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# **A YANKEE FROM THE WEST.**

***FOURTEENTH EDITION.***

**A Novel**

**BY**

**OPIE READ,**

**AUTHOR OF**

**"JUDGE ELBRIDGE," "THE WATERS OF CANEY FORK," "AN ARKANSAS PLANTER."**

**CHICAGO AND NEW YORK: RAND, MCNALLY & COMPANY, PUBLISHERS.**

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## A YANKEE FROM THE WEST.

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### CHAPTER I.

#### MILFORD.

In his mind the traveler holds of Illinois a tiresome picture, the kitchen garden of a great people, a flat and unromantic necessity. The greatest of men have trod the level ground, but it is hard to mark history upon a plane; there is no rugged place on which to hang a wreath, and on the prairie the traveling eye is accommodated by no inn whereat it may halt to rest. Such is the Illinois as remembered by the hastening tourist. But in the southern part of the State there are mountains, and in the north, the scene of this story, there is a spread and a roll of romantic country—the green billows of Wisconsin gently breaking into Illinois; lakes scattered like a handful of jewels thrown broadcast, quiet rivers singing low among the rushes. Traveling north, we have left the slim, man-tended tree of the prairies, and here we find the great oak. There are hillsides where the forest is heavy. There are valleys sweet in a riot of flowers. Along the roads the fences are almost hidden by grape-vines. On a knoll the air is honeyed with wild crab-apple; along a slope the senses tingle with the scent of the green walnut. There are lanes so romantic that cool design could have had no hand in their arrangement—they hold the poetry of accident. The inhabitants of this scope of country have done nothing to beautify it. They have built wooden houses and have scarred the earth, but persistent nature soon hides the scars with vines and grasses. The soil is wastefully strong. In New England and in parts of the South, the feeble corn is a constant care, but here it grows with the rankness of a jungle weed. And yet, moved by our national disease, nervousness, the farmer sells his pastoral dales to buy a wind-swept space of prairie in the far West. A strange shiftlessness, almost unaccountable in a climate so stimulating, has suffered many a farm to lie idle, with fences slowly moldering under flowering vines—a reproach to husbandry, but a contri Line 2620 column 53 - Query missing paragraph break? bution to sentiment. Amid these scenes many an astonished muser has asked himself this question: "Where are the poets of this land, where the bluebell nods in metre to the gentle breeze?" Not a poem, not a story has he se Line 2620 column 53 - Query missing paragraph break?en reflecting the life of this rude England in America. In the summer the Sunday newspaper prints the names of persons who, escaping from Chicago, have "sardined" themselves in cottages or suffered heat and indigestion at a farm-house; the maker of the bicycle map has marked the roads and dotted the villages; the pen and ink worker for the daily press has drawn sketches of a lily pad, a tree and a fish much larger than the truth; the reporter has caught a bit of color here and there, but the contemplative writer has been silent and the American painter has shut his eyes to open them upon a wood-shod family group in Germany.

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This region was settled by Yankees. They brought with them a tireless industry and a shrewd humor. But to be wholly himself the Yankee must live on thin soil. Necessity must extract the full operation of his energy. Under his stern demand, the conquered ground yields more than enough. Vanquished poverty stuffs his purse. He sets up schools and establishes libraries. But on a soil that yields with cheerful readiness, he becomes careless and loses the shrewd essence of his energy. His humor, though, remains the same. Nervous and whimsical, he sees things with a hollow eye, and his laugh is harsh. Unlike his brother of the South, he does not hook arms with a joke, walk with it over the hill and loll with it in the shade of the valley; it is not his companion, but his instrument, and he makes it work for him.

One afternoon in early summer a man got off a train at Rollins, a milk station, and stood looking at a number of farmers loading into wagons the empty milk cans that had been returned from the city. He was tall and strong-appearing. He wore a dark, short beard, trimmed sharp, and his face was almost fierce-looking, with a touch of wildness, such as the art of the stage-man tries in vain to catch. He was not well dressed; he carried the suggestion that he might have lived where man is licentiously free. With his sharp eye he must have been quick to draw a bead with a gun; but his eye, though sharp, was pleasing. A dog sniffed him and walked off, satisfied with his investigation. The countryman stands ready to sanction a dog's approval of a stranger—it is wisdom fortified by superstition, by tales told around the fire at night—so a look of mistrust was melted with a smile, and the owner of the dog spoke to the stranger.

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"Don't guess you've got a newspaper about you?" said the farmer, putting his last can into the wagon.

"No. The afternoon papers weren't out when I left town."

"Morning paper would suit me just as well—haven't seen one to-day. I get a weekly all winter, and I try to get a daily in the summer, but sometimes I fail. Goin' out to anybody's house?"

"I don't know."

The farmer looked at him sharply. A man who did not know—who didn't even guess that he didn't know—was something of a curiosity to him. "Did you expect anybody to meet you?"

"No; I came out to look around a little—thought I might rent a farm if I could strike the right sort of terms."

"Well, I guess you've come to the right place." He turned and pointed far across a meadow to a windmill above tree tops on the brow of a hill. "Mrs. Stuvic, a widow woman, that lives over yonder, has an adjoinin' farm to rent. Get in, and I'll drive you over—goin' that way anyhow, and it shan't cost you a cent. Throw your carpet-bag in there, it won't fall out. Whoa, boys! They won't run away. Yes, sir, as good a little place as there is in the county," he added, turning down a lane. "But the old woman has had all sorts of bad luck with it. That horse would have a fit if he couldn't clap his tail over that line every five minutes. But he won't run away."

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"I don't care if he does," said the stranger.

"Well, you would if you had to pick up milk cans for half a mile. He scattered them from that house up yonder down to that piece of timber day before yesterday."

"Did he run away?"

"Well, he wasn't walkin'."

"Then how do you know he won't run away again?"

"Well, I think I've sorter Christian scienced him."

The stranger laughed, and the farmer clucked an applause of his own wisdom. They had reached a corner where a large white house stood surrounded by blooming cherry trees. Bees hummed, and the air was heavy with sweetness. The stranger took off his hat, and straightening up breathed long. "Delicious," he said. The farmer turned to the right, into another road. "I'm almost glad I'm alive," said the stranger.

"You must have paid your taxes and got it over with," the farmer replied. The stranger did not rejoin. His mind and his eye had gone forth to roam in a piece of woods gently sloping toward the road. He saw the mandrake's low canopy, shading the sod, the crimson flash of a woodpecker through the blue of the air beneath the green of the trees, like a spurt of blood. The farmer's eye, cloyed with the feasts that nature spreads, followed a horse that galloped through the rank tangle of a marsh-dip in a meadow.

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"Over on that other hill is where the old lady lives," he said.

"What did you say her name was?"

"Well, her name *was* first one thing then another, but it's Stuvic now. She's been married several times—a Dutchman the last time, a good-hearted fellow that used to work for her first husband—a good talker in his way, smokin' all the time, and coughin' occasionally fit to kill himself. He liked to read, but he had to keep his books hid in the barn, for the old lady hates print worse than she does a snake. He'd wait till she was off the place, and then he'd go out and dig up his learnin'. But the minute he heard her comin'—and he could hear her a mile—he'd cover up his knowledge again. One day he told her he was goin' to die, and she might have believed him, but he had lied to her a good deal, so she hooted at him; but a few days afterwards he convinced her, and when she found he had told the truth, she jumped into a black dress and cried. Strangest creature that ever lived, I guess; and if you want to come to good terms with her tell her you can't read. She gets on a rampage once in a while, and then she owns the road. I saw her horse-whip a hired man. He had let a horse run away with him. She took the horse, hitched him to a buggy, jumped in, laid on the whip, and drove him at a gallop till he was only too glad to behave himself. Well, you can get out here."

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The stranger got down in front of a white "frame" house near the road. The farmer waved him a good-bye and drove on. From a young orchard behind the house there came the laughter of children at play. In the yard sat an aged man beneath an old apple tree. The place was a mingling of the old and the new, a farm-house with an extension for summer boarders.

As the stranger entered the gate, a tall, heavy, but graceful old woman stepped out upon the veranda. "Wasn't that Steve Hardy that you rode up with?" she asked, gazing at him. The visitor bowed, and was about to answer when she snapped: "Oh, don't come any of your bowin' and scrapin' to me. All I want is the truth."

"The man didn't tell me his name, madam."

"Well, you didn't lose anythin'. It was Steve Hardy, and a bigger liar never trod luther. Come in."

The visitor stepped upon the veranda, and sat down upon a bench. The old woman stood looking at him. "Do you want board?" she asked. He took off his hat and placed it upon the bench beside him. She gazed at his bronzed face, his white brow, and grunted:

"I asked if you wanted board."

"I want something more than board, madam; I want work."

She snapped her eyes at him. "You look more like you was dodgin' it than huntin' for it; yes, you

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bet. I know all about a man lookin' for work. All he wants is a chance to get drunk and lie down in the corner of the fence. Yes, you bet. What sort of work do you want?"

"A man that needs work is not very particular. I've never been lazy enough to look for an easy job."

She leaned toward him; she held out her hand. "Shake! You've earned your supper by sayin' that." He took her hand and smiled. She frowned. "Don't try to look putty at me! No, you bet! It won't work with me."

There came a hoarse cry from the old apple tree. An enormous Dutch girl ran by, laughing. An old man came forward, brushing himself.

"Now what's the matter with you, Lewson?" the old woman asked.

The aged man was in a rage. "That infernal Dutch cow ran over me again. Why the devil can't she walk? What does she want to snort around for like a confounded heifer? If I don't get me a gun and shoot her I'm the biggest liar on the earth."

"Now, you keep still, Lewson; you keep right still!"

"Still! How the deuce am I going to keep still when she's knocking me down all the time? Every time I walk out she runs over me; if I sit down she runs over me; if I go to my room to take a nap she runs against the house and wakes me up. She can't understand a word you say to her—and confound her, I hit her with a stick, and was three days trying to explain it. Why don't you drive her away?"

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A bell at the end of a pole at the kitchen door rang furiously. There came an answering shout from the lake across the meadow. "You've earned your supper," said the old woman. "Yes, you bet!"

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## CHAPTER II.

### LIKED HIM.

Summer was just opening, and there were not many boarders at Mrs. Stuvic's house. But the posting of a railway time-card in the dining-room showed that everything was in readiness. A cook had come from the city to set up her temper against the slouching impudence of the hired man, and an Irish girl stood ready to play favorites at the table. Mrs. Stuvic gave the stranger a seat at the head of the table, and three tired women—hens, worn out with clucking to their boisterous broods—began a whispered comment upon him. One, with a paper novel lying beside her plate, said that he was fiercely handsome. Mrs. Stuvic sat down near him.

"What is your name?" she asked.

"Milford," he answered, and the woman with the novel seemed pleased with the sound.

"Yes, I know," said Mrs. Stuvic, as if she had divined as much, "but your other name. I can't remember outlandish names."

"William."

"Yes, Bill," she said. "Well, Bill, you hinted you wanted work."

The woman with the novel withdrew her attention. Milford shot a glance at her. "Yes," he replied. "The man you say is the biggest liar that ever trod leather told me that you had a farm to rent."

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"Well, land sakes! when did he take to tellin' the truth? But just keep still now and say nothin'. Don't say a word, but keep still, and after supper I'll show you somethin'."

A red-headed boy, the natural incumbrance of the woman with the novel, snorted over his plate, and the old woman set her teeth on edge and looked hard at him. "Yes, well, now what's the matter with you? Who told you to break out?"

"Eat plenty of supper, Bobbie, or you'll be hungry before bed-time," said the mother. "He hasn't had much appetite lately," she added, and the boy tried to look pitiful. Mrs. Stuvic cleared her throat, and under her breath muttered "Calf." The mother looked at Milford. "I beg your pardon," she said, "but are you related to the Milfords that live down in Peoria County?"

"I think not, madam," Milford answered.

"They are such nice people," the woman went on; "distant relatives of mine. Sit up straight, Bobbie. One of the boys has made quite a name as a lawyer—Alfred, I think. And I hear that the daughter, Julia, is about to be married to a foreigner of considerable distinction."

"I've lived down in that part of the country," said a woman with a lubberly cub in her arms, "and I know a family down there named Wilford. They have a son named Alfred, and a daughter Julia who is about to be married to a foreigner."

"Wilford, now let me see," mused the mother of the red boy. "Well, I declare, I believe that is the name!"

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"And that," said Milford, "is no doubt the reason, or at least one of the reasons, why they are not kin to me."

"Oh, you keep still!" Mrs. Stuvic cried, snapping a smile in two. "You didn't have to say that—but when you don't know what to say, Bill, say the next best thing. Yes, you bet! Oh, I know a lot, but I don't tell it all. People come here and think they can fool me, but they can't. Some of them come a turnin' up their noses at the table, when I know as well as I know anythin' that they haven't got half as good at home. We had one family in particular that was always growlin'. And when they went home in the fall I said to myself, I'll just slip into town one of these days, and see what you've got to eat.' I did, and I never set down to such a meal in my life—soup that looked like tea, and birds put on thin pieces of burnt bread. But if you are through, Bill, come with me; I want to show you somethin'."

She put on her bonnet, and as she stepped out told the Irish girl to take Milford's bag upstairs. It was evident that her favorable impression of him extended as far as a night's lodging. They crossed the road, passed through a gate, so heavy on its hinges that it had to be dragged open, and entered a grove of hickory trees. The sward was thick. Here and there were patches of white and pink wild flowers. The sun was going down, and the lake, seen through a gap in the trees, looked like a prairie fire. They came to a broad lane shaded by wild-cherry trees. Milford stopped.

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"I've never seen anything more beautiful than this," he said.

"You just keep still!" she replied. "Yes, and I'll show you somethin' worth lookin' at."

They passed through another gate, went up a graceful rise, into a field, along a broad path hedged with vines and flowers. "Just look at this!" she said. "There ain't better land in this county, and here it lies all gone to waste. The men out here ain't worth the powder and lead it would take to kill 'em. I've rented this farm half a dozen times in the last three years. And what do they do? Get so drunk Sunday that it takes them nearly all week to sober up. I've had to drive 'em away. And the last one! Mercy sakes! The biggest fool that ever made a track; and a hypercrit with it. I found him in the corner of the fence prayin' for rain. Well, I just gathered a bridle and slipped up on him, and if his prayer didn't have a hot end I don't know beans when I see 'em. There was a streak of barbed wire on the fence, and in tryin' to get over he got tangled; and if I didn't give it to him! The idea of a fool gettin' down on his knees tryin' to persuade the Lord to change his mind! All that belongs to me," she went on, waving her hand—"best farm right now in Lake County. And there's the house on the hill, as nice a cottage as you'd want to live in. What do you think of it all?"

"Charming," said Milford. "There's many an old cow in the West that would like to stick her nose up to her eyes into this rich grass."

"You bet, Bill! Are you from the West?"

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"Yes, from all over the West. I used to herd cattle; I tried to raise sheep—and I could have done something, but I was restless and wanted to stir about. But I've got over that. Now I want to work."

"That's the way I like to hear a man talk," she said, lifting the latch of a gate. "I don't believe you'd pray for rain."

"The only thing worth prayin' for, madam, is a soul."

"Good enough! Bill, I like you. They say you have to eat a barrel of salt with a man before you know him, and I reckon it's true. But I've eaten so many barrels of salt with men that I know one as far as I can see him. You don't profess to be so awful honest, do you?"

There was hollowness in his laugh, and bitterness in his smile. "I haven't made any pretensions," he said.

"Well, you just keep still and don't make any," she replied.

Through an orchard, they passed to a house on a hill. It stood in the shade of a great walnut tree. She pointed out the barn, the garden-patch, and the woods that belonged to the place. In the soft light it appeared a paradise to the man from the West, green with grass, purple with flowers. She asked him a question, and he answered with a sigh. Then he told her that he was almost moneyless. He had no capital but his will—his muscle. Such a place would be a godsend to him. In his past life there was much to grieve over—time thrown away, opportunities laughed at, money squandered. He could not help dreaming over his follies, and his dream choked him; so he wanted to work with his hands, to fight against a blunt opposition. He stood bareheaded, his face strong. She looked upon him with admiration. From the first, something about him had caught her odd fancy. She was an implacable enemy and a surprising friend. She put her hand on his arm.

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"Now, don't you fret," she said. "You didn't have to tell me you had no money. That's all right. If you want this farm you can have it. It's no use to me, lyin' this way. Yes, Bill, you can take it right now. Oh, you may go around here, and some of 'em will tell you that a meaner woman never lived—them that's tried to have their own way over me—but the poor and the needy will tell a

different tale. They know where to get somethin' to eat. Well, it's settled. Come on, now, and we'll go back and fix up the particulars when we get time."

He was cheerful as they walked back toward the old woman's home. New tones came out of his voice. There was baritone music in his laugh. She assured him that the details could be arranged without a hitch, that for the present he might rest at ease. He replied that there could be no ease for him, except as he might dig it out of the ground; he seemed to crave a strain of the body to relieve a strain of the mind. She was accustomed to meet all sorts of men, the scum and the leisure of the city, but this man gave her a new feeling of interest. He looked like a man that would fight, and this kindled the fire of her admiration. She loathed a coward. As a girl, she had hunted with her father in the woods of Ohio. One night his house was attacked by roughs, and she had fought with him. To her there was no merit that did not show action; thought that did not lead to action was a waste of the mind. A book was the record of laziness. She tolerated newspapers—in one she had found the announcement that a man whom she hated was dead. Once a man slandered her. She laughed—a sound as cold as the trickling of iced water—and said that she would live to see his last home marked out upon the ground. She did. She was seen in the cemetery, digging. "What are you doing there?" was asked. And she answered: "I'm planting a hog-weed on Thompson's grave." Old Lewson, the man who sat under the apple tree, gave his meager property to his children. They turned him out to die. Mrs. Stuvic took him. "I won't live long," he said. "I'm eighty-three years old." "Don't you fret," she replied; "a man that's as big a fool as you be may live to be a hundred and fifty." And the heart of this old woman was deeply stirred by Milford, not by his misfortunes, his homelessness, the touch of the adventurous vagabond in his face, but by her belief that he possessed an unconquerable spirit.

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"Yes, you keep still, and we'll arrange it all in time," she said, as they entered the hickory grove. "And you needn't tell me anythin' about yourself, nuther. A man's never so big a liar as when he's tellin' things about himself or his enemy. It seems that he can't tell the truth about either one. So you keep still. It's most too late in the season for you to do very much now in the way of plantin', but you can make a good beginnin'. There's stuff enough in the cottage back yonder, and you may take possession to-morrow if you want to. There's a fellow named Bob Mitchell around here that's out of work, and you can hire him to help you. He's a good hand to work—the only trouble is, he thinks he's smart. But he'll follow if there's any one to lead."

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"Madam, I wish I knew how to thank you," said Milford, as he opened the gate leading into the main road. "I came without an introduction, without a single letter—"

"Don't you dare come fetchin' any of your letters to me! There ain't nothin' much easier than to write a lie."

"I'm not going in now. I'll walk about a while."

"Do as you like," she replied. "Your room's at the end up there," she added, pointing. She went into the house, and he turned back into the grove. He sat down with his back against a tree, his hat on the ground. He muttered words to himself; he felt the cool air upon his moist brow; he breathed the perfume of the fresh night.

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## CHAPTER III.

### INTERESTED IN HIM.

Milford took possession of the farm-cottage. The terms were so loose-jointed that the neighbors lamented the old woman's lack of business sense. She told them to keep still. She said that for years she had been following the advice of a lawyer, and that every string of her affairs had come untied. Now she was going to act for herself. It was hinted that her methods would reflect discredit upon the practical sense of the community. She replied that she paid her own taxes.

On the old farm there was a sprout of new life. At break of day the dozing idler heard a song afield; the hired man, going to milk the cows, the city man, snapping his watch, hastening to catch a train, saw the Westerner working, wet with dew. And when the evening's lamps were lighted, the wild notes of his cowboy song rang from the hillside. Farmers going to the village of a Saturday afternoon stopped at his fence to engage him in talk, but he answered their questions as he went on with his work. One day they heard him say to his hired man: "Go to the house, Mitchell, and rest a while. You are worn out." A man whose table was light, whose shipments of veal and poultry to town were heavy, and who had been requested to put a better quality of water into his milk, declared that he had lived too long and had too much experience of the world to be fooled by a man from the West. He had committed some crime—murder, no doubt—and Steve Hardy was censured for hauling him over from the station. This surmise reached the ears of Mrs. Stuvic. She waited till she saw the wise man driving past her house, and she stopped him in the road.

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"I'm glad you know all about my man over there, Hawkins."

"Why, I don't know anything about him."

"Oh, yes, you said he'd committed murder."

"No, I said most likely; but I didn't want it repeated, for, of course, I don't know."

"Yes, you bet! And there's a good many things you don't want repeated. You don't want it repeated that you put old Lewson's brats up to turning him out of the house."

"Look here, madam, I didn't do anything of the sort. I simply said I didn't see how they could live with him; and I didn't, either."

"Well, it's all right. The old man's got a better home than he ever had; and you needn't worry yourself about my man over yonder. He couldn't sell as much milk from five cows as you can do, and I don't believe you can keep it up unless we have rain pretty soon, but he knows how to attend to his own business, and that's somethin' you've never been able to learn."

"Madam, if you'll step from in front of my horses I'll drive on."

"Yes, and mighty glad of the opportunity. You stir trouble, and are the first one to hitch up and drive out of it. Now go on, and don't you let me hear of any more murder stories." [Pg 24]

Mrs. Blakemore, mother of the red boy, would not presume to say that there was a stain on Milford's character; but he was undoubtedly peculiar, with an air which bespoke a constant effort to hide something. She knew, however, that there was good blood somewhere in his family. She believed in blood. Her husband had failed in business, and she could afford to despise trade. One Sunday, with her vacant-eyed husband and her red tormentor, she halted at Milford's cottage. He was sitting on the veranda, with the billows of a Sunday newspaper about him on the floor. She introduced her husband, who nodded. She spoke of the fervor of the day and the ragged cloud-skirts flaunting in the sky. She thought it must be going to rain. In the city a rain was wasted, a sloppy distress; but in the country it was a beautiful and refreshing necessity. In each great drop there was a stanza of sentiment.

Milford's eyes twinkled. "You ought to go to a mining-camp," he said. "Men who couldn't parse would call you a poem."

She turned to her husband. "George, do you hear that? Isn't that sweet? So unaffected, too." George grunted; he was thinking of the receiver that had had charge of his affairs. His wife continued, speaking to Milford: "In my almost hothouse refinement, I have longed to see the rude chivalry of the West—where a rhythm of true gallantry beats beneath a woolen shirt." [Pg 25]

"Yes," said Milford, "and beneath a linen shirt, too. The West is just as wide but not so woolen as it was."

"Oh, what quaint conceits! George, do you hear them? George, dear."

"George, dear" turned a tired eye upon her. Affection seeking to console a loved one sometimes chooses an unseasonable moment for the exercise of its tender office. She felt the look of her husband's worry-rusted eye; a memory of his weary pacing up and down the floor at night came to her, of his groans upon a comfortless bed, his sighs at breakfast, his dark brow as he went forth to try again to save his credit. She thought of this; she felt that at this moment he needed her help. And affectionately she put her hand upon his arm, and said: "You have met reverses, George, but you've still got me." And George muttered: "You bet I have." She glanced at him as if she felt that he said it with a lack of enthusiasm, as if it were a sad fact acknowledged rather than a possession declared; and she would have replied with a thin sentiment strained through the muslin of a summer book, but George turned away. She followed and he opened a gate and halted, waiting for her to pass through. The boy crawled under the fence. She scolded the youngster, brushed at his clothes, and said to George:

"He is almost a gentleman."

"Who is so far gone as that?"

"Why, the man back there on the veranda."

"I don't know what you mean by almost a gentleman." [Pg 26]

"Oh, George, don't you know that there are distinctions?"

"But I don't see how a man can be almost a gentleman. You might as well say that a man almost has money."

"Bobbie, don't try to climb over that stump. There's a poison vine on it. Money is not everything, George."

"Comes devilish near it."

"No, George. Money is not love."

"Well, I don't know about that," he said, in a way implying that he did know.

"Don't be cynical, dear," she replied. "We are both young; we have everything before us."

"Everything we had is behind us."

She pulled upon his arm, and kissed his dry cheek. "Don't be downcast. Everything will come right."

Mitchell, the hired man, came out upon the veranda. "A sappy pea-vine and a dried pea-stick," said Milford, pointing toward George and his wife.

"He looks like he's tired," said the hired man.

"Yes, a fly in a pot of jam. She's too sweet for him. He ought to break loose from her and run wild for a while—ought to rough it out West on fat sow bosom and heifer's delight. Never were married, were you, Bob?"

"Well, not for any length of time. I did marry a girl over near Antioch once, but shortly afterwards they took me up for sellin' liquor without a license, and when I got through with the scrape I found my wife was gone with a feller to Kansas."

"Did you ever hear of her?"

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"Oh, yes, she writ to me. She wanted to come back, but I scratched her word that I'd try to jog along without her. I don't guess women are exactly what they used to be. I reckon the bicycle has changed 'em a good bit."

"They want money, Bob. That's what's the matter with 'em."

"Well, they've got about all I ever had, them and liquor together, and still they don't seem to be satisfied. Ever married, Bill?"

"No. But I was on the edge of falling in love once. She squirted poison at me out of her eyes, and I shook in the knees. Her smile kept me awake two nights, and on the third morning I got on my pony, said good-bye to the settlement, and rode as hard as I could. I don't suppose she really saw me—but I saw her, and that was enough. Well, I believe I'll go over and chin the old woman."

Mrs. Stuvic was walking up and down the yard. A number of new boarders had arrived, and she was in a great flurry. She was ever on the lookout for new-comers, but was never prepared for them. She told every one to keep still; she spoke in bywords that barked the shins of profanity. Just as Milford came up, some one told her that her hired man was lying out in the grove, drunk and asleep. Upon her informer she bent a recognition of virtue. It was not exactly a grin. The boarders called it her barbed-wire smile. She thanked him with a nod and a courtesy caught up from a memory of her grandmother. She snatched a buggy whip and sallied forth into the grove. Milford followed her. She told him to stand back. She swore she would give it to him if he presumed to interfere. She knew her business. The Lord never shut her eyes to a duty that lay in front of her. The hired man went howling through the woods, and she returned to the house, smiling placidly. She was always better humored when she had kept faith with duty.

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"Bill," she said to Milford, "tell those women who you are. They are all crazy to know."

"Why didn't you tell them?"

"Well, how was I to tell 'em somethin' I didn't know? You haven't told me. Who are you, Bill? Come, speak up. I've fooled with you long enough. Come, who are you?"

"A Yankee from the West."

"Shut up. Go on away from here. Who told you to come? Did anybody send after you?" By this time they had reached the veranda. A kitten came out to meet her. She called to the Dutch girl to bring some milk in a saucer. "Poor little wretch," she said. "Well, sir, it do beat all. About a week ago I found that I'd have to drown a litter of kittens. I had a barrel of water ready at the corner of the house. I got all the kittens together except one. I couldn't find him. After a while, I heard him mewling under the house. I looked under and see him fastened, and he couldn't get out. He was nearly starved. I said, 'You little wretch, I'll fix you,' and I crawled under after him. I had a time at gettin' him, too; and when I did get him he looked so pitiful that I gave him some milk. Then I gave the others milk, and didn't drown 'em. I have provided homes for all except this one, and I'm goin' to keep him. Here, lap your milk."

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Old Lewson sat beneath an apple tree. Milford went out to talk with him. The old man looked up, his eyes red under white lashes. His hat was on the ground, and in it were two eggs.

"My dinner," said he, pointing to the eggs. "If I didn't listen for the cackling of the hens I'd starve to death. I can't eat anything but eggs; and they must be fresh. That infernal Dutch girl spoiled my supper last night. She ran over me, as usual, and broke my eggs. I wish she was dead."

"They ought to hobble her like a horse," said Milford.

"They ought to break her bones, and I would if I was strong enough," the old man declared. "She kindled a fire with my spiritualist books. Are you a spiritualist?"

"No, I'm merely an ordinary crank."

"Fool, you mean," said the old fellow. "A man that shuts his eyes to the truth is a fool. See this?" He took from his pocket a pale photograph, and handed it to Milford. "That's a picture of my wife, taken ten years after the change. She came to see me not long ago, and I cut off a piece of her dress. Here it is." From a pocketbook he took a piece of white silk.

"They dress pretty well over there," said Milford, examining it.

"Yes. She wove it herself."

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"Looks as if it might have been done by a fine machine."

"It was; it was woven in the loom of her mind. Over there, whatever the mind wills is done. But you can't make fools understand it."

"I suppose not. What will become of the Dutch girl when she goes over?"

"They'll make a dray-horse of her. Here comes the old woman. She pretends she don't believe in it. But she does. She can't help herself."

The old fellow hid his eggs. She looked at him sharply. "He'd rather hear the cackle of a hen than a church organ," she said to Milford.

"Yes, it means more," the old man replied.

"Well, you won't rob my hens much longer. Your days are numbered."

"So are yours, ma'am."

"Now, don't you fret. I'll plant flowers on your grave."

"See that you don't plant hog-weeds."

"What difference will it make to you? Your soul will be gone. But what will you do over there? You'd be out of place makin' silk dresses. If you do make any send me one. I'll want it when I marry again."

"Why do you want to dress up to meet a fool?"

"Shut your rattle-trap. It will be a wise man that marries me. If Bill here was a little older, I'd set my cap for him. Wouldn't I, Bill?"

"I don't doubt it. We can all set a trap for a fox, but it takes a shrewd trapper to catch him."

The old man chuckled. She looked at him and said that he would have been hauled off long ago, but that the devil didn't care to hitch up for one—Yankee-like, wanting a load whenever he drove forth. "But before you go, Lewson, I want you to promise me one thing,—that you will come back. You've got me half-way into the notion that you can."

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"I will come back the third night, ma'am," he replied, his voice earnest. "When my body has been in the grave three days I will come back to my room and meet you there."

Milford turned away. The old woman followed him. "Do you believe he can come back?" she asked.

His sharp eyes cut round at her, like the swing of a scythe. "An old log may learn to float up-stream," he said. She stepped in front of him. "You've done somethin' that you don't want known," she declared. "As smart a man as you wouldn't come out here and work on a farm for nothin'."

"I don't expect to work for nothing."

"Come into the house, Bill. Those women want to get acquainted with you."

"Why don't they get acquainted with their husbands?"

"I know it," she replied, with a look, and in a younger eye the light would have been a gleam of mischief, but with her it was a glint almost of viciousness. "I know it. They are always after a curiosity. They've got it into their heads that you've done some sort of devilry, and they want to talk to you. One of them said her husband was such a dear, dull business man. And nearly all of them hate children."

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"I hate a woman that hates children," Milford replied, and the old woman said, "I know it."

Mrs. Blakemore, the tired George, and the tugging boy came into the yard. The woman's eyes brightened when she saw Milford. It seemed that the other women had commissioned her to sound his mysterious depth. His keen eyes, his sharp-cut beard, a sort of sly unconcern marked him a legitimate summer exploration. Men from the city came and went, shop-keepers, tailors, machinists, lawyers, drivelings of hard times and the hope of a business revival, and no particular attention was paid to them, but here was a man with a hidden history. Perhaps he was a deserter from the regular army; doubtless he had killed an officer for insulting him. This was a sweet morsel and they made a bon-bon of it.

"I hope you are not going just because we came," said Mrs. Blakemore to Milford. "George, do take that rocker and sit down. You look so tired. Go away, Bobbie. You are such a pest."

A straining voice in the sitting-room and the tin-pan tones of a piano were hushed, and out upon the veranda came several women. Milford was introduced to them. Some of them advanced with a smile, and some hung back in a sweet dread of danger. Milford sat down on a corner of the veranda with his feet on the ground. A wagon load of beer-drinkers, singing lustily, drove past the house. From the lake came the report of a gun, some one firing at a loon. There seemed to be no law to enforce respect for the day which the Puritan called Sabbath, and which the austerity of his creed had made so cold and cheerless. On Sunday night there had been a hop on the shore of the lake, and a constable had danced with a skillet-wiper from town. The children of the New Englander sell their winter piety for the summer dollar.

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"I can't conceive of anything more delicious than this atmosphere," said Mrs. Blakemore. "It's heavenly down by the lake. And in the woods there are such beautiful ferns. Are you fond of ferns, Mr. Milford?"

"Don't believe I ever ate any," Milford answered, and the women screamed with laughter. One of them spoke of such charming impudence, and George looked at her with his cankered eye. Mrs. Stuvic said, "Oh, you keep still!" The Dutch girl passed at a spraddling gallop, setting a dog at a chicken condemned to death. Old Lewson shouted and shrank behind a tree. Mrs. Blakemore's thin hand was seen in the air. It was a command, and silence fell.

"Would you mind telling us something of the wild life in the West?"

"There's no wild life in the West now," Milford answered. "It is there, as it is nearly everywhere, a round of stale dishonesty."

"George, dear, do you hear that? Stale dishonesty! Really, there is thought in that. Western men are so apt in their phrasing. They aren't afraid of critical judgment. But they are too picturesque to be simple. They are like an old garden run to blossoming weeds—the impudent new springing from the venerable old. Did you hear me, George?"

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"How's that?" George asked, looking up from a dream of trouble.

"Oh, I shall not repeat it. Mr. Milford, nearly all my thoughts are wasted on him. His mind is occupied by things sterner but not nearer true." George grunted something that sounded like "bosh." She smiled and tapped him on the arm. Her face was thin but pretty. Milford gave her an admiring look. She caught it in an instant and drooped her eyes at him. Some of the women saw it and pulled at one another, standing close together. But the old woman did not see it. Her eye was not set for so fine a mischief. A Mrs. Dorch began to hum a tune. She left off to tell Milford that she had a sister in Dakota. She had gone out as a school-teacher, and had been married by a rancher. His name was Lampton. It was possible that Mr. Milford might know him. He did not, but it gave her a chance to talk, and the slim Mrs. Blakemore began to droop her eyes. The man was nothing to her. She wouldn't stoop to set up a conquest over him, so much in love was she with her husband, but what right had this woman to cut in?

"Oh, I could never think of talking commonplaces with a man from the wilds," she said. "He may never have read poetry, but he is a lover of it. Tell me, is it true that certain flowers disappeared with the buffalo?"

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"I don't know, ma'am, but a good deal of grass disappeared with him."

It was a cue to laugh, and they laughed. Mrs. Blakemore said that Milford was becoming intentionally droll. She much preferred unconscious drollery.

Attention was now given to three men who came across the meadow from the lake. One of them proudly held up a string of sun-fish. A fisherman's ear is keen-set for flattery. The women knew this, and they uttered "ohs" and "ahs" of applause. The fishermen came up, everybody talking at once, and Milford slipped away. He passed through the hickory grove and turned into the broad lane leading to the lake. He saw Mrs. Stuvic's hired man, sitting under a tree, muttering, a red streak across his face.

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## CHAPTER IV.

### HE DID NOT COME.

The neighbors continued to speculate and to ply Mrs. Stuvic with questions concerning Milford. Men who had spent many a rainy day in the hay-mow, gambling, knew that he had played poker. An old man, with a Rousseau love for botanizing, had been found dead in the woods, with five red leaves in his hand. And Milford had said: "The poor old fellow made his flush and died." They knew that he was brave, for, with a stick of brushwood, he had attacked a dog reported to be mad. But they believed, also, that he had something heavy on his mind, for they had seen him walking about in the woods at night, once when a hard rain was beating him. Steve Hardy, the man who had hauled the stranger from the station, was caught in a storm one night, and a flash of lightning revealed Milford standing gaunt in the middle of a marsh. But he had never attempted to borrow money in the neighborhood, and of all the virtues held dear by the rural Yankee, restraint in the matter of borrowing is the brightest. "Yes, sir, old Brady was as mean a man as ever lived among us, but, sir, he died out of debt." Old Brady could have illumined his death-bed with no brighter light.

One evening, while Milford and Mitchell were at supper, the hired man said: "They keep on askin' me all sorts of questions about you. I never saw folks so keen. They are like spring sheep after salt. I've got so I throw up my hands whenever I meet any of 'em in the road."

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Milford reached over and turned down the ragged blaze of the smoking lamp. "Am I the first stranger that ever happened along here?"

"It would look that way. But there is a sort of a somethin' about you, Bill. I heard Henwood's

daughter say you was mighty good-lookin', but she hasn't got much sense." Milford looked up with a smile. "No, she ain't," Mitchell went on. "And if her daddy was to die she'd have to have a gardeen appointed. But to-day, while I was gettin' a drink at the windmill, I heard two or three of Mrs. Stuvic's women standin' over in the road talkin'. One of 'em said that she had a cousin that's a detective in Chicago, and she was goin' to bring him out here and let him investigate you just for fun."

Milford turned down the light. "I'll throw this thing into the road the first thing you know. Bring a detective, eh? All right, let her bring him."

"What will you do, Bill?"

"Knock him down if he gets in my road."

"I guess that's the way to look at it. But have you got any cause to be afraid of a detective, Bill?"

"If I had, do you suppose I'd tell you?"

"Well, I don't know why. We're workin' here together, and I wouldn't say anythin' about it. What did you do, Bill?"

"Stole a saw-mill."

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"You don't say so! What did you want with a saw-mill?"

"To rip out new territory—I wanted to make a state."

"That's all right. You're guyin' me. But say, where did you get your education?"

"I stole that, too. Did you ever hear of a French marquise that ran stage lines and shot fellows out West? Well, I robbed his ranch, and carried off a cook-book. That's how I learned to boil salt pork."

"That's where you learned how to feed a fellow on guff. I'm givin' it to you straight. I want to know, for they say that a fellow never gets too old to learn, and I'd like to have education enough to get out of hard work."

"You don't see me out of it, do you?"

"No, but I guess you could do somethin' else if you wanted to. Did you go to school much when you was a boy?"

