The Project Gutenberg eBook of The Triumph of Virginia Dale, by John Francis

Title: The Triumph of Virginia Dale

Author: John Francis

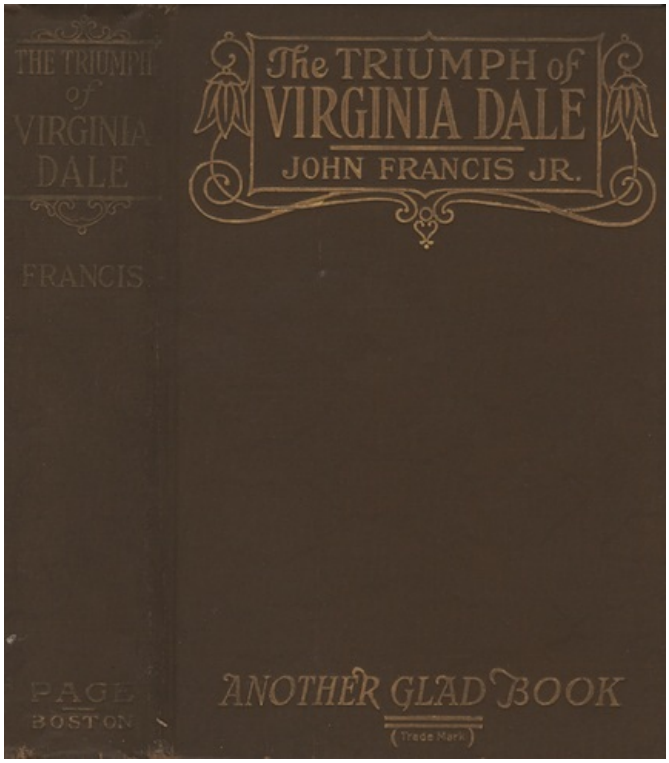
Illustrator: Haskell Coffin

Illustrator: John Goss

Release Date: December 5, 2010 [EBook #34575]

Language: English

Credits: Produced by Juliet Sutherland, Roger Frank and the Online Distributed Proofreading Team at http://www.pgdp.net



VIRGINIA DALE

The TRIUMPH *of* VIRGINIA DALE

By JOHN FRANCIS, Jr.

WITH A FRONTISPIECE IN FULL COLOR
FROM A PAINTING BY

W. HASKELL COFFIN

AND OTHER ILLUSTRATIONS FROM DRAWINGS
BY

JOHN GOSS

BOSTON
THE PAGE COMPANY
MDCCCCXXI

Entered at Stationers' Hall, London

First Impression, August, 1921

THE COLONIAL PRESS
C. H. SIMONDS CO., BOSTON, U. S. A.

DEDICATED
TO THE MEMORY OF
MY FATHER AND MOTHER

CONTENTS

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

THE TRIUMPH OF VIRGINIA DALE

CHAPTER I
HER MISSION IN LIFE

Obadiah Dale was the richest man in South Ridgefield. He owned the great textile mill down by the river where hundreds of people were employed and which hummed and clattered from morning until night to add to his wealth. He lived in a fine house. About it, broad lawns, shaded by ancient elms and dotted with groups of shrubbery, formed a verdant setting for the walls and massive porch pillars spotless in white paint.

Obadiah's only child was Virginia. She was a charming bit of girlhood with a complexion so clear that it seemed pale in contrast to the black hair and the clearly lined brows which arched those big, serious, blue eyes.

On an afternoon in early June she was reading on the couch which swung from the lofty ceiling of the porch when she became aware that some one was coming up the walk from the gate. She arose and her face lighted with happiness as she ran down the steps to greet a smartly dressed woman of middle age. "Oh, Hennie dear," she cried, "I am so glad that you've come."

The older woman laughed gaily as she caught the girl in her arms, "You know I couldn't forget

your birthday, Virginia."

"No, you wouldn't do that, Hennie. You don't come often," the girl sighed, "but you always remember that."

Mrs. Henderson kissed her little hostess. Always had her big heart gone out to this motherless maid. Long ago she had been the intimate friend of Virginia's mother. Elinor Dale had died when her daughter was a year old so that Hennie had a twofold reason for loving her young friend.

"It's good to have you here," exclaimed the girl as she drew her visitor to a chair by the couch. "I wish you would come every day."

"Now, listen to that. Wouldn't it be better, please, for you to come and see me instead of planning for a poor old woman,"–Mrs. Henderson did not look the part–"who has twinges of rheumatism, to make daily calls upon you?"

Virginia regarded her guest with great seriousness. "I come to your house very often, Hennie. I was over the other day, but,"–she gave another sigh,–"you were not home."

"I do remember. Carrie told me that you were over with Serena. I supposed that you came to see her. I am on so many committees for various charitable organizations––" She stopped short and reaching over patted the girl's hand. "I am sorry that I was not home, dear. I should remember that you are rather old to call upon my negro cook."

Virginia's eyes danced. "I must have called upon Carrie a thousand times since I was a baby. A few more calls in your kitchen instead of your parlor won't hurt me." 3

"Why are you laughing?" demanded Mrs. Henderson.

"I can tell you a secret about your own house but you must agree not to use it against Carrie."

"I promise."

"Well, Hennie, you might be interested to know that refreshments are served oftener in your kitchen than your parlor. I learned that years ago."

"The very idea!" exclaimed the caller.

The girl's gaze wandered thoughtfully over the beautiful grounds. "I do so love to have you here. I don't see very many people." Her voice was wistful. "This big place gets lonesome sometimes. I think I envy girls who live in houses with stoops on the sidewalk. They have the cars, peddlers, policemen and lots of people going by all of the time. It would be great fun to live that way." She was very sober now. "I think that I want noises and lots of things going on. Am I very strange, Hennie?"

"No indeed, all young people are that way," declared Mrs. Henderson with emphasis. "I felt so myself, once. Of course, it is lonely for you in this big house with only Serena. Your father is home for so short a time each day."

"Please don't misunderstand me, I am not very lonely–only a little bit. If something interesting–something exciting and wildly adventurous–would happen, Hennie, it would be fine."

Mrs. Henderson smiled. "I am afraid that I can't help you in such ways, dear, but I have something here which I am very sure that you will dearly love." She drew forth a small parcel from her bag. 4

Virginia waited in pleased expectation. "I am going to adore it," she cried joyously, as, accepting the package, she prolonged anticipation by inspecting it curiously, "because you gave it to me."

"You will care for it for other reasons," replied the older woman soberly.

Within the wrappings, the girl found a little volume, the cover of which was much worn.

"Don't be misled by appearances," Mrs. Henderson suggested as Virginia opened the book.

Upon the fly leaf, written in ink faded with age, was the name, Elinor Clark. The girl's eyes opened wide in wonder and suppressed delight. "It was my mother's book, Hennie?" she asked gently.

"Yes, dear, it was a girlhood possession of your mother. During her last illness she gave it to me and asked me to see that you got it on your eighteenth birthday. She explained that she didn't want to trouble your father, yet she wanted you to have it. It was the last request Elinor ever made of me." Mrs. Henderson's eyes winked suspiciously and leaning forward she peered at the worn cover. When she spoke her voice was husky with emotion. "It's a gift that you will always cherish, dear."

A great tenderness swept over Virginia's face. "It's my mother's birthday present to me, isn't it, Hennie?"–she almost whispered–"the only one that I can remember."

As the older woman bowed her agreement, she moved over upon the couch by the girl and for a time they were silent. 5

Virginia was the first to speak. "Tell me about my mother, please," she said softly, her hand caressing the cover of the book. "It makes Daddy sad if I talk to him too much about her so I never do. But Hennie, I should like to know more of her if I could."

"Bless your heart, I will gladly tell you everything I can, dear." She was thoughtful for a moment and then resumed, "Your mother was three years older than you are now when I first met her."

“And married,” cried the girl in surprise, “I never thought of my mother as so young. I pictured her as much older.”

“Old, nonsense! Your mother was my age. She was hardly grown at the time of her death.”

“Where did my father meet her? I know that she lived down South. Serena is always talking about the old home.”

“He met her here in South Ridgefield. He had come here from New England and started his mill. It was small in those days, but prosperous. Social affairs had little attraction for your father. That made him very interesting to us girls. I suppose too we did not forget that he was making lots of money and could give the girl of his choice everything she desired. He had been here four or five years when the marriage took place. Its announcement caused much excitement among us young people. We had given your father up as a hopeless old bachelor. Think of it, in a week, your mother snatched the best catch from under the noses of the South Ridgefield girls.” Mrs. Henderson laughed gaily. “Elinor did that very thing.” 6

“My mother must have been very beautiful?”

“She was, every one admitted that, but she had the advantage in another way. She came from Virginia after her father’s death to settle some business affairs with your father.” Again Mrs. Henderson laughed. “The girls used to say that he took Elinor in full settlement of all indebtedness. After the marriage he built this house and you were born,” she pointed upwards, “in that big corner room on the second floor.”

“Please go on, Hennie,” begged the girl, after a pause in which the older woman’s thoughts wandered in the past.

“I was thinking of the good times I’ve had in this house. Your mother used to give delightful dances.”

“Dances, *here*!” Virginia’s astonishment was evident.

“Certainly, I have danced here many times until three o’clock in the morning and thought nothing of it.”

“You danced, too?” It was as if the girl were shocked.

“Of course I danced. Do you think I was a wall flower who could lure no partners to myself?” Mrs. Henderson demanded with spirit. “Remember, I had been married only a year. There were grand dinners, too.” She went on more calmly. “How we enjoyed Serena’s cooking and afterwards many is the gay crowd this porch sheltered in those days.”

“It is hard to imagine, Hennie.” The girl shook her head soberly. “Daddy and I are so quiet. We sit here in the evenings and I talk until he falls asleep. Then I watch the fire-flies until he wakes up and we go to bed. The thought of him dancing is very strange.” 7

There was a note of pity in Mrs. Henderson’s voice when she spoke, “To be sure it is, dear. I never said that your father danced. He seemed to enjoy having people here. It was your mother, though, who loved that sort of thing and her word was law to him in everything. She depended on Hezekiah Wilkins to set the pace by wielding a rhythmic toe, as he used to call it.” A smile of gay memories died in her eyes at more solemn thoughts. “Those good times lasted only a couple of years. Your mother was taken ill and then–” she paused and continued softly, “–one afternoon she went away from the room upstairs and left you, dear,” her voice caught, “to Serena and me.”

Mrs. Henderson’s arm went about the girl but in a moment she resumed, “After the death of your mother your father devoted himself to money making again. It took all of his time.” There was a flash of anger in her eye. “He has succeeded very well in that.”

Mrs. Henderson arose hastily. “Dear me, child, I am staying too long. You should go to some of these youthful affairs about town. I imagine that the boys and girls of South Ridgefield have some very good times.”

The girl’s eyes lighted with interest but in a moment it had gone, replaced by a thoughtful little smile. “Daddy would be lonely without me. I ought not to leave him alone in the evening.”

Again the angry glint came in Mrs. Henderson’s eyes, but she controlled herself and said quietly, “You are the best judge of that, dear. But now that you have finished school you should have something to occupy your time. I know that Serena would have you play great lady, but, with due respect to her ideas, you will find it a lonely game in these busy days. Why don’t you give some of your time to helping those not so fortunate as you? Think it over, child,” she urged as she left. 8

After her caller had departed Virginia returned to the couch and with intense interest gave herself up to the examination of the book which had been her mother’s.

A negress of uncertain age appeared in the doorway of the house. Her hair was streaked with grey and she was enormously fat. She wore a calico dress over the front of which stretched a snowy white apron, its strings lost in a crease of flesh at the waist line. Bound about her head was a white handkerchief and her sleeves were rolled to her elbows.

She moved about the porch replacing the wicker furniture. Stopping by the couch she rearranged some magazines, and then, “Honey chil’, ain’ you gwine git dressed? De clock done struck fo’.”

“In a minute.”

Serena’s eyes wandered to the side lawn. Instantly her attention was riveted upon certain objects

protruding from some shrubbery. They were conspicuous and unusual as lawn decorations, bulking large beside a recumbent lawn mower, a rake and grass shears.

“You Ike,” she shouted. The objects moved convulsively. “Wot you mean a sleepin’ under dat bush?” The commotion in the shrubbery ceased and the objects reappeared in their normal position as the feet of a sleepy-eyed negro youth. 9

“Ah ain’ a sleepin’ none, Miss Sereny, ah was a layin’ under dat bush a ca’culatin’ whar ah gwine to trim it.”

“You got a po’ haid fo’ figgers den. You computen all dis yere afternoon, ah guesses. Ma eye is on you, boy. Go change you’ clothes an’ git dat ca’ah down to de office a fo’ you is late.”

Ike gathered the tools and disappeared in haste.

Serena turned again to the girl, who had displayed but slight interest in the sleeping laborer. “It gittin’ mighty late, chil’.”

“Yes, I know, Serena.”

“You bettah dress you’se’f.”

“Please, only a little longer.”

“You gwine be fo’ced to be mighty spry den,” warned the old negress as she waddled into the house.

“Oh, how wonderful,” breathed the girl, a great joy suddenly showing in her face. “It’s for me–from mother. Really.”

The worn volume lay open in her lap. It contained selections from the works of many poets. Upon the page before her these lines, taken from Coleridge’s, “The Ancient Mariner,” were printed,

> “He prayeth best who loveth best
> All things both great and small:
> For the dear God who loveth us,
> He made and loveth all.”

They were heavily underlined. In the broad margin was written in a tremulous hand which displayed the effects of illness, 10

> “My darling little daughter–
> –live these lines. Elinor Dale.”

