you never asked him? No?"

"Not in so many words, no. But I--I--came near enough to give him the chance to tell the truth, if he would, but he had reasons of his own, and he would not."

"Then--where we go now--to him--you have been to that place before? Not?"

"I have."

"And he--he knows it? Not?"

"He knows it well. I told him it was there I left my son--my little son--but he would say nothing. I was not even sure he knew the place until these letters came to me. He has as yet written me no word, only the message he sent me in his letter to you--that he will some time write me." Then Larry took Betty's letter from his pocket and turned it over and over, sadly. "This letter tells me more than all else, but it sets me strangely adrift in my thoughts. It's not at all like what I had thought it might be."

Amalia leaned forward eagerly. "Oh, tell me more--a little, what you thought might be."

"This letter has added more to the heartache than all else that could be. Either Harry King is my son--Richard Kildene--or he is the son of the man who hated me and brought me sorrow. There you see the reason he would tell me nothing. He could not."

"But how is it that you do not know your own son? It is so strange."

Larry's eyes filled as he looked off over the arid plains. "It's a long story--that. I told it to him once to try to stir his heart toward me, but it was of no use, and I'll not tell it now--but this. I'd never looked on my boy since I held him in my arms--a heartbroken man--until he came to me there--that is, if he were he. But if Harry King is my son, then he is all the more a liar and a coward--if the claim against him is true. I can't have it so."

"It is not so. He is no liar and no coward." Amalia spoke with finality.

"I tell you if he is not my son, then he is the son of the man who hated me--but even that man will not own him as his son. The little girl who wrote this letter to me--she pleads with me to come on and set them all right: but even she who loved him--who has loved him, can urge no proof beyond her own consciousness, as to his identity; it is beyond my understanding."

"The little girl--she--she has loved your son--she has loved Harry--Harry King? Whom has she loved?" Amalia only breathed the question.

"She has not said. I only read between the lines."

"How is it so--you read between lines? What is it you read?"

Larry saw he was making a mistake and resumed hurriedly: "I'll tell you what little I know later, and we will go there and find out the rest, but it may be more to my sorrow than my joy. Perhaps that's why I'm taking you there--to be a help to me--I don't know. I have a friend there who will take us both in, and who will understand as no one else."

"I go to neither my joy nor my sorrow. They are of the world. I will be no more of the world--but I will live only in love--to the Christ. So may I find in my heart peace--as the sweet sisters who guarded me in my childhood away from danger when that my father and mother were in fear and sorrow living--they told me there only may one find peace from sorrow. I will go to them--perhaps--perhaps--they will take me--again--I do not know. But I will go first with you, Sir Kildene, wherever you wish me to go. For you are my friend--now, as no one else. But for you, I am on earth forever alone."

CHAPTER XXXV

THE TRIAL

After Mr. Ballard's visit to the jail, he took upon himself to do what he could for the young man, out of sympathy and friendship toward both parties, and in the cause of simple justice. He consulted the only available counsel left him in Leauvite, a young lawyer named Nathan Goodbody, whom he knew but slightly.

He told him as much of the case as he thought proper, and then gave him a note to the prisoner, addressing him as Harry King. Armed with this letter the young lawyer was soon in close consultation with his new client. Despite Nathan Goodbody's youth Harry was favorably impressed. The young man was so interested, so alert, so confident that all would be well. He seemed to believe so completely the story Harry told him, and took careful notes of it, saying he would prepare a brief of the facts and the law, and that Harry might safely leave everything to him.

"You were wounded in the hip, you say," Nathan Goodbody questioned him. "We must not neglect the smallest item that may help you, for your case needs strengthening. You say you were lamed by it--but you seem to have recovered from that. Is there no scar?"

"That will not help me. My cousin was wounded also, but his was only a flesh wound from which

he quickly recovered and of which he thought nothing. I doubt if any one here in Leavite ever heard of it, but it's the irony of fate that he was more badly scarred by it than I. He was struck by a spent bullet that tore the flesh only, while the one that hit me went cleanly to the bone, and splintered it. Mine laid me up for a year before I could even walk with crutches, while he was back at his post in a week."

"And both wounds were in the same place--on the same side, for instance?"

"On the same side, yes; but his was lower down. Mine entered the hip here, while he was struck about here." Harry indicated the places with a touch of his finger. "I think it would be best to say nothing about the scars, unless forced to do so, for I walk as well now as I ever did, and that will be against me."

"That's a pity, now, isn't it? Suppose you try to get back a little of the old limp."

Harry laughed. "No, I'll walk straight. Besides they've seen me on the street, and even in my father's bank."

"Too bad, too bad. Why did you do it?"

"How could I guess there would be such an impossible development? Until I saw Miss Ballard here in this cell I thought my cousin dead. Why, my reason for coming here was to confess my crime, but they won't give me the chance. They arrest me first of all for killing myself. Now that I know my cousin lives I don't seem to care what happens to me, except for--others."

"But man! You must put up a fight. Suppose your cousin is no longer living; you don't want to spend the rest of your life in the penitentiary because he can't be found."

"I see. If he is living, this whole trial is a farce, and if he is not, it's a tragedy."

"We'll never let it become a tragedy, I'll promise you that." The young man spoke with smiling confidence, but when he reached his office again and had closed the door behind him, his manner changed quickly to seriousness and doubt.

"I don't know," he said to himself, "I don't know if this story can be made to satisfy a jury or not. A little shady. Too much coincidence to suit me." He sat drumming with his fingers on his desk for a while, and then rose and turned to his books. "I'll have a little law on this case,--some point upon which we can go to the Supreme Court," and for the rest of that day and long into the night Nathan Goodbody consulted with his library.

In anticipation of the unusual public interest the District Attorney directed the summoning of twenty-five jurors in addition to the twenty-five of the regular panel. On the day set for the trial the court room was packed to the doors. Inside the bar were the lawyers and the officers of the court. Elder Craigmile sat by Milton Hibbard. In the front seats just outside the bar were the fifty jurors and back of them were the ladies who had come early, or who had been given the seats of their gentlemen friends who had come early, and whose gallantry had momentarily gotten the better of their judgment.

The stillness of the court room, like that of a church, was suddenly broken by the entrance of the judge, a tall, spare man, with gray hair and a serious outlook upon life. As he walked toward his seat, the lawyers and officers of the court rose and stood until he was seated. The clerk of the court read from a large book the journal of the court of the previous day and then handed the book to the judge to be signed. When this ceremony was completed, the judge took up the court calender and said,--

"The State *v.* Richard Kildene," and turning to the lawyers engaged in the case added, "Gentlemen, are you ready?"

"We are ready," answered the District Attorney.

"Bring in the prisoner."

When Harry entered the court room in charge of the sheriff, he looked neither to the right nor to the left, and saw no one before him but his own counsel, who arose and extended a friendly hand, and led him to a seat beside himself within the bar.

Nathan Goodbody then rose, and, addressing the court with an air of confident modesty, as if he were bringing forward a point so strong as to require nothing more than the simple statement to give it weight, said:--

"If the court please, the defense is ready, but I have noticed, as no doubt the court has noticed, a distinguished member of this bar sitting with the District Attorney as though it were intended that he should take part in the trial of this case, and I am advised that he intends to do so. I am also advised that he is in the employ of the complaining witness who sits beside him, and that he has received, or expects to receive, compensation from him for his services. I desire at the outset of this case to raise a question as to whether counsel employed and paid by a private person has a right to assist in the prosecution of a criminal cause. I therefore object to the appearance of Mr. Hibbard as counsel in this case, and to his taking any part in this trial. If the facts I have stated are questioned, I will ask Elder Craigmile to be sworn."

The court replied: "I shall assume the facts to be as stated by you unless the counsel on the other side dissent from such a statement. Considering the facts to be as stated, your objection raises a novel question. Have you any authorities?"

"I do not know that the Supreme Court of this State has passed upon this question. I do not think it has, but my objection finds support in the well-established rule in this country, that a

public prosecutor acts in a quasi-judicial capacity. His object, like that of the court, should be simple justice. The District Attorney represents the public interest which can never be promoted by the conviction of the innocent. As the District Attorney himself could not accept a fee or reward from private parties, so, I urge, counsel employed to assist him must be equally disinterested."

"The court considers the question an interesting one, but the practice in the past has been against your contention. I will overrule your objection, and give you an exception. Mr. Clerk, call a jury!"^[1]

Then came the wearisome technicalities of the empaneling of a jury, with challenges for cause and peremptory challenges, until nearly the entire panel of fifty jurors was exhausted.

In this way two days were spent, with a result that when counsel on both sides expressed themselves as satisfied with the jury, every one in the court room doubted it. As the sheriff confided to the clerk, it was an even bet that the first twelve men drawn were safer for both sides than the twelve men who finally stood with uplifted hands and were again sworn by the clerk. Harry King, who had never witnessed a trial in his life, began to grow interested in these details quite aside from his own part therein. He watched the clerk shaking the box, wondering why he did so, until he saw the slips of paper being drawn forth one by one from the small aperture on the top, and listened while the name written on each was called aloud. Some of the names were familiar to him, and it seemed as if he must turn about and speak to the men who responded to their roll call, saying "here" as each rose in his place behind him. But he resisted the impulse, never turning his head, and only glancing curiously at each man as he took his seat in the jury box at the order of the judge.

During all these proceedings the Elder sat looking straight before him, glancing at the prisoner only when obliged to do so, and coldly as an outsider might do. The trial was taking more time than he had thought possible, and he saw no reason for such lengthy technicalities and the delay in calling the witnesses. His air was worn and weary.

The prisoner, sitting beside his counsel, had taken less and less interest in the proceedings, and the crowds, who had at first filled the court room, had also lost interest and had drifted off about their own affairs until the real business of the taking of testimony should come on, till, at the close of the second day, the court room was almost empty of visitors. The prisoner was glad to see them go. So many familiar faces, faces from whom he might reasonably expect a smile, or a handshake, were it possible, or at the very least a nod of recognition, all with their eyes fixed on him, in a blank gaze of aloofness or speculation. He felt as if his soul must have been in some way separated from his body, and then returned to it to find all the world gazing at the place where his soul should be without seeing that it had returned and was craving their intelligent support. The whole situation seemed to him cruelly impossible,—a sort of insane delusion. Only one face never failed him, that of Bertrand Ballard, who sat where he might now and then meet his eye, and who never left the court room while the case was on.