"I saw the worn doorsteps in the old part of Yale, for two days, and then I turned away and went West. My father died, and I didn't want to be a tax on mother, so I decided to shift for myself."

"Was it a good shift?"

"I can't say it was. Are you going to bed?" Milford asked, as Mitchell got up from the table.

"No, not now. I've got an engagement to take the Dutch girl out in a boat."

"She'll upset your craft and drown you."

"I'm goin' to take the scow."

He went out whistling a light tune, but dragging his feet heavily, for he had worked hard all day, keeping pace with Milford's bounding energy. Milford sat musing, and his brow was not clear. From behind the clock on the mantel-piece, he took a newspaper, and strove to read it by the smoky light, but his mind wandered off. He went out and sat on the grass beneath the walnut tree. The night was hot. The slow air fumbled among the leaves. Far in the sultry west was an occasional play of lightning, the hot eye of day peeping back into the sweltering night. He heard some one coming up the hill, talking. It was Mrs. Stuvic's voice. She arose into the dim light, and he saw that she was alone. He called to her, and she came forward at a faster gait, still talking. "Wouldn't believe me—couldn't get him to believe me, but he does now—yes, you bet!"

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"What's the matter, ma'am?"

"Old Lewson—told him he was dyin'—wouldn't believe me. He's dead. Conscience alive! and they were thumpin' on the piana all the time. The hired man can't be found since I gave him the larrupin'. I hope he's drowned himself. He's no account on the face of the earth, and I wish now I'd kept Mitchell when I had him. He seems to work well enough for you. But what I want you to do is to go to the old man's daughter and tell her. She lives about two miles down the road, just beyant the second corners—white house to the right. Come on with me. The buggy'll be hitched up by the time we get to the house. Yes, set right there, lookin' right at me, with his chin droppin' down. I says, 'Lewson, you are dyin'.' And he mumbled that he wan't. But I reckon he knows now whether he was or not."

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She talked nearly all the way over, sobbing at times, and then hardening herself with scolding. The buggy was ready in the road. Low tones came from the veranda. Through the shrubbery along the fence could be seen the ghost-like outlines of women dressed in white. A dog howled under the old apple tree.

"Wait," said the old woman, as Milford gathered up the lines. "I want you to kill that infernal dog before you go. Never set down under that tree before in his life, and now that the poor old man's

dead he goes there to howl, as if everythin' wan't dismal enough anyway. Get out and I'll fetch the gun."

"Oh, no. Don't kill him. He doesn't know any better. By the way, what's the name of the woman I am going to see?"

"Now, just look at that! If I haven't forgot her name I'm the biggest fool on earth. Did you ever see anythin' like that? If that confounded John, the hired man, was here, he'd know. I'm almost sorry now that I licked him. But if I ever ketch him again I'll give it to him for treatin' me this way when I need him. Well, go on, and stop at the house I told you. And if that horse don't want to go, lick the life out of him."

Milford drove off, and the dog jumped over the fence and came trotting along behind the buggy. It did not take long to reach the place. A man came to the door in answer to Milford's knock. There was no attempt to soften the news. "I came to tell you that old Mr. Lewson is dead," said Milford. And there was no effort on the man's part to show surprise. "Well, I'm not an undertaker," he replied.

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"But you married his daughter."

"But not with his consent or good-will. He was nothing to us. Well," he added, as Milford continued to stand there, "anything else?"

"Yes, just a word or two more. I want to tell you that you are a brute and a coward; and if you'll just step out here I'll mop up the ground with you."

The man stepped back and shut the door. Milford came away, the muscles in his arms hard with a desire to fight. He thought of the tenderness of a mining camp, of the cowboy's manly tear, of hard men who were soft toward a dead stranger. "Hearts full of cold ashes," he mused, bitterly. "And how can it be in a place so beautiful? An infidel from the sand-hills would here cry out that there is a God, an artist God. And some of these wretches would teach him that there is a hell. Well, I'm going to fight it out. I don't see any other way. I guess I'm a fool, but I've got that thing to do."

Mrs. Stuvic tiptoed in her rage. "Horton," she said, almost dancing in the road. "That's the scoundrel's name. And don't you dare to judge us by him. He's a stranger here, too. I hope the hogs will root him up and crack his bones. Well, go on to bed, Bill. I guess the old man can take care of himself till mornin'."

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Early the next day, the old man's daughter came, stricken with grief and remorse. She said that her husband had forced her to treat her father cruelly. She knelt beside the poor old relic of weary bones, and prayed that the Lord might forgive her. Mrs. Stuvic relented. "Come," she said, leading the daughter away. "We believe you, and won't hold it against you, but I'll never love you till you poison that man of yours. There, now, don't whimper. Everythin's all right."

The sympathy of the community was aroused, and it was a genuine sympathy. Milford found that this neighborhood was very much like the rest of the world, lacking heart only in places. He stood at the grave, listening to the faltering tones of an aged man, and he muttered to himself, "I've got to do that one thing."

Old Lewson had convinced Mrs. Stuvic of the truth of spiritualism. She was attracted by a faith that entailed no prayers and no church-going. It left her free, not to lie down in the green pastures of the poetic psalmist, but to tramp rough-shod among the nettles of profanity. The church advised that no eye should be turned upon wine, rich in deceitful color, and the old woman was not always sober. Therefore, she took up old Lewson's faith, first because it was easy, and afterward because it seemed natural that she should come back and haunt her enemies. More than once she had been heard to say, gazing after some one driving along the road, "Oh, but I'll make it lively for him when I come back! He shan't sleep a wink!" But to the old man she did not make a complete confession of her conversion to his faith till she saw death staring out of his eyes, and then she reminded him of his promise to return on the third night, and make himself known to her. Had there remained in her heart any fag-end of rebellion gainst the pliable tenets of his credulous doctrine, the last look that he gave her would have driven it out. "I believe you, Lewson," she gasped, when his wrinkled chin sank upon his withered breast.

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The third night came. She did not give her secret to the boarders; she was not afraid of the heat of an argument or the scorch of a fight, but the thought of ridicule's cold smile made her shudder. She hated education, and was afraid of its nimble trickery. There was more of insult in a word which she did not understand than in a term familiarly abusive. But she told Milford. He was under obligations, and dared not scoff. She requested him to sit upon the veranda, to wait for her coming from the spirit's presence chamber. She drove the Dutch girl to bed, not in the house, but in an outlying cottage. In the dining-room she whispered to Milford, ready to turn him out upon the veranda. The clock's internals growled the five-minute verge of twelve. She turned Milford out, and hastened into Lewson's room. She sat down in a rocking chair, her nervous hands fidgeting in her lap. Spirits keep their promises best in the dark, and she had not lighted a lamp. Moonbeams fell through the window, a ladder of light, upon which a spirit might well descend to earth. The clock in the dining-room struck twelve. The dog howled under the apple tree.

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"Lewson, are you here?"

Two eggs on a shelf caught the light of the moon. She started. Surely, they were not there a moment ago. Was the old man robbing hens' nests in the spiritual world? A breeze stirred, and there was a whisper of drapery at the window.

"Lewson, is that you?"

She glanced again at the eggs. Hadn't they moved? A midnight cock crew, and she started. Why should he crow just as she glanced at the eggs? She waited.

"Lewson, oh, Lewson! Do you hear me? Don't you remember your promise? Come, now, don't treat me this way. You know how hard it was for me to believe in your doctrine. You know how I've tried to have some sort of religion. And now, please don't knock down all the props. Haven't I been kind to you? Didn't I take you when nobody else would? Then help me, Lewson. Give me something to cling to. Just say one word—just one—somethin' to let me know you have told the truth. I want the truth, that's all I want, Lewson. You haven't come. No, you haven't, and you needn't say you have. You can't come, and you know it. Well, I'm goin' now. Are you comin'? No, you ain't. You are an old fraud, that's what you are." She flounced out upon the veranda, and said to Milford: "Go to bed. There never was a bigger liar than that old fool."

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## CHAPTER V.

### NEEDED HIS SPIRITUAL HELP.

Early the next morning, before the clanging bell had shattered the boarder's dream, the old woman hastened to Milford's cottage. When she surprised him at breakfast, he thought that possibly the old man might have called at some time during the night, and that she had come to bring the good news, but this early hope was killed by the darkness of her brow. "I've come over to tell you that if ever you say a word about what happened last night, I'll drive you out of the county," she said, her lips parted and her teeth sharp-set.

"Why, nothing did happen," he replied with a laugh.

"No, you bet! But don't you ever dare to say that I expected anythin' to happen. I won't allow any old man, dead or alive, to make a monkey of me. Well, I'll eat breakfast with you. What, is this all you've got, just bread and bacon? Conscience alive! you are livin' hard."

"I can't afford anything else," he replied, looking down upon his rough fare.

"Well, you ought to get rich at this rate. There's not one man in a thousand that would be willin' to put up with it. What's your aim, anyway?"

"To make money."

"Money! It's some woman, that's what it is. Well, you're a fool. What thanks do you reckon she'll ever give you? She'll growl because you didn't make more. I'll get back. I don't like your grub. But recollect, now," she added, as she turned toward the door, "that if you say a word about what I expected to happen last night, I'll drive you out of the county." She went out, but her head soon reappeared at the door. "Bill," she said, "there's a sucker born every minute."

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"And sometimes twins," he replied. She leaned against the door-facing to laugh, not in the jollity of good-humor, but in the sharp and racking titter of soured self-pity. "Sometimes twins—yes, you bet!"

"If I didn't have a word for it that I couldn't dispute, I'd think that I was the weakling of a set of triplets," said Milford.

"Oh, you'll do. There's no flies buzzing around you, I tell you. Well, I'll leave you, sure enough now."

For a time, he clattered the rough dishes, clearing them out of the way, despising the work—a loathing shared by all human beings. Mitchell was at the barn, among the horses, and there came the occasional and almost rhythmic tap, tap, tap of his currycomb against the thin wall. In the damp sags of the corn field, the plow could not be used with advantage, and Milford assigned to himself the work of covering this territory with a hoe. The advisory board, men who drove past in milk wagons, condemned it as a piece of folly. They said that a man might wear himself out among the clods, and to no great purpose, either; but Milford appeared to rejoice in his conquest over the combative soil. Steve Hardy said that he must be doing penance in the hot sun for some crime committed in the cool shade. But the old woman had given it out that her man was working for a woman, and the women commended it. How soft is the voice of woman when she speaks of one who sweats for her sex! They sat upon the veranda, watching Milford as he delved in the blaze of the sun. It was a romance. Afar off there must be a sighing woman, waiting for him. Mrs. Blakemore could see her, and she sighed with her, watching the hero dealing the hard licks of love. With her scampering son, she crossed the field, going toward the lake, the morning after the expected visit from Lewson. She was determined to speak to Milford. Mrs. Stuvic had just said, "That man is killin' himself for a woman." On she came, her feet faring ill among the clods. She stumbled and laughed, and the boy, in budding derision of woman's weakness, shouted

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contemptuously.

"Why did you come across this rough place?" Milford asked, planting his hoe in front of him. To her he was a man behind the flag-staff of his honor.

"Because it's so much nearer to the lake," she answered. The boy cried out that he had found a rattlesnake, and proceeded to attack with clods a rusty toad.

"Come away, Bobbie. He'll bite you." She saw that it was a toad, and she knew that it would not bite him; but motherly instinct demanded that she must warn him. "Oh, it's such a jaunt, coming across here. Really, I don't see how you can stand it to work so long in the hot sun. Let me bring you some cool water."

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She felt that she ought to do something for him. He smiled, and glanced down at her thin-shod feet. He felt that there was genuineness in this slim creature, and he was moved to reply: "No, I thank you. Your sympathy ought to relieve a man of thirst."

"Really, that is so nice of you. No wonder all the women like you when you say such kind things. But there is one thing I wish, Mr. Milford—I wish you'd taken more to my husband. He's awfully low-spirited, and I'm so distressed about him. He's worried nearly to death in town, and he comes out here and mopes about. I didn't know but you might say something to interest him. He'll be out again this evening. Will you please come over to the house to see him?"

He thought of his weariness after his day of strain, of his own melancholy that came with the shades of night. He thought that, in comparison with himself, the man ought to be boyishly happy; but he told her that to come would give him great pleasure.

"Oh, I'm so glad to hear you say so. Tell him of fights, of men that wouldn't give up, but fought their way out of hard luck. Tell him what you are doing. I know it's preposterous to ask you, but will you do it?"

Her eyes were as bright as the dew caught by the cobweb, shaded by the clod, he thought—as he stood there leaning on the handle of his hoe, looking at her; and he read woman's great chapter of anxious affection. "I will tell him of a man who failed in everything, and then found that he had a fortune in his wife," he said. She put out her hand toward him, and snatched it back to hide her eyes for a moment. She turned toward the boy, and in a cool voice commanded him not to romp so hard over the rough ground. Milford saw a soul that loved to be loved, that lived to be loved, a soul that may not be the most virtuous, but which is surely the most beautiful. He did not presume to understand women; he estimated her by a "hunch" as to whether she was good or bad. He remembered that he had jumped upon his pony and galloped off to the further West, to keep from falling in love with one. And since that time he had felt himself safe, so into this woman's eyes he could look without fear.

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"Yes," she said, "tell him that love is the greatest estate. It will make him think, coming from a man. Poor George was in the hardware business, and he failed not long ago, and I don't know why, for I'm sure I saved every cent I could. What you tell him will have a good deal of weight."

Milford had to laugh at this. "I don't know why," said he.

"Because you are a good man."

Milford sneered. "Madam, I'm a crank." He begged her pardon for his harshness. Her forgiveness came with a smile. He told her that he was as morbid as a mad dog, and he said it with such energy that she drew back from him. "But you won't fail to see George, will you? Come on, Bobbie. Oh, I forgot to tell you of some new arrivals—a Mrs. Goodwin, wife of a well-known doctor in town, and her companion, one of the handsomest young women I ever saw—a Norwegian girl, as graceful as one of her native pines. You won't fail to come, will you? Good-bye."

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The evening was sultry, with a lingering smear of red in the western sky. At the supper table Milford nodded in his chair. The hired man spoke to him, and he looked up, his batting eyes fighting off sleep.

"Them slashes have about got the best of you, haven't they, Bill? I'd let that corn go before I'd dig my life out among them tough clods. I'm givin' it to you straight."

"I don't doubt it. But it will pay in the end. I've come to the conclusion that all hard work pays. It pays a man's mind, and he couldn't get a much better reward. But I'd like to go to bed, just the same."

"Why don't you? Not goin' to dig any more to-night, are you?"

"No, but I've got to go over to Mrs. Stivic's to see a man."

"A man?" Mitchell asked, with a wink.

"I said a man."

"Yes, I know you said a man."

"Then why not a man?"

"Well, I don't know, only it seems to me that if I was as tired as you look I wouldn't go to see no

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man's man."

"How about any woman's woman?"

"Well, that's different. You can put off seein' a man, and you might put off seein' a woman, but you don't want to. But maybe you ain't as big a chump about a woman as I am."

Milford said that the wisest man among wise men could easily be a fool among women. Solomon's wisdom, diluted by woman, became a weak quality. "Except once," he added, taking down his pipe from the clock shelf, "and that was when he called for a sword to cut a child in two to divide it between two mothers; but if the question had been between himself and a woman, I don't know but he'd have got the worst of it."

It was the hired man's turn to clear away the dishes, and Milford sat smoking in a muse. Night flies buzzed about the lamp, and the mosquito, winged sting of the darkness, sang his sharp tune over the rain-water barrel beneath the window. The hired man put away the dishes, and went into his shell-like bedroom, a thin addition built against the house. Milford heard him sit upon the edge of his bed, heard his heavy shoes drop upon the floor, heard him stretch out upon the creaking slats to lie a log till the peep of day. The tired laborer's pipe fell to the floor. He got up with a straining shrug of his stiff shoulders, snatched off his sticking garments, bathed in a tub, put on clean clothing, and set out to keep his appointment. He muttered as he walked along the road. He halted upon a knoll in the oat-field, and stood to breathe the cool air from the low-lying meadow. As he drew near to the house, he heard the shouts of children and the imploring tones of nurses and mothers, begging them to go to bed. A lantern hanging under the eaves of the veranda shed light upon women eager to hear gossip from the city apartment house, and men, who, though breathing a fresh escape from business, had already begun to inquire as to the running of the trains. In the dooryard, a dull fire smoked in a tin pan,—a "smudge" to drive off the mosquitoes. Some one flailed the piano. The Dutch girl, singing a song of the lowlands, was grabbing clothes off a line, with no fear of running over an old man. Mrs. Blakemore and George were sitting at a corner of the veranda, apart from the general nest of gossipers. Bobbie had been bribed to bed. The woman got up and gave Milford her hand. In his calloused palm it felt like the soft paw of a kitten. George nodded with an indistinct grunt.

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"Well, how is everything?" Milford asked.

"Rotten," George answered. His wife sighed, and brushed off a white moth that had lighted on his coat sleeve. "But it will get better," she said. "Don't you think so, Mr. Milford?"

"Bound to," Milford agreed. "I'm a firm believer in everything coming out all right. I've seen it tested time and again. Hope is the world's best bank account." George looked at him. "That's all right enough," he admitted.

"Hope is the soul's involuntary prayer," his wife observed, and he looked at her. "That's all well enough, too," said he, "but what's the use of tying a ribbon around your neck in a snow-storm, when what you need is an overcoat? A man can wrap all the hope in the world around himself, and then freeze to death."

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"That's true," said Milford, catching sight of the woman's eyes as she drew a long breath, "but hope may lead him out of the storm. Pardon me, but I infer that you've met business reverses."

"Struck the ceiling," said George.

"How often?"

"Isn't once enough?"

"Yes, but I've struck it a hundred times. I've been kept on the bounce, like a ball."

"That's all right, but do you feel thankful for it?"

"Well, my heart isn't bursting with gratitude, but it might have been worse—I might have stuck to the ceiling. When you throw a dog into the water, he always shakes himself when he comes out. It's a determination to be dry again. And that's the way a man ought to do—shake himself every time he's thrown."

"I don't know but you're right. What are you doing here, anyway?"

"Rooting like a hog for something to eat. And I've not only failed in nearly everything I undertook, but I've been a fool besides. But I've got sense enough to know that it has all been my own fault. I believe that, if a man's in good health, it's always his own fault if he don't succeed. I could sit down and growl at the world; I could wish I had it under my heel to grind the life out of it; and the truth is, we all have a part of it under our heels, and if we keep on grinding we'll make an impression. I am what you might call a national egotist. I believe that nearly everything lies within the range of an American. He may do wrong—he does do wrong. Sometimes he does a great wrong, but nine times out of ten he tries to make it right. I believe that the Yankee has more conscience than other men. He may keep it well sheathed, but after a while the edge eats through the scabbard and cuts him. He works with an object. They say it is to make money. That's true, but the money is to serve a purpose, a heart, a conscience."

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George turned about in his chair, and looked with keen interest at the laboring man. "Look here, you are a man of brains. Why do you stay here and dig? You are fitted for something better."

Milford smiled at him. "How often that's said of a man who's not fitted for anything. As I remarked to your wife, I'm a crank. But I've got an object—there's something that must be done, and I'm going to do it or broil out my life in that field."

"You are a brave man. Not all of us are so nervy. But you may not have to broil out your life."

"Hope," said Milford. "And what a muscle it is, hardening with each stroke. Now, it's not my place to say anything to you, but don't fool along with affairs that are hopelessly tangled. Strike at something else. Perhaps that wasn't the business you were fitted for, anyway."

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"Can't tell. But I wasn't stuck on it, that's a fact. What line have you failed in, mostly?" he asked, laughing; and his wife's thin shoulders shook as if she were seized with a sudden physical gladness.

"Oh I've been a sort of bounty jumper of occupations."

"But we know," said Mrs. Blakemore, "that your work was always honest."

"Well," he replied, his white teeth showing through the dark of his beard, "I never squatted on the distress of an old soldier to discount his pension."

"That's not bad. Louise," he added, playfully touching his wife's hand, "how is it you took to me when you have a knack of finding such interesting fellows?"

"Why, you were one of the most interesting fellows I ever found. Is that Bobbie crying? Yes. I must go to him. Good-night, Mr. Milford. I'm ever so glad you came over this evening." She gave him a grateful look, and hastened away, crying out, "Mamma's coming," as she ran up the stairs. And now Mrs. Stuvic's voice arose from the outlying darkness of the road. "Well," she shouted at some one, "you tell him that if he ever leaves my gate open again I'll fill his hide so full of shot he'll look like a woodpecker'd pecked him. A man that's too lazy to shut a gate ought to be made to wear a yoke like a breachy cow. Yes, you bet!" she said over and again as she came toward the veranda. "Like a breachy cow. And here's Bill, bigger than life! Why, the way I saw you pounding them clods over yonder, I didn't think you could move at night. This is Mr.—What-his-name? I never could think of it. Are you still mopin' about? Bah, why don't you get down to somethin'? Suppose the women was to mope that way? Do you reckon anythin' would be done. No, you bet! There's no time for them to mope. I saw Eldridge hauling a load of folks from the station to-day. And I know 'em—the Bostics, out here last year, and went off without payin' their board. Well, he can have 'em, for all of me. Stuck up. 'Please do this,' and 'Please do that,' and 'How do you feel this mornin', dear mamma?' 'Bah!' I said, 'why don't dear mammy get out and stir around?' Bill, I want you to come over here to dinner to-morrow—settin' about readin' all day Sunday. You come over here and get somethin' to eat. But don't let Mitchell come. I had a chance to hire him, and didn't do it, and now I haven't got any too much use for him. The rascal deceived me. I didn't know he was half as good a worker as he is. But you be sure to come," and leaning over, she added in a whisper: "I've got the putties gal here you ever saw in your life."

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"But that's not the question. Will you have anything to eat?"

"Better than you've had for many a day, sir, I can tell you that."

"I'll be here," he replied, getting up.

"Going?" said George. "I'll walk out a piece with you."

And talking knavishly of the old woman and the wives who pretended to be so glad to see their husbands, they walked out into the hickory grove. "The old lady whispered to you about a pretty girl," said George. "Might just as well have shouted it. But she is a stunner! I hunted deer up in the mountains once, and I never saw one, but I imagined what one ought to look like, stepping around in the tangle; and when I saw that girl out here in the woods to-day, I thought of the deer that I didn't see. She's with a fussy woman, a doctor's wife, a sort of companion, I believe. I should think so! Anybody'd like to be her companion. Well, sir, I'm just getting on to the beauty of this place. I never saw such grass, and between here and the station there's a thousand colors growing out of the ground. Huh!" he grunted, "and I'm just beginning to remember them. Old fellow, I guess the little talk we had to-night has done me good. Yes; and what's the use in worrying? Things are going to come out just as they are—they always do—and all the worry in the world won't help matters. I think you are right about the Yankee."

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"Children of fate, gathered from the four corners of the world, and planted here," said Milford.

"I guess you are right. Well, I'm going back to town Monday and do a little hustling. I've got to. There's no two ways about it. I'll turn back here. Glad I met you again. So long."

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## CHAPTER VI.

### THE "PEACH."

Milford was at the dinner table, talking to Blakemore, when a young Norwegian woman entered the room. Blakemore nudged him. He looked up and quickly looked down. He heard a woman say,

"Sit here, Gunhild." He heard her introduced as Miss Strand.

"Isn't she a peach?" Blakemore whispered.

"What did you say, George?" his wife asked, picking at him.

"I didn't say anything."

"What was it you whispered?"

"About a peach," the boy blurted. "I want a peach. Maw, give me a peach."

She commanded him to hush; she raked the wayward flax out of his eyes, and straightened him about in his chair. George shook with the abandoned laughter of a man's gross mischief. His wife did not see anything to laugh at; she thought it was impolite to whisper. Mr. Milford was not laughing. No, Mr. Milford was not. His face wore a look of distress. He shot sharp glances at the Norwegian girl. He heard her voice, her laugh. A moment ago he draped Mrs. Blakemore with an overflow of sentimental sympathy, but now his soul was as selfish as a hungry wolf. He had talked with pleasant drollery. Now he offered nothing, and cut his answers down to colorless brevity. Mrs. Stuvic came in and stood near him. He was silent under her Gatling talk, chill-armed against her fire. She said she would introduce him to the Norwegian girl, and he flinched. He excused himself, got up, and went out. He walked as far as the gate opening into the grove, stood there a moment, turned and came back to the veranda.

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"He was hit quick and hard," said George to his wife, as Mrs. Stuvic left them. "She's a stunner, and she stunned him."

"George, please don't. She may remind him of some one, that's all. Why, he's engaged, and is working——"

"That's all right. I said she hit him, and she did. Hit anybody."

"George!"

"Well, that's what I said. I can't help it."

"I despise her."

"Of course, but she's a stunner all the same. But come, now, don't look that way. I'm not in love with her."

"I'm not so sure about it. You called her a 'peach'," she said, helping the boy out of his chair, and telling him to run along.

It was too much to ask her not to suspect him, now that he was determined not to be cast down by business troubles. She had buoyed him with her sympathy, and it was natural that she should resent his notice of the young woman, if not his good humor. But after a lowly wallow in melancholy, a sudden rise of spirits is always viewed with suspicion by a woman. It is one of the sentimental complexities, of her nature. She looked at him with eyes that might never have been soft. No doubt there was in George's breast a strong cast of the rascal. He was not a stepson of old Adam, but a full blood. He knew, however, the proper recourse, and he took it. He began to fret over his vanished business, and, forgetting the "peach," she gave him her sympathy.

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Milford, meanwhile, was slowly striding up and down the veranda. Mrs. Stuvic came out, followed by the Norwegian.

"She didn't want to meet you, Bill, but here she is."

That was the introduction, an embarrassment that fed the old woman's notion of fun. Milford stammered, and the young woman blushed.

"I did not say I did not want to meet you," she said, with a slight accent, her unidiomatic English learned at school. "I would not say such a thing. Mrs. Stuvic is full of jokes. She makes me laugh." And she did laugh, strange echo from North Sea cliffs, the glow of the midnight in her eyes, a thought that shot through the cowboy's mind as he gazed upon her. Mrs. Stuvic went back, laughing, to the dining-room, having flushed the young woman and turned the dark man red.

"She is a very funny woman," said the "peach," looking far across the meadow toward the lake, her long lashes slowly rising and falling. She was not beautiful; her features were not regular, but there was a marvelous light in her countenance, and her bronze-tinted hair was as rank in growth as the yellowing oats where the soil is rich and damp. She looked to be just ripe, but was too lithe to be luscious. Mrs. Blakemore said that her nose was slightly tipped up, a remark more slanderous than true, and when taken to task by an oldish woman who had no cause to be jealous, declared that it was not a matter of taste but a question of observation. At any rate, she had come as a yellow flash, and must soon fade.

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Milford continued to gaze at her, wanting to say something, but not knowing what to say. He heard the gruff laughter of the men in the dining-room, joking with Mrs. Stuvic, and the romping of the children coming out.

"I guess that's the best rabbit dog anywhere around here," he said, as a flea-bitten cur trotted past. He had never seen the dog hunt rabbits. He knew nothing about him except that he had been ordered to shoot him for howling, the dreary night when old Lewson died.

"He does not look that he could run very fast," she replied, turning her eyes upon the dog.

"Oh, yes, he runs like a streak. He outran a pack of wolves up in the Wisconsin woods."

"Wolves!" she said, looking at him.

He knew that he was a liar, but he said "wolves." He asked if she had ever seen any wolves. She had seen packs of coyotes on the prairie. "I went to my uncle when I came to this country," she said. "He lived away in the West. I stayed there two years, and then I came with him to Chicago. I did not like it so far off. The wind was always blowing lonesome in the night, and I thought of my old home where the grass fringed the edge of the cliff."

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"Did you speak English before you came to this country?"

"I could read it, and I did read much—old tales of fierce fights on the sea."

"How long do you expect to stay out here?"

"I am with Mrs. Goodwin, and when she says go, I go. She is very kind to me."

Mrs. Goodwin came out, calling "Gunhild." She was tall, with grayish hair, and on the stage might have played the part of a duchess. Her husband's affairs were prosperous, and she devoted herself to the discovery of genius. She had found a young girl with a marvelous voice, and had educated her into a common-rate singer, put her in opera, and the critics scorched her. The discoverer swallowed a lump of disappointment, and turned about to find another genius. In an obscure corner of a newspaper, she found a gem in verse, the soul-spurt of a young man. She sought him out, and paid for the printing of a volume of verses. The critics scoffed him, and she swallowed another lump. One of her assistant discoverers brought to her a pencil sketch of a buffalo, and this led to the finding of Gunhild Strand. The girl was modest. She disclaimed genius, but she was sent to the Art Institute; she would climb the mountain. But she got no higher than the foot-hills. "I did not have any confidence in myself," the girl declared. "And now I must work for you to pay you for what has been spent." This was surely a proof that she had no genius, but it was an evidence of gratitude, a rarer quality, and Mrs. Goodwin was pleased. "You shall be my companion," she said, "Your society will more than repay me. You must not refuse. I set my heart upon it."

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Milford was introduced, and the stately woman threw her searchlight upon him. Here might be another genius.

"They tell me, Mr. Milford, that you are a man of great industry."

"They might have told you, madam, that I am a great fool."

Ha! a gleam of true light. She warmed toward him. She thought of Burns plowing up a mouse. But she was skeptical of poets. They have a contempt for their patrons if their wares do not sell.

"You credit them with too shrewd a discovery," she replied.

"I simply give them credit for ordinary eyesight, madam."

"You prove the contrary." She smiled upon him. "They tell me that you came like a mist, out of the mysterious woods."

"A fog from the marsh," he replied, laughing; and the "peach" laughed, too—more music from the North Sea. He saw the pink of her arm through the gauze of her sleeve. Mrs. Goodwin thought that he knew nothing about women, and she was right, but, as a rule, if rule can be applied, a woman thinks this of a man when, indeed, he has mastered innocent hearts to make wantons of them.

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"Where is your field?" the discoverer inquired.

"Over yonder, where the sun is hottest."

"And your house?"

"Over on the hill, yonder, where the wind will blow coldest in winter."

Surely, he had a volume of verse hidden under the old clothes in his trunk. She could have wished that he was even an inventor. She shuddered at the thought of another attempt to set up a shaft to American letters. The jovial doctor had shaken his fat sides at her. Suddenly she was inspired with forethought. She asked him if he had ever written any verse. He said that once he had been tempted to toss a firebrand into an enemy's wheat-rick, but had never ruined a sheet with measured lines. She saw that he had caught the spirit of the paragrapher's fling. So this fear was put aside; still, he must be a genius of some sort—an inventor, perhaps. She asked if he had ever invented anything, and he answered, "Yes, a lie." This stimulated her interest in him. He was so frank, so refreshing. She had heard that a laborer could be quaintly entertaining. She contrasted him with the numerous men of her acquaintance, men whose sentences were as dried herbs, the sap and the fragrance gone. She was weary of the doctor's shop-talk, the impoverished blood of conversation, the dislocated joint of utterance. She would have welcomed track talk with a race-horse starter. And the bluntness of this man from the hillside was invigorating. His words were not dry herbs, but fresh pennyroyal, sharp with scent. Milford smiled at her, wishing that she were locked among her husband's jars of pickled atrocities. He wanted to talk silliness with

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the girl.

The other boarders came out, George and his wife among them. George handed Milford a cigar, telling him to light it,—that the ladies did not object to smoking.

"You haven't asked them," said his wife.

"Well, I know they don't."

"There, don't you see? Mrs. Dorch is moving off."

George grinned. "Her husband is a great smoker, and she don't want to be reminded of home," he said.

"You ought to be ashamed of yourself," she replied.

"I can't afford it. I'm too much loser."

Mrs. Goodwin asked Gunhild to walk with her. She looked at Milford, but he lost his nerve and did not offer to go with them.

"That was a bid," said George. His wife reprimanded him. "It is a wonder you didn't offer to go," she declared. "But let us take a walk," she added.

"Too soon after eating. Believe I'll go up and take a snooze," he said.

A mother, worn out with hot nights of worrying over the ills of a teething child, sat rocking the little one. Bobbie stood looking on with the critical eye of a boy. "A baby sticks out his tongue when you wipe his face with a wet rag," he said, and George snorted. "What a boy don't see ain't worth seeing," he said. The boy's mother reached out, drew him to her, and attempted to take from his clenched hands a piece of castiron, a rusty key, and a hog's tooth. "Throw those nasty things away."

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"Let him keep his tools," said George. "A boy can't work without tools." He hung to the implements of his trade. She turned him about and set him adrift. "Mr. Milford," she said, "you don't seem to be quite yourself this afternoon. You aren't enjoying yourself."

He appeared surprised that she should think so. If he were not enjoying himself it was news to him, deserving of a big headline. She saw his eye searching the woods; she thought of the young woman who sighed out her breath at a window far away, waiting for him to hoe out a place for her. The wreath that she had hung upon him began to wither. After all, he was but a man with a shifting soul, and she did not believe that his talk had morally helped her husband. George was nodding. She shook him, and he looked up quickly, as if he expected a railway conductor to tell him that he was to get off there.

"What makes you so stupid?"

"The beastly weather. Well, I'm going up."

She sat there rocking herself, with a knife in her bosom for the man who sat near, the deceitful laborer. He was, after all, nothing but a hired man. What could she have expected of him? She was foolish to believe that there was anything spiritual about him. She would give him a dig.

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"The young woman whom you were pleased to call a 'peach'—"

"I didn't call her a 'peach'."

"No matter. The young woman who has been called a 'peach,' with a bouquet of man's promises perfuming her heart, thinks, no doubt, that he is longing to see her again, when, perhaps, he has forgotten her, or remembers her only as a joke. Those foreign girls are so simple." She looked at him with her drooping eyes. Her fancy rewarded her with the belief that there was a sudden mixture of red in the brown of his face.

"Don't you think she's handsome?" she asked, after waiting for him to speak.

"No," he answered, glad to disappoint her.

"Oh, I do. Don't you, really?"

"Well, she's not ugly."

"But don't you think she's handsome?"

"Yes," he said, and looked as if he wanted to add: "Now what are you going to do about it?"

"I knew you did. Men have such queer tastes. Well, I don't think she's a bit handsome. It's no trick at all to keep the eyes wide open; and any woman can let her hair go to seed. Of course, I ought not to say anything, but I should think that you would hold a brighter picture of some one who is waiting—but what am I saying? How warm it is! We are surely going to have rain."

She heard the boy bawling out in the orchard. She ran to him. Milford stalked off toward home. "She's a little fool," he thought, and dismissed her. In the road he met the "discoverer" and the "peach," decked with purple flowers. He waited for them to show a disposition to halt. They did not, so he bowed and passed them by. On the knoll in the oat field he turned and looked back. On the veranda he saw a purple glimmer. Was the girl waving flowers at him? He turned toward

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home, with the music of her accent in his heart. The place was deserted. The hired man was out among the women, poverty once bitten, looking for another bite. Milford stretched himself out upon the grass under the walnut tree. Grimly, he compared himself with a man thrown from a horse, not knowing yet whether or not he was hurt. He had the plainsman's sense of humor, and he laughed at himself. "No matter which way I turn, I'm generally up against it," he said, and he could hear his words whispered up among the leaves of the tree. The earth seemed to throb beneath him. The heat made the whole world pant. He dozed, and dreamed that he saw violets rained from a purple cloud.

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## CHAPTER VII.

### THE PROFESSOR.

Milford was aroused from his dozing by some one walking up and down the veranda. "Don't let me disturb you," a cheery voice cried out, when he got up. "I dropped over to pay you a visit, and finding you asleep, thought I would wait till you reached the end of your nap. And I am sorry if I have disturbed you." He held out his hand as Milford came within reach, and in the heartiest manner said that his name was Professor Dolihide. "I suppose you heard that I moved into your neighborhood. Yes, sir, I have lived near you some ten days or more—a longtime to live anywhere during these grinding times, sir."

Milford had heard that Professor Dolihide had moved into an old house that had long stood deserted. He shook hands on suspicion, and then, on better acquaintance, he brought out two chairs, planted the Professor in one, sat down himself, and said he hoped that his visitor found the new home pleasant. The Professor closed his eyes till he looked through narrow cracks. "Well, as to that, I must say that I never expect to find another pleasant home. It is one's occupation abroad that makes the home pleasant, and when one has been compelled against his liking to change his trade, the home suffers. But I must explain," he said, opening his eyes and rubbing his hands together. "For years, I held the chair of English literature in a Kansas college. My salary was small, but I was happy, and my family had an exalted respect for me, as a learned man. But now I keep books at a planing-mill up here at Lake Villa, and am entitled to no respect whatever, not because I am not respectable, but for the reason that I have failed."

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He came as a fresh breeze, and Milford enjoyed him. He possessed a sort of comical dignity. His eyes were lamp-dimmed. His beard was thin and red.

"Failed," he repeated, "not on the account of incompetence, mind you, but traceable, I may say, to a changed condition of the times. I had been led to believe that my work was giving entire satisfaction. My scope was not broad, it is true, but the ground was thoroughly tilled. But a difference arose in the board of supervisors. And it was decided that I was not idiomatic enough in my treatment of our mother tongue. They argued that English is progressive. I did not doubt that, but I said that slang was not true progress. They cited an extract from a speech delivered by the president of an Eastern grove of learning, in which he said that the purist was as dead as stagnant water. I was pleased to be called a purist, sir. I had striven to maintain that position; but it did not compensate me for the loss of my living. After that, I taught in a common school, but they said I was wanting in discipline. Then I drifted about, and now here I am, bookkeeper at a planing-mill. But I have a hope that it will all come right, and I could exist fairly, but my wife and my daughter do not share my hope. I trust I do not shock you when I affirm that a woman has a contempt for the hope of a man. She is a materialist; she wants immediate results, and all that keeps her from being a gambler is the fear of losing. I trust I have not shocked you."

