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A HAZARD OF NEW FORTUNES

By William Dean Howells

PART 1

BIBLIOGRAPHICAL

The following story was the first fruit of my New York life when I began to live it after my quarter of a century in Cambridge and Boston, ending in 1889; and I used my own transition to the commercial metropolis in framing the experience which was wholly that of my supposititious literary adventurer. He was a character whom, with his wife, I have employed in some six or eight other stories, and whom I made as much the hero and heroine of 'Their Wedding Journey' as the slight fable would bear. In venturing out of my adoptive New England, where I had found myself at home with many imaginary friends, I found it natural to ask the company of these familiar acquaintances, but their company was not to be had at once for the asking. When I began speaking of them as Basil and Isabel, in the fashion of 'Their Wedding Journey,' they would not respond with the effect of early middle age which I desired in them. They remained wilfully, not to say woodenly, the young bridal pair of that romance, without the promise of novel functioning. It was not till I tried addressing them as March and Mrs. March that they stirred under my hand with fresh impulse, and set about the work assigned them as people in something more than their second youth.

The scene into which I had invited them to figure filled the largest canvas I had yet allowed myself; and, though 'A Hazard of New Fortunes was not the first story I had written with the printer at my heels, it was the first which took its own time to prescribe its own dimensions. I had the general design

well in mind when I began to write it, but as it advanced it compelled into its course incidents, interests, individualities, which I had not known lay near, and it specialized and amplified at points which I had not always meant to touch, though I should not like to intimate anything mystical in the fact. It became, to my thinking, the most vital of my fictions, through my quickened interest in the life about me, at a moment of great psychological import. We had passed through a period of strong emotioning in the direction of the humaner economics, if I may phrase it so; the rich seemed not so much to despise the poor, the poor did not so hopelessly repine. The solution of the riddle of the painful earth through the dreams of Henry George, through the dreams of Edward Bellamy, through the dreams of all the generous visionaries of the past, seemed not impossibly far off. That shedding of blood which is for the remission of sins had been symbolized by the bombs and scaffolds of Chicago, and the hearts of those who felt the wrongs bound up with our rights, the slavery implicated in our liberty, were thrilling with griefs and hopes hitherto strange to the average American breast. Opportunely for me there was a great street-car strike in New York, and the story began to find its way to issues nobler and larger than those of the love-affairs common to fiction. I was in my fifty-second year when I took it up, and in the prime, such as it was, of my powers. The scene which I had chosen appealed prodigiously to me, and the action passed as nearly without my conscious agency as I ever allow myself to think such things happen.

The opening chapters were written in a fine, old fashioned apartment house which had once been a family house, and in an uppermost room of which I could look from my work across the trees of the little park in Stuyvesant Square to the towers of St. George's Church. Then later in the spring of 1889 the unfinished novel was carried to a country house on the Belmont border of Cambridge. There I must have written very rapidly to have pressed it to conclusion before the summer ended. It came, indeed, so easily from the pen that I had the misgiving which I always have of things which do not cost me great trouble.

There is nothing in the book with which I amused myself more than the house-hunting of the Marches when they were placing themselves in New York; and if the contemporary reader should turn for instruction to the pages in which their experience is detailed I assure him that he may trust their fidelity and accuracy in the article of New York housing as it was early in the last decade of the last century: I mean, the housing of people of such moderate means as the Marches. In my zeal for truth I did not distinguish between reality and actuality in this or other matters—that is, one was as precious to me as the other. But the types here portrayed are as true as ever they were, though the world in which they were finding their habitat is wonderfully, almost incredibly different. Yet it is not wholly different, for a young literary pair now adventuring in New York might easily parallel the experience of the Marches with their own, if not for so little money; many phases of New York housing are better, but all are dearer. Other aspects of the material city have undergone a transformation much more wonderful. I find that in my book its population is once modestly spoken of as two millions, but now in twenty years it is twice as great, and the grandeur as well as grandiosity of its forms is doubly apparent. The transitional public that then moped about in mildly tinkling horse-cars is now hurried back and forth in clanging trolleys, in honking and whirring motors; the Elevated road which was the last word of speed is undermined by the Subway, shooting its swift shuttles through the subterranean woof of the city's haste. From these feet let the witness infer our whole massive Hercules, a bulk that sprawls and stretches beyond the rivers through the tunnels piercing their beds and that towers into the skies with innumerable tops—a Hercules blent of Briareus and Cerberus, but not so bad a monster as it seemed then to threaten becoming.

Certain hopes of truer and better conditions on which my heart was fixed twenty years ago are not less dear, and they are by no means touched with despair, though they have not yet found the fulfilment which I would then have prophesied for them. Events have not wholly played them false; events have not halted, though they have marched with a slowness that might affect a younger observer as marking time. They who were then mindful of the poor have not forgotten them, and what is better the poor have not often forgotten themselves in violences such as offered me the material of tragedy and pathos in my story. In my quality of artist I could not regret these, and I gratefully realize that they offered me the opportunity of a more strenuous action, a more impressive catastrophe than I could have achieved without them. They tended to give the whole fable dignity and doubtless made for its success as a book. As a serial it had crept a sluggish course before a public apparently so unmindful of it that no rumor of its acceptance or rejection reached the writer during the half year of its publication; but it rose in book form from that failure and stood upon its feet and went its way to greater favor than any book of his had yet enjoyed. I hope that my recognition of the fact will not seem like boasting, but that the reader will regard it as a special confidence from the author and will let it go no farther.

KITTERY POINT, MAINE, July, 1909.

PART FIRST

A HAZARD OF NEW FORTUNES

I.

"Now, you think this thing over, March, and let me know the last of next week," said Fulkerson. He got up from the chair which he had been sitting astride, with his face to its back, and tilting toward March on its hind-legs, and came and rapped upon his table with his thin bamboo stick. "What you want to do is to get out of the insurance business, anyway. You acknowledge that yourself. You never liked it, and now it makes you sick; in other words, it's killing you. You ain't an insurance man by nature. You're a natural-born literary man, and you've been going against the grain. Now, I offer you a chance to go with the grain. I don't say you're going to make your everlasting fortune, but I'll give you a living salary, and if the thing succeeds you'll share in its success. We'll all share in its success. That's the beauty of it. I tell you, March, this is the greatest idea that has been struck since"—Fulkerson stopped and searched his mind for a fit image—"since the creation of man."

He put his leg up over the corner of March's table and gave himself a sharp cut on the thigh, and leaned forward to get the full effect of his words upon his listener.

March had his hands clasped together behind his head, and he took one of them down long enough to put his inkstand and mucilage-bottle out of Fulkerson's way. After many years' experiment of a mustache and whiskers, he now wore his grizzled beard full, but cropped close; it gave him a certain grimness, corrected by the gentleness of his eyes.

"Some people don't think much of the creation of man nowadays. Why stop at that? Why not say since the morning stars sang together?"

"No, sir; no, sir! I don't want to claim too much, and I draw the line at the creation of man. I'm satisfied with that. But if you want to ring the morning stars into the prospectus all right; I won't go back on you."

"But I don't understand why you've set your mind on me," March said. "I haven't had, any magazine experience, you know that; and I haven't seriously attempted to do anything in literature since I was married. I gave up smoking and the Muse together. I suppose I could still manage a cigar, but I don't believe I could—"

"Muse worth a cent." Fulkerson took the thought out of his mouth and put it into his own words. "I know. Well, I don't want you to. I don't care if you never write a line for the thing, though you needn't reject anything of yours, if it happens to be good, on that account. And I don't want much experience in my editor; rather not have it. You told me, didn't you, that you used to do some newspaper work before you settled down?"

"Yes; I thought my lines were permanently cast in those places once. It was more an accident than anything else that I got into the insurance business. I suppose I secretly hoped that if I made my living by something utterly different, I could come more freshly to literature proper in my leisure."

"I see; and you found the insurance business too many, for you. Well, anyway, you've always had a hankering for the inkpots; and the fact that you first gave me the idea of this thing shows that you've done more or less thinking about magazines."

"Yes—less."

"Well, all right. Now don't you be troubled. I know what I want, generally, speaking, and in this particular instance I want you. I might get a man of more experience, but I should probably get a man of more prejudice and self-conceit along with him, and a man with a following of the literary hangers-on that are sure to get round an editor sooner or later. I want to start fair, and I've found out in the syndicate business all the men that are worth having. But they know me, and they don't know you, and that's where we shall have the pull on them. They won't be able to work the thing. Don't you be anxious about the experience. I've got experience enough of my own to run a dozen editors. What I want is an editor who has taste, and you've got it; and conscience, and you've got it; and horse sense, and you've got that. And I like you because you're a Western man, and I'm another. I do cotton to a Western man when I find him off East here, holding his own with the best of 'em, and showing 'em that he's just as much civilized as they are. We both know what it is to have our bright home in the setting sun; heigh?"

"I think we Western men who've come East are apt to take ourselves a little too objectively and to feel ourselves rather more representative than we need," March remarked.

Fulkerson was delighted. "You've hit it! We do! We are!"

"And as for holding my own, I'm not very proud of what I've done in that way; it's been very little to hold. But I know what you mean, Fulkerson, and I've felt the same thing myself; it warmed me toward you when we first met. I can't help suffusing a little to any man when I hear that he was born on the other side of the Alleghanies. It's perfectly stupid. I despise the same thing when I see it in Boston people."

Fulkerson pulled first one of his blond whiskers and then the other, and twisted the end of each into a point, which he left to untwine itself. He fixed March with his little eyes, which had a curious innocence in their cunning, and tapped the desk immediately in front of him. "What I like about you is that you're broad in your sympathies. The first time I saw you, that night on the Quebec boat, I said to myself: 'There's a man I want to know. There's a human being.' I was a little afraid of Mrs. March and the children, but I felt at home with you—thoroughly domesticated—before I passed a word with you; and when you spoke first, and opened up with a joke over that fellow's tableful of light literature and Indian moccasins and birch-bark toy canoes and stereoscopic views, I knew that we were brothers-spiritual twins. I recognized the Western style of fun, and I thought, when you said you were from Boston, that it was some of the same. But I see now that its being a cold fact, as far as the last fifteen or twenty years count, is just so much gain. You know both sections, and you can make this thing go, from ocean to ocean."

"We might ring that into the prospectus, too," March suggested, with a smile. "You might call the thing 'From Sea to Sea.' By-the-way, what are you going to call it?"

"I haven't decided yet; that's one of the things I wanted to talk with you about. I had thought of 'The Syndicate'; but it sounds kind of dry, and doesn't seem to cover the ground exactly. I should like something that would express the co-operative character of the thing, but I don't know as I can get it."

"Might call it 'The Mutual'."

"They'd think it was an insurance paper. No, that won't do. But Mutual comes pretty near the idea. If we could get something like that, it would pique curiosity; and then if we could get paragraphs afloat explaining that the contributors were to be paid according to the sales, it would be a first-rate ad."

He bent a wide, anxious, inquiring smile upon March, who suggested, lazily: "You might call it 'The Round-Robin'. That would express the central idea of irresponsibility. As I understand, everybody is to share the profits and be exempt from the losses. Or, if I'm wrong, and the reverse is true, you might call it 'The Army of Martyrs'. Come, that sounds attractive, Fulkerson! Or what do you think of 'The Fifth Wheel'? That would forestall the criticism that there are too many literary periodicals already. Or, if you want to put forward the idea of complete independence, you could call it 'The Free Lance'; or—"

"Or 'The Hog on Ice'—either stand up or fall down, you know," Fulkerson broke in coarsely. "But we'll leave the name of the magazine till we get the editor. I see the poison's beginning to work in you, March; and if I had time I'd leave the result to time. But I haven't. I've got to know inside of the next week. To come down to business with you, March, I sha'n't start this thing unless I can get you to take hold of it."

He seemed to expect some acknowledgment, and March said, "Well, that's very nice of you, Fulkerson."

"No, sir; no, sir! I've always liked you and wanted you ever since we met that first night. I had this thing inchoately in my mind then, when I was telling you about the newspaper syndicate business—beautiful vision of a lot of literary fellows breaking loose from the bondage of publishers and playing it alone—"

"You might call it 'The Lone Hand'; that would be attractive," March interrupted. "The whole West would know what you meant."

Fulkerson was talking seriously, and March was listening seriously; but they both broke off and laughed. Fulkerson got down off the table and made some turns about the room. It was growing late; the October sun had left the top of the tall windows; it was still clear day, but it would soon be twilight; they had been talking a long time. Fulkerson came and stood with his little feet wide apart, and bent his little lean, square face on March. "See here! How much do you get out of this thing here, anyway?"

"The insurance business?" March hesitated a moment and then said, with a certain effort of reserve,

"At present about three thousand." He looked up at Fulkerson with a glance, as if he had a mind to enlarge upon the fact, and then dropped his eyes without saying more.

Whether Fulkerson had not thought it so much or not, he said: "Well, I'll give you thirty-five hundred. Come! And your chances in the success."

"We won't count the chances in the success. And I don't believe thirty-five hundred would go any further in New York than three thousand in Boston."

"But you don't live on three thousand here?"

"No; my wife has a little property."

"Well, she won't lose the income if you go to New York. I suppose you pay ten or twelve hundred a year for your house here. You can get plenty of flats in New York for the same money; and I understand you can get all sorts of provisions for less than you pay now—three or four cents on the pound. Come!"

This was by no means the first talk they had had about the matter; every three or four months during the past two years the syndicate man had dropped in upon March to air the scheme and to get his impressions of it. This had happened so often that it had come to be a sort of joke between them. But now Fulkerson clearly meant business, and March had a struggle to maintain himself in a firm poise of refusal.

"I dare say it wouldn't—or it needn't-cost so very much more, but I don't want to go to New York; or my wife doesn't. It's the same thing."

"A good deal samer," Fulkerson admitted.

March did not quite like his candor, and he went on with dignity. "It's very natural she shouldn't. She has always lived in Boston; she's attached to the place. Now, if you were going to start 'The Fifth Wheel' in Boston—"

Fulkerson slowly and sadly shook his head, but decidedly. "Wouldn't do. You might as well say St. Louis or Cincinnati. There's only one city that belongs to the whole country, and that's New York."

"Yes, I know," sighed March; "and Boston belongs to the Bostonians, but they like you to make yourself at home while you're visiting."

"If you'll agree to make phrases like that, right along, and get them into 'The Round-Robin' somehow, I'll say four thousand," said Fulkerson. "You think it over now, March. You talk it over with Mrs. March; I know you will, anyway; and I might as well make a virtue of advising you to do it. Tell her I advised you to do it, and you let me know before next Saturday what you've decided."

March shut down the rolling top of his desk in the corner of the room, and walked Fulkerson out before him. It was so late that the last of the chore-women who washed down the marble halls and stairs of the great building had wrung out her floor-cloth and departed, leaving spotless stone and a clean, damp smell in the darkening corridors behind her.

"Couldn't offer you such swell quarters in New York, March," Fulkerson said, as he went tack-tacking down the steps with his small boot-heels. "But I've got my eye on a little house round in West Eleventh Street that I'm going to fit up for my bachelor's hall in the third story, and adapt for 'The Lone Hand' in the first and second, if this thing goes through; and I guess we'll be pretty comfortable. It's right on the Sand Strip—no malaria of any kind."

"I don't know that I'm going to share its salubrity with you yet," March sighed, in an obvious travail which gave Fulkerson hopes.

"Oh yes, you are," he coaxed. "Now, you talk it over with your wife. You give her a fair, unprejudiced chance at the thing on its merits, and I'm very much mistaken in Mrs. March if she doesn't tell you to go in and win. We're bound to win!"

They stood on the outside steps of the vast edifice beetling like a granite crag above them, with the stone groups of an allegory of life-insurance foreshortened in the bas-relief overhead. March absently lifted his eyes to it. It was suddenly strange after so many years' familiarity, and so was the well-known street in its Saturday-evening solitude. He asked himself, with prophetic homesickness, if it were an omen of what was to be. But he only said, musingly: "A fortnightly. You know that didn't work in England. The fortnightly is published once a month now."

"It works in France," Fulkerson retorted. "The 'Revue des Deux Mondes' is still published twice a

month. I guess we can make it work in America—with illustrations."

"Going to have illustrations?"

"My dear boy! What are you giving me? Do I look like the sort of lunatic who would start a thing in the twilight of the nineteenth century without illustrations? Come off!"

"Ah, that complicates it! I don't know anything about art." March's look of discouragement confessed the hold the scheme had taken upon him.

"I don't want you to!" Fulkerson retorted. "Don't you suppose I shall have an art man?"

"And will they—the artists—work at a reduced rate, too, like the writers, with the hopes of a share in the success?"

"Of course they will! And if I want any particular man, for a card, I'll pay him big money besides. But I can get plenty of first-rate sketches on my own terms. You'll see! They'll pour in!"

"Look here, Fulkerson," said March, "you'd better call this fortnightly of yours 'The Madness of the Half-Moon'; or 'Bedlam Broke Loose' wouldn't be bad! Why do you throw away all your hard earnings on such a crazy venture? Don't do it!" The kindness which March had always felt, in spite of his wife's first misgivings and reservations, for the merry, hopeful, slangy, energetic little creature trembled in his voice. They had both formed a friendship for Fulkerson during the week they were together in Quebec. When he was not working the newspapers there, he went about with them over the familiar ground they were showing their children, and was simply grateful for the chance, as well as very entertaining about it all. The children liked him, too; when they got the clew to his intention, and found that he was not quite serious in many of the things he said, they thought he was great fun. They were always glad when their father brought him home on the occasion of Fulkerson's visits to Boston; and Mrs. March, though of a charier hospitality, welcomed Fulkerson with a grateful sense of his admiration for her husband. He had a way of treating March with deference, as an older and abler man, and of qualifying the freedom he used toward every one with an implication that March tolerated it voluntarily, which she thought very sweet and even refined.

"Ah, now you're talking like a man and a brother," said Fulkerson. "Why, March, old man, do you suppose I'd come on here and try to talk you into this thing if I wasn't morally, if I wasn't perfectly, sure of success? There isn't any if or and about it. I know my ground, every inch; and I don't stand alone on it," he added, with a significance which did not escape March. "When you've made up your mind I can give you the proof; but I'm not at liberty now to say anything more. I tell you it's going to be a triumphal march from the word go, with coffee and lemonade for the procession along the whole line. All you've got to do is to fall in." He stretched out his hand to March. "You let me know as soon as you can."