When the time arrived for the introduction of the witnesses, the court room again filled up; but he no longer looked for faces he knew. He held himself sternly aloof, as if he feared his reason might leave him if he continued to strive against those baffling eyes, who knew him and did not know that they knew him, but who looked at him as if trying to penetrate a mask when he wore no mask. Occasionally his counsel turned to him for brief consultation, in which his part consisted generally of a nod or a shake of the head as the case might be.

While the District Attorney was addressing the jury, Milton Hibbard moved forward and took the District Attorney's seat.

Then followed the testimony of the boys—now shy lads in their teens, who had found the evidences of a struggle and possible murder so long before on the river bluff. Under the adroit lead of counsel, they told each the same story, and were excused cross-examination. Both boys had identified the hat found on the bluff, and testified that the brown stain, which now appeared somewhat faintly, had been a bright red, and had looked like blood.

Then Bertrand Ballard was called, and the questions put to him were more searching. Though the manner of the examiner was respectful and courteous, he still contrived to leave the impression on those in the court room that he hoped to draw out some fact that would lead to the discovery of matters more vital to the case than the mere details to which the witness testified. But Bertrand Ballard's prompt and straightforward answers, and his simple and courteous manner, were a full match for the able lawyer, and after two hours of effort he subsided.

Then the testimony of the other witnesses was taken, even to that of the little housemaid who had been in the family at the time, and who had seen Peter Junior wear the hat. Did she know it for his? Yes. Why did she know it? Because of the little break in the straw, on the edge of the brim. But any man's hat might have such a break. What was there about this particular break to make it the hat of Peter Junior? Because she had made it herself. She had knocked it down one day when she was brushing up in the front hall, and when she hung it up again, she had seen the break, and knew she had done it.

And thus, in the careful scrutiny of small things, relating to the habits, life, and manner of dressing of the two young men,—matters about which nobody raised any question, and in which no one except the examiner took any interest,—more days crept by, until, at last, the main witnesses for the State were reached.

[1] The question raised by the prisoner's counsel was ruled in favor of his contention in

CHAPTER XXXVI

NELS NELSON'S TESTIMONY

The day was very warm, and the jury sat without their coats. The audience, who had had time to debate and argue the question over and over, were all there ready to throng in at the opening of the doors, and sat listening, eager, anxious, and perspiring. Some were strongly for the young man and some were as determined for the Elder's views, and a tension of interest and friction of minds pervaded the very atmosphere of the court room. It had been the effort of Milton Hibbard to work up the sentiment of those who had been so eagerly following the trial, in favor of his client's cause, before bringing on the final coup of the testimony of the Swede, and, last of all, that of Betty Ballard.

Poor little Betty, never for a moment doubting her perception in her recognition of Peter Junior, yet fearing those doubting ones in the court room, sat at home, quivering with the thought that the truth she must tell when at last her turn came might be the one straw added to the burden of evidence piled up to convict an innocent man. Wordlessly and continually in her heart she was praying that Richard might know and come to them, calling him, calling him, in her thoughts ceaselessly imploring help, patience, delay, anything that might hold events still until Richard could reach them, for deep in her heart of faith she knew he would come. Wherever in all the universe he might be, her cry must find him and bring him. He would feel it in his soul and fly to them.

Bertrand brought Betty and her mother news of the proceedings, from day to day, and always as he sat in the court room watching the prisoner and the Elder, looking from one set face to the other, he tried to convince himself that Mary and Betty were right in their firm belief that it was none other than Peter Junior who sat there with that steadfast look and the unvarying statement that he was the Elder's son, and had returned to give himself up for the murder of his cousin Richard, in the firm belief that he had left him dead on the river bluff.

G. B. Stiles sat at the Elder's side, and when Nels Nelson was brought in and sworn, he glanced across at Milton Hibbard with an expression of satisfaction and settled himself back to watch the triumph of his cause and the enjoyment of the assurance of the ten thousand dollars. He had coached the Swede and felt sure he would give his testimony with unwavering clearness.

The Elder's face worked and his hands clutched hard on the arms of his chair. It was then that Bertrand Ballard, watching him with sorrowful glances, lost all doubt that the prisoner was in truth what he claimed to be, for, under the tension of strong feeling, the milder lines of the younger man's face assumed a set power of will,—immovable,—implacable,—until the force within him seemed to mold the whole contour of his face into a youthful image of that of the man who refused even to look at him.

Every eye in the court room was fixed on the Swede as he took his place before the court and was bade to look on the prisoner. Throughout his whole testimony he never varied from his first statement. It was always the same.

"Do you know the prisoner?"

"Yas, I know heem. Dot is heem, I seen heem two, t'ree times."

"When did you see him first?"

"By Ballards' I seen heem first—he vas horse ridin' dot time. It vas nobody home by Ballards' dot time. Eferybody vas gone off by dot peek-neek."

"At that time did the prisoner speak to you?"

"Yas, he asket me where is Ballards' folks, und I tol' heem by peek-neek, und he asket me where is it for a peek-neek is dey gone, und I tol' heem by Carter's woods by der river, und he asket me is Mees Betty gone by dem yet or is she home, und I tol' heem yas she is gone mit, und he is off like der vind on hees horse already."

"When did you see the prisoner next?"

"By Ballards' yard dot time."

"What time?"

"It vas Sunday morning I seen heem, talkin' mit her."

"With whom was he talking?"

"Oh, he talk mit Ballards' girl—Mees Betty. Down by der spring house I seen heem go, und he kiss her plenty—I seen heem."

"You are sure it was the prisoner you saw? You are sure it was not Peter Craigmile, Jr.?"

"Sure it vas heem I saw. Craikmile's son, he vas lame, und vank by der crutch all time. No, it vas

dot man dere I saw."

"Where were you when you saw him?"

"I vas by my room vere I sleep. It vas a wine growin' by der vindow up, so dey nefer see me, bot I seen dem all right. I seen heem kiss her und I seen her tell heem go vay, und push heem off, und she cry plenty."

"Did you hear what he said to her?"

Bertrand Ballard looked up at the examiner angrily, and counsel for the prisoner objected to the question, but the judge allowed it to pass unchallenged, on the ground that it was a question pertaining to the motive for the deed of which the prisoner was accused.

"Yas, I hear it a little. Dey vas come up und stand dere by de vindow under, und I hear dem talkin'. She cry, und say she vas sorry he vas kiss her like dot, und he say he is goin' vay, und dot is vot for he done it, und he don't come back no more, und she cry some more."

"Did he say anything against his cousin at that time?"

"No, he don' say not'ing, only yust he say, 'dot's all right bouts heem,' he say, 'Peter Junior goot man all right, only he goin' vay all same.'"

"Was that the last time you saw the prisoner?"

"No, I seen heem dot day und it vas efening."

"Where were you when you saw him next?"

"I vas goin' 'long mit der calf to eat it grass dere by Ballards' yard, und he vas goin' 'long mit hees cousin, Craikmile's son, und he vas walkin' slow for hees cousin, he don' got hees crutch dot day, he valk mit dot stick dere, und he don' go putty quvick mit it." Nels pointed to the heavy blackthorn stick lying on the table before the jury.

"Were the two young men talking together?"

"No, dey don' speak much. I hear it he say, 'It iss better you valk by my arm a little yet, Peter,' und Craikmile's son, he say, 'You go vay mit your arm, I got no need by it,' like he vas little mad yet."

"You say you saw him in the morning with Miss Ballard. Where were the family at that time?"

"Oh, dey vas gone by der church already."

"And in the evening where were they?"

"Oh, dey vas by der house und eat supper den."

"Did you see the prisoner again that day?"

"No, I didn' see heem dot day no more, bot dot next day I seen heem--goot I seen heem."

Harry King here asked his counsel to object to his allowing the witness to continually assert that the man he saw was the prisoner.

"He does not know that it was I. He is mistaken as are you all." And Nathan Goodbody leaped to his feet.

"I object on behalf of my client to the assumption throughout this whole examination, that the man whom the witness claims to have seen was the prisoner. No proof to that effect has yet been brought forward."

The witness was then required to give his reasons for his assertion that the prisoner was the man he saw three years before.

"By what marks do you know him? Why is he not the man he claims to be, the son of the plaintiff?"

"Oh, I know heem all right. Meester Craikmile's son, he vos more white in de face. Hees hair vas more--more--I don' know how you call dot--crooked on hees head yet." Nels put his hand to his head and caught one of his straight, pale gold locks, and twisted it about. "It vas goin round so,--und it vas more lighter yet as dot man here, und hees face vas more lighter too, und he valked mit stick all time und he don' go long mit hees head up,--red in hees face like dis man here und dark in hees face too. Craikmile's son go all time limp in' so." Nels took a step to illustrate the limp of Peter Junior when he had seen him last.

"Do you see any other points of difference? Were the young men the same height?"

"Yas, dey vas yust so high like each other, but not so vide out yet. Dis man he iss vider yet as Meester Craikmile's son, he iss got more chest like von goot horse--Oh, I know by men yust de same like horses vat iss der difference yet."

"Now you tell the court just what you saw the next day. At what time of the day was it?"

"It vas by der night I seen heem."

"On Monday night?"

"Yas."

"Late Monday night?"

"No, not so late, bot it vas dark already."

"Tell the court exactly where you saw him, when you saw him, and with whom you saw him, and what you heard said."

"It vas by Ballards' I seen heem. I vas comin' home und it vas dark already yust like I tol' you, und I seen dot man come along by Ballards' house und stand by der door--long time I seen heem stan' dere, und I yust go by der little trees under, und vatching vat it is for doin' dere, dot man? Und I seen heem it iss der young man vat iss come dot day askin' vere iss Ballards' folks, und so I yust wait und look a little out, und I vatchin' heem. Und I seen heem stand und vaitin' minute by der door outside, und I get me low under dem little small flowers bushes Ballards is got by der door under dot window dere, und I seen heem, he goin' in, and yust dere is Mees Betty sittin', und he go quivck down on hees knees, und dere she yump lak she is scairt. Den she take heem hees head in her hands und she asket heem vat for is dat blud he got it on hees head, und so he say it is by fightin' he is got it, und she say vy for is he fightin', und he say mit hees cousin he fight, und hees cousin he hit heem so, und she asket heem vy for is hees cousin hit heem, und vy for iss he fightin' mit hees cousin any vay, und den dey bot is cryin'. So I seen dot--und den she go by der kitchen und bring vater und vash heem hees head und tie clots round it so nice, und dere dey is talkin', und he tol' her he done it."