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He stroked his thin beard to a point, and twisted it. He cocked his head, and looked at Milford as if he expected a weighty decision concerning an important matter. His clothes were well-kept relics, but his dignity came out fresh, as if it had been newly dusted. What a tenderfoot he would have been in a mining camp; what a guy at a variety show! Milford agreed that his views were no doubt correct. The man was an unconscious joke, and argument would spoil him.

"I thank you," said the Professor. "Such ready and cheerful agreement is rarely found, except between two intelligent men, and the admission of a third man of equal intelligence would greatly lessen the chances. And now I may tell you that my wife and daughter objected to my calling, affirming, as they had a right to do, that it was your place to call on me, as I was the newer comer. And I said, 'Madam, there are no women in this case, so, therefore, we have no need to be finical and unnatural.'" He cleared his throat, and cocked his head. The sharp face of his host looked serious, but there was a titter in his breast.

"Of course," said the Professor, "one may have ever so hairy an ear, and yet the gossip of the neighborhood will force its way in. I have heard much concerning you. I heard that they did not understand you, and then I said to myself that you must be a man worth knowing."

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"Then I must be rare," said Milford.

"Ah, sharp; that is sharp, sir. A dignified contempt for man may not belong to the text of the virtues, but it is one of the pictures that brightens the page. I beg pardon for even the appearance of infringement, but do you expect to reside here permanently?"

"No, I have stopped to stay over night, and to chop wood for breakfast."

"A judicious answer, sir; a shrewd statement. They told me that you were strangely guarded in speech, that you suffered yourself to seem dull rather than to trip off a waste of words. That is true wisdom, not, indeed, to have nothing to say, but keeping the something that fain would fly forth. I take it that you came from the city to these parts."

"Yes, directly. But I was there only a short time."

"A stranger, indeed. Have you ever chanced to live in Kansas?"

"I've broken out there in spots."

"Ha! an idiomatic answer. I see that you belong to the new school. Perhaps it is better, but I am too old to learn. Did you ever happen to break out in a spot called Grayson?"

"I passed through there on my way to break out somewhere else."

"You did? That was my town, sir—a seat of learning made famous by a bank robbery. When our city was ten years old, I read a paper at the celebration. Were you ever engaged in any educational work?"

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"Yes, one of the greatest. I sold a cook-book."

"Shrewd; yes, sharp. From what I heard, I thought that you would be worth knowing. I have met your landlady, a most impressive woman, but with a vulgar contempt for my profession. She said that it was a good thing that I had left off fooling and at last got down to work. And I think that this has precluded any relationship between her and my wife. She can't stand a reference, not that kind of a reference, to my decline. In this regard, women haven't so much virtue as a man possesses. They can not piece a torn quilt with an aphorism. In what part of the country have your labors been mostly confined?"

"Mostly between here and sunset."

"More poetic than sharp," said the Professor, clearing his throat. "May I trouble you for a drink of water?"

Milford drew water from the well near the walnut tree, and in the kitchen dipper conveyed a quart of it to the Professor, who drank with the thirst of a toper and the suck of a horse. "I am sufficiently watered," he said, bowing and returning the dipper to Milford, who threw it out upon the grass where the hired man could find it. "What a delightful way to live!" said the Professor. "You throw things about as you please, and there is no one to complain. You may leave your pipe anywhere, and probably find it again; you let hunger, instead of time, summon you to eat. I trust I do not shock you when I say that Adam enjoyed his greatest freedom before the appearance of Eve."

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Milford said that he was not shocked, and the Professor thanked him. It was pleasant to meet a philosopher, a man who did not foolishly feel called upon in resentment to declare, that his mother was a woman. A shrewder man than Milford might have inferred that the Professor had been nagged by his wife through the tedium of a Sunday forenoon. Work-day annoyances fester on Sunday. In the country, when a man has, on a Sunday, killed the chickens for dinner, salted the sheep in the pasture, and returned to the house, he is in the way; everything he does is wrong; everything he leaves undone is worse. He is kept on the ducking verge of a constant dodge.

"No man has more respect for a woman than I have," said the Professor, "but I am forced to admit that she is a constant experiment. Nature herself does not as yet know what to make of her. One moment she is a joy, and the next she is searching for a man's weak spots, like a disease. I think that it was some such expression, spoken in a sententious mood, that helped to oust me from the easy chair of congenial letters." A clock struck the hour of five. The Professor seemed surprised at the swift rush of time. "Well, I must take my leave," said he, getting up and standing with his hands resting on the back of the chair. "Ah, and would you mind walking over to my home with me?"

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The lingering dawn of Milford's suspicions was now streaked with gray. "I'd like to, but the hired man's gone out, and I've got to do the chores about the place."

"But perhaps I may return with you and assist you. I am an apt hand."

"No, thank you, not to-day; some other time."

A shade of disappointment fell upon him and darkened his dignity. "I am sorry," he said. "I had hoped to know you better, and we were making such fair progress. It is not often that I get along so well with a new acquaintance." He brightened suddenly, as if the reserve forces of his mind had been brought up. "Ah, would you object to my helping you with your work, and then taking a bachelor's supper with you?"

"That's all right—fits me like a glove," said Milford.

"Good!" cried the Professor. "Idiomatic, and divested of all shrewdness. Now, what shall we do first?"

"I'll hatch up a bite to eat, and then we'll feed the stock. You sit here."

He protested against a decree that might make a lazy guest of him, but he yielded, and sat down to hum a tune of contentment, pliant heart postponing trouble, procrastinator of annoyances. It did not take Milford long to prepare the meal, crisp strips of bacon, bread, and coffee boiled in a tin pail. The host said that it was but ranch fare. The guest rubbed his hands together, and declared that freedom was a pudding's sweetest sauce. He had read of many great feasts, in the days of the barons, when bulls were roasted whole, of the wild boar's head served upon the golden platter of the king, but to him there was one banquet mellow with sentiment than all the rest—General Marion and the British officer in the forest, with a pile of roasted sweet potatoes on a log. He sipped the dreggy coffee as if it were the mulled wine of a New Year's night. He talked loudly as if he enjoyed the resonant freedom of his own voice. He laughed in the present, and then was silent as a cool shadow of the future fell upon him. But he shifted from under the shadow, and went on with his talk, in florid congratulation of his host, his ease, his independence. There were no soft cushions, but there was rough repose, the undisturbed rest of honest weariness. Milford's judgment of men told him that this man had ever been a laughing-stock, afflicted as he was with a certain incompetent refinement of mind. But, in the varied society of life, how important is the office of such a failure! A shiftless man sometimes makes shiftless men more contented, softening enmities against life, and quieting clamors against discriminating nature. Here was a man who really was worth knowing, and the cowboy gratefully accepted him. He opened up his Noah's Ark of adventures, and entertained the man-child. He shoved back from the table, and sang a roaring song of a plainsman who died for love. He recited a poem by Antrobus, the herdsman's sneer of abandoned recklessness—"Like a Centaur, he speeds where the wild bull feeds." The Professor clapped his hands. He swore that no Eastcheap could afford a more delicious entertainment. Milford brought cider from the cellar, beading in a brown, earthen ewer, and the Professor snapped his eyes. "Where the wild bull feeds," he laughed, passing his cup for more. They shook hands, that they held in common so many old songs, lines familiar to our grandmothers—"Come, dearest, the daylight hath gone;" "The tiger's cub I'd bind with a chain." They sang till the daylight was gone, and then went forth laughingly to feed the stock. But the Professor left off his part of the singing before the work was completed. The shadow of the future had again fallen upon him, and he could not shift from under it.

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"Look here," he said, "you must go home with me. Do you understand?"

"I think I do, and I'll go anywhere with you."

"Idiomatic, and accommodating. Put her there!" he cried, striking hands with Milford. "Ha! how is that for idiom? Stay by me, gentle keeper, my soul is heavy, and I fain would—would duck." He leaned against the barn door and shook. Milford clapped him on the shoulder, and shook with him.

Across a field, through a wood and along a grassy slope, they went, toward the Professor's home, passing a house which schoolboys said was haunted. The Professor talked philosophy. He had a religious theory, newly picked up on the way: If we die suddenly at night, dreaming a sweet dream, we continue the dream throughout eternity—heaven. If we die dreaming a troubled dream, we go on dreaming it after death—hell. Moral, then let us strive to live conducively to pleasant dreams. Milford agreed that, as a theory, it was good enough. Nearly anything was good enough for a theory. But wise men had summed up the future, and had died trusting in their creed. The Professor hung back at the word future. The future was now too near to be discussed as a speculation. He saw it shining through the window of his house. He heard it in the slamming of a door.

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"Well, here we are," he said, unwinding a chain from about a post, and opening a gate. "Step in. We will sit on the veranda—cooler than in the house."

The door opened, and a large woman stepped out upon the veranda. Seeing who came, she uttered one of anger's unspellable words, a snort. She was a good woman, no doubt, but she was of the class who, in the old days, lent virtue to the ducking stool. In short, she was one who deemed herself the most abused of all earthly creatures, a scold. Pretending not to see her husband, she asked Milford what he wanted.

"Mrs. Dolihide," said the Professor, "this is my very dear friend, Mr. Milford, our neighbor, and a man who has lived over most of the ground between here and sunset."

"Oh, is that you? Really, I didn't expect to see you again. It's a pretty time to come poking home now, when you were to be here to go to church with us. Oh, you needn't blink your eyes, having us get ready and set here and wait and wait."

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"Mad and dressed up," muttered the Professor. "What could be more pitiable? Don't go," he whispered to Milford. "I pray thee, gentle keeper, stay by me. Idiomatically, I am half shot."

"Let me go," said Milford.

"Not on your idiomatic life," muttered the Professor. "Mother, I am very sorry that I didn't get here in time to accompany you and my daughter to the humble house of the Lord. But we may not be too late now to catch the welcome end of a long sermon."

A voice came from within the house. "Is that pa?"

"Yes," the Professor's wife replied, "and he's as drunk as a fool."

"Oh, for pity sake! How dreadful, how humiliating to us! But he never thinks of us." An inner door slammed.

Milford strove to pull away. The Professor clung to him. "It is not fear," he said. "It is a sort of awe that the sex inspires. But there is a time for boldness. Madam, you have told your daughter that I am drunk. I am here to refute that statement. I am not drunk. My friend is not drunk. We drank some cider, sinuous with age, but we are not drunk. He is a man of high moral character, and I breathe a respect for letters——"

"Your breath would scorch a feather right now," she snapped, looking at him with contempt, her hands on her hips.

"I deny that statement, also. I am here to refute it. I have been merrier than is my wont; we have shaken warm hands over a stone jug, but nobody's character was assailed. And I had thought, in view of the fact that I present a neighbor, you would treat me with a little more courtesy."

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"You didn't know me."

"It appears not, madam. A man may think that he knows his wife to-day, but to-morrow there appears in her system the symptoms of a strange disease. But, if you will forgive me," he added, slowly advancing, "forgive a memory for slipping up in a slippery place, I will promise that there shall be no recurrence of the fall. Mrs. Dolihide, Mr. Milford."

Milford roared with laughter. He broke loose from the Professor, and fled through the gate, and he did not check his flight till he was far down the road, and then he halted to laugh again.

Since early evening, the sky had been overcast, and drops of rain began to fall. Milford hastened onward. In the woods, far across a willow flat, the wind blew hard, and the rain lashed the leaves. He turned aside into the haunted house. All the doors were open. He went to the back door and stood looking out at the coming of the rain. A noise quickened his blood, and looking about he saw a vision of white in the front door.

"Who is that?"

A slight cry, a swaying of the vision, a voice replying: "Oh, I did not know there was any one in here. I have stopped in out of the rain."

And now his blood jumped. "Is that you, Miss Strand?"

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"Oh, yes, but I do not know you. Oh, is it Mr. Milford? How strange! But you do not live here?"

"No, I've simply dodged in out of the wet. It's pouring down."

"Yes, the clouds were a long time here, but the rain was quick. I went far over after a laundress. Mrs. Stuvic would have sent me in the buggy, but I wanted to walk; and now I shall be made sorry."

"I hope not. Let me see if I can't make it more comfortable for you."

He struck a match, and looked about. The room was bare. In places the floor was broken. She said, with a laugh, that she would not mind it so much but for the dark.

"I hope you have many matches," she said.

"I haven't, but I can remedy it. Here is an old smudge pan. I'll build a fire in it."

He broke up a piece of board, split fine pieces with his knife, tore up a letter, and made a fire in the pan. In a shed-room he found a bench, dusted it, and brought it in for her. She sat down, and he stood looking at the play of the shadows and the light on her hair. The spirit of the cider was gone. He wondered why he had run down the road, laughing. He got down on his knees to feed the fire. It was a trick; it was stealing an attitude to pay a homage.

"Mrs. Goodwin will be very much worried," she said. "I wish that I did not come. It was so much further than they said. I left when the sun was down. Now it is late, and I walked all the time."

"I will run over there and bring the buggy for you."

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"Oh, no, no. The rain pours too much. When it is done I will go with you. The road is hard. There will be not much mud. We found many flowers in the woods to-day."

"I saw you with an armful."

"Did you see me wave at you when you stand on the high place in the oats?"

"I did, but I was almost afraid to believe it."

"Almost afraid? Why, what harm? There is no harm to wave a flower. Now it rains easier. It will soon quit."

Never did a promised clearing of the sky so mock a man. He mended the fire, for, in his enraptured gazing, he had neglected it. He got up and looked out, to see a glimmer of the threatening moon and a star peeping from a nest of glinted cloud-wool. He returned and knelt near the fire-pan.

"Is it clearing away?" she asked.

"It's going to pour down."

"But it is getting lighter."

"I know, but another cloud is coming."

"I may get home before the new rain falls."

"No, I hear it in the woods off yonder."

"If I run I may get to a house where some one lives."

"The rain will catch you. A wind is behind it."

"I don't hear the wind."

"It is a low wind, but it will soon be high."

"The smoke hurts my eyes. You have put on too much wood at once."

"And we must stay till it burns out to keep the house from catching fire."

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"Oh, the moon is out. I must go now."

"I will go with you."

"Take me to the straight road, and then I will go alone."

He took the pan between two sticks, and threw it far out upon the wet grass. A flock of sheep pattered by. "Sheep always run past a haunted house," he said, leading her to the road.

"Is this place haunted?" she asked, looking back.

"Yes, by a young man who drowned himself in the lake."

"Why did he drown himself?"

"On account of a young woman who lived here."

She laughed at the cowboy's impromptu lie. "He was foolish to drown himself. Let us walk fast now. Mrs. Goodwin will be much afraid for me. Can you not walk faster?"

When they reached the corners, where a broad road crossed their path, she turned to him and said: "I know where I am now. This is my road, and I am not far. I thank you ever so much, and I bid you good-night." She fled swiftly down the road, and he stood there long after she had faded from sight.

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## CHAPTER VIII.

### THE GOSSIPERS.

The low place where Milford hoed the young corn was not far from Mrs. Stuvic's, and more than once during the forenoon he went to the top of the rise and looked toward the house. He saw George out in the road, teaching his wife to ride a wheel, saw the Dutch girl driving the turkeys out of the garden, heard the old woman shout for the pony-cart to take her to the town of Waukegan, but saw nothing of the young woman who had filled his sleep with dreams. He returned to his work, chopping the stubborn clods, the heat growing fiercer with the approach of noon, the wet land steaming. Of a sudden, he cursed his hoe, and threw it from him. "But I've got to do it," he said, and resumed his labor. George came across the field.

"Well, sir," said he, "I didn't go back to town this morning as I laid out to do, and now I'm like a fish out of water. Just as I got ready to go, my wife misunderstood something I said, and then it was all off. A man's a fool to leave his wife with a misunderstanding in her head. Everything ought to be smoothed over before he goes. One morning, not long ago, I scolded the boy at the breakfast table, and he was crying when I left the house. I got on the car and tried to read a newspaper, but couldn't. And, sir, I hopped off the car, took another one back, and made it up with him. He had forgotten all about it, but I hadn't. We were all pretty well stirred up over the 'peach' last night. Got caught out in the rain, and we thought the doctor's wife would have a fit. And at the breakfast table this morning, she gave an account of herself. Oh, she's straightforward. She said you entertained her with a fire."

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"A flash in the pan," said Milford.

"Well, I don't know as to that, for when there's a flash in the pan there's no report, but I guess you'll hear report enough when you meet those women over at the house. They've made a love affair out of it—they say you're treating a certain young woman shamefully. Oh, they've got it all fixed up to suit themselves. They told the 'peach' you were engaged, and that she's wrong to encourage you."

"The devil they did!" Milford shouted. "What right have they got to presume——"

"It's not presuming on the part of a woman, my dear fellow; it's a natural conclusion. The girl couldn't say a thing. She stammered, and finally she stormed. She said it was nothing to her if you were engaged to a thousand women. She threatened to leave, and then the women apologized. And about that time I decided that I wouldn't go to town to-day."

"I'll go over there," said Milford.

"No, don't do anything of the sort, not while you're mad. It's all right now."

"No, it's not all right, but I want to tell you that I'll make it all right".

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"Now, don't go on getting hot. The thing was a joke, and is all smoothed over. It arose out of pity for the other young woman."

"Confound it! there isn't any other woman."

"That's all right; that's what I told them. No other woman, of course not. There never is. Well, I'll be off. I go at twelve forty-five."

George trudged off over the clods, and Milford stood looking after him, a dark scowl on his face. Those miserable women, not half so innocent as blanketed squaws drooling about a camp-fire. And that slim Mrs. Blakemore, lithe as a viper, had inspired it all. How could a refined woman be so full of the devil's poisonous juice? In his humble way, he had tried to help her out of a trouble. Tired, and with every bone aching, he had fought off sleep to make good his word with her. Wasp! she had stung him. It was nearly noon, and he went to the house to make fat meat hiss in a hot pan. He sat brooding over the table when Mitchell came in. "Are you stalled in sight of the stable?" the hired man asked, seeing that Milford had not begun to eat.

"I'm down to the hub in a rut."

"Prize out," said Mitchell, sitting down.

"That's right, I guess; only thing I can do. Shove that hog down this way. How are you getting along over there?"

"Be done by night. Rain put the ground in pretty good fix. You about done?"

"Yes. I'll plow this afternoon."

"Say, Bill, what are divorces worth?"

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"Divorces? I never bought one."

"Well, it looks to me like I ought to get one pretty cheap under the circumstances. Wife ran away."

"Yes, they ought to give you a good discount. Don't you think you'd better get two while you're at it? You might need another one after a while."

"No, I guess one'll be about enough."

"Generally, when a man is looking for a divorce, he wants to marry again. Have you got any such notion?"

"Well, I know a woman that would make a man a mighty good livin'. She ain't putty; she's as freckled as a turkey egg, but she's a hustler from 'way back. I could bring her here. You could board with us. She's a rattlin' cook; and she's got land. What do you say?"

"I say you are a scoundrel?"

"Oh, that's all right; I'm a man. But I don't see anythin' wrong in it. She's a woman, and if it ain't right for a woman to keep house, then I don't know what it is right for her to do. She wants to marry, and I don't see that anybody is kickin' up much dust around her. What do you say?"

"I told you what I said."

"Yes, you said I was a scoundrel, and there hain't been any argument raised on that p'int. What do you say about her comin'?"

"She'll not come while I'm here; I'll tell you that."

"That's all you need to tell me. I'm a good scuffler, but I know when I'm flung down. You didn't see the Professor's daughter when you was over there, did you?"

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"Is she the woman?"

"That I'm thinkin' of marryin'? Not much! Willie bows to her and passes on. She reminds me of a blue heron, and the wind whistles when she passes."

"How did you happen to mention her?"

"Oh, she flew into my head—so different from my woman. I know'd the Professor when he tried to keep boarders over near Antioch. Talked his house empty. Took up a tramp that had book sense, and kept him till the old woman drove him off. It took more than a hint to get rid of him. She throw'd his wallet and stick out into the road. He picked 'em up, and went back into the house to

argy Scripture with the Professor. Then she flew at him with a fire-shovel, and he hulled out. What makes you so glum on women, Bill?"

"What makes a dog so glum on cats?"

"There must be somethin' wrong, sure enough, when you put it that way. What's wrong?"

"Oh, they've raised hell over at the house."

"The women have? Well, that's their business, Bill; that's their trade."

"I guess you're right," Milford replied, with a laugh. He got up, took down his pipe, and went out for a half-hour's smoke on the grass, in the shade of the walnut tree. The smoke soothed him. Tobacco may be a great physical enemy, he argued, but a briar-root pipe is the most trustworthy timber for president of a peace society. Why are women so unforgiving? Because they do not smoke. Why was James the First a pedantic ass? Because he wrote a pamphlet against tobacco. Milford lay back in a forgiving muse. Perhaps, after all, the slim woman had not been so much at fault. She had too much sympathy to be very strong, and it is manly to forgive a woman's weakness; it is, at least, manly to acknowledge to ourselves that we do. It is also manly to hold a slight grudge as a warning against a recurrence of the offense. Milford would hold a grudge, and show it by sulking. He would keep himself apart from them during the week, and on Sunday he would walk high-headed past the house. This was a sound and respectable resolution, and he smiled upon his own resources. It took occasion to inspire a plan. And the woman who did not care whether he were engaged to a thousand women? He would—of course, he would speak to her, but with distinct reserve. However, some time must pass before he would give any of them a chance to speak to him.

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A boy came up through the orchard and halted at the garden fence. Milford asked him what was wanted. "They are going to have some music over at Mrs. Stuvic's to-night, and they told me to come over and tell you to be sure and come."

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## CHAPTER IX.

### IN THE OLD WOMAN'S PARLOR.

It was clearly an insult to ask him to come. They had slandered him, and now they wanted him at their entertainment. He told the boy to tell them that he would not be there. He plowed during the afternoon, with never a look toward the house when he turned at the end of a row. He hoped that they expected him; he would smack his lips over the vicious joy of disappointing them. The invitation had, no doubt, come from Mrs. Blakemore; Miss Strand could have had no hand in it. She did not care enough for him to wish for his company. But it made no difference who did the inviting, he would not go. He went home tired, and was sleepy at the supper table. He took down his pipe and lighted it. Mitchell talked about the woman whose freckles were as gold to him. He had found a valuable rod and reel in the rushes; he would sell them and buy a divorce.

"If you take my advice," said Milford, "you'll let the women alone."

"But a feller that's in love can't take advice."

"Love!" Milford sneered. "You in love?"

"That's what. Fell in love about a quarter to two, last Sunday was a week. What are you doin' with that boiled shirt lyin' out there? Goin' to put it on?"

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"I don't know. Is there any water in the rain barrel?"

"Ought to be if it hain't leaked out; poured in there last night. Goin' to take a bath?"

"Don't suppose I want to drink out of the rain barrel, do you?"

"Didn't know; no tellin' much what a feller'll do. But it hits me that when a man begins to take baths he's sorter in love himself, now that we're on that subject."

"Well, I don't have to get a divorce."

"That don't sound like you, Bill. Don't believe I'd gouge you that way."

Milford's dark countenance flushed; he made a noise in his throat. He held out his hand, and in a gentle voice said: "I beg your pardon. Shake."

"You've said enough," Mitchell replied, shaking hands with him. "All that a son of old Illinois needs is that sort of play, and he's done. Goin' somewhere to-night?"

"No; thought I'd put on clean clothes and walk about in the woods."

He dressed himself and walked down by the lake. He heard the merry splashings of moonlight bathers, the hound-like baying of the bull frogs, far away in the rushes. He picked his way over a barbed-wire fence, and went into the thick woods where the close air still held the heat of the day. He came out into the road a quarter of a mile below Mrs. Stuvic's house. It was too dark to

go back through the woods; there were numerous stumps, tangled vines, and the keen briar of the wild gooseberry. The grass field further along was drenched with dew. He would pass the house and take the road through the hickory grove. As he drew near, he heard the piano. It reminded him of an old box that had been hauled over the mountains and set up in a mining camp. The red lantern swung from the eaves of the veranda. Some one began to sing, and he halted at the gate. Why make an outcast of himself? he mused. He went into the yard, and stood there. Who was he, to be sulking? What right had he, a laborer, to expect anything? They had made him a gift of their attention. In the city, they would not have noticed him. He would go in, a nobody, and pick up a crumb of entertainment. The door stood open. Mrs. Blakemore saw him. She came out with a smile.

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"Oh, I thought you would come if you could," she said. "So kind of you. Come in."

The first person whom he saw upon entering the room was the Professor, in earnest conversation with the "discoverer." He was telling her of the pleasure it would give him to have her meet his wife. They would strike up a friendship, both being patronesses of art and intellect. But his wife was a great home-body. She rarely went out; she was contented to have him represent her with his praises. And he thought that it was pardonable in a man to praise his wife. He offered no apology for it. Romance had not deserted his fireside. A fresh bow of blue ribbon was ever at the throat of his married life. At this moment he spied Milford, and blustered up to greet him. It was not enough to say that he was pleased; he was delighted. He grasped Milford's hand and shook it warmly. He spoke of Milford's charming visit to his home; it was an honor that his family keenly appreciated. "Oh, you are acquainted with Mrs. Goodwin. Yes, I remember now, you paid her a deserved compliment. He spoke of your great gifts, madam."

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Gunhild was not in the room. Footsteps came down the passage-way, and Milford's eyes flew to the floor. Some one at the piano loosened a dam, and let flow a merry rivulet, and into the room danced Mrs. Stuvic, her head high, and her back as straight as an ironing board. The children shrieked with laughter, and the men and women clapped their hands. She was oblivious to applause. She was looking far back upon a hewed log floor, bright faces about a great fireplace, and a fiddler in the corner, beneath a string of dried pumpkin, hanging from a rafter. The rillet of music ran out.

"Yes, you bet!" she said, with tears in her eyes. "Many and many a time, Bill; and all night long, with the snow three feet outside, and the wolves howlin' in the woods. Yes, you bet! Who is this?"

Mrs. Goodwin introduced the Professor. He hopped to one side, back again, bowed, and expressed his great pleasure. "Dolihide," said Mrs. Stuvic. "I'd forget that name even if it was my own. But my, what names they do fish up these days! Oh, let me see, you've moved over to the old Pruitt place. Yes, I saw your wife at Lake Villa. Big fat woman. And I've met you before."

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The Professor bowed. "Not lean, madam; not lean, but not fat. She couldn't dance as you do, but not fat, madam."

"No, you bet she couldn't," said Mrs. Stuvic. "And there ain't many that can. Strike up a tune there, and, Bill, you come out here and dance with me."

"Oh, yes, do!" Mrs. Blakemore cried.

Milford not only declined; he "bucked." He was not to be caught in such a trap. He might be made to look ridiculous, but not with his willing assistance. He might have nerve enough to break wild horses, he said, but not enough to get out on a floor to dance. Why not take the Professor? Milford expected to see him run, but he stepped forth with a gracious smile, and took hold of the old woman. And while they were dancing Gunhild entered the room. Without even the slightest tint of embarrassment, she went straightway to Milford and shook hands with him. She had been out bareheaded, under the trees, and dewdrops gleamed in her hair.

"Did you find Mrs. Goodwin much scared about you last night?"

"Not much. She knew I would come home safe. This morning, when I said how kind it was of you to keep a light burning in a pan for me, they laughed. And I was angry till they told me it was all a joke."

"I heard about it. Blakemore told me."

"Did he? Oh, it was not much important."

"And they tried to guy you about me, did they?"

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"Guy me? They tried to plague. Then I get mad till I understand, and then I laugh."

"Blakemore said they told you that I—that I was engaged."

"Yes, but that was of no difference. They tried to make me think I do wrong to walk with you when you engaged. I told them that it made no difference."

"But I am not engaged."

"No? But it makes no difference. You know, I think it almost a shame for that old woman to dance. It makes me feel—feel—I do not know, but you know—you understand."

"Yes; I feel the same way."

"Yes. Have you been working hard to-day?"

"Pretty hard. What have you been doing?"

"Reading a book and trying to draw. I could do neither. Spread everywhere was a drawing that I could not catch; and hummed in the air were words more beautiful than in the book. They have quit dancing. I am glad."

The Professor resumed his talk with the "discoverer." "One of the truest pleasures enjoyed by man is to meet a woman with a mind."

"Indeed! And are they so very rare?"

"Oh, no, no," the Professor quickly replied, realizing that he had struck the wrong key. "As an educator, I know the scope and the power of the female mind—I do not like the expression, female mind, but I must employ it to make my meaning clear. Yes, I know the scope and the power, comparing more than favorably with the mind of man. But—" and here he halted, with a finger in the air, to give the word emphasis—"but, once in a long while, we meet an exceptional female mind, and it is then that we experience our truest pleasure. Such a mind, I may say, is possessed by my wife; and, begging the pardon of your presence, such is the mind that I have met here to-night."

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She looked at him with a woman's doubt, which means more than half believing. She glanced at Gunhild, wondering whether the girl had overheard the remark. She seemed anxious that some one should have caught it. Compliments are almost worthless when they reach none but the flattered ear. And to tell that they have been paid is too much like presenting one with a withered flower. Gunhild had not heard the remark. She was picking up Milford's slowly dropping words.

"You are very kind, Professor, but, really, you don't expect me to believe you when you express such satisfaction at meeting me."

The Professor appeared grief-smitten. "Madam, as an educator, I have been accustomed to deal with many phases of the human mind. And I have lived long enough to verify the adage that honesty is the best policy, in words as well as in acts; and I have learned that, while truth told to man is a virtue, it is, told to a woman, a sublimity." He bowed and twisted the sharp point of his red beard, a gimlet with which he would bore through the soft sheeting of a woman's incredulity. At this moment, it flashed upon her that she had made another discovery, not of a genius, but of a philosopher. But she must be cautious. He might have a treatise ready for the publisher. She sighed a regret that the doctor was not present to hear the exalted talk of this gifted man. How dim his eyes were, with groping in the dusk, looking for the learning of the ancients! In such wisdom there must be sincerity. But it was not wise to swallow with too keen a show of relish. She would dally with this delicious food.

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"Oh," she laughed, "it is so easy for a man to pay a compliment."

"Madam, I admit that a studied art may become a careless grace, witness the Frenchman and the Spaniard; but the blunt Anglo-Saxon must still depend upon truth for his incentive—the others taste dainty viands; he feeds upon blood-dripping meat."

She did not know exactly what he meant, but it sounded well, and bowing thoughtfully, she said: "How true!"

Some one raised a clamor for a song from Mrs. Stuvic. She was as ready to sing as to dance. Her accomplishments belonged to her boarders. And she sang a song popular in her day:

"Pretty little Miss, don't stand on beauty,  
"That's a flower that must soon decay,  
Reddest rose in yonder's garden,  
"Half an hour will fade away.  
No, no, no, sir, no; all the answer she made was no."

Milford was called upon for a story. He refused, but the girl's eyes implored him, and he told a story of heroism in a blizzard. The Professor was then called out for a speech. The Liberty of the American was his theme; the glory of every man having a castle, his climax. Milford smiled to think of the road leading from the Professor's castle, of the portcullis that had come near falling on him. He saw the mistress of the castle standing with her hands on her hips.

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"He has so many fine words," said Gunhild. "Why don't they send him to the Congress?"

"Because they've got too many fine words there already, I guess," Milford answered.

"But is he not a very smart man?"

"Oh, yes, smart enough, I guess. That's what's the matter with him—too smart."

"But how can a man be too smart?"

"I give it up. But it seems as if it takes a fool to make a success of life; the hogs of the business world root up money."

"I do not understand. You are making some fun of me."

"No, I'm giving it to you straight. The successful business man wears bristles on his back."

She laughed at this. She said that she knew he was making fun of her; but she liked to hear him talk like that. It was so new to her.

"Ha! her complexion reminds me of a tinted vase with the light seeping through it," said the Professor, talking to the "discoverer," but with his eyes fixed upon the Norwegian girl. "A flower come up out of the wild and long-neglected garden of the Viking. And how truly American those people soon become! Blood, madam; it is blood."

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"Gunhild is a good girl, and knows nothing so well as she does honor."

"A girl who knows honor is splendidly equipped, madam. I have a daughter. And who is it that accompanies her? It is honor, madam. Throughout the seasons, they are together, arm about waist, like school girls, studying virtue from the same book."

She leaned over and touched his arm. "I want to ask you something. Do you know very much about Mr. Milford?"

"He warmed his hand with his heart, madam, and extended it to me."

"But don't you think he's peculiar?"

"All things are peculiar until we understand them."

"I know, but isn't there something strange about his being here as he is, working on a farm?"

"Not to me, when I meditate upon the fact that I myself keep books and do general roust-about work for a planing mill. Roust-about—idiomatic, good, and to the point."

"But farm work is so hard," she persisted. "And he appears to be so well equipped for something better. At times, he is almost brilliant."

"A brightness in the rough," said the Professor. "He has that crude quality of force which sometimes puts to shame the more nearly even puissance of a systematic training."

She looked at him as if her eyes said, "Charming." And the world had suffered him to go to seed, nodding his ripe and bursting pod in the empty air. It was a shame. But his treatise on philosophy—she must find out about that.

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"Professor, have you ever written anything?"

He smiled. "Madam, the web I have woven, if spun straight, would encircle the globe. I have written."

"Philosophy?"

"Finance, madam."

She choked a laugh in its infant uprising. That this threadbare man should write about money! How ridiculous! But true genius has many a curious kink.

Mrs. Blakemore, feeling that she was neglected, brought in Bobbie to annoy the company with him. She bade him shake hands with Mr. Milford; she commanded him to recite for the Professor. The learned man smiled. He said that there was nothing so sweet as the infant lip, lisping its way into the fields of knowledge. Multicharged by his mother, the boy began to fire off, "I am not mad, no, am not mad." Mrs. Stuvic, who had been remarkably quiet, got up and remarked as she passed Milford: "This lets me out; yes, you bet!"

The Professor applauded the youngster. He would be a great man, some day. He had the voice and the manner of the true orator. Only seven years old? Quite remarkable. His mother stroked his hair, and said that, in fact, he would not be seven till the eighteenth of September. At this the Professor was much surprised. Really a remarkable boy.

Mr. Josh Spence, a fat man rounding out a corner of the room with his retiring flesh, was called upon for a song. He was modest, and he declined, but yielded upon persuasion, and in strained tenor sang "Marguerite."

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"Do you like his voice?" Gunhild asked.

"It's not big enough to fit him," Milford answered. "But let him sing. It keeps the boy quiet."

"Oh, are you not ashamed? He is a nice little man, and his mother loves him so."

"And only seven years old," said Milford.

"You must not make fun. The boy is her heart. You must not laugh at a heart."

Milford flinched. He had not said the right thing. "Mitchell, the man who works with me, called me down for saying something that I oughtn't to have said, and I apologized, and we shook hands. I apologize to you. Shall we shake hands?"

She shook her head. "No, it will not be necessary. You do not mean to be cruel."

This touched him. He tried to hide himself with a laugh. She looked at him earnestly, and his face

sobered. He thought of the night before, his kneeling to her on the floor of the haunted house, and felt that it would be a comfort to drop upon his knees again, not to talk of the wind rising among the trees, but to tell her that she had clasped her hands about his heart.

"Shall we go out on the veranda?" he asked, eating her with his glutton eyes.

"No, it is getting late. See, Mrs. Goodwin is telling the Professor good-night. I must go too."

"May I see you again soon?"

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"Oh, you may come. Mrs. Goodwin will not care."

"But do you want me to—do you care if I come?"

"Yes, I will like for you to come. We will be friends."

"And shall we go over into the woods where the mandrakes are in bloom?"

"Yes, Mrs. Goodwin likes the flowers that grow in the woods. She calls them beautiful barbarians."

Mrs. Stuvic took the lantern down from under the eaves of the veranda. She called it a sign to every rat to hunt his hole. She joked at Milford as he passed her, going out. Even her blunt eye saw that he was enthralled. "Not so loud," he said. "Those people might hear you."

"I'd better flag you down," she replied, swinging the red lantern before his face.

Milford and the Professor walked off together along the road running through the grove. "Professor, you seemed to be happy to-night."

"My dear fellow, I am the most miserable man alive—just at this time."

"What's the trouble?"

"Life insurance. It will be due on the ninth of this present month, three days from now, ninety-seven dollars and forty cents, and how I am to raise it the Lord only knows. I have been carrying it for seven years, a galling burden, shifted from shoulder to shoulder, with but a moment of relief between the shifts. Many a time as the day approached have I wished that the lightning might strike me. And I pledge you my word that I would rather die any sort of death than to have it lapse. It has been a hard fight, a fight that my wife and daughter, as intelligent as they are, could not fully understand. They argue sometimes that the money thus invested would make them comfortable, with better clothes and more furniture in the house. They cannot comprehend that I am making this great sacrifice for a rainy day, a day when I shall be out in the rain and they in a better house."

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"Well, I want to tell you that it's noble in you."

"No, I don't look at it that way. It is a self-defense, an easing of my conscience for not providing better for them. But I must manage to raise it somehow, and I have an idea. I have been sounding Mrs. Goodwin. She has faith in my ability. I am going to write something and upon it borrow enough money from her to pay my installment. Her husband can send the paper to a medical review with his name signed to it. Some sanitary measures that I have long pondered shall be set forth. Result, notoriety for the doctor and his wife and a moment of ease between the shifts for me. Would you resort to anything like that?"

"Would I? Well, I should think so. Do you know what I'd do? If I had—had some one dependent upon me and had my life insured, I'd go out on the highway and hold up a chosen servant of the Lord before I'd let it lapse."

"My dear boy, I am delighted to know that you understand how I feel. I don't want to be a rascal; I would like to be honest. But I tell you that I have resorted to many a piece of trickery—almost treachery—to pay my premiums. I could tell you something, but you would hate me for it."

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"No, I wouldn't."

"Well, I would better not tell it. What a charming young woman!"

"Yes. Blakemore calls her a 'peach.'"

"A vulgarism not altogether unbecoming," said the Professor, stumbling along in the dark. "She has not the dash of the American girl, perhaps, but I rather admire her for the lack of it. Well, our roads part here. From now until morning I must work on my medical paper."