March deferred taking his hand till he could ask, "Where are you going?"

"Parker House. Take the eleven for New York to-night."

"I thought I might walk your way." March looked at his watch. "But I shouldn't have time. Goodbye!"

He now let Fulkerson have his hand, and they exchanged a cordial pressure. Fulkerson started away at a quick, light pace. Half a block off he stopped, turned round, and, seeing March still standing where he had left him, he called back, joyously, "I've got the name!"

"What?"

"Every Other Week."

"It isn't bad."

"Ta-ta!"

II.

All the way up to the South End March mentally prolonged his talk with Fulkerson, and at his door in Nankeen Square he closed the parley with a plump refusal to go to New York on any terms. His

daughter Bella was lying in wait for him in the hall, and she threw her arms round his neck with the exuberance of her fourteen years and with something of the histrionic intention of her sex. He pressed on, with her clinging about him, to the library, and, in the glow of his decision against Fulkerson, kissed his wife, where she sat by the study lamp reading the Transcript through her first pair of eye-glasses: it was agreed in the family that she looked distinguished in them, or, at any rate, cultivated. She took them off to give him a glance of question, and their son Tom looked up from his book for a moment; he was in his last year at the high school, and was preparing for Harvard.

"I didn't get away from the office till half-past five," March explained to his wife's glance, "and then I walked. I suppose dinner's waiting. I'm sorry, but I won't do it any more."

At table he tried to be gay with Bella, who babbled at him with a voluble pertness which her brother had often advised her parents to check in her, unless they wanted her to be universally despised.

"Papa!" she shouted at last, "you're not listening!" As soon as possible his wife told the children they might be excused. Then she asked, "What is it, Basil?"

"What is what?" he retorted, with a specious brightness that did not avail.

"What is on your mind?"

"How do you know there's anything?"

"Your kissing me so when you came in, for one thing."

"Don't I always kiss you when I come in?"

"Not now. I suppose it isn't necessary any more. 'Cela va sans baiser.'"

"Yes, I guess it's so; we get along without the symbolism now." He stopped, but she knew that he had not finished.

"Is it about your business? Have they done anything more?"

"No; I'm still in the dark. I don't know whether they mean to supplant me, or whether they ever did. But I wasn't thinking about that. Fulkerson has been to see me again."

"Fulkerson?" She brightened at the name, and March smiled, too. "Why didn't you bring him to dinner?"

"I wanted to talk with you. Then you do like him?"

"What has that got to do with it, Basil?"

"Nothing! nothing! That is, he was boring away about that scheme of his again. He's got it into definite shape at last."

"What shape?"

March outlined it for her, and his wife seized its main features with the intuitive sense of affairs which makes women such good business-men when they will let it.

"It sounds perfectly crazy," she said, finally. "But it mayn't be. The only thing I didn't like about Mr. Fulkerson was his always wanting to chance things. But what have you got to do with it?"

"What have I got to do with it?" March toyed with the delay the question gave him; then he said, with a sort of deprecatory laugh: "It seems that Fulkerson has had his eye on me ever since we met that night on the Quebec boat. I opened up pretty freely to him, as you do to a man you never expect to see again, and when I found he was in that newspaper syndicate business I told him about my early literary ambitions—"

"You can't say that I ever discouraged them, Basil," his wife put in. "I should have been willing, any time, to give up everything for them."

"Well, he says that I first suggested this brilliant idea to him. Perhaps I did; I don't remember. When he told me about his supplying literature to newspapers for simultaneous publication, he says I asked: 'Why not apply the principle of co-operation to a magazine, and run it in the interest of the contributors?' and that set him to thinking, and he thought out his plan of a periodical which should pay authors and artists a low price outright for their work and give them a chance of the profits in the way of a percentage. After all, it isn't so very different from the chances an author takes when he publishes

a book. And Fulkerson thinks that the novelty of the thing would pique public curiosity, if it didn't arouse public sympathy. And the long and short of it is, Isabel, that he wants me to help edit it."

"To edit it?" His wife caught her breath, and she took a little time to realize the fact, while she stared hard at her husband to make sure he was not joking.

"Yes. He says he owes it all to me; that I invented the idea—the germ—the microbe."

His wife had now realized the fact, at least in a degree that excluded trifling with it. "That is very honorable of Mr. Fulkerson; and if he owes it to you, it was the least he could do." Having recognized her husband's claim to the honor done him, she began to kindle with a sense of the honor itself and the value of the opportunity. "It's a very high compliment to you, Basil—a very high compliment. And you could give up this wretched insurance business that you've always hated so, and that's making you so unhappy now that you think they're going to take it from you. Give it up and take Mr. Fulkerson's offer! It's a perfect interposition, coming just at this time! Why, do it! Mercy!" she suddenly arrested herself, "he wouldn't expect you to get along on the possible profits?" Her face expressed the awfulness of the notion.

March smiled reassuringly, and waited to give himself the pleasure of the sensation he meant to give her. "If I'll make striking phrases for it and edit it, too, he'll give me four thousand dollars."

He leaned back in his chair, and stuck his hands deep into his pockets, and watched his wife's face, luminous with the emotions that flashed through her mind—doubt, joy, anxiety.

"Basil! You don't mean it! Why, take it! Take it instantly! Oh, what a thing to happen! Oh, what luck! But you deserve it, if you first suggested it. What an escape, what a triumph over all those hateful insurance people! Oh, Basil, I'm afraid he'll change his mind! You ought to have accepted on the spot. You might have known I would approve, and you could so easily have taken it back if I didn't. Telegraph him now! Run right out with the despatch—Or we can send Tom!"

In these imperatives of Mrs. March's there was always much of the conditional. She meant that he should do what she said, if it were entirely right; and she never meant to be considered as having urged him.

"And suppose his enterprise went wrong?" her husband suggested.

"It won't go wrong. Hasn't he made a success of his syndicate?"

"He says so—yes."

"Very well, then, it stands to reason that he'll succeed in this, too. He wouldn't undertake it if he didn't know it would succeed; he must have capital."

"It will take a great deal to get such a thing going; and even if he's got an Angel behind him—"

She caught at the word—"An Angel?"

"It's what the theatrical people call a financial backer. He dropped a hint of something of that kind."

"Of course, he's got an Angel," said his wife, promptly adopting the word. "And even if he hadn't, still, Basil, I should be willing to have you risk it. The risk isn't so great, is it? We shouldn't be ruined if it failed altogether. With our stocks we have two thousand a year, anyway, and we could pinch through on that till you got into some other business afterward, especially if we'd saved something out of your salary while it lasted. Basil, I want you to try it! I know it will give you a new lease of life to have a congenial occupation." March laughed, but his wife persisted. "I'm all for your trying it, Basil; indeed I am. If it's an experiment, you can give it up."

"It can give me up, too."

"Oh, nonsense! I guess there's not much fear of that. Now, I want you to telegraph Mr. Fulkerson, so that he'll find the despatch waiting for him when he gets to New York. I'll take the whole responsibility, Basil, and I'll risk all the consequences."

III.

March's face had sobered more and more as she followed one hopeful burst with another, and now it expressed a positive pain. But he forced a smile and said: "There's a little condition attached. Where did you suppose it was to be published?"

"Why, in Boston, of course. Where else should it be published?"

She looked at him for the intention of his question so searchingly that he quite gave up the attempt to be gay about it. "No," he said, gravely, "it's to be published in New York."

She fell back in her chair. "In New York?" She leaned forward over the table toward him, as if to make sure that she heard aright, and said, with all the keen reproach that he could have expected: "In New York, Basil! Oh, how could you have let me go on?"

He had a sufficiently rueful face in owning: "I oughtn't to have done it, but I got started wrong. I couldn't help putting the best foot, forward at first—or as long as the whole thing was in the air. I didn't know that you would take so much to the general enterprise, or else I should have mentioned the New York condition at once; but, of course, that puts an end to it."

"Oh, of course," she assented, sadly. "We COULDN'T go to New York."

"No, I know that," he said; and with this a perverse desire to tempt her to the impossibility awoke in him, though he was really quite cold about the affair himself now. "Fulkerson thought we could get a nice flat in New York for about what the interest and taxes came to here, and provisions are cheaper. But I should rather not experiment at my time of life. If I could have been caught younger, I might have been inured to New York, but I don't believe I could stand it now."

"How I hate to have you talk that way, Basil! You are young enough to try anything—anywhere; but you know I don't like New York. I don't approve of it. It's so big, and so hideous! Of course I shouldn't mind that; but I've always lived in Boston, and the children were born and have all their friendships and associations here." She added, with the helplessness that discredited her good sense and did her injustice, "I have just got them both into the Friday afternoon class at Papanti's, and you know how difficult that is."

March could not fail to take advantage of an occasion like this. "Well, that alone ought to settle it. Under the circumstances, it would be flying in the face of Providence to leave Boston. The mere fact of a brilliant opening like that offered me on 'The Microbe,' and the halcyon future which Fulkerson promises if we'll come to New York, is as dust in the balance against the advantages of the Friday afternoon class."

"Basil," she appealed, solemnly, "have I ever interfered with your career?"

"I never had any for you to interfere with, my dear."

"Basil! Haven't I always had faith in you? And don't you suppose that if I thought it would really be for your advancement I would go to New York or anywhere with you?"

"No, my dear, I don't," he teased. "If it would be for my salvation, yes, perhaps; but not short of that; and I should have to prove by a cloud of witnesses that it would. I don't blame you. I wasn't born in Boston, but I understand how you feel. And really, my dear," he added, without irony, "I never seriously thought of asking you to go to New York. I was dazzled by Fulkerson's offer, I'll own that; but his choice of me as editor sapped my confidence in him."

"I don't like to hear you say that, Basil," she entreated.

"Well, of course there were mitigating circumstances. I could see that Fulkerson meant to keep the whip-hand himself, and that was reassuring. And, besides, if the Reciprocity Life should happen not to want my services any longer, it wouldn't be quite like giving up a certainty; though, as a matter of business, I let Fulkerson get that impression; I felt rather sneaking to do it. But if the worst comes to the worst, I can look about for something to do in Boston; and, anyhow, people don't starve on two thousand a year, though it's convenient to have five. The fact is, I'm too old to change so radically. If you don't like my saying that, then you are, Isabel, and so are the children. I've no right to take them from the home we've made, and to change the whole course of their lives, unless I can assure them of something, and I can't assure them of anything. Boston is big enough for us, and it's certainly prettier than New York. I always feel a little proud of hailing from Boston; my pleasure in the place mounts the farther I get away from it. But I do appreciate it, my dear; I've no more desire to leave it than you have. You may be sure that if you don't want to take the children out of the Friday afternoon class, I don't want to leave my library here, and all the ways I've got set in. We'll keep on. Very likely the company won't supplant me, and if it does, and Watkins gets the place, he'll give me a subordinate position of

some sort. Cheer up, Isabel! I have put Satan and his angel, Fulkerson, behind me, and it's all right. Let's go in to the children."

He came round the table to Isabel, where she sat in a growing distraction, and lifted her by the waist from her chair.

She sighed deeply. "Shall we tell the children about it?"

"No. What's the use, now?"

"There wouldn't be any," she assented. When they entered the family room, where the boy and girl sat on either side of the lamp working out the lessons for Monday which they had left over from the day before, she asked, "Children, how would you like to live in New York?"

Bella made haste to get in her word first. "And give up the Friday afternoon class?" she wailed.

Tom growled from his book, without lifting his eyes: "I shouldn't want to go to Columbia. They haven't got any dormitories, and you have to board round anywhere. Are you going to New York?" He now deigned to look up at his father.

"No, Tom. You and Bella have decided me against it. Your perspective shows the affair in its true proportions. I had an offer to go to New York, but I've refused it."

IV

March's irony fell harmless from the children's preoccupation with their own affairs, but he knew that his wife felt it, and this added to the bitterness which prompted it. He blamed her for letting her provincial narrowness prevent his accepting Fulkerson's offer quite as much as if he had otherwise entirely wished to accept it. His world, like most worlds, had been superficially a disappointment. He was no richer than at the beginning, though in marrying he had given up some tastes, some preferences, some aspirations, in the hope of indulging them later, with larger means and larger leisure. His wife had not urged him to do it; in fact, her pride, as she said, was in his fitness for the life he had renounced; but she had acquiesced, and they had been very happy together. That is to say, they made up their quarrels or ignored them.

They often accused each other of being selfish and indifferent, but she knew that he would always sacrifice himself for her and the children; and he, on his part, with many gibes and mockeries, wholly trusted in her. They had grown practically tolerant of each other's disagreeable traits; and the danger that really threatened them was that they should grow too well satisfied with themselves, if not with each other. They were not sentimental, they were rather matter-of-fact in their motives; but they had both a sort of humorous fondness for sentimentality. They liked to play with the romantic, from the safe vantage-ground of their real practicality, and to divine the poetry of the commonplace. Their peculiar point of view separated them from most other people, with whom their means of self-comparison were not so good since their marriage as before. Then they had travelled and seen much of the world, and they had formed tastes which they had not always been able to indulge, but of which they felt that the possession reflected distinction on them. It enabled them to look down upon those who were without such tastes; but they were not ill-natured, and so they did not look down so much with contempt as with amusement. In their unfashionable neighborhood they had the fame of being not exclusive precisely, but very much wrapped up in themselves and their children.

Mrs. March was reputed to be very cultivated, and Mr. March even more so, among the simpler folk around them. Their house had some good pictures, which her aunt had brought home from Europe in more affluent days, and it abounded in books on which he spent more than he ought. They had beautified it in every way, and had unconsciously taken credit to them selves for it. They felt, with a glow almost of virtue, how perfectly it fitted their lives and their children's, and they believed that somehow it expressed their characters—that it was like them. They went out very little; she remained shut up in its refinement, working the good of her own; and he went to his business, and hurried back to forget it, and dream his dream of intellectual achievement in the flattering atmosphere of her sympathy. He could not conceal from himself that his divided life was somewhat like Charles Lamb's, and there were times when, as he had expressed to Fulkerson, he believed that its division was favorable to the freshness of his interest in literature. It certainly kept it a high privilege, a sacred refuge. Now and then he wrote something, and got it printed after long delays, and when they met on

the St. Lawrence Fulkerson had some of March's verses in his pocket-book, which he had cut out of astray newspaper and carried about for years, because they pleased his fancy so much; they formed an immediate bond of union between the men when their authorship was traced and owned, and this gave a pretty color of romance to their acquaintance. But, for the most part, March was satisfied to read. He was proud of reading critically, and he kept in the current of literary interests and controversies. It all seemed to him, and to his wife at second-hand, very meritorious; he could not help contrasting his life and its inner elegance with that of other men who had no such resources. He thought that he was not arrogant about it, because he did full justice to the good qualities of those other people; he congratulated himself upon the democratic instincts which enabled him to do this; and neither he nor his wife supposed that they were selfish persons. On the contrary, they were very sympathetic; there was no good cause that they did not wish well; they had a generous scorn of all kinds of narrow-heartedness; if it had ever come into their way to sacrifice themselves for others, they thought they would have done so, but they never asked why it had not come in their way. They were very gentle and kind, even when most elusive; and they taught their children to loathe all manner of social cruelty. March was of so watchful a conscience in some respects that he denied himself the pensive pleasure of lapsing into the melancholy of unfulfilled aspirations; but he did not see that, if he had abandoned them, it had been for what he held dearer; generally he felt as if he had turned from them with a high, altruistic aim. The practical expression of his life was that it was enough to provide well for his family; to have cultivated tastes, and to gratify them to the extent of his means; to be rather distinguished, even in the simplification of his desires. He believed, and his wife believed, that if the time ever came when he really wished to make a sacrifice to the fulfilment of the aspirations so long postponed, she would be ready to join with heart and hand.

When he went to her room from his library, where she left him the whole evening with the children, he found her before the glass thoughtfully removing the first dismantling pin from her back hair.

"I can't help feeling," she grieved into the mirror, "that it's I who keep you from accepting that offer. I know it is! I could go West with you, or into a new country—anywhere; but New York terrifies me. I don't like New York, I never did; it disheartens and distracts me; I can't find myself in it; I shouldn't know how to shop. I know I'm foolish and narrow and provincial," she went on, "but I could never have any inner quiet in New York; I couldn't live in the spirit there. I suppose people do. It can't be that all these millions—'

"Oh, not so bad as that!" March interposed, laughing. "There aren't quite two."

"I thought there were four or five. Well, no matter. You see what I am, Basil. I'm terribly limited. I couldn't make my sympathies go round two million people; I should be wretched. I suppose I'm standing in the way of your highest interest, but I can't help it. We took each other for better or worse, and you must try to bear with me—" She broke off and began to cry.

"Stop it!" shouted March. "I tell you I never cared anything for Fulkerson's scheme or entertained it seriously, and I shouldn't if he'd proposed to carry it out in Boston." This was not quite true, but in the retrospect it seemed sufficiently so for the purposes of argument. "Don't say another word about it. The thing's over now, and I don't want to think of it any more. We couldn't change its nature if we talked all night. But I want you to understand that it isn't your limitations that are in the way. It's mine. I shouldn't have the courage to take such a place; I don't think I'm fit for it, and that's the long and short of it."

"Oh, you don't know how it hurts me to have you say that, Basil."

The next morning, as they sat together at breakfast, without the children, whom they let lie late on Sunday, Mrs. March said to her husband, silent over his fish-balls and baked beans: "We will go to New York. I've decided it."

"Well, it takes two to decide that," March retorted. "We are not going to
New York."

"Yes, we are. I've thought it out. Now, listen."

"Oh, I'm willing to listen," he consented, airily.

"You've always wanted to get out of the insurance business, and now with that fear of being turned out which you have you mustn't neglect this offer. I suppose it has its risks, but it's a risk keeping on as we are; and perhaps you will make a great success of it. I do want you to try, Basil. If I could once feel that you had fairly seen what you could do in literature, I should die happy."

"Not immediately after, I hope," he suggested, taking the second cup of coffee she had been pouring out for him. "And Boston?"