"What did he tell her he had done?"

"Oh, he say he keel heem hees cousin. Dot vat I tol' you he done it."

"How did he say he killed him?"

The silence in the court room was painful in its intensity. The Elder leaned forward and listened with contorted face, and the prisoner held his breath. A pallor overspread his face and his hands were clenched.

"Oh, he say he push heem in der rifer ofer, und he do it all right for he liket to do it, but he say he goin' run vay for dot."

"You mean to say that he said he intended to push him over? That he tried to do it?"

"Oh, yas, he say he liket to push heem ofer, und he liket to do dot, but he sorry any vay he done it, und he runnin' vay for dot."

"Tell the court what happened then."

"Den she get him somedings to eat, und dey sit dere, und dey talk, und dey cry plenty, und she is feel putty bad, und he is feel putty bad, too. Und so--he go out und shut dot door, und he valkin' down der pat', und she yust come out der door, und run to heem und asket heem vere he is goin' und if he tell her somedings vere he go, und he say no, he tell her not'ing yet. Und den she say maybe he is not keel heem any vay, bot yust t'inkin' he keel him, und he tol' her yas, he keel heem all right, he push heem ofer und he is dead already, und so he kiss her some more, und she is cry some more, und I t'ink he is cry, too, bot dot is all. He done it all right. Und he is gone off den, und she is gone in her house, und I don't see more no."

As the witness ceased speaking Mr. Hibbard turned to counsel for the prisoner and said: "Cross-examine."

Rising in his place, and advancing a few steps toward the witness, the young lawyer began his cross-examination. His task did not call for the easy nonchalance of his more experienced adversary, who had the advantage of knowing in advance just what his witness would testify. It was for him to lead a stubborn and unwilling witness through the mazes of a well-prepared story, to unravel, if possible, some of its well-planned knots and convince the jury if he could that the witness was not reliable and his testimony untrustworthy.

But this required a master in the art of cross-examination, and a master begins the study of his subject--the witness--before the trial. In subtle ways with which experience has made him familiar, he studies his man, his life, his character, his habits, his strength, his weakness, his foibles. He divines when he will hesitate, when he will stumble, and he is ready to pounce upon him and force his hesitation into an attempt at concealment, his stumble into a fall.

It is no discredit to Nathan Goodbody that he lacked the skill and cunning of an astute cross-examiner. Unlike poets, they are made, not born, and he found the Swede to be a difficult witness to handle to his purpose. He succeeded in doing little more than to get him to reaffirm the damaging testimony he had already given.

Being thus baffled, he determined to bring in here a point which he had been reserving to use later, should Milton Hibbard decide to take up the question of Peter Junior's lameness. As this did not seem to be imminent, and the testimony of Nels Nelson had been so convincing, he wished of all things to delay the calling of the next witness until he could gain time, and carry the jury with him. Should Betty Ballard be called to the stand that day he felt his cause would be lost. Therefore, in the moment's pause following the close of his cross-examination of the last witness, he turned and addressed the court.

"May it please the Court. Knowing that there is but one more witness to be called, and that the testimony of that witness can bring forward no new light on this matter, I have excellent reason to desire at this time to move the Court to bring in the verdict of not guilty."

At these words the eyes of every one in the court room were turned upon the speaker, and the silence was such that his next words, though uttered in a low voice, were distinctly heard by all present.

"This motion is based upon the fact that the State has failed to prove the *corpus delicti*, upon

the law, which is clear, that without such proof there can be no conviction of the crime of murder. If the testimony of the witness Nels Nelson can be accepted as the admission of the man Richard Kildene, until the State can prove the *corpus delicti*, no proof can be brought that it is the admission of the prisoner at the bar. I say that until such proof can be brought by the State, no further testimony can convict the prisoner at the bar. If it please the Court, the authorities are clear that the fact that a murder has been committed cannot be established by proof of the admissions, even of the prisoner himself that he has committed the crime. There must be direct proof of death as by finding and identification of the body of the one supposed to be murdered. I have some authorities here which I would like to read to your honor if you will hear them."

The face of the judge during this statement of the prisoner's counsel was full of serious interest. He leaned forward with his elbow on the desk before him, and with his hand held behind his ear, intent to catch every word. As counsel closed the judge glanced at the clock hanging on the wall and said:--

"It is about time to close. You may pass up your authorities, and I will take occasion to examine them before the court opens in the morning. If counsel on the other side have any authorities, I will be pleased to have them also."

CHAPTER XXXVII

THE STRANGER'S ARRIVAL

On taking his seat at the opening of court the next morning, the judge at once announced his decision.

"I have given such thought as I have been able to the question raised by counsel last evening, and have examined authorities cited by him, and others, bearing upon the question, and have reached the conclusion that his motion must be overruled. It is true that a conviction for murder cannot rest alone upon the extra-judicial admission of the accused. And in the present case I must remind the court and the jury that thus far the identity of the prisoner has not yet been established, as it is not determined whether or not he is the man whom the witness, Nels Nelson, heard make the admission. It is true there must be distinct proof, sufficient to satisfy the jury, beyond a reasonable doubt, that homicide has been committed by some one, before the admission of the accused that he did the act can be considered. But I think that fact can be established by circumstantial evidence, as well as any other fact in the case, and I shall so charge the jury. I will give you an exception. Mr Nathan Goodbody, you may go on with your defense after the hearing of the next witness, which is now in order."^[1]

The decision of the court was both a great surprise and a disappointment to the defendant's young counsel. Considering the fact that the body of the man supposed to have been murdered had never been found, and that his death had been assumed from his sudden disappearance, and the finding of his personal articles scattered on the river bluff, together with the broken edge of the bluff and the traces of some object having been thrown down the precipice at that point, and the fact that the State was relying upon the testimony of the eavesdropping Swede to prove confession by the prisoner, he still had not been prepared for the testimony of this witness that he had heard the accused say that he had killed his cousin, and that it had been his intention to kill him. He was dismayed, but he had not entirely lost confidence in his legal defense, even now that the judge had ruled against him. There was still the Supreme Court.

He quickly determined that he would shift his attack from the court, where he had been for the time repulsed, and endeavor to convince the jury that the fact that Peter Junior was really dead had not "been proven beyond a reasonable doubt."

Applying to the court for a short recess to give him time to consult with his client, he used the time so given in going over with the prisoner the situation in which the failure of his legal defense had left them. He had hoped to arrest the trial on the point he had made so as to eliminate entirely the hearing of further testimony,--that of Betty Ballard,--and also to avoid the necessity of having his client sworn, which last was inevitable if Betty's testimony was taken.

He had never been able to rid himself of the impression left upon his mind when first he heard the story from his client's lips, that there was in it an element of coincidence--too like dramatic fiction, or that if taken ideally, it was above the average juryman's head.

He admonished the prisoner that when he should be called upon for his testimony, he must make as little as possible of the fact of their each being scarred on the hip, and scarred on the head, the two cousins dramatically marked alike, and that he must in no way allude to his having seen Betty Ballard in the prison alone.

"That was a horrible mistake. You must cut it out of your testimony unless they force it. Avoid it. And you must make the jury see that your return was a matter of--of--well, conscience--and so forth."

"I must tell the truth. That is all that I can do," said the prisoner, wearily. "The judge is looking this way,--shall we--"

Nathan Goodbody rose quickly. "If the court please, we are ready to proceed."

Then at last Betty Ballard was called to the witness stand. The hour had come for which all the village had waited, and the fame of the trial had spread beyond the village, and all who had known the boys in their childhood and in their young manhood, and those who had been their companions in arms--men from their own regiment--were there. The matter had been discussed among them more or less heatedly and now the court room could not hold the crowds that thronged its doors.

At this time, unknown to any of the actors in the drama, three strangers, having made their way through the crowd outside the door, were allowed to enter, and stood together in the far corner of the court room unnoticed by the throng, intently watching and listening. They had arrived from the opposite sides of the earth, and had met at the village hotel. Larry had spied the younger man first, and, scarcely knowing what he was doing, or why, he walked up to him, and spoke, involuntarily holding out his hand to him.

"Tell me who you are," he said, ere Richard could surmise what was happening.

"My name is Kildene," said Richard, frankly. "Have you any reason for wishing to know me?"

For the moment he thought his interlocutor might be a detective, or one who wished to verify a suspicion. Having but that moment arrived, and knowing nothing of the trial which was going on, he could think only of his reason for his return to Leauvite, and was glad to make an end of incognito and sorrowful durance, and wearisome suspense, and he did not hesitate, nor try any art of concealment. He looked directly into Larry's eyes, almost defiantly for an instant, then seeing in that rugged face a kindly glint of the eye and a quiver about the mouth, his heart lightened and he grasped eagerly the hand held out to him.

"Perhaps you will tell me whom you are? I suppose I ought to know, but I've been away from here a long time."

Then the older man's hand fell a-trembling in his, and did not release him, but rather clung to him as if he had had a shock.

"Come over here and sit beside me a moment, young man--I--I've--I'm not feeling as strong as I look. I--I've a thing to tell you. Sit down--sit down. We are alone? Yes. Every one's gone to the trial. I'm on here from the West myself to attend it."

"The trial! What trial?"

"You've heard nothing of it? I was thinking maybe you were also--were drawn here--you've but just come?"

"I've been here long enough to engage a room--which I shan't want long. No, I've come for no trial exactly--maybe it might come to that--? What have you to tell me?"