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## CHAPTER X.

### HIS NICKNAME.

The hot weather fled before a cool mist that came floating over from Lake Michigan. A cold rain began to fall. Cows lowed, and dogs, soonest of all creatures to feel a change in the atmosphere,

crouched shivering in the doorways. Milford worked in the barn till there was nothing more to do, and then he went to the house and sat down with a newspaper. But he could not find interest in it. He threw down the paper and from his bag he took out a worn copy of Whittier. It was a day when we like to read the old things which long ago we committed to memory. We know the word before we reach it, but reaching it, we find it full of a new meaning. But the hours are long when the heart is restless. Out in the woods the mist hung in the tree-tops as if vapor were the world's slow-moving time, balking among the dripping leaves. From a longing Milford's desire to go over to Mrs. Stuvic's became a feverish throb. But the old woman's grin and the red lantern waved in his face constantly arose before him. He strove to recall what the girl had said. He could not find the words that she had spoken, but he remembered that he had felt an encouragement. He went out in the drizzle, to the knoll in the oat field, and stood there, gazing toward the house. He cursed himself for a fool and returned to his cheerless shelter. The hired man sat at the dining-room table, playing solitaire with a pack of greasy cards.

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"I worked this thing the other day, but it won't come now," he said.

"But what have you done when you do it?"

"Well, not much of anything, but you're on top. Heigho! I'd almost rather work than to sit around such a day as this. I don't believe we can do anything in the field to-day. Think so?"

"No. Thinking about going somewhere?"

"Not exactly. Didn't know but I might go over to see my girl. Told me the other day she was lonesome without me. And when you get a woman so she's lonesome without you, why, you've got her foul. Haven't changed your mind about not wantin' her here, have you?"

"No, and I don't expect to change it. I don't know how long I'll be here." He strode up and down the room. "But I'll stick it out," he added, talking to himself. "It's got to be done, no matter what comes."

"Yes, stick it out," said the hired man. "You've got too good a hold to turn loose now. The fellers around have begun to praise you. They say you are goin' to make a go of it."

"A go of what?"

"I don't know, but that's what they said."

"Bob, do you remember my telling you not long ago that I once jumped on a horse and galloped away from a girl."

"Yes, and I thought of how different your case was from mine. Girl galloped away from me. But what about it?"

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"That woman is over at Mrs. Stuvic's now."

"You don't mean the same woman?"

"Yes, I do; the very same woman—a Norwegian."

"Did she say she was the same?"

"She hasn't said anything about it and neither have I. But I know she's the same. She wasn't quite grown when I saw her in a little town out West. She was at a hotel—I think her uncle ran the place. I don't believe she ever noticed me. But I noticed her, and I made up my mind that I wasn't going to be tangled up with her, so I rode away, whistling over the prairie. Yes, sir, the same woman. I never could forget that face, not so beautiful, but a face that takes hold and never turns loose."

"Well, that is strange," said the hired man, looking at an ace of clubs and slowly placing it on the table. Believe I'm going to fluke on this thing. Smart woman, Bill?"

"I don't know; I can't tell."

"But you've heard her talk, haven't you?"

"Yes," said Milford, standing at the window, looking out at the mist, now trailing low over the fields. "I've heard her talk, but when a man has galloped away from a woman he's not much of a judge of her mind."

"This ten specker wants to go right here. Now let me see. I guess you're right, Bill. But what are you goin' to do about it?"

"I don't know."

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"Well, that's perfectly natural. Six goes here. You better not let the old woman find it out. She'll devil you to death."

"She already knows there's something up. It didn't take but a moment for me to satisfy myself that this was the same girl; and I struck out again, intending to go away; but I stopped at the gate and went back."

"But what makes you run away from 'em? I run after 'em. Built that way. Canal cook goes here," he said, referring to a queen. "Is she skittish, Bill?"

"No," said Milford, turning from the window and walking up and down the room. "She's modest, but not skittish."

"And you don't remember whether she's got good sense or not?"

"Of course she has. What the devil are you talking about?"

"All right. But you said you didn't know. I simply want to get at the merits of the case. I know a good deal about women as women go, and they go. Been married once and slipped up three times. Can she talk without smilin' all the time?"

"Yes. She's very earnest at times."

Mitchell raked the cards together, shuffled them and threw the pack on the table. "A woman that smiles all the time wants you to think she's better than she is. I married a smile."

"A frown trailing the skirts of a smile," said Milford, and then with a laugh, he added: "I must have caught that from the Professor."

"I don't know, Bill. But a man that'll sit up and read poetry is apt to say most anythin'. I once heard a fellow say that men read poetry because they like it and women because they think they do." [Pg 109]

"That fellow was a fool and a liar."

"Well, it's easy enough to be both. That sort of double harness is always handy. I don't know much about your case, as I haven't seen her, but if I was in your place I don't believe I'd rush things. A man that starts in by being badly stuck generally has to win the woman—not often that they are stuck alike. I'd stay away and make her get lonesome to see me."

"But how can I tell whether or not she's lonesome to see me?"

"By her tryin' not to seem glad when she sees you again."

"But that leaves the case open for a trip-up. How can I tell that she's trying not to seem glad?"

"Well, your horse-sense will have to tell you that. But I thought you didn't want any woman on the place."

"I don't. In looking at it I haven't strained my eye as far as marriage."

"Then what's the use of lovin' her? It's a waste of raw material."

"There's something I must do before I could permit myself to think of marrying, and I'm going to do it if it takes a leg. But I'll tell you what's a fact, I'd rather have that woman's love than anything on the earth. Sometimes I think that if I knew she loved me I'd be willing to die. There's somebody out there on the veranda." [Pg 110]

A boy came with a note from the Professor's wife, inviting Milford to supper that evening. There was no allusion to the cause that led to his kicking up the dust in front of her gate. It would give her husband, her daughter and herself great pleasure to have him come, and it was hoped that he would not disappoint them. The boy had not waited for an answer. The courtesy fell as an obligation. There was no easy way to dodge it. He would go.

The afternoon was long. Mitchell rigged himself in his best, bought of a peddler after much haggling, and went forth to woo the freckled woman. Milford strolled out into the woods. It was a pleasure to stand in the mist, the trees shadowy about him. It was dreamy to fancy the fog a torn fragment of night, floating through the day. It was easy to imagine the lake a boundless sea. Over the rushes a loon flew, a gaunt and feathered loneliness, looking for a place to light. Milford strolled along a pathway, over high ground, once the brow of the receding lake; and here the growth was heavy, with great trees leaning toward the marsh and hawthorn thickets standing in rounded groups. He came to an open space. In the midst of it stood a sapling. A grape vine had spread over its branches, neatly trimming its outer edges, a hoisted umbrella of leaves. He stopped short. On a boulder beneath this canopy, with her back toward him, almost hidden, sat a woman. She was wrapped in a cloak. But there was no mistaking her hair. She heard his footstep and looked round. She did not appear much surprised. She arose with a smile. [Pg 111]

"I have been sitting here in Norway," she said. "See the cliffs?" she added, pointing to a mountain range of mist.

"But you must have got wet."

"No. But it would make no difference. I do not mind it. I love such a day. It is an etching. Do you go this way? I have stayed long enough."

She walked along the path in front of him, bending to avoid the low boughs, laughing when a wet leaf slapped her cheek.

"Let me go in front to clear the way," he said.

"Oh, no, I like this."

She leaped across a gully. A briar pulled at her skirts. She turned about with the merest tint of a blush. He was not enough of an idealist to etherealize her. He felt her spirit, but acknowledged

her a flesh and blood woman, belonging to the earth, but as the flower does, with a perfume. Her lips bespoke passion; her eyes control. He was glad that he saw her so clearly.

"We shall soon be to the road," she said.

"And you mean that you will leave me there as you did the other night?"

"You are quick to guess."

"Is it because you don't want to be seen with me?"

"Yes. Those women talk."

"But haven't they—haven't they any faith in their kind?"

"Not much," she said frankly.

"But why should you care what they say?"

She looked back at him. "I mean that you are so far above them," he added. "You are worth all of them put together." [Pg 112]

"It is very kind of you to say so. But I am not."

"I would swear it on a stack of Bibles."

"Your oath would not be taken. But let us not talk about it. You do not know what you say when you praise me. I don't place myself above them. I know myself." She halted, turned about and held forth her hand. "See, I have worked in the potato field. I have been a laborer."

"I am a laborer now," he said as they walked on. "There's no disgrace in work."

"Not for a man, not for a woman, but in a field with rough men—" she shrugged her shoulders.

"But the rough men—they had no effect on you," he said, almost pleadingly. "What effect could they have?"

"I was very young. Even at school I had not forgotten their oaths. My uncle sent me to school. He was a poor man, but he sent me."

"Didn't he run a hotel at one time?" he asked.

"Yes, out in Dakota. I worked for him between terms. There were many Norwegians about, and I learned English slowly. But this is of no interest to you."

"Yes, it is—the keenest sort of interest. I mean I like to hear it. What became of your uncle?"

"He is a gripman on a cable train in the city. One of these days I am going to pay him back. And I am going to pay Mrs. Goodwin, too. I will be her companion as long as it pleases her, and then I must find work. I think I can teach drawing in the country. I could do nothing at it in town. Now, you see, I must be careful not to have any talk. I can take care of myself anywhere, in a potato field or in the woods, but I must not distress Mrs. Goodwin. This is the road." [Pg 113]

"Wait a moment. I feel more at liberty to talk to you."

"Now that you find out that I have been a laborer? I do not like that. I wish you had not said it."

"Wait. No, not that, but because we are more of a kind in a way—we both have an object. I am going to pay a man. That's the reason I dig in the hot sun."

"Are you so honest?"

"No, I'm worse than a thief. Don't go—just one moment, please. Sometime I may tell you. They think I like to work, but I hate it. In my thoughts I have committed a thousand murders with my hoe. Let me ask you a question, one laborer of another. Do you like me?"

"Very much," she answered, looking at him steadily.

"I thank the Lord for that much. We might help each other to—"

"No, our battles are apart."

"Oh, I didn't mean that. I mean we can help each other spiritually. Don't you think so?"

"We can all help one another spiritually," she said. "May I go now?" she asked, smiling.

"I wish I could keep you from going. Wait. I can't understand that you have labored in a field. You are the most graceful woman I ever saw—the most perfect lady couldn't discount you. You've got good blood. I believe in blood." [Pg 114]

"I am of a good family," she said. "My father was once a man of some importance. But the world turned against him. Blood is all that saved me."

"I've got one more word to say, now that we are better acquainted. I jumped on a horse once and galloped away from you—out at the little town on the prairie. You don't remember me, but I do you."

"Galoped away from me!" she said in surprise. "Why did you do that?"

"Because I didn't want to get tangled up. Did you ever see a bigger fool? And when I saw you out here I started off again, but I stopped and said, 'I'll be damned if I do.' Once is enough. May I tell you more?"

"No," she said, stepping back. "I have heard enough. And what you tell me may not be true—about galloping away. I don't mean to offend you. But I have been taught to believe—"

"That all men are liars," he suggested. She nodded. "They taught you about right," he went on. "Yes, they did. But sometimes the biggest liar may tell the truest truth. They took you out of the field and taught you politeness. I went from a college out into the wilds and there I forgot learning and learned deviltry. Do you know what they used to call me? Hell-in-the-Mud. That was my nickname. Hell-in-the-Mud, think of it! And what saved me, if I am saved? An old woman living on a hillside in Connecticut—my mother—prayed for me and died. It's a fact. I don't know whether there's a God or not, that is, for the average run of us, but there's one for her. Prayed for Hell-in-the-Mud, and her prayer was printed in the village paper, and I got hold of it. Then I said I would pay him—a man. But go on, I'm telling you too much."

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She turned away without saying another word and almost ran along the road. He stood watching her, hoping that she would look back at him, but she did not. He went to the house. He snatched the cards from the table and tore them into bits. "I hate the sight of them," he said. The clock struck five. He was reminded of his engagement at the Professor's, and he hastened to fill it. He had dreaded to meet the woman who had scared him out of her dooryard. His nerve had been lead. Now it was iron.

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## CHAPTER XI.

### A MAN

As Milford hastened over the road that led to the Professor's house, a picture thrust itself into his mind, to shorten his stride, to make him slow. He saw the girl's hand held out to him, and he wondered why he had not dared to touch it. Surely, there was no labor mark upon it, pink and soft-looking, a hand for the pressure of love and not for work in a field. She had said that she liked him. But any one might have said that. She had said it with a frankness which showed that she had not told more than the truth. But why should she have told more than the truth? Why have had more than truth to tell? He put it all aside and strode onward toward the Professor's house. A light gleamed feebly through the mist.

He unwound the chain from about the gate-post. A dog barked. The door opened and the Professor stepped out, gowned and slippers. He seized his visitor warmly by the hand and led him into the sitting-room, dim with faded furnishings. His fingers were ink-stained, and his red hair was awry as if he had raked his head for thought. Mrs. Dolihide came into the room.

"My dear," said the Professor, "permit me to present to you, and to the humble hospitality of our home, our neighbor and my friend, Mr. Milford, the so-called mysterious, but, indeed, the plain and straightforward. Mrs. Dolihide, Mr. Milford."

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She smiled pleasantly, drew back with a bow, stepped forward and held out her hand. She said that she was delighted to meet him. She had heard her husband speak of him so often. Milford breathed a new atmosphere. He saw that there was to be no allusion to the dust that was kicked up in front of the house. From the dining-room there came a stimulating sniff of coffee. A cat came in with a limber walk and stiffened herself to rub against Milford's chair.

"A fine cat," he said, stroking her.

"A marvelous animal," replied the Professor. "We have had her now going on—how long have we had her, my dear?"

"Oh, she's only been here about two weeks," his wife answered.

"Ah, I was thinking of her predecessor, a most wonderful cat, with a keen sense of propriety, never disturbing the loose ends of thought that a student suffers to lie upon his table."

Mrs. Dolihide agreed that the other cat was good enough, but that she had fits, and in his way Milford acknowledged that fits, while not necessarily arguing a want of merit, could not avoid giving an erratic cast even to most pronounced worth. This was all the Professor needed, and he forthwith launched a ship of disquisition, but when he had fully rigged it and neatly trimmed its sails, his wife broke in with the remark that the country was overrun with common people from the city. One would naturally expect noisy uncouthness, and a lack in many instances of refined reading, but—

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"My dear," the Professor interrupted, "you must bear in mind that the minor summer resort is a kind of Castle Garden, with now and then a shining exception. Here we have the drudges of trade. Am I right, Mr. Milford?"

"Yes, the experiments, the hagglers and the failures."

The Professor slapped his leg. "A goodly remark, sir; upon my soul, a worthy illustration."

"And I have a good deal of fault to find with the home society," said Mrs. Dolihide. "It is jagged and raw, with a constant scuffle after the dollar—"

"The necessary dollar," observed the Professor.

"The scarce dollar," she replied.

"And therefore necessary, my dear. But you are right as to society. There are many good people here, excellent families, but the rank and file are common scratchers of the soil. But they thrive, a reproach to men of more intelligence. And now, sir," he added, turning to Milford, "upon what does success depend? Mind? Oh, no. Industry? No. What then? Temperament. Temperament is of itself a success. It—"

"Supper," said a young woman appearing in the door.

At the table Milford was presented to Miss Katherine Dolihide, slim, cold and prettyish. She might have had a respect for her father's learning, but it was evident that she held his failure in contempt. With her, a mind that gathered the trinkets of knowledge and fell short of providing luxuries for the body could not be reckoned among the virtues. Wisdom's reflected light was dimmer than an earring. She looked at Milford, and he felt that he failed to reach her mark. She gave him, he thought, the dry and narrow smile of ironic pity. She asked him if he liked the country. He answered that he did, and she remarked that it was a crude picture daubed with green. There were no old mills. She loved old mills; no country was beautiful without them. Had she seen old mills? No, she had not, but she had read of them and had found them scattered throughout the pages of art. She acknowledged after a time that the lakes were charming, the woods replete with sweet dreaming, the lanes full of a vagabond fancy, tinkers of imagination sleeping under the leaves; but without a ruined mill there could be no perfect rest for the mind. Milford knew that this was a pretense, not from any psychological reasoning, but because she was so unlike the Norwegian girl. To him there was more of conviction in silent opposites than in noisy arguments.

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"I heard of you the other night over at the honey sociable," she said.

"Honey sociable?"

"Yes, honey and biscuit for the benefit of the church. Quite a unique affair, and wholly new to me, I assure you. A Mrs. Blakemore was present and spoke of you; she said it was a pity that you hadn't come to tell stories of the West. A very intelligent woman, don't you think?"

"Yes, I guess she is."

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"But the most intelligent woman over there," said the Professor, "is Mrs. Goodwin."

"Over where?" his wife asked.

"Why, over at Mrs. Stuvic's."

"When did you meet her?"

"Why—er—let me see. I was passing, stepped in to get a drink of water, and was presented to the lady by Mrs. Stuvic. I didn't stay long, mind you, but long enough to discover the lady's intelligence. Mr. Milford, it may take years to discover a comet, sir, but intelligence, brighter in quality, shines out at once. Pass your cup."

"You didn't tell me you'd met her," said Mrs. Dolihide.

"Didn't I mention it? I thought I did. Speaking of this part of the country, Mr. Milford, is like discussing a new picture with old spots on it; but all great pictures were once new. Take the view, for instance, from our veranda. Nothing could be more charming. The grass land, with scattered trees, trim and graceful in their individuality, the cattle beneath them, the woods beyond, and—"

"No, you didn't mention meeting her," said Mrs. Dolihide.

"But what difference does it make, mother?" the daughter spoke up. "By this time you ought to know that he meets many intelligent persons that we never see. Stuck here all the time," she added under her breath.

"Ah," said the Professor, "man may be walking pleasantly with prosperity hooked upon his arm, talking of the deeds they are to perform in common, when up gallops misfortune on a horse, and that is the end. I was going to take my family to Europe, but there came a galloping down the road and overtook me. Since then my hands have been tied."

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"When I look around," said Mrs. Dolihide, "and see ordinary people living on the best in the land, it makes me mad to think that as smart a man as the Professor—"

"My dear, like you I could question fate, but—"

"Fate nothing; I don't know what it is, but it does seem strange to me. I don't understand why a

man as well educated as you are has to struggle with the world when the commonest sort of a person can buy property. I don't understand it."

"Easy enough," the Professor replied. "The commonest sort of a person may have money, and having money, buys property. Nut-shell argument, Milford," he added, slapping his hand flat upon the table.

"Failure has always been easier to understand than success," said Milford. "Failure is natural, it seems to me. It comes from the weakness of man and nothing is more natural than weakness. I am arguing from my own case, and don't mean to reflect on any one else. I have thrown away many an opportunity, but that was in keeping with my weakness."

"But I hear that you are anything but weak," said the Professor's daughter. "They call you a mystery, and a mystery is a success until it is solved."

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"But an unsolved conundrum might starve to death," he replied.

"Not so long as it remained unsolved," the Professor declared. "We feed the performer till he explains the trick."

"Then I suppose Mr. Milford will not explain his trick," said the girl.

"I'd be foolish to shut off my supplies, wouldn't I?"

"Yes," she admitted, "but if you have a mystery you ought to let your friends share it."

"Ha," said the Professor, "that would mean the disposition of all the shares. But I don't see why they call my friend a mystery. A man comes into the neighborhood and goes to work. Is there anything so mysterious about that? It would be more of a mystery if he lived without work."

"Father sometimes fails to catch the atmosphere of a situation," said the girl, giving Milford a smile not so narrow and not so dry with irony. "One's appearance might have something to do with the estimate formed of him," she continued.

"The hired man marches from the east to the west and back again," said Milford. "And I am a hired man—hired by myself to do something, and I am going to do it," he added with a tightening of his face.

"But that mysterious something?" queried the girl. "What is it?"

"To make money," he answered. "Simmer it down and that's all there is to life."

In her heart she agreed with him, but she took issue. She said that there was something better than money. He asked if it were an old mill, and they laughed themselves into better acquaintance.

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"It would be well to sit here," said the Professor to Milford, "but I want you to go up to my work shop with me. I wish to show you something."

As Milford arose to follow him, he thought that on the woman's face he saw a sneer at "work shop," and he felt that she and her daughter had learned to look upon it as an idle corner, full of useless lumber. The schemes of this ducking failure of a man were not of serious interest to them. His readiness to talk made him seem light of purpose, and a sigh that came from his heart might have been an unuttered word breathed upon the air, a word in excuse of his poverty.

Milford was conducted to an upper room, furnished with two chairs, a worn carpet and a table. But the Professor entered it reverently, as if it were the joss-house of hope. He turned down his light to steady the flame, placed the lamp upon the table, motioned his visitor to a chair, sat down, drew a pile of papers toward him, and said: "My dear fellow, I think I have something here that will tide me over the quarterly rapids. I believe that among these sheets lie a life insurance premium of ninety-seven dollars and forty cents. I want you to hear it, and then I will steal it forth to that woman. Now, in writing for a professional man, a physician, we will say, you must of all things employ sky-scraping terms. Medicine has no use for the simple. I wanted to start off with a cloud-capped sentence, a quotation, and here is one I found in Hazlett, referring to old Sir Thomas Brown: 'He scooped an antithesis from fabulous antiquity and raked up an epithet from the sweepings of chaos.' Isn't that a wild pigeon with the sun on its back?"

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"Yes, I know, but what has it to do with an article on medicine?"

"Everything. Now let me tell you something. In a paper of this sort you must take a text, and with sophistry draw your deductions. You must never be clear. In the opinion of the world involution is depth. It takes a simple book a hundred years to become a classic. The writer has starved to death. He sleeps under marble. And who is it that is lost out there among the briars? The man who wrote the pampered fad. Yes, sir; let contemporaneous man seek to untangle your skein and you flatter him. Now, listen."

He read his paper, making alterations from time to time, marking out small words and writing in larger ones; and when he was done he looked at his visitor with a smile.

"It catches me," said Milford. "I don't know anything about it, but I'm caught all the same. Have you read it to the ladies?"

"What!" gasped the Professor. "Read it to them? They would scoff at me, not because they would

catch its pretentious weakness, but because I wrote it—because I am a failure. And now, sir, do you know I begin to fall down, as the idiomatics would have it? Yes, sir, I am weakening."

"How so?"

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"Why, I've hardly got the nerve to take it to that woman. She hasn't said so, but I know she wants it. When do you expect to see her again?"

"I don't know."

"Now let me see. Would you mind taking this thing along and handing it to her the next time you see her? It would be one of the greatest favors you could do me. You can explain; I'll trust you for that. It is my only recourse; my hope has been built on it, and if I fail I swear I—but I must not fail. You remember I told you that I did something once to help out the amount, something that would cause you to hate me. I will tell you what it was. It was a mean trick—dastardly—but I had to do it. A dog came to my house, a handsome dog with a brass collar. And what did I do? I sneaked that dog off and sold him for six dollars. Now you'll hate me."

"Give me the paper," said Milford, reaching for it. "Don't say another word. Give it to me. I don't know you very well as knowing men goes, but you are kind to me, and I want to put my arm around you. I said down there that money was everything. But it isn't. There's something better—to find a kinsman in the wilderness. She shall take this thing. She's got to. If she doesn't, I'll take it to her husband." He put his arm about the Professor. Tears streamed from the old man's eyes. "There, it's all right. I'll go over there now. If she won't have it, I'll take the train for town. I'm going now."

"Wait a moment," said the Professor, wiping his eyes. "I must not go down this way. Let me recover myself. You have touched my heart, and, poor withered thing, it is fluttering. Just a moment. Now we'll go."

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He led the way down the stairs. "I wish you could stay longer," he said cheerily, "but you know your own affairs. My dear, Mr. Milford is going. We hope to have the pleasure of seeing you again soon. Our latch-string is out. Katherine, shake hands with Mr. Milford. I will light him out."

He stood on the veranda holding the lamp. "It is a dark night, and I wish we had a lantern. But the road is straight to your house. Good-night, and God bless you."

"They have struck up a warm friendship," said the girl.

"Astonishing," her mother replied.

The Professor put the lamp on the mantel-piece. "Is he your lost brother?" his wife asked.

"He is more than that," the Professor answered, sinking into a chair. "He is a man."

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## CHAPTER XII.

### THE OLD SOFA.

Early the next morning, the Professor hastened from the dining-room to answer a rap at his door. And there stood Milford with a roll of bank notes in his hand.

"Ha, you've got it; I see you have. Let me shut the door. They must not hear. Was there ever such luck? Yes, let me take it, the money. Is it all here? Yes, down to the forty cents." He stuffed the notes into his pocket. He held up his hand to enjoin caution. "They would rather have a new settee than an assurance of protection against want in the future. They live from sun to sun. I live for them, but my mind is fixed on the time to come. I don't know how to thank you. You are a man of nerve. And that woman! She is glorious. What did she say?"

"Oh, nothing much."

"Didn't she agree that it was the very thing for the Doctor? Didn't she acknowledge that it would spread the news of his high standing as a physician and a thinker?"

"Yes, she said it would do him a great deal of good abroad."

"A woman in a million. Did the abstruse parts seem to impress her?"

"Yes, she caught all the kinks."

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"The Socrates of her sex. Did she say that she would send it off at once?"

"By the first train. She was particular to ask if you had let any one else into the secret. She's sensitive—and as I was about to go, she asked me not to refer to the matter again, and she hoped that you wouldn't. I don't think she can bear to be thanked. So I promised that neither of us would speak of the transaction, even to her."

"Delicate soul! And you did well to promise. My boy, if sincere thanks are winged things that fly to heaven, there is now a flight of gratitude to the sky. Won't you come in?"

"No, I've just had breakfast and must go to work."

"Well, I hope to see you again before long. And, by the way, I wish to tell you that my wife and daughter were charmed with your visit. They are dear to me, but they do not understand. Pardon me, I am detaining you."

For more than a week the Professor had drooped under anxiety, but now he walked high of head. When he entered the dining-room his wife asked who had called. He answered that it was some one who wanted directions to Mrs. Stuvic's. Lying might at one time have been a luxury with him, but now it was a necessity. She rarely expected the truth from him. It took him longer to tell a lie, and he was fond of talking. And besides, a failure is under no obligations to tell the truth.

"It took you quite a while to give him directions."

"Yes, it is a roundabout way."

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"But you seem to have quite a knack for finding it yourself—to be presented to remarkable women."

"My knack for finding remarkable women began in my earlier years."

"Indeed! And you have been keeping yourself well in practice ever since."

"Constant rehearsal with a former discovery keeps me from growing rusty."

"Well, I don't care, but there's one thing certain! When you come home to-night you'll find that I have thrown that old sofa out into the back yard."

"It's a dreadful thing, pa," said Miss Katherine. "It's a disgrace."

"I know it, but we shall have a new one pretty soon."

"I've heard that for years," said his wife. "Why don't you let that old life insurance go? Gracious alive, it's nonsense to deny yourself everything."

"It's worse than that," the girl spoke up; "it's almost a crime. We don't want you to fret your life out for us. If we are to have anything we want you to share it. You haven't seen anything but worry since you took out the policy. Let it drop. The money you'd have to give for the next payment would make us happy. We could get so many nice things with it, and wouldn't feel ashamed every time a visitor comes into the house. Do, pa." She put her hand on his arm and looked at him appealingly.

He shook his head. "A crime, you say. Then let us acknowledge it a crime. But let us also acknowledge that it is not so dark a crime as it is for a man to die and leave his family in distress. Look at Norwood; look at Bracken. The neighbors had to contribute."

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"But you aren't going to die yet a while," said his wife. "You are in good health. Well, there's no two ways about it. I'm going to throw that old sofa out into the yard. I've stood it as long as I can. It's the first thing a stranger sees when he comes into the house."

"And I imagine that people stop just to look in at it," Katherine spoke up.

"We might label it as having been the property of some great man," said the Professor.

"Oh, I know it's a joke with you, but it's not with us," his wife retorted. "I don't see any fun in a disgrace."

"Have you no respect for the aged?" he asked, trying to wink at his daughter, but she would not accept it. "Let us trail a vine about it and call it a ruined mill."

"That's a stab at me, mother," said the girl. "I am not permitted to have a sentiment."

"Well, I don't want any; I've had enough," the mother replied. "It's sentiment, sentiment ever since I can remember, and I'm sick of it."

"You want poetry, my dear," said the Professor. "Or at least you set store by it, for didn't you give Tennyson to the preacher?"

"I don't care if I did, I'm going to throw that old thing out. Wesley, when is your insurance due?"

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"It is paid, madam, thanks be to the Lord. I sent the money off yesterday."

"Why didn't you tell me you were going to send it?"

"Oh, it was a mere trifle, and I forgot it."

"For pity sake! And where did you get the money?"

"I combed it out of the grass."

"Well, you'd better comb out some for us while you are combing. I've lived this way till I'm tired of it. Where did you get that money?"

"The grass was thick, and the grass was long, and the comb pulled heavy and slow."

"You ought to be ashamed of yourself. That's all I've got to say."

"I'm afraid not."

"I'll talk just as much as I please."

"I'm afraid so. But let us all be cheerful now. Yesterday it was dark and misty, and now the sun is bright. Here, mamma, kiss me to my labor. I haven't drawn at the weak sinews of my feeble salary, and you shall have enough to buy a new sofa."

"That's a good dear," she said, kissing him. "Don't let what I said worry you. I didn't mean it."

He whistled at the dog as he went out; he sang merrily as he walked along the road, with the sunrise on his face and the noontime in his heart.

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## CHAPTER XIII.

### DORSEY.

It was Mitchell's day to cook, and when Milford came in to dinner, the hired man told him that he had something of importance to tell.

"Out with it," said Milford.

"No, not till you eat. I never like to choke off a man's appetite. I wouldn't like to have a man choke off mine. I'd be like old Matt Lindsey. The court said he must hang for murderin' a peddler. His lawyers took his case before the supreme bench. And after it had been argued one of 'em came down to the jail to see old Matt. Just about that time the jailer brought in his dinner. Old Matt said to the lawyer, 'Don't tell me till I've eat this stuff. Afterwards I mightn't be in the humor, and I don't want to miss a meal.' And it was a good thing he eat first."

"Well, is what you've got to say so bad as all that?"

"Not a hangin' affair, but it's bad enough. The fact is, you can make it just as bad as you want it."

"If it rests with me, I'll not make it very bad. I'll tell you that."

"But I'll be hanged if it hain't made you turn pale. Why, you're scared, Bill. Oh, it's not so bad. I'll tell you now, seein' that I've already choked off your appetite. Why, there's a feller over at Mrs. Stuvic's that's too fresh. I was out by the windmill and your girl and a woman came along; and this feller was standin' off, not far away, talkin' to a chump that was with him, and he made a remark about the girl—won't tell you what it was, for a feller that's stuck don't like to hear such things repeated—I know I wouldn't. And I said to myself at the time, 'If Bill knowed that he'd mash your mouth.'"

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"What sort of a looking fellow is he?" Milford quietly asked.

"Big feller. The hired man over there says his name's Dorsey. Just got here, I believe."

"All right. Did you fix the fence where the sheep broke in?"

"Somebody left the gap down. It's all right now."

"Did you wrap the collar so it won't hurt the horse's shoulder?"

"Yes, works all right, now. Haven't got enough to eat, have you?"

"Not very hungry to-day," said Milford as he walked out. The hired man called after him, but he did not stop. He took the straight road to Mrs. Stuvic's. He saw Mrs. Blakemore coming out to the gate. She smiled upon him as he drew near. She said that she had just received a letter from George. He was in business again; a real estate firm had taken him as an experiment. He made a large sale the second day, and was now regularly employed at a good commission. It had made her very happy. She never would forget Mr. Milford; there was no doubt about it, he had inspired her husband with strength. Milford asked if a man named Dorsey were at the house. She said that she believed there was; he was at dinner. "If you want to see him, I'll tell Mrs. Stuvic," she said.

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"I wish you would. Tell her I want to see him now. I haven't time to wait."

"I will. But isn't that glorious news from George? Oh, you don't know how low-spirited he was. Sometimes I thought he never would get up again. Don't you know that just a word, even though lightly spoken, may sometimes spur one to renewed action? Oh, it's undoubtedly a fact."

"Yes, words may sometimes be ashes, but often they are coals of fire. Will you please—"

"Oh, that's a good sentiment. I must remember it and tell George. He'll be out again Saturday evening. But I'll go and tell Mrs. Stuvic that you want to see—that's the man coming out now."

A strong-looking man came walking out toward the gate. Mrs. Blakemore stepped aside, and he was about to pass when Milford said: "Your name is Dorsey, I understand."

"That's it," the man replied, taking a toothpick out of his mouth.

"I'd like to see you a moment on business; over in the grove."

"What's your name?"

"Come over into the grove. I want to see you a moment. My name's Milford."

"Do you want to see me about a horse? I want to hire one. Is that it?"

"Yes, over in the grove."

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"All right. Got him there? I don't care whether he's gentle or not. I can manage him all right. The first thing one of you farmers tells a fellow is that his horse is gentle, when he knows that all he wants is an opportunity to run away. So you may save yourself that trouble."

Milford conducted him to a spot out of view from the house. He halted and threw his hat on the ground. He told him what the hired man had said.

"Well," said Dorsey, "this is a fine proceeding."

"Take off your coat."

"What are you going to do?"

"Whip you if I can."

"But I'm not looking for any trouble."

"You may not have looked for it, but you've found it."

"Say, this is all nonsense. You won't tell me what I said, and I don't remember. But let me tell you something. You can't whip me. I can mop the earth with you—my way. Is that the way you want to fight?"

"Yes. *My* way would mean something. But it won't do in this country. Take off your coat."

The fellow was an athlete. Milford was no match for him. He had the strength, but not the skill in boxing. But once Milford got him down, ran under and snatched his feet from under him. In a moment, though, he was up again, meeting strength with skill. Three times he knocked Milford down. It was useless to continue to fight. Milford held up his hands. "We'll call it off for the present," he said, panting.

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"Suit yourself. I've got nothing to fight about except to keep from getting licked, and it's for you to say when to stop."

"Well, I say stop, for the present. I haven't been used to fighting your way. I'm from the West, and if I had you there we'd soon settle it. It's not over with as it is. I'll see you again. Do you expect to come back out here this summer?"

"Well, I'm not going to let you keep me away. You don't know what you've run up against, young fellow. I teach boxing in town. That's my lay."

"All right. I'll see you again."

"But my way, understand. Don't come any Western business on me."

"I'll see you again and your way. I never was beaten long at a time."

"Good enough. Got through seeing me about the horse?"

"I'm through. No, wait a moment. If you go back to the house and say anything about this affair, I'll try you the Western way. Do you understand?"

"Oh, it's nothing to me. I won't mention it. Good-day. I'll take care of your horse."

Milford went home, covered with blood. He washed himself and lay down under the walnut tree to steam in his anger. His lip was cut and his cheek was bruised. He jumped up suddenly, ran into the house and took two pistols out of a battered leather bag, but he put them back and sat down in the door to cool. The hired man came around the corner of the house.

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"I guess you must have found him," he said, halting with a smile and a nod.

"Yes, and he was too much for me. But I'll get even with him."

"That's the way to look at it. May take a long time, but it's to come round all right. I used to drive a team in Chicago. And one day I had to cuss the driver of a coal wagon, and he ups with a lump of coal and smashes my face. I was a long time getting even with him, but I got there."

"Did you kill him?"

"Kill him! Well, I should say not. I didn't have enough money to kill him and get away with it. I just waited, watchin' him close every time I saw him. And one day he jumped off his wagon, slipped on the ice and broke his leg. Satisfied me, and after that I turned him loose."

"Bob, do you know anything about boxing?"

"I used to be somethin' of a scrapper. Why?"

"I want you to teach me."

"Don't believe I'd be a very good teacher. But, say, I know a feller that's all right. He used to be a sort of a prize fighter and he's now got a little saloon up here at Antioch, 'bout ten miles up the road. His name's Mulligan."

"All right. You go ahead with your work just as if I was with you. I'm going up there."

"Sure enough? All right. When I get through with one thing I'll go at another."

Milford trudged off across the fields toward the village of Antioch. At a well beneath a tree where cows stood in the shade, he stopped to bathe his face. He saw his dark countenance wrinkling in the disturbed water; he committed the natural folly of talking to himself. "You are a fool," he said, looking down into his wavering eye. "You are a fool, and you want to prove it." He smiled to think how easy it was to produce the testimony. In such cases nature cheerfully gives her deposition.

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He continued his way across the fields, through a skirt of wooded land and out into a road. Bicycles cracked past him. A buggy overtook him. Some one spoke. He looked round and recognized the "discoverer" and the Norwegian. It was only a two-seated vehicle, but they invited him to ride. He declined to accept their kindness, trying to hide his face. He said that he had heard Mrs. Stuvic say that the buggy was not strong. They were going to the village of Lake Villa. They might stop at the mill and have a word with the Professor. Milford remarked that the Professor would no doubt be pleased to see them, but that he was no doubt very busy. They drove on without having noticed the wounds on his face. To one not bent upon a vengeful mission, to a thoughtful man with a mind in tone with the scented air, the soft sky, the spread of green, the gleam of water, the clouds of blackbirds, such a stroll would have been rich with an inner music played upon many sweet chords. At a crossroads stood an old brick house, an ancient rarity upon a landscape white-spotted with wooden cottages. It was a rest for the eye, a place for a moment of musing, a page of a family's record, a bit of dun-colored history. It was built long before the railroad set the clocks of the country, before man entered into business copartnership with the minute and employed the second as his agent. It was a relief to look upon a worn door-sill, a rotting window-blind hanging by one hinge. In the years long gone the congressman's carriage, laboring through the mud, had halted there, and the statesman had warmed himself at a fire of wood, delighting an old Whig with predictions of a glorious victory. At this place Milford halted to get a drink of water and to sit for a few moments in the shade. A man came out and asked him if he wanted a team. He had a team that would not run away. He was not prepared to take boarders, but when it came to a team he was there. He had driven great men, pork-packers of Chicago. The man who owned the enormous ice-house over on the lake had ridden with him. And it was probably one of the largest ice-houses in the world. It took thousands of dollars the year before to paint it. Milford told him that he did not want a team, and the fellow shambled off in disgust.