"We needn't make a complete break. We can keep this place for the present, anyway; we could let it for the winter, and come back in the summer next year. It would be change enough from New York."

"Fulkerson and I hadn't got as far as to talk of a vacation."

"No matter. The children and I could come. And if you didn't like New York, or the enterprise failed, you could get into something in Boston again; and we have enough to live on till you did. Yes, Basil, I'm going."

"I can see by the way your chin trembles that nothing could stop you. You may go to New York if you wish, Isabel, but I shall stay here."

"Be serious, Basil. I'm in earnest."

"Serious? If I were any more serious I should shed tears. Come, my dear, I know what you mean, and if I had my heart set on this thing—Fulkerson always calls it 'this thing' I would cheerfully accept any sacrifice you could make to it. But I'd rather not offer you up on a shrine I don't feel any particular faith in. I'm very comfortable where I am; that is, I know just where the pinch comes, and if it comes harder, why, I've got used to bearing that kind of pinch. I'm too old to change pinches."

"Now, that does decide me."

"It decides me, too."

"I will take all the responsibility, Basil," she pleaded.

"Oh yes; but you'll hand it back to me as soon as you've carried your point with it. There's nothing mean about you, Isabel, where responsibility is concerned. No; if I do this thing—Fulkerson again? I can't get away from 'this thing'; it's ominous—I must do it because I want to do it, and not because you wish that you wanted me to do it. I understand your position, Isabel, and that you're really acting from a generous impulse, but there's nothing so precarious at our time of life as a generous impulse. When we were younger we could stand it; we could give way to it and take the consequences. But now we can't bear it. We must act from cold reason even in the ardor of self-sacrifice."

"Oh, as if you did that!" his wife retorted.

"Is that any cause why you shouldn't?" She could not say that it was, and he went on triumphantly:

"No, I won't take you away from the only safe place on the planet and plunge you into the most perilous, and then have you say in your revulsion of feeling that you were all against it from the first, and you gave way because you saw I had my heart set on it." He supposed he was treating the matter humorously, but in this sort of banter between husband and wife there is always much more than the joking. March had seen some pretty feminine inconsistencies and trepidations which once charmed him in his wife hardening into traits of middle-age which were very like those of less interesting older women. The sight moved him with a kind of pathos, but he felt the result hindering and vexatious.

She now retorted that if he did not choose to take her at her word he need not, but that whatever he did she should have nothing to reproach herself with; and, at least, he could not say that she had trapped him into anything.

"What do you mean by trapping?" he demanded.

"I don't know what you call it," she answered; "but when you get me to commit myself to a thing by leaving out the most essential point, I call it trapping."

"I wonder you stop at trapping, if you think I got you to favor Fulkerson's scheme and then sprung New York on you. I don't suppose you do, though. But I guess we won't talk about it any more."

He went out for a long walk, and she went to her room. They lunched silently together in the presence of their children, who knew that they had been quarrelling, but were easily indifferent to the fact, as children get to be in such cases; nature defends their youth, and the unhappiness which they behold does not infect them. In the evening, after the boy and girl had gone to bed, the father and mother resumed their talk. He would have liked to take it up at the point from which it wandered into hostilities, for he felt it lamentable that a matter which so seriously concerned them should be confused in the fumes of senseless anger; and he was willing to make a tacit acknowledgment of his own error by recurring to the question, but she would not be content with this, and he had to concede explicitly to her weakness that she really meant it when she had asked him to accept Fulkerson's offer. He said he knew that; and he began soberly to talk over their prospects in the event of their going to New York.

"Oh, I see you are going!" she twitted.

"I'm going to stay," he answered, "and let them turn me out of my agency here," and in this bitterness their talk ended.

V.

His wife made no attempt to renew their talk before March went to his business in the morning, and they parted in dry offence. Their experience was that these things always came right of themselves at last, and they usually let them. He knew that she had really tried to consent to a thing that was repugnant to her, and in his heart he gave her more credit for the effort than he had allowed her openly. She knew that she had made it with the reservation he accused her of, and that he had a right to feel sore at what she could not help. But he left her to brood over his ingratitude, and she suffered him to go heavy and unfriended to meet the chances of the day. He said to himself that if she had assented cordially to the conditions of Fulkerson's offer, he would have had the courage to take all the other risks himself, and would have had the satisfaction of resigning his place. As it was, he must wait till he was removed; and he figured with bitter pleasure the pain she would feel when he came home some day and told her he had been supplanted, after it was too late to close with Fulkerson.

He found a letter on his desk from the secretary, "Dictated," in typewriting, which briefly informed him that Mr. Hubbell, the Inspector of Agencies, would be in Boston on Wednesday, and would call at his office during the forenoon. The letter was not different in tone from many that he had formerly received; but the visit announced was out of the usual order, and March believed he read his fate in it. During the eighteen years of his connection with it—first as a subordinate in the Boston office, and finally as its general agent there—he had seen a good many changes in the Reciprocity; presidents, vice-presidents, actuaries, and general agents had come and gone, but there had always seemed to be a recognition of his efficiency, or at least sufficiency, and there had never been any manner of trouble, no question of accounts, no apparent dissatisfaction with his management, until latterly, when there had begun to come from headquarters some suggestions of enterprise in certain ways, which gave him his first suspicions of his clerk Watkins's willingness to succeed him; they embodied some of Watkins's ideas. The things proposed seemed to March undignified, and even vulgar; he had never thought himself wanting in energy, though probably he had left the business to take its own course in the old lines more than he realized. Things had always gone so smoothly that he had sometimes fancied a peculiar regard for him in the management, which he had the weakness to attribute to an appreciation of what he occasionally did in literature, though in saner moments he felt how impossible this was. Beyond a reference from Mr. Hubbell to some piece of March's which had happened to meet his eye, no one in the management ever gave a sign of consciousness that their service was adorned by an obscure literary man; and Mr. Hubbell himself had the effect of regarding the excursions of March's pen as a sort of joke, and of winking at them; as he might have winked if once in a way he had found him a little the gayer for dining.

March wore through the day gloomily, but he had it on his conscience not to show any resentment toward Watkins, whom he suspected of wishing to supplant him, and even of working to do so. Through this self-denial he reached a better mind concerning his wife. He determined not to make her suffer needlessly, if the worst came to the worst; she would suffer enough, at the best, and till the worst came he would spare her, and not say anything about the letter he had got.

But when they met, her first glance divined that something had happened, and her first question frustrated his generous intention. He had to tell her about the letter. She would not allow that it had any significance, but she wished him to make an end of his anxieties and forestall whatever it might portend by resigning his place at once. She said she was quite ready to go to New York; she had been thinking it all over, and now she really wanted to go. He answered, soberly, that he had thought it over, too; and he did not wish to leave Boston, where he had lived so long, or try a new way of life if he could help it. He insisted that he was quite selfish in this; in their concessions their quarrel vanished; they agreed that whatever happened would be for the best; and the next day he went to his office fortified for any event.

His destiny, if tragical, presented itself with an aspect which he might have found comic if it had been another's destiny. Mr. Hubbell brought March's removal, softened in the guise of a promotion. The management at New York, it appeared, had acted upon a suggestion of Mr. Hubbell's, and now authorized him to offer March the editorship of the monthly paper published in the interest of the

company; his office would include the authorship of circulars and leaflets in behalf of life-insurance, and would give play to the literary talent which Mr. Hubbell had brought to the attention of the management; his salary would be nearly as much as at present, but the work would not take his whole time, and in a place like New York he could get a great deal of outside writing, which they would not object to his doing.

Mr. Hubbell seemed so sure of his acceptance of a place in every way congenial to a man of literary tastes that March was afterward sorry he dismissed the proposition with obvious irony, and had needlessly hurt Hubbell's feelings; but Mrs. March had no such regrets. She was only afraid that he had not made his rejection contemptuous enough. "And now," she said, "telegraph Mr. Fulkerson, and we will go at once."

"I suppose I could still get Watkins's former place," March suggested.

"Never!" she retorted. "Telegraph instantly!"

They were only afraid now that Fulkerson might have changed his mind, and they had a wretched day in which they heard nothing from him. It ended with his answering March's telegram in person. They were so glad of his coming, and so touched by his satisfaction with his bargain, that they laid all the facts of the case before him. He entered fully into March's sense of the joke latent in Mr. Hubbell's proposition, and he tried to make Mrs. March believe that he shared her resentment of the indignity offered her husband.

March made a show of willingness to release him in view of the changed situation, saying that he held him to nothing. Fulkerson laughed, and asked him how soon he thought he could come on to New York. He refused to reopen the question of March's fitness with him; he said they had gone into that thoroughly, but he recurred to it with Mrs. March, and confirmed her belief in his good sense on all points. She had been from the first moment defiantly confident of her husband's ability, but till she had talked the matter over with Fulkerson she was secretly not sure of it; or, at least, she was not sure that March was not right in distrusting himself. When she clearly understood, now, what Fulkerson intended, she had no longer a doubt. He explained how the enterprise differed from others, and how he needed for its direction a man who combined general business experience and business ideas with a love for the thing and a natural aptness for it. He did not want a young man, and yet he wanted youth—its freshness, its zest—such as March would feel in a thing he could put his whole heart into. He would not run in ruts, like an old fellow who had got hackneyed; he would not have any hobbies; he would not have any friends or any enemies. Besides, he would have to meet people, and March was a man that people took to; she knew that herself; he had a kind of charm. The editorial management was going to be kept in the background, as far as the public was concerned; the public was to suppose that the thing ran itself. Fulkerson did not care for a great literary reputation in his editor—he implied that March had a very pretty little one. At the same time the relations between the contributors and the management were to be much more, intimate than usual. Fulkerson felt his personal disqualification for working the thing socially, and he counted upon Mr. March for that; that was to say, he counted upon Mrs. March.

She protested he must not count upon her; but it by no means disabled Fulkerson's judgment in her view that March really seemed more than anything else a fancy of his. He had been a fancy of hers; and the sort of affectionate respect with which Fulkerson spoke of him laid forever some doubt she had of the fineness of Fulkerson's manners and reconciled her to the graphic slanginess of his speech.

The affair was now irretrievable, but she gave her approval to it as superbly as if it were submitted in its inception. Only, Mr. Fulkerson must not suppose she should ever like New York. She would not deceive him on that point. She never should like it. She did not conceal, either, that she did not like taking the children out of the Friday afternoon class; and she did not believe that Tom would ever be reconciled to going to Columbia. She took courage from Fulkerson's suggestion that it was possible for Tom to come to Harvard even from New York; and she heaped him with questions concerning the domiciliation of the family in that city. He tried to know something about the matter, and he succeeded in seeming interested in points necessarily indifferent to him.

VI.

In the uprooting and transplanting of their home that followed, Mrs. March often trembled before

distant problems and possible contingencies, but she was never troubled by present difficulties. She kept up with tireless energy; and in the moments of dejection and misgiving which harassed her husband she remained dauntless, and put heart into him when he had lost it altogether.

She arranged to leave the children in the house with the servants, while she went on with March to look up a dwelling of some sort in New York. It made him sick to think of it; and, when it came to the point, he would rather have given up the whole enterprise. She had to nerve him to it, to represent more than once that now they had no choice but to make this experiment. Every detail of parting was anguish to him. He got consolation out of the notion of letting the house furnished for the winter; that implied their return to it, but it cost him pangs of the keenest misery to advertise it; and, when a tenant was actually found, it was all he could do to give him the lease. He tried his wife's love and patience as a man must to whom the future is easy in the mass but terrible as it translates itself piecemeal into the present. He experienced remorse in the presence of inanimate things he was going to leave as if they had sensibly reproached him, and an anticipative homesickness that seemed to stop his heart. Again and again his wife had to make him reflect that his depression was not prophetic. She convinced him of what he already knew, and persuaded him against his knowledge that he could be keeping an eye out for something to take hold of in Boston if they could not stand New York. She ended by telling him that it was too bad to make her comfort him in a trial that was really so much more a trial to her. She had to support him in a last access of despair on their way to the Albany depot the morning they started to New York; but when the final details had been dealt with, the tickets bought, the trunks checked, and the handbags hung up in their car, and the future had massed itself again at a safe distance and was seven hours and two hundred miles away, his spirits began to rise and hers to sink. He would have been willing to celebrate the taste, the domestic refinement, of the ladies' waiting-room in the depot, where they had spent a quarter of an hour before the train started. He said he did not believe there was another station in the world where mahogany rocking-chairs were provided; that the dull-red warmth of the walls was as cozy as an evening lamp, and that he always hoped to see a fire kindled on that vast hearth and under that aesthetic mantel, but he supposed now he never should. He said it was all very different from that tunnel, the old Albany depot, where they had waited the morning they went to New York when they were starting on their wedding journey.

"The morning, Basil!" cried his wife. "We went at night; and we were going to take the boat, but it stormed so!" She gave him a glance of such reproach that he could not answer anything, and now she asked him whether he supposed their cook and second girl would be contented with one of those dark holes where they put girls to sleep in New York flats, and what she should do if Margaret, especially, left her. He ventured to suggest that Margaret would probably like the city; but, if she left, there were plenty of other girls to be had in New York. She replied that there were none she could trust, and that she knew Margaret would not stay. He asked her why she took her, then—why she did not give her up at once; and she answered that it would be inhuman to give her up just in the edge of the winter. She had promised to keep her; and Margaret was pleased with the notion of going to New York, where she had a cousin.

"Then perhaps she'll be pleased with the notion of staying," he said.

"Oh, much you know about it!" she retorted; and, in view of the hypothetical difficulty and his want of sympathy, she fell into a gloom, from which she roused herself at last by declaring that, if there was nothing else in the flat they took, there should be a light kitchen and a bright, sunny bedroom for Margaret. He expressed the belief that they could easily find such a flat as that, and she denounced his fatal optimism, which buoyed him up in the absence of an undertaking and let him drop into the depths of despair in its presence.

He owned this defect of temperament, but he said that it compensated the opposite in her character. "I suppose that's one of the chief uses of marriage; people supplement one another, and form a pretty fair sort of human being together. The only drawback to the theory is that unmarried people seem each as complete and whole as a married pair."

She refused to be amused; she turned her face to the window and put her handkerchief up under her veil.

It was not till the dining-car was attached to their train that they were both able to escape for an hour into the care-free mood of their earlier travels, when they were so easily taken out of themselves. The time had been when they could have found enough in the conjectural fortunes and characters of their fellow-passengers to occupy them. This phase of their youth had lasted long, and the world was still full of novelty and interest for them; but it required all the charm of the dining-car now to lay the anxieties that beset them. It was so potent for the moment, however, that they could take an objective view at their sitting cozily down there together, as if they had only themselves in the world. They wondered what the children were doing, the children who possessed them so intensely when present, and now, by

a fantastic operation of absence, seemed almost non-existents. They tried to be homesick for them, but failed; they recognized with comfortable self-abhorrence that this was terrible, but owned a fascination in being alone; at the same time, they could not imagine how people felt who never had any children. They contrasted the luxury of dining that way, with every advantage except a band of music, and the old way of rushing out to snatch a fearful joy at the lunch-counters of the Worcesier and Springfield and New Haven stations. They had not gone often to New York since their wedding journey, but they had gone often enough to have noted the change from the lunch-counter to the lunch-basket brought in the train, from which you could subsist with more ease and dignity, but seemed destined to a superabundance of pickles, whatever you ordered.

They thought well of themselves now that they could be both critical and tolerant of flavors not very sharply distinguished from one another in their dinner, and they lingered over their coffee and watched the autumn landscape through the windows.

"Not quite so loud a pattern of calico this year," he said, with patronizing forbearance toward the painted woodlands whirling by. "Do you see how the foreground next the train rushes from us and the background keeps ahead of us, while the middle distance seems stationary? I don't think I ever noticed that effect before. There ought to be something literary in it: retreating past and advancing future and deceitfully permanent present—something like that?"

His wife brushed some crumbs from her lap before rising. "Yes. You mustn't waste any of these ideas now."

"Oh no; it would be money out of Fulkerson's pocket."

VII.

They went to a quiet hotel far down-town, and took a small apartment which they thought they could easily afford for the day or two they need spend in looking up a furnished flat. They were used to staying at this hotel when they came on for a little outing in New York, after some rigid winter in Boston, at the time of the spring exhibitions. They were remembered there from year to year; the colored call-boys, who never seemed to get any older, smiled upon them, and the clerk called March by name even before he registered. He asked if Mrs. March were with him, and said then he supposed they would want their usual quarters; and in a moment they were domesticated in a far interior that seemed to have been waiting for them in a clean, quiet, patient disoccupation ever since they left it two years before. The little parlor, with its gilt paper and ebonized furniture, was the lightest of the rooms, but it was not very light at noonday without the gas, which the bell-boy now flared up for them. The uproar of the city came to it in a soothing murmur, and they took possession of its peace and comfort with open celebration. After all, they agreed, there was no place in the world so delightful as a hotel apartment like that; the boasted charms of home were nothing to it; and then the magic of its being always there, ready for any one, every one, just as if it were for some one alone: it was like the experience of an Arabian Nights hero come true for all the race.

"Oh, why can't we always stay here, just we two!" Mrs. March sighed to her husband, as he came out of his room rubbing his face red with the towel, while she studied a new arrangement of her bonnet and handbag on the mantel.

"And ignore the past? I'm willing. I've no doubt that the children could get on perfectly well without us, and could find some lot in the scheme of Providence that would really be just as well for them."

"Yes; or could contrive somehow never to have existed. I should insist upon that. If they are, don't you see that we couldn't wish them not to be?"

"Oh yes; I see your point; it's simply incontrovertible."

She laughed and said: "Well, at any rate, if we can't find a flat to suit us we can all crowd into these three rooms somehow, for the winter, and then browse about for meals. By the week we could get them much cheaper; and we could save on the eating, as they do in Europe. Or on something else."

"Something else, probably," said March. "But we won't take this apartment till the ideal furnished flat winks out altogether. We shall not have any trouble. We can easily find some one who is going South for the winter and will be glad to give up their flat 'to the right party' at a nominal rent. That's my

notion. That's what the Evanses did one winter when they came on here in February. All but the nominality of the rent."