But Larry Kildene sat silent for a time before replying. An eager joy had seized him, and a strange reticence held his tongue tied, a fear of making himself known to this son whom he had never seen since he had held him in his arms, a weak, wailing infant, thinking only of his own loss. This dignified, stalwart young man, so pleasant to look upon--no wonder the joy of his heart was a terrible joy, a hungering, longing joy akin to pain! How should he make himself known? In what words? A thousand thoughts crowded upon him. From Betty's letter he knew something of the contention now going on in the court room, and from the landlord last evening he had heard more, and he was impatient to get to the trial.

Now this encounter with his own son,--the only one who could set all right,--and who yet did not know of the happenings which so imperatively required his presence in the court room, set Larry Kildene's thoughts stammering and tripping over each other in such a confusion of haste, and with it all the shyness before the great fact of his unconfessed fatherhood, so overwhelmed him, that for once his facile Irish nature did not help him. He was at a loss for words, strangely abashed before this gentle-voiced, frank-faced, altogether likable son of his. So he temporized and beat about the bush, and did not touch first on that which was nearest his heart.

"Yes, yes. I've a thing to tell you. You came here to be at a--a--trial--did you say, or intimate it might be? If--if--you'll tell me a bit more, I maybe can help you--for I've seen a good bit of the world. It's a strange trial going on here now--I've come to hear."

"Tell me something about it," said Richard, humoring the older man's deliberation in arriving at his point.

"It's little I know yet. I've come to learn, for I'm interested in the young man they're trying to convict. He's a sort of a relative of mine. I wish to see fair play. Why are you here? Have you done anything--what have you done?"

The young man moved restlessly. He was confused by the suddenness of the question, which Larry's manner deprived of any suggestion of rudeness.

"Did I intimate I had done anything?" He laughed. "I'm come to make a statement to the proper ones--when I find them. I'll go over now and hear a bit of this trial, since you mention it."

He spoke sadly and wearily, but he felt no resentment at the older man's inquisitiveness. Larry's face expressed too much kindness to make resentment possible, but Richard was ill at ease to be talking thus intimately with a stranger who had but just chanced upon him. He rose to leave.

"Don't go. Don't go yet. Wait a bit--God, man! Wait! I've a thing to tell you." Larry leaned forward, and his face worked and tears glistened in his eyes as he looked keenly up into his son's face. "You're a beautiful lad--a man--I'm--You're strong and fine--I'm ashamed to tell it you--ashamed I've never looked on you since then--until now. I should have given all up and found you. Forgive me. Boy!--I'm your father--your father!" He rose and stood looking levelly in his son's eyes, holding out both shaking hands. Richard took them in his and held them--but could not speak.

The constraint of witnesses was not upon them, for they were quite alone on the piazza, but the emotion of each of them was beyond words. Richard swallowed, and waited, and then with no word they both sat down and drew their chairs closer together. The simple act helped them.

"I've been nigh on to a lifetime longing for you, lad."

"And I for you, father."

"That's the name I've been hungering to hear--"

"And I to speak--" Still they looked in each other's eyes. "And we have a great deal to tell each other! I'm almost sorry--that--that--that I've found you at last--for to do my duty will be harder now. I had no one to care--particularly before--unless--"

"Unless a lass, maybe?"

"One I've been loving and true to--but long ago given up--we won't speak of her. We'll have to talk a great deal, and there's so little time! I must--must give myself up, father, to the law."

"Couldn't you put it off a bit, lad?"

Larry could not have told why he kept silent so long in regard to the truth of the trial. It might have been a vague liking to watch the workings of his son's real self and a desire to test him to the full. From a hint dropped in Betty's letter he guessed shrewdly at the truth of the situation. He knew now that Richard and his young friend of the mountain top were actuated by the same motives, and he understood at last why Harry King would never accept his offer of help, nor would ever call him father. Because he could not take the place of the son, of whom, as he thought, he had robbed the man who so freely offered him friendship--and more than friendship. At last Larry understood why Peter Junior had never yielded to his advances. It was honor, and the test had been severe.

"Put it off a little? I might--I'm tempted--just to get acquainted with my father--but I might be arrested, and I would prefer not to be. I know I've been wanted for three years and over--it has taken me that long to learn that only the truth can make a man free,--and now I would rather give myself up, than to be taken--"

"I'm knowing maybe more of the matter than you think--so we'll drop it. We must have a long talk later--but tell me now in a few words what you can."

Then, drawn by the older man's gentle, magnetic sympathy, Richard unlocked his heart and told all of his life that could be crowded in those few short minutes,--of his boyhood's longings for a father of his own--of his young manhood's love, of his flight, and a little of his later life. "We'd be great chums, now, father,--if--if it weren't for this--that hangs over me."

Then Larry could stand it no longer. He sprang up and clapped Richard on the shoulder. "Come, lad, come! We'll go to this trial together. Do you know who's being tried? No. They'll have to get this off before they can take another on. I'm thinking you'll find your case none so bad as it seems to you now. First there's a thing I must do. My brother-in-law's in trouble--but it is his own fault--still I'm a mind to help him out. He's a fine hater, that brother-in-law of mine, but he's tried to do a father's part in the past by you--and done it well, while I've been soured. In the gladness of my heart I'll help him out--I'd made up my mind to do it before I left my mountain. Your father's a rich man, boy--with money in store for you--I say it in modesty, but he who reared you has been my enemy. Now I'm going to his bank, and there I'll make a deposit that will save it from ruin."

He stood a moment chuckling, with both hands thrust deep in his pockets. "We'll go to that trial--it's over an affair of his, and he's fair in the wrong. We'll go and watch his discomfiture--and we'll see him writhe. We'll see him carry things his own way--the only way he can ever see--and then we'll watch him--man, we'll watch him--Oh, my boy, my boy! I doubt it's wrong for me to exult over his chagrin, but that's what I'm going for now. It was the other way before I met you, but the finding of you has given me a light heart, and I'll watch that brother-in-law's set-down with right good will."

He told Richard about Amalia, and asked him to wait until he fetched her, as he wished her to accompany them, but still he said nothing to him about his cousin Peter. He found Amalia descending the long flight of stairs, dressed to go out, and knew she had been awaiting him for the last half hour. Now he led her into the little parlor, while Richard paced up and down the piazza, and there, where she could see him as he passed the window to and fro, Larry told her what had come to him, and even found time to moralize over it, in his gladness.

"That's it. A man makes up his mind to do what's right regardless of all consequences or his prejudices, or what not,--and from that moment all begins to grow clear, and he sees right--and things come right. Now look at the man! He's a fine lad, no? They're both fine lads--but this one's mine. Look at him I say. Things are to come right for him, and all through his making up his mind to come back here and stand to his guns. The same way with Harry King. I've told you the contention--and at last you know who he is--but mind you, no word yet to my son. I'll tell

him as we walk along. I'm to stop at the bank first, and if we tell him too soon, he'll be for going to the courthouse straight. The landlord tells me there's danger of a run on the bank to-morrow and the only reason it hasn't come to-day is that the bank's been closed all the morning for the trial. I'm thinking that was policy, for whoever heard of a bank's being closed in the morning for a trial--or anything short of a death or a holiday?"

"But if it is now closed, why do we wait to go there? It is to do nothing we make delay," said Amalia, anxiously.

"I told Decker to send word to the cashier to be there, as a deposit is to be made. If he can't be there for that, then it's his own fault if to-morrow finds him unprepared." Larry stepped out to meet Richard and introduced Amalia. He had already told Richard a little of her history, and now he gave her her own name, Manovska.

After a few moments' conversation she asked Larry: "I may keep now my own name, it is quite safe, is not? They are gone now--those for whom I feared."

"Wait a little," said Richard. "Wait until you have been down in the world long enough to be sure. It is a hard thing to live under suspicion, and until you have means of knowing, the other will be safer."

"You think so? Then is better. Yes? Ah, Sir Kildene, how it is beautiful to see your son does so very much resemble our friend."

They arrived at the bank, and Larry entered while Richard and Amalia strolled on together. "We had a friend, Harry King,"--she paused and would have corrected herself, but then continued--"he was very much like to you--but he is here in trouble, and it is for that for which we have come here. Sir Kildene is so long in that bank! I would go in haste to that place where is our friend. Shall we turn and walk again a little toward the bank? So will we the sooner encounter him on the way."

They returned and met Larry coming out, stepping briskly. He too was eager to be at the courthouse. He took his son's arm and rapidly and earnestly told him the situation as he had just heard it from the cashier. He told him that which he had been keeping back, and impressed on him the truth that unless he had returned when he did, the talk in the town was that the trial was likely to go against the prisoner. Richard would have broken into a run, in his excitement, but Larry held him back.

"Hold back a little, boy. Let us keep pace with you. There's really no hurry, only that impulse that sent you home--it was as if you were called, from all I can learn."

"It is my reprieve. I am free. He has suffered, too. Does he know yet that I too live? Does he know?"

"Perhaps not--yet, but listen to me. Don't be too hasty in showing yourself. If they did not know him, they won't know you--for you are enough different for them never to suspect you, now that they have, or think they have, the man for whom they have been searching. See here, man, hold back for my sake. That man--that brother-in-law of mine--has walked for years over my heart, and I've done nothing. He has despised me, and without reason--because I presumed to love your mother, lad, against his arrogant will. He--he--would--I will see him down in the dust of repentance. I will see him willfully convict his own son--he who has been hungering to see you--my son--sent to a prison for life--or hanged."

Richard listened, lingering as Larry wished, appalled at this revelation, until they arrived at the edge of the crowd around the door, eagerly trying to wedge themselves in wherever the chance offered.

"Oh! Sir Kildene--we are here--now what to do! How can we go in there?" said Amalia.

Larry moved them aside slowly, pushing Amalia between Richard and himself, and intimating to those nearest him that they were required within, until a passage was gradually made for the three, and thus they reached the door and so gained admittance. And that was how they came to be there, crowded in a corner, all during the testimony of Betty Ballard, unheeded by those around them--mere units in the throng trying to hear the evidence and see the principals in the drama being enacted before them.

[1] The ruling of the court upon this point was afterwards justified by the Supreme Court of Wisconsin in the case of *Buel v. State*, 104 Wis. 132, decided in 1899.