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There was not much time to be wasted, for the sun was now far over toward the west. Milford's anger had settled into a cool determination, and he walked easier, not so hard upon the ground. He began to notice more things, a cat sitting at a window, looking out upon the narrow world, a boy with a goat harnessed to a wagon, a farmer who starved his boarders, hauling veal to the railway, to be shipped to town. He fell in with a tramp and divided smoking tobacco with him. They strolled along together.

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"Beautiful country to walk through," said Milford.

"That's no lie," said the tramp.

"But all countries are about the same when times are hard, I should think," Milford remarked.

"That's no pipe," said the tramp.

"They tell us, however, that we are to have better times."

"They are smokin'," said the tramp.

Their roads separated, and they parted company. The sun was down when Milford reached the village. It was an easy matter to find Mulligan's saloon. One of the oldest citizens pointed it out. Mulligan was half-dozing behind his bar. Several men were at a table, playing cards. Milford made short work of his introduction. He told his story. There was but one way to get even. Mulligan laughed. That sort of revenge appealed to his Irish heart. He would give lessons, and it should not cost a cent. He put out his whisky bottle. His face beamed. He was glad to meet a civilized man. The very fact that Milford had come on such a mission was a proof of an improvement in the country.

"Dorsey," he said. "Dorsey. He can't box; I never heard of him. Well, we'll make a jelly out of his face."

They went out to supper together. "This man has heard of me and has come miles to get lessons," said Mulligan to the tavern keeper.

They boxed till late at night and shook hands warmly at parting. Earnestness is genius, and when Milford set out for home, the moon on his right shoulder, he felt that he had made surprising progress. It was nearly daylight when he reached the end of his journey. The hired man was going out to the barn.

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"You are born to be a great man," said Mitchell. "The cards are shuffled and cut that way and you can't help it. What are you goin' to do now?"

"I'm going to sleep for a few hours and then get to work."

"When are you goin' to take another lesson?"

"Day after to-morrow."

"Ain't that feller a bird?"

"He understands his business."

"About when do you think you can tackle your job again?"

"Not till I have learned how. I'm going to get some gloves and have you box with me between times."

He went into the house and lay down, and when Mitchell came in he was asleep with his head on his fist.

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## CHAPTER XIV.

### PEEPED IN AT HIM.

Blakemore came out on Sunday morning, snapping his watch and complaining against the pall-bearing march of time. He was full of business. His pockets were stuffed with papers. He made figures on the backs of envelopes as he sat at the table. He asked after Milford. His wife said that the place had somehow lost its charm for Mr. Milford. Mrs. Goodwin and Miss Strand had seen him in the road. Mrs. Stuvic, standing near, pressed her lips close together. She shook her head. She did not understand him, she declared. Lately he had been seen in Antioch. She did not know what business could have taken him there.

"You may not be supposed to know," said George, making his figures.

"Now you keep still," she replied. "I am supposed to know more than you think for. I wasn't born yesterday, and I'm goin' to live longer than any of you, I tell you that."

"It's very natural for us to expect every one else to die," said George. "It's a pretty hard matter to picture one's self as dead. But the old fellow is coming along yonder whetting his scythe as he comes."

"George," said his wife, "don't talk to her that way."

"Oh, let him talk," the old woman spoke up. "I don't care what he says. Goes in at one ear and comes out at the other, with me. I'll live to see him cold, I'll tell you that."

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"Oh, please don't talk that way, Mrs. Stuvic; you give me the shudders. By the way, Mr. Dorsey has gone back to town, hasn't he?"

"Yes," Mrs. Stuvic answered. "And he owes me, too."

"That's what you say about everybody," George declared. "You'll be saying it about me, next."

"Well, you did owe me till to-day; and see that you don't do it again. But that feller Dorsey'll pay. He'll be back again in about two weeks. He says I've got the finest place in the county."

"The 'peach,'" George whispered, as Mrs. Goodwin and Gunhild came into the dining-room. His wife pulled at him. The boy wanted to know what he had said. For a wonder he had not heard. His mind was among the green apples in the orchard. George bowed to the ladies and began to tell them about the great improvement in business. The banks had plenty of money to lend. Real estate, the true pulse of the times, had begun to throb with a new life. Mrs. Goodwin did not think that there had been any improvement. The Doctor had written that money was scarce. Every one complained of slow collections. George asked the Norwegian if there were any sale for pictures.

"There is no sale for mine," she answered. "I do not expect to sell any."

"Then," said George, "it's a waste of time to paint them."

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"I do not paint," the girl replied. "My ambition was not dressed in colors."

Mrs. Goodwin smiled upon her, and Mrs. Blakemore drew her husband's attention to what she termed the bright aptness of the remark. George said that it did not make any difference whether art was done with a brush or pencil, it was a waste of time if it failed to sell; and hereupon Mrs. Stuvic began to sniff as a preliminary to an important statement.

"A man boarded with me a while last winter that could knock 'em all out when it comes to makin' pictures with a pen," she said. "He drew a bird without takin' his pen up from the paper, and it looked for all the world like it was flyin'. But when that was said all was said. He wan't no manner

account. He went away owing me. Now, what does he want to go to Antioch for? I'd just like for somebody to tell me that."

"The man that drew the bird?" George spoke up.

"Oh, you keep still. I mean Milford."

"Probably the woman he's been working for so hard has moved into the neighborhood," said George. Mrs. Stuvic declared that you never could tell what a man was working for. No man was worth trusting. She knew; she had tried them. Milford was no better than the rest of them. Why didn't he explain himself? Why didn't he stand out where every one could see him? She had defended him. She was getting tired of it. He had not rewarded her with his confidence. He came a stranger and had been a stranger ever since. One of these days he might set fire to the house and run away.

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"You shall not talk about him so," the girl declared. "No one shall abuse him."

"Good for you," Mrs. Stuvic cried. "I've been fightin' his battles all along and I'm glad to get some help. Why, she looks like a cat, don't she? And it's what I like to see, I tell you. But it's usually the way; a man works for one woman and is took up for and defended by another."

"He is not working for any woman, madam," said Gunhild. "No woman has any claim on him."

Mrs. Blakemore shook her head. "With that dark, handsome face it would be difficult long to escape the claim of a woman."

"Come off," said George. "I don't see anything so killing about him."

"Men never see killing features in man," his wife replied. "They are left for softer eyes to discover."

"Oh," he rejoined, looking worriedly at her.

"The 'peach,'" she whispered. "Am I to hear that again?"

He scratched upon an envelope and handed to her the words: "I give in. Let us call it even and quits."

Mrs. Goodwin looked at Gunhild as if by a new light. Next in importance to the discovery of genius itself, is the discovery that genius is picking its way along the briary path of love, lifting a thorny bough in bloom to peep blushing from a hiding place, or boldly to tear through the brambles out into the open, and in honest resentment defy the wondering gaze of the common eye. It would be a pretty sight to see this girl in love, the woman mused. She did not wish to see her married to a man who labored in a field; but it would be delicious to see her love him and hating herself for it, fighting a rosy battle with her heart. There was no romance in loving an "available" man; there was no suffering in it, and how empty was a love that did not swallow a midnight sob! She asked Gunhild to walk out into the woods with her. They crossed a low, marshy place where pickerel split the trashy water in the spring of the year, and strolled up a slope into the woods. They gathered flowers, talking of things that interested neither of them; they found an old log covered with moss and here they sat down to rest. It was always sad to feel that the summer would soon be gone, the elderly woman said, gazing at a soldierly mullein stalk, nodding its yellow head. More summers were coming, and the leaves and the flowers would be the same, the grass as green, the birds as full of happy life; but the heart could not be turned back to live over the hours and the days—only, in dreaming, in reminders of the time forever gone. To the youthful, two summers are twins; to the older, they are relatives; to the aged, strangers.

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"You make me sad when you talk that way," said the girl.

"My dear child, a sadness to-day may be food for sweet reflection in the future. Indeed, it would even be well for you to suffer now."

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"But I do not want to suffer. I do not see the need of it."

"My dear, suffering prepares us for the better life. It makes us more thankful."

"I do not know that," she said with energy. "Sometimes it may harden us. We may be kept from food so long that we have no manners when we come to the table."

"Gunhild, that is a very good remark—a thoughtful remark, true in the main, but not illustrative of the point I wish to make. But you are so full of hope that—"

"Full of hope, madam?"

"Yes, the hope that rises from health and strength. You have so much to look forward to. You might make a brilliant match."

"Then I must hope that sometime I may sell myself?"

"Oh, no, no. I didn't mean that. I mean that you have prospects. Shall I be plain? You have the prospects of loving one man and marrying another. That is called a brilliant match, I believe. Or, at least, it is a feature of nearly all brilliant matches. Don't you think so?"

"I am not supposed to know, madam."

"Not even to please me?"

"Oh, if it please you, I am supposed to know everything."

"Good. Then tell me what you know about Mr. Milford. You understand that it is my mission to find interest in nearly all—well, I might say, odd persons. You have met him when I was not with you. And he must have told you something." [Pg 148]

"He has told me nothing that I can repeat."

"Oh, is it that bad?"

"Is what that bad, Mrs. Goodwin? I do not understand what you mean by that bad. Perhaps what he told me did not make enough impression to be remembered."

"But didn't he say things you did not remember, but continued to feel?"

"Yes, I believe so. You know that I do not understand men very well. I do not understand any one very well. They make remarks about him and say that he is mysterious, but he is plainer to me than any one. Somehow I feel with him. He has had a hard life, I think, and that brings him closer to me."

"Ah, my dear, the suffering I spoke of just now."

"But," the girl added, "I do not know that his hard life has made him any better."

"Perhaps not. But it must have made him more thoughtful. After all, I'm not so much interested in him. He is one of the characters that throw a side-light on our lives. He can never take an essential part in our affairs. Do you think so?"

"I must again say that I do not understand."

"Why, don't you know that we meet many persons, and become quite well acquainted with them, and yet never feel that they belong to our atmosphere? They are not necessary to the story of our lives, so to speak, and yet that atmosphere of which they are not really a part, would not be wholly complete without them. They stand ready for our side talks; sometimes they even flip a sentiment at us. We catch it, trim it with ribbons and hand it back. They keep it; we forget. The Blakemores are such persons. We may never see them again—may almost wholly forget them, and yet something that we have said may influence their lives. And perhaps to Mr. Milford, we are but side-lights. He may soon be in his saddle again, forgetting that he ever knew us. But are we to forget him? Has his light been strong enough to dazzle us?" [Pg 149]

"I shall not forget him, madam."

"Then he may have made himself essential to the story of your life."

"He has made himself a part of my recollection."

"No more than that? Sometimes we recall because it is no trouble, and sometimes we remember with pain. You know, Gunhild, that I think a great deal of you."

"I can never forget that. It is an obligation—"

"Now, my child, I don't want you to look at it that way. You must not. What I have done has given me pleasure. And if I deserve any reward, it is—well, frankness."

"You deserve more than that—gratitude."

"Then let frankness be an expression of gratitude. Are you in love with that man?"

"Madam, a long time ago I used to slip to the door of the dining-room of the little hotel in the West and peep in at him. They said he was bad, that he would kill; but he came like a cavalier, with his spurs jingling, and fascinated me. I felt that my own spirit if turned loose would be as wild as his, for had not my forefathers fought on the sea till the waves were bloody about them, and had they not dashed madly into wild lands? I peeped in at him; I did not speak to him; but I watched for his coming. And late at night I have lain awake to hear his wild song in the bar-room, just below me. One day I met him in the passage-way, and looked into his eyes, with my heart in my own, I feared; and I did not see him again till I came out here. I did not know his name. They called him Hell-in-the-Mud." [Pg 150]

Mrs. Goodwin did not remain quiet to hear the story. With many exclamations, she walked up and down, sometimes with her back toward the girl sitting on the log, her hands in her lap, lying dreamily; sometimes she wheeled about and stood wide of eye and with mouth open.

"Well, who ever heard of the like? But are you sure he is the same man?"

"Yes. I did not remind him that I had seen him there. He said that he had seen me—he said—"

"But what did he say? You must keep nothing back now. It would spoil everything. What did he say?"

"He said that he got on his horse and galloped away—from me. He said that he did not want to be—be tangled up."

"Well, well, who ever heard of such a thing? And you have met out here. Has he asked you to marry him?"

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"No, and I do not think he will. I must not marry him."

"But you love him."

"Bitterly, madam."

"Oh, isn't that sweet—I mean, how peculiar a situation it is! No, you can't think of marrying him. It wouldn't at all do. I don't believe he could live tied down to one place. It is a first love and must live only as a romance. It will help you in your art. It will be an inspiration to all your after life, a poem to recite to your daughter in the years to come. I had one, my dear. He was wild, wholly impossible, you might say. And I was foolish enough to have married him, but my mother—she married me to the dear Doctor. And how fortunate it was for both of us, I mean for me and for Arthur! He threw himself away."

"But he might not have thrown himself away, madam, if you had married him."

"Oh, yes, he was really thrown away before I met him. My mother was right. She knew. She had married the opposite to her romance."

"But are women never to marry the men they love?"

"Oh, yes, to be sure. We all love our husbands. But we ought not to marry our first love. That would be absurd. It would leave our after life without a sweet regret. My dear, romantic love is one thing and marriage is another. Love is a distress and marriage is business. That's what the Doctor says."

"And pardon me, madam, but he lives it."

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"How? What do you mean?"

"Why, you are his business partner. You take care of his house. If you are not there your servants keep the house. He may be pleased to see you, but there is never any joy in his eyes—or yours. You are dissatisfied with life. You try to make yourself believe you are not, but you are. You look about for something, all the time. If you and the Doctor should fail in business, you would grow tired of each other. You told me to be frank."

"Oh, yes, but you must not believe that. I think the world of him. I don't see how I could live without him. He is absolutely necessary to me. But he wasn't my romance. And I am glad of it. I couldn't dream over him if he were. But your story. It almost upsets me. Got on his horse and rode away! It is evident that he didn't want a romance. What wise man could have warned him against it? I am glad you told me, my dear. I can be of a great deal of assistance to you. Suppose we go back to the house. Well, well, you have given me a surprise."

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## CHAPTER XV.

### WANTED THE HORSE.

The days were linked out into weeks; there had been rag-time music and break-down dancing at Mrs. Stuvic's, but Milford had not shown himself. A farmer passing late at night had looked through the window and had seen him boxing with the hired man. Some one else had seen him sparring with an Irishman in Antioch. The old woman swore that he was "going daft." But it was noised around that he had threshed out nearly two thousand bushels of oats, and this redeemed his standing. He had not arrived in time to sow the oats, but the luck of the harvest had fallen to him. The crop had been threatened with rust and the old woman advised him to plow up the fields, but he had held out against her and was rewarded, not alone with a surprising yield of grain, but with a recognized right to exercise freedom of action, such as would not have been tolerated in a man who had fallen short. A wise old skinflint halted one day to ask his opinion of a bulky subscription book for which he had paid one dollar down and signed notes for three more, payable, of course, at times when money worries would buzz thickly about him. And news came through the hired man that a young woman, thin of chest and clumsy of foot, but worth a hundred acres, had set her cap for him.

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"Of course, I wouldn't advise you to take her," said Mitchell, putting on his necktie before a three-cornered fragment of a looking-glass, "but I want to tell you that land's land out here. And besides, she might die in a year or two. You never can tell. I may see her at church to-day. She and my girl are sorter kin to each other. I'm a marryin' man, myself. I don't see enough difference in married life or single life to get scared at either one, so I take the marryin' side. A married man has a place to keep away from and a single man hasn't any place to go to, so it's all about the same, that is, without property. Goin' anywhere to-day?"

"There's no place for me to go except over to the old woman's, and I don't care to go there yet awhile. I wonder why she hasn't been over here?"

"Who, the girl?"

"No, the old woman. Do you suppose I expect the girl to come?"

"Well, I didn't know," said Mitchell, brushing his stiff hair. "You never can tell what a girl will do. They keep me guessin' and I'm on to their curves pretty well. I see that Mrs. Goodwin yesterday evenin'. And she looked like a full-rigged ship. Guess I'd be a little afraid of her with her big talk. But you could tackle her all right enough. Say, I'm sore as I can be, boxin' with you. Is that cigar up by the clock, one that the prize-fighter give you? Let me take it along. I want to perfume my way with it. Thanks," he added, taking the cigar before Milford had said a word. "How do these pants set?"

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"They strike me as being a trifle short," said Milford, surveying him.

"That's what I was afraid of, but they dragged the ground till the peddler left, and then they began to draw up. A man's sure to get the worst of it when he buys out of a pack. I'd like to have a suit of clothes made to order, but I can't afford it now. Did you ever have a suit put up to your own notion?"

"Yes, a few."

"Well, I said all the time that you wan't no common man."

"And right there you struck the ancient and the modern idea of what a man is—garments. You can't get away from the effect of clothes. The city and the backwoods are alike. With the exception that the city insists that the coat shall fit better and the pantaloons be a little longer," he added, smiling.

"Don't laugh at 'em, Bill; they're all I've got. When a man's got two pair of briches you may laugh at one, but when he's got only one pair, don't laugh. Are you goin' to set up here and read that book all day? What's his name? Whitson?"

"Whittier. I don't know. I'm a Quaker waiting to be moved. I had this old book with me out West. We used to read it at night in the shack. We had some pretty smart fellows with us. Some of them pretended to be ignorant when in fact they had read their names on a sheepskin. They had been beaten over the head with books till they were sick of them."

"I don't blame 'em," said the hired man. "I'd rather set up with a corpse than a book."

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"Sometimes it's about the same thing," Milford replied. "Did you ever read the Bible?"

"What do you take me for?"

"I don't take you for a man who has read very much of it. But it's the greatest thing ever written."

"It's out of date, Bill."

"Yes, to those who don't think. Why, there's more wisdom in it than in all other books put together. I don't care anything about creed, or what one man or another may believe; I don't care how or why it was written—I brush aside the oaths that have been sworn on it, and the dying lips that have kissed it; I shut my eyes to everything but the fact that it is the greatest opera, the greatest poem, the greatest tragedy ever written."

"If I could talk that way I'd go out and preach about it, Bill."

"Not with my record behind you, old fellow."

"But why should a man that believes as you do have a record to hold him down?"

"There you've got me. That's what I'd like to know. But when a man has learned to understand himself, then all things may become clear. We sometimes say that it was not natural for a man to do a certain thing. The fact is, it's natural for a man to do almost anything that he can do."

"This is good Sunday mornin' talk, all right, Bill. But I've got to go after my girl. She's got lots of sense, horse sense and flap-doodle sense all mixed up. She's got more flap-doodle sense than I have; she reads books, and not long ago she give me a piece of poetry that she'd cut out of a newspaper. I said, 'Read her off and take her back.' And she did. Well, I'm off."

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Milford hailed a man who drove up in a buggy, gave ten cents for a Sunday newspaper, and sat on the veranda to read it. The wind blew a sheet out into the yard. He started after it, but halted, looking at a man who was crossing the field where the oats had been reaped, striding with basket and rod toward the lake. Milford left the paper to the wind. He hastened to the woods between the oat field and the lake and waited for the man, leaning musingly against a tree. The man got over the fence and came along the path. Milford stepped out.

"Good-morning, Mr. Dorsey."

"Why, helloa. How's everything?"

"All right, I hope. Are you done with that horse?"

"Oh, that horse. Yes, I'm about done with him."

"Hold on. I want him."

"What do you mean?"

"You remember the last time we met I—well, we'll say, I let you have a horse."

"You mean we fought over yonder in the grove."

"That's what I mean."

"Well, what about it?"

"We are going to fight over here in this grove."

"Why, I thought you had enough?"

"I did have then, but I want more. I said then that I'd never been beaten for long at a time. I've been waiting for you."

"A man don't have to wait for me very long. But say, this is all rank foolishness. I've got nothing against you; and as for what I said about the woman, why, I'm willing to apologize, although I don't know what it was." [Pg 158]

"You will apologize, but not till I get through with you. Take off your coat."

"You beat any fellow I ever saw. I don't want to fight; I want to fish."

"I don't want to fish, I want to fight. Take off your coat or I'll knock you down in it."

"All right, my son." He threw his coat on a stump. Milford was in his shirt sleeves. "Wait a moment," said Dorsey. "You have brought this thing about, and I want to tell you that I won't let you off as easy as I did the last time."

They went at it. Dorsey fell sprawling. He scrambled to his feet with trash in his hair and blood in his mouth. Milford knocked him over a stump. He got up again and came forward, cutting the capers of a tricky approach, but Milford caught him with a surprising blow and sent him to grass again. This time he did not get up. He squirmed about on the ground. Milford took him under the arms and lifted him to his knees. "Go away," he muttered, his head drooping. "You've—you've broken my jaw."

Milford ran to the lake and brought water in his hat. Dorsey was sitting up when he returned.

"You've knocked out two of my teeth," he mumbled.

"Here, let me bathe your face."

"Biggest fool thing I ever saw," Dorsey blubbered through the water applied to the mouth. "I told you I'd apologize." [Pg 159]

"Yes, and you may do so now. Do you?"

"Of course. What else can I do?"

"I'm almost sorry I hit you so hard."

"Almost! I don't stop at that. I don't want you to say anything about it," he added. "It would hurt my business."

"A horse kicked you," said Milford. "You're all right now. You can go to the house."

"I'm going to town by the first train. I'm done up. You've been practicing. You ought to make a success of yourself if that's the sort of fellow you are."

Milford helped him put on his coat. "Now, I wish I could do something for you," he said. "No matter what I do, I always get the worst of it."

"You didn't get the worst of this, by a long shot."

"Yes. Now I've got to grieve over it. I've been trying to do right, but the cards are against me."

"You needn't grieve over me. You have licked a good man."

"I grieve because you were willing to apologize."

"Don't let that worry you. I wouldn't have apologized any too strong. Well, I don't believe the fish will bite to-day. I'll go back."

Milford watched him as he walked slowly across the stubble field, and strove to harden his heart against the cutting edge of remorse. The fellow was a bully. To him there was nothing sacred, and he thought evil of all women. His manliest words waited to be knocked out of him. [Pg 160]

Milford returned to the house and gathered up the scattered sheets of his newspaper. But he sat a long time without reading. The gathered vengeance of his arm had been spent. It had shot forth with delight, like a thought inspired by devoted study, but like a hot inspiration grown cold, it faded under the strong light of reason. He heard the shriek of a railway train, rushing toward the city. He saw George Blakemore coming up the hill. [Pg 161]

## CHAPTER XVI.

### THE GRIZZLY AND THE PANTHER.

Blakemore came up briskly, shook hands with a quick grasp, looked at his watch and sat down on the edge of the veranda. His eye was no longer fixed and rusty, but bright and restless. He did not drool his words, hanging one with doubtful hesitation upon another, but blew them out like a mouthful of smoke. He talked business; he had just engineered another land deal. He had traveled about among the surrounding towns, and spoke of a railway ticket as a "piece of transportation." Sunday to him was a disease spot, the blotch of an inactive liver. Rest! There was no rest for a man who wanted to work.

"What's to be the end of this rush?" Milford asked. "What's your object?"

"Money, of course. You know what the object of money is, so there you are."

"I don't know that I do. Money's object is to increase, but I've never been able to discover its final aim, except possibly in a few instances. We struggle to get rich. Then what? We read an advertisement and find that we have kidney trouble. We take medicines, go to springs, grow puffy, turn pale—die. That's the average man who makes money for money's sake. But it's a waste of words to talk about it."

"It is undoubtedly a waste of time to think about it," said Blakemore. "Not only that, to give it daily attention would mean stagnation and dry rot. There'd be no land sales. But, speaking of an object, you have one, of course." [Pg 162]

"Yes, such as it is. And strain my eyes as I may, I can't look beyond it. I made up my mind a good while ago that there's not much to live for. This is an old idea, I know, but at some time it is new to every man. We fight off trouble that we may fight into more trouble. And our only pleasure is in looking back upon a past that was full of trouble, or in looking forward to a time that will never come."

"You're a queer sort of a duck, anyhow," Blakemore replied, throwing the stub of a cigar out into the grass. "You must have been burnt sometime. And yet you're no doubt looking for the fire again."

"Did you ever catch a bass with his mouth full of rusty hooks? I'm one—hooks sticking out all around, but I must have something to eat, and I may snap a phantom minnow."

"Yes, sir, you're a queer duck. But there's a lot of good stuff in you, I'll tell you that; and I could take you in tow and make a winner of you. Drop this farm and come to town."

Milford smiled and shook his head. "Winning looks easy to the man that wins. No, when I leave this place I'll have my object in my pocket."

"Queer duck," Blakemore repeated. "Any insanity in your family?"

"No, none to speak of. My father took the bankrupt law and paid his debts ten years afterwards." [Pg 163]

Blakemore lighted a cigar. "Did you disown him?"

"No. He went to the springs, grew pale—and we buried him."

Blakemore turned his cigar about between his lips. "And your idea is to pay your debts, grow pale, and let them bury you. Is that it?"

"Not exactly," and then he added: "I owe a peculiar sort of debt."

"A man's foolish to pay a peculiar debt," Blakemore replied.

"But a peculiar debt might take a strange hold on the conscience."

"Yes," Blakemore agreed, "but a tender conscience has no more show in business than a peg leg has in a foot-race. Do you know what I did? I moped about under a debt of twenty thousand dollars. After a while I looked up and didn't see anybody else moping. I quit. Am I going to pay it? Maybe, but not till the last cow has come home, I'll tell you that. They scalped me, and I'm going to scalp them. By the way, I met a fellow just now—fellow named Dorsey. You might have seen him out here. Met him a while ago, and he told me that a horse kicked him over yonder in the woods. Didn't do a thing but kick his teeth out. He's gone to town to have his jaw attended to. Your horse?"

"No, a horse that Dorsey hired when he was out some time ago. He must have misused him."

"He got in his work all right. Well, I've come after you. They want you at the house. Rig yourself up; I'll wait." [Pg 164]

Upon benches and in chairs, and lolling on the thick grass, Milford found Mrs. Stuvic's summer family. They told jokes and sang vaudeville songs and slyly tickled one another's necks with spears of timothy, frolicking in the shade while time melted away in the sun. The ladies came forward to shake hands. They called Milford a stranger. They inquired as to the health of the young woman in Antioch. He disclaimed all knowledge of a woman in Antioch. They knew better, shaking their fingers at him. Blakemore and Mrs. Stuvic entered upon a harangue. Milford sat

down on a bench with Mrs. Goodwin and Gunhild. Although under the eye of the "discoverer," the girl had shaken hands warmly with him. Between them there was a quiet understanding, and he was at ease. Mrs. Blakemore sat in a rocking chair that threatened to tip over on the uneven ground. She liked the uncertainty, she said. It gave her something to think about. Mrs. Goodwin had read during all the forenoon, and was sententious. It would soon be time for her to return to the city, and she felt that she wore a yellow leaf in her hair. She was anxious to return, of course, but to go away from a sweet season's death-bed was always a sad departure. Mr. Milford, she said, would attend the summer's funeral.

"I will help dig the grave," he replied.

She thanked him for following her idea. So few men had the patience to fondle the whimsical children of a woman's mind. When they crept out to the Doctor he scouted them back to bed, and there they lay trembling, not daring to peep out at him. Some men thought it a manly quality to despise a pretty conceit, but it was pretty conceits that made marble live, that made a canvas breathe. At one time she had been led to believe that the realist was the man of the hour. And indeed, he was—just for one hour. And the veritist—what was he? One whose soul was kept cool in a moldy cellar. None but the artist had a right to speak. And what was art? A semblance of truth more beautiful than the truth. But writers were often afraid to be artists, even at the promptings of an artistic soul. They were told that women would not read them, and man must write for woman. What nonsense! Take up a book and find the beautiful passages marked. A woman has read it.

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"I can make a great noise in shallow water," said Milford, "but if I follow you, you'll lead me out over my head. I believe you, however; I believe you speak the truth. I don't know anything about art, but, so far as I am concerned, it is a waste of time for any scholar to pick flaws in a thing that makes me feel. He may tell me why it is bad taste to feel, but he can't convince me that I haven't felt."

He said this looking at the girl, and their eyes warmed with the communion. "I have studied art," she said, "until I do not know anything about it; and I am beginning to believe if the world listens to—to a talk about it, it is with a sneer. No one wants to know. No one is willing to listen, except like this, out in the country when there is nothing else to do."

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"I find plenty to do," said Mrs. Stuvic, overhearing the remark and turning from Blakemore, who had been "joshing" her about an old man. "Yes, you bet. There's always a plenty to do in the country if a body's a mind to do it. The country people ain't such fools. No, you bet. The most of 'em's got sense enough to keep a horse from kickin' 'em. Yes, walked right over in the woods and let a horse kick him. Why, old Lewson would've knowed better than that, and he didn't have sense enough to know that he couldn't come back. Now, Bill, you keep quiet. Don't you say a word."

"If you were afraid the old fellow would come back, why didn't you marry him?" said Blakemore.

"Now, you keep still, too. I wan't so anxious about him comin' back. It wan't nothin' to me. But I do believe he robbed my hens' nests after he was dead. Now, whose team is that goin' along the road? If a man would rein up my horses that way I'd break his neck. Bill, why haven't you been over here?"

"I've been too busy."

"You haven't been too busy to trudge off to Antioch. What did you go for?"

"Because it was nobody's business but mine."

"Oh, you don't say so? What made you box with that Irishman? Oh, you can't fool me. I know more than you think I do. Went up there to practice. And then a horse kicked Dorsey over in the woods. How about that? You met him over in the grove some time ago, and he licked you. How about that? Then you took lessons till you was able to knock his teeth out. How about that?"

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"Who told you all that rubbish?" Milford demanded, uneasy under the gaze of the company.

"Never mind. There's a freckled faced woman not far from here. And she couldn't keep a secret any more than a sieve could hold water. You've got a hired man, too, you must remember."

"Yes, and I'll—"

"You'll do nothin' of the sort. It was perfectly natural. I knowed it was comin'. I knowed that he mashed your mouth. And what was it all about? How about that?"

Milford arose to go. Mrs. Goodwin begged him to sit down. Mrs. Blakemore was in a flutter of excitement. Blakemore stood with his mouth open. Gunhild looked straight at Milford. "Did you hit him, Mr. Milford?" she asked.

"Yes," he promptly answered.

"Then you must have had a good cause, and I shall wait before feeling sorry for him. But I could not feel very sorry anyway. I do not like him. He has the eye of a beast. May we ask why you struck him?"

"He made a remark about you."

The girl jumped up from her seat, anger flaming in her eyes. Mrs. Goodwin made some sort of cooing noise. Mrs. Blakemore cried "Oh!" and fluttered.

"That's all I've got to say," said Milford. "I oughtn't to have said that much, and wouldn't if it hadn't come round as it did. And now I must ask you to let the subject drop." [Pg 168]

Gunhild sat down without a word. But in her quietness of manner was a turbulent spirit choked into subjection. In all things it seemed that her modesty was a conscious immodesty held in restraint. The uncouth girl, with utterance harsh in rough words of men from the far north, had been remodeled by the English school. But the blood of the Viking was strong within her, as she sat there, striving to appear submissive; but Milford fancied that she would like to dash out Dorsey's brains with a war-club. He sat down beside her, and with a cool smile she said: "Made a remark about me. It takes me back to the potato-field. I must thank you. We are fellow workmen." She spoke in a low voice. He looked from one to another, as if afraid that they might hear her. "It makes no difference," she said.

"Yes, it does. It is none of their business. I am going to set claim to all that part of the past. You may share your pleasure with them, but your trouble belongs to me. I will mix it with mine."

"The color might be dark," she replied.

"But two dark colors may make a white hope."

She shook her head and looked about as if now she were afraid that some one might hear. But the other boarders were talking among themselves. Mrs. Goodwin, at the far end of the bench, was giving to Blakemore her idea of the future life; Mrs. Blakemore had run off, summoned by an alarming howl from the boy; Mrs. Stuvic, still a believer in spiritualism and a devotee of fortune-telling, stood near, sniffing in contempt. [Pg 169]

"Nothing can keep us apart," said Milford. "I'm not a soft wooer; I don't know how to play the he dove; I don't know how to sing a lie made by some one else; I don't pretend to be a gentleman; I am out of the rut, and they may call me unnatural. But let me tell you that all hell can't keep us apart."

"Mr. Milford, you must not talk like that. I too am out of the rut, and they may call me unnatural, but I do not like to hear you talk that way."

"Yes, you do. You can't help yourself. If it's the devil that brought us together, then blessed be the name of the devil."

"Hush, Mr. Milford."

"I won't hush. I must talk. I suppose I ought to call you an angel. But you are not. You are a woman—once a hired hand. But you jump on me like a panther; you suck the blood out of my heart. Am I a brute? Yes. So are you. You are a beautiful brute—the panther and the grizzly. Is that it?"

She looked at him, and her eyes were not soft. "I used to peep in at the grizzly—into the dining-room when he had come to feed. But no more now. No, nothing can keep us apart. But we must wait. What a courtship!" she said, with a sigh.

"It's not a courtship," he replied. "It's a fight, a draw fight. Now I'll hush. What's the wrangle?" he asked, turning toward Mrs. Goodwin.

"Nothing," she answered, moving closer to him. "It hasn't the dignity of a wrangle. Mrs. Stuvic is trying to convert me to fortune-telling." [Pg 170]

"Nothing of the sort," said Mrs. Stuvic. "I don't care whether she believes in it or not. It's nothin' to me; but truth's truth, and you can't get round it; no, Bill, you bet. I know what I've been told, and I know what's come to pass. A woman told me that a man was goin' to beat me out of board, and he did. She never saw him. How about that? And she told me I was goin' to lose a cow, and I did. She was dead by the time I got home. How about that? Don't come talkin' to me about what you expect after you're dead. Truth's truth. Now, there's Bill. He thinks I'm an old fool. But I know more than he thinks I do. Yes, you bet!"

"No, I don't think that, Mrs. Stuvic," Milford replied. "I'm under too many obligations to you to think that."

"Now, there is honesty," Mrs. Goodwin spoke up. "Gunhild, my dear, do you catch the drift of it?"

"It's not honesty, but villainy," Blakemore declared, and turning to his wife, who had just returned, he asked if the boy were hurt. She said that he had got hung in the forks of an apple tree.

"But villainy holds a virtue when it tells the truth," Mrs. Goodwin replied.

"Holds fiddlesticks," said Mrs. Stuvic, with a sniff. "Why can't you folks talk sense? Just as soon as a woman reads a book, she's got to talk highfurlutin' blabber. Now, what does that man out there want?"

"He wants beer," said Blakemore.

"Well, he can't get it. He looks like the man that had me fined last summer. I hate a detective on [Pg 171]

the face of the earth. One went down in my cellar and drank beer, and then had me up. Go on away from here," she shouted. "There's not a drop of beer on this place. Move on off with you. I'll let you know that I don't keep beer."

The man went away, grumbling. Blakemore turned to Milford and said: "Come join me in a bottle."

"Now, you keep still," Mrs. Stuvic snapped. "Bill don't drink. And the first thing I know you'll have me up."

Milford asked Mrs. Goodwin when she expected to go home. She answered that she would leave on the following Tuesday. He remarked that he would come over to go to the station with her, and then, waving a farewell to the company, he strode off toward home. In his heart there flamed the exultation of a great conquest after a fierce battle.

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## CHAPTER XVII.

### AN AMBITION.

In the evening the hired man returned with his trousers drawing shorter every moment. He swore that he was going to kill the peddler, which of course meant that he would buy another pair from him. He would take off the wretched leg-wear and hang weights to the legs, he said. No peddler could get ahead of him. He called himself an inventive "cuss." He said that his grandfather had sat upon a granite hillside and with a jackknife whittled out a churn-dasher that revolutionized the art of butter-making in that community. He smacked his mouth as he spoke of the delights of the day just ended. It had been like sitting under a rose-bush, with sweetened dew dripping upon him. He had seen his girl trip from one rapture to another, mirroring a smile from the sun and throwing it at him. Her face was joy's looking-glass. And aside from all that, she had sense. She was an uncommon woman. He was not afraid to tell her everything. It was certain to go no further. He could read a woman the moment he set eyes upon her. They all invited confidence, but few of them were worthy of it. Milford did not have it in his heart to smash the fellow's idol. He said that he was pleased to know that so true a woman had been found.

"Oh, you can trust her all right, Bill. But to tell you the truth, I don't believe you could trust the girl that has set her cap for you. Her tongue's too slippery, and I said to myself that you'd better stick to the Norwegian. I'm not stuck on foreigners myself. The girl I married had a smack of the Canadian French about her. But Lord, she was putty. You ought to have seen her eyes—black as a blackberry, and dancin' a jig all the time. And they danced me out of the set, I tell you that. I could have her again if I wanted her. But I don't exactly want her. Would you, Bill?"

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"I'd cut her throat."

"Say, you ought to see her throat, speakin' about throats. Puttiest thing you ever seen in your life—white as snow—"

"With the pink of the sunset falling on it," said Milford, with his gluttonous mind's eye upon the Norwegian's neck.

"If that ain't it, I'm the biggest liar that ever milked a cow. Just exactly it. And yet you wouldn't advise me to take her again."

"I'd kick her downstairs," said Milford.

"Yes, that's all right, Bill; but it would save getting a divorce. Still, my other girl's the thing. I can put confidence in her, and the first one was tricky. I couldn't tell her a thing that wan't repeated. I'll stand for anythin' sooner than bein' repeated all the time. How are you gettin' along over at the house?"

Milford put him off with the remark that everything was all right so far as he knew. A man may gabble of a love that is spreading over the heart, but when it has gathered the whole world beneath its wings he is more inclined to silence.