"Yes, and we could pay a very good rent and still save something on letting our house. You can settle yourselves in a hundred different ways in New York, that is one merit of the place. But if everything else fails, we can come back to this. I want you to take the refusal of it, Basil. And we'll commence looking this very evening as soon as we've had dinner. I cut a lot of things out of the Herald as we came on. See here!"

She took a long strip of paper out of her hand-bag with minute advertisements pinned transversely upon it, and forming the effect of some glittering nondescript vertebrate.

"Looks something like the sea-serpent," said March, drying his hands on the towel, while he glanced up and down the list. "But we sha'n't have any trouble. I've no doubt there are half a dozen things there that will do. You haven't gone up-town? Because we must be near the 'Every Other Week' office."

"No; but I wish Mr. Fulkerson hadn't called it that! It always makes one think of 'jam yesterday and jam tomorrow, but never jam to-day,' in 'Through the Looking-Glass.' They're all in this region."

They were still at their table, beside a low window, where some sort of never-blooming shrub symmetrically balanced itself in a large pot, with a leaf to the right and a leaf to the left and a spear up the middle, when Fulkerson came stepping square-footedly over the thick dining-room carpet. He wagged in the air a gay hand of salutation at sight of them, and of repression when they offered to rise to meet him; then, with an apparent simultaneity of action he gave a hand to each, pulled up a chair from the next table, put his hat and stick on the floor beside it, and seated himself.

"Well, you've burned your ships behind you, sure enough," he said, beaming his satisfaction upon them from eyes and teeth.

"The ships are burned," said March, "though I'm not sure we alone did it. But here we are, looking for shelter, and a little anxious about the disposition of the natives."

"Oh, they're an awful peaceable lot," said Fulkerson. "I've been round among the caciques a little, and I think I've got two or three places that will just suit you, Mrs. March. How did you leave the children?"

"Oh, how kind of you! Very well, and very proud to be left in charge of the smoking wrecks."

Fulkerson naturally paid no attention to what she said, being but secondarily interested in the children at the best. "Here are some things right in this neighborhood, within gunshot of the office, and if you want you can go and look at them to-night; the agents gave me houses where the people would be in."

"We will go and look at them instantly," said Mrs. March. "Or, as soon as you've had coffee with us."

"Never do," Fulkerson replied. He gathered up his hat and stick. "Just rushed in to say Hello, and got to run right away again. I tell you, March, things are humming. I'm after those fellows with a sharp stick all the while to keep them from loafing on my house, and at the same time I'm just bubbling over with ideas about 'The Lone Hand'—wish we could call it that!—that I want to talk up with you."

"Well, come to breakfast," said Mrs. March, cordially.

"No; the ideas will keep till you've secured your lodge in this vast wilderness. Good-bye."

"You're as nice as you can be, Mr. Fulkerson," she said, "to keep us in mind when you have so much to occupy you."

"I wouldn't have anything to occupy me if I hadn't kept you in mind, Mrs. March," said Fulkerson, going off upon as good a speech as he could apparently hope to make.

"Why, Basil," said Mrs. March, when he was gone, "he's charming! But now we mustn't lose an instant. Let's see where the places are." She ran over the half-dozen agents' permits. "Capital—first-rate—the very thing—every one. Well, I consider ourselves settled! We can go back to the children to-morrow if we like, though I rather think I should like to stay over another day and get a little rested for the final pulling up that's got to come. But this simplifies everything enormously, and Mr. Fulkerson is as thoughtful and as sweet as he can be. I know you will get on well with him. He has such a good heart. And his attitude toward you, Basil, is beautiful always—so respectful; or not that so much as appreciative. Yes, appreciative—that's the word; I must always keep that in mind."

"It's quite important to do so," said March.

"Yes," she assented, seriously, "and we must not forget just what kind of flat we are going to look for. The 'sine qua nons' are an elevator and steam heat, not above the third floor, to begin with. Then we must each have a room, and you must have your study and I must have my parlor; and the two girls must each have a room. With the kitchen and dining room, how many does that make?"

"Ten."

"I thought eight. Well, no matter. You can work in the parlor, and run into your bedroom when anybody comes; and I can sit in mine, and the girls must put up with one, if it's large and sunny, though I've always given them two at home. And the kitchen must be sunny, so they can sit in it. And the rooms must all have outside light. And the rent must not be over eight hundred for the winter. We only get a thousand for our whole house, and we must save something out of that, so as to cover the expenses of moving. Now, do you think you can remember all that?"

"Not the half of it," said March. "But you can; or if you forget a third of it, I can come in with my partial half and more than make it up."

She had brought her bonnet and sacque down-stairs with her, and was transferring them from the hatrack to her person while she talked. The friendly door-boy let them into the street, and the clear October evening air brightened her so that as she tucked her hand under her husband's arm and began to pull him along she said, "If we find something right away—and we're just as likely to get the right flat soon as late; it's all a lottery—we'll go to the theatre somewhere."

She had a moment's panic about having left the agents' permits on the table, and after remembering that she had put them into her little shopping-bag, where she kept her money (each note crushed into a round wad), and had left it on the hat-rack, where it would certainly be stolen, she found it on her wrist. She did not think that very funny; but after a first impulse to inculpate her husband, she let him laugh, while they stopped under a lamp and she held the permits half a yard away to read the numbers on them.

"Where are your glasses, Isabel?"

"On the mantel in our room, of course."

"Then you ought to have brought a pair of tongs."

"I wouldn't get off second-hand jokes, Basil," she said; and "Why, here!" she cried, whirling round to the door before which they had halted, "this is the very number. Well, I do believe it's a sign!"

One of those colored men who soften the trade of janitor in many of the smaller apartment-houses in New York by the sweetness of their race let the Marches in, or, rather, welcomed them to the possession of the premises by the bow with which he acknowledged their permit. It was a large, old mansion cut up into five or six dwellings, but it had kept some traits of its former dignity, which pleased people of their sympathetic tastes. The dark-mahogany trim, of sufficiently ugly design, gave a rich gloom to the hallway, which was wide and paved with marble; the carpeted stairs curved aloft through a generous space.

"There is no elevator?" Mrs. March asked of the janitor.

He answered, "No, ma'am; only two flights up," so winningly that she said,

"Oh!" in courteous apology, and whispered to her husband, as she followed lightly up, "We'll take it, Basil, if it's like the rest."

"If it's like him, you mean."

"I don't wonder they wanted to own them," she hurriedly philosophized. "If I had such a creature, nothing but death should part us, and I should no more think of giving him his freedom!"

"No; we couldn't afford it," returned her husband.

The apartment which the janitor unlocked for them, and lit up from those chandeliers and brackets of gilt brass in the form of vine bunches, leaves, and tendrils in which the early gas-fitter realized most of his conceptions of beauty, had rather more of the ugliness than the dignity of the hall. But the rooms were large, and they grouped themselves in a reminiscence of the time when they were part of a dwelling that had its charm, its pathos, its impressiveness. Where they were cut up into smaller spaces, it had been done with the frankness with which a proud old family of fallen fortunes practises its

economies. The rough pine-floors showed a black border of tack-heads where carpets had been lifted and put down for generations; the white paint was yellow with age; the apartment had light at the front and at the back, and two or three rooms had glimpses of the day through small windows let into their corners; another one seemed lifting an appealing eye to heaven through a glass circle in its ceiling; the rest must darkle in perpetual twilight. Yet something pleased in it all, and Mrs. March had gone far to adapt the different rooms to the members of her family, when she suddenly thought (and for her to think was to say), "Why, but there's no steam heat!"

"No, ma'am," the janitor admitted; "but dere's grates in most o' de rooms, and dere's furnace heat in de halls."

"That's true," she admitted, and, having placed her family in the apartments, it was hard to get them out again. "Could we manage?" she referred to her husband.

"Why, I shouldn't care for the steam heat if—What is the rent?" he broke off to ask the janitor.

"Nine hundred, sir."

March concluded to his wife, "If it were furnished."

"Why, of course! What could I have been thinking of? We're looking for a furnished flat," she explained to the janitor, "and this was so pleasant and homelike that I never thought whether it was furnished or not."

She smiled upon the janitor, and he entered into the joke and chuckled so amiably at her flattering oversight on the way down-stairs that she said, as she pinched her husband's arm, "Now, if you don't give him a quarter I'll never speak to you again, Basil!"

"I would have given half a dollar willingly to get you beyond his glamour," said March, when they were safely on the pavement outside. "If it hadn't been for my strength of character, you'd have taken an unfurnished flat without heat and with no elevator, at nine hundred a year, when you had just sworn me to steam heat, an elevator, furniture, and eight hundred."

"Yes! How could I have lost my head so completely?" she said, with a lenient amusement in her aberration which she was not always able to feel in her husband's.

"The next time a colored janitor opens the door to us, I'll tell him the apartment doesn't suit at the threshold. It's the only way to manage you, Isabel."

"It's true. I am in love with the whole race. I never saw one of them that didn't have perfectly angelic manners. I think we shall all be black in heaven—that is, black-souled."

"That isn't the usual theory," said March.

"Well, perhaps not," she assented. "Where are we going now? Oh yes, to the Xenophon!"

She pulled him gayly along again, and after they had walked a block down and half a block over they stood before the apartment-house of that name, which was cut on the gas-lamps on either side of the heavily spiked, aesthetic-hinged black door. The titter of an electric-bell brought a large, fat Buttons, with a stage effect of being dressed to look small, who said he would call the janitor, and they waited in the dimly splendid, copper-colored interior, admiring the whorls and waves into which the wallpaint was combed, till the janitor came in his gold-banded cap, like a Continental porker. When they said they would like to see Mrs. Grosvenor Green's apartment, he owned his inability to cope with the affair, and said he must send for the superintendent; he was either in the Herodotus or the Thucydides, and would be there in a minute. The Buttons brought him—a Yankee of browbeating presence in plain clothes—almost before they had time to exchange a frightened whisper in recognition of the fact that there could be no doubt of the steam heat and elevator in this case. Half stifled in the one, they mounted in the other eight stories, while they tried to keep their self-respect under the gaze of the superintendent, which they felt was classing and assessing them with unfriendly accuracy. They could not, and they faltered abashed at the threshold of Mrs. Grosvenor Green's apartment, while the superintendent lit the gas in the gangway that he called a private hall, and in the drawing-room and the succession of chambers stretching rearward to the kitchen. Everything had been done by the architect to save space, and everything, to waste it by Mrs. Grosvenor Green. She had conformed to a law for the necessity of turning round in each room, and had folding-beds in the chambers, but there her subordination had ended, and wherever you might have turned round she had put a gimcrack so that you would knock it over if you did turn. The place was rather pretty and even imposing at first glance, and it took several joint ballots for March and his wife to make sure that with the kitchen there were only six rooms. At every door hung a portiere from large rings on a brass rod; every shelf and dressing-

case and mantel was littered with gimcracks, and the corners of the tiny rooms were curtained off, and behind these portieres swarmed more gimcracks. The front of the upright piano had what March called a short-skirted portiere on it, and the top was covered with vases, with dragon candlesticks and with Jap fans, which also expanded themselves bat wise on the walls between the etchings and the water colors. The floors were covered with filling, and then rugs and then skins; the easy-chairs all had tidies, Armenian and Turkish and Persian; the lounges and sofas had embroidered cushions hidden under tidies.

The radiator was concealed by a Jap screen, and over the top of this some Arab scarfs were flung. There was a superabundance of clocks. China pugs guarded the hearth; a brass sunflower smiled from the top of either andiron, and a brass peacock spread its tail before them inside a high filigree fender; on one side was a coalhod in 'repousse' brass, and on the other a wrought iron wood-basket. Some red Japanese bird-kites were stuck about in the necks of spelter vases, a crimson Jap umbrella hung opened beneath the chandelier, and each globe had a shade of yellow silk.

March, when he had recovered his self-command a little in the presence of the agglomeration, comforted himself by calling the bric-a-brac Jamescracks, as if this was their full name.

The disrespect he was able to show the whole apartment by means of this joke strengthened him to say boldly to the superintendent that it was altogether too small; then he asked carelessly what the rent was.

"Two hundred and fifty."

The Marches gave a start, and looked at each other.

"Don't you think we could make it do?" she asked him, and he could see that she had mentally saved five hundred dollars as the difference between the rent of their house and that of this flat. "It has some very pretty features, and we could manage to squeeze in, couldn't we?"

"You won't find another furnished flat like it for no two-fifty a month in the whole city," the superintendent put in.

They exchanged glances again, and March said, carelessly, "It's too small."

"There's a vacant flat in the Herodotus for eighteen hundred a year, and one in the Thucydides for fifteen," the superintendent suggested, clicking his keys together as they sank down in the elevator; "seven rooms and bath."

"Thank you," said March; "we're looking for a furnished flat."

They felt that the superintendent parted from them with repressed sarcasm.

"Oh, Basil, do you think we really made him think it was the smallness and not the dearness?"

"No, but we saved our self-respect in the attempt; and that's a great deal."

"Of course, I wouldn't have taken it, anyway, with only six rooms, and so high up. But what prices! Now, we must be very circumspect about the next place."

It was a janitress, large, fat, with her arms wound up in her apron, who received them there. Mrs. March gave her a succinct but perfect statement of their needs. She failed to grasp the nature of them, or feigned to do so. She shook her head, and said that her son would show them the flat. There was a radiator visible in the narrow hall, and Isabel tacitly compromised on steam heat without an elevator, as the flat was only one flight up. When the son appeared from below with a small kerosene hand-lamp, it appeared that the flat was unfurnished, but there was no stopping him till he had shown it in all its impossibility. When they got safely away from it and into the street March said: "Well, have you had enough for to-night, Isabel? Shall we go to the theatre now?"

"Not on any account. I want to see the whole list of flats that Mr. Fulkerson thought would be the very thing for us." She laughed, but with a certain bitterness.

"You'll be calling him my Mr. Fulkerson next, Isabel."

"Oh no!"

The fourth address was a furnished flat without a kitchen, in a house with a general restaurant. The fifth was a furnished house. At the sixth a pathetic widow and her pretty daughter wanted to take a family to board, and would give them a private table at a rate which the Marches would have thought low in Boston.

Mrs. March came away tingling with compassion for their evident anxiety, and this pity naturally soured into a sense of injury. "Well, I must say I have completely lost confidence in Mr. Fulkerson's judgment. Anything more utterly different from what I told him we wanted I couldn't imagine. If he doesn't manage any better about his business than he has done about this, it will be a perfect failure."

"Well, well, let's hope he'll be more circumspect about that," her husband returned, with ironical propitiation. "But I don't think it's Fulkerson's fault altogether. Perhaps it's the house-agents'. They're a very illusory generation. There seems to be something in the human habitation that corrupts the natures of those who deal in it, to buy or sell it, to hire or let it. You go to an agent and tell him what kind of a house you want. He has no such house, and he sends you to look at something altogether different, upon the well-ascertained principle that if you can't get what you want you will take what you can get. You don't suppose the 'party' that took our house in Boston was looking for any such house? He was looking for a totally different kind of house in another part of the town."

"I don't believe that!" his wife broke in.

"Well, no matter. But see what a scandalous rent you asked for it."

"We didn't get much more than half; and, besides, the agent told me to ask fourteen hundred."

"Oh, I'm not blaming you, Isabel. I'm only analyzing the house-agent and exonerating Fulkerson."

"Well, I don't believe he told them just what we wanted; and, at any rate, I'm done with agents. Tomorrow I'm going entirely by advertisements."

VIII.

Mrs. March took the vertebrate with her to the Vienna Coffee-House, where they went to breakfast next morning. She made March buy her the Herald and the World, and she added to its spiny convolutions from them. She read the new advertisements aloud with ardor and with faith to believe that the apartments described in them were every one truthfully represented, and that any one of them was richly responsive to their needs. "Elegant, light, large, single and outside flats" were offered with "all improvements—bath, ice-box, etc."—for twenty-five to thirty dollars a month. The cheapness was amazing. The Wagram, the Esmeralda, the Jacinth, advertised them for forty dollars and sixty dollars, "with steam heat and elevator," rent free till November. Others, attractive from their air of conscientious scruple, announced "first-class flats; good order; reasonable rents." The Helena asked the reader if she had seen the "cabinet finish, hard-wood floors, and frescoed ceilings" of its fifty-dollar flats; the Asteroid affirmed that such apartments, with "six light rooms and bath, porcelain wash-tubs, electric bells, and hall-boy," as it offered for seventy-five dollars were unapproached by competition. There was a sameness in the jargon which tended to confusion. Mrs. March got several flats on her list which promised neither steam heat nor elevators; she forgot herself so far as to include two or three as remote from the down-town region of her choice as Harlem. But after she had rejected these the nondescript vertebrate was still voluminous enough to sustain her buoyant hopes.

The waiter, who remembered them from year to year, had put them at a window giving a pretty good section of Broadway, and before they set out on their search they had a moment of reminiscence. They recalled the Broadway of five, of ten, of twenty years ago, swelling and roaring with a tide of gayly painted omnibuses and of picturesque traffic that the horsecars have now banished from it. The grind of their wheels and the clash of their harsh bells imperfectly fill the silence that the omnibuses have left, and the eye misses the tumultuous perspective of former times.

They went out and stood for a moment before Grace Church, and looked down the stately thoroughfare, and found it no longer impressive, no longer characteristic. It is still Broadway in name, but now it is like any other street. You do not now take your life in your hand when you attempt to cross it; the Broadway policeman who supported the elbow of timorous beauty in the hollow of his cotton-gloved palm and guided its little fearful boots over the crossing, while he arrested the billowy omnibuses on either side with an imperious glance, is gone, and all that certain processional, barbaric gayety of the place is gone.

"Palmyra, Baalbec, Timour of the Desert," said March, voicing their common feeling of the change.

They turned and went into the beautiful church, and found themselves in time for the matin service. Rapt far from New York, if not from earth, in the dim richness of the painted light, the hallowed music took them with solemn ecstasy; the aerial, aspiring Gothic forms seemed to lift them heavenward. They came out, reluctant, into the dazzle and bustle of the street, with a feeling that they were too good for it, which they confessed to each other with whimsical consciousness.

"But no matter how consecrated we feel now," he said, "we mustn't forget that we went into the church for precisely the same reason that we went to the Vienna Cafe for breakfast—to gratify an aesthetic sense, to renew the faded pleasure of travel for a moment, to get back into the Europe of our youth. It was a purely Pagan impulse, Isabel, and we'd better own it."