A vast tenderness enfolded the girl. She reread the lines. “My mother is telling me how to live,” she whispered. “Her voice is calling to me through all the years–the only time.” She touched her lips impulsively to the place where the cherished hand had rested and then, clasping the book to her breast, she closed her eyes and remained so for awhile. When her lids raised anew, the blue eyes were filled with a great yearning as she breathed softly and reverently as if in prayer, “Yes, mother.”

A little later, Virginia entered the house and Serena told her, “Ah done lay out yo’all’s clothes, honey chil’. Ef you want anythin’ else jes yell.”

The girl dreamily climbed the broad staircase. At the bend she remembered something, and, turning back, smiled down at the old colored woman below. “Thank you, Serena,” she called.

Amply rewarded, the faithful servant contentedly busied herself once more with the affairs of the Dale household. From that far away day when she had, “’cided ah gwine foller Miss Elinor to de no’th,” she had been recognized by well informed persons as one in authority in that home.

It was Serena who first held Virginia in her arms and tenderly rocked the squirming red mite across her ample bosom. During those long days and nights of watching in the last illness of Elinor Dale, it was Serena who, with undisguised distrust of the trained nurse, was in and out of the sick room almost every hour. It was Serena who closed Elinor Dale’s eyes, and it was Serena who held the motherless child with great tears rolling down her black face as she stood by the open grave. 11

No formal agreement held Serena after the death of her mistress. She saw the home as a storm tossed craft, from whose deck the navigator had been swept, drifting aimlessly upon the sea of domesticity. Unhesitatingly, she had assumed the vacant command which carried with it the mothering of Virginia.

In the early months of his bereavement, Obadiah Dale gave some attention to the establishment which he had created for his wife’s enjoyment. Yet all things followed a well managed routine and, more important than all to a man of his nature, the monthly bills evidenced economical judgment. Quick to recognize a valuable subordinate, Obadiah saw no necessity for immediate change.

Serena had excellent ideas in child training. Although in her mind Virginia was a young lady of position who could properly demand appropriate attention, yet must she learn to meet the responsibilities of her station.

Obadiah was assured that his daughter in Serena’s charge was in the care of one who loved her. From time to time he made vague plans for the child’s future. As they were to commence at an indefinite time they never materialized. More and more the business activities of the

manufacturer occupied his time, and slowly but surely the duty of Virginia's upbringing was shifted to the negro woman.

When Virginia was five, Serena told her employer, "Dis yere chil' orter be in school a learnin' mo' an' ah kin teach her," and so the mill owner's daughter was started upon her scholastic career at a kindergarten.

Obadiah never knew the worries of this illiterate negro woman in planning suitable clothing for his child. No man could appreciate that watchful eye ever ready to copy styles and materials from the garments of children of families deemed worthy as models.

Virginia's education was continued under the guidance of a Miss Keen who conducted a select school for young ladies in South Ridgefield. This institution, highly esteemed as a seat of learning by Serena, offered courses usually terminating when pupils refused longer to attend the establishment. In its most prosperous years its enrollment never exceeded twenty misguided maidens.

Now, Virginia had arrived at the age of eighteen, a serious, rather shy girl, whose youth had been spent under the supervision of an old negro woman, narrowed by the influence of a small school and neglected by a busy father.

When Obadiah came home that night for dinner, she met him in the hall. He was a very tall man and extremely thin. His sharp features gave a shrewd expression and his smooth shaven face displayed a cruel mouth and an obstinate jaw.

"Hello, Daddy dear," cried the girl as she held up her mouth to be kissed. She gave a happy little laugh when he pinched her cheek, and demanded of him, "What day is this?"

"Tuesday," he answered indifferently, "the tenth of June."

"Can't you think of anything else?"

He looked puzzled. "It's not a holiday, is it?"

"No, but it's my birthday, Daddy dear."

He displayed some interest now. "Is that so? How old are you today?"

"I am eighteen," she explained proudly. "Serena made me a cake with candles. She brought it in at lunch. She said it might bother you, tonight." She looked up at him quickly. "Do you love me, Daddy?"

"Surely," he answered absently and shaking his iron grey head he ascended the stairs to prepare for dinner, muttering, "Time flies–how time flies."

He joined his daughter again in the dining room in response to the gong. Serena had planned the meal with due regard to the fact that the day had been warm. A lobster, magnificent in its gorgeousness, reposed upon a bed of lettuce on the platter before Obadiah. A potato salad flanked it and a dish of sliced tomatoes reflected the color scheme of the crustacean. Dainty rolls, Serena's pride, peeped from the folds of a napkin and the ice clinked refreshingly in the tall tumblers of tea as they were stirred.

Sometimes Virginia and her father chatted, but there were long silences. At intervals, Serena, noiselessly in spite of her weight, appeared to replenish or change a dish and to see that all things were in order.

As they waited for the table to be cleared for dessert, the girl said wistfully, "I wish that I could help somebody, Daddy."

He looked at her curiously. "What ever put that into your head? You are a help to me sitting there and smiling at me."

"Oh, but that's not much. To sit at a table and smile and eat good things only helps oneself."

"Well, why should you want to help anybody but you and me?"

She gazed at him thoughtfully. "Don't joke, Daddy. I know I would be happier if I could do something for some one."

Obadiah chuckled. "Where did you get that idea? I am perfectly happy tonight, and I haven't bothered myself about other people."

"The very idea. All this livelong day you have been planning for those who work in your mill."

A sudden light came to him, he chuckled again. "Surely, I look after my employees or they would look after me."

"That makes you happy." Virginia was certain that she had made her point.

"No," Obadiah shook his head vigorously, "my employees make me angry more than they make me happy. My happiness is the result of my own efforts."

"That is what I mean, Daddy. You have had such great opportunities to make yourself happy." She viewed him with eyes of fond admiration. "You have accomplished so much."

Obadiah was filled with a comfortable egotism. "I have accomplished a whole lot," he boasted. His mind was upon his commercial success and the wealth he had accumulated. "I'm not through," he bragged. He became thoughtful as he dwelt upon certain fertile fields awaiting his financial plough. His jaw set. He had rivals who would contest his tillage. He would fight as he

had always fought. His eyes glistened beneath his shaggy brows as he sensed the fray.

The conversation languished as they ate their dessert, but Obadiah's pride of accomplishment had not departed. "I am going to do bigger things than ever before," he exulted. "When you are older you will realize what I have done for you," he explained as they went out on the porch.

For a time the girl and the old man followed their own thoughts while the fire-flies sparkled and gleamed about the lawn as if they were the flashlights of a fairy patrol. Emma Virginia was thinking of her father's words. He was going to do more for her. She must certainly share her blessings.

"Daddy dear, do you mind if I help some one?" she asked gently.

"Back on that?" he demanded with a note of sharpness.

She gave an emphatic little nod. "It is very important. I–I–can't tell you now, why," she hesitated. "I should feel much better, though."

"You are not sick, are you?" Obadiah worried.

"Oh, no indeed, perfectly well. Only, I am sure that I would be much happier if I could do something for someone else. I don't know whom. That doesn't make any difference."

"What a strange idea!" It seemed to bother Obadiah. "You want to help someone but you don't know whom." He considered a moment. "Here's my advice. Help somebody who can help you." 16

"Now you are teasing me, Daddy?" she protested. "I am really serious about this. I want to be of more use in the world." Her voice was very soft and gentle now. "I know that I should share my blessings and I want to do it. It is such a comfort to talk things over with you, Daddy dearest." She moved quietly over to him and seated herself upon his lap.

As she touched him, he jumped. "Gracious, you startled me so, Virginia. I was asleep."

"Please, Daddy, don't mind," she whispered, "I'll be quiet as a mouse."

Almost grudgingly, he let her settle herself and drop her head against his shoulder. In a moment his head slipped down against the soft hair of the girl and Obadiah dozed anew.

She murmured softly, "It was so easy to explain to you. Serena wouldn't understand, I am afraid. All of your life, Daddy, you have been helping other people."

"Whom?" asked Obadiah in alarm, starting up and shaking the girl's head from his shoulder.

"Daddy, wake up. You were asleep while I was talking to you." She tried to kiss him as he rubbed his eyes, but his arms were in her way. "You are such a comfort, Daddy. I wish I could be like you," she said softly.

"You can try," conceded Obadiah immodestly. "You are keeping me up. I am tired. I want to go to bed. My legs are asleep from your sitting on them," he complained and then told her shortly, "The place for you to dream is in bed, not on my lap."

CHAPTER II

THE MISSION BEGUN 17

Obadiah Dale's car was waiting at his home. It stood upon the gravel driveway opposite the steps at the end of the porch. Virginia was seated in the rear seat and her eyes rested seriously upon Serena, who from the higher floor of the porch, viewed Ike, lounging by the car, as from a rostrum.

The young negro was attired in a neat livery which gave him a natty aspect distinctly absent when his siesta was disturbed by Serena. Regardless of his more attractive guise, however, he shifted nervously under her stern gaze. He, who ever bore himself, in hours of leisure, before the black population of South Ridgefield as one of imperial blood, was abashed before her. That poise, that coolness of demeanor, that almost insolent manner exhibited at crap games, chicken fights or those social functions where the gentler sex predominates, was absent now. Before Serena, his lofty soul became as a worm, desirous of burying itself from the pitiless light of publicity.

"You Ike," she said with great severity, "mine wot ah say. Stop you' fas' drivin'. Miss Virginy ain' wantin' to go shootin' aroun' dis yere town lak er circus lady in er cha'iot race."

The girl displayed interest in the remark, but remained silent. 18

Ike climbed into the car and sought support from the steering wheel. In a gentle manner, as if desirous of averting wrath, he made answer, "Ah ain' no speeder, Miss Sereny. Ah is de carefulest chauffah in dis town. Ah sez, 'Safety fust.' Dat's ma motta." At the sound of his own voice he gained in assurance. He had acquired these statements by heart from frequent repetition.

"Wat you down in dat co't fo', den?" inquired Serena. "Mr. Dale he done say, he gittin' tired er payin' fines fo' yo'all. He say de nex' time he gwine ax de jedge to let you rot in dat calaboose."

Ike listened to this promise of extended incarceration with the casual interest due an oft repeated tale. Disregarding it, he continued, “Ah goes to co’t ’count o’ de inexpe’ienced drivers.” He spoke as an expert. “Ef dey had ’spe’ienced drivers dey ain’ gwine be no trouble a tall.”

“Dey bettah be no mo’ trouble,” snapped Serena, “les yo’all gits in worse. G’wan now ’bout you’ business. Take Miss Virginy down to de sto’ an’ den out on de river road. You gotta git back in time to bring her pa home fo’ lunch.” The solution of a difficult problem dawned upon her and instantly she returned to her former argument. “Don’ you drive dat caah no fas’er den er hoss an’ er ker’idge kin go,” she commanded.

It is of record that even a worm upon extreme irritation will fall upon its tormentor. Thus Ike reacted to this notable example of feminine ignorance. “How’s ah gwine mek dis yere high powah caah run dat slow? Ah ast you dat? How’s ah gwine do it?” 19

Apparently heedless of this incipient rebellion, Serena gave her attention to her young mistress, “Good bye, honey chil’,” she worried. “Don’ you mek youse’f sick on sody an’ ice cream.”

Virginia smiled sweetly at the now beaming black face of the negro woman. “I’ll be very careful,” she promised.

Serena devoted herself again to her minion. “You Ike, go slow. Go mighty cafful. Dat’s wot ah say.”

He looked askance at her. Every vestige of humor had departed from the black face replaced by a cold, implacable glare. Without a word, he started the machine and it glided down the drive.

Her purchases completed, Virginia sat musing upon the message from her mother as the big car hummed softly towards the quiet beauty of the river road. Vague plans, indefinite as dreams, floated through her mind.

Ike was obeying Serena’s wishes so faithfully that the absence of excitement, so essential to the display of what he considered his best talents, was almost lulling him to sleep.

A large bill board fenced the front of a vacant lot, on their way. A magnificent example of the lithographer’s art, as adapted to the advertising needs of a minstrel show, was posted upon it. It’s coloring, chiefly red, was effective and forceful and displayed an extravagant disregard of the high cost of ink. It portrayed the triumphant passage of the Jubilee Minstrels. The brilliant uniforms, the martial air of the musicians as well as the exceeding pleasure with which this aggregation appeared to be welcomed by the reviewing public, was of a character to please, to impress, yes, even to stun all beholders, except the blind. 20

This picture caught the soul of Ike as he came within the scope of its influence. To him, applause and admiration were as strong drink. Envy knocked at his heart as he beheld the bright raiment. He visualized himself, thus dazzlingly attired, exhibited to his admiring fellow townsmen. Violating speed laws was infantile piffle to this. A syncopated melody, appropriate to a victorious march, blared in memory’s ear. He hummed it softly. His body twitched to the rhythm and his feet took up the cadence. He pressed a pedal and the powerful car accelerated its motion well above the modest limits commanded by Serena. To the shell of Ike, the increased speed was but a return to normal. His spirit was away. Expanding as a morning-glory to the sun, it paraded, in wondrous garments, to martial music, before gaping thousands.

A turn in their way was before them. Ike partially roused himself from his sweet dreams and automatically attended to the necessities of the moment. These included no slackening of speed.

The car swung a corner and instantly thereafter there came a mighty groaning of brakes as it was finally stopped in the midst of what had been an orderly procession of small negro children. The startling arrival of the big machine had scattered them, with shrill cries and screams, in every direction.

Virginia was alarmed at the sudden halt and at the frightened outcries of the youngsters. She leaped out. On the curb an excited colored woman was holding a weeping black boy by the hand. He was very small and, because of a deformed leg, used a crutch. Between efforts to reassemble her scattered charges, she endeavored to calm and comfort him. 21

Hurrying to the woman, Virginia cried, “I’m so sorry.”