CHAPTER XXXVIII

BETTY BALLARD'S TESTIMONY

Betty Ballard stood, her slight figure drawn up, poised, erect, her head thrown back, and her eyes fixed on the Elder's face. The silence of the great audience was so intense that the buzzing of flies circling around and around near the ceiling could be heard, while the people all leaned forward as with one emotion, their eyes on the principals before them, straining to hear, vivid,

intent.

Richard saw only Betty, heeding no one but her, feeling her presence. For a moment he stood pale as death, then the red blood mounted from his heart, staining his neck and his face with its deep tide and throbbing in his temples. The Elder felt her scrutiny and looked back at her, and his brows contracted into a frown of severity.

"Miss Ballard," said the lawyer, "you are called upon to identify the prisoner in the box."

She lifted her eyes to the judge's face, then turned them upon Milton Hibbard, then fixed them again upon the Elder, but did not open her lips. She did not seem to be aware that every eye in the court room was fastened upon her. Pale and grave and silent she stood thus, for to her the struggle was only between herself and the Elder.

"Miss Ballard, you are called upon to identify the prisoner in the box. Can you do so?" asked the lawyer again, patiently.

Again she turned her clear eyes on the judge's face, "Yes, I can." Then, looking into the Elder's eyes, she said: "He is your son, Elder Craigmile. He is Peter. You know him. Look at him. He is Peter Junior." Her voice rang clear and strong, and she pointed to the prisoner with steady hand. "Look at him, Elder Craigmile; he is your son."

"You will address the jury and the court, Miss Ballard, and give your reasons for this assertion. How do you know he is Peter Craigmile, Jr.?"

Then she turned toward the jury, and holding out both hands in sudden pleading action cried out earnestly: "I know him. He is Peter Junior. Can't you see he is Peter, the Elder's son?"

"But how do you know him?"

"Because it is he. I know him the way we always know people--by just--knowing them. He is Peter Junior."

"Have you seen the prisoner before since his return to Leauvite?"

"Yes, I went to the jail and I saw him, and I knew him."

"But give a reason for your knowledge. How did you know him?"

"By--by the look in his eyes--by his hands--Oh! I just knew him in a moment. I knew him."

"Miss Ballard, we have positive proof that Peter Junior was murdered and from the lips of his murderer. The witness just dismissed says he heard Richard Kildene tell you he pushed his cousin Peter Junior over the bluff into the river. Can you deny this statement? On your sacred oath can you deny it?"

"No, but I don't have to deny it, for you can see for yourselves that Peter Junior is alive. He is not dead. He is here."

"Did Richard Kildene ever tell you he had pushed his cousin over the bluff into the river? A simple answer is required, yes, or no!"

She stood for a moment, her lips white and trembling. "Yes!"

"When did he tell you this?"

"When he came to me, just after he thought he had done it--but he was mistaken--he did not--he only thought he had done it."

"Did he tell you why he thought he had done it? Tell the court all about it."

Then Betty lifted her head and spoke rapidly--eagerly. "Because he was very angry with Peter Junior, and he wanted to kill him, and he did try to push him over, but Peter struck him, and Richard didn't truly know whether he really pushed him over or not--for he lay there a long time before he even knew where he was, and when he came to himself again, he could not find Peter there and only his hat and things--he thought he must have done it, because that was what he was trying to do, just as everyone else has thought it--because when Peter saw him lying there, he thought he had killed Richard, and so he pushed a great stone over to make every one think he had gone over the bluff and was dead, too, and he left his hat there and the other things, and now he has come back to give himself up, just as he has said, because he could not stand it to live any longer with the thought on his conscience that he had killed Richard when he struck him. But you would not let him give himself up. You have kept on insisting he is Richard. And it is all your fault, Elder Craigmile, because you won't look to see that he is your son." She paused, panting, flushed and indignant.

"Miss Ballard, you are here as a witness," said the judge. "You must restrain yourself and answer the questions that are asked you and make no comments."

Here the Elder leaned forward and touched his attorney, and pointed a shaking hand at the prisoner and said a few words, whereat the lawyer turned sharply upon the witness.

"Miss Ballard, you have visited the prisoner since he has been in the jail?"

"Yes, I said so."

"Your Honor," said the examiner, "we all know that the son of the plaintiff was lame, but this young man is sound on both his feet. You have been told that Richard Kildene was struck on the head and this young man bears the scar above his temple--"

Richard started forward, putting his hand to his head and lifting his hair as he did so. He tried

to call out, but in his excitement his voice died in his throat, and Larry seized him and held him back.

"Watch him,--watch your uncle," he whispered in his ear. "He thinks he has you there in the box and he wants you to get the worst the law will give you. Watch him! The girl understands him. See her eyes upon him. Stand still, boy; give him a chance to have his will. He'll find it bitter when he learns the truth, and 'twill do him good. Wait, man! You'll have it all in your hands later, and they'll be none the worse for waiting a bit longer. Hold on for my sake, son. I'll tell you why later, and you'll not be sorry you gave heed to me."

In these short ejaculated sentences, with his arm through Richard's, Larry managed to keep him by his side as the examiner talked on.

"Your Honor, this young lady admits that she has visited the prisoner in the jail, and can give adequate reason for her assertion that he is the man he claims to be. She tells us what occurred in that fight on the bluff--things that she was not there to see, things she could only learn from the prisoner: is there not reason to believe that her evidence has been arranged between them?"

"Yes, he told me,--Peter Junior told me, and he came here to give himself up, but you won't let him give himself up."

"Miss Ballard," said the judge again, "you will remember that you are to speak only in reply to questions put to you. Mr. Hibbard, continue the examination."

"Miss Ballard, you admit that you saw Richard Kildene after he fought with his cousin?"

"Yes."

"Was his head wounded?"

"Yes."

"What did you do?"

"I washed his head and bound it up. It was all bleeding."

"Very well. Then you can say on your sacred oath that Richard Kildene was living and not murdered?"

"Yes."

"Did you see Peter Junior after they fought?"

"No. If I had seen him, I could have told everybody they were both alive and there would have been no--"

"Look at the prisoner. Can you tell the jury where the cut on Richard Kildene's head was?"

"Yes, I can. When I stood in front of him to bind it up, it was under my right hand."

From this point the examiner began to touch upon things Betty would gladly have concealed in her own heart, concerning her engagement to Peter Junior, and her secret understanding with his cousin, and whether she loved the one or the other, and what characteristics in them caused her to prefer the one over the other, and why she had never confided her preferences to any of her relatives or friends. Still, with head erect, Betty flung back her answers.

Bertrand listened and writhed. The prisoner sat with bowed head. To him she seemed a veritable saint. He knew how she suffered in this public revelation of herself--of her innocent struggle between love and loyalty, and maiden modesty, and that the desire to protect him and help him was giving her strength. He saw how valiantly she has been guarding her terrible secret from all the world while he had been fleeing and hiding. Ah, if he had only been courageous! If he had not fled, nor tried to cover his flight with proofs of his death! If he had but stood to his guns like a soldier! He covered his face in shame.

As for Richard, he gloried in her. He felt his heart swell in triumph as he listened. He heard Amalia Manovska murmur: "Ah, how she is very beautiful! No wonder it is that they both loved her!"

While he was filled with admiration for her, yet his heart ached for her, and with anger and reproach against himself. He saw no one but her, and he wanted to end it all and carry her away, but still yielded to his father's earnest plea that he should wait. He understood, and would restrain himself until Larry was satisfied, and the trial ended. Still the examination went on.

"Miss Ballard, you admit that Peter Junior was lame when last you saw him, and you observe that the prisoner has no lameness, and you admit that you bound up a wound which had been inflicted on the head of Richard Kildene, and here you see the scar upon the prisoner; can you still on your sacred oath declare this man to be the son of the plaintiff?"

"Yes!" She looked earnestly at the prisoner. "It is not the same head and it is not the same scar." Again she extended her hands toward the jury pleadingly and then toward the prisoner. "It is not by people's legs we know them,--nor by their scars--it is by themselves--by--by their souls. Oh! I know you, Peter! I know you!"

With the first petulance Milton Hibbard had shown during the trial he now turned to the prisoner's counsel and said: "Take the witness."

"No cross-examination?" asked Nathan Goodbody, with a smile.

"No."

Then Betty flung one look back at the Elder, and fled to her mother and hid her flushed face on Mary Ballard's bosom.

Now for the first time Richard could take an interest in the trial merely for his own and Peter Junior's sake. He saw Nathan Goodbody lean over and say a few words hurriedly to the prisoner, then rise and slightly lift his hand as if to make a special request.

"If the court please, the accused desires permission to tell his own story. May he be sworn on his own behalf?"

Permission being given, the prisoner rose and walked to the witness chair, and having been sworn by the clerk to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, began his statement.

Standing there watching him, and listening, Richard felt his heart throb with the old friendship for this comrade of his childhood, his youth, and his young manhood, in school, in college, and, at last, tramping side by side on long marches, camping together, sleeping side by side through many a night when the morrow might bring for them death or wounds, victory or imprisonment,--sharing the same emotions even until the first great passion of their lives cut them asunder.

Brought up without father or mother, this friendship had meant more to Richard than to most men. As he heard his cousin's plea he was only held from hurrying forward with extended arms by Larry's whispered words.

"It's fine, son. Let him have his say out. Don't stop him. Watch how it works on the old man yonder," for Peter Junior was telling of his childhood among the people of Leavite, speaking in a low, clear voice which carried to all parts of the room.

"Your Honor, and Gentlemen of the Jury, Because I have no witness to attest to the truth of my claim, I am forced to make this plea, simply that you may believe me, that the accusation which my father through his lawyer brings against me could never be possible. You who knew my cousin, Richard Kildene, how honorable his life and his nature, know how impossible to him would be the crime of which I, in his name, am accused. I could not make this claim were I any other than I am--the son of the man who--does not recognize his son.

"Gentlemen of the Jury, you all knew us as boys together--how we loved each other and shared our pleasures like brothers--or more than brothers, for we quarreled less than brothers often do. During all the deep friendship of our lives, only once were we angry with each other--only once--and then--blinded by a great passion and swept beyond all knowledge of our acts, like men drunken we fought--we struggled against each other. Our friendship was turned to hatred. We tried--I think my cousin was trying to throw me over the brink of the bluff--at least he was near doing it. I do not make the plea of self-defense--for I was not acting in self-defense. I was lame, as you have heard, and not so strong as he. I could not stand against his greater strength,--but in my arms and hands I had power,--and I struck him with my cane. With all my force I struck him, and he--he--fell--wounded--and I--I--saw the blood gush from the wound I had made in his temple--with the stick I carried that day--in the place of my crutch.