"I don't know," she returned. "I think we reduce ourselves to the bare bones too much. I wish we didn't always recognize the facts as we do. Sometimes I should like to blink them. I should like to think I was devouter than I am, and younger and prettier."

"Better not; you couldn't keep it up. Honesty is the best policy even in such things."

"No; I don't like it, Basil. I should rather wait till the last day for some of my motives to come to the top. I know they're always mixed, but do let me give them the benefit of a doubt sometimes."

"Well, well, have it your own way, my dear. But I prefer not to lay up so many disagreeable surprises for myself at that time."

She would not consent. "I know I am a good deal younger than I was. I feel quite in the mood of that morning when we walked down Broadway on our wedding journey. Don't you?"

"Oh yes. But I know I'm not younger; I'm only prettier."

She laughed for pleasure in his joke, and also for unconscious joy in the gay New York weather, in which there was no 'arriere pensee' of the east wind. They had crossed Broadway, and were walking over to Washington Square, in the region of which they now hoped to place themselves. The 'primo tenore' statue of Garibaldi had already taken possession of the place in the name of Latin progress, and they met Italian faces, French faces, Spanish faces, as they strolled over the asphalt walks, under the thinning shadows of the autumn-stricken sycamores. They met the familiar picturesque raggedness of Southern Europe with the old kindly illusion that somehow it existed for their appreciation, and that it found adequate compensation for poverty in this. March thought he sufficiently expressed his tacit sympathy in sitting down on one of the iron benches with his wife and letting a little Neapolitan put a superfluous shine on his boots, while their desultory comment wandered with equal esteem to the old-fashioned American respectability which keeps the north side of the square in vast mansions of red brick, and the international shabbiness which has invaded the southern border, and broken it up into lodging-houses, shops, beer-gardens, and studios.

They noticed the sign of an apartment to let on the north side, and as soon as the little bootblack could be bought off they went over to look at it. The janitor met them at the door and examined them. Then he said, as if still in doubt, "It has ten rooms, and the rent is twenty-eight hundred dollars."

"It wouldn't do, then," March replied, and left him to divide the responsibility between the paucity of the rooms and the enormity of the rent as he best might. But their self-love had received a wound, and they questioned each other what it was in their appearance made him doubt their ability to pay so much.

"Of course, we don't look like New-Yorkers," sighed Mrs. March, "and we've walked through the Square. That might be as if we had walked along the Park Street mall in the Common before we came out on Beacon. Do you suppose he could have seen you getting your boots blacked in that way?"

"It's useless to ask," said March. "But I never can recover from this blow."

"Oh, pshaw! You know you hate such things as badly as I do. It was very impertinent of him."

"Let us go back and 'ecraser l'infame' by paying him a year's rent in advance and taking immediate possession. Nothing else can soothe my wounded feelings. You were not having your boots blacked: why shouldn't he have supposed you were a New-Yorker, and I a country cousin?"

"They always know. Don't you remember Mrs. Williams's going to a Fifth Avenue milliner in a Worth dress, and the woman's asking her instantly what hotel she should send her hat to?"

"Yes; these things drive one to despair. I don't wonder the bodies of so many genteel strangers are found in the waters around New York. Shall we try the south side, my dear? or had we better go back to our rooms and rest awhile?"

Mrs. March had out the vertebrate, and was consulting one of its glittering ribs and glancing up from it at a house before which they stood. "Yes, it's the number; but do they call this being ready October first?" The little area in front of the basement was heaped with a mixture of mortar, bricks, laths, and shavings from the interior; the brownstone steps to the front door were similarly bestrewn; the doorway showed the half-open, rough pine carpenter's sketch of an unfinished house; the sashless windows of every story showed the activity of workmen within; the clatter of hammers and the hiss of saws came out to them from every opening.

"They may call it October first," said March, "because it's too late to contradict them. But they'd better not call it December first in my presence; I'll let them say January first, at a pinch."

"We will go in and look at it, anyway," said his wife; and he admired how, when she was once within, she began provisionally to settle the family in each of the several floors with the female instinct for domiciliation which never failed her. She had the help of the landlord, who was present to urge forward the workmen apparently; he lent a hopeful fancy to the solution of all her questions. To get her from under his influence March had to represent that the place was damp from undried plastering, and that if she stayed she would probably be down with that New York pneumonia which visiting Bostonians are always dying of. Once safely on the pavement outside, she realized that the apartment was not only unfinished, but unfurnished, and had neither steam heat nor elevator. "But I thought we had better look at everything," she explained.

"Yes, but not take everything. If I hadn't pulled you away from there by main force you'd have not only died of New York pneumonia on the spot, but you'd have had us all settled there before we knew what we were about."

"Well, that's what I can't help, Basil. It's the only way I can realize whether it will do for us. I have to dramatize the whole thing."

She got a deal of pleasure as well as excitement out of this, and he had to own that the process of setting up housekeeping in so many different places was not only entertaining, but tended, through association with their first beginnings in housekeeping, to restore the image of their early married days and to make them young again.

It went on all day, and continued far into the night, until it was too late to go to the theatre, too late to do anything but tumble into bed and simultaneously fall asleep. They groaned over their reiterated disappointments, but they could not deny that the interest was unfailing, and that they got a great deal of fun out of it all. Nothing could abate Mrs. March's faith in her advertisements. One of them sent her to a flat of ten rooms which promised to be the solution of all their difficulties; it proved to be over a livery-stable, a liquor store, and a milliner's shop, none of the first fashion. Another led them far into old Greenwich Village to an apartment-house, which she refused to enter behind a small girl with a loaf of bread under one arm and a quart can of milk under the other.

In their search they were obliged, as March complained, to the acquisition of useless information in a degree unequalled in their experience. They came to excel in the sad knowledge of the line at which respectability distinguishes itself from shabbiness. Flattering advertisements took them to numbers of huge apartment-houses chiefly distinguishable from tenement-houses by the absence of fire-escapes on their facades, till Mrs. March refused to stop at any door where there were more than six bell-ratchets and speaking-tubes on either hand. Before the middle of the afternoon she decided against ratchets altogether, and confined herself to knobs, neatly set in the door-trim. Her husband was still sunk in the superstition that you can live anywhere you like in New York, and he would have paused at some places where her quicker eye caught the fatal sign of "Modes" in the ground-floor windows. She found that there was an east and west line beyond which they could not go if they wished to keep their self-respect, and that within the region to which they had restricted themselves there was a choice of streets. At first all the New York streets looked to them ill-paved, dirty, and repulsive; the general infamy imparted itself in their casual impression to streets in no wise guilty. But they began to notice that some streets were quiet and clean, and, though never so quiet and clean as Boston streets, that they wore an air of encouraging reform, and suggested a future of greater and greater domesticity. Whole blocks of these downtown cross-streets seemed to have been redeemed from decay, and even in the midst of squalor a dwelling here and there had been seized, painted a dull red as to its brick-work, and a glossy black as to its wood-work, and with a bright brass bell-pull and door-knob and a large brass plate for its key-hole escutcheon, had been endowed with an effect of purity and pride which removed its shabby neighborhood far from it. Some of these houses were quite small, and imaginably within their means; but, as March said, some body seemed always to be living there himself, and the fact that none of them was to rent kept Mrs. March true to her ideal of a fiat. Nothing prevented its realization so much as its difference from the New York ideal of a flat, which was inflexibly seven rooms and a bath. One or two rooms might be at the front, the rest crooked and cornered backward through

increasing and then decreasing darkness till they reached a light bedroom or kitchen at the rear. It might be the one or the other, but it was always the seventh room with the bath; or if, as sometimes happened, it was the eighth, it was so after having counted the bath as one; in this case the janitor said you always counted the bath as one. If the flats were advertised as having "all light rooms," he explained that any room with a window giving into the open air of a court or shaft was counted a light room.

The Marches tried to make out why it was that these flats were so much more repulsive than the apartments which everyone lived in abroad; but they could only do so upon the supposition that in their European days they were too young, too happy, too full of the future, to notice whether rooms were inside or outside, light or dark, big or little, high or low. "Now we're imprisoned in the present," he said, "and we have to make the worst of it."

In their despair he had an inspiration, which she declared worthy of him: it was to take two small flats, of four or five rooms and a bath, and live in both. They tried this in a great many places, but they never could get two flats of the kind on the same floor where there was steam heat and an elevator. At one place they almost did it. They had resigned themselves to the humility of the neighborhood, to the prevalence of modistes and livery-stablemen (they seem to consort much in New York), to the garbage in the gutters and the litter of paper in the streets, to the faltering slats in the surrounding window-shutters and the crumbled brownstone steps and sills, when it turned out that one of the apartments had been taken between two visits they made. Then the only combination left open to them was of a ground-floor flat to the right and a third-floor flat to the left.

Still they kept this inspiration in reserve for use at the first opportunity. In the mean time there were several flats which they thought they could almost make do: notably one where they could get an extra servant's room in the basement four flights down, and another where they could get it in the roof five flights up. At the first the janitor was respectful and enthusiastic; at the second he had an effect of ironical pessimism. When they trembled on the verge of taking his apartment, he pointed out a spot in the kalsomining of the parlor ceiling, and gratuitously said, Now such a thing as that he should not agree to put in shape unless they took the apartment for a term of years. The apartment was unfurnished, and they recurred to the fact that they wanted a furnished apartment, and made their escape. This saved them in several other extremities; but short of extremity they could not keep their different requirements in mind, and were always about to decide without regard to some one of them.

They went to several places twice without intending: once to that old-fashioned house with the pleasant colored janitor, and wandered all over the apartment again with a haunting sense of familiarity, and then recognized the janitor and laughed; and to that house with the pathetic widow and the pretty daughter who wished to take them to board. They stayed to excuse their blunder, and easily came by the fact that the mother had taken the house that the girl might have a home while she was in New York studying art, and they hoped to pay their way by taking boarders. Her daughter was at her class now, the mother concluded; and they encouraged her to believe that it could only be a few days till the rest of her scheme was realized.

"I dare say we could be perfectly comfortable there," March suggested when they had got away. "Now if we were truly humane we would modify our desires to meet their needs and end this sickening search, wouldn't we?"

"Yes, but we're not truly humane," his wife answered, "or at least not in that sense. You know you hate boarding; and if we went there I should have them on my sympathies the whole time."

"I see. And then you would take it out of me."

"Then I should take it out of you. And if you are going to be so weak, Basil, and let every little thing work upon you in that way, you'd better not come to New York. You'll see enough misery here."

"Well, don't take that superior tone with me, as if I were a child that had its mind set on an undesirable toy, Isabel."

"Ah, don't you suppose it's because you are such a child in some respects that I like you, dear?" she demanded, without relenting.

"But I don't find so much misery in New York. I don't suppose there's any more suffering here to the population than there is in the country. And they're so gay about it all. I think the outward aspect of the place and the hilarity of the sky and air must get into the people's blood. The weather is simply unapproachable; and I don't care if it is the ugliest place in the world, as you say. I suppose it is. It shrieks and yells with ugliness here and there but it never loses its spirits. That widow is from the country. When she's been a year in New York she'll be as gay—as gay as an L road." He celebrated a

satisfaction they both had in the L roads. "They kill the streets and avenues, but at least they partially hide them, and that is some comfort; and they do triumph over their prostrate forms with a savage exultation that is intoxicating. Those bends in the L that you get in the corner of Washington Square, or just below the Cooper Institute—they're the gayest things in the world. Perfectly atrocious, of course, but incomparably picturesque! And the whole city is so," said March, "or else the L would never have got built here. New York may be splendidly gay or squalidly gay; but, prince or pauper, it's gay always."

"Yes, gay is the word," she admitted, with a sigh. "But frantic. I can't get used to it. They forget death, Basil; they forget death in New York."

"Well, I don't know that I've ever found much advantage in remembering it."

"Don't say such a thing, dearest."

He could see that she had got to the end of her nervous strength for the present, and he proposed that they should take the Elevated road as far as it would carry them into the country, and shake off their nightmare of flat-hunting for an hour or two; but her conscience would not let her. She convicted him of levity equal to that of the New-Yorkers in proposing such a thing; and they dragged through the day. She was too tired to care for dinner, and in the night she had a dream from which she woke herself with a cry that roused him, too. It was something about the children at first, whom they had talked of wistfully before falling asleep, and then it was of a hideous thing with two square eyes and a series of sections growing darker and then lighter, till the tail of the monstrous articulate was quite luminous again. She shuddered at the vague description she was able to give; but he asked, "Did it offer to bite you?"

"No. That was the most frightful thing about it; it had no mouth."

March laughed. "Why, my dear, it was nothing but a harmless New York flat—seven rooms and a bath."

"I really believe it was," she consented, recognizing an architectural resemblance, and she fell asleep again, and woke renewed for the work before them.

IX.

Their house-hunting no longer had novelty, but it still had interest; and they varied their day by taking a coupe, by renouncing advertisements, and by reverting to agents. Some of these induced them to consider the idea of furnished houses; and Mrs. March learned tolerance for Fulkerson by accepting permits to visit flats and houses which had none of the qualifications she desired in either, and were as far beyond her means as they were out of the region to which she had geographically restricted herself. They looked at three-thousand and four-thousand dollar apartments, and rejected them for one reason or another which had nothing to do with the rent; the higher the rent was, the more critical they were of the slippery inlaid floors and the arrangement of the richly decorated rooms. They never knew whether they had deceived the janitor or not; as they came in a coupe, they hoped they had.

They drove accidentally through one street that seemed gayer in the perspective than an L road. The fire-escapes, with their light iron balconies and ladders of iron, decorated the lofty house fronts; the roadway and sidewalks and door-steps swarmed with children; women's heads seemed to show at every window. In the basements, over which flights of high stone steps led to the tenements, were green-grocers' shops abounding in cabbages, and provision stores running chiefly to bacon and sausages, and cobblers' and tinners' shops, and the like, in proportion to the small needs of a poor neighborhood. Ash barrels lined the sidewalks, and garbage heaps filled the gutters; teams of all trades stood idly about; a peddler of cheap fruit urged his cart through the street, and mixed his cry with the joyous screams and shouts of the children and the scolding and gossiping voices of the women; the burly blue bulk of a policeman defined itself at the corner; a drunkard zigzagged down the sidewalk toward him. It was not the abode of the extremest poverty, but of a poverty as hopeless as any in the world, transmitting itself from generation to generation, and establishing conditions of permanency to which human life adjusts itself as it does to those of some incurable disease, like leprosy.

The time had been when the Marches would have taken a purely aesthetic view of the facts as they glimpsed them in this street of tenement-houses; when they would have contented themselves with saying that it was as picturesque as a street in Naples or Florence, and with wondering why nobody

came to paint it; they would have thought they were sufficiently serious about it in blaming the artists for their failure to appreciate it, and going abroad for the picturesque when they had it here under their noses. It was to the nose that the street made one of its strongest appeals, and Mrs. March pulled up her window of the coupe. "Why does he take us through such a disgusting street?" she demanded, with an exasperation of which her husband divined the origin.

"This driver may be a philanthropist in disguise," he answered, with dreamy irony, "and may want us to think about the people who are not merely carried through this street in a coupe, but have to spend their whole lives in it, winter and summer, with no hopes of driving out of it, except in a hearse. I must say they don't seem to mind it. I haven't seen a jollier crowd anywhere in New York. They seem to have forgotten death a little more completely than any of their fellow-citizens, Isabel. And I wonder what they think of us, making this gorgeous progress through their midst. I suppose they think we're rich, and hate us—if they hate rich people; they don't look as if they hated anybody. Should we be as patient as they are with their discomfort? I don't believe there's steam heat or an elevator in the whole block. Seven rooms and a bath would be more than the largest and genteelest family would know what to do with. They wouldn't know what to do with the bath, anyway."

His monologue seemed to interest his wife apart from the satirical point it had for themselves. "You ought to get Mr. Fulkerson to let you work some of these New York sights up for Every Other Week, Basil; you could do them very nicely."

"Yes; I've thought of that. But don't let's leave the personal ground. Doesn't it make you feel rather small and otherwise unworthy when you see the kind of street these fellow-beings of yours live in, and then think how particular you are about locality and the number of bellpulls? I don't see even ratchets and speaking-tubes at these doors." He craned his neck out of the window for a better look, and the children of discomfort cheered him, out of sheer good feeling and high spirits. "I didn't know I was so popular. Perhaps it's a recognition of my humane sentiments."

"Oh, it's very easy to have humane sentiments, and to satirize ourselves for wanting eight rooms and a bath in a good neighborhood, when we see how these wretched creatures live," said his wife. "But if we shared all we have with them, and then settled down among them, what good would it do?"

"Not the least in the world. It might help us for the moment, but it wouldn't keep the wolf from their doors for a week; and then they would go on just as before, only they wouldn't be on such good terms with the wolf. The only way for them is to keep up an unbroken intimacy with the wolf; then they can manage him somehow. I don't know how, and I'm afraid I don't want to. Wouldn't you like to have this fellow drive us round among the halls of pride somewhere for a little while? Fifth Avenue or Madison, up-town?"

"No; we've no time to waste. I've got a place near Third Avenue, on a nice cross street, and I want him to take us there." It proved that she had several addresses near together, and it seemed best to dismiss their coupe and do the rest of their afternoon's work on foot. It came to nothing; she was not humbled in the least by what she had seen in the tenement-house street; she yielded no point in her ideal of a flat, and the flats persistently refused to lend themselves to it. She lost all patience with them.