“Much good sorry gwine do after you kill somebody,” shouted the woman, much angered by the occurrence. “Ain’ you got no bettah sense ’en to run down a lot o’ chillun?”

“It would have been terrible if we had hurt one of them. I never would have forgiven myself. We couldn’t see them until we turned the corner.” In her excitement she sought friendly support. “Could we, Ike?”

To Ike, it was a duty from which much pleasure could be derived to take part in any controversy. Likewise, one acquires merit, when one is a chauffeur, by strongly maintaining the contention of one’s mistress–she may reciprocate in a difficult hour. Ike turned an unfriendly countenance upon the woman, and asked for information, “How ah gwine see ’roun’ er corner? Does you ’spect dat ma eyes is twisted?”

“Go long, man. Mine you’ own business.”

Not thus summarily was Ike to be dismissed. “Dese yere chillun ain’ no call to be in de street. Howcum ’em der? Ain’ it yo’all’s business to keep ’em outen de way?” A uniformity in costume struck him. “Ain’ dey orphant chillun runnin’ loose?”

“Orphans! The poor things!” Virginia cried.

“Wot ef dey is orphants?” the woman protested with great belligerence. 22

“Den,” Ike behaved as if he, a public spirited citizen, had discovered the warden of a penitentiary seeking pleasure beyond the walls with notorious criminals, “howcum dey heah? Wharfo?”

The suspicion and force in the chauffeur’s manner brought fresh tears to orphan eyes.

Encouraged by these evidences of public attention, Ike continued his investigation. “Ah axes you woman, why ain’ dey in de ’sylum whar dey ’long?”

The chauffeur’s words had not soothed the guardian of the children. She showed unmistakable signs of increasing wrath. Glaring fixedly at him, she blazed, “Mine you’ own business, you black po’cupine.”

Although the application of the epithet was obscure, its effect was all that could be desired. Ike suffered a species of fit. His mouth opened and closed without sound. His wildly rolling eyes exposed wide areas of white and then glued themselves in invenomed hatred upon the woman. Muscles contracted and worked in his neck. Even as a panther, he appeared about to spring upon his foe.

Virginia interfered. Her experience of life was limited, but she understood the negro. “Don’t get out of the car, Ike,” she ordered.

“Ef dat spindle legged dude git outen dat caah, ah is boun’ to bus’ his haid wid ma fist,” predicted the woman.

Virginia feared no blood shed but deemed it desirable to take steps to avoid an argument certain to be loud and long and to add nothing to her dignity as a bystander. She answered Ike’s 23
inquiries herself. “The children were out walking, I suppose, and had to cross the street?”

This overture slightly mollified the woman but she yet viewed the porcupine with distinct hostility.

“Are all of these poor children orphans?” continued Virginia, shaking her head at the pity of it.

“Yas’m, dey’s all orphants f’om the Lincoln Home, up de street.”

“And you had them out for their daily walk?”

“No, mam, dey gits out onest er week. Ah ain’ got no time to take ’em out every day.”

Virginia looked at the woman very thoughtfully. “Your work makes you very happy, doesn’t it?” she asked.

“Ah ain’ heard o’ no kind er wo’k mekin’ nobody happy. Ah jes allers was, an’ allers is happy. Dat’s me,” the woman explained.

“Why, you are a mother to all of those children.”

“Yas’m, de onlies’ mother dey gwine git, ah guesses.” The woman viewed her reassembled charges speculatively. She patted the little cripple at her side. “Po’ li’l Willie, he cain’t walk ve’y fas’, kin you, sweetheart?”

“You poor little fellow,” sighed Virginia.

“Ah bettah tote you, Willie. We gotta move right smart afo’ noon an’ you ain’ ve’y spry on dat crutch.” Picking up the lame boy, the woman began to issue instructions for the advance of her forces.

Virginia surveyed the manoeuvering orphans comprehensively. “If I could get them all into the car I would take them for a ride,” she exclaimed, and then, “They can be crowded in, I believe. 24
May they go?”

The woman regarded the girl in great astonishment. “Cou’se dey kin go eff yo’all wants ’em.” Her conscience appeared to demand a further warning. “Dey is er powe’ful mouthy and mischievous lot o’ rascallions.”

Ike was disgusted. To be required to act as chauffeur for a crowd of screaming infants of his own race was another wound to that dignity so recently and fearfully lacerated. He submitted protest. “Dis yere caah ain’ gwine hol’ all dem chillun. It ain’ no dray. Dey gwine bus’ de springs smack bang offen it.”

“If the car breaks down you can have them fix it at the garage, Ike. They always have been able to mend it,” Virginia told him with great complacency as she proceeded with her plans.

“Ef all de chillun stan’ close, ’ceptin fo’ or five wid li’l Willie an’ me on de back seat, dey is plenty room,” the orphan’s guardian indicated, greatly pleased at the prospect of the ride.

The sullen fire of eternal hatred burned in the eye which Ike turned upon her. He fired his last shot. “Miss Virginy, you’ Daddy ain’ want all des yere chillun in dis caah. He mighty biggoty about whoall ride in it. Ah ’spects dey is gwine dirty it up sumpin fierce.”

“Who yo’all call dirty?” demanded the woman; but Virginia made peace by an emphatic “Hush,” as the colored orphans were packed into the back of the machine. With their attendant they filled the entire space.

The car moved away as soon as Virginia had taken her seat by the irritated Ike. They left the 25

town and sped along country roads. The little negroes, awed by their new surroundings, became noisy with familiarity and expressed their joy by screaming.

The young hostess of this strange party was at first uncomfortable and embarrassed at the clamor of her small guests, but as she awakened to the enjoyment she was giving the orphans she forgot herself in their pleasure.

It was a beautiful ride along the river shore, through the woods, and then back between great fields of growing grain the surfaces of which were broken into moving waves of green at the touch of the summer breeze.

They reentered the town a few minutes before noon and were almost back to the turn towards the Orphans' Home, when far down the street they caught the glitter of brass and the glow of red. "Er ban', er ban'," screamed the little negroes.

The enticing strains of melody called to Ike across the intervening blocks. There was a look of deep guile in his face, which became regret, as he suggested to Virginia, "Des po' orphants ain' no chans to heah fine ban' music. Ah might circle aroun' dat minst'el ban' an' let de chillun lis'en fo' er spell."

As Virginia nodded assent, the car shot away, straight down the street. In a few moments they had overtaken the marching musicians, the reality of the poster which had charmed Ike. From them burst melody which coursed through his veins. As he drifted away on a sea of syncopated bliss, the car, subconsciously driven, closed upon the marching minstrels. In the midst of a 26
delegation of youth, honoring the snare and bass drummers, it rolled. Bearing Virginia and her guests behind the pageant and as an apparent part thereof, it proceeded towards the center of the city.

The negro children were clamorous with delight at the wonderful concentration of humanity, noise, and excitement. Their screams vied with the band and their guardian on the rear seat assumed a careless dignity.

Virginia's mind was occupied with the infants. To her, the onlookers, more numerous as they neared the business part of town, were the background of a picture. She was utterly unconscious that the load of pickaninnies formed a most appropriate part of the spectacle.

Laughter pealed from the increasing crowds at the nonsensical behavior of the orphans. In the center of town, prominent business men were away from their offices for luncheon. They gazed indifferently at the marching band, but as the machine approached, they recognized its monogram, and, attracting the attention of companions, they burst into shouts of laughter. Here was the car of wealthy Obadiah Dale, packed with negro children, chaperoned by his daughter, taking part in a minstrel parade.

Suddenly upon the sidewalk near the curb, Virginia espied her father. Regardless of her surroundings, the girl endeavored to attract his attention by waving her hand. The pickaninnies joined with shouts, considering it a pleasant game.

Plunged in thought and heedless of the band, the increased clamor aroused Obadiah. Incredulity 27
and amazement, at the sight of his daughter and her company, held him. An acquaintance approached, spoke and laughed. Anger flushed the mill owner as he marked the staring eyes fixed in unveiled amusement on himself and his daughter.

"Daddy is over there,–there." She indicated the place to Ike, delight in her discovery accenting her cry.

The chauffeur, thus rudely torn from his musical reverie, solaced his disturbed harmoniousness, by smiting the ears of the crowd and wrecking the sweet tones of the band, by a discordant honk. Thus soothed, he attempted to turn towards the sidewalk, but the congested traffic blocked him and he had to delay a few moments before he could swing the car over to the curb.

Obadiah came up. He glared at the assembled orphans with manifest disapproval and gave gruff tongue to his astonishment. "What does this mean? I don't understand it," he snarled at Virginia.

In the depths of her big blue eyes lay tenderness as she anxiously searched his cold grey ones for some sign of sympathetic appreciation. "Daddy, dear"–there was a note of pride in her manner–"these are orphans from the Lincoln Home. I have had them out riding all morning."

The pickaninnies acknowledged the introduction with screams.

This attention added fuel to Obadiah's irritation, "How are you going to get rid of this bunch?" he asked loudly, giving no heed to the listening ears of guests. "I want to go home and get my lunch."

The girl wrinkled her nose in thoughtful consideration of the social dilemma she faced. The truly 28
resourceful are never long at a loss. "You get in here, Daddy," she urged, "you can hold me on your lap and we will run over to the Orphans' Home. We can leave the children there and go straight home."

"The idea!" snapped Obadiah, "I won't be made more ridiculous than I have been, today. You must learn to give thought to others, Virginia."

Instantly, her happiness faded before his words. "I am so sorry. I forgot how time was passing and I didn't mean to get in this big crowd. How will you get home? What can I do for you, Daddy?"

Once more he realized that amused faces watched him as he interviewed his daughter, a lily in a bed of black tulips. “Get out of this crowd. Everybody is laughing at me. I’ll get home some way,” he declared peevishly. “You get rid of that outfit as soon as you can,” he called, as he moved away, apparently in a hurry to escape the orphans’ company. “I’ll see you at home.”

CHAPTER III
UNGIVEN ADVICE

Obadiah Dale’s office was in a modern building. He considered it the finest in South Ridgefield, but then–Obadiah owned it. The proximity of an army of employees disturbed him. So he had gathered his principal assistants about him, away from the mill, in this more peaceful environment.

Obadiah’s personal suite contained three rooms. His private lair was in the corner. Its windows overlooked metal cornices, tin roofs and smoke stacks. The view should have afforded inspiration to sheet metal workers, and professional atmosphere was available at all times to such chimney sweeps as called.

The personal staff consisted of Obadiah’s stenographer, Mr. Percy Jones, who referred to himself as the “Private Secretary” and was habitually addressed in discourteous terms by his employer, and a bookkeeper identified by the name Kelly.

Across the hall was the sanctum of Hezekiah Wilkins, general attorney for the Dale interests. The other executive officers of the organization occupied the rest of the floor.

Certain preparatory sounds evidencing to the discriminating ear of youth the probability of a band bursting into melody had reached Mr. Jones. Rising hurriedly from his desk in the center of the middle room of Obadiah’s suite, he had gone to a window, and peering down, discovered that the Jubilee Minstrels were about to favor South Ridgefield with a parade.

Mr. Jones watched the preparations with interest. He was a dapper little fellow with thin, dark hair, who sported a very small mustache with a very great deal of pride. As much of a dandy as his small salary would permit, he had indefinite social aspirations, and rather considered himself a man of much natural culture and refinement.

His curiosity satisfied, he turned to a door, opposite to the one which insured privacy to Obadiah, and entered the domain of Kelly. The bookkeeper was perched upon a high stool before an equally elevated desk burdened with the mill owner’s ledgers. He was red headed, big and raw boned, clearly designed by nature for the heaviest of manual labor but by a joke of fate set to wielding a pen.

“Hi, Kelly,–minstrels,” thus Mr. Jones advertised the forthcoming pageant as he lighted a cigarette.

The upper part of Kelly’s person was brilliantly illuminated by the reflected light of a globe hanging an inch above his head. “Where?” he asked, blinking about from his area of high illumination into the shadows of the room as though looking for callers.

“In the street, you chump. They are going to parade. As soon as the old man goes, we’ll hustle out and look ’em over.”

A movement in the corner room sent Mr. Jones scurrying to his desk. From the street sounded the staccato taps of a snare drum, rhythmically punctuated by the boom of the bass, passing up the street. Obadiah emerged from his room as one marching to martial music. He broke step like a rooky to tell his stenographer, “I’m going to lunch.”

Leaping to his feet, Mr. Jones bowed profoundly as his employer departed, his manner filled with the awe and respect due a man of such wealth and position. He listened intently until the elevator descended, then he shouted, “Get a move on you, in there. He’s gone.”

The bookkeeper appeared, his hat on the back of his head and struggling into his coat.

“Hurry, we can get the elevator on its next trip,” urged the stenographer.

“What’s the rush–we don’t want to run into the old man,” the bookkeeper demurred.

“We’ve got a right to eat, ain’t we? What’s the lunch hour for?”

“Say, who’s talking about not eating? I don’t want the old man’s face as an appetizer,” protested Kelly.

“Gee, he has got you bluffed. You are scared of him.”

The bookkeeper shrugged his big shoulders and laughed. “Not on your life am I afraid of that old spider, but I don’t like him. That’s all.”

“The old man is a good enough scout when you know how to handle him,” boasted Mr. Jones. “Tell him where to get off once in awhile and he’ll eat out of your hand.”

“Say,” chuckled Kelly. “The next time you decide to call him down, put me wise. I don’t want to miss it.”

“Quit your kidding and come on. You think that I am shooting hot air. I’ll show you some day.” 32

Their hasty luncheon was completed when the strains of music heralding the return of the minstrel show hurried them forth to the curb to procure suitable places to watch the parade.