"Your Honor and Gentlemen of the Jury, it was my--intent to kill him. I--I--saw him lying at my feet--and thought I had done so." Here Peter Junior bowed his head and covered his face with his hands, and a breathless silence reigned in the court room until he lifted his head and began again. "It is now three years and more--and during all the time that has passed--I have seen him lying so--white--dead--and red with his own blood--that I had shed. You asked me why I have at last returned, and I reply, because I will no longer bear that sight. It is the curse of Cain that hangs over a murderer's soul, and follows wherever he goes. I tell you the form of my dead friend went with me always--sleeping, he lay beside me; waking, he lay at my feet. When I looked into the shadows, he was there, and when I worked in the mine and swung my pick against the walls of rock, it seemed that I still struck at my friend.

"Well may my father refuse to own me as his son--me--a murderer--but one thing can I yet do to expiate my deed,--I can free my cousin's name from all blame, and if I were to hang for my deed, gladly would I walk over coals to the gallows, rather than that such a crime should be laid at his door as that he tried to return here and creep into my place after throwing me over the bluff into those terrible waters.

"Do with me what you will, Gentlemen of the Jury, but free his name. I understand that my cousin's body was never found lying there as I had left it when I fled in cowardice--when I tried to make all the world think me also dead, and left him lying there--when I pushed the great stone out of its place down where I had so nearly gone, and left my hat lying as it had fallen and threw the articles from my pocket over after the stone I had sent crashing down into the river. Since the testimony here given proves that I was mistaken in my belief that I had killed him, may God be thanked, I am free from the guilt of that deed. Until he returns or until he is found and is known to be living, do with me what you will. I came to you to surrender myself and make this confession before you, and as I stand here in your presence and before my Maker, I declare to you that what I have said is the truth."

As he ceased speaking he looked steadily at the Elder's averted face, then sat down, regarding no one else. He felt he had failed, and he sat with head bowed in shame and sorrow. A low murmur rose and swept through the court room like a sound of wind before a storm, and the old Elder leaned toward his lawyer and spoke in low tones, lifting a shaking finger, then dropped his hand and shifted slightly in his chair.

As he did so Milton Hibbard arose and began his cross-examination.

The simplicity of Peter Junior's story, and the ingenuous manner in which it had been told, called for a different cross-examination from that which would have been adopted if this same counsel had been called upon to cross-examine the Swede. He made no effort to entangle the witness, but he led him instead to repeat that part of his testimony in which he had told of the motive which induced him to return and give himself up to justice. In doing so his questions, the tone of his voice, and his manner were marked with incredulity. It was as if he were saying to the jury: "Just listen to this impossible story while I take him over it again. Did you ever hear anything like it?" When he had gone in this direction as far as he thought discreet, he asked abruptly: "I understand that you admit that you intended to kill your cousin, and supposed you had killed him?"

"Yes. I admit it."

"And that you ran away to escape the consequences?"

"Yes."

"Is it your observation that acknowledged murderers are usually possessed of the lofty motives and high sense of justice which you claim have actuated you?"

"I--"

Without waiting for the witness to reply, the lawyer turned and looked at the jury and with a sneer, said: "That's all."

"Your Honor, we have no other witness; the defense rests. I have proposed some requests for your charge to the jury which I will hand up."

And the judge said: "Counsel may address the jury."

During a slight pause which now ensued Larry Kildene tore a bit of blank paper from a letter and wrote upon it: "Richard Kildene is in this room and will come forward when called upon." This he folded and sent by a boy to Nathan Goodbody.

CHAPTER XXXIX

RECONCILIATION

Milton Hibbard arose and began his argument to the jury. It was a clear and forcible presentation of the case from his standpoint as counsel for the State.

After recapitulating all the testimony that had been brought out during the course of the trial, he closed with an earnest appeal for the State against the defendant, showing conclusively that he believed the prisoner guilty. The changing expressions on the faces of the jury and among his audience showed that he was carrying them largely with him. Before he began speaking, Richard again started forward, but still Larry held him back. "Let be, son. Stand by and watch the old man yonder. Hear what they have to say against Peter Junior. I want to know what they have in their hearts." The strong dramatic appeal which the situation held for Larry was communicated through him to Richard also, and again he waited, and Milton Hibbard continued his oratory.

"After all, the evidence against the prisoner still stands uncontradicted. You may see that to be able to sway you as he has, to be able to stand here and make his most touching and dramatic plea directly in the face of conclusive evidence, to dare to speak thus, proves the man to be a most consummate actor. Your Honor and Gentlemen of the Jury, nothing has ever been said against the intellect or facile ability of the prisoner. The glimpses we have been shown of his boyhood, even, prove his skill in carrying a part and holding a power over his comrades, and here we have the talent developed in the man.

"He is too wise to try to deny the statements made by the witnesses of the State, but from the moment Miss Ballard was allowed to see him alone in the jail, he has been able to carry the young lady with him. We do not bring any accusation against the young lady. No doubt she thinks him what he claims to be. No doubt he succeeded in persuading her he is her former fiancé, knowing well that he saw her and talked with her before he fled, believing that her innocent acceptance of his story as the true explanation of his reappearance here and now will place him securely in the home of the man he claims is his father. That she saw Richard Kildene and knows him to be living is his reason for reappearing here and trying this most daring plea.

"Is the true Peter Craigmile, Jr., dead? Then he can never arise to take the place this young man is now daring to usurp. Can Richard Kildene be proved to be living? Then is he, posing as Peter Craigmile, Jr., free from the charge of murder even if he makes confession thereto. He returns and makes this plea because he would live the life of a free man and not that of an outcast. He has himself told you why.

"Now, as for the proofs that he is Richard Kildene, you have heard them--and know them to be

unanswered. He has not the marks of Elder Craigmile's son. You have seen how the man he claims is his father refuses to even look upon him. Could a father be so deceived as not to know his own son? When Peter Craigmile, Jr., disappeared he was lame and feeble. This man returns,--strong and walking as well as one who never received a wound. Why, gentlemen, he stepped up here like a soldier--erect as a man who is sound in every limb. In that his subtlety has failed him. He forgot to act the part. But this forgetfulness only goes to further prove the point in hand. He was so sure of success that he forgot to act the part of the man he pretends to be.

"He has forgotten to tell the court how he came by that scar above his temple,--yet he makes the statement that he himself inflicted such a wound on the head of Richard Kildene--the omission is remarkable in so clever an actor. Miss Ballard also admits having bound up that wound on the head of Richard Kildene,--but still she claims that this man is her former fiancé, Peter Craigmile, Jr. Gentlemen of the Jury, is it possible that you can retire from this court room and not consider carefully this point? Is it not plainly to be seen that the prisoner thought to return and take the place of the man he has slain, and through the testimony of the young lady prove himself free from the thing of which he accuses himself in his confession, and so live hereafter the life of a free man without stain--and at last to marry the young girl he has loved, of whom he robbed his cousin, and for whom he killed him, and counting on the undeniable resemblance to that cousin, as proved in this court, to deceive not only the young lady herself--but also this whole community--thus making capital out of that resemblance to his own advantage and--"

"Never! Never!" cried a voice from the far corner of the court room. Instantly there was a stir all over. The Elder jumped up and frowned toward the place from whence the interruption came, and Milton Hibbard lifted his voice and tried to drown the uproar that rose and filled the room, but not one word he uttered could be heard.

Order was called, and the stillness which ensued seemed ominous. Some one was elbowing his way forward, and as he passed through the crowd the uproar began again. Every one was on his feet, and although the prisoner stood and gazed toward the source of commotion he could not see the man who spoke. He looked across to the place where Betty Ballard had been sitting between her father and mother, and there he saw her standing on a chair, forgetful of the throng around her and of all the eyes that had been fixed upon her during her testimony in cold criticism, a wonderful, transfiguring light in her great gray eyes, and her arms stretched out toward some one in the surging crowd who was drawing nearer to the prisoner's box. Her lips were moving. She was repeating a name over and over. He knew the name she was repeating soundlessly, with quivering lips, and his heart gave a great bound and then stopped beating, and he fell upon his knees and bowed his head on his hands as they clung to the railing in front of him.

Amalia, watching them all, with throbbing pulses and luminous eyes, saw and understood, and her spirit was filled with a great thankfulness which she could not voice, but which lifted her, serene and still, above every one there. Now she looked only at Peter Junior. Then a tremor crept over her, and, turning, she clasped Larry's arm with shaking hands.

"Let me that I lean a little upon you or I fall down. How this is beautiful!"

Larry put his arm about her and held her to him, supporting her gently. "It's all coming right, you see."

"Yes. But, how it is terrible for the old man! It is as if the lightning had fallen on him."

Larry glanced at his brother-in-law and then looked away. After all his desire to see him humbled, he felt a sense of shame in watching the old man's abject humility and remorse. Thereafter he kept his eyes fixed on his son, as he struggled with the throng packed closely around him and shouting now his name. Suddenly, when he could no longer progress, Richard felt himself lifted off his feet, and there, borne on the shoulders of the men,--as he had so shortly before been borne in triumph through the streets of Paris,--he was carried forward, this time by men who had tramped in the same column of infantry with him. Gladly now they held him aloft and shouted his name, and the people roared it back to them as they made way, and he was set down, as he directed, in the box beside the prisoner.

Had the Judge then tried to restore order it would have been futile. He did not try. He stood smiling, with his hand on the old Elder's shoulder. Then, while the people cheered and stamped and shouted the names of the two young men, and while women wept and turned to each other, clasping hands and laughing through tears, Milton Hibbard stooped and spoke in the Elder's ear.

"I throw up the case, man, and rejoice with you and the whole town. Go down there and take back your son."