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The hired man continued to talk. Before he met the freckled woman he had looked forward to sixteen hours a day at eighteen dollars a month. He had not dared to see the flush of the sunrise light his bedroom window, except perhaps on some odd Sunday when he might steal the sweet essence of a forbidden nap, but his "love" for that woman had promised him an unbroken dream at dawn and a breakfast of soft-boiled eggs at eight. After all, it was fortunate that the first woman had run away. She was saucy and had made his heart laugh, at times, but he was a hired man still, and the cold dew of the morning had cracked his rough boots and caused his wet trousers to flap about his ankles.

"Bill," he asked, "do you ever expect to wear a boiled shirt all the week and sleep till after sun-up?"

Milford had learned that this was the hired man's notion of elegance and of ease. He answered that such a time might come.

"It's got to come with me," said Mitchell. "It's comin', and I'd be a fool to dodge it. Yes, sir, and I'm goin' to have me about a dozen shirts made. I don't care so much about the coat and pants; I want the shirts. And I want 'em made as broad as I can fill 'em out, with a ruffle or two, and as white as chalk. That's the way I want to be dressed when fellers come to me and ask if I want to hire a man. Bill, you look like you've made up your mind to do some thin'. What is it? Git married?"

"I came here with my mind already made up," Milford replied, new lines seeming to come to the surface of his countenance. "And I'm not going to change it," he declared, louder of tone, as if he had been debating with himself. "I'm going to follow the line, and then if something else comes, all the better."

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"What is your line, Bill?"

"Haven't you learned enough not to ask that?"

"Oh, well, but I didn't know but you'd found out there wouldn't be any harm in tellin' me. We've been working together a good while, and I've got an interest in you. I've told you what my object is."

"To wear white shirts and to see the sun shine in on you of a morning, I believe. That's a good enough object."

"I think so, Bill. At least, it won't do nobody no harm. And I tell you what's a fact: I'd like, after a while, to live in town, so's I could come out in the country and clar my throat and ask fellers about the crops. But you always sorter turn up your nose at my object. I wouldn't at yours. Tell a feller what it is, Bill."

"The idea of every man having an object seems to have become rather popular in this community," said Milford. "Everybody looks on me with a sort of suspicion, and this object business comes out of that. You may not know it, but you've been set as a trap to catch me."

The hired man was genuinely astonished. His mouth flew open, and he drooled his surprise. He wiped his mouth on his sleeve; he hemmed, hawed, and grunted. But, after a time, he admitted that his "girl" had shown the edge of a keen interest in Milford. However, there was nothing vicious in it. She had never been stirred by a vicious instinct. She was naturally interested in the man who gave employment to her future husband. Of course, his object did not amount to much when compared with Milford's; he was nothing but a hired man, but presidents had been hired men, and the world could not afford to turn its scornful back upon the affairs of the farm-hand. The field laborer had a heart, a talkative heart, perhaps, but a heart that society would one day learn to fear. It was not heartlessness that would overthrow the political state and trample upon the rich; it was heart, abused heart, that would give crushing weight to the vengeful foot. This was the substance of his talk, the egotism of muscle, a contempt for the luxuries of the refined brain, but with a longing to imitate the appearance of leisure by wearing white linen and lying in bed till the sun was high. Milford recognized the voice of the discontented farmer.

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"You remember the speeches of the last campaign," said he. "You believe that the laborer is to overturn society. All right. But that has nothing to do with my object. That makes no difference, however, since everything leads to the distress of the farmer. But I want to tell you and all the rest that it is your own fault, as one and as a whole. You never read anything but murders and robberies, or the grumbings of some skate that wants an office. You haven't schooled yourselves into sharpness enough to see that he is trying to use you. You get up before sunrise, and work till after dark, and think that the whole world is watching you. The world doesn't care a snap, I'll tell you that."

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"And that's just it, Bill; the world's tryin' to do us."

"Yes, and it will do you."

"I know it, and that's the reason I want to marry out of it."

"That is to say, you want to 'do' a woman to get out of it yourself. What do you expect to give her?"

"Why, I'll give her a good husband, a man that'll fight for her, do anything——"

"Except to work for her," Milford broke in. The hired man grinned. He said that a good husband was about all that a woman ought to expect, these days; he would not fall short, and a man who did not disappoint a good woman came very near to the keeping of all commandments. He was not going to marry for property. But if property made a woman beautiful to the rich, why should it make her ugly to the poor?"

"But you say she is homely and freckled."

"I said freckled, Bill; I didn't say homely. Why, I like freckles. I think they are the puttiest things in the world. They catch me every time. A trout wouldn't be half as putty if he wan't speckled. And if this woman is a trout and has snapped at my fly, all right. The world ain't got a right to say a word."

"The world doesn't know that you are born or ever will be."

"Oh, I know you don't think I amount to much, Bill; I know the world don't care for me, but I'll

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make her care one of these days."

"When the worm turns on the woodpecker."

"That's all right, Bill. Have all the flings you want. But I'll tell you one thing: I don't talk about the Bible bein' the greatest book in the world, and then go in the woods and lay for a feller to mash his mouth. Oh, I know all about it. My girl's brother see the feller git on the train with his jaw tied up, and I knowed what had happened."

"You say the fellow's mouth was mashed?" said Milford.

"Yes, mashed as flat as a pancake."

"Then you want to keep your mouth shut."

"All right, Bill, I understand."

Milford walked about the room. "We are neglecting everything," he said. "It's time to feed the cattle." They went out to the barn, neither of them speaking. Mitchell climbed into the loft and tossed down the hay; Milford measured out oats to the horses. In silence they returned to the house.

"Why don't you say something?" said Milford.

"When I said the feller's mouth was mashed you said I wanted to keep mine shut. I help you learn how to box till you could out-box me, and I guess you can mash my mouth easy enough, Bill."

"But do you think I would, Bob?"

"No, I can't hardly think so. Got any smokin' tobacco?"

"Fresh bag up there on the shelf. Fill up that briar of mine—the old-timer."

"But you don't want nobody to smoke it, do you?"

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"You may keep it; I've got another one."

"But you've had that one so long, Bill."

"Then it's all the sweeter."

"I'm a thousand times obliged to you."

"All right." He was silent for a thoughtful minute, and then he said: "The summer is about gone. It will leave on the train next Tuesday."

The hired man nodded as if he understood. "And I've got to be lookin' out for somethin' to do in the winter," he said. "I don't reckon you can afford to keep me."

"Yes, I want you. I expect to be busy all winter, trading around. Your wages may go on just the same."

"You don't mean at eighteen dollars?"

"I said just the same."

Mitchell's face beamed with satisfaction. "That would scare some of these farmers around here half to death," said he. "They never think of payin' more than ten in winter."

"But I'm not one of these farmers round here."

"That's what you ain't, and I don't know what you have been, nur what you're goin' to be, but to me you're about the best feller I ever struck up with."

They talked of affairs on the farm, the hay, the ripening corn. In the renting of the place a number of ragged sheep had been included, a contingent sale; and a few months of care had wrought almost a miracle in the appearance of the flock, so much so that the old woman regretted her terms and would have withdrawn from them, but Milford had insisted upon a witnessed contract. They talked about the sheep, the increase to come in the winter, the sale of lambs in the early summer. They laid plans for work in the fall, for the cutting and the husking of the corn.

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"But I thought you were going to marry," said Milford.

"Yes, but not for a year, Bill. I've got a good deal to attend to first. I've got to get a divorce, you know. That won't take long, of course, but a man's divorce ought to get cool before he marries again. I've talked to my girl about it, and she thinks so. She's a proper thing."

"Did it ever occur to you that she can't be a very proper thing to talk to you about marriage or to receive attentions from you before you get your divorce?"

"I don't guess she ever thought of that. But I believe she did say she wanted I should get a divorce before I said much more about it. It's all right, anyway. I don't believe in holding a woman to strict rule. If you force the rule on her before you're married, she'll force it on you afterwards, and then where'll you be? Well," he added, leaning over to untie his shoe, "believe I'll go to bed. I'm glad you're pleased with my work. I want to save up enough to git them shirts, you

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## CHAPTER XVIII.

### ACROSS THE DITCH.

Early Tuesday morning a girl from the poor-house went to Mrs. Stuvic's place. This meant that the season was about closed, that the "journeyman" cook had been discharged, the "help" told to go, and that this wretched creature was to do the work. Careful not to appear too early, Milford came almost too late. The carriage had set out for the station. He ordered the driver to stop. He reminded Gunhild of her promise to walk with him across the fields. She declared that she had not promised, but said that she was willing enough to walk. Mrs. Goodwin cautioned her not to loiter by the way; it would greatly put her out to miss the train. Gunhild jumped out, Milford catching at her, and the carriage drove on. They walked down the road to a place where there was a gap in the fence, and here they entered the field. Down deep in the grass a horde of insects shouted their death songs. Their day of judgment was soon to lie white upon the ground. Artists in their way, with no false notes, with mission ended, they were to die in art, among fantastic pictures wrought by the frost. Milford did not try to hide his sadness. The girl was livelier; the girl nearly always is.

"The other day I got near you, although others were present, but now you are far off," he said. [Pg 182]  
"Must I rope you every time I want you?"

She laughed at this picture of life in the West, thrown in a word. Again she saw men lassoing the cattle. But the potato field came back to her, the rough words of the men, the drudgery, and her face grew sad. "I am as close to you now as I was then."

"Not with your eyes. Stop. Let me look at you."

They halted and stood face to face. "Give me your eyes." She gave them to him without a waver. But she reminded him that they must not miss the train. Afar off they could see the carriage turn a corner.

"When am I to see you again?" he asked, as they walked on.

"I do not know that," she answered. "I shall not stay in the winter time at Mrs. Goodwin's house. She will have many persons there then, and will not need me."

"The kingdom of heaven, though it were full, would need you."

"Sometimes you are a wild book, with sentences jumping out at me," she said. "I must rope you," she added, laughing.

"I wish you would—I wish you'd choke me to death, and——"

"And what?"

"And then take my head in your lap."

"In your other life you must have stood at the bow of a boat, making the sea red with the blood of your enemy—and in my other life I bound up your wounds." [Pg 183]

They came to a broad ditch. On each side was a forest of wild sunflowers. "You could stand in there and blaze with them," he said, stepping down into the ditch. "Give me your hand, and I'll help you across."

"I can jump."

"Give me your hand—and I hope you'll stumble and fall."

She stood among the sunflowers, looking down at him. "Did you see the cowboy preacher that came West?" she asked. "Would he not have had a wild steer if he had roped your soul?"

"Give me your hand—both."

She gave him her hands, and leaped across the ditch. "I wish there were a thousand," he said, climbing out. "But you haven't answered me. When am I to see you again?"

"I am coming again with Mrs. Goodwin next summer."

"That'll be like a boy's Christmas—ten years in coming. Can't I come to see you in town?"

"I shall not be in the town. I am going into the country to teach."

"Then I can come into the country."

"No. With your wild ways you would make me feel ashamed."

"You are right—I've got sense enough to see it. But is there to be no better understanding

between us?"

"Didn't you say that all—something could not keep us apart? Is not that understanding enough?" [Pg 184]  
They had halted again, and she had given him her eyes.

"It's an acknowledgment, but not a plan. What I want is something to work up to."

"There is the carriage coming down the road over yonder. Mrs. Goodwin is waving her handkerchief at me. The station is just across the fence."

"I know all that. But won't you let me write to you?"

"I should like to hear from you. A letter from you in the winter might bring the summer back—the crickets in the grass and the wild sunflowers by the ditch. Yes, you may write to me."

"And you will send me your address?"

"Yes, I will write first—when I go to the country. Not before."

"And if you don't go to the country I am not to know where you are?"

"But I am going to the country. You shall hear."

Near the road, between them and the station, stood an old cheese factory, now inhabited by summer vagabonds. The windows were stuffed with cast-off clothes. It was a wretched place, but now it served a purpose—it shut off all view from the station. It made no difference as to who might peep from the windows.

They walked on slowly a few paces, and halted behind the old house. They heard the rumble of the train. He looked down at her up-turned face. Her lips were slightly apart as if on the eve of utterance. He thought of the seam in a ripe peach. [Pg 185]

"There, the train is coming," she said.

"Plenty—plenty of time."

"No. Mrs. Goodwin is calling me. Good-bye," she said, still suffering him to hold her hand. "Are you always going to be a wild man?"

"You remember what they used to call me."

"Yes, that bad name. But I must go."

She ran away from him. He strode back across the field. He heard the train when it stopped and when it started again, but did not look round. He stood in the ditch where he had helped her across. There was the print of her foot in the moist earth. He heard the crickets crying in the deep grass. He lay down for a moment, and felt that the cry of his heart drowned all sounds of earth. "If it were only different," he said to himself, over and over again. "When she knows, what will she think? Must she know? Perhaps not—I hope not. When it is all over, I will kill it in my own breast." He was conscious of the theatrical. He was on the stage. Glow-worms were his footlights; his orchestra was deep-hidden in the grass. "Why can't a man be genuine?" he asked himself. "Why does a heart put on, talk to itself, and strut?"

In the road he met Mrs. Blakemore walking with Bobbie. The boy had a long stick, pushing it on the ground in front of himself. He called it his plow. His mother cautioned him. He might hurt himself. The stick struck a lump in the road and punched him. He howled just as Milford came up.

"I told you not to shove that stick. And now you've nearly ruined yourself. Here's Mr. Milford. Perhaps he will carry you." [Pg 186]

Milford took the boy on his back. "You are my horse," said the boy, whimpering. They turned toward the house, Mrs. Blakemore striving to keep step with Milford. "Don't go so fast. I can't keep step with you," she said.

"Get up," the boy commanded.

"How long do you expect to stay?" Milford asked.

"I don't know," she answered. "George is away on a tour, and I am to wait till I hear from him. I don't think I'll be here but a few days longer. I ought to put Bobbie in school."

"We'll have a good deal more of warm weather," Milford said; "and October out here I should think is the finest time of the year."

"Oh, yes, but you know we must get back. After all, the summer spent in the country is a hardship. We give up everything for the sake of being out of doors. Put him down when he gets heavy."

"He's all right. Yes, hardship in many ways. But hardships make us stronger; still, I don't know that we need to be much stronger. We are strong enough now for our weak purposes."

"You mean spiritually stronger, don't you? Well, I don't know. But, of course, we are more meditative when we have been close to nature, and that always gives us a sort of spiritual help. But the time out here might be spent to great advantage, in reading and serious converse. As it

is, however, people seem ashamed to talk anything but nonsense. They hoot at anything that has a particle of sentiment in it. And as for art—well, so few persons know anything about art. And on this account I shall miss Mrs. Goodwin so much. She talked beautifully on art. Don't you think so?"

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"She talks well on almost any subject."

"And Gunhild is a real artist," she said, looking at him. "Did she show you any of her drawings?"

"No. I didn't ask her and she didn't offer to show them."

"Perhaps you were more interested in the artist than in her art."

"Yes, that may be about the size of it."

"Do you know, Mr. Milford, I can't fathom you. Sometimes you speak with positive sentiment and dignity, and then again you are a repository of slang. Why is it? Is it because that, at times, I am incapable of—shall I say inspiring?"

"Yes, I guess that's about the proper thing to say. No. What am I talking about? You are always inspiring, of course. The fault lies with me."

"Such a strange man!" she said, meditatively. "Mrs. Stuvic declares she doesn't know you any better now than she did the first day, but I believe I do, though not much better, I must confess. I wish you would tell me something."

"Well, what is it?"

"Did you know Gunhild before she came out here?"

"I had never spoken to her."

"Well, it's very strange. You got acquainted very soon. Oh, I know she was out here quite a while, still—oh, you know what I mean. Yes, you met her at the haunted house—once. More than once? Am I too inquisitive? But I am so interested."

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He acted the part of a politer man; he said that she was not too inquisitive—glad that she was interested. The boy, pulling at his ears, the bridle, turned his head toward her, and he caught the drooping of her eye. Over him she had established a sentimental protectorate, in accordance with a Monroe Doctrine of the heart, and resented foreign aggression.

"So much interested in Gunhild, you know," she said. "Peculiar girl, not yet Americanized. Perhaps it is her almost blunt honesty that gives her the appearance of lacking tact. But tact is the protection of honesty. Don't you think so?"

"I don't know anything about tact, as you understand it. I know what it is to get the drop on a man, and I suppose the woman of tact always has the drop. Is that it?"

"Yes," she laughed, walking close beside him. "A woman of tact is never taken unawares."

"A suspicious woman, I take it."

"Well, a ready woman. And Gunhild is not dull, but she is not always ready. Do you think so?"

"I'll be—I don't know what you're driving at."

"Get up," the boy cried, clucking.

"Perhaps I am a little obscure. But I thought you would understand."

"But I swear I don't."

"Then it would be cruel to explain."

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"It would? You've got to explain now." He halted and turned to her. The boy pulled at his ears. Her laughter came like the rippling of cool water.

"You know that Gunhild is an experiment," she said. "She was a girl of talent with uncertain manners. Even her restraint is blunt. And I think that Mrs. Goodwin has found her a failure."

Milford began to ease the boy to the ground. "I must bid you good evening here," he said.

"Won't you come to the house to supper?"

"No. I'll go and eat at a table where no restraint is blunt and where no experiment is a failure."

"I have offended you," she said, taking the boy by the hand. "And I didn't mean it, I'm sure. I hope you don't think that I would say a word against her. We are all fond of her, I'm sure. But we are all interested in you."

"In me? Who the—the deuce am I? What cause have you to be interested in me? You are not interested in me, except as a sort of freak—a mud-turtle, caught in the lake, viewed by woman with their 'ahs' and 'ohs,' standing back holding their skirts. I know that woman. She is worth —"

"I thought you said you didn't know her till she came out here?"

"I said I'd never spoken to her."

"Know her but had never spoken to her. The plot curdles. Really, Mr. Milford, what I said was simply to draw you out. I don't know a thing against her; I don't think she's a failure. Now tell me what you know. I am hungry for something of interest; I'm tired to death of this everlasting market report. If she and you have been mixed up in a romance, tell me, please. Bobbie, don't pull at me. I'm going in a moment."

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"The ripening fruit of a romance," said Milford, putting his hand on the boy's head. "Isn't that enough for you?"

"The fruit is a tender care; the bud a careless pleasure," she replied. "Tell me about it—now. I might not see you again."

"Then you will soon forget."

"Oh, no, I can't forget you. You have had a strong influence on me—for good, I am sure. You have some noble purpose, hidden away, and when we meet one with a noble purpose we feel stronger, though we may not know what that purpose is. I long to do something in the world, too——"

"Then love your husband," said the tactless man.

"What are you saying? I do love him."

"If you love him, you have a noble purpose."

"But who are you to talk so morally?"

"A man who has seen so much vice that he would like to see virtue. There's my road," he said, pointing to the gate. "I must bid you good-bye."

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## CHAPTER XIX.

### A WOMAN'S THREAT.

A cow that had been hurt by a falling tree went limping down the road, and Milford, looking at her, said that she pictured the passing of time. And when at evening he saw her again, he said that she was the same hour, passing twice. In the woods he met the girl from the poor-house, and she told him that Mrs. Blakemore was gone. One afternoon Mrs. Stuvic sent for him, and when he went she scolded him for not having come sooner to lighten the dark hour of her loneliness. She was afraid of solitude. In the bustle of a boarding-house, in fault-finding, in all annoyances, there was life, with no time to muse upon the soul's fall of the year; but in the empty rooms, the quiet yard, the hushed piano, there was a mocking stillness, the companion of death. She hated death. It had a cold grip, and old Lewson had proved that there was no breaking away from it. To her it was not generous Nature's humane leveler; it was vicious Nature giving one's enemies an opportunity to exult. She declared that if all her enemies were dead, she would not oppose death. A woman in the neighborhood had sworn that she would drag a dead cat over her grave; she was a spiteful wretch, and she would do it. Years ago there had been a fight over a line fence, and Mrs. Stuvic had won the suit, hence the only proper thing to do was to wait till she was buried and then to drag a dead cat over her grave. A terrible triumph! The old woman shuddered as she spoke of it. She had a premonition that she was to die in the winter, alone, at night, while creaking wagons passed the gate and stiff-jointed dogs bayed the frozen moon. They would cut away the snow and bury her—and then at night would come the woman with the dead cat. She could see it all, the frozen clods, the pine head-board with her name in pencil upon it, the cat left lying there, the woman returning home to gloat in the light of a warm room. Upon a bench on the veranda Milford sat and listened and did not smile, and accepting his grimness as a sympathy, her hard eye grew moist, a flint-stone wet with dew. She asked him if he had an idea as to who that woman was; and when he answered that he did not, she said:

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"Nobody but my own sister. Now, you keep still. And that's the reason I was so quick to let you have that farm almost at your own terms. I was afraid some one would rent it for her. Oh, but you may call me unnatural and all that sort of thing, but you don't know what I've had to contend with. My first husband died a drunkard. Many a time I've hauled him home almost frozen. He'd leave me without a bite to eat and spend every cent of money he had. And many a time I told him I'd pour whiskey on him after he was dead—and I did—yes, you bet! I said, 'Now go soak in it throughout eternity.' Ah, Lord, one person don't know how another one lives. I've had nothin' but trouble, trouble—all the time trouble."

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"We all have our troubles, madam."

"Hush your mouth. You don't know what troubles are. Think of havin' to fight with your own blood kin, your own children. Think of your own daughter slanderin' you, and your own son havin' you arrested!"

"I expect you've had a pretty hard life, Mrs. Stuvic."

"Hard life! That don't tell half of it."

"And yet you want to stay here longer."

"What! Do you reckon I want to give Nan a chance to drag that cat over my grave?"

"Let her drag it. What's the difference? You won't know anything about it."

"But how do I know that? And I'd be in a pretty fix, havin' her drag a cat over me and not bein' able to help myself. No, I want to wait till she dies, the unnatural thing."

"Can't you make it up with her?"

"Make it up with her? Do you reckon I want to make it up with her? Do you reckon I'd stoop that much?"

"You call her unnatural. Don't you think you may be just a little unnatural yourself?"

"Now, look here, if you're goin' to take her part you march yourself off this place."

"I'm not taking her part. I don't know her."

"Then keep still. Don't you think you'd better come over to the house and stay durin' the winter?" [Pg 194]

"No, I'd rather stay over there."

"All by yourself?"

"Bob'll be there."

"Land's sakes, are you goin' to keep him all winter? I thought you had more sense than to put on such lugs. But you've got to come over here every night or two. I don't want to die here alone."

A boy on a horse rode up to the gate. The old woman went out to him. She came running back, with her limp hands flapping in the air. Her sister had sent for her. She begged Milford to hitch up the pony as fast as he could. She said that he must drive her over there.

On the road she did not speak a word, except to give directions. She sat stiff and grim. Persons whom they passed stared at her, straight, squaw-like, with a hawk feather standing sharp in her hat. They drew up at a small white house in the woods. Yellow leaves were falling about it. A peacock spread the harsh alarm of their arrival. The old woman commanded Milford to get out and to wait for her. She did not know how long she might stay. A woman opened the door for them. Mrs. Stuvic recognized her as the mother of the girl from the poor-house. Milford sat down in the dreary passage-way. Mrs. Stuvic followed the woman into a room. The lines about her mouth tightened as she caught sight of her sister, on a bed in a corner. She drew up a chair, and sat down by the bedside.

"What's the matter, Nan?"

The sister slowly turned upon her pillow and looked at her with gaunt eyes and open mouth. [Pg 195]

"Dying," she whispered in her hard breathing.

"Do you think you be?"

"I know it—taken last night—doctor's gone. Couldn't do anythin'. Worn out, Mary Ann."

"No, Nan, you just think you be. Look at me. I've had twice as much trouble as you."

The dying woman slowly shook her head. "It's been all trouble—nothin' but trouble. Mary Ann, you know the threat I made."

"Don't now—keep still."

"Well, the Lord has taken that out of my heart. Do you think—think you could kiss me, Mary Ann?"

Milford heard the old woman sob, and he walked out beneath the trees where the leaves were falling. The day grew yellow, and brown, and the stars came out, and still he waited, with the leaves falling slowly in the quiet air. The insects sang, and sitting with his back against a tree, he fell asleep. Something touched him. He looked up with a start, and there stood Mrs. Stuvic, her feather sharp in the moonlight. "Drive me home," she said.

On the way home she did not speak, but when the buggy drew up at the gate she said: "If there's a God—and there must be one—I thank him for the tears I've shed this night. Now, you keep still. Turn the pony loose and go home. Don't come into the house. I don't want to see anybody. Keep all my affairs to yourself and you'll make no mistake." [Pg 196]

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## CHAPTER XX.

### THE CUP AND THE SLIP.

In a pelting rain a funeral passed along the road, and a man who had no time for such affairs,

hastening with his milk-cans to the railway station, caught sight of Mrs. Stuvic's face, pressed against the water-streaked glass of a carriage window. He lashed his team to make up for loss of time in turning aside; he wondered at the mysterious tie that could have drawn her out, not indeed on such a day, but at all, for he knew her to be at enmity's edge with neighbors and frosty to every relative. At the station he met Milford, walking up and down beneath the shed. Milford remembered him, Steve Hardy, the man who had given him a "lift" from the station on the day of his coming into the neighborhood. And to his head-shakings, winks, nods, wise mutterings, the new-comer owed much of his reputation for mystery.

"I see your old boss off down the road there goin' to a funeral," said Hardy.

"Did you? It's one of the privileges granted by the constitution of the State."

"Yes. They don't have to take out license to go to funerals, or I don't guess the old woman would er went. Guess all her boarders have gone, or I don't s'pose she'd found the time. Who's dead?"

"Her sister, I believe."

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"That so? Then I wonder more than ever. Believe I did hear somethin' about it t'uther evenin', but I was milkin' at the time and I didn't think that she was the old woman's sister. They must have made it up."

"Made what up?"

"Why, the row they had over the line-fence a good while ago. Somebody told me you wanted to buy some calves."

"Yes, I'd like to get a few good ones."

"Well, mine are as good as ever stood on four feet. I guess you mean to settle here permanently. Well, folks that have stirred around a good bit tell me that there ain't a purtier place on the earth. I've had my house full all summer, and there ain't been a word of complaint. Goin' out my way?"

"Not till after the mail comes."

The post office was in a weather-beaten cottage, in the midst of an apple orchard, just across the railway tracks; and of late Milford had become well-acquainted with the postmaster, calling on him early and sitting with him till the last pouch had been thrown off for the day. But not a word had he received from Gunhild. He strove to console himself with the thought that it was too soon, that she had not gone to the country, but a consolation that comes with strife, consoles but poorly. The train came, the mail-pouch was thrown off, and he followed the postmaster to the house, stood close in anxiety till the letters were all put into the pigeon-holes, and then turned sadly away. He took his course through the wet grass, across the fields. He halted at the ditch, and in the rain and the gathering dark stood there to think, amid the wind-tangled stems and the rain-shattered blooms of the wild sunflowers. He stepped down into the ditch, deep with mire, and the grim humor of his nickname in the West, "Hell-in-the-Mud," fell upon him like a cowboy's rope. He drew himself out, threw down a handful of grass that he had pulled up by the roots, and strode on, through the green slop of the low land. As he turned in at the gate, to pass through the hickory grove, he saw the light of a lantern moving about in Mrs. Stuvic's barnyard. He spoke to a dog that came scampering to meet him; the light shot upward, came toward him; and he recognized the old woman, bareheaded, with the rain pattering on her gray hair.

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"Is that you, Bill? Now what are you pokin' round in this rain for? Come over to the house and get your supper."

"No, I must go home."

"Home? Why, you haven't got any home and never will have."

"That's true," he agreed.

"Not till you go where we took my old sister to-day," she said, letting the lantern down till her face was in the dark. "And just to think it should have come as it did, while I was talkin' about her! I'd been thinkin' about her all day, and I knowed somethin' was goin' to happen. But come on in the house, and don't be standin' here in the rain like a fool. Get away, Jack. I do think he's got less sense than any dog I ever set eyes on. Now, if you do put your muddy feet on me I'll cut your throat. You just dare to do it, you triflin' whelp! Are you goin' to the house with me, Bill?"

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"You're not afraid, are you?" he asked, now that her fear of the dead cat was gone.

"Now you keep still. I'm not afraid of the devil himself. But this is just the sort of a night for me to die. Yes, I'll tell you that."

"I thought you were to die on a cold night, with the wagons creaking along the road."

"That was the plan, but it has been changed. Now I'm goin' to die when the ground is soaked. You don't know Peterson, do you? Well, no matter. But he lived just down the road there not long ago, and a meaner neighbor never breathed. I caught him drivin' his turkeys into my tomato patch. Yes. And his well went dry, and he come to my house and wanted to haul off water in barrels. Yes. And I wouldn't let him. And what did he say? He said he'd see my grave full of water. And now just think of what I've had to contend with all my life. Think of me lyin' there in the water, with that feller prancin' around!"

"But the chances are that you'll outlive him, Mrs. Stuvic."

"Yes, you bet, that's what I'm goin' to do," she said, her voice strong with encouragement. "I'll outlive the whole pack of 'em, and then mebbe they'll let me alone. Well, I'm not goin' to stand here any longer like a fool."

When Milford reached home he found the Professor warm in a disquisition delivered to the hired man. He hopped up from his chair and seized Milford by the hand. "Ha," said he, "I was just telling our friend here that exact memory is not the vital part of true culture. It is the absorption of the idea rather than the catching of the words."

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"Sit down," said Milford. "But what does he know about it? Woman is his culture, and he's not only caught her idea, but has learned her by heart."

"Now you're trottin'," spoke the hired man. "If there's anything in a woman's nature that I don't know, why, it must have come to her in the last hour or so."

The Professor crossed his legs and slowly nodded his head. "You ask," said he, speaking to Milford, "what does he know about it? A man never knows unless he learns. Even to the ignorant, wisdom may be music. The man whose mind has been dried and hardened in the field of harsh toil, may sip the delicious luxury, the god-flavored juice of knowledge. Wisdom cannot be concealed. You may lock it in an iron box, but it will seep through."

Upon entering the room Milford had seen the hired man put aside an earthen ewer, and now he knew that cider had been brought from the cellar.

"Nearly all utterances upon knowledge, human nature or life, are trite," the learned man proceeded. "And so are herbs and flowers trite, the stars in the heavens common, but once in a while there appears from the ground a shoot so new that botany marvels, a star in the sky so strange that astronomers gape in the wonder of a discovery. And I, humble as the lowly earth, may sprout a new thought."

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"I was going to suggest more cider," said Milford, "but I guess you've had enough."

"Ha! enough and not too much. To pause at the line, a virtue; to cross but an inch, a vice. Do you know of a publication that would buy a paper upon the decadence of the modern drama? I have one in my head, a hot and withering blast of fierce contempt."

"The last play I saw was a hummer," said the hired man. "There was a whole lot of dancin' and cavortin' before they got down to it, fellers givin' each other gags, and women singin' songs. But when they got down to her she was there—a sort of a Mormon play; and they had a bed that reached clear across the platform."

"Melpomene rioting as a bawd," declared the Professor. "I could elucidate if permitted one more russet cup, drawn from the oak." He looked at Milford. "One more, and let it be russet."

"No more to-night, Professor," said Milford. "I am going to get a bite to eat pretty soon. Won't you join me?"

"To eat, to clog the stomach, to stupefy the nimble brain, that fine machinery of wheels invisible and pulleys more delicate than the silkworm's dream of a gauzy thread! No, I will not eat, but I will drink—one more russet cup."

"Just one," said Milford.

"I spoke one, one in true sincerity; and if I squeeze the gentle hand of hospitality till the bones crack, and ask for more—give it to me," he roared, throwing his head back.

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"Bob, bring him a cup of cider," said Milford.

"This has been an off day with me," the Professor remarked, following the hired man with his eyes. "The mill shut down to undergo repairs, and I am a boy out of school." He listened, as if straining his ears to catch the babble of the cider. "I sat about the house, with a dry book, to feel the contrast of the rain; I sniffed the dust of an Elizabethan's pedantry—and then my wife and my daughter began on me. I beggared myself and got them a sofa, and now they want a set of chairs. I made with them a treaty of peace, and, barbarians, they violated it. What a reproach it is to woman to see a man think! She must stir him up, scatter his faculties."

"Not all women," said Milford.

"Ha! About how many women have you married, sir?"

Mitchell came in with the cider, and the Professor reached for it. He placed the cup on the table and gazed at the bursting beads as if counting them. He drank, smacked his mouth, and no whip-lash could have popped keener; he gazed down into the cup, regretting the fall of the yellow tide. He leaned back, with his eyes turned upward, and breathed long; he whistled softly as if to coax back a thought that had escaped him; he leaned forward, drained the cup, and sadly put it down, shoving it far across the table. "Just within arm's reach of a temptation to ask for more," he said, thrusting forth his hand. "But I will not. My word has been given. Yes, about how many women have you married?"

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"Well, just about one fewer than yourself if you've married only one," Milford answered.

The Professor's eyes snapped. "Was that word fewer contemplated or was it an accident? Do you study to find such niceties of distinction?"

"I don't give a snap for niceties of distinction, Professor; I don't know them, in fact. They might have been hammered into my head once, but they were jolted out by bucking horses. Sometimes we forced them out. We didn't want to be hampered. I knew a rancher, an Oxford man, who wilfully clawed the polish off his tongue. He wanted to live down among men, he said, and the rougher the better. One day I saw him get down off his horse to kick a book that some one had dropped in the trail."

"I don't blame him for kicking a book that he might find out there," said the Professor.

"You don't? A scholar lost an Æschylus on the prairie, and some one might have kicked it."

"Ha! I draw you on apace. We'll discuss the ancient goat-song next."

"No, I'd rather talk about sheep and calves. I know more about them. I never look at a learned man that I don't fancy him weary of his burden. Think of a professor's moldy pack, dead languages, dried thought——"

"Hold on, my dear friend. I was a professor, and I had no such pack. Like the modern peddler, I carried the wants of to-day. But, after all, I agree with you in the main. I know that the average doctor of learning is not able to see virtue in the new. To him old platitude is of more value than new vigor. And with one more cup I could——"

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"No more."

"Not in the interest of clear elucidation?"

"Not in any interest that you can fish up. I don't want you to go home drunk."

"Drunk! Why, my dear boy, I hadn't thought of such a thing; it hasn't entered my head. You mistake me, and I am here to refute it. A man needs something beyond his needs; there are times when we look for something aside from our own natural forces; there are wants which nature was ages in supplying. Look at tobacco. The Greeks missed it as they sat deep in the discussion of their philosophy. They did not know what it was they were missing, but they knew it was something and I know it was tobacco. But be that as it may. You have said that I shall have no more, and I bow." He twisted his beard and seemed to force into himself the spirit of resignation. They heard a tramping on the veranda. A voice called Mitchell. He went to the door and opened it, told some one to come in, and then stepped out. There came a mumbling, and then a profane exclamation. Mitchell stepped back into the room and slammed the door. He sat down and leaned over with his arms upon his knees. The Professor looked at him, still twisting his beard. Milford asked him what had happened. He looked up with a sour snarl. "It's all off," he said.

"What's all off?" Milford asked.

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"It's all off with me, that's what. My girl's married."

"You don't mean it!" the Professor cried.

"Then what the devil do I want to say it for? She married about two hours ago, so Miles Brent tells me, and he was there—married a feller named Hogan. I see him around there once or twice, but don't think anythin' of it. Well, I'll swear. I thought I knowed her, and I did know her at one time, but she changed. Blamed if you can tell how soon they'll change on you. Hogan—an old widower."

"I know him," said Milford. "He milks fifteen cows. His milk caught her."

"I hate to think that," Mitchell drawled, "but I'll have to. Yes, sir, hauled off in a milk-wagon. And she owns a piece of land worth fifty dollars an acre."

"She must have wanted milk to wash off her freckles," said Milford.

"Don't, Bill—don't make light of a man's trouble. She's a big loss to me, I tell you."

"But, Bob, you didn't really love her, now, did you?"

"Bill, there's different sorts of love. I loved her in my way, as much as any man ever loved a woman, I reckon, in his way. I put my faith in her, and that was goin' a good ways. Humph! I can't hardly believe it, but I know it's so."

"When the heart is rent," said the Professor, twisting his beard to aid his thought; "when the heart is rent——"

"It's the failure of the rent—on the land, that gets Bob," Milford broke in. "His heart has nothing to do with it."

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"Bill, I thought you had more sympathy than——"

"Sympathy for a man who has failed to beat a woman out of her property? Of course, I wish you'd succeeded, but I'm not going to console you because you haven't. I'm a scoundrel all right enough, but a scoundrel has his limits."

"That's all right, Bill, but somebody may give you the slip."

"That's true enough, but my heart and not my pocket will do the grieving. I haven't any time to give to a man's pocket grief."

"Wait till you have a real grief," said the Professor. "Wait till ignorance comes heavy of hoof down your hallway to tell you that your years of study are but a waste-land, covered with briars; to cut you with the blue steel of a chilling smile, and to turn you out of an institution that you hold dear. That's grief." He leaned forward upon the table, with his head on his arms.

"You had no right to go to see her," said Milford. "You had no divorce."

"But I could've got one, couldn't I? Are they so blamed scarce that a man can't get 'em? Well, let it go."

"Yes, I must go," said the Professor, getting up. "Is it raining yet? I slipped off between showers without an umbrella."

"Sorry I haven't one," Milford replied. "Yes, it's raining. Take that coat up there. It may protect you some."

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"Thank you. I shall avail myself of your offer."

He put on the coat, bade them good-night, and set out for home. The road was muddy and he walked close to the fence. Once he strode into a patch of briars. "The waste land of my years of study," he said. He shied when he saw the light in his window, and he cleared his throat and braced himself. His wife and Miss Catherine, hearing him upon the veranda, sat down upon the floor, as if they had no chairs. He stepped in, looked at them, and sadly shook his head.