“Kelly, look at the pickaninnies in the automobile following the band,” exclaimed Mr. Jones, greatly interested. “That’s something new. I never saw it before.” Thus he confirmed originality from the wealth of his own knowledge.

“What’s the white girl doing there?” Kelly sought information at the fountain of wisdom.

The sagacious Mr. Jones was puzzled, but for an instant only. He elucidated. “They have a white manager and that’s his wife who won’t black up.”

The explanation struck Kelly as reasonable and for the moment it sufficed, as he gave his attention to the passing machine. “That’s a peach of a car,” he proclaimed, and in further commendation, “Gosh, it’s as fine as the old man’s!”

Now it was so close that Mr. Jones was enabled to place an expert’s eyes upon it. “Why,” gasped that specialist, astounded by the revelations of his own keen optic, “blamed if it ain’t the old man’s car and,” he stammered in his excitement, “I–I–It’s the old man’s daughter–Virginia–in that minstrel parade.”

In silent wonder the young men watched the passing marvel and, turning, followed it as if expecting further events of an extremely sensational nature.

“By Jove, there’s the old man.” The eagle eye of Mr. Jones had picked his employer unerringly from amidst the multitude. “He sees the car,” the stenographer continued, as one announcing 33
races, on distant tracks, to interested spectators. “Wilkins is kidding him. He’s getting sore. We’d better beat it.” Regardless of previous fearlessness, Mr. Jones guided his companion into the entrance of a building from which vantage point they watched the meeting of Obadiah and his daughter.

“By crackie, he’s hot. Everybody is laughing at him.” To prove the truth of his own assertion, Mr. Jones threw back his head and guffawed cruelly at the embarrassment of his employer.

One o’clock found the two clerks at their desks. Obadiah was a punctual man. Always on time himself, he demanded it of his employees. Today, however, minutes flew by with no sign of the manufacturer’s return.

At one thirty, Mr. Jones entered Kelly’s room to confer in regard to this unwonted tardiness. Resting his elbows upon the bookkeeper’s desk he projected his head within the area of light in which his colleague labored and submitted a sporting proposition. “I’ll bet my hat that the old man is raising the deuce somewhere.”

Kelly inspected the illuminated face of the stenographer with interest, as if the brilliant rays exposed flaws which he had not previously noted. Disregarding the wager, he replied with emphasis, “You said a mouthful.”

Mr. Jones displayed marked uneasiness. “I’m surprised that he is not back. He had important matters to attend to.” The stenographer waxed mysterious. “Only this morning he called me in. 34
‘Mr. Jones,’ sez he, ‘I must have your invaluable assistance, today, on a matter of great importance. I couldn’t get along without your help. Please, don’t step out without warning me.’”

Apparently Kelly regarded the stenographer’s secret revelations lightly. “You told him that you didn’t have the time?” he suggested with a grin.

Mr. Jones attempted to frown down unseemly levity regarding serious matters.

Kelly burst into laughter. “Gee, if I wasn’t here to keep you off the old man, he sure would suffer.”

Mr. Jones changed the subject, before such frivolity. “He ought to fire that feller Ike. I’ll bet he’s to blame for the whole thing. The idea of getting a young lady mixed up in a mess like that. He ought to be fired.” Mr. Jones’ soul revolted at the notoriety which had befallen his employer’s daughter. He became thoughtful and then confidential. “That girl is a pippin, Kelly. A regular pippin.”

“You’ve said it.” The bookkeeper’s emphasis spoke volumes.

“Did you ever think about her?”

“Sure,” admitted Kelly with candor, “lots of times.”

“That girl lives a lonesome life in that big house with only the colored servants and her father,” alleged the knowing Mr. Jones. “What fun does she ever have? The old man thinks that she is only a baby. If she has a nurse and is taken out every day for an airing, he imagines nothing else is necessary.”

“You are talking,” quoth Kelly.

“If the old man had any brains–” Mr. Jones noted a correction–“I mean, if he was a cultured and 35
refined man, if he was alive–” Mr. Jones’s manner expressed grave doubt of Obadiah’s vitality–“He would understand that young people must enjoy themselves once in awhile.” Poignant memories of the mill owner’s refusal to grant certain hours off for social purposes embittered the stenographer at this point in his discourse. He paused. “If he had any brains, instead of hanging around and trying to grab every cent that isn’t locked in a burglar proof safe,

the old duffer would open up his swell house and spend some coin. He's got plenty of money. It sticks to him as if his hands were magnets and his fingers suction cups."

"I say so," agreed Kelly, with a vigorous nod.

For a moment Mr. Jones departed to assure himself that Obadiah did not surreptitiously draw nigh. Thus reassured, he returned and vigorously pursued his scathing arraignment of the absent one. "If he had red blood in his veins he'd have a heart where that girl is concerned. Why doesn't he ever give a dance for her? If he wasn't an old tight wad he'd give several a week, have a swell dinner every night and a theater party each time a decent show comes to town. He'd do that thing if he wasn't a short sport. He ought to get a lively bunch of young people to make his place their social headquarters and tear things loose."

"That's me." Thus did the laconic Kelly record his position.

Mr. Jones went on, "He should give his daughter the opportunity to enjoy the better things of life." The stenographer drifted over to a window and fell to musing. He gave thought to volumes 36
of lighter literature which had led him to believe that, in well conducted families of wealth and position, private secretaries often assumed the responsibilities of social secretaries or major domos. Turning again to the bookkeeper, he resumed, "It takes certain peculiar qualifications to handle that sort of thing. Everybody knows that the old man couldn't do it. He ought to come out like a man and admit that he has no conception of that bigger social life which plays such an important part in the world today. Then–" Mr. Jones spoke with great meaning–"there are those who understand such matters and could relieve him of all responsibilities except–" Mr. Jones snapped his fingers as though it was a bagatelle–"signing the checks."

CHAPTER IV 37
THOSE DARKIES AGAIN

After Obadiah, highly indignant at the presence of the black orphans, had departed, his car moved slowly up the street. It stopped at the corner for the policeman's signal. At the edge of the sidewalk stood a newsboy eating an ice cream cone with great enjoyment. The shouts of the pickaninnies were stilled at the pleasing spectacle of a fellow man partaking of food. Every eye watched the disappearing cone as if fascinated by some novel mechanical process.

The unusual silence aroused Virginia from uneasy thoughts of her father. Following the eyes of her guests she caught the common target as the last bite disappeared, and noted that the lips of the black company moved sympathetically coincident with its departure.

"These children will be late for lunch?" worried the young hostess, awakening to the requirements of the hour.

"Yas'm," the woman confessed with indifference. "It ain' no mattah." From outward appearances the infants took issue upon the question, deeming it one of grave concern. "Dey eats at noon but ah fix 'em up er snack w'en we git back." The orphans registered relief.

"How would they like an ice cream cone?" suggested Virginia. 38

The infants awaited the verdict in breathless anticipation.

"Ah guesses dey lak it mighty well." The woman looked about her at the upturned mouths even as in a nest of fledgeling blackbirds. The financial extravagance daunted her. "Yo'all mought git one fo' each two."

Sore disappointment depressed the fledgelings.

Virginia sensed the prevalent dejection. "No," she decided, "each child shall have one. Go on to Vivian's, Ike."

Now, Mr. Vivian maintained an establishment for the distribution of those mild refreshments appealing to youth. His fastidious soul endeavored to foster the delicate things of life. He dealt in sugars and syrups in preference to lard or kerosene. This spirit prevailed in his public parlors. Golden rays reflected in dazzling brilliancy in many mirrors from gilded grills. It was meet that in such a temple only the elect should partake of ambrosia. This thought exuded from every pore of Mr. Vivian. At times he spoke of it.

The world accepts a man at his own value. So, South Ridgefield appraised Mr. Vivian's resort at his own valuation; but by no means does this mean that his clientele was limited. Far from it. The youth of South Ridgefield were not modest in their self-esteem. In spite of individual embarrassment, when first brought under the influence of the Vivian presence and decorations, they gathered daily in great numbers in the Vivian parlors, that the world might bear witness, 39
through their presence, to their elevated social status.

Indeed, certain hardy and desperate spirits did, by continued presence and notable consumption of wares, become so bold that they dared to address the proprietor as "Bill," and risked mild pleasantries as that the nectar was "rotten dope," or that, through error, a "dash er onion or sumpin'" had been introduced into their sacchariferous cup. Such familiarity was for the few. Did not eye witnesses support tradition in evidence of the casting forth of the unworthy from the

Vivian portals?

Had not reputable bibbers testified that certain dirty faced urchins, essaying early adventures in trade and tendering but five coppers instead of the eight, well known to be the post war value of the cone, been driven into the street with loud objurgation?

Likewise, there was the memorable episode of the drunken tramp. Stumbling into this resort of innocent youth under the belief that it was a saloon, he was summarily ejected by the police. For a time, a splintered mirror gave silent testimony to this banishment. It evidenced the casting of a root beer mug at the white coated soda dispenser by the vulgar varlet, obsessed by the delusion that he was enjoying the more thrilling sport of heaving a beer stein at a bartender.

But by far the greater number of refusals of service, with its corollary of altercation and throwings out, had to do with negroes.

"I ain't serving 'em in my place," Mr. Vivian had proclaimed, with a frank disregard of at least the spirit of the fifteenth amendment. 40

The sweets dispensed by Mr. Vivian drew the black people as molasses does the fly, and South Ridgefield had a large percentage of negro residents. For a time hardly a day passed without noisy wrangles. Comfortably seated in full view and hearing of such disputes, the elect were greatly edified thereby. Of late, such disturbances had decreased, and, as they had ended always in favor of the confectioner, he felt assured that he had settled the race issue in his own place at least.

Mr. Vivian waited today behind his marble topped counter and supervised his numerous assistants. Through the front windows he watched the multitude which had assembled to view the minstrel parade disperse. He observed an influx of gilded youth over his threshold. One listening to explanations would have gathered that the unusual number present was not due to interest in such low concerns as minstrel bands. Through untoward events the pageant had obtruded itself, as it were, into blasé vision.

Mr. Vivian's eyes, as has been suggested, rested upon the street. Into his optical angle rolled the Dale car. It was well known to the confectioner. Often it paused for long periods before his place while Virginia refreshed herself within. It was his delight, at these times, to greet the maiden with profound respect, as his heart swelled with pride. The car of Obadiah Dale, the wealthiest, and in consequence, in Mr. Vivian's judgment, the peak of the town's social strata, awaited without. Within the house of Vivian, the heiress partook of Vivian products. What could be more appropriate? 41

The spectacle of the big machine given up to the conveyance of this small maiden had always pleased Mr. Vivian. There was a cavalier disregard of the cost of gasoline, oil, and tires which appealed to him. Today, the large passenger list astonished him, and, even as the number impressed him, their aspect amazed him.

"Negroes," he gasped, "coming *here*!" There are moments in every life which have far-reaching consequences. The confectioner faced one.

The car stopped at the Vivian door. The glad shouts of infants penetrated the halls set apart for the fashionable. They offended the ears of the elect.

"There is Virginia Dale and those colored kids with whom she was making a spectacle of herself in the minstrel parade," sneered an excited girl. "If she brings them in here, I'll leave and never come back."

"Oh, don't worry," a man of the world, of sixteen, calmed her. "Old Viv won't stand for any foolishness. You watch him."

"Virginia Dale has lived so long in that big house with only colored people that she likes them for friends," declared another girl contemptuously. "Too good to associate with any of the young people of this town, she parades around like that. I think it is disgusting myself and I would tell her so, for very little."

These and similar remarks filled the ears of the perplexed proprietor. He decided that whatever was done in this instance had better be done, contrary to his usual practice, beyond the hearing of the elect.

He rushed out to the waiting car. A smile was upon his face but it was not his usual one of hearty welcome. It spoke of hidden pain and anxiety. 42

"How do you do, Mr. Vivian," Virginia courteously greeted the dispenser of toothsome delicacies. "I want you to meet these little people from the Lincoln Home."

He cast a glance into the nest of the blackbirds. It lacked that interest with which new friends should be greeted. He felt the curious glances of the chosen, impinging against his back.

"They are hungry, Mr. Vivian. We have had a long ride and the children missed their lunch watching the parade. Each of us wants the nicest ice cream cone you can make. Seventeen, please."

"Cones!" Light dawned in Mr. Vivian's darkness.

"Bring them out, please?" Virginia begged.

"Out?" The clouds which had veiled the true Mr. Vivian rolled aside. Came sunshine and gladsome welcome.

In a moment the confectioner was behind his counter urging his assistants to diligence. In joyous relief, he shouted, “Make ’em big, boys. Make ’em big!”

Then, disregarding the feelings of the staring elect, Mr. Vivian hastened forth, bearing a box of cones. In a moment, with his kindest smile, encouraged by Virginia, he delivered with his own hand, to each infant, one of his products.

“The poor things. I don’t suppose orphans get ice cream cones very often, do they?” Virginia asked the woman.

“Some ain’ nevah had none afo’, Ah bets. Has you, chillun? Who had one?” Six worldly wise 43
infants voted in the affirmative.

Mr. Vivian was stirred deeply by this information. That human beings were permitted to arrive at such an age without experience of cones struck him as an economic mistake. “It’s a shame,” he cried.

“They eat them as though they were used to them,” laughed Virginia.

“Yes,” he agreed, as he watched the mouths of the blackbirds wag in solemn unison. Another thought struck him. “You have had these orphans out for a ride all morning, Miss Dale?”

She nodded. “We’ve had a grand time, too. Haven’t we, children?”

Mouths were too full for utterance but there was a unanimous bobbing of heads.

When Virginia opened her purse to pay for the cones, Mr. Vivian, after inspecting the tendered currency for a moment, submitted a proposal. “Miss Dale, would you object if I presented the cones to the children? I would be glad to do it.”