"The Lord has visited me heavily for the wicked pride of my heart. I have no right to joy in my son's return. He should cast me off." The old man sat there, shriveled and weary--gazing straight before him, and seeing only his own foolish prejudice, like a Giant Despair, looming over him. But fortunately for him, no one saw him or noticed him but the two at his side, for all eyes were fixed on the young men, as they stood facing each other and gazed in each other's eyes.

It was a moment of breathless suspense throughout the court room, as if the crowd by one impulse were waiting to hear the young man speak, and the Judge seized the opportunity to again call for order.

When order had been secured, the prisoner's counsel rose and said: "If your Honor please, I ask leave to have the proofs opened, and to be permitted to call another witness."

The Judge replied: "I have no doubt the District Attorney will consent to this request. You may call your witness."

"Richard Kildene!" rang out the triumphant voice of Nathan Goodbody, and Richard stepped into the witness box and was sworn.

The natural eloquence with which he had been endowed was increased tenfold by his intense earnestness as he stood, turning now to the Judge and now to the jury, and told his story. The great audience, watching him and listening breathlessly, perceived the differences between the two men, a strong individuality in each causing such diversity of character that the words of Betty Ballard, which had so irritated the counsel, and which seemed so childish, now appealed to them as the truest wisdom--the wisdom of the "Child" who "shall lead them."

"It is not the same head and it is not the same scar. It is not by their legs or their scars we know people, it is by themselves--by their souls." Betty was vindicated.

Poignantly, intently, the audience felt as he wished them to feel the truth of his words, as he described the eternal vigilance of a man's own soul when he has a crime to expiate, and when he concluded by saying: "It is the Eye of Dread that sees into the hidden recesses of the heart,--to the uttermost end of life,--that follows the sinner even into his grave, until he yields to the demands of righteousness and accepts the terms of absolute truth," he carried them all with him, and again the tumult broke loose, and they shouted and laughed and wept and congratulated each other. The Judge himself sat stiffly in his seat, his chin quivering with an emotion he was making a desperate effort to conceal. Finally he turned and nodded to the sheriff, who rapped loudly for order. In a moment the room was silent, every one eager to hear what was to be the next step in the legal drama.

"Gentlemen of the Jury," said the Judge, "Notwithstanding what has occurred, it becomes our duty to proceed to an orderly determination of this case. If you believe the testimony of the last witness, then, of course, the crime charged has not been committed, the respondent is not guilty, and he is entitled to your verdict. You may, if you choose, consult together where you are, and if you agree upon a verdict, the court will receive it. If you prefer to retire to consider your verdict, you may do so."

The foreman of the jury then wrote the words, "Not guilty" on a piece of paper, and writing his name under it, passed it to the others. Each juror quickly signed his name under that of the foreman, and when it was returned to him, he arose and said: "The jury finds the accused not guilty."

Then for the first time every one looked at the Elder. He was seated bowed over his clasped hands, as if he were praying, as indeed he was, a fervent prayer for forgiveness.

Very quietly the people left the court room, filled with a reverent awe by the sight of the old man's face. It was as if he had suddenly died to the world while still sitting there before them. But at the door they gathered and waited. Larry Kildene waited with them until he spied Mary Ballard and Bertrand, with Betty, leaving, when he followed them and gave Amalia into their charge. It was a swift and glad meeting between Larry and his old friends, and a hurried explanation.

"I'm coming to tell you the whole, soon, but meantime I've brought this lovely young lady for you to care for. Go with them, Amalia, and tell them all about yourself, for they will be father and mother and sister to you. I've found my son--I've a world to tell you, but now I must hurry back and comfort my brother-in-law a bit." He took Mary's hand in his and held it a moment, then Bertrand's, and then he relieved the situation by taking Betty's and looking into her eyes, which looked tearfully back at him. Stooping, as if irresistibly drawn to her, he touched her fingers with his lips, and then lightly her hair. It was done with the grace of an old courtier, and he was gone, disappearing in the courthouse.

For a good while the crowd waited around the doors, neighbor visiting with neighbor and recounting the events of the trial that had most impressed them, and telling one and another how they had all along felt that the young prisoner was no other than Peter Junior, and laying all the blame on the Elder's reckless offer of so large a reward. Nels Nelson crept sulkily back to the stable, and G. B. Stiles returned to the hotel and packed his great valise and was taken to the station in the omnibus by Nels Nelson. As they parted, G. B. Stiles asked for the paper he had given the Swede.

"It's no good to you or any one now, you know. You're out nothing. I'm the only one that's out--all I've spent--"

"Yas, bot I got heem. You not--all ofer de vorl. Dey vas bot' coom back, dot's all," and so they parted.

Every one was glad and rejoiced over the return of the young men, with a sense of relief that resulted in hilarity, and no one would leave until he had had a chance to grasp the hands of the "boys." The men of the jury lingered with the rest, all eager to convince their friends that they would never have found the prisoner guilty of the charge against him, and at the same time chaffing each other about their discussions, and the way in which one and another had been caught by the evidence and Peter's changed appearance.

At last the doors of the courthouse opened, and the Judge, and Milton Hibbard, Peter Junior, his

father, and the lawyers, and Larry and Richard walked out in a group, when shouting and cheering began anew. Before descending the steps, the Elder, with bared head, stepped forward and stood regarding the people in silence, and the noise of shouting and cheering stopped as suddenly as it began. The devout old man stood erect, but his words came to them brokenly.

"My friends and my neighbors, as you all know, I have this day been saved--from committing, in my blindness and my stubbornness, a great crime--for which the Lord be thanked. Unworthy as I am, this day my son has been restored to me, fine and strong, for which the Lord be thanked. And here, the young man brought up as a brother to him, is again among you who have always loved him,"--he turned and took Richard by the hand, and waited a moment; then, getting control of himself, once more continued--"for which again, I say, the Lord be thanked.

"And now let me present to you one whom many of you know already, who has returned to us after many years--one whom in the past I have greatly wronged. Let me here and now make confession before you all, and present him to you as a man--" He turned and placed his hand on Larry's shoulder. "Let me present him to you as a man who can forgive an enemy--even so far as to allow that man who was his enemy to claim him forevermore as--as--brother--and friend--Larry Kildene!" Again cheers burst forth and again were held back as the Elder continued. "Neighbors--he has sent us back my son. He has saved me--more than me--from ruin and disaster, in these days when ruin is abroad in the land. How he has done it you will soon learn, for I ask you all to come round to my house this night and--partake of--of--a little collation to be prepared by Mr. Decker and sent in for this occasion." The old man's voice grew stronger as he proceeded, "Just to welcome home these boys of ours--our young men--and this man--generous and--"

"You've not been the only one to blame." Larry stepped forward and seized the Elder's hand, "I take my share of the sorrow--but it is past. We're friends--all of us--and we'll go all around to Elder Craigmile's house this night, and help him give thanks by partaking of his bounty--and now--will ye lift your voices and give a cheer for Elder Craigmile, a man who has stood in this community for all that is excellent, for uprightness and advancement, for honor and purity, a man respected, admired, and true--who has stood for the good of his fellows in this town of Leavite for fifty years." Larry Kildene lifted his hand above his head and smiled a smile that would have drawn cheers from the very paving stones.

And the cheers came, heartily and strongly, as the four men, rugged and strong, the gray-haired and the brown-haired, passed through the crowd and across the town square and up the main street, and on to the Elder's home.

Ere an hour had passed all was quiet, and the small town of Leavite had taken up the even tenor of its way. After a little time, Larry Kildene and Richard left the Elder and his son by themselves and strolled away from the town on the familiar road toward the river. They talked quietly and happily of things nearest their hearts, as they had need to do, until they came to a certain fork of the road, when Larry paused, standing a moment with his arm across his son's shoulder.

"I'll go on a piece by myself, Richard. I'm thinking you'll be wanting to make a little visit."

Richard's eyes danced. "Come with me, father, come. There'll be others there for you to talk with--who'll be glad to have you there, and--"

"Go to, go to! I know the ways of a man's heart as well as the next."

"I'll warrant you do, father!" and Richard bounded away, taking the path he had so often trod in his boyhood. Larry stood and looked after him a moment. He was pleased to hear how readily the word, father, fell from the young man's lips. Yes, Richard was facile and ready. He was his own son.

CHAPTER XL

THE SAME BOY

Mary Ballard stepped down from the open porch where Amalia and the rest of the family sat behind a screen of vines, interestedly talking, and walked along the path between the rose bushes that led to the gate. She knew Richard must be coming when she saw Betty, who sat where she could glance now and then down the road, drop her sewing and hurry away through the house and off toward the spring. As Larry knew the heart of a man, so Mary Ballard knew the heart of a girl. She said nothing, but quietly strolled along and waited with her hand on the gate.

"I wanted to be the first to open the gate to you, Richard," she said, as he approached her with extended arms. Silently he drew her to him and kissed her. She held him off a moment and gazed into his eyes.

"Yes, I'm the same boy. I think that was what you said to me when I entered the army--that I should come back to you the same boy? I've always had it in mind. I'm the same boy."

"I believe you, Richard. They are all out on the front porch, and Bertrand is with them--if you wish to see him--first--and if you wish to see Betty, take the path at the side, around the house to the spring below the garden."

Betty stood with her back to the house under the great Bartlett pear tree. She was trembling. She would not look around--Oh, no! She would wait until he asked for her. He might not ask for her! If he did not, she would not go in--not yet. But she did look around, for she felt him near her--she was sure--sure--he was near--close--

"Oh, Richard, Richard! Oh, Richard, did you know that I have been calling you in my heart--so hard, calling you, calling you?"

She was in his arms and his lips were on hers. "The same little Betty! The same dear little Betty! Lovelier--sweeter--you wore a white dress with little green sprigs on it--is this the dress?"

"Yes, no. I couldn't wear the same old one all this time." She spoke between laughing and crying.

"Why is this just like it?"

"Because."

He held her away and gazed at her a moment. "What a lovely reason! What a lovely Betty!" He drew her to him again. "I heard it all--there in the court room. I was there and heard. What a load you have borne for me--my little Betty--all this time--what a load!"

"It was horrible, Richard." She hid her flaming face on his breast. "There, before the whole town--to tell every one--everything. I--I--don't even know what I said."

"I do. Every word--dear little Betty! While I have been hiding like a great coward, you have been bravely bearing my terrible burden, bearing it for me."