"I would be polite enough to choose a finer insinuation," said he. "There may be virtue in a hint—there may be all sorts of spice in it, but there's nothing but insult in squatting around on the floor like this. I don't know how to choose words for the occasion. I will simply bid you good-night."

He heard them talking after he went to bed. He sighed out his distemper and fell asleep. In the morning he found that he had hung Milford's coat upside down. A paper had fallen from the pocket. He took it up, opened it, and with a start he recognized his medical treatise.

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## CHAPTER XXI.

### FROM HER.

Early the next morning Milford was leading a horse out of the barn when he met the Professor at the door. For a moment the scholar stood puffing the short breath of his haste; he had not picked his way, for his clothes were bespattered with mud, as if in his eagerness he had split the middle of the road.

"You're out early," said Milford.

"But not early enough. One who has been deceived is always too late. Mr. Milford, I have been grossly imposed upon by—by your generosity, sir. That paper, the medical treatise. It fell out of your coat. I found it this morning. Can you explain?"

"Well, I haven't time just now," said Milford, preparing to mount the horse. "I've got to ride over to Hardy's to see about some calves. We'll talk about the treatise some other time."

"No, sir," the Professor replied, holding up his hand. "We must talk about it now. You were to take that paper to the Doctor's wife. You brought me the money for it. You said that she liked it. And this morning it fell out of the pocket of your coat."

"It does seem a little strange, I admit."

"Strange! No, it is not strange. It is a generous outrage. I don't know what else to call it. I have been tricked, laughed at in the pocket of your treacherous coat."

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Milford mounted the horse. The Professor took hold of the bridle rein. "You must not leave me thus. I have been left too long to simper and smirk in self-cajolery, with an inward swell to think that my pen had paid my insurance. You must explain."

"All right, I'll tell you. I thought well of your paper, you understand, but when I got over to the house and faced the woman, my nerve failed me, and I couldn't ask her to buy it."

"But you praised it," said the Professor, with a gulp, still holding the bridle reins.

"Yes, and it was all right, but I lost my nerve. I had conjured up a sort of speech to make to her, but it slipped me, and then my nerve failed. It wasn't my fault, for I liked the paper all right enough, you understand."

"But you brought the money. How about that?"

"Well, I had a few dollars, and I borrowed the rest from the old woman. But that needn't worry you, for I paid her back when I sold my oats. It's all right."

"Needn't worry me! Why, you fail to catch the spirit of my distress. Your act leaves me in debt. Why did you do it, Milford? Why?"

Milford looked down at him, his eyes half closed. "You'd acknowledged yourself a thief. You said you'd stolen a dog."

"Yes, I know," the Professor agreed, glancing about. "I know, but what of that?"

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"Well, it made you my brother. And don't you think a man ought to help his brother in distress? Don't let it worry you. Don't think about it. If you can ever pay it back, all right. If you can't, it's still all right, so there you are. Let me go."

"Milford, in the idiom of the day, I am not a dead beat. I do not like the term, and I employ it only out of necessity. Beat is well enough, but dead is lacking in the significance of natural growth. I hope that you give me credit for seriousness. I am not a flippant man; I am innately solemn, knowing that the only progressive force in the human family is earnestness. But sometimes in the hour of my heaviest solemnity I may appear light; and why? In the hope that I may deceive my own heart into a few moments of forgetful levity. And you say that you are going over to look at some calves. Now that gives me an idea. I can fatten two calves very nicely—could keep them all winter and get a very good price for them in the spring. I abhor debt, but do you think you could make arrangements for me to get two, or three? Do you think you could?"

"The man I am to deal with is close and I don't believe he'll give credit."

"Very likely he might object. I didn't know, however, but that you might make some arrangements with him, and let me settle with you afterward. Such things have been done in trade, you know."

"Yes, but I'm not prepared to do it now, Professor."

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"Well, you know best. But I want you to understand that the money you advanced me shall be repaid."

"I understand that."

"But you must understand it thoroughly. I am afraid that you do not grasp the full significance of it."

"I think I do. Well, I must go."

"Yes, and so must I. One of these days, Milford, you will think well of me."

"I do now, Professor. You are my brother."

"Ah! I have strengths that you——"

"Your brother on account of your weaknesses, Professor."

"I would rather that our kinship rested upon other qualities, but we will not discuss the question, since we both of us are in a hurry. Therefore, I bid you good-morning and wish you good luck."

When Milford returned at noontime the hired man gave him a letter. It was from Gunhild. In a Michigan community she had found, not a field, indeed, but a garden-patch for her labors. "The pay is very small, but it is an encouragement," she said. "It has been hard to find a place, and I was willing to accept almost anything. The people are not awake to art; to them life demands something sterner, and I have come to believe that everything but a necessity is a waste of time, but then what I do is a necessity, and I find my excuse to myself in that. I had a letter from Mrs. Goodwin a few days ago, and I also met a woman who had seen her recently. She has made another discovery, a musical genius on the piano, a girl whom she found in a mission school. I take this to mean that she has put me aside, for with her the new blots out the old. And this makes my success as a teacher all the more——" Here she had erased several words and substituted "needful." "She will never remind me of my obligation, I am sure, but I cannot forget it. I feel that she was disappointed in me, but it is not my fault, for I all the time told her that I was not to be great. I will make no false modesty to hide that I have thought of you many times. I dreamed of you in English. This may not mean much to you, but I nearly always dream in Norwegian, and persons who speak English to me when I am awake, speak Norwegian in my dreams. But you did not. I thought I saw you standing in a ditch and the rain was falling, and it was night. I ran to you, and you spoke the name they used to call you in the West. It was the ditch you helped me over. I had been thinking about it in the day, and was sorry because the sunflowers must be all dead. I had to send some money to my uncle. He lost his place on the street-car, but they have taken him back. He has five children and cannot afford to be idle. Oh, that was a beautiful summer out there. Do you remember the night at the house where they said the spirits are? I can see you now, kneeling on the floor. I will be bold and say that I wanted to kneel beside you. Will there ever come another summer like that? It was my first rest. But I cannot hope for another soon. Mrs. Goodwin will not want me to come out with her next year. She will have with her the musical genius then. But we shall see each other. I feel that you spoke the truth when you said that all—something could not keep us apart. I boarded at the house of a man who had this season a large potato field. I went out when the digging time was at hand, and behind the plow I saw a woman from Norway and I wanted to help her, but it would not do for these people to know that I have ever worked in a field. The teacher of the public school spoke of me as the graceful young woman, and I thought that it might please you to know that he had said

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it."

"Please me?" said Milford, talking aloud to himself. "Blast his impudence, what right——"

"Anything wrong, Bill?" Mitchell inquired.

"Oh, no, everything's all right."

"Letter from her, ain't it?"

"Yes. She's in Michigan."

"I used to go with a woman from Michigan," said the hired man. "And I thought I'd like to marry her, but I found out she'd been married twice, and I didn't feel like bein' no third choice."

"I didn't suppose you'd object to that," Milford replied, folding his letter.

"Well, I may be more particular than most fellers, but it sorter stuck in my crop. I guess it's a good plan to let all the women alone. For awhile at least," he added. "The best of 'em don't bring a man nothin' but trouble. What does your girl say in her letter?"

"Oh, nothing much. She's teaching."

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"I guess she's a pretty good sort of a woman. Are you goin' to bring her here?"

"Not if I know myself."

"Yes, but a feller that keeps on foolin' with a woman gits so after a while he don't know himself. What's your object in not wantin' to bring her here?"

"I've got something else to do first. She may not want me after I've told her—the truth."

"Then don't do it, Bill. Talk to a woman all you're a mind to, but don't tell her any more truth than you can help. It gives her the upper hand of you."

"I don't know, Bob, that I'd be warranted in accepting your theories about woman."

"Mebbe not, but I'm the chap that's had the experience."

Milford replied in effect that experience does not always make us wise. It sometimes tends to weaken rather than to make us strong. It might make freshness stale; it is a thief that steals enthusiasm; it enjoins caution at the wrong time. He took out his letter and read it again, studying the form of each word. The hired man said that he had received many a letter, had read them over and over, but that did not alter the fact that the writer thereof had proved false to him. "I don't want to pile up trash in no man's path," he said, "but I want to give it out strong that it's a mighty hard matter for a woman to be true even to herself. Look how I've been treated."

Milford did not reply. He studied his letter, and the words, "wanted to kneel beside you," gathered a melody, and were sweet music to him.

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## CHAPTER XXII.

### REMEMBERED HIS OBLIGATION.

Now and then there was a blustery day, but good weather remained till late in November. But the ground tightened with the cold, and a snow-whirlwind came from the Northwest. Nowhere had the autumn been fuller of color, but a hiss and a snarl had buried it all beneath the crackly white of winter. Windmills creaked in the fierce blast, sucking smoky water from the ground, to gush, to drip, and then to hang from the spout a frozen beard. Black-capped milkmen, with flaps drawn down over ears, sat upon their wagons, appearing in their garb as if the hangman had rigged them up for a final journey. To look upon the frozen fields and to stand in the groaning woods it did not seem possible that there had ever been a day of lazy heat and nodding bloom. At tightening midnight the flinty lake cracked with a running shriek. The dawn was a gray shudder, the sunrise a shiver of pale red, and then a black cloud blot-out and more snow. A day that promised to be good-tempered often ended in a fury; and sometimes, when it seemed that nature could not be more harsh, the wind would soften, a thaw come with rain, and then another freeze with a snow-storm fiercer than before. Sometimes thunder growled, a lost mood of summer in the upper air; sometimes a lagging autumn bird was whirled through the freezing wind. And with it all the Yankee man was full of spirit, almost happy, happy as the Yankee well can be. His cool nature demanded a fight with the cold. The ears of all his ancestors had been frozen in bleak New England. His religion had been nurtured in a snow-drift, and unlike the breath of a freezing rabbit, did not melt an inch of it. In the howl of a cutting wind he heard a psalm to his vengeful Deity. And to-day the winter reminds him that his army was victorious in the summer South. It was a fight of Winter against Summer.

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Milford had no idle time upon his hands. When not at work in the barn he was trading among the farmers. They called him sharp, and this was a compliment. He had beaten Steve Hardy in a trade, and this was praise. An honest sort of a fellow is an eyesore to the genuine Yankee. He

must have other virtues—thrift. There was but one drawback in the Rollins community: The land was too productive. It yielded a good living without the full exercise of the Yankee quality. The Yankee is happiest when strongly opposed. His religion was sweetest when he had to pray with one eye open, sighting at the enemy, the dragoon sent by the king to break up the Conventicle, or the American Indian come to burn the meeting-house.

The winter had brought out Milford's strong points. He doubled his money on a flock of sheep. Fathers spoke of it to their daughters. Mothers asked their sons if they were acquainted with Mr. Milford. Mrs. Stuvic was proud of him.

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"Oh, I knowed what I was doin'," she said one night, sitting near the hot stove in Milford's dining-room. "You can't fool me. I know lots, I tell you. Do you know the Bunker girl? Well, she was at my house yesterday, and she talked like she knowed you but wanted to know you better. Now put down that newspaper and talk to me. Do you know her?"

"I think I've met her," said Milford.

"You think you have. Well, a woman has taken mighty little hold of a man when he thinks he's met her. She'd make you a good wife; yes, you bet!"

"I don't want a wife, good or bad."

"Oh, you keep still. What the deuce are you workin' for? You know there's a woman somewhere waitin' for you."

"And if there is, why should I want to marry the Bunker girl?"

"Now listen at him! Why, I didn't know but you'd got tired of foolin' with the other one. Who is she? That tall critter that was out here? Well, I don't know about her, with her art. Art the cat's foot! You'd better marry a woman that knows how to do housework. She may be all right for summer, but you'd better marry a woman for winter. Don't you think so, Bob?"

"For winter and summer, I should think," said the hired man. "But I married one for winter, and she went away along in July. But I guess I could get her again."

"And he's just about fool enough to take her," Milford spoke up. "Why, she'd run away again."

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"I don't think that, Bill. I guess she's got more sense now."

"At any rate, she's got more sense than you," said the old woman. "She had sense enough to run away and you didn't. But I hear that somebody else run away, Bill. I heard that you left a wife out West."

"You heard a lie, madam," Milford replied. "But that's not hard to hear. A man may be ever so deaf, and sometimes might hear a lie."

"That's gospel, Mrs. Stuvic," said the hired man. "I was out at the deaf and dumb asylum one time, and they had a boy shut up for lyin' with his fingers."

"Well, what do you come tellin' me about it for? Do you s'pose I care? I wasn't talkin' about lyin'. I was talkin' about some folks not havin' much sense, and you was right at the top of the pot, I'll tell you that. You haven't got sense enough to catch a good woman."

"I might not have from your standpoint, but I have from mine. I don't believe I'd want the woman you'd call good. She'd think it was her duty to keep a man stirred up all the time; she'd make him work himself to death."

"Well," she snapped, "a woman's better off every time she makes a man work himself to death, I'll tell you that."

"Yes, from your standpoint," drawled the hired man, opening the stove door to get a light for his pipe. "But I wouldn't kill myself for no woman, would you, Bill?"

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"I don't know that I'm called on to do it," Milford replied. "Give me that," he added, reaching for the bit of blazing paper which the hired man was about to put out. He lighted his pipe, threw the burning paper on the stove, and idly looked at the cinder waving in the draft. "As unsteadfast as Mitchell's love," he said.

"What is?" the hired man inquired. "That thing, there? No, that's a woman's love. See, it's blowed away."

"Such nonsense!" said the old woman. "How can you keep it up so long? I'd get sick to death of it. Woman's love, woman's love—I never was as tired of hearing of a thing. I hear it all summer, and now you're talkin' it. Conscience alive, how the wind blows! It makes me think of old Lewson, the cold made him shiver so. I've knowed him to sit up at night with his fire out and his teeth chatterin', waitin' for the spirits to come. One night I asked him who he expected, and he said his wife, and I told him she was a fool to come out such a night, and he flung his spirit book at me, and the Dutch girl kindled the fire with it the next mornin'. Poor old feller! I passed his grave the other day, all heaped up with snow; and it made me shake so to think I'd be lyin' there sometime, with the snow fallin' an' the cows mooin' down the road. But I'm not gone yet, Bill. Do you understand that? I say I'm not gone yet, and many a one of 'em 'll be hauled off before I do go. Yes, you bet! I'll outlive all of you; the last one of you."

"I hope so, Mrs. Stuvic," said Milford.

"You do? Thank you for the compliment."

"But you've got to go sometime," Mitchell spoke up; and she frowned upon him.

"You shut your mouth, now," she snapped. "I wan't talkin' to you. I'll go when I get ready, and it's none of your business. But ain't it awful," she added, speaking to Milford, "that we've got to go? And we don't know where and don't know what'll happen to us afterwards. Lord, Lord, such a world! If we could only be dead for a while to see what it's like; but to think forever and ever, all the summers and all the winters to come! Dead, all the time dead. I wake up in the night, and think about it and wish I'd never been born. Sometimes I look at my hand and say, 'Yes, the flesh has got to drop off.' Not long ago a doctor stopped at my house one night with a skeleton. He was a young fool, and had bought it somewhere. He jerked the thing around like it was a jumpin'-jack; and I said to myself, 'You'd do me the same way, you scoundrel.' And I told him to drive away from there as fast as he could. And old Lewson's failin' to come back has made it worse. I wonder if he did lie to me. I wonder if he could come back. And if he could, why didn't he? I'd always been kind to him; took him when his own flesh and blood turned him out. Then what made him lie to me? I don't care so much about his not comin' back; all I want is to know that he could have come. That would satisfy me. And why couldn't he let me know that much? Bill, you lump of mud, don't you think about dyin'?"

"You're coming pretty close to my name, old lady. Yes, I think about it, but death will have to take care of itself. I haven't the time to worry with it just at present." [Pg 221]

"Yes, and the first thing you know you can't worry about it."

"Then I'll be all right; won't need to worry."

She reached over and gripped his wrist. "Ah, that's it; that's just it. How do you know that you won't need to worry? What proof have you got? Tell me, if you've got any." She jerked him. "Tell me. Don't you see how I'm sufferin'? If you know anythin', tell me. I want the truth. That's all I want, the truth."

"I don't know anything, Mrs. Stuvic. I can only hope."

She turned loose his wrist and shoved herself back further from him. "You can only hope. You mean that you're only a fool. That's what you mean. What do you want to hope for? Why don't you find out? What's all the smart men doin' that they don't find out? Talk to me about the world gettin' wiser! Oh, they can invent their machines and all that, but why don't they find out the truth?"

"Some of the wisest of them think they have found out long ago," Milford replied. "Don't you see the churches? Somebody must believe that the truth is known or there wouldn't be so many churches."

"Churches," she sneered, "yes, churches. But I don't believe in 'em, and you don't neither. Same old thing all the time; believe, believe, nothin' but believe. Well, I'm goin' home. I see you don't know any more than I do. We're all a pack of fools." [Pg 222]

Mitchell said that he was going her way, and she told him to come on. At the door going out they met the Professor coming in. The old woman fell back as if she had seen a ghost. She declared that for a moment he was Old Lewson, just as he looked on the day when last he urged her to accept his faith. She sat down to recover breath. The Professor assured her that he meant no harm. Any resemblance that he might bear to the living or the dead was wholly unintentional on his part. She told him to shut up, that he was a fool. He acknowledged it with a bow, and said that this fact also was wholly unintentional.

"You pretend to be so smart," she said. "Yes, but why don't you know the truth?"

"I should know it, madam, were I to hear it."

"Oh, you get out! You don't know half the time what you're talkin' about. What's to become of us all? That's what I want to know."

The Professor sat down. The hired man stood at the door. Milford leaned back in his chair. The old woman looked at the learned man and repeated her question. He began to say something about philosophy, and she broke in with a contemptuous snort and the cat's foot. She did not want philosophy; she wanted the truth. The Professor attempted to persuade her that philosophy was the truth, and she fluttered like a hen. It was nothing of the sort; it was ignorance put in big words. What she wanted was the truth. [Pg 223]

"But if you won't listen I can't give it to you," said the Professor. "You cut me off at the beginning. Now, you say that what you want is the truth. You demand an answer to your question of what is to become of us all, after this life. You want me to answer it in a word, when the books that have been written on the subject would sink the biggest ship afloat."

"Yes, and you don't know anythin' about it. What I want to know is, can we come back? Answer me that."

"Madam, in my opinion——"

"I don't give a snap for your opinion. Come on, Bob Mitchell, if you're goin' with me." She bustled out of the room, leaving the Professor with his finger-tips pressed together and his head erect. "As odd a fish as was ever hooked," said he. "She must be afraid that she is going to die."

"It's on her mind all the time," said Milford. "She wants to believe something, she doesn't know exactly what."

"The pitiable case of one beyond the reach of philosophy. But in her struggling to land herself somewhere she keeps her interest in herself keenly alive. There is always some sort of hope as long as we are interested in ourselves. Trite, I admit that it is trite, but it is a fact that we should always bear in mind, endeavoring constantly to keep alive an interest in self so that we may not fail in the obligations which we owe to others. But well may the old woman ask what is to become of us all. I wash my hands of the spiritual part," he said, going through the motion of washing; "I can shift the responsibilities here, or at least feel that I can, but—bodily, bodily, what's to become of us bodily?"

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"When such riddles are asked of me, I'm always ready to give them up," said Milford. "I'm not asking myself any questions."

"Ha! you don't need to," the Professor declared. "You bristle yourself against the world, and in the fight that ensues you are not always beaten. I am. Your nerve is sound. Mine has been broken many a time, tied together again, and is therefore weak. Leaving age out of the question, there is scarcely any comparison between our equipments for the fight. You have a habit of silence that enforces respect for your talk. I am talkative, and a talkative man utters many an unheeded truth. At times you are almost grim, and this makes your good humor the brighter. I am always pleasant, and as a consequence fail to hold the interest of the company. In overalls you can assert a sort of dignity, or rather what the thoughtless would take for dignity, but which I know to be a gruffism—permit the expression—a gruffism toned down. But I—even in a dress-suit I could not keep my dignity from cutting a prejudicial caper. The trouble is that my acquaintances will not take me seriously. I once heard a man say, 'Yes, as light as one of Dolihide's worries.' It angers me to feel that outwardly I am a caricature of my inner self. Not even my wife knows how serious I am, or what a tragedy life is to me. But, my dear fellow, my oddities are crystal, and I will not thread them off in spun glass. I came over for a different purpose. The money with which you so generously deceived me—I have raised it; it was a fearful scuffle, but I seized the obstacles that danced about me and threw them down, one by one. Here is the money."

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He took out a number of bank notes with a scattering of silver, and slowly spread them on the table, carefully placing one upon the other. "I said that I would pay you, and here's the money,—down to the forty cents."

"I am much abliged to you, Professor. No hurry, though, you understand."

"There has been no hurry, my dear friend. No one can ever know what a struggle it was to—raise it at this time, this needful time." He leaned back, and with lips tightly sealed together, and with head slowly nodding, gazed at the pile of dirty paper. "This needful time, thou filth," he said.

"Now, if you need it," Milford spoke up quickly, "take it. I'm not pressed. You can pay it some other time."

"My life insurance will be due again within three days."

"Then go ahead and pay it."

The Professor continued to gaze at the bank notes. "Must I again crease you into uncleanly folds—I am a thousand times your debtor, my dear boy. I could spin fine, but I won't. I could pronounce a curse upon these pieces of motley paper, but I won't. I cannot afford to. In their mire they lie between me and my family's future misery. I don't know what your ultimate aim is in this life, but I know that you are a Christian. I don't know what you have done, but it is what a man does now that makes him a Christian. Well, solemn under the weight of a renewed obligation, I will return to my own fireside. Before touching this money again, let me shake your hand."

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## CHAPTER XXIII.

### NOT THE OLD SUMMER.

At no time during the lagging winter did the Professor mention his renewed obligation, but one night in April he came over with a tune in his voice, a laugh in his eye, and paid the debt. The bank notes were not ragged and soiled as if they had been snatched in the dust of a fierce scuffle; they were new, and as bright as if they had come as a gracious legacy. And, indeed, they had. A dead "lot," lying in the neighborhood of a punctured "boom" in Kansas, fluttered with the returning life of speculative resurrection. A new railway needed the site for a station. An agent found the Professor, reluctantly offered him half as much as the property was worth, and he gladly accepted it. For a day his household was happy in the possession of a set of new chairs, a rug and a center table, but soon fell to brooding over the lonesome absence of dining-room linen and new paper on the walls. The Professor had hoped that he might be able to buy a bookcase for

his room upstairs, but realizing that it was impossible to fill up the rat hole of want in the floor below, did not dare to speak of his longing. But he was sharper than his family had suspected. With a wink he told Milford that he had, in the stealthy hour of midnight, put by enough to enable him to do a little speculating. Milford had set him an example of thrift. There was money to be made in buying and selling and he was going to buy and sell. All that he had needed was an example. A mind that could weigh a heavy problem could turn a trifle to account. The ancient philosophers, counseling contentment of the mind, had money loaned out at interest. It was no wonder that they could be contented. And, after all, they held the right idea of life, money first and philosophy afterward. He would go back to first principles; would deal in cattle, the origin of money. The bicycle might hurt the horse, but it could not hurt the steer. There was no invention to take the place of a beefsteak. Some men might argue that it was difficult if not impossible for a failure to become a success, but all astonishing success had come out of previous failure. Without failure the world could never have realized one of its most precious virtues—perseverance. Society placed a premium upon rascality. He could be a rascal. At one time he had thought it wise to lie down with his friend, death; but now he felt it expedient to stand up with his enemy, life.

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Milford did not take issue with his newly adopted creed. He brought up a jug of cider and they drank to it. The Professor had an option on four bullocks, and they drank to them. And then filling his cup, the reformed scholar said:

"To our dear enemies, the ladies."

"No," Milford replied. He had that day received a letter. "I won't drink to them as our enemies."

"Well, then, as our endeared mistakes."

"No, they are not mistakes."

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"Ha! you put me to for a term. What shall we call them?"

"The honest helpers of dishonest men," said Milford.

The Professor frowned. "I cannot subscribe to a sentiment so ruffled and furbelowed with—shall I say tawdry flounces? Permit me; I have said it. My dear fellow, in this humid air of American sentimentalism, we are not permitted to talk rationally about woman. Some man is always ready to hop up and declare that his mother is a woman. Of course she is. Has any one ever disputed the fact? His mother is a woman, and so in fact we hope is the person whom he expects to marry—I say expects to marry, for it is usually an unmarried man who hops up. I would not abolish marriage, you understand. I would—well, I would insist upon both parties having a little more sense. I would enact a law, compelling a man, before being granted a license, to show a certificate of financial success. I would inquire into the amount of money he had realized on his last lot of bullocks."

"You'd have a fine world."

"Wouldn't I? There would be no scuffling for life insurance, no harassment over wall-paper, no daughters to pity a father's failure. If I could roll up the surface of the sea into a megaphone, I would shout a caution to the unmarried world."

"What would you shout, Professor?"

"Shut your eyes on love. If you have no money, throw your license into the fire and turn the preacher out at the back door. That is what I would shout."

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"There are millions of mistakes," said Milford. "But there are many happy hits. Your marriage \_\_\_"

"Thoroughly happy, my dear fellow—as a marriage, you understand. I wouldn't undo it for the world. My people are everything to me. They are too much to me, hence my everlasting worry over life insurance. But it is not possible for the average woman to understand, and nearly every woman is the average woman. But my worries are over now. I am to start out anew. Don't think ill of me for not having opened my eyes sooner. An eye is like a chestnut bur; it doesn't open till it is ripe, and up to this time mine has been green in ignorance. Don't call me eccentric. I would rather be called a thief than eccentric. What is eccentricity but a loose joint, a flaw in the machinery? I am not so much out of the common. The trouble is that I show effects more plainly perhaps than other men. But I am serious. I am not light. To the plodder, I have been chimerical, but I will shame him by becoming a plodder, by out-plodding him. For the first time in many months, I return to my home as much as half satisfied with myself."

A few days later Milford saw him in the road, popping a whip behind four bullocks. Not long afterward, at a farmyard sale, he was seen haggling for a small flock of sheep. He bought a cow of Mrs. Stuvic. He urged her to come to terms. He was a man of business, and had no time for words.

"Well, now you have woke up," she said. "Who would thought it? They might as well go out to the graveyard now and tell the rest of 'em it's time to get up. Gracious alive, take the cow. I don't want to stand in the way of a man that's just woke up. Have you quit the mill?"

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"No, but since I woke up I do my work in about two-thirds of the time."

"Good for you! Oh, that feller Milford has stirred up the whole country."

"And when he gets through with that farm, madam, I'll take it. I don't think he'll stay a great while longer."

"Why, has he said anythin' about goin' away?"

"No, but with my shrewd eye I can see that he's getting restless. But I have no time to talk to you."

The season for breaking land and planting came, slowly through the stubborn and lingering cold, and Milford bent himself to the putting in of a large crop. His letters from Gunhild were rambling, but affectionate. She was now in Indiana. Her work in Michigan had been but partly successful. "I'm studying so that after awhile I may teach a regular school," she said. "But there is so much to learn and the examination is very hard. I met a man the other day who said that he knew you. He tried to sell you a book. He said that you were very hard to deal with. I told him that you must know what you wanted. Mr. Blakemore was here three days ago, to look at some land. He came to the house where I board, and said that he is making much money. There was a church sociable and he wanted me to go with him, but I refused. He said that I never would succeed as long as I was so particular. And I felt that you would rather I be particular than to succeed. I do not want any success that you would not like. His little boy has been sick, but is well now. They are not coming out to Rollins in the summer. They are going further away to a more fashionable place. Mrs. Goodwin writes to me yet, so she has not forgotten me. She says that her discovery is marvelous. She asked about you. She believes that you will be rich one of these days. I told her in my letter that I did not want to think so, but I know that she cannot understand. She will not know that I do not want you to get so far away from me. But you would not. It is a dream with me to come out there once again. I never have seen a place more beautiful. The woods here are not so full of the sketches that no one can draw, and there are no lakes scattered everywhere. I may come for one week during the vacation."

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June was cool, but July was hot, and with the change in the weather came Mrs. Goodwin and her discovery, a pale girl with long hands. The "discoverer" sent for Milford. She was graciously pleased to meet him again. "I am sorry we can't call back the old summer," she said, giving him her hand. "But the old summers never come back." She introduced him to the musical genius, Miss Swartz. Her pale lips parted in a white smile. Milford asked her to play. Mrs. Goodwin shrugged, glanced at the piano and said: "I can't let her touch that thing." If Mrs. Stuvic had heard this remark she would have bundled them off down the road. But she was out in the orchard at scolding heat with a retired policeman, sent by the city to board with her during the summer. Miss Swartz languidly waved herself out of the room, and Mrs. Goodwin, motioning Milford to a seat beside her on the sofa, commanded him to tell her all about himself.

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"I haven't anything of interest to tell."

"Ah, the same close mouth. You hear from her quite often, I suppose. A strong woman. Don't you think so? I urged her to stay with me, but she thought it her duty to go away. Do you expect to reside here permanently? Gunhild likes this place so much. She's perfectly charmed with it."

"Which question shall I answer first?"

"Did I ask more than one? I haven't seen you in so long that I must rattle on at a fearful rate."

"I don't expect to live here permanently."

"Not if she should request it?"

"She will not request it. Our arrangements are not yet quite clear enough for such requests."

"Indeed? I fancied that it was all understood."

"It is, in a way, but we must have a very serious talk before there can be—be—"

"Anything definite," she suggested. "Yes, I understand. But this serious talk? How can that change your plans or have any bearing upon them?"

"That is for her to decide. I had a certain object in view before she entered into any of my calculations."

"Dear me, we are as far apart as ever. You must know that I dote upon that girl, and that consequently I am interested in you. But I needn't tell you this. You know it already."

"Yes, and I am grateful."

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"But you will give me no hint as to what your object is. Don't you think I ought to know it?"

"She doesn't know it yet."

"But you must have told her something."

"A little, and she didn't urge me to tell her more."

"Do I deserve that reproach? I hope not. Really, she and you present a singular romance."

"It is not a romance; it's only a sort of understanding."

"But you say there is no perfect understanding. Oh, a sort of romance. I see. Well, you will make her a good husband and consequently a good living."

A vision of the Professor as he had sat amid his shifting toasts to woman arose before Milford. "Good husband, I hope; and a good living, I am determined," he said.

"You couldn't have made a better reply, Mr. Milford, if you had pondered a week. You are quite happy at times. It was voted last summer that you had good blood, and you must have it still," she added with a smile. "Although you call yourself a Westerner, you are really from the East, I believe."

"Yes, but to live in the West soon rubs out the marks of all sections."

"True enough, I suppose. But do you expect to go back there?"

"Yes, but I don't know how long I'll stay. I may run out and come straight back. I can't tell. It all depends."

"Upon Gunhild's decision?"

"Not wholly. The fact is I can't explain myself. Oh, I could," he added, observing her wondering eye, "but I serve my purpose best by——" [Pg 235]

"By showing that you have no confidence in me," she suggested. "No," she hastened to continue, "you have none. You have shown it all along. But why should I ask you to have confidence? We met by accident at a farm-house, during a holiday, at a time when real friendships are rarely formed. Impressed by the ephemeral season, we recognize that we too are but fleeting, with changing likes and dislikes, the prejudices and predilections of an hour. Of course, my affection for Gunhild is lasting. Her interests and mine walk far down the road together, hand in hand. I could not expect you to see this; you saw her and all else stood about her in a dim radius. I was a shadow, dim or dark, as the day was light or heavy, the same as Mrs. Blakemore. My station entitled me to respect, and you gave it. But you did not feel that my love for the young woman entitled me to something closer than respect. You are no common man, Mr. Milford. Your face is a Vandyke conception of a spirit of adventure. You are a strength repenting a weakness; there are flaws in you, and yet I could wish that I were the mother of such a son."

"Don't," said Milford, touching her hand; "please don't. I honor you; I could get down on my knees to you. You're not a shadow. There is nothing in a shadow that makes a man bow his head in reverence. But I can't tell you."

"Is it so very bad, Mr. Milford?"

"Yes, it is worse than very bad." [Pg 236]

He moved further from her, and looked at her as if he expected her to move also, but she did not. "There is redemption," she said; "moral redemption."

"There must be a material redemption," he replied.

"God demands that it must be spiritual," she said.

"But man insists that it must be earthly," he persisted.

"The gospel was tenderest coming from the mouth of one who had been infamous."

"Yes," he replied, "but then the blood of the Virgin's Son was still red upon the earth, and in the heart of the changing world that blood atoned for everything. It is different now. Man may forgive, but he wants the dollar."

"And he's goin' to get it unless you tie his hands behind him," said Mrs. Stuvic, stepping into the room. "Yes, you bet! Why don't you have that girl play the pian, Mrs.—I can't recollect your name to save my life."

"She didn't bring her music," Mrs. Goodwin replied, and the old woman "whiffed." "Music the cat's foot! Don't she know a tune? Tell her to give me a jig and I'll dance it."

"She won't play, Mrs. Stuvic. It's of no use to ask her."

"She won't? Well, then, she needn't. Mebbe she don't like my pian. But I want to tell you that it's as good as anybody's. I give a hundred and fifty dollars and a colt for it, and the carpenter painted it fresh this spring. But if she don't want to play, she needn't. What's become of that woman—out here last year? Can't think of her name, but her husband moped about and ended up by callin' your young woman a peach. What's become of her?" [Pg 237]

"She's gone to the seashore, I understand," Mrs. Goodwin answered, looking slyly at Milford.

"Oh, she has? Well, let her go, there wan't no string tied to her. Bill, I want you to drive over to Antioch for me if you've got the time, and you never appear to be busy when there's women around. They've got the pony hitched up."

Mrs. Goodwin drove with him. Near the old brick house they met the Professor, leading a calf.

He snatched off his hat, and the calf snatched him off his feet, but he scrambled up, tied the rope to a fence-post, and was then ready to do the polite thing, bowing and brushing himself. He had

been on the keen jump, he said, catching drift-wood in the commercial whirlpool, but he had often thought of Mrs. Goodwin, one of the noblest of her honored sex. "I have turned from the sylvan paths where wild roses nod," said he, "turned into the dusty highway of trade, but I have not forgotten the roses, madam," he declared with a bow. "They come as a sweet reminiscence of my brighter but less useful days. Permit me to extend to you——"

The calf broke loose and went scampering down the road, a twinkling of white hoofs in the black dust; and with a shout the Professor took to his heels in pursuit.

"Something always happens to that man's dignity," said Mrs. Goodwin, laughing as they drove on. [Pg 238]  
"Is he ever serious?"

"He may not appear so, but he's serious now," Milford answered, looking back at him, galloping down the road.

"Couldn't we have helped him in some way?" she asked, now that it was too late even to think about it.

"We might have shouted advice after him, but that was about all we could have done," said Milford. "He'll catch him down there. Somebody'll head him off."

As they drove through the village street, Milford pointed out the place wherein he had trained himself to meet the man Dorsey. He had worked during weeks that one minute might be a victory. She told him that it was the appearance of having a dauntless spirit that at first aroused in her an interest in him. She detested a quarrel, but she liked a man who would fight. Her father had been a captain in the navy, and he had taught her to believe that a courageous knave was more to be admired than an honest man without nerve. Of course this was an extreme view, the exaggerated policy of a fighting man, and though she did not accept it in full, yet it had strongly impressed her. She did not see how a man could be an American and not be brave. And frankness was a part of bravery. At least it ought to be. Milford was brave, but not frank enough, with her. On the way home she returned to the subject. There was a charm in the confidence of a brave man. It was strange that he had not told Gunhild more about himself. He surely loved her. She was capable of inspiring the deepest love. Of course she had seen him in the West, but had merely seen him, and his life was still a sealed book to her. Oh, no, she had not complained. That was not her nature. [Pg 239]

"She'll know enough one of these days," said Milford. "Perhaps too much," he added.

"Well, I suppose we must wait," she replied. "And I hope you'll not think my curiosity idle. All interest is curiosity, more or less, but all interest is not idle. So you don't know how long you'll remain here?"

"I haven't staked off the time."

She sighed. She said that the summer had been a disappointment. She had not been happy since Gunhild left her. Her going away must have been a wild notion, caught from Milford. There was no necessity for teaching, till at least she had studied longer herself. She had not been disappointed in her development, not wholly. Her outcome as a woman had more than offset her failure as an artist. And she found that it was the woman whom she had liked, rather than the artist. With her new care it was different. She was all musician, a genius with whims and caprices, a moody companion, not capable of inspiring friendship. She had taken her as a duty, a duty which she felt that she owed to the musical world.

"I am going home to-morrow," she said, when Milford helped her down at Mrs. Stuvic's gate. "I don't like these new people. They are coarse." [Pg 240]

"To-morrow I have business across the country," said Milford. "I may not see you again."

"I am sorry. Will you do me a favor? When you write to Gunhild tell her that she must come back to me. I need her."

"I will tell her that you have said so."

"That won't be much of a favor, but tell her. And I want you to promise one thing—that you will come to see me, when you are married."

"I'll promise that gladly, and keep it. I am very fond of you."

"Are you?"

"Yes. You said you would like to be the mother of such a son. That was the kindest thing ever said to me. It makes you my mother."

"Oh," she said, falteringly, as he took her hand. "You will understand me better in the time to come. Good-bye." [Pg 241]

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## CHAPTER XXIV.

## DREAMED OF THE ANGELUS.

Gunhild wrote that she could not spare the money to come out, and to Milford the summer fell flat and lay spiritless on the ground. He begged her to let him bear the expense, and for this she scolded him. But she enlivened him with a suggestion. Near the first of October she would visit her uncle in the city. "It will make me glad to have you come to see me then," she said. "And I shall feel that you have held the summer and brought it with you. Mrs. Goodwin wrote to me as soon as she came home. She said much about you, and I really think she likes you deeply. I have been astonished at her. I did not think that she would care for me more when her house I left, but she does. She is a good woman. Oh, you remember the Miss Swartz who was with her. Well, she wanted to keep company with a fiddler in a variety show, and Mrs. Goodwin objected, and that was not the end of it. The girl went out at night late and married the fiddler, and Mrs. Goodwin has seen her no more."