There was a look of understanding in Virginia’s eyes as she answered him, “I know how you feel about it. I can’t let you do it today, though, Mr. Vivian. You see, it is my treat.”

Motionless as a statue, Mr. Vivian stood before the door of his establishment and watched the machine depart. As it disappeared a look of great approval rested upon his countenance. “There goes a darn fine girl,” he muttered. He threw back his fat shoulders and worked them as though a great load had been recently removed from them. “Thank heaven,” he cried, “she didn’t take it 44
into her head to unload that outfit in my place.” He scratched his head. “What would I have done?”

CHAPTER V 45
ACCIDENTS WILL HAPPEN

It was past one o’clock when Virginia left the colored children at the Orphans’ Home. The purchase of the cones had detained them much longer than she had anticipated. Now, rid of her guests, she remembered her meeting with her father. Appreciating with dismay how the minutes had flown, she considered it advisable to return home as soon as practicable that rough water might be lubricated.

“Hurry, Ike,” she told the chauffeur.

Now, Ike needed little encouragement in this matter. It delighted him exceedingly to find excuse to unloose the surplus power of the fast machine. Tantalizing qualms which only Serena’s cooking could quiet likewise beset him. It was his custom to lunch early and abundantly.

Ike hurried. In a moment the car was rushing along one of South Ridgefield’s residential streets at a high rate of speed. Virginia’s thoughts rehearsed the events of the morning. Those of the chauffeur anticipated his delayed repast.

They approached a corner. The hoarse honk of a horn sounded from the intersecting street. At the crossing came an instantaneous perception of a man approaching at high speed upon a motorcycle and trying to dodge. The sickening sensation of impending peril held the girl as the 46
emergency brake squealed. A heavy shock at the back of the automobile seemed to lift it. Virginia screamed. The motorcycle rider half dove, half tumbled out from the back of the big car and crumpled an inert and senseless heap in the street.

The Dale car stopped almost at the instant of the shock. Seeming to fall from his seat, Ike ran back and stared for a second at the upset motorcycle and then hurried to the recumbent figure.

A bystander rushed out and joined the chauffeur, crying, “Is he dead?”

Ike, filled with personal woes, took no heed of the inquiry. “Run squa’e into me. Smack bang. Done knock er big dent in ma caah,” he protested.

Luckily the bystander was a man of action rather than words. He gave attention to the stricken one. “Get the doctor, over there,” he commanded sharply, pointing to a white house nearby.

Ike disappeared on the run.

For seconds which seemed hours, Virginia, held by fright, could not move. Her eyes, wide with horror, stared back at the motionless motorcyclist. His flattened figure resembled a bundle of old

clothes dropped carelessly in the roadway. Certain that the man was dead, the terrible thought came to the girl that she was responsible for it. She could hear herself saying, “Hurry, Ike.” It made her frantic, she could not sit still and yet she wondered if she had the strength to move. In a moment, she found herself standing. Hardly knowing what she did, she climbed from the car 47
and moved slowly towards the figure lying in the dust. She watched it fearfully, as if it might suddenly leap at her. Now she saw the face. How dreadfully white it was. Surely he was dead. The pity of this great fellow lying helpless in the street moved her strangely. The pathos of his weakness wrung her heart.

The bystander removed his coat intending to make a pillow of it. Guessing his purpose, Virginia hastened to the car and brought back a cushion.

“Thank you, that will be better,” he told her. Taking the cushion, he held it irresolutely as though planning how best to use it.

“May I help?” To Virginia it seemed that the words came of their own accord. She doubted if she had the strength to do anything.

“If you would, please? When I lift his head, will you push the cushion under?”

The girl dropped upon her knees in the dust of the roadway. It brought her face very near to that of the unconscious man. She noticed that he was young, not much older than herself. When the cushion was placed it lifted his head into an awkward position. Readjusting the cushion, Virginia pushed it too far. The motorcyclist’s head slid over and rested against her knee. For an instant she hesitated and then, making a pillow of her lap, she very gently lifted his head into it.

“That’s better. That’s the stuff,” approved the bystander. Noticing her pallor, he added, “If you can do it.”

“I–I–I will be all right,” she hesitatingly reassured him. Yet, at the moment, she was not at all sure 48
of herself. Was she not holding the head of a dead youth in her lap? It had shifted and a rivulet of blood oozed from a small wound in the forehead, formerly hidden. A deathly sickness swept the girl. But even as it seized her came a determination to fight her feelings and conquer them. She would not faint.

The motorcyclist groaned. Virginia almost dropped his head in alarm. He wasn’t dead, but certainly that melancholy sound marked the passing of his soul. Other groans followed of such grievous quality that she was sure each one was his last.

“He’s coming around, I believe,” declared the bystander.

The words reawakened hope in Virginia’s breast. “Isn’t he dead?” she murmured gently.

“No.” The voice came from her lap.

Her startled blue eyes dropped. Two wide open black eyes looked up into them wonderingly for an instant and the lids closed.

“Lord,” moaned the stricken one in unmistakable language.

“He’s praying,” thought Virginia and solemnly bowed her head.

Ike returned, followed soon by a doctor.

“He’s regained consciousness,” the bystander told the medical man.

The physician knelt by the injured youth. He listened to his heart and then started to lift an eyelid when both lids opened so wide that Virginia was enabled to confirm her previous impression that the motorcyclist’s eyes were black. The doctor felt the man’s body and the groans redoubled as 49
he touched one of the legs. The medical man straightened up. “His head seems to be all right. There is a fracture of the right leg and probably a rib or two broken. He is lucky to get off so easy. He will be a mass of bruises, too, I suppose,” he announced. He glanced curiously at the waiting car and then at Virginia and went on, “You are Obadiah Dale’s daughter, are you not?”

As she nodded her assent, he asked, “How did the accident happen?”

“I was to blame,” confessed Virginia, her eyes filling with tears.

“You weren’t driving the car?” he argued sympathetically and when she admitted it, “I don’t see how you can be in fault.”

“I was though, doctor.”

He gave her an enveloping professional glance. The pale face and the flood of tears fighting to break their dams did not escape him. “You are suffering from the shock of the accident. You have been under a strain and are nervous and unstrung.”

Ike considered this an appropriate moment to make public outcry. “Dat man was to blame. Ran smack into me. Lak to punch er hole in de tiah wid ’is haid. Ah gwine look fo’ er punkcher,” he assured the crowd which had assembled.

This attempt to win public favor at the expense of a semi-unconscious opponent filled the doctor with indignation. “You talk like a fool,” he informed the chauffeur. “Without inquiring into the matter I conclude that you are to blame. You help me carry this man under the trees and make 50
him comfortable until I can call an ambulance.”

The snap judgment of the medical man apparently struck Ike as of uncontrovertible accuracy, because he prepared in silence to assist in caring for the injured until Virginia suggested,

“Why not take the man in our machine and get him to the hospital so much quicker?”

“Very good,” agreed the doctor. He eyed Ike sternly. “It’s not a question of speed now. There has been too much of that around here in my opinion.”

“Yas’r,” the chauffeur made illogical response. “Ah ain’ no speeder. Ah is de carefles’ drivah in dis yere town. Safety fust. Dat’s ma motta.”

“Appearances are against you,” the doctor snorted as he prepared a rough splint to protect the leg of the motorcyclist during his removal.

They placed the youth in the Dale car, the doctor holding him in his arms but using a middle seat to support the lower part of the body. Ike pulled down the other seat and, at a sign from the physician, Virginia took it.

As they slowly left the scene of the accident, the girl noticed that the arm of the youth nearest to her swung helplessly at every jolt of the car. Taking the hand in her own, she lifted it into her lap. When she released it, there was a faint movement as if the fingers searched for her own. Knowing him to be suffering, Virginia regrasped his hand and it seemed to her that there came an answering pressure as of appreciation.

Yet woe descended anew upon the girl. The youth could not walk. He could not talk. As she looked at his grotesquely postured body, she became convinced that he was dying. The doctor’s remarks were to cheer her. No one could forecast the results of such an accident. The victim might pass away in the car. He was so young to die, a mere boy. She had killed him. Such thoughts were overwhelming her with fear when they reached the hospital. 51

In the reception room of the institution, she awaited in dread the outcome of a more thorough examination. As she looked about her, there was nothing in the furnishing of the apartment to distinguish it from thousands of others except the faint, sickening odor of ether which told its own story.

A most attractive young woman in a nurse’s uniform came across the hall from a small office opposite. “Were you with the emergency case Dr. Millard brought?” she asked.

Virginia thought the blonde curls, beneath the cap, very attractive. Also she approved of the hazel eyes. They seemed sympathetic and the overwrought girl longed for that. “I came with a motorcyclist who was hurt. I don’t know the doctor’s name,” she responded.

“If you can give me the information about the patient I will fill out his card.”

Virginia looked at the nurse in astonishment. “Why I don’t know him. I never met him until he ran into our car.”

“A violent introduction,” giggled the nurse, and then, more seriously, “I am glad that it is not your husband.”

“*Husband*,” gasped Virginia, “on a *motorcycle*.” Her face reddened in an embarrassment the absurdity of which provoked her. 52

The nurse broke into a gale of soft laughter. “They come in automobiles, on motorcycles and on foot. Evidently, you don’t care for those on motorcycles.” She considered a moment. “I don’t blame you. He would have so many accidents that you would never know whether you were wife or widow.”

Virginia was uncomfortable. The strain of the most exciting day in her life was telling. The mischievous eyes of the nurse were not helping matters. “I think that I am quite young to be married,” the girl announced with a prim dignity meant to suppress this frivolous person.

That sophisticated young woman shook anew with amusement. “Oh, I don’t know. Have a look at our maternity ward.”

The shot went wide of the mark with Virginia. “Oh,” she exclaimed, with rapturous interest, “I’d love to. That’s where you keep the babies, isn’t it? I adore them.”

“We were speaking of husbands, not babies, you know.” The irrepressible nurse persisted. “They are closely related but not the same thing. That is, unless the wife, as many of them do, insists upon making a baby of her husband.”

Husbands! Babies! Where was this strange conversation leading? Again an annoyed Virginia felt herself flush beneath the amused eyes of this very complacent young person. With a rush, horrible thoughts of the youth upstairs, surely suffering, possibly dying, through her fault, obsessed her. Yet this nurse could look at one with hazel eyes dancing with merriment. The mill owner’s daughter whirled to a window, but, regardless of her efforts, the tears came. 53

She heard the nurse move. In a moment a hand touched her shoulder and a kind voice whispered, “Dearie, you are all broken up, aren’t you? It’s a shock from the accident. I should have remembered. Let me get you something?”

“No,–no,” protested Virginia, dissolved in tears. “It’s not medicine I need. Oh, if I could only be sure that poor fellow isn’t going to die. I will never have a happy moment the rest of my life if he does.” She raised her tear drenched face. “I wanted to make people happy, not to bring sorrow or trouble to any one. And now,” she sobbed, “I’ve killed a man.”

“Don’t be silly, girlie. You couldn’t kill a flea, let alone a man. Accidents will happen. We get hundreds of such cases every month.”

“You don’t get motorcyclists though. They are injured while riding at fearful speed.”

“Oh yes, we do. I don’t mean to criticise your friend but most motorcyclists are dreadfully reckless.”

“He isn’t my friend. I told you that I don’t know him,” grieved Virginia.

“Why worry so, then? I heard the doctor say that it was not a serious case myself.”

“He was concealing something. Anyway, it is wrong of us to say unkind things about the poor fellow when he has no friends to help him,” Virginia concluded with a note of defiance.

“*Have* we?” the nurse responded, “I think that I said,–you may remember–that motorcyclists are reckless.” 54

“But,” sobbed the unhappy girl, “I thought it, too.”

“He wouldn’t care about it, anyway,” argued the nurse soothingly. “Cheer up, he’ll soon be well. I never remember a motorcyclist dying in this hospital. They are either killed outright,” she explained in a matter of fact tone, “or they soon recover. They have so many accidents learning to ride, I suppose, that they get toughened. I don’t mean that they are tough fellows,” she explained hastily, fearful that Virginia might deem the remark unkind. “I mean that one must be young, and strong, and hard, to run one of the things.”

Virginia’s tears had ceased to flow. “I should think that a motorcyclist would have to be–quick–and graceful,” she interrupted, and then ended, “–and very brave,” being, evidently much uplifted by the nurse’s remarks.

“And,” continued the very observant attendant of the sick, “I should think that they would have to be very strong and healthy, perfectly nerveless, and,” she smiled, “not a bit fastidious to ride a motorcycle.”

Virginia’s face bore a look of mild reproof which melted away as she joined in the hearty laugh of the nurse.

“I am going up stairs,” resumed that energetic person cheerfully, “and see your motorcyclist. In a minute, I will be back able to assure you that he is not seriously injured.”

As the girl waited, the quiet of the great building depressed her. To her came the thought that it was a place of weariness, pain, suffering. The hall before her was the highway along which men and women passed on their way to those white bed battle-grounds beyond. Through hours, and days of weariness and suffering the combat dragged its weary length or moved in strenuous actions, short and sharp, towards victory, with the joyous return of the pale and weakened warrior to loved ones, home, friends, and all that makes life worth living, or else– 55

A door opened above stairs. Something very like a smothered laugh echoed and the soft pad of rubber soles came on the steps.

“He’s all right,” the nurse reassured Virginia, as she reentered the room. “He’s perfectly conscious and the doctor says that he sees no reason why he should not get along nicely.” Her manner became very professional as she went on, “Your motorcyclist has a fractured leg, three fractured ribs, and many bruises.” She shrugged her shoulders deprecatingly, “That’s nothing.”