"Oh, Richard! For weeks and weeks my heart has been calling you, calling you--night and day, calling you to come home. I told them he was Peter Junior, but they would not believe me--no one would believe me but mother. Father tried to, but only mother really did."

"I heard you, Betty. I had a dingy little studio up three flights of stairs in Paris, and I sat there painting one day--and I heard you. I had sent a picture to the Salon, and was waiting in suspense to know the result, and I heard your call--"

"Was--was--that what made you come home--or--or was it because you knew you ought to?" She lifted her head and looked straight into his eyes.

Richard laughed. "It's the same little Betty! The same Betty with the same conscience bigger than her head--almost bigger than her heart. I can't tell you what it was. I heard it again and again, and the last time I just packed my things and wound up matters there--I had made a success, Betty, dear--let me say that. It makes me feel just a little bit more worth your while. I thought to make a success would be sweet, but it was all worthless--I'll tell you all about it later--but it was no help and I just followed the call and returned, hurrying as if I knew all about the thing that was going on, when really I knew nothing. Sometimes I thought it was you calling me, and sometimes I thought it was my own conscience, and sometimes I thought it was only that I could no longer bear my own thoughts--See here, Betty, darling--don't--don't ever kill any one, for the thought that you have committed a murder is an awful thing to carry about with you."

She laughed and hid her face again on his breast. "Richard, how can we laugh--when it has all been so horrible?"

"We can't, Betty--we're crying." She looked up at him again, and surely his eyes were filled with tears. She put up her hand and lightly touched his lips with her fingers.

"I know. I know you've suffered, Richard. I see the lines of sorrow here about your mouth--even when you smile. I saw the same in Peter Junior's face, and it was so sad--I just hugged him, I was so glad it was he--I--I--hugged him and kissed him--"

"Bless his heart! Somebody ought to."

"Somebody will. She's beautiful--and so--fascinating! Let's go in so you can meet her."

"I have met her, and father has told me a great deal about her. I've had a fine talk with my father. How wonderful that Peter should have been the means of finding my father for me--and such a splendid father! I often used to think out what kind of a father I would like if I could choose one, but I never thought out just such a combination of delightful qualities as I find in him."

"It's like a story, isn't it? And we'll all live happily ever after. Shall we go in and see the rest, Richard? They'll be wanting to see you too."

"Let's go over here and sit down. I don't want to see the rest quite yet, little one. Why, Betty, do you suppose I can let go of you yet?"

"No," said Betty, meekly, and again Richard laughed. She lifted the hair from his temple and touched the old scar.

"Yes, it's there, Betty. I'm glad he hit me that welt. I would have pushed him over but for that. I deserved it."

"You're not so like him--not so like as you used to be. No one would mistake you now. You don't

look so much like yourself as you used to--and you've a lot of white in your hair. Oh, Richard!"

"Yes. It's been pretty tough, Betty, dear,--pretty tough. Let's talk of something else."

"And all the time I couldn't help you--even the least bit."

"But you were a help all the time--all the time."

"How, Richard?"

"I had a clean, sweet, perfect, innocent place always in my heart where you were that kept me from caring for a lot of foolishness that tempted other men. It was a good, sweet, wholesome place where you sat always. When I wanted to see you sitting there, I had only to take a funny little leather housewife, all worn, and tied with cherry-colored hair ribbons, in my hand and look at it and remember."

Betty sighed a long sigh of contentment and settled herself closer in his arms. "Yes, I was there, and God heard me praying for you. Sometimes I felt myself there."

"In the secret chamber of my heart, Betty, dear?"

"Yes." They were silent for a while, one of the blessed silences which make life worth living. Then Betty lifted her head. "Tell me about Paris, Richard, and what you did there. It was Peter who was wild to go and paint in Paris and it was you who went. That was why no one found you. They never thought that of you--but I would have thought it. I knew you had it in you."

"Oh, yes, after a fashion I had it in me."

"But you said you met with success. Did that mean you were admitted to the Salon?"

"Yes, dear."

"Oh, Richard! How tremendous! I've read a lot about it. Oh, Richard! Did you like the 'Old Masters'?"

"Did I! Betty, I learned a thing about your father, looking at the work of some of those great old fellows. I learned that he is a better painter and a greater man than people over here know."

"Mother knew it--all the time."

"Ah, yes, your mother! Would you like to go there, Betty? Then I'll take you. We'll be married right away, won't we, dear?"

"You know, Richard, I believe I would be perfectly--absolutely--terribly happy--if--if I could only get over being mad at your uncle. He was so stubborn, he was just wicked. I hated him--I--I hated him so, and now it seems as if I had got used to hating him and couldn't stop."

She had been so brave and had not once given way, but now at the thought of all the bitterness and the fight of her will against that of the old man, she sobbed in his arms. Her whole frame shook and he gathered her close and comforted her. "He--he--he was always saying--saying--"

"Never mind now what he was saying, dear. Listen."

"I--I--I--am afraid--I can never see him--or--or look at him again--I--I--hate him so!"

"No, no. Don't hate him. Any one would have done the same in his place who believed as firmly as he did what he believed."

"B--b--but he didn't need to believe it."

"You see he had known through that Dane man--or whatever he is--from the detective--all I told you that night--how could he help it? I believed Peter was dead--we all did--you did. He had brooded over it and slept upon it--no wonder he refused even to look at Peter. If you had seen Uncle Elder there in the court room after the people had gone, if you had seen him then, Betty, you would never hate him again."

"All the same, if--if--you hadn't come home when you did,--and the law of Wisconsin allowed of hanging--he would have had him, Peter Junior--he would have had his own son hanged,--and been glad--glad--because he would have thought he was hanging you. I do hate--"

"No, no. And as he very tersely said--if all had been as it seemed, and it had been me--trying to take the place of Peter Junior--I would have deserved hanging--now wouldn't I, after all the years when Uncle Elder had been good to me for his sister's sake?"

"That's it--for his sister's sake--n--n--not for yours, always himself and his came first. And then it wouldn't have been so. Even if it were so, it wouldn't have been so--I mean--I wouldn't have believed it--because it couldn't have been you and been so--"

"Darling little Irish Betty! What a fine daughter you will be to my Irish Dad! Oh, my dear! my dear!"

"But you know such a thing would have been impossible for you to do. They might have known it, too, if they'd had any sense. And that scar on Peter's head--that was a new one and yours is an old one. If they had had any sense, they could have seen that, too."

"Never any man on earth had a sweeter job than I! It's worth all I've been through to come home here and comfort you. Let's keep it up all our lives, see? You always stay mad at Uncle Elder, and I'll always comfort you--just like this."

Then Betty laughed through her tears, and they kissed again, and then proceeded to settle all their future to Richard's heart's content. Then, after a long while, they crept in where the family

were all seated at supper, and instantly everything in the way of decorum at meals was demoralized. Every one jumped up, and Betty and Richard were surrounded and tumbled about and hugged and kissed by all--until a shrill, childish voice raised a shout of laughter as little Janey said: "What are we all kissing Betty for? She hasn't been away; she's been here all the time."

It was Peter Junior who broke up the rout. He came in upon them, saying he had left his father asleep, exhausted after the day's emotion, and that he had come home to the Ballards to get a little supper. Then it was all to be done over again, and Peter was jumbled up among outstretched arms, and shaken and pounded and hugged, and happy he was to be taken once more thus vociferously into the home that had always meant so much to him. There they all were,--Martha and Julien--James and Bob, as the boys were called these days,--and little Janey--and Bertrand as joyous as a boy, and Mary--she who had always known--even as Betty said, smiling on him in the old way--and there, watching all with glowing eyes, Amalia at one side, waiting, until Peter had her, too, in his arms.

Quickly Martha set a place for Peter between Amalia and herself. Yes, it was all as it should be--the circle now complete--only--"Where is your father, Richard?" asked Mary.

"He went off for a walk. Isn't he a glorious father for a man to fall heir to? We're all to meet at Uncle Elder's to-night, and he'll be there."

"Will he? I'm so glad."

"Yes, Mrs. Ballard." Richard looked gravely into her eyes and from her to Bertrand. "You left after the verdict. You weren't at the courthouse at the last. It's all come right, and it's going to stay so."

The meal progressed and ended amid laughter; and a little later the family all set out for the banker's home.

"How I wish Hester were here!" said Mary. "I did not wish her here before--but now we want her." She looked at Peter.

"Yes, now we want her. We're ready for her at last. Father leaves for New York to-morrow to fetch her. She's coming on the next steamship, and he'll meet her and bring her back to us all."

"How that is beautiful!" murmured Amalia, as she walked at Peter's side. He looked down at her and noted a weariness in her manner she strove to conceal.

"Come back with me a little--just a little while. I can go later to my father's, and he will excuse you, and I'll take you to him before he leaves to-morrow. Come, I think I know where we may find Larry Kildene." So Peter led her away into the dusk, and they walked slowly--slowly--along the road leading to the river bluff--but not to the top.

After a long hour Larry came down from the height where he had been communing with himself and found them in the sweet starlight seated by the wayside, and passed them, although he knew they were Peter and Amalia. He walked lingeringly, feeling himself very much alone, until he was seized by either arm and held.

"It is your blessing, Sir Kildene, we ask it."

And Larry gave them the blessing they asked, and took Amalia in his arms and kissed her. "I thought from the first that you might be my son, Peter, and it means no diminution in my love for you that I find you are not. It's been a great day--a great day--a great day," he said as if to himself, and they walked on together.

"Yes, yes! Sir Kildene, I am never to know again fear. I am to have the new name, so strong and fine. Well can I say it. Hear me. Peter-Craigmile-Junior. A strange, fine name--it is to be mine--given to me. How all is beautiful here! It is the joy of heaven in my heart--like--like heaven, is not, Peter?"

"Now you are here--yes, Amalia."

"So have I say to you before--to love is all of heaven--and all of life, is not?"

Peter held in his hand the little crucifix he had worn on his bosom since their parting. In the darkness he felt rather than saw it. He placed it in her hand and drew her close as they walked. "Yes, Amalia, yes. You have taught me. Hatred destroys like a blast, but love--love is life itself."

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