There was a lament for the swift flight of the sunny days, by the woman on the bicycle and the man casting his line into the lake, but to Milford the time was slow. He remembered having seen a lame cow limping down the road, with the sluggish hours dragging at her feet, and he told the hired man that she had come back again to vex him. But time was never so slow that it did not pass, and one evening the sun went down beyond the fading edge of September. Milford waited two days longer and then went to the city; and just out of the fields, how confusing was the noise and the sight of scattering crowds that were never scattered! But his sense of the world soon came back to him. He had been moneyless in many a town, hanging about the gambler's table, feeding upon the chip tossed by the exultant winner. The woods, the cattle, the green and purple pictures, musings with his head in the grass, had taken the gamester's wild leap out of his blood, but he knew that he dared not go near the vice. He found the Norwegian's cottage, in the western part of town, and he stood at the door listening before he rang the bell. A little girl came out with a tin pail, the gripman's dinner. As she opened the door he saw Gunhild. She dropped a boy's jacket, which she had evidently been mending, and came bounding to meet him, with her welcome bursting out in a laugh. Her hands were warm, and her eyes full of happiness. There was no put-on and no disguises in their meeting. It was two destinies touching again, destinies that were to become as one. She led him into the neat little parlor, gave him a rocking-chair, and talked of her gladness at his coming, standing for a moment in front of a glass to put back into place a wayward wisp of hair. Their meeting had not been cool. She drew up a chair beside him and they talked about the country, of the haunted house, and the tree that had hoisted a vine like an umbrella. He told her that he had come through the fields to the station, and had stood in the ditch among the wild sunflowers. He had plucked some for her, but they were dead and had fallen to pieces.

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They went out into the park, not far away, and sat amid the scenes of a changing season, the leaves falling about them. It was an odd courtship, an indefinite engagement. There was no attempt at sentiment, no time when either one felt that something tender must be said, but between them there was a wholesome understanding of the heart. They were not living a love story. She was not clothed in the glamour-vestment of love's ethereal fancy, not sigh-fanned by the breath of reverential melancholy. Her hand did not feel like the velvet paw of a kitten; it was a hand that had toiled; and though easier days may come, the mark of labor can never be erased from the palm.

She left him on the rustic seat, and hastened across the sward to pluck a bloom that had been sheltered from the early frost, and he looked at her, a gladness tingling in his nerves. How trim she was in her dark gown! She looked back at him, pointed at a policeman standing off among the trees, and imitated the walk of a sneak-thief. She returned laughing, and pinning the flower on his coat, stood to gaze upon him as if he were in bloom, and said in an accent that always reminded him of a banjo's lower tones, "See, the frost has not killed you." Simple, playful, loving, strong, were the words to express an estimate of her—the healthy refinement of an honest heart, and modest because she had seen immodesty. She possessed a knowledge that was a better safeguard than mere innocence, and her passion illumined her virtue.

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They strolled among the trees, society's forest; they listened to the ducks and the geese, the city's barnyard.

"Would you rather live in the country?" he asked.

"I would not rather teach art there," she laughed.

"It must be very hard."

"It is very stupid."

"I don't suppose the farmers take to it any too kindly."

"No, they often ask me why I do not draw comic as they see in the newspapers."

"They must like to see themselves buying gold bricks."

She did not understand him, and he explained that the honest farmer believing that a fortune was coming down the road to meet him, was the prey of sharp swindlers who prowled about through the country. Steve Hardy, one of the shrewdest men in the community, once had bought an express package filled with worthless paper. It was a case of "honesty" trying to beat the three-shell man at his own game. Ignorance always credits itself with shrewdness. Industry is no sure

sign of honesty. "Worked like a thief" has become a saying. Smiling at his philosophy, she said that he never could have learned it in a school.

"No," he replied. "In the school we are taught to believe in the true, the beautiful, and the good; but in life we find that the true as we learned it is often false, the beautiful painted, and the good bad." [Pg 245]

"I would not have you think that," she said. "The beautiful is not always painted." She stooped and picked up a maple leaf, blushed with the rudeness of the frost. "This is not painted, and it is beautiful. It was the cold that brought out its color. You must not be a—what would you call it?"

"Cynic?"

"Yes. You must not be that. It is an acknowledgment of failure."

He took her hand, and they walked on among the trees. "You talk like a virtue translated from a foreign tongue," he said. He called her a heathen grace. She protested. She was a Christian, so devout that she would have hung her head in the potato field had she heard the ringing of the angelus. They saw a woman on a wheel, and he dropped her hand. The woman waved at them, jumped off and came to meet them, smiling. It was Mrs. Blakemore. "Oh, I am so surprised and delighted," she said, shaking hands. "Why, how unexpected! You must come home with me. I don't live far from here. Bobbie will be delighted to see you. He refuses to go to school, and we won't force him, he is so delicate. How well you look, Gunhild! And you too, Mr. Milford." The man would have yielded against his will; the woman saw this and declined the invitation. She said that they had an engagement to dine. Milford looked at her in surprise. He thought of the frost-tinted leaf. Mrs. Blakemore was sorry—she said. It would be such a disappointment to Bobbie. George was out of town. She bade them an effusive good-bye, mounted her wheel, pulling at her short skirts, and glided away. [Pg 246]

"Engagement to dine?" said Milford, as they turned from watching Mrs. Blakemore.

"Yes, at the little bakery over by the edge of the park."

"Oh, I see. But I thought you wanted to go with her."

"I knew that you did not," she replied.

"But did you?" he asked.

"I would not spoil a beautiful day," she answered.

They dined at the bakery, flattering themselves that the girl who waited on them did not know that they were lovers. They did not see her wink at her fat mother behind the showcase.

"I haven't asked you how long I may stay," said Milford, as they walked out.

"I was afraid to come to that," she replied. "I must leave on the train to-night. I have only waited for you."

"When do you think I can see you again?"

"I do not know. I will write."

"Remember that nothing can keep us apart—nothing but yourself."

"Then we shall not be kept apart. But why do you leave it with me?"

"Because you are to decide when I tell you something."

"Do you put it off because it is so hard to tell?" [Pg 247]

"No, because I'm not ready yet. I will be when I close out with the old woman."

"I would like to know now."

"It would be plucking green fruit," he replied.

"You know best," she said, trustfully.

The air grew chilly when the sun had set, and they returned to the cottage to sit alone in the parlor. They heard the kindly tones of the gripman talking to his children. There was a melodeon in the room, and she played a Norwegian hymn. The barefoot youngsters scampered in the passage-way.

"Let them come in," he said.

"No, they are undressed for bed," she replied. It was the evening romp, a tired mother's trial-time before the hour of rest when all are asleep.

He went to the railway station with her; walked that they might be longer on the road, looked at cottages, gazed up at flats, planning for the future. In the deep secrecy of a crowd he kissed her good-bye, and then went forth to stroll about the town. He stood listening to the weird song of a salvation woman; he dropped a nickel into a rich beggar's hat; he saw the grief-stricken newsboy weeping in a doorway, and believing that he was a liar, gave him a penny; he went to sleep in a hotel and dreamed that he saw a woman with bowed head listening to the angelus. [Pg 248]

## CHAPTER XXV.

### THE BIGGEST LIAR ON EARTH.

When Milford reached Rollins he found the Professor at the station waiting for him. "I will go home with you," he said. "I have something of grave importance to communicate." Steve Hardy offered them a ride in his milk wagon, but they set out on foot, at the suggestion of the Professor, who said that in this way he could better lead up to his subject. Milford was silent till they had proceeded some distance down the lane, and then he asked if anything had gone wrong. The Professor answered that everything had gone wrong, but as he had not yet led up to his subject, he continued to walk on, brooding, sighing like the wind in the rushes. They turned the corner, went down a slope, and at the bottom, the scholar took Milford by the arm apparently to conduct him to the subject, which presumably was waiting on the top of the hill.

"We are coming to it, my dear Milford. It is elusive, but we are almost to it. Now, here we are," he said, with evident relief, as they reached the top of the hill.

"All right, go ahead," said Milford. "Shoot it off."

"Idiomatic," breathed the Professor. "And, sir, to follow it with idiom, I am up against it."

"Up against what?"

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"Failure, grinning and teeth-chattering failure. You have seen me turn defiantly upon my false training, and woo the ways of the world. You have seen me buy; you have seen me snatched off my feet by a yearling calf, in the presence of a dignified woman; you have heard me pop my whip at the crack of day. And what has it all come to? Failure. I know that this sounds funny to you, but it is my way, and I find it useless to attempt another. Now, to the point: On all my speculations I have lost money. My bargains turned out to be disasters. I sold at a sacrifice, and am still in debt. I don't know why I should not have succeeded. My object was as worthy as yours. But I failed."

"That may be, but you're nearly as well off as you were before you made the attempt. You haven't so much to grieve over after all."

"Oh, yes, I have. My life insurance. But for that I could snap my fingers at defeat."

"When's the money due?"

"Day after to-morrow."

"I can let you have it. What are you trying to do?"

"I am grabbing after your hand."

"Let it alone."

"But, my dear fellow, your kindness overwhelms me."

"Then don't take the money."

"Oh, yes, I shall; I am more than willing to be overwhelmed. Ha! I had set my heart on you, and was afraid that you might not be back in time. Thank the Lord for the man who comes in time. All others are a blotch upon the face of the earth. Last night was a torture to me. More than once my wife called out, 'You give me the fidgets with your walking up and down. I want to sleep.' Sleep! There was no sleep for me. I saw the sun rise, and I said to myself, 'If that man don't come you won't shine for me to-day.' But you came, God bless you. Well, I'll turn off here and go by home, to show them that I am not crushed into the earth, and will see you at your house this evening."

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Mrs. Stuvic saw Milford, and came out to the barnyard gate. She wanted to ask him if he had seen any of her boarders, but had forgotten their names. Some one had told her that Milford expected soon to quit the place, and she asked him why he had not told her.

"I've told you as much as I have any one," said he. "I don't expect to go before next spring."

"Well, we may all be dead and buried before then," she replied.

"Yes, all except you."

"You bet! Why, three men have been here lately wantin' to insure my life. Did you see that girl? But I know you did. Why don't you buy the farm and bring her out here? You could soon pay for it."

"I'd rather live in the West."

"The cat's foot! You don't know what you want. Was that the Professor man with you over there on the hill? I couldn't see very well. He's crazy. Yes, he is, as crazy as a loon, and I don't want him round here. He might set the house afire. Don't you think he's crazy?"

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"Well, he's one of the peculiar many that go to make up the world."

"He's one of the peculiar many that go to make up an asylum, I'll tell you that. Everybody says

he's crazy. Come in and set down a while."

"No, I must go home."

"You're in a mighty hurry now, ain't you? Crazy as a loon, and you ain't fur behind him. Go on with you."

At night the Professor came whistling out of the dark. The sky was moonless, but brighter, he said, than the sunrise contemplated by him in the hour of his dejection. Once more had he proved himself a failure, but consoled himself with the assertion, made over and over again, that it required a peculiar sharpness to deal in cattle. There ought to be other ways by which a man might earn money; there were other ways, and he would find one of them. He believed that he could write a book and sell it himself, by subscription. He knew a man who had done this, and now there were stone gate-posts in front of his house. Talk was the necessary equipment, and he could talk. The agent ought to be the echo of the wisdom in the book, and to echo had been his fault in the practical world. But echo was worthy of its hire.

"Why, let me tell you what I can do," he said, his face beaming. "I can take a book on Babylon, on Jerusalem, Nineveh, Jericho, the Red Sea, home, mother, and make a volume that the farmers will snap at. Easy! Why, slipping on the ice is hard compared with it. What do you think of it?"

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"Looks all right," said Milford.

"Well, anything that looks all right is all right in the book business. I thought of it coming over to-night, and instantly the road was carpeted. Yes, sir, it is all right. I have the necessary books, and all I have to do is to begin work at once. No, there is perhaps a preliminary—a certain amount of correspondence with publishers. Chicago is the subscription book center of the country. Oh, it is the plainest sort of sailing."

Milford gave him the life insurance money, and he smiled as he tucked it into his pocket. "This is my last worry," said he. "I have had hopes, mere hopes, you understand, but now I am confident. It is the speculative uncertainty that brings out a hope. But I am too old now to find pleasure in the intoxication of hope. I want assurance, and I have it. Well, I would like to sit longer and talk to you, but I must get to work."

Milford walked a part of the way home with him, congratulating him upon his happy idea. It was an inspiration. They wondered why it had not come sooner. But inspirations have their own time, and we should be thankful for their coming rather than to carp at their lateness.

As Milford was returning to the house, he heard the hired man singing at his work in the barn. He had been away from home, and had come back rather late for one who had stock to look after. When he came into the house Milford asked the cause of his delay.

"Well, I got tangled up in an affair and had to see it through. I've been up to Antioch, and I see your prize-fighter there. He threw a drink into me because I worked for you, he said. He says you can get along anywhere with your dukes. Find everythin' in town all right?"

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"Had a great time, walking about in the park. Shortest day I ever spent."

"Haven't fixed any date or anythin' of the sort, I guess."

"We haven't said anything, but it's understood. We caught each other looking at houses and flats, and had to laugh."

"I guess that's about as good a way as any. But love as a general thing is full of a good deal of talk. Well, my affairs of that sort are over now."

"So the freckled woman has cured you."

"Oh, no, I forgot her in no time. Fact is I never did love but one woman and I married her."

"What's become of her?"

"She's up at Antioch."

"Did you see her?"

"Oh, yes, and we made it up. We're goin' to live together. I understood from what you said t'other day that you wan't goin' to keep this place another year, so I told the old woman that I wanted it. Yes, we are goin' to take a fresh start. You said once that I ought to have cut her throat, but I can't look at it in that light. After all, she's as good as I am."

"A devilish sight better," said Milford.

"I guess you're right. So you wouldn't cut her throat?"

"Well, not if I were you."

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"I don't exactly understand the difference, but it's all right. I got to thinkin' this way about it, Bill. Most any woman will take a man back, and I said to myself that it oughtn't to be so one-sided as that. I heard she was at Antioch, at her aunt's house, so I goes up there. She was a-sweepin' when I stepped up. And she dropped the broom. I says, 'Don't be in a hurry,' and she stopped and looked at me. 'And is this you, Bob?' she says. I told her it was, so far as I knowed. She come up

close to me and said I'd been workin' too hard. She took hold of my hand and turned it loose quick, lookin' like she wanted to cry. I says, 'Don't turn me loose. I've been thinkin' about you.' 'About such a thing as I am?' she says. Then I told her she was a heap better than me, and she cried. She said she never would have run away, but she drank some wine with one of her aunt's boarders. I told her all that made no difference now if she could promise not to run away again. And then she grabbed me, Bill; she grabbed me round the neck, and that was the way we made up."

"Go and bring her here," said Milford, turning his eyes from the light of the lamp. "It makes no difference what I said last week or the week before, or at any time. You bring her here, and take the best room. I'll take your old bunk in there. Hitch up and go after her now. Wait a minute. Take this and buy some dishes, and curtains for the windows. That isn't enough. Take this twenty," he added, giving him a bank note. "Good as you are! Why, she's worth both of us. Any heart that wants to be forgiven is one of God's hearts. Drive fast, and the stores won't be shut up. They keep open later Saturday nights. What are you staring at? I can see the poor thing now, clinging to you."

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"Wait a moment, Bill. I guess she'll be afraid to come. I told her what you said."

"You did? Then go and tell her that I'm the biggest liar on earth. Wait! I'll go with you."

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## CHAPTER XXVI.

### THE OLD STORY.

A black-eyed little woman was installed in the house. Accepting her husband's story and her own statement, her life had not been wholly respectable, but she brought refinement into the animal cage. A new carpet lay soft and bright upon the floor. The windows, now curtained, no longer looked like browless eyes staring into cold vacancy. The dinner table lost the air and the appearance of a feed trough. Not in words nor in sighs, but in a hundred ways, she proved the sincerity of her repentance.

The autumn lasted a long time, and wise men said that it would end in a snarl, and it did, for winter came in a night, like a pack of howling wolves. But their cold teeth did not bite through the walls of Milford's sitting-room. Black eyes had looked after the work of a carpenter and a paper-hanger.

The Professor, thin-clad as he was, welcomed the change in the weather. The cold that made a dog scamper forced a new energy upon the mind. He had found that his book required the aid of rain and snow and every trick that the air could turn. One day he could write better because a tree in front of his window had been stripped of its leaves. One night the rattle of sleet graced a period that he had bungled under the energy-lacking influence of a full moon. This was but a prideful conceit, for the fact was that, like nearly every impractical man, he wrote with great ease at all times. Milford had faith in the outcome of his work, and often visited him at night. And the indorsement of so shrewd a man had encouraged Mrs. Dolihide and Miss Katherine. Sometimes the young woman would read a chapter. Once she said: "Ma, this is really good." It was not much for a daughter to say, but the Professor had been so repeated a failure that even a cool compliment was warm to him. His wife accepted the daughter's judgment. It is possible that she saw a vision of new gowns and a better house.

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One evening, after welcoming Milford into his workshop, the scholar declared himself on the verge of a great success. He was arrayed in an old dressing-gown, with a rope tied monkishly about his loins. His fingers were stained with ink, "the waste juice of thought," he said. "I should now be the happiest of men, and I am, but, my dear boy, it is not nearly so easy as I expected. I find that I cannot cut, slash, and piece; I must absorb and write, and what I thought could be done in a few weeks, will take months to perform. At first I thought it would be well to enter into correspondence with the publishers, but I put it off till now I have decided to surprise them with the work itself. Ah, work, work, true balm to the restless soul! I was never really happy until I took up this brightening task; I was never so serious; I was never before able to understand the necessity of my previous training, my struggles and disappointments. But now all is clear. How is everything with you?"

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"All right. Everything over my way is as neat as——"

"A new gold dollar," suggested the Professor.

"Yes, and my house is as comfortable as a fur-lined nest."

"And at a time, too, when you are thinking about giving it up."

"That's so. But I've got to go out West to see a man, and then I may return to this neighborhood."

"Are you going to take any one with you on your trip?"

"No, I'm going alone."

"On important business, I presume?"

"Very; so important that all my work here has been toward that end. How long before you'll have this thing done?"

"I am working toward an end," the Professor said, smiling, "but I cannot work toward a date. But, to approximate, I should think about the middle of March."

"Don't know but I bother you, coming over so often."

"My dear boy, you help me. You are a constant encouragement. Ah, you are a double encouragement, for you encourage them." He pointed downward. "And that is the greatest good you could do me."

They talked a long time about the book, the sure winner, and as Milford was taking his leave, the Professor followed him to the head of the stairway. "My dear boy," he said, putting his hand on his visitor's shoulder, "you must at last perceive that I am earnest."

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"I know it."

"I hope you believe so, for I am. I may be odd—I may be amusing to the thoughtless, but to the wise I am serious."

And it was thus, during all the cold months of his work, pleading to his friends to construe him seriously. Sometimes he would check his enthusiasm, fearful that his dancing spirits might make him appear grotesque. But the neighbors, among their rattling milk-cans, laughed at him, his walk, his gestures, the tones of his voice. One morning near the end of March, he got on the train, a precious bundle hugged under his arm. He had spent half the night with Milford, and had come away strengthened by the strong man. Now he flew toward the journey-end of hope. A brakeman on the milk train had heard the farmers laugh at him, and felt at liberty to poke fun at him.

"Got your crop under your arm?" he asked.

The Professor bristled. "If it were the straw of wild oats three times threshed, it would still hold more value than the chaff that blows about in your empty skull. Keep your place, which means—distance."

He was serious; he felt it and gloated over it with a solemn pride. But before the train reached the city he begged the fellow's pardon. "I am worn out with hard work," he said, "and I hope you will forget my harshness."

Cabmen bellowed at him as he passed out of the station, and ragged boys geyed him as he walked along the street. He had a list of the subscription book publishers, and decided to submit his favor to the nearest one. The elevator boy put him off on the wrong floor. A scrub-woman looked up and leered at him. "Poverty, like anger, hath a privilege," he mused. He found the publisher's quarters, but waited a long time before he was admitted to the presence of the manager. The great man was closeted with a book agent. In the subscription book house the author is nothing; the agent everything. The manager has been an agent, or perhaps a "fake" advertising man. He hates an author; he hated the Professor at sight, and flouted when he learned that the scholar had brought a book. What an insult! The idea of bringing a book to a publishing house! The Professor attempted to explain the scope of his work. The manager drew back. "No need to unwrap it," he said. "We've got more books now than we can sell. Say," he bawled, to some one outside his den, "tell Ritson I want to see him before he goes."

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"I thought," began the Professor, bowing;—but the manager shut him off. "We do our own thinking," he said.

"Well, sir, I shall bid you good-morning."

"Yes. Say," he shouted, "tell Bruck I want to see him, too."

The list was followed, and a night of sorrow fell at the end of a heart-breaking day. Not in all instances had the publishers been gruff; some had spoken kindly, one had looked at the manuscript, and then had shown the Professor a bank of books written on the same line. At last, worn out with serving as pall-bearer to his own dead spirit, he offered the book for enough money to pay his life insurance. The publisher shook his head. Old, old story, gathering mold.

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## CHAPTER XXVII.

### WARMER THAN THE WORLD.

A bluster of warm wind brought a thaw, and the ice in the lake was breaking—a disjuncting time, a cracking of winter's old bones, a time when being alone we feel less lonely than in a noisy company. At night Milford sat musing in the kitchen. The outer door stood open, and he heard the cattle tramping about in the mushy barnyard. The hired man and his wife were singing a lonesome song in the sitting-room. There came another tramping, not of cattle, but of one more

weariness, of a man, the Professor. He trod into the light that fell from the door, and Milford bounded up to meet him, but fell back in reverence of his grief-stricken face. For a time the old man did not speak. He dropped his bundle, once so precious, but now a sapless husk, laid his walking-stick across it, took hold of a chair, and let himself slowly down with a groan.

"We are going to have rain," he said, attempting to smile, and unbuttoning his old coat with a palsied fumble.

"Yes, I think so. The clouds have been tumbling about all day."

"A weird song they are singing in there."

"The love song of the ignorant and the poor," said Milford.

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"The poor and the wise would not have written it," the Professor replied.

"Shall I tell them to stop?" Milford asked.

"Oh, no, poor crickets. Bring some cider, my boy. Let us live for a time in recollection only. I will not take too much."

"You may take as much as you like. It is time to drink."

"Yes, to drink or to rave."

Milford brought a jug of cider. "The devil's sympathy," said the old man, drinking. "More, give me more—promises heaven, but slippers the foot that treads its way to hell. But I will not take too much. Did I tell you that I had lost my place at the mill?"

"No, you didn't say anything about it."

"I was discharged the evening before I went to town, but it made no impression on me then."

"Well, don't let it make any now. Everything will come all right."

"Yes, it will. I have walked with many an experiment, but at last there is such a thing as facing a certainty."

"Have you anything in view?"

"Oh, yes. And everything will be all right."

"I hope so."

"I don't hope—I know. But enough of that. It is a philosopher who can say, 'Ha! old Socrates, pass your cup this way.' They have hushed their song. Even the poor and the ignorant grow weary of singing; then who can expect music from the wise? What have you there? Old Whittier? He died, and they gave him a stingy column in the newspapers, squeezed by the report of the prize fight at New Orleans. If a poet would look to his fame, let him die when there is no other news. But some have died in a spread of newspaper glory—Eugene Field, the sweetest lisper of a boy's mischief, the tuner of tenderest lyrics, but with a laugh for man that cut like a scythe. And some of the rich whom he had laughed at, scrambled for a place at his coffin to bear it to the grave—tuneless clay, scuffling over tuneful dust! Oh, hypocrisy, stamp thy countenance with a dollar!"

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"It's raining now," said Milford, seeking to draw his mind from the darkness of its wandering.

"Yes, the falling of water, rhythmic, poetry—all poets have been as water. I will class them for you. Keats, the rivulet; Shelley, the brook; Byron, the creek; Tennyson, the river; Wordsworth, the lake; Milton, the bay; and Shakespeare, the waters of all the world, the sea. But I will not keep you up. You are a working-man, and must rest."

"Don't go; I'm not tired; I haven't done a thing to-day. Shall I fill the jug?"

"No, enough. Let me take up my gilded trash," he said, reaching for his bundle.

"I wish you'd stay longer. Let me go home with you."

"No, I prefer to walk alone. You remember in the old reader, the dog went out to walk alone."

"It was the cat that walked alone," said Milford. "The dog sat down to gnaw his bone. Don't you recollect?"

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The old man touched his forehead, and shook his head. "So it was the cat that walked alone. But we will reverse it. The dog will walk alone to-night."

"I wish you'd let me go with you."

"Plead not your friendship, or I shall yield. But I want to be alone."

"Then you shall be."

"I thank you, and good-night." He strode off, with his bundle and stick; and out in the darkness he cried: "Don't forget my classification of the poets. Wordsworth! Wordsworth! And so, good-night."

The hired man came into the kitchen. "Wan't that the Professor shoutin' out there?" he asked.

"Yes, the poor old man has just come home, crushed."

"Didn't find no market, then, for his book?"

"No. He brought it back with him. And, by the way, his life insurance will soon be due, and I must pay it for him."

"Don't he owe you for one?"

"That makes no difference. I must help him. The world ought to help him, but he is laughed at by you clods."

"Bill, don't call me a clod. I don't own enough dirt to be called a clod."

"That's all right, Bob. I don't mean you. What day of the month is this?"

"Second, ain't it?"

"I asked you."

"Then I guess it's the second."

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"His insurance will be due on the ninth. Bob, early in the morning you go over to Antioch and tell old Bryson that he may have those calves at the price he offered."

"Yes, but I don't think it's enough, Bill."

"Can't help it. I've got to raise money enough for that poor old fellow."

Before breakfast the next morning Milford hastened to the Professor's house. Mrs. Dolihide heard him unchaining the gate, and came out upon the veranda. He did not care to go in; he dreaded to look again upon that blasted countenance. "Good morning, madam. I wish you'd tell the Professor not to worry over his insurance. Tell him I'll make it all right."

"I will when he comes home. I expected him last night, but he didn't get back."

"What——" But he checked himself. An alarm had arisen in his breast, but he would not spread it. He muttered something and turned away, leaving her to gaze after him in wonderment. A man came running down the road. Milford stopped him, and he stood panting until he could gather breath enough for his story. It was brief. The Professor's body had been taken from the lake. At daylight he had come down to the shore and had shoved out in a boat. A man warned him against the tumbling ice, for the wind was fresh. He had a rod, and said that he was going to fish. The man told him that the fish would not bite. He said that they would bite for him. Out beyond the dead rushes where the water was deep the boat tipped over. It looked like an accident—the ice. There were no means of rescue, and so he drowned. The man was excited, and could not say for certain, but he thought that the Professor had cried out, "Warmer than the world!"

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## CHAPTER XXVIII.

### CONCLUSION.

The neighbors dropped their milk-cans and flocked to the stricken home. A bundle and a walking-stick had been reverently carried to an upper room and placed upon a desk. These relics of despair's weary journey had been picked up from the ground, beneath the old man's window. He had stood there at night, alone, when the household was asleep. And now, when all were awake, he lay asleep, beflowered, roses on his breast, a broken heart perfumed.

"He looks natural," said a man who had laughed at him.

"But he doesn't seem to be tickling any one now," Milford was bitter enough to reply.

The soft earth beneath the window, the window once of fair prospect, was many-tracked by the feet of indecisive agony, as if the old man had shambled there, debating with his despair. But that he had made up his mind early in the evening was now clear to Milford. Perhaps the sight of the window through which he had looked out upon the leafless tree, the hope that he had seen hanging from its branches—perhaps his nearness to the sleeping household had caused him for a brief time to waver, but not for long. Milford recalled his classification of the poets, "Wordsworth, the lake." And his cry out in the dark, "Wordsworth! Wordsworth!" His fishing-rod argued that he strove to hide the appearance of self-destruction, but in the iced water he forgot his last thin pretense of caution, shouting as the excited spectator believed, "Warmer than the world!"

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The awful agony of the first clod, falling with hollow sound, the tearing rush of memory, the gasp of the heart, missing a beat! The widow fell senseless at the grave, and they took her away, the daughter sobbing over her. Yes, they all took him seriously now.

"It does seem that he could have done something," said Steve Hardy, waiting for Milford outside the graveyard.

"He did," Milford replied.

"I mean—you know what I mean. I don't see how a man can give up that way. Seems to me like I'd fight till the last."

"Yes, but that man was more of a hero than you could ever be. He saw that he could not keep up his insurance, and he decided that it was better to die."

"I understand that the widow'll get ten thousand."

"Yes, the community is very quick to understand that point."

"I was talkin' to a lawyer, and he said that they couldn't keep her out of the money. The courts have decided that the money in such cases has to be paid."

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"He understood it, too, or he wouldn't have drowned himself."

"I guess so. Well, you never can tell what a man may do. You form your idea of him and find out afterwards that it was all wrong. But it would be a cold day when I'd kill myself for anybody. I hear you're goin' to have a sale at your house."

"Yes, I don't care to stay here any longer."

"Every man to his own taste, but you can't find a puttier country. I guess this community right here ships more milk than any section along the road. But they say that when a man once lives away out in the West he always has a likin' for it. Well, I'll be over there on the day of the sale."

Milford sold all of his belongings, with the exception of some tools, a cow, and a loft full of cattle-feed which he gave to the hired man. He was not quite ready to go, but would remain a few days and perhaps a week longer. He was waiting for a letter, and he searched the newspapers every day. Mrs. Stuvic demanded that he should spend the remaining time at her house. She was sorry to lose him. She had confessed that she was half afraid of him, and this feeling had endeared him to her.

"What makes you grab after the newspaper so?" she asked one morning, in the dining-room.

"I want to know the news."

"No, you don't; there's somethin' else. You've sold all your stuff and can't be interested in the markets."

"I am looking for Western news. I want to keep track of a certain man."

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"Who was that letter from you got this mornin'?"

"From her."

"Where is she?"

"In the city."

"Has she quit her school?"

"She's given it up as a failure."

"Then you'll be goin' to town soon."

"To-morrow morning. I see by the paper that my man is there."

"Plague take your man and your woman too. Why can't you stay here and behave yourself? I do hate mightily to see you go. Why don't you say you hate to go?"

"Because I don't. I have worked in order to be able to go."

"What do you want to see the man for? You never have told me anythin' about yourself, and here you are, goin' away. What do you want with him?"

"Want to tell him I'm well, and ask him how's all."

"Oh, you'll do. Fainted at the grave," she said, after a moment's silence. "Yes, I know all about such faintin'. They can't fool me, Bill. It's been tried too often. Fainted at the thought of gettin' that ten thousand dollars, and I wish to the Lord I had half of it. I'd faint too; yes, you bet!"

Early the next morning he bade the old woman good-bye. She scolded him, with tears in her eyes, wheeled about, and left him standing at the gate. At the station the milkmen gathered about him to shake hands. They were sorry to lose him. In trade some of them had been nipped by him, but that only proved his worth as a citizen. He waved them a farewell, and Rollins became a memory.

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Upon reaching the city, he went straightway to the Norwegian's cottage. There was a romping of children within, and it was some time before he made himself heard. But finally a woman came to the door. He asked for Gunhild, and was told that she had gone over to see Mrs. Goodwin, but would not long be absent. He stood for a moment with his hand on the door. "When she comes back," he said, "tell her that a Yankee from the West has called. She will understand. Tell her that he will be back soon."

Jim Mills, railway monarch of the West, sat in his room at a hotel. Strong, an engine of industry, he could do the work of three men. He had heard the hum of a multitude of enemies; he had climbed in slippery places, sliding back, falling, getting up, struggling onward to stand on the top of the mountain. Without a change of countenance he had swallowed the decree of many a defeat. In playful tones he had announced to his associate the news of many a victory. He was a reader of old books and of young men. His word could build or kill a city. Legislators traveled with his name in their pockets. Men who cursed him in private were proud to be seen with him in public. He could clap an enemy on the shoulder and laugh enmity out of him, but failing, would fight him to an end that was not sweet. A commercial viking, he was ever thrusting himself into unexplored territory, a great commander with his scouts snorting on iron across the plains. He was a generous host and a captivating companion, but it was said that with all his apparent heartiness, he never forgave an injury. This, however, was spoken by his enemies, men whose "real estate" had been slaughtered by him.

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Mills was busy in his room at the hotel, for neither at home nor abroad had he an aimless moment. His dozing on a train involved millions. A card, bearing a name in pencil, was handed to him.

"I don't know him," he said, glancing at the name.

"He says he must see you on most important business."

"What sort of looking man is he? I can't recall his name."

"Nice enough looking—hard worker, I should think."

"Tell him to come in."

Milford stepped into the room, looked at Mills and then at the secretary who stood near. "I should like to see you alone," he said.

Mills glanced at the secretary. The man vanished.

"Well, sir," said Mills, "what can I do for you? Sit down."

Milford sat down, a table between them.

"I wish to tell you of something that happened about five years ago."

"Well, go ahead. But I'm busy."

"I saw by the newspapers that you had arrived in town—you'll have to let me get at it in my own way."

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Mills glanced at him and moved impatiently. Milford cleared his throat. He leaned back and then leaned forward with his arms on the table. "Have just a little patience, please. For years I have worked toward this moment—have pictured it out a thousand times, but now that I'm up against it I hardly know how to begin. But let me say at the outset that I have come to repair a wrong done you."

Mills grunted. "Rather an odd mission," said he. "Men don't read the newspapers to learn my whereabouts to repay any wrong done me. But does the wrong concern me?"

"Yes, you and me. Now I'll get at it. I lived in Dakota. I was sometimes sober, but more often drunk. I gambled. I fought. At one time I was town marshal of Green Mound. Once I was station agent for you. An evil report reached the main office, and I was discharged. I was broke. I was mad. I was put out of a gambling house."

"But what have I got to do with all this?"

"Wait. I met a man, a twin-brother of the devil. He made a suggestion. I agreed to it. We heard that you and your pay-master were coming across in a stage. We stopped the stage, and robbed you of twelve hundred and fifty dollars. That was all you had in currency. We didn't want checks."

"Go ahead," said Mills, without changing countenance.

"I was called Hell-in-the-Mud. My partner was Sam Bradley. We got back to town, and were seen that night in a gambling house. But we didn't play—broke, presumably. We were not suspected. Sam died three months afterwards in Deadwood. We had run through with your money. The town buried him. I won't pretend to give you any flub-dub about reform, any of the guff of a mother's dying prayers, for that has been worked too often. But I got a newspaper from Connecticut with a prayer in it—the last words of an old woman. That's all right. We'll let that go. But I resolved to pay you—my part and Sam's too. So I drifted about looking for something to do, and at last I rented a farm not far from here, and went to work. My luck was good. I skinned every farmer in the neighborhood. All I wanted was enough money to clear my conscience. Something—it must have been the devil—gave me a strange insight into cattle trading. Anyway I prospered, and the other day sold out. And here's your money, with six per cent interest for five years."

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He placed a roll of paper on the table. Mills looked at him and then at the card which he had taken up. "My name is Newton," said Milford—"William Milford Newton. There's your money."

Mills took up the money, and then looked at his visitor. "I remember the occasion," said he. "And you have worked all this time. Very commendable, I assure you. How much more have you?"

"Less than ten dollars. Doesn't that satisfy you?"

"Oh, yes, I'm satisfied, but did it occur to you that the law might have to be satisfied?"

"The law?" Milford gasped.

"Yes. You seem to have forgotten that part of it."

"The law!" said Milford.

"Yes, sir, the law."

"And that means the penitentiary," said Milford, looking hard at him.

"That's what it means. Will you go quietly with me, or shall I send for an officer?"

"I came here quietly, didn't I? Yes, I'll go with you. I'm prepared to take my medicine. When do you leave?"

"At twelve to-night."

"Will you let me go out on my word of honor? I'll be back by six o'clock."

"Yes, but on your word of honor."

"Thank you. I will be here by six. I didn't think—but it's all right. Yes, the law, of course. I'll be here by six."

A loud knock startled Gunhild, and she ran to the door and opened it in nervous haste. Her eyes leaped out, and then she shrank back. "Oh, what is the matter?" she cried.

"Nothing," Milford answered, trying to smile.

"But you look old," she said. "You have scared me."

She took hold of his hand to lead him into the sitting-room. "No, not in there," he said. "I will tell you out here. I must not go in. I am afraid that I might hear that Norwegian hymn—out here—let me tell you! There was a time when you might have gone with me, but not now—not where I am going."

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"Don't, dearest; don't. What are you saying? I will go with you anywhere. Yes, I will go with you. I dream of nothing but going with you—through the fields, across the ditches."

"Will you go with me to the penitentiary?"

She put her arms about his neck. "Anywhere," she said. "To the gallows, where we may both die. Yes, I will go to the penitentiary. And I will wait by the wall, and then we will go to the potato field."

It was nearly six o'clock.

"Tell him to come in," said Jim Mills.

Milford and Gunhild stepped into the room. Mills got up with a bow. "Who is this?" he asked.

"My wife," said Milford.

"You didn't tell me you were married."

"I wasn't until a few moments ago. She knows all about it, and will go with me."

Mills clapped Milford on the shoulder. "My dear sir," said he, "all my life I have been looking for an honest man, and now I have found him. Penitentiary! Why, you are worth five thousand dollars a year to me." He turned to Gunhild with a smile, and handing her a roll of bank notes, said: "A marriage dower from a hard-working man. Keep it, in the name of honesty; and, my dear, you and your honorable husband shall eat your wedding-supper with me."

### THE END.

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Page 66 He hung to the implements, changed to clung

Page 95 told them that it made no difERENCE, changed to difference

Page 232 she has not forgotten me, changed to forgotten

\*\*\* END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK A YANKEE FROM THE WEST: A NOVEL \*\*\*

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