“Nothing! I think that it is dreadful.” Virginia displayed indications of renewed agitation.

The nurse made haste to comfort her, “Remember, I have seen him. That young man may be brittle but he’ll mend fast.”

“He will suffer so,” worried Virginia.

“No, not after his leg is set. Of course he will be in some pain for a few days but that will soon pass.” The nurse giggled. “Right now he has a bad headache from striking either your car or the street with his head. It must be made of extraordinarily strong material.”

Virginia gave no heed to the concluding sentence. A look of alarm spread over her face. “He struck the car an awful blow. It fairly lifted it. Was that his head?” she gasped. 56

“Possibly,” admitted the dancing eyed nurse. “His headache is severe. But he’ll be over that in the morning.”

Another matter of anxiety recurred to the girl. “How’s his fever?” she troubled, her eyes big with pity.

“Fever!” Surprise claimed the nurse as its own. “Now what ever put that into your head?”

“I held his hand when we brought him here. It was very hot.”

“Oh, I see,” admitted the nurse with a solemnity of tone which belied her tell-tale orbs. “What a little helper you *were*. You held the patient’s hand, and, discovering it to be warm, you believed him dead.”

“Wasn’t it strange?” Virginia gravely pursued her own line of thought. “It seemed to me that he wanted me to hold his hand, so I did.”

“Kind girl,” the nurse complimented her, and then, as from a wealth of experience, explained, “I never knew a man who disliked to hold hands. Certainly a motorcyclist would have no compunctions about it. Don’t worry about fever in this case.”

“You are laughing at me again. You love to tease me,” protested Virginia.

“I can’t help it after seeing that motorcyclist.”

“Why should you laugh about him? Poor fellow, he suffers so.”

“Yes, I suppose he does, but his appearance does not draw sympathy. They’ve dressed him up in pink pajamas. He’s a great big fellow and his eyes–” 57

“Are black,” announced Virginia with great assurance.

“Yes, but how on earth did you know it?”

“He looked up at me,” Virginia confessed soberly.

“Looked up at you? Please tell me when? While you were holding his hand?”

“No.” The girl spoke with great gentleness, as if in a dream she reënacted the scene she described. “His head was lying in my lap and suddenly he opened his eyes and looked up at me for a moment–and closed them.”

The nurse choked with suppressed laughter. “I thought,” she rippled, “that it was a collision of vehicles, not of hearts.”

“How very silly,” thought Virginia, and regarding the nurse coldly, she said aloud, “I’ll go now. I am sorry to have been so much trouble to you.”

Unmoved by the change in the mood of the visitor, the nurse accompanied her to the door. “You’ll be coming back to see your patient?” she suggested.

“I suppose I should,” Virginia mused. Her coolness towards the nurse melted. “It would be dreadfully embarrassing to visit a strange man.”

“I can help you. I go back to ward duty tomorrow and will have charge of the surgical cases. I’ll know him by the time you call.”

“That will be fine. I’ll bring him something to eat.” A further courtesy occurred to Virginia. “Would you let him know, please, that I waited to be sure that he was as comfortable as possible?”

“That has been done,” the nurse told her. “When I was up stairs I explained to him that you were waiting, in almost your very words.” 58

The curiosity of her sex beset the mill owner’s daughter. “Did he say anything about it?” she questioned.

Great merriment, promptly subdued, shook the nurse. “I should hardly call it ‘anything.’ Of course, I could not question him in his condition. I caught two words. Perhaps I misunderstood them.”

“What were they?”

“He said”–again the nurse was shaken by concealed amusement–“something which sounded to me like”–she hesitated to regain control of her feelings–“Some chicken.”

“Poor fellow,” sympathized compassionate Virginia. “He is hungry. Serena fries chicken deliciously, and he shall have some of it.” As she hurried away, she wondered what it was that had amused the nurse so much that she could not overcome a final outburst.

CHAPTER VI 59
IKE EXPLAINS

Obadiah Dale gave unusual thought to his daughter during a period following the minstrel parade. This attention was due primarily to the appearance of Virginia as a seeming part of the pageant. It was due secondarily, and consequently in ever increasing force as the minutes passed, to the girl’s unexplained delay in returning home to lunch.

Immediately upon his arrival, Obadiah had attempted to elicit from Serena all information in her possession concerning orphans and minstrels. His approach to the subject was craftily obscured.

“I don’t see the car. Virginia not home, yet?”

“Yas’r. She orter bin back er long time ergo.” From Serena’s appearance one would have judged her deeply aggrieved.

“Where is she?”

“She tek er li’l ride. Ain’t she bin at yo’all’s office?”

Serena was conscious that her speed regulations, literally interpreted and conscientiously obeyed by Ike, might be responsible for the delayed return of the absent ones. She was aware, that regardless of the real reason, Ike, constitutionally, would not be adverse to transferring all blame to her. She deemed it advantageous, therefore, to submit her defence before the arrival of the complainant and thus win the sympathetic support of the court. 60

“Ah tole dat Ike to drive mo’e cafful. Ah ain’ wantin’ Miss Virginy broke up ’count o’ his

foolishness.”

“They were safe enough when I saw them down town. As far as I could make out they had been following a minstrel band about,” Obadiah informed her.

“Minst’el band!” Serena lifted up her voice loudly. “Dat’s Ike. Wot inte’est dat chil’ got in er ole minst’el band. It sure is dat fool Ike.”

“They had a negro woman and a lot of negro children in the back of the car.”

“Black woman an’ chillun,” shouted the old negress. “Howcum dey in dat caah? Ah axes you dat?” Serena’s temper was rising. “Dat fool boy Ike done fill up dat caah wid trash. Yas’r. Whar was dey?”

“Following that band down the middle of Main Street.”

“On Main Street, wid all de high tone folks er lookin’ at ma po’ li’l honey chil’ er packed in wid er bunch o’ trash er laughin’ an’ er hollerin’ at er minst’el band.” Serena became almost inarticulate in her anger.

Obadiah kicked angrily at the rug in front of him. Again he remembered the smiles of the crowd. Gruffly dismissing the servant, he watched her depart, every line of her body quivering with indignation and muttering dire threats at Ike.

The manufacturer dropped into a chair and attempted to read a newspaper but he could not keep 61
his mind from the episode of the morning. It had been an absurd affair. His sense of personal dignity rebelled at his daughter being entangled in such a thing. The thought came that Virginia was only a child who had become involved in an escapade of Ike’s which every one had already forgotten.

He settled himself more comfortably but the picture of the parade would not depart from his thoughts. Obadiah could not stand ridicule and those laughing faces danced before him. That child argument was unsatisfactory, too. Virginia had appeared quite proud of the load of colored children when he had talked to her. She didn’t look the child part, either. To the contrary she seemed quite mature–almost a woman. With a start, he remembered his daughter’s age. “Confound it,” he muttered, “she is a woman. She should behave as one. She must learn to have some regard for my dignity and to uphold my position in this town.”

He arose, looked at his watch, and, striding out upon the porch, gazed anxiously down the street. As he watched, there came a distant honk of familiar note and in a few moments his car turned in through the gate.

“What made you so late?” roared Obadiah before the machine stopped.

Virginia leaped out as the car paused and running up the steps threw her arms about her father. “Oh Daddy,” she responded, “I have been so frightened.” Laying her head against his arm, she shuddered.

“What happened?” Obadiah’s voice was cutting, sharp. 62

“We almost killed a man. We broke his legs and ribs and gave him a terrible headache. We had to take him to the hospital where he is suffering dreadfully.”

“Dat man done knock er big dent in dis yere caah wid his haid,” proclaimed Ike. “Ran slap bang into me.”

At the sound of the chauffeur’s well remembered voice, Serena, as a privileged member of the household, returned to the porch. Approaching Virginia who had drawn an arm of her father about herself, the old negress patted the girl reassuringly upon the shoulder and pledged revenge. “Nev’ mine, honey chil’, nev’ mind, ah gwine ’tend to dat fool, Ike, presen’ly.” Hurrying to the end of the porch she glared down at the chauffeur as if he were the root of all evil in that vicinity. “Wot you mean er takin’ er woman an’ ’er fambly in dat caah wid ma honey chil’ an’ er runnin’ ovah er ban’ an’ er killin’ er minst’el man? ’Splain youse’f, boy.”

Ike was puzzled to identify the victim of his alleged manslaughter under the conditions named. “Wot minst’el man? Ah ain’ kill no minst’el man a tall.”

“Who dat done dent yo’all’s caah?” cried the accusing voice.

“How ah gwine tell if dat man wot bre’k hisse’f up on ma caah is er minst’el man? Ah ain’ ax ’im. Ah ain’ kill no man.”

“Who dat woman an’ her fambly you ’vite into dat caah? Wot mar’ied woman is yo’all makin’ up 63
to? Wot’s de name o’ dat frien’, wid chillun?”

Ike had to suffer much that morning. He writhed under this new inquisition which displayed a tendency to besmirch his reputation. No love light glowed in the porcupine’s eyes but hatred, intense and eternal, flashed from them, and he bristled as he made forceful denial. “Dat female sco’pion ain’ no frien’ o’ mine.”

Before such dislike, who could suspect? Where dwelt such frankness? Who could doubt? Yet, Serena, conjecturing that a more complete understanding of the case might insure some interesting developments, excused him with words of warning, “You ain’ nevah kep’ nothin’ f’on me, no time.”

After Obadiah had heard his daughter’s story of the accident, his mind reverted to the minstrel parade. “You seem to have had a very strenuous morning, Virginia,” he remarked. “When we met,

you had quite a load of passengers with you. Tell me about them." He wanted to know how those orphans got into the car.

Virginia was in the midst of her description of the morning's events when her father interrupted,

"Why should you take those negro children for a ride? What made you do it?"

"Can't you understand, Daddy? Those poor little darkies were frightened almost out of their wits by our car. They cried, and they looked so forlorn. The walk is their big pleasure each week. We spoiled it in a way, today, and I tried to make up for it." She was lost in thought for a moment and then went on. "Think of it! Those children are shut up within the walls of that institution every minute of the time except for that weekly walk." 64

"What's the matter with that? Where else would you keep them? They can't run loose upon the streets." Obadiah wished to bring his daughter to a reasonable and sensible view of the situation.

"Of course, Daddy, the orphans can't be allowed to run wild. That would never do. But that makes it no less hard for them to be shut up in that yard year after year with only a walk now and then for a change." She looked appealingly at him. "How would you like to be shut up in a yard all of the time, Daddy?"

Obadiah almost shuddered. The thought of being confined in an inclosure was repulsive to him. It savored of the penalties prescribed in certain anti-trust laws of which he had an uncomfortable knowledge. He would have gladly eliminated the question of restraint, but not being able to, asked, "How can you help it?"

Virginia gleefully clinched her argument. "Take the orphans out oftener and take them riding so that they can go farther than their little legs can carry them. I did the last thing, Daddy, don't you see?"

Obadiah saw, and, admitting the strength of his daughter's argument to himself, recognized that it had logical strength as a plea for a series of rides. He dropped the matter promptly and in this was assisted by the gong calling them to a belated luncheon.

Virginia, because of the excitement of the morning, had little appetite. She watched her father for a time and then her eyes took on a deeper blue as, without averting her gaze, she drifted away into one of those mysterious musings of girlhood. 65

He gulped his food hastily as if he had a train to catch. "I should be back," he fretted. "My time is worth money. You must learn to be considerate of others, Virginia."

The shadow of unhappiness veiled the face of dreams as the girl started at his words. "I am very thoughtless, I am afraid, Daddy," she answered. "I shall try to be more careful." And then in a whisper so low that he could not hear it, she continued, "It would make mother unhappy to know that I was that way."

"You should overcome your faults, particularly your thoughtlessness in regard to others," he grumbled, and immediately changed the subject. "Do you know the name of the fellow who ran into you?"

"No, Daddy."

He considered a moment. "Don't you bother about it." He gave her a smile and the traces of her unhappiness faded before it. "I will have some one call up the hospital. I must take the matter up with Wilkins."

"Honey, chil', ain' yo'all gwine res' you'se'f dis afternoon?" Serena demanded, as they arose from the table.

"In a minute, Serena, I want to ask Daddy something."

She hurried after him. There was almost a trace of embarrassment in her voice, as she asked, "Daddy, may I go to the hospital tomorrow and visit that man?"

"What?" Obadiah was surprised. "Why on earth should you want to do that?" 66

"I think I should. I told Ike to hurry, as I explained to you. If I hadn't done that the man would not have been hurt." She gave a woeful little sigh. "I helped to take him to the hospital and so I feel acquainted with him."

A shrewd, calculating look swept over Obadiah's face. "That's a most informal introduction, I am thinking. However, it will do no harm to get on friendly terms with that fellow. I suppose that it will mean a suit, anyway, but I won't oppose your going."

Virginia's face lighted with happiness and pride. "Daddy dear, you have the kindest and most thoughtful heart. You are always trying to do something nice," she laughed, softly. "You've made a mistake this time, and you will have to think of something else. The man in the hospital doesn't need clothes. I noticed that his were not hurt in the accident."

"*Clothes*," cried Obadiah, much perplexed by the tribute to himself and the subsequent explanation. "Who said anything about clothes?" Suddenly, understanding came to him. "I'll swear–" promised the astounded manufacturer.

Virginia quickly kissed him squarely upon the mouth.

"No, you won't," she said, her eyes tender with love and pride, "you are much too good and generous and noble to do that."

For an instant, Obadiah appeared about to contradict his daughter, but, changing his mind, he hurried out to his waiting car and pressed the button on the horn. 67

At the signal, Ike appeared, coming hurriedly from the kitchen. As he advanced, he deposited in his mouth the remains of a slice of pie. Because of the unfortunate events of the morning, the procurement of this pastry partook of the nature of a diplomatic triumph. Ike had but little pride in this. His mind was upon weightier matters. As he approached his employer, he bolted the remnants in a manner conducive neither to his present dignity nor future health.