"Oh, I don't say the flats are in the right of it," said her husband, when she denounced their stupid inadequacy to the purposes of a Christian home. "But I'm not so sure that we are, either. I've been thinking about that home business ever since my sensibilities were dragged—in a coupe—through that tenement-house street. Of course, no child born and brought up in such a place as that could have any conception of home. But that's because those poor people can't give character to their habitations. They have to take what they can get. But people like us—that is, of our means—do give character to the average flat. It's made to meet their tastes, or their supposed tastes; and so it's made for social show, not for family life at all. Think of a baby in a flat! It's a contradiction in terms; the flat is the negation of motherhood. The flat means society life; that is, the pretence of social life. It's made to give artificial people a society basis on a little money—too much money, of course, for what they get. So the cost of the building is put into marble halls and idiotic decoration of all kinds. I don't object to the conveniences, but none of these flats has a living-room. They have drawing-rooms to foster social pretence, and they have dining-rooms and bedrooms; but they have no room where the family can all come together and feel the sweetness of being a family. The bedrooms are black-holes mostly, with a sinful waste of space in each. If it were not for the marble halls, and the decorations, and the foolishly expensive finish, the houses could be built round a court, and the flats could be shaped something like a Pompeiian house, with small sleeping-closets—only lit from the outside—and the rest of the floor thrown into two or three large cheerful halls, where all the family life could go on, and society could be transacted unpretentiously. Why, those tenements are better and humaner than those flats! There the whole family lives in the kitchen, and has its consciousness of being; but the flat abolishes the family consciousness. It's confinement without coziness; it's cluttered without being snug. You couldn't keep a

self-respecting cat in a flat; you couldn't go down cellar to get cider. No! the Anglo-Saxon home, as we know it in the Anglo-Saxon house, is simply impossible in the Franco-American flat, not because it's humble, but because it's false."

"Well, then," said Mrs. March, "let's look at houses."

He had been denouncing the flat in the abstract, and he had not expected this concrete result. But he said, "We will look at houses, then."

X.

Nothing mystifies a man more than a woman's aberrations from some point at which he, supposes her fixed as a star. In these unfurnished houses, without steam or elevator, March followed his wife about with patient wonder. She rather liked the worst of them best: but she made him go down into the cellars and look at the furnaces; she exacted from him a rigid inquest of the plumbing. She followed him into one of the cellars by the fitful glare of successively lighted matches, and they enjoyed a moment in which the anomaly of their presence there on that errand, so remote from all the facts of their long-established life in Boston, realized itself for them.

"Think how easily we might have been murdered and nobody been any the wiser!" she said when they were comfortably outdoors again.

"Yes, or made way with ourselves in an access of emotional insanity, supposed to have been induced by unavailing flat-hunting," he suggested. She fell in with the notion. "I'm beginning to feel crazy. But I don't want you to lose your head, Basil. And I don't want you to sentimentalize any of the things you see in New York. I think you were disposed to do it in that street we drove through. I don't believe there's any real suffering—not real suffering—among those people; that is, it would be suffering from our point of view, but they've been used to it all their lives, and they don't feel their discomfort so much."

"Of course, I understand that, and I don't propose to sentimentalize them. I think when people get used to a bad state of things they had better stick to it; in fact, they don't usually like a better state so well, and I shall keep that firmly in mind."

She laughed with him, and they walked along the L bestridden avenue, exhilarated by their escape from murder and suicide in that cellar, toward the nearest cross town track, which they meant to take home to their hotel. "Now to-night we will go to the theatre," she said, "and get this whole house business out of our minds, and be perfectly fresh for a new start in the morning." Suddenly she clutched his arm. "Why, did you see that man?" and she signed with her head toward a decently dressed person who walked beside them, next the gutter, stooping over as if to examine it, and half halting at times.

"No. What?"

"Why, I saw him pick up a dirty bit of cracker from the pavement and cram it into his mouth and eat it down as if he were famished. And look! he's actually hunting for more in those garbage heaps!"

This was what the decent-looking man with the hard hands and broken nails of a workman was doing-like a hungry dog. They kept up with him, in the fascination of the sight, to the next corner, where he turned down the side street still searching the gutter.

They walked on a few paces. Then March said, "I must go after him," and left his wife standing.

"Are you in want—hungry?" he asked the man.

The man said he could not speak English, Monsieur.

March asked his question in French.

The man shrugged a pitiful, desperate shrug, "Mais, Monsieur—"

March put a coin in his hand, and then suddenly the man's face twisted up; he caught the hand of this alms-giver in both of his and clung to it. "Monsieur! Monsieur!" he gasped, and the tears rained down his face.

His benefactor pulled himself away, shocked and ashamed, as one is by such a chance, and got back to his wife, and the man lapsed back into the mystery of misery out of which he had emerged.

March felt it laid upon him to console his wife for what had happened. "Of course, we might live here for years and not see another case like that; and, of course, there are twenty places where he could have gone for help if he had known where to find them."

"Ah, but it's the possibility of his needing the help so badly as that," she answered. "That's what I can't bear, and I shall not come to a place where such things are possible, and we may as well stop our house-hunting here at once."

"Yes? And what part of Christendom will you live in? Such things are possible everywhere in our conditions."

"Then we must change the conditions—"

"Oh no; we must go to the theatre and forget them. We can stop at Brentano's for our tickets as we pass through Union Square."

"I am not going to the theatre, Basil. I am going home to Boston to-night. You can stay and find a flat."

He convinced her of the absurdity of her position, and even of its selfishness; but she said that her mind was quite made up irrespective of what had happened, that she had been away from the children long enough; that she ought to be at home to finish up the work of leaving it. The word brought a sigh. "Ah, I don't know why we should see nothing but sad and ugly things now. When we were young—"

"Younger," he put in. "We're still young."

"That's what we pretend, but we know better. But I was thinking how pretty and pleasant things used to be turning up all the time on our travels in the old days. Why, when we were in New York here on our wedding journey the place didn't seem half so dirty as it does now, and none of these dismal things happened."

"It was a good deal dirtier," he answered; "and I fancy worse in every way—hungrier, raggeder, more wretchedly housed. But that wasn't the period of life for us to notice it. Don't you remember, when we started to Niagara the last time, how everybody seemed middle-aged and commonplace; and when we got there there were no evident brides; nothing but elderly married people?"

"At least they weren't starving," she rebelled.

"No, you don't starve in parlor-cars and first-class hotels; but if you step out of them you run your chance of seeing those who do, if you're getting on pretty well in the forties. If it's the unhappy who see unhappiness, think what misery must be revealed to people who pass their lives in the really squalid tenement-house streets—I don't mean picturesque avenues like that we passed through."

"But we are not unhappy," she protested, bringing the talk back to the personal base again, as women must to get any good out of talk. "We're really no unhappier than we were when we were young."

"We're more serious."

"Well, I hate it; and I wish you wouldn't be so serious, if that's what it brings us to."

"I will be trivial from this on," said March. "Shall we go to the Hole in the Ground to-night?"

"I am going to Boston."

"It's much the same thing. How do you like that for triviality? It's a little blasphemous, I'll allow."

"It's very silly," she said.

At the hotel they found a letter from the agent who had sent them the permit to see Mrs. Grosvenor Green's apartment. He wrote that she had heard they were pleased with her apartment, and that she thought she could make the terms to suit. She had taken her passage for Europe, and was very anxious to let the flat before she sailed. She would call that evening at seven.

"Mrs. Grosvenor Green!" said Mrs. March. "Which of the ten thousand flats is it, Basil?"

"The gimcrackery," he answered. "In the Xenophon, you know."

"Well, she may save herself the trouble. I shall not see her. Or yes—I must. I couldn't go away without seeing what sort of creature could have planned that fly-away flat. She must be a perfect—"

"Parachute," March suggested.

"No! anybody so light as that couldn't come down."

"Well, toy balloon."

"Toy balloon will do for the present," Mrs. March admitted. "But I feel that naught but herself can be her parallel for volatility."

When Mrs. Grosvenor-Green's card came up they both descended to the hotel parlor, which March said looked like the saloon of a Moorish day-boat; not that he knew of any such craft, but the decorations were so Saracenic and the architecture so Hudson Riverish. They found there on the grand central divan a large lady whose vast smoothness, placidity, and plumpness set at defiance all their preconceptions of Mrs. Grosvenor Green, so that Mrs. March distinctly paused with her card in her hand before venturing even tentatively to address her. Then she was astonished at the low, calm voice in which Mrs. Green acknowledged herself, and slowly proceeded to apologize for calling. It was not quite true that she had taken her passage for Europe, but she hoped soon to do so, and she confessed that in the mean time she was anxious to let her flat. She was a little worn out with the care of housekeeping—Mrs. March breathed, "Oh yes!" in the sigh with which ladies recognize one another's martyrdom—and Mrs. Green had business abroad, and she was going to pursue her art studies in Paris; she drew in Mr. Ilcomb's class now, but the instruction was so much better in Paris; and as the superintendent seemed to think the price was the only objection, she had ventured to call.

"Then we didn't deceive him in the least," thought Mrs. March, while she answered, sweetly: "No; we were only afraid that it would be too small for our family. We require a good many rooms." She could not forego the opportunity of saying, "My husband is coming to New York to take charge of a literary periodical, and he will have to have a room to write in," which made Mrs. Green bow to March, and made March look sheepish. "But we did think the apartment very charming", (It was architecturally charming, she protested to her conscience), "and we should have been so glad if we could have got into it." She followed this with some account of their house-hunting, amid soft murmurs of sympathy from Mrs. Green, who said that she had been through all that, and that if she could have shown her apartment to them she felt sure that she could have explained it so that they would have seen its capabilities better, Mrs. March assented to this, and Mrs. Green added that if they found nothing exactly suitable she would be glad to have them look at it again; and then Mrs. March said that she was going back to Boston herself, but she was leaving Mr. March to continue the search; and she had no doubt he would be only too glad to see the apartment by daylight. "But if you take it, Basil," she warned him, when they were alone, "I shall simply renounce you. I wouldn't live in that junk-shop if you gave it to me. But who would have thought she was that kind of looking person? Though of course I might have known if I had stopped to think once. It's because the place doesn't express her at all that it's so unlike her. It couldn't be like anybody, or anything that flies in the air, or creeps upon the earth, or swims in the waters under the earth. I wonder where in the world she's from; she's no New-Yorker; even we can see that; and she's not quite a country person, either; she seems like a person from some large town, where she's been an aesthetic authority. And she can't find good enough art instruction in New York, and has to go to Paris for it! Well, it's pathetic, after all, Basil. I can't help feeling sorry for a person who mistakes herself to that extent."

"I can't help feeling sorry for the husband of a person who mistakes herself to that extent. What is Mr. Grosvenor Green going to do in Paris while she's working her way into the Salon?"

"Well, you keep away from her apartment, Basil; that's all I've got to say to you. And yet I do like some things about her."

"I like everything about her but her apartment," said March.

"I like her going to be out of the country," said his wife. "We shouldn't be overlooked. And the place was prettily shaped, you can't deny it. And there was an elevator and steam heat. And the location is very convenient. And there was a hall-boy to bring up cards. The halls and stairs were kept very clean and nice. But it wouldn't do. I could put you a folding bed in the room where you wrote, and we could even have one in the parlor"

"Behind a portiere? I couldn't stand any more portieres!"

"And we could squeeze the two girls into one room, or perhaps only bring Margaret, and put out the whole of the wash. Basil!" she almost shrieked, "it isn't to be thought of!"

He retorted, "I'm not thinking of it, my dear."

Fulkerson came in just before they started for Mrs. March's train, to find out what had become of them, he said, and to see whether they had got anything to live in yet.

"Not a thing," she said. "And I'm just going back to Boston, and leaving Mr. March here to do anything he pleases about it. He has 'carte blanche.'"

"But freedom brings responsibility, you know, Fulkerson, and it's the same as if I'd no choice. I'm staying behind because I'm left, not because I expect to do anything."

"Is that so?" asked Fulkerson. "Well, we must see what can be done. I supposed you would be all settled by this time, or I should have humped myself to find you something. None of those places I gave you amounts to anything?"

"As much as forty thousand others we've looked at," said Mrs. March. "Yes, one of them does amount to something. It comes so near being what we want that I've given Mr. March particular instructions not to go near it."

She told him about Mrs. Grosvenor Green and her flats, and at the end he said:

"Well, well, we must look out for that. I'll keep an eye on him, Mrs. March, and see that he doesn't do anything rash, and I won't leave him till he's found just the right thing. It exists, of course; it must in a city of eighteen hundred thousand people, and the only question is where to find it. You leave him to me, Mrs. March; I'll watch out for him."

Fulkerson showed some signs of going to the station when he found they were not driving, but she bade him a peremptory good-bye at the hotel door.

"He's very nice, Basil, and his way with you is perfectly charming. It's very sweet to see how really fond of you he is. But I didn't want him stringing along with us up to Forty-second Street and spoiling our last moments together."

At Third Avenue they took the Elevated for which she confessed an infatuation. She declared it the most ideal way of getting about in the world, and was not ashamed when he reminded her of how she used to say that nothing under the sun could induce her to travel on it. She now said that the night transit was even more interesting than the day, and that the fleeing intimacy you formed with people in second and third floor interiors, while all the usual street life went on underneath, had a domestic intensity mixed with a perfect repose that was the last effect of good society with all its security and exclusiveness. He said it was better than the theatre, of which it reminded him, to see those people through their windows: a family party of work-folk at a late tea, some of the men in their shirt-sleeves; a woman sewing by a lamp; a mother laying her child in its cradle; a man with his head fallen on his hands upon a table; a girl and her lover leaning over the window-sill together. What suggestion! what drama? what infinite interest! At the Forty-second Street station they stopped a minute on the bridge that crosses the track to the branch road for the Central Depot, and looked up and down the long stretch of the Elevated to north and south. The track that found and lost itself a thousand times in the flare and tremor of the innumerable lights; the moony sheen of the electrics mixing with the reddish points and blots of gas far and near; the architectural shapes of houses and churches and towers, rescued by the obscurity from all that was ignoble in them, and the coming and going of the trains marking the stations with vivider or fainter plumes of flame-shot steam-formed an incomparable perspective. They often talked afterward of the superb spectacle, which in a city full of painters nightly works its unrecorded miracles; and they were just to the Arachne roof spun in iron over the cross street on which they ran to the depot; but for the present they were mostly inarticulate before it. They had another moment of rich silence when they paused in the gallery that leads from the Elevated station to the waiting-rooms in the Central Depot and looked down upon the great night trains lying on the tracks dim under the rain of gas-lights that starred without dispersing the vast darkness of the place. What forces, what fates, slept in these bulks which would soon be hurling themselves north and south and west through the night! Now they waited there like fabled monsters of Arab story ready for the magician's touch, tractable, reckless, will-less—organized lifelessness full of a strange semblance of life.

The Marches admired the impressive sight with a thrill of patriotic pride in the fact that the whole world perhaps could not afford just the like. Then they hurried down to the ticket-offices, and he got her a lower berth in the Boston sleeper, and went with her to the car. They made the most of the fact that her berth was in the very middle of the car; and she promised to write as soon as she reached home. She promised also that, having seen the limitations of New York in respect to flats, she would not be hard on him if he took something not quite ideal. Only he must remember that it was not to be

above Twentieth Street nor below Washington Square; it must not be higher than the third floor; it must have an elevator, steam heat, hail-boys, and a pleasant janitor. These were essentials; if he could not get them, then they must do without. But he must get them.

XI.

Mrs. March was one of those wives who exact a more rigid adherence to their ideals from their husbands than from themselves. Early in their married life she had taken charge of him in all matters which she considered practical. She did not include the business of bread-winning in these; that was an affair that might safely be left to his absent-minded, dreamy inefficiency, and she did not interfere with him there. But in such things as rehanging the pictures, deciding on a summer boarding-place, taking a seaside cottage, repapering rooms, choosing seats at the theatre, seeing what the children ate when she was not at table, shutting the cat out at night, keeping run of calls and invitations, and seeing if the furnace was dampered, he had failed her so often that she felt she could not leave him the slightest discretion in regard to a flat. Her total distrust of his judgment in the matters cited and others like them consisted with the greatest admiration of his mind and respect for his character. She often said that if he would only bring these to bear in such exigencies he would be simply perfect; but she had long given up his ever doing so. She subjected him, therefore, to an iron code, but after proclaiming it she was apt to abandon him to the native lawlessness of his temperament. She expected him in this event to do as he pleased, and she resigned herself to it with considerable comfort in holding him accountable. He learned to expect this, and after suffering keenly from her disappointment with whatever he did he waited patiently till she forgot her grievance and began to extract what consolation lurks in the irreparable. She would almost admit at moments that what he had done was a very good thing, but she reserved the right to return in full force to her original condemnation of it; and she accumulated each act of independent volition in witness and warning against him. Their mass oppressed but never deterred him. He expected to do the wrong thing when left to his own devices, and he did it without any apparent recollection of his former misdeeds and their consequences. There was a good deal of comedy in it all, and some tragedy.

He now experienced a certain expansion, such as husbands of his kind will imagine, on going back to his hotel alone. It was, perhaps, a revulsion from the pain of parting; and he toyed with the idea of Mrs. Grosvenor Green's apartment, which, in its preposterous unsuitability, had a strange attraction. He felt that he could take it with less risk than anything else they had seen, but he said he would look at all the other places in town first. He really spent the greater part of the next day in hunting up the owner of an apartment that had neither steam heat nor an elevator, but was otherwise perfect, and trying to get him to take less than the agent asked. By a curious psychical operation he was able, in the transaction, to work himself into quite a passionate desire for the apartment, while he held the Grosvenor Green apartment in the background of his mind as something that he could return to as altogether more suitable. He conducted some simultaneous negotiation for a furnished house, which enhanced still more the desirability of the Grosvenor Green apartment. Toward evening he went off at a tangent far up-town, so as to be able to tell his wife how utterly preposterous the best there would be as compared even with this ridiculous Grosvenor Green gimcrackery. It is hard to report the processes of his sophistication; perhaps this, again, may best be left to the marital imagination.

He rang at the last of these up-town apartments as it was falling dusk, and it was long before the janitor appeared. Then the man was very surly, and said if he looked at the flat now he would say it was too dark, like all the rest. His reluctance irritated March in proportion to his insincerity in proposing to look at it at all. He knew he did not mean to take it under any circumstances; that he was going to use his inspection of it in dishonest justification of his disobedience to his wife; but he put on an air of offended dignity. "If you don't wish to show the apartment," he said, "I don't care to see it."

The man groaned, for he was heavy, and no doubt dreaded the stairs. He scratched a match on his thigh, and led the way up. March was sorry for him, and he put his fingers on a quarter in his waistcoat-pocket to give him at parting. At the same time, he had to trump up an objection to the flat. This was easy, for it was advertised as containing ten rooms, and he found the number eked out with the bath-room and two large closets. "It's light enough," said March, "but I don't see how you make out ten rooms"

"There's ten rooms," said the man, deigning no proof.