Obadiah endeavored to fix the shifting glance of his chauffeur with a piercing eye. “Ike,” he demanded, roughly, “how did that accident occur?”

“Yas’r, dat man come er speedin’ down Secon’ Street an’ ran smack bang into dis yere caah. He dent it wid his haid,” the chauffeur testified glibly.

“Show me the dent!”

Ike promptly indicated a slight depression in the body of the car above a rear fender.

“You did that when you ran into a coal truck and smashed the fender.”

Ike was greatly astonished but admitted erroneous conclusions. “Ah mek er mistake. Dat man mus’ er landed on de wheel den.”

“Don’t make any more mistakes about this accident,” the manufacturer rapped. “Virginia tells me that you were coming out Forest Avenue and that this fellow was going down Second Street.”

Ike considered this with care, that deception be eliminated. “Yas’r, Miss Virginny ain’ mek no mistake, neither.”

Obadiah glared at his humble retainer. “He was on your right hand then?” he suggested. 68

“Ah dis’remembers jes whar dat man cum f’om, Misto Dale. He cum so fas’ it plum slip ma mind.” Ike scratched his head thoughtfully. “It done gone f’om me.”

“He was going down Second Street towards the Court House and you were coming out home, weren’t you?”

“Yas’r, dat’s jes de way o’ it.”

“Then, he approached you on your right hand. He had the right of way.”

“Misto Dale, dat man done took all de way.”

“You know he had the right of way under the law,” bawled Obadiah, provoked by the stupidity of his servitor.

“Yas’r, dat’s de law.” A most flattering note of admiration for his employer’s legal acumen crept into Ike’s voice. “Misto Dale, yo’all sutinly knows de law.”

“Never mind what I know,” roared Obadiah, thrusting compliments rudely aside. “If that fellow hit my car you must have been in his way.”

“No, sar, Ah was er gwine to hit ’im, ’ceptin’ he dodge. He done cum so quick ah ain’ seen ’im ’till he whar der. Yas’r.”

Puzzled at what he had unearthed, Obadiah sought illumination along other lines. “How fast was that fellow running, Ike, when he hit you?”

The chauffeur lifted his eyes heavenward as if seeking inspiration. A crow winged its way slowly across the sky. He followed it critically as if using its speed as a measure for the estimate sought. 69
“’Bout seventy seven mile er hour,” he ventured.

Obadiah boiled. “Seventy seven miles an hour on Second Street is absurd,” he blurted. “It’s too rough. A man would have to fly to do it.”

“Yas’r dat’s hit. He was er flyin’. Jest er hittin’ de high places.”

Obadiah scorched his menial with a look which should have reduced him to a cinder.

Ike shifted uneasily under the unkind gaze of his indignant employer as he waited further interrogation.

“How fast were you running?” Obadiah’s tone was as warm as his aspect.

Ike deemed it advisable at this point to make his statements general. “Ah drives cafful. Safety furst, dat’s ma motta.”

“I have heard that nonsense of yours before. What I want to know,” Obadiah bleated in a high falsetto, “is, how fast were you going?”

Again, Ike turned to the skies. Suddenly came a change. His doubtful demeanor disappeared. He met the stern countenance of his employer with a glad smile of confidence and assurance. To him, in the hour of need, had been vouchsafed a solution of his problem. “Miss Sereny,” he explained, with great satisfaction, “she done tell me not to drive no fas’er den er hoss an’ ker’idge kin go. Dat’s jes how fas’ ah goes.”

Obadiah leaped into his car and slammed the door. “Take me to my office,” he blazed.

Ike obeyed him, running, it may be noted, at a speed well above that usually attained by the horses and carriages of Serena’s fond remembrance. 70

Obadiah entered his office yet much irritated by the recent examination of his chauffeur. “Jones,” he shouted peevishly.

“At your service, Sir,” responded the ever courteous private secretary, ceasing his social plannings for the House of Dale, hurriedly, and leaving the bookkeeper sorely embarrassed in his labors, through the loss of the voucher from which he was working snatched away by Mr. Jones, and borne into the manufacturer’s presence, as proof that his absence was due to zealous watchfulness of his employer’s interests, rather than to personal motives.

“Tell Mr. Wilkins that I want to see him.”

“Immediately, sir.” Obadiah’s voice demanded speed and Mr. Jones sped, bearing the bookkeeper’s work away with him.

In a moment the expeditious private secretary returned followed by Hezekiah Wilkins who passed on into Obadiah’s room and closed the door.

Obadiah was waiting behind a large desk in the center, and motioning to his legal adviser to be seated, made known his business in these words. “An embarrassing personal matter has occurred, Hezekiah, in which I must ask your assistance.” The manufacturer chose his words with care. Diplomacy is necessary when asking corporation lawyers to attend to the minor concerns of life. “It is so small a matter, I hesitate to ask your advice.”

Mr. Wilkins was short and fat. His head was bald and his face intellectual. There was a glint of humor in his eyes which was very noticeable when he removed his nose glasses for purposes of gesticulation. His defective sight did not prevent him from casting a keen glance at his employer, meanwhile tapping upon his front teeth with the gold frame of his glasses. “Don’t hesitate on my account, Obadiah.” There was a shadow of a smile on the attorney’s face. “I’ve done everything for you, but–” he intended to suggest as a pleasantry–“bail you out of jail,” but after a second’s consideration of his employer’s grim countenance, he continued, “buy you a marriage license,” as being less likely to affront a sensitive soul.

Now, Obadiah Dale had never given a moment’s consideration to a second marriage, and the thought that his attorney harbored inner suspicions of matrimonial designs upon his part interfered with the thread of his remarks. “What put that into your head?” he demanded, testily.

“Put what?” The fat face of the lawyer reflected great innocence.

“Marriage licenses,” retorted Obadiah.

“Oh,” chuckled the attorney, and quite frankly for one of his profession, he confessed, “It just slipped out, I suppose.”

The mill owner gave Hezekiah a severe glance as if to warn him of the grave danger of slips of the tongue to one in his profession.

This attention was lost, because the lawyer seemed greatly interested in the erection of a sign over the way.

Finding looks unavailing, Obadiah reverted to his business. “A fellow on a motorcycle ran into my car this morning. He broke a leg and they took him to the hospital where he is now, I believe.”

“Who was to blame?” asked the attorney.

“I can’t tell,” Obadiah replied crossly, as he remembered Ike’s testimony. “I can’t get a thing out of that fool chauffeur of mine. His story is absurd.”

“Were there witnesses?”

“One, I think, besides my daughter.”

“What does she say?” Hezekiah tickled his chin with his glasses and examined the picture moulding as if it were something unique in that line.

“I have not asked her, directly. I thought it inadvisable. I gather that she believes herself to blame because she told the chauffeur to hurry home.”

“Ahem,” said the lawyer, resuming his dental tattoo with great spirit. “Who had the right of way?”

“The motorcycle was approaching from the right,” admitted Obadiah grudgingly.

Hezekiah arose to his feet and moved around until he stood opposite to his employer. “Keep out of court, Obadiah,” he warned him. “A jury will soak you in this kind of case. How far can I go in a compromise?” he concluded, perfunctorily.

“I won’t pay a cent,” roared Obadiah, flying into a rage. “They can’t bleed me.”

Hezekiah understood the manufacturer’s mood. He paused for a minute and then continued very calmly. “How about a couple of hundred dollars and hospital expenses?”

“No.”

“The fellow’s hospital expenses?” There was a persuasive note in the lawyer’s voice.

“No!” Obadiah’s face was flushed and set in its obstinacy.

“The man may be poor. He may have dependents who will be deprived of the actual necessities of life. It could easily be that suffering and want would arise from this little case.” There was a

pleading note in Hezekiah's voice and almost a look of entreaty upon his kindly face.

"I don't give a hang," snarled Obadiah. "That's their bad luck, not mine."

Yet, the attorney waited, silently watching the angry manufacturer thrust papers from side to side of his desk.

Finally he glanced up. His temper had worn itself out. "Fix it up for twenty-five dollars," he snapped. "That's my limit."

Hezekiah shrugged his shoulders in frank disgust at the smallness of the sum named, nodded his head in recognition of his instructions and left the room.

CHAPTER VII
JOE PROVES INTERESTING

The morning was beautiful. During the hours of darkness a shower had cleansed the great outdoor world with its gentle moisture. Now, in all of its new laundered freshness, the earth welcomed the warm rays of the rising sun, sweeping with millions of scintillating reflections through the air, clear and pellucid in its purity. The rays sparkled and glittered on the drops of moisture which clung to the grass blades and to the leaves. They gave warm caresses to the bushes and to the trees and from the upturned faces of the flowers, waving coyly and coquettishly, they stole sly kisses, until the blossoms blushed red and pink and hid their faces beneath the leaves for very shame.

Down from the hills danced a gentle breeze, and, catching the naughty lovemakers, laughed merrily and rushed away to whisper the story in the branches of the trees. The birds overheard it and they laughed, too, and spread the news, the naughty gossips, in a cheery chorus of song.

Then the world awakened and heard the laughter of the wind and the merry song of the birds and felt the caress of the sun and wise men threw back their shoulders and took deep draughts of the morning air and were happy, too.

At the hospital, a nurse in her garb of white was humming softly as she moved about among the awakening patients, setting the ward in order. She stopped by a bed to remove a glass from the enameled table.

A big, handsome fellow, arrayed in pink pajamas, opened a pair of black eyes beneath a mop of disheveled black hair and smiled up at her.

"Good morning," she greeted him. "How are you this morning?"

"Good–ouch!" An attempt to move was the cause of the peculiar response.

She came to his assistance. "Isn't that better?"

"Yes, thank you. I forgot about yesterday's troubles while I slept. How could I get so many sore spots when I only struck in one place?" he asked.

The nurse laughed as she inspected his chart. "How's your head this morning?"

"Sister–" he grinned good humoredly–"that dome of mine has completely recovered. I am healing from the top down."

She raised a shade and a ray of sunshine flashed across the foot of his bed. "Isn't that better? It's a beautiful day."

He rolled and twisted his eyes until he was able to get a glimpse of a bit of blue sky through the window. His face registered great regret. "What a day for a two or three hundred mile spin, sister," he mused.

Again she examined his chart. "Say, Mr. Joseph Tolliver Curtis," she remonstrated sharply.

"Those who love me call me Joe," he interrupted in a gentle voice as he watched with great interest and amusement the snap in her hazel eyes.

She disregarded the brazen hint and proceeded to reprimand. "It's time for you to cut out this 'sister' business. I might stand for it once in awhile but you have a chronic case of it. You took a spin yesterday which is going to make us intimate acquaintances for some time."

"Oh death, where is thy sting?" he interjected.

Perfectly oblivious to his remark, she continued, "It will be better, particularly for you, if our acquaintance is a pleasant one. You will call me–Miss Knight–Mr. Curtis," she intimated with a grave dignity which the wayward blonde curls beneath her cap did not loyally support.

"'Night, sable goddess, from ebon throne descends,'" he quoted with dramatic emphasis. "Do you furnish breakfast as well as lectures on behavior in this hospital?"

She retired with great hauteur between smiling masculine eyes to the end of the ward. Suddenly, she whirled and waved her hand at the injured one, and, as if addressing an old and intimate friend, called, "You can have your breakfast in a minute, Joe."

In his apartment above the garage at the Dale home, Ike was awakened by the shrill alarm of an electric bell rung from a button pressed by Serena in the comfort of her own bed. Thus he arose betimes of necessity, rather than from personal desire to salute the rising sun.

Breathing deeply, the spirit of the morning entered into the chauffeur's veins as he watched a couple of fat robins enjoying a breakfast of elastic worms pulled from the moist earth. Lifting his voice in muffled song, he ran the big car out of the garage, and, opening its bonnet, reclined on 77
the radiator and lazily looked at the engine.

Like a high priestess veiled in clouds of incense while engaged in holy mysteries, Serena moved about her kitchen in the midst of appetizing odors, preparing coffee, frying ham and cooking waffles for the morning refreshment of the Dales. Now, as if such dainties were insufficient, she brought forth another skillet and put diverse parts of a fowl therein, and with skilled, fork-armed hand shifted them about until they sissled and hissed and fried.

The morning breeze faintly wafted pleasing odors to Ike. They assailed his nostrils delightfully. He breathed yet a little deeper and sang yet a little louder. Closing the bonnet, he climbed into a seat that he might, in pleasant anticipation, rest from labor. Suddenly, there came to him a more delicious scent. He sniffed in disbelief that fate could be so kind, but his experienced olfactory nerves reassured him. In such matters, they could not err.

"Chicken!" He sniffed and sought appropriate outlet for joy. With a roar which shook the early peace of the neighborhood as a salute of artillery, Ike raced the engine of the machine and in the midst of this diabolical furore, he sang a paean of joy.

The uproar smote the calm of Serena's kitchen. She jerked with alarm, but the wisdom of years asserted itself. Rushing out on the stoop she fixed indignant eyes on the chauffeur. "You, Ike," she cried, "stop dat noise."

He returned her words with a cheery smile of trust and confidence. Deafened by his own row, he 78
judged that she desired speech with him. The engine slowed and the noise decreased until there could be distinguished the words of a ballad of strenuous love,

> "Ah kissed 'er in de mouf
> An' ah hugged 'er in de souf."

"Ain' you know bettah an' to mek a noise dat a way, dis time in de mo'ning?" the irritated cook inquired.

"Ah ain' mek no noise, Miss Sereny. Hit de *caah*," he made reply in pleasant tones. It would be folly to irritate unduly the custodian of the chicken lest the fowl be consumed before friendly relations could be reestablished. His black face was bathed in good humor as he went on. "Miss Sereny, ma hand an' ma foot done slip."

That smile disarmed the cook. It was his strongest weapon, but Ike usually resorted to a sullen obstinacy which infuriated her, to his undoing. She glared at him for a moment and then his smile and the spirit of the morning claimed her. "You bettah watch you' step, den," she returned, and their voices blended in a boisterous gust of laughter.

Ike's salute to his favorite fowl awakened Virginia from her sleep with a start. Sitting up in bed, she cast a frightened glance about her pretty bedroom. For a moment she listened intently, drawn up in a little white heap on her bed, her blue eyes misty with dreams, peeping out from a frame of towsled hair. "It's Ike running the engine," she decided.

She gave a little yawn as she poked her feet into her slippers and ran over to a window. From it 79
she could look, between the tops of two great elms, across the valley in which South Ridgefield lay to the top of a small hill upon which, bathed in the morning sun, stood the brick hospital building. Her eyes rested upon it, thoughtfully, and she took a deep breath of morning air. She began to sing happily as she turned to dress.

Obadiah was shaving in his bath room. He used an old fashioned razor, the pride of his youth. His deep cut wrinkles made it a matter of care–almost a ceremony. Ike's disturbance nearly resulted in the amputation of a lip. Obadiah was peeved. Rushing to the window, he threw it open. He heard Serena's words of remonstrance and determined to dismiss Ike. He often did that.

Suddenly the morning breeze played caressingly about him. He pulled his bath robe closer to him and slammed the window down. His face felt stiff where the lather had dried upon it. "Darn the luck," growled Obadiah. He washed his face, restropped his razor, reprepared his lather, and finally completed his shave by nicking his neck on his Adam's apple. "Dang it all," he howled. The world was ill using Obadiah and he resented it. He dressed slowly and from his bedroom window moodily viewed his beautiful grounds.

Into his view danced Virginia, swinging a wide brimmed hat by its streamers and singing gaily as she made for a bed of sweet peas.

Obadiah watched her, but the harsh lines upon his face did not soften nor the irascible look fade. He gave a grim nod when the girl discovered him and shouted a merry greeting. 80

There was no one in the dining room when the manufacturer entered it that morning. He seated himself and began to eat his melon.

The rich voice of Serena with all of its carrying power came in at the window, "Yo' all bettah git in yere mighty fas'. You' Daddy done eat up all de breakfus'."

Then sounded the answering words of the girl, ringing silvery and sweet, “Ask Daddy to wait. I have some beautiful flowers for him.”

Serena was suddenly beset with internal mutterings and grumblings and broke into incoherent utterances. “Ah ain’ got no time–no time–flowers–tell him dat–No siree–Ah ain’ no fool.” A few moments later she entered the dining room worrying aloud. “Dat chil’ gwine be fo’ced to eat a col’ breakfus. Ah caint keep grub hot all day.”

“She must learn to be on time at her meals,” Obadiah scolded.

Serena gave him a look of stern disapprobation. “Dat gal miss ’er breakfus er gittin’ flowers fo’ yo’ all.”

Light feet ran through the hall and Virginia skipped into the room, her face flushed, her hair tossed and a bunch of sweet peas in either hand.

Unexpectedly, two soft arms were about Obadiah’s neck. He found his face buried in a mass of blossoms while girlish laughter in peals of delight rang in his ears.

Virginia shifted her position to examine in mock solemnity the sober face of her father blinking 81
from the mass of delicate colors. She gave a shout of amusement. “Daddy, you don’t match very well.” She shifted the bouquets about his face. “There, that is much better,” she decided. “Don’t you think so, Serena?”

Obadiah sneezed.

“God bless you,” Virginia whispered.

“Take those things out of my nose,” protested Obadiah.

“You look so beautiful,” the girl giggled. “Doesn’t he, Serena?”

The colored woman watched the proceedings with great gravity. “Leave you’ Daddy ’lone, chil’,” she urged. “De breakfus gwine be ruined.”

Obadiah released himself from his daughter’s embrace and the blossoms dropped in a glowing mass upon the table. “Eat your breakfast and stop this foolishness,” he told her.

“I’ll eat anything you’ll give me, Daddy dear. I am as hungry as a bear.” She glanced at the clock. “It’s late. I must hurry to get over to the hospital.”

“What for?” he asked in apparent surprise.

“To see the man who was hurt yesterday. I spoke to you about it.”

“Yes, but upon reflection I think it inadvisable. You might catch some disease in a place like that. You must think of yourself.”

A look of disappointment came into her face. She ate in silence, the gayety of the morning swept away by his refusal.

When breakfast was over, she followed him into the living room where he sank into a chair and 82
devoted himself to his paper. Thinking deeply, she paused by the center table. Very quietly, she opened a drawer and took from it the book which had belonged to her mother. She caressed the little volume gently for a moment, a great tenderness in her eyes. Then she replaced it. Determination had driven disappointment from her face and there was a faint reflection of his obstinacy in her jaw when she went over and confronted her father. “Daddy,” she commenced, very softly. “All your life you have been helping people–thinking of others. In your thoughtfulness for my health you wish to keep me away from the hospital. But, don’t you see, I was to blame for that accident. It is my duty to help that man, if I can. I must go.”

Obadiah glanced over his paper at Virginia as she began to speak. Realizing that her words savored of rank rebellion, he reddened and glared at the sheet before him as if it contained a warning of the presence in his household of a serpent pledged to destroy its peace. “What–what–what’s this?” he spluttered.

“I can’t allow your love to make a coward of me–turn me from my duty, Daddy.”

Obadiah blinked as he considered this mutiny. Judgment and experience warned him to control himself. Unpleasant differences in the past had not always resulted as he could have wished. There had been times when he had been forced not only to sue Virginia for peace but likewise to make abject overtures to that firmest of allies, Serena.

Obadiah thought rapidly. Outside of moral suasion, modern opinion recognizes but few methods 83
for the influencing of eighteen year old female insurgents. If Obadiah argued, he would get mad. In his dilemma, he surrendered, but not with good grace. “Well,” he yielded sulkily, “if you feel that way about it, have it your own way.” Scowling darkly, he flung his paper from him and departed for his office with asperity.

From the porch Virginia waved him a last good bye. “Poor Daddy. He is so afraid that I will get sick,” she thought, pensively, as she watched the disappearing car. But in a moment her good spirits returned and she hurried into the kitchen. Serena was forced to lay aside her work until the chicken was daintily arranged in a basket with other delicacies added by the old negress in reparation, possibly, for her weakness in yielding to Ike a small portion of the invalid’s fare.

Later that morning Virginia arrived at the hospital. Following the directions given her, she found herself standing in the doorway of a long room on the second floor. On each side of a center aisle

ran a row of white bedsteads. The walls, painted a dull buff, were pierced by many windows and the linoleum in the aisle and the hard wood floor were waxed and polished until they shone. In this place, cleanliness, fresh air, and sunshine reigned.

The beds were filled with pajama clad men. To the embarrassed young girl it was as if she had blundered into a man's bedroom, and impulsively she turned to flee.

A cheery voice arrested her, and the nurse whom she had met in the reception room on the previous day greeted her. "I told you that I would meet you here." She smiled with a frank cordiality which instantly dissipated the visitor's embarrassment. 84

Virginia knew now that she liked this young woman, even though she was a great tease, so she answered the smile with one of equal friendliness and told her, "It is nice to find someone I know"; but instantly she referred to the cause for her visit. "How is he?"

"I think that we have his fever under control," laughed the nurse.

"Now she is beginning to tease," thought Virginia. "I won't notice it."

The nurse went on. "He is really getting along fine. If I were you I shouldn't give a moment's worry to that young man's health. Don't trouble to plan your remarks to him, either. He won't listen to them. He does most of the talking."

The walk down the aisle between those beds, each with its pair of masculine optics, was a trial for the girl. It seemed miles. At last, safely by this gauntlet of inquisitive male glances, she found herself looking down into those same black eyes which had looked into hers for a second out on Forest Avenue. Then they were dazed with pain, now they were filled with friendly inquiry.

The nurse, Miss Knight, was direct and explicit. "Joe," she announced, "this is the young lady who says that she put you here."

Joe accepted this surprising remark as a matter of amusement which increased as the nurse went on.

"Now she comes to soften the hard blows with tender words and kind attentions."

Virginia blushed furiously. She thought Miss Knight's manner towards men distinctly common. 85

A deep voice came from the bed. "I am very glad to meet you and be able to thank you for what I have been told you did for me, Miss Dale. That accident was my hard luck." He put his whole soul into his smile of welcome and the girl knew that she liked it.

Having endeavored to relieve his guest's embarrassment, he turned upon Miss Knight, the greatly delighted cause of it, and adapted his manner and speech to her case. "Say, sister, blow. Blow while the breeze will toss you away. I haven't noticed any invitations for you to sit in on this peace conference."

The nurse flared at his words, although his smile had tempered them. Drawing herself up, she made answer with great dignity.

"You don't need to urge me not to hang around while your wounds are being dressed with soothing lotions. It's not necessary to hit me with an automobile to get me out of the way," she exclaimed with great sarcasm, and flounced away.

"The gloom of night departs," he chuckled, and, turning dancing eyes upon his visitor, continued softly, "and now comes dawn."

Virginia flushed again. "For all that you know, it may be stormy," she retorted, astonished at her own glib tongue. The merry banter of the patient and nurse had surprised her. She had been taught that this sort of thing was vulgar. Yet, somehow, it didn't seem so dreadful. She suspected that she rather liked it and was troubled by this symptom of innate depravity. Now she became aware that those black eyes were studying her, and mischief gleamed in their depths. 86

"Our meeting was very sudden yesterday," he laughed. "I didn't have a chance to give you my card. My name is Joseph Tolliver Curtis. Those who–" he hesitated and then went on–"are my friends, call me Joe." Happiness radiated from him. He was so good humored that it was contagious.

The visitor beamed upon the patient. "My name is Virginia Dale," she explained.

"I know it," he admitted, and then, with the manner of intense personal interest, he demanded, "Do your friends–your intimate friends–by any chance call you 'Virge'?"

"I should say not." The girl's eyes flashed as she retorted, "They would hear from me."

"By letter," he inquired, "or telephone?" In a moment he continued, "I have it. You will sing to them just as you are going to sing to me."

"Sing to you?"

"Of course you are going to sing to me. Every one who visits a hospital should sing. It was found wonderfully soothing to the patients in the big army hospitals during the war. After they had listened to the performers they were more contented to endure their suffering."

"They would have died on the spot if I'd sung," she answered.

They both laughed in the exuberance of their youth at their own nonsense until his injured ribs stopped him and she became very serious.

“I came, today–” her manner was almost shy–“to tell you how sorry I am for that accident. It makes me unhappy to think of you suffering here through my fault.” 87

“How can you blame yourself? You had nothing at all to do with it,” he declared with great earnestness.

“I told our chauffeur to hurry,” she explained, and then with finality, “if he hadn’t, there would have been no collision.”

Again his injured ribs subdued his laughter. “If everybody had stayed off the street, I wouldn’t have been hurt. That’s your argument.” He studied her face for a moment and then resumed. “Listen, I am going to tell you a secret. Promise never to tell.”

“Honest,” she agreed.

“I was running away over the speed limit. I must have been going forty miles an hour.”

Virginia became the custodian of his secret with great calmness and solemnly confessed, “We were running over the speed limit, too. Ike usually does. He knows that I enjoy going fast. The speed limit in this town is away too low, I think.”

“Yes,” he concurred, “I wouldn’t have been hurt worse if I had been running twice as fast. The point is, that we could both be arrested and fined for speeding.”

“They always arrest Ike,” she explained with complacency. “He doesn’t care a bit. He’s used to it.” Anxiety arose in her eyes. “Surely, they wouldn’t arrest one as badly hurt as you?”

“You don’t know that judge.” Joe spoke with experience. “If they brought a dying man into his court who had only fifty dollars to leave to his widow and children, that judge would take it from him for speeding. That is, if he rode a motorcycle.” 88

“Oh, the injustice of it. Doesn’t he care for motorcyclists?”

“No,” asserted Joe with great forcefulness. “Nobody likes a motorcyclist.”

“I do,” proclaimed Virginia, and then, after taking a moment to recover from the embarrassment of her own outspokenness, she continued, “It’s not right. They are entitled to equal justice,” as if enunciating a newly discovered truth.

“Sure, they are entitled to it, but they don’t get it. That’s why I must keep quiet. My accident insurance will take care of my hospital bills and my job will keep.”

“Why don’t you collect damages?” urged Virginia with great gravity.

“From whom?”

After a moment’s consideration, she solved the legal problem. “From me–that is, from my father, for me.”

At the reference to her father a change came in the injured man. His good humor faded. “No,” he said decidedly. “In the first place I wouldn’t accept money from your father and in the second place he would not give any.”

“You don’t know my father,” she said with pride. “He is a very just man. Sometimes he’s gruff and a little cross but he doesn’t mean anything by that. He always wants to do the right and generous thing.” Her face was alight with loyalty and admiration.

“Does he?” There was a note of sarcasm in his voice which disappeared, and he said no more after he had read her eyes. 89

She misinterpreted the change in him. “I have stayed too long,” she worried. “You are tired.” She remembered the chicken. “I brought you something.” She put the plate of fowl beside him.

He viewed it in joyous anticipation. “Fine,” he shouted. “If there is one thing I love, it is fried chicken. How did you guess it?”

She smiled at Miss Knight who had joined them. “A bird told me,” she answered him.

The nurse put her hands on her hips and viewed the visitor with marked suspicion at this remark, but, as if satisfied that her distrust was