March took his fingers off the quarter, and went down-stairs and out of the door without another

word. It would be wrong, it would be impossible, to give the man anything after such insolence. He reflected, with shame, that it was also cheaper to punish than forgive him.

He returned to his hotel prepared for any desperate measure, and convinced now that the Grosvenor Green apartment was not merely the only thing left for him, but was, on its own merits, the best thing in New York.

Fulkerson was waiting for him in the reading-room, and it gave March the curious thrill with which a man closes with temptation when he said: "Look here! Why don't you take that woman's flat in the Xenophon? She's been at the agents again, and they've been at me. She likes your look—or Mrs. March's—and I guess you can have it at a pretty heavy discount from the original price. I'm authorized to say you can have it for one seventy-five a month, and I don't believe it would be safe for you to offer one fifty."

March shook his head, and dropped a mask of virtuous rejection over his corrupt acquiescence. "It's too small for us—we couldn't squeeze into it."

"Why, look here!" Fulkerson persisted. "How many rooms do you people want?"

"I've got to have a place to work—"

"Of course! And you've got to have it at the Fifth Wheel office."

"I hadn't thought of that," March began. "I suppose I could do my work at the office, as there's not much writing—"

"Why, of course you can't do your work at home. You just come round with me now, and look at that again."

"No; I can't do it."

"Why?"

"I—I've got to dine."

"All right," said Fulkerson. "Dine with me. I want to take you round to a little Italian place that I know."

One may trace the successive steps of March's descent in this simple matter with the same edification that would attend the study of the self-delusions and obfuscations of a man tempted to crime. The process is probably not at all different, and to the philosophical mind the kind of result is unimportant; the process is everything.

Fulkerson led him down one block and half across another to the steps of a small dwelling-house, transformed, like many others, into a restaurant of the Latin ideal, with little or no structural change from the pattern of the lower middle-class New York home. There were the corroded brownstone steps, the mean little front door, and the cramped entry with its narrow stairs by which ladies could go up to a dining-room appointed for them on the second floor; the parlors on the first were set about with tables, where men smoked cigarettes between the courses, and a single waiter ran swiftly to and fro with plates and dishes, and, exchanged unintelligible outcries with a cook beyond a slide in the back parlor. He rushed at the new-comers, brushed the soiled table-cloth before them with a towel on his arm, covered its worst stains with a napkin, and brought them, in their order, the vermicelli soup, the fried fish, the cheese-strewn spaghetti, the veal cutlets, the tepid roast fowl and salad, and the wizened pear and coffee which form the dinner at such places.

"Ah, this is nice!" said Fulkerson, after the laying of the charitable napkin, and he began to recognize acquaintances, some of whom he described to March as young literary men and artists with whom they should probably have to do; others were simply frequenters of the place, and were of all nationalities and religions apparently—at least, several were Hebrews and Cubans. "You get a pretty good slice of New York here," he said, "all except the frosting on top. That you won't find much at Maroni's, though you will occasionally. I don't mean the ladies ever, of course." The ladies present seemed harmless and reputable-looking people enough, but certainly they were not of the first fashion, and, except in a few instances, not Americans. "It's like cutting straight down through a fruitcake," Fulkerson went on, "or a mince-pie, when you don't know who made the pie; you get a little of everything." He ordered a small flask of Chianti with the dinner, and it came in its pretty wicker jacket. March smiled upon it with tender reminiscence, and Fulkerson laughed. "Lights you up a little. I brought old Dryfoos here one day, and he thought it was sweet-oil; that's the kind of bottle they used to have it in at the country drug-stores."

"Yes, I remember now; but I'd totally forgotten it," said March. "How far back that goes! Who's Dryfoos?"

"Dryfoos?" Fulkerson, still smiling, tore off a piece of the half-yard of French loaf which had been supplied them, with two pale, thin disks of butter, and fed it into himself. "Old Dryfoos? Well, of course! I call him old, but he ain't so very. About fifty, or along there."

"No," said March, "that isn't very old—or not so old as it used to be."

"Well, I suppose you've got to know about him, anyway," said Fulkerson, thoughtfully. "And I've been wondering just how I should tell you. Can't always make out exactly how much of a Bostonian you really are! Ever been out in the natural-gas country?"

"No," said March. "I've had a good deal of curiosity about it, but I've never been able to get away except in summer, and then we always preferred to go over the old ground, out to Niagara and back through Canada, the route we took on our wedding journey. The children like it as much as we do."

"Yes, yes," said Fulkerson. "Well, the natural-gas country is worth seeing. I don't mean the Pittsburg gas-fields, but out in Northern Ohio and Indiana around Moffitt—that's the place in the heart of the gas region that they've been booming so. Yes, you ought to see that country. If you haven't been West for a good many years, you haven't got any idea how old the country looks. You remember how the fields used to be all full of stumps?"

"I should think so."

"Well, you won't see any stumps now. All that country out around Moffitt is just as smooth as a checker-board, and looks as old as England. You know how we used to burn the stumps out; and then somebody invented a stump-extractor, and we pulled them out with a yoke of oxen. Now they just touch 'em off with a little dynamite, and they've got a cellar dug and filled up with kindling ready for housekeeping whenever you want it. Only they haven't got any use for kindling in that country—all gas. I rode along on the cars through those level black fields at corn-planting time, and every once in a while I'd come to a place with a piece of ragged old stove-pipe stickin' up out of the ground, and blazing away like forty, and a fellow ploughing all round it and not minding it any more than if it was spring violets. Horses didn't notice it, either. Well, they've always known about the gas out there; they say there are places in the woods where it's been burning ever since the country was settled.

"But when you come in sight of Moffitt—my, oh, my! Well, you come in smell of it about as soon. That gas out there ain't odorless, like the Pittsburg gas, and so it's perfectly safe; but the smell isn't bad—about as bad as the finest kind of benzine. Well, the first thing that strikes you when you come to Moffitt is the notion that there has been a good warm, growing rain, and the town's come up overnight. That's in the suburbs, the annexes, and additions. But it ain't shabby—no shanty-farm business; nice brick and frame houses, some of 'em Queen Anne style, and all of 'em looking as if they had come to stay. And when you drive up from the depot you think everybody's moving. Everything seems to be piled into the street; old houses made over, and new ones going up everywhere. You know the kind of street Main Street always used to be in our section—half plank-road and turnpike, and the rest mud-hole, and a lot of stores and doggeries strung along with false fronts a story higher than the back, and here and there a decent building with the gable end to the public; and a court-house and jail and two taverns and three or four churches. Well, they're all there in Moffitt yet, but architecture has struck it hard, and they've got a lot of new buildings that needn't be ashamed of themselves anywhere; the new court-house is as big as St. Peter's, and the Grand Opera-house is in the highest style of the art. You can't buy a lot on that street for much less than you can buy a lot in New York—or you couldn't when the boom was on; I saw the place just when the boom was in its prime. I went out there to work the newspapers in the syndicate business, and I got one of their men to write me a real bright, snappy account of the gas; and they just took me in their arms and showed me everything. Well, it was wonderful, and it was beautiful, too! To see a whole community stirred up like that was—just like a big boy, all hope and high spirits, and no discount on the remotest future; nothing but perpetual boom to the end of time—I tell you it warmed your blood. Why, there were some things about it that made you think what a nice kind of world this would be if people ever took hold together, instead of each fellow fighting it out on his own hook, and devil take the hindmost. They made up their minds at Moffitt that if they wanted their town to grow they'd got to keep their gas public property. So they extended their corporation line so as to take in pretty much the whole gas region round there; and then the city took possession of every well that was put down, and held it for the common good. Anybody that's a mind to come to Moffitt and start any kind of manufacture can have all the gas he wants free; and for fifteen dollars a year you can have all the gas you want to heat and light your private house. The people hold on to it for themselves, and, as I say, it's a grand sight to see a whole community hanging together and working for the good of all, instead of splitting up into as many different cut-throats as there are able-bodied citizens. See that fellow?" Fulkerson broke off, and indicated with a twirl of his head a short,

dark, foreign-looking man going out of the door. "They say that fellow's a Socialist. I think it's a shame they're allowed to come here. If they don't like the way we manage our affairs let 'em stay at home," Fulkerson continued. "They do a lot of mischief, shooting off their mouths round here. I believe in free speech and all that; but I'd like to see these fellows shut up in jail and left to jaw one another to death. We don't want any of their poison."

March did not notice the vanishing Socialist. He was watching, with a teasing sense of familiarity, a tall, shabbily dressed, elderly man, who had just come in. He had the aquiline profile uncommon among Germans, and yet March recognized him at once as German. His long, soft beard and mustache had once been fair, and they kept some tone of their yellow in the gray to which they had turned. His eyes were full, and his lips and chin shaped the beard to the noble outline which shows in the beards the Italian masters liked to paint for their Last Suppers. His carriage was erect and soldierly, and March presently saw that he had lost his left hand. He took his place at a table where the overworked waiter found time to cut up his meat and put everything in easy reach of his right hand.

"Well," Fulkerson resumed, "they took me round everywhere in Moffitt, and showed me their big wells—lit 'em up for a private view, and let me hear them purr with the soft accents of a mass-meeting of locomotives. Why, when they let one of these wells loose in a meadow that they'd piped it into temporarily, it drove the flame away forty feet from the mouth of the pipe and blew it over half an acre of ground. They say when they let one of their big wells burn away all winter before they had learned how to control it, that well kept up a little summer all around it; the grass stayed green, and the flowers bloomed all through the winter. I don't know whether it's so or not. But I can believe anything of natural gas. My! but it was beautiful when they turned on the full force of that well and shot a roman candle into the gas—that's the way they light it—and a plume of fire about twenty feet wide and seventy-five feet high, all red and yellow and violet, jumped into the sky, and that big roar shook the ground under your feet! You felt like saying:

"'Don't trouble yourself; I'm perfectly convinced. I believe in Moffitt.' We-e-e-ll!" drawled Fulkerson, with a long breath, "that's where I met old Dryfoos."

"Oh yes!—Dryfoos," said March. He observed that the waiter had brought the old one-handed German a towering glass of beer.

"Yes," Fulkerson laughed. "We've got round to Dryfoos again. I thought I could cut a long story short, but I seem to be cutting a short story long. If you're not in a hurry, though—"

"Not in the least. Go on as long as you like."

"I met him there in the office of a real-estate man—speculator, of course; everybody was, in Moffitt; but a first-rate fellow, and public-spirited as all get-out; and when Dryfoos left he told me about him. Dryfoos was an old Pennsylvania Dutch farmer, about three or four miles out of Moffitt, and he'd lived there pretty much all his life; father was one of the first settlers. Everybody knew he had the right stuff in him, but he was slower than molasses in January, like those Pennsylvania Dutch. He'd got together the largest and handsomest farm anywhere around there; and he was making money on it, just like he was in some business somewhere; he was a very intelligent man; he took the papers and kept himself posted; but he was awfully old-fashioned in his ideas. He hung on to the doctrines as well as the dollars of the dads; it was a real thing with him. Well, when the boom began to come he hated it awfully, and he fought it. He used to write communications to the weekly newspaper in Moffitt—they've got three dailies there now—and throw cold water on the boom. He couldn't catch on no way. It made him sick to hear the clack that went on about the gas the whole while, and that stirred up the neighborhood and got into his family. Whenever he'd hear of a man that had been offered a big price for his land and was going to sell out and move into town, he'd go and labor with him and try to talk him out of it, and tell him how long his fifteen or twenty thousand would last him to live on, and shake the Standard Oil Company before him, and try to make him believe it wouldn't be five years before the Standard owned the whole region.

"Of course, he couldn't do anything with them. When a man's offered a big price for his farm, he don't care whether it's by a secret emissary from the Standard Oil or not; he's going to sell and get the better of the other fellow if he can. Dryfoos couldn't keep the boom out of has own family even. His wife was with him. She thought whatever he said and did was just as right as if it had been thundered down from Sinai. But the young folks were sceptical, especially the girls that had been away to school. The boy that had been kept at home because he couldn't be spared from helping his father manage the farm was more like him, but they contrived to stir the boy up—with the hot end of the boom, too. So when a fellow came along one day and offered old Dryfoos a cool hundred thousand for his farm, it was all up with Dryfoos. He'd 'a' liked to 'a' kept the offer to himself and not done anything about it, but his vanity wouldn't let him do that; and when he let it out in his family the girls outvoted him. They just made him sell.

"He wouldn't sell all. He kept about eighty acres that was off in some piece by itself, but the three hundred that had the old brick house on it, and the big barn—that went, and Dryfoos bought him a place in Moffitt and moved into town to live on the interest of his money. Just what he had scolded and ridiculed everybody else for doing. Well, they say that at first he seemed like he would go crazy. He hadn't anything to do. He took a fancy to that land-agent, and he used to go and set in his office and ask him what he should do. 'I hain't got any horses, I hain't got any cows, I hain't got any pigs, I hain't got any chickens. I hain't got anything to do from sun-up to sun-down.' The fellow said the tears used to run down the old fellow's cheeks, and if he hadn't been so busy himself he believed he should 'a' cried, too. But most o' people thought old Dryfoos was down in the mouth because he hadn't asked more for his farm, when he wanted to buy it back and found they held it at a hundred and fifty thousand. People couldn't believe he was just homesick and heartsick for the old place. Well, perhaps he was sorry he hadn't asked more; that's human nature, too.

"After a while something happened. That land-agent used to tell Dryfoos to get out to Europe with his money and see life a little, or go and live in Washington, where he could be somebody; but Dryfoos wouldn't, and he kept listening to the talk there, and all of a sudden he caught on. He came into that fellow's one day with a plan for cutting up the eighty acres he'd kept into town lots; and he'd got it all plotted out so-well, and had so many practical ideas about it, that the fellow was astonished. He went right in with him, as far as Dryfoos would let him, and glad of the chance; and they were working the thing for all it was worth when I struck Moffitt. Old Dryfoos wanted me to go out and see the Dryfoos & Hendry Addition—guess he thought maybe I'd write it up; and he drove me out there himself. Well, it was funny to see a town made: streets driven through; two rows of shadetrees, hard and soft, planted; cellars dug and houses put up—regular Queen Anne style, too, with stained glass—all at once. Dryfoos apologized for the streets because they were hand-made; said they expected their street-making machine Tuesday, and then they intended to push things."

Fulkerson enjoyed the effect of his picture on March for a moment, and then went on: "He was mighty intelligent, too, and he questioned me up about my business as sharp as I ever was questioned; seemed to kind of strike his fancy; I guess he wanted to find out if there was any money in it. He was making money, hand over hand, then; and he never stopped speculating and improving till he'd scraped together three or four hundred thousand dollars, they said a million, but they like round numbers at Moffitt, and I guess half a million would lay over it comfortably and leave a few thousands to spare, probably. Then he came on to New York."

Fulkerson struck a match against the ribbed side of the porcelain cup that held the matches in the centre of the table, and lit a cigarette, which he began to smoke, throwing his head back with a leisurely effect, as if he had got to the end of at least as much of his story as he meant to tell without prompting.

March asked him the desired question. "What in the world for?"

Fulkerson took out his cigarette and said, with a smile: "To spend his money, and get his daughters into the old Knickerbocker society. Maybe he thought they were all the same kind of Dutch."

"And has he succeeded?"

"Well, they're not social leaders yet. But it's only a question of time—generation or two—especially if time's money, and if Every Other Week is the success it's bound to be."

"You don't mean to say, Fulkerson," said March, with a half-doubting, half-daunted laugh, "that he's your Angel?"

"That's what I mean to say," returned Fulkerson. "I ran onto him in Broadway one day last summer. If you ever saw anybody in your life; you're sure to meet him in Broadway again, sooner or later. That's the philosophy of the bunco business; country people from the same neighborhood are sure to run up against each other the first time they come to New York. I put out my hand, and I said, 'Isn't this Mr. Dryfoos from Moffitt?' He didn't seem to have any use for my hand; he let me keep it, and he squared those old lips of his till his imperial stuck straight out. Ever see Bernhardt in 'L'Etrangere'? Well, the American husband is old Dryfoos all over; no mustache; and hay-colored chin-whiskers cut slanting froze the corners of his mouth. He cocked his little gray eyes at me, and says he: 'Yes, young man; my name is Dryfoos, and I'm from Moffitt. But I don't want no present of Longfellow's Works, illustrated; and I don't want to taste no fine teas; but I know a policeman that does; and if you're the son of my old friend Squire Strohfeldt, you'd better get out.' 'Well, then,' said I, 'how would you like to go into the newspaper syndicate business?' He gave another look at me, and then he burst out laughing, and he grabbed my hand, and he just froze to it. I never saw anybody so glad.

"Well, the long and the short of it was that I asked him round here to Maroni's to dinner; and before we broke up for the night we had settled the financial side of the plan that's brought you to New York."

"I can see," said Fulkerson, who had kept his eyes fast on March's face, "that you don't more than half like the idea of Dryfoos. It ought to give you more confidence in the thing than you ever had. You needn't be afraid," he added, with some feeling, "that I talked Dryfoos into the thing for my own advantage."

"Oh, my dear Fulkerson!" March protested, all the more fervently because he was really a little guilty.

"Well, of course not! I didn't mean you were. But I just happened to tell him what I wanted to go into when I could see my way to it, and he caught on of his own accord. The fact is," said Fulkerson, "I guess I'd better make a clean breast of it, now I'm at it, Dryfoos wanted to get something for that boy of his to do. He's in railroads himself, and he's in mines and other things, and he keeps busy, and he can't bear to have his boy hanging round the house doing nothing, like as if he was a girl. I told him that the great object of a rich man was to get his son into just that fix, but he couldn't seem to see it, and the boy hated it himself. He's got a good head, and he wanted to study for the ministry when they were all living together out on the farm; but his father had the old-fashioned ideas about that. You know they used to think that any sort of stuff was good enough to make a preacher out of; but they wanted the good timber for business; and so the old man wouldn't let him. You'll see the fellow; you'll like him; he's no fool, I can tell you; and he's going to be our publisher, nominally at first and actually when I've taught him the ropes a little."

XII.

Fulkerson stopped and looked at March, whom he saw lapsing into a serious silence. Doubtless he divined his uneasiness with the facts that had been given him to digest. He pulled out his watch and glanced at it. "See here, how would you like to go up to Forty-sixth street with me, and drop in on old Dryfoos? Now's your chance. He's going West tomorrow, and won't be back for a month or so. They'll all be glad to see you, and you'll understand things better when you've seen him and his family. I can't explain."

March reflected a moment. Then he said, with a wisdom that surprised him, for he would have liked to yield to the impulse of his curiosity: "Perhaps we'd better wait till Mrs. March comes down, and let things take the usual course. The Dryfoos ladies will want to call on her as the last-comer, and if I treated myself 'en garcon' now, and paid the first visit, it might complicate matters."

"Well, perhaps you're right," said Fulkerson. "I don't know much about these things, and I don't believe Ma Dryfoos does, either." He was on his legs lighting another cigarette. "I suppose the girls are getting themselves up in etiquette, though. Well, then, let's have a look at the 'Every Other Week' building, and then, if you like your quarters there, you can go round and close for Mrs. Green's flat."

March's dormant allegiance to his wife's wishes had been roused by his decision in favor of good social usage. "I don't think I shall take the flat," he said.

"Well, don't reject it without giving it another look, anyway. Come on!"

He helped March on with his light overcoat, and the little stir they made for their departure caught the notice of the old German; he looked up from his beer at them. March was more than ever impressed with something familiar in his face. In compensation for his prudence in regard to the Dryfooses he now indulged an impulse. He stepped across to where the old man sat, with his bald head shining like ivory under the gas-jet, and his fine patriarchal length of bearded mask taking picturesque lights and shadows, and put out his hand to him.

"Lindau! Isn't this Mr. Lindau?"

The old man lifted himself slowly to his feet with mechanical politeness, and cautiously took March's hand. "Yes, my name is Lindau," he said, slowly, while he scanned March's face. Then he broke into a long cry. "Ah-h-h-h-h, my dear poy! my gong friendt! my-my—Idt is Passil Marge, not zo? Ah, ha, ha, ha! How gladt I am to zee you! Why, I am gladt! And you rememberdt me? You remember Schiller, and Goethe, and Uhland? And Indianapolis? You still lif in Indianapolis? It sheers my hardt to zee you. But you are lidtle oldt, too? Tventy-five years makes a difference. Ah, I am gladt! Dell me, idt is Passil

Marge, not zo?"

He looked anxiously into March's face, with a gentle smile of mixed hope and doubt, and March said: "As sure as it's Berthold Lindau, and I guess it's you. And you remember the old times? You were as much of a boy as I was, Lindau. Are you living in New York? Do you recollect how you tried to teach me to fence? I don't know how to this day, Lindau. How good you were, and how patient! Do you remember how we used to sit up in the little parlor back of your printing-office, and read Die Rauber and Die Theilung der Erde and Die Glocke? And Mrs. Lindau? Is she with—"

"Deadt—deadt long ago. Right after I got home from the war—tventy years ago. But tell me, you are married? Children? Yes! Goodt! And how oldt are you now?"

"It makes me seventeen to see you, Lindau, but I've got a son nearly as old."

"Ah, ha, ha! Goodt! And where do you lif?"

"Well, I'm just coming to live in New York," March said, looking over at Fulkerson, who had been watching his interview with the perfunctory smile of sympathy that people put on at the meeting of old friends. "I want to introduce you to my friend Mr. Fulkerson. He and I are going into a literary enterprise here."

"Ah! zo?" said the old man, with polite interest. He took Fulkerson's proffered hand, and they all stood talking a few moments together.

Then Fulkerson said, with another look at his watch, "Well, March, we're keeping Mr. Lindau from his dinner."

"Dinner!" cried the old man. "Idt's better than breadt and meadt to see
Mr. Marge!"

"I must be going, anyway," said March. "But I must see you again soon,
Lindau. Where do you live? I want a long talk."

"And I. You will find me here at dinner-time." said the old man. "It is the best place"; and March fancied him reluctant to give another address.

To cover his consciousness he answered, gayly: "Then, it's 'auf wiedersehen' with us. Well!"

"Also!" The old man took his hand, and made a mechanical movement with his mutilated arm, as if he would have taken it in a double clasp. He laughed at himself. "I wanted to gif you the other handt, too, but I gafe it to your gountry a goodt while ago."

"To my country?" asked March, with a sense of pain, and yet lightly, as if it were a joke of the old man's. "Your country, too, Lindau?"

The old man turned very grave, and said, almost coldly, "What gountry hass a poor man got, Mr. Marge?"

"Well, you ought to have a share in the one you helped to save for us rich men, Lindau," March returned, still humoring the joke.

The old man smiled sadly, but made no answer as he sat down again.

"Seems to be a little soured," said Fulkerson, as they went down the steps. He was one of those Americans whose habitual conception of life is unalloyed prosperity. When any experience or observation of his went counter to it he suffered—something like physical pain. He eagerly shrugged away the impression left upon his buoyancy by Lindau, and added to March's continued silence, "What did I tell you about meeting every man in New York that you ever knew before?"

"I never expected to meat Lindau in the world again," said March, more to himself than to Fulkerson. "I had an impression that he had been killed in the war. I almost wish he had been."

"Oh, hello, now!" cried Fulkerson.

March laughed, but went on soberly: "He was a man predestined to adversity, though. When I first knew him out in Indianapolis he was starving along with a sick wife and a sick newspaper. It was before the Germans had come over to the Republicans generally, but Lindau was fighting the anti-slavery battle just as naturally at Indianapolis in 1858 as he fought behind the barricades at Berlin in 1848. And yet he was always such a gentle soul! And so generous! He taught me German for the love of it; he wouldn't spoil his pleasure by taking a cent from me; he seemed to get enough out of my being young

and enthusiastic, and out of prophesying great things for me. I wonder what the poor old fellow is doing here, with that one hand of his?"

"Not amassing a very 'handsome pittance,' I guess, as Artemus Ward would say," said Fulkerson, getting back some of his lightness. "There are lots of two-handed fellows in New York that are not doing much better, I guess. Maybe he gets some writing on the German papers."

"I hope so. He's one of the most accomplished men! He used to be a splendid musician—pianist—and knows eight or ten languages."

"Well, it's astonishing," said Fulkerson, "how much lumber those Germans can carry around in their heads all their lives, and never work it up into anything. It's a pity they couldn't do the acquiring, and let out the use of their learning to a few bright Americans. We could make things hum, if we could arrange 'em that way."

He talked on, unheeded by March, who went along half-consciously tormented by his lightness in the pensive memories the meeting with Lindau had called up. Was this all that sweet, unselfish nature could come to? What a homeless old age at that meagre Italian table d'hote, with that tall glass of beer for a half-hour's oblivion! That shabby dress, that pathetic mutilation! He must have a pension, twelve dollars a month, or eighteen, from a grateful country. But what else did he eke out with?

"Well, here we are," said Fulkerson, cheerily. He ran up the steps before March, and opened the carpenter's temporary valve in the door frame, and led the way into a darkness smelling sweetly of unpainted wood-work and newly dried plaster; their feat slipped on shavings and grated on sand. He scratched a match, and found a candle, and then walked about up and down stairs, and lectured on the advantages of the place. He had fitted up bachelor apartments for himself in the house, and said that he was going to have a flat to let on the top floor. "I didn't offer it to you because I supposed you'd be too proud to live over your shop; and it's too small, anyway; only five rooms."

"Yes, that's too small," said March, shirking the other point.

"Well, then, here's the room I intend for your office," said Fulkerson, showing him into a large back parlor one flight up. "You'll have it quiet from the street noises here, and you can be at home or not, as you please. There'll be a boy on the stairs to find out. Now, you see, this makes the Grosvenor Green flat practicable, if you want it."

March felt the forces of fate closing about him and pushing him to a decision. He feebly fought them off till he could have another look at the flat. Then, baked and subdued still more by the unexpected presence of Mrs. Grosvenor Green herself, who was occupying it so as to be able to show it effectively, he took it. He was aware more than ever of its absurdities; he knew that his wife would never cease to hate it; but he had suffered one of those eclipses of the imagination to which men of his temperament are subject, and into which he could see no future for his desires. He felt a comfort in irretrievably committing himself, and exchanging the burden of indecision for the burden of responsibility.

"I don't know," said Fulkerson, as they walked back to his hotel together, "but you might fix it up with that lone widow and her pretty daughter to take part of their house here." He seemed to be reminded of it by the fact of passing the house, and March looked up at its dark front. He could not have told exactly why he felt a pang of remorse at the sight, and doubtless it was more regret for having taken the Grosvenor Green flat than for not having taken the widow's rooms. Still, he could not forget her wistfulness when his wife and he were looking at them, and her disappointment when they decided against them. He had toyed, in his after-talk to Mrs. March, with a sort of hypothetical obligation they had to modify their plans so as to meet the widow's want of just such a family as theirs; they had both said what a blessing it would be to her, and what a pity they could not do it; but they had decided very distinctly that they could not. Now it seemed to him that they might; and he asked himself whether he had not actually departed as much from their ideal as if he had taken board with the widow. Suddenly it seemed to him that his wife asked him this, too.

"I reckon," said Fulkerson, "that she could have arranged to give you your meals in your rooms, and it would have come to about the same thing as housekeeping."

"No sort of boarding can be the same as house-keeping," said March. "I want my little girl to have the run of a kitchen, and I want the whole family to have the moral effect of housekeeping. It's demoralizing to board, in every way; it isn't a home, if anybody else takes the care of it off your hands."

"Well, I suppose so," Fulkerson assented; but March's words had a hollow ring to himself, and in his own mind he began to retaliate his dissatisfaction upon Fulkerson.

He parted from him on the usual terms outwardly, but he felt obscurely abused by Fulkerson in

regard to the Dryfooses, father and son. He did not know but Fulkerson had taken an advantage of him in allowing him to commit himself to their enterprise without fully and frankly telling him who and what his backer was; he perceived that with young Dryfoos as the publisher and Fulkerson as the general director of the paper there might be very little play for his own ideas of its conduct. Perhaps it was the hurt to his vanity involved by the recognition of this fact that made him forget how little choice he really had in the matter, and how, since he had not accepted the offer to edit the insurance paper, nothing remained for him but to close with Fulkerson. In this moment of suspicion and resentment he accused Fulkerson of hastening his decision in regard to the Grosvenor Green apartment; he now refused to consider it a decision, and said to himself that if he felt disposed to do so he would send Mrs. Green a note reversing it in the morning. But he put it all off till morning with his clothes, when he went to bed, he put off even thinking what his wife would say; he cast Fulkerson and his constructive treachery out of his mind, too, and invited into it some pensive reveries of the past, when he still stood at the parting of the ways, and could take this path or that. In his middle life this was not possible; he must follow the path chosen long ago, wherever, it led. He was not master of himself, as he once seemed, but the servant of those he loved; if he could do what he liked, perhaps he might renounce this whole New York enterprise, and go off somewhere out of the reach of care; but he could not do what he liked, that was very clear. In the pathos of this conviction he dwelt compassionately upon the thought of poor old Lindau; he resolved to make him accept a handsome sum of money—more than he could spare, something that he would feel the loss of—in payment of the lessons in German and fencing given so long ago. At the usual rate for such lessons, his debt, with interest for twenty-odd years, would run very far into the hundreds. Too far, he perceived, for his wife's joyous approval; he determined not to add the interest; or he believed that Lindau would refuse the interest; he put a fine speech in his mouth, making him do so; and after that he got Lindau employment on 'Every Other Week,' and took care of him till he died.

Through all his melancholy and munificence he was aware of sordid anxieties for having taken the Grosvenor Green apartment. These began to assume visible, tangible shapes as he drowsed, and to became personal entities, from which he woke, with little starts, to a realization of their true nature, and then suddenly fell fast asleep.

In the accomplishment of the events which his reverie played with, there was much that retroactively stamped it with prophecy, but much also that was better than he forboded. He found that with regard to the Grosvenor Green apartment he had not allowed for his wife's willingness to get any sort of roof over her head again after the removal from their old home, or for the alleviations that grow up through mere custom. The practical workings of the apartment were not so bad; it had its good points, and after the first sensation of oppression in it they began to feel the convenience of its arrangement. They were at that time of life when people first turn to their children's opinion with deference, and, in the loss of keenness in their own likes and dislikes, consult the young preferences which are still so sensitive. It went far to reconcile Mrs. March to the apartment that her children were pleased with its novelty; when this wore off for them, she had herself begun to find it much more easily manageable than a house. After she had put away several barrels of gimcracks, and folded up screens and rugs and skins, and carried them all off to the little dark store-room which the flat developed, she perceived at once a roominess and coziness in it unsuspected before. Then, when people began to call, she had a pleasure, a superiority, in saying that it was a furnished apartment, and in disclaiming all responsibility for the upholstery and decoration. If March was by, she always explained that it was Mr. March's fancy, and amiably laughed it off with her callers as a mannish eccentricity. Nobody really seemed to think it otherwise than pretty; and this again was a triumph for Mrs. March, because it showed how inferior the New York taste was to the Boston taste in such matters.

March submitted silently to his punishment, and laughed with her before company at his own eccentricity. She had been so preoccupied with the adjustment of the family to its new quarters and circumstances that the time passed for laying his misgivings, if they were misgivings, about Fulkerson before her, and when an occasion came for expressing them they had themselves passed in the anxieties of getting forward the first number of 'Every Other Week.' He kept these from her, too, and the business that brought them to New York had apparently dropped into abeyance before the questions of domestic economy that presented and absented themselves. March knew his wife to be a woman of good mind and in perfect sympathy with him, but he understood the limitations of her perspective; and if he was not too wise, he was too experienced to intrude upon it any affairs of his till her own were reduced to the right order and proportion. It would have been folly to talk to her of Fulkerson's conjecturable uncandor while she was in doubt whether her cook would like the kitchen, or her two servants would consent to room together; and till it was decided what school Tom should go to, and whether Bella should have lessons at home or not, the relation which March was to bear to the Dryfooses, as owner and publisher, was not to be discussed with his wife. He might drag it in, but he was aware that with her mind distracted by more immediate interests he could not get from her that judgment, that reasoned divination, which he relied upon so much. She would try, she would do her

best, but the result would be a view clouded and discolored by the effort she must make.

He put the whole matter by, and gave himself to the details of the work before him. In this he found not only escape, but reassurance, for it became more and more apparent that whatever was nominally the structure of the business, a man of his qualifications and his instincts could not have an insignificant place in it. He had also the consolation of liking his work, and of getting an instant grasp of it that grew constantly firmer and closer. The joy of knowing that he had not made a mistake was great. In giving rein to ambitions long forborne he seemed to get back to the youth when he had indulged them first; and after half a lifetime passed in pursuits alien to his nature, he was feeling the serene happiness of being mated through his work to his early love. From the outside the spectacle might have had its pathos, and it is not easy to justify such an experiment as he had made at his time of life, except upon the ground where he rested from its consideration—the ground of necessity.

His work was more in his thoughts than himself, however; and as the time for the publication of the first number of his periodical came nearer, his cares all centred upon it. Without fixing any date, Fulkerson had announced it, and pushed his announcements with the shameless vigor of a born advertiser. He worked his interest with the press to the utmost, and paragraphs of a variety that did credit to his ingenuity were afloat everywhere. Some of them were speciously unfavorable in tone; they criticised and even ridiculed the principles on which the new departure in literary journalism was based. Others defended it; others yet denied that this rumored principle was really the principle. All contributed to make talk. All proceeded from the same fertile invention.

March observed with a degree of mortification that the talk was very little of it in the New York press; there the references to the novel enterprise were slight and cold. But Fulkerson said: "Don't mind that, old man. It's the whole country that makes or breaks a thing like this; New York has very little to do with it. Now if it were a play, it would be different. New York does make or break a play; but it doesn't make or break a book; it doesn't make or break a magazine. The great mass of the readers are outside of New York, and the rural districts are what we have got to go for. They don't read much in New York; they write, and talk about what they've written. Don't you worry."

The rumor of Fulkerson's connection with the enterprise accompanied many of the paragraphs, and he was able to stay March's thirst for employment by turning over to him from day to day heaps of the manuscripts which began to pour in from his old syndicate writers, as well as from adventurous volunteers all over the country. With these in hand March began practically to plan the first number, and to concrete a general scheme from the material and the experience they furnished. They had intended to issue the first number with the new year, and if it had been an affair of literature alone, it would have been very easy; but it was the art leg they limped on, as Fulkerson phrased it. They had not merely to deal with the question of specific illustrations for this article or that, but to decide the whole character of their illustrations, and first of all to get a design for a cover which should both ensnare the heedless and captivate the fastidious. These things did not come properly within March's province—that had been clearly understood—and for a while Fulkerson tried to run the art leg himself. The phrase was again his, but it was simpler to make the phrase than to run the leg. The difficult generation, at once stiff-backed and slippery, with which he had to do in this endeavor, reduced even so buoyant an optimist to despair, and after wasting some valuable weeks in trying to work the artists himself, he determined to get an artist to work them. But what artist? It could not be a man with fixed reputation and a following: he would be too costly, and would have too many enemies among his brethren, even if he would consent to undertake the job. Fulkerson had a man in mind, an artist, too, who would have been the very thing if he had been the thing at all. He had talent enough, and his sort of talent would reach round the whole situation, but, as Fulkerson said, he was as many kinds of an ass as he was kinds of an artist.

PG EDITOR'S BOOKMARKS:

Anticipative homesickness
Any sort of stuff was good enough to make a preacher out of
Appearance made him doubt their ability to pay so much
As much of his story as he meant to tell without prompting
Considerable comfort in holding him accountable
Extract what consolation lurks in the irreparable
Flavors not very sharply distinguished from one another
Handsome pittance

He expected to do the wrong thing when left to his own devices
Hypothetical difficulty
Never-blooming shrub
Poverty as hopeless as any in the world
Seeming interested in points necessarily indifferent to him
Servant of those he loved
Sigh with which ladies recognize one another's martyrdom
Sorry he hadn't asked more; that's human nature
That isn't very old—or not so old as it used to be
Tried to be homesick for them, but failed
Turn to their children's opinion with deference
Wish we didn't always recognize the facts as we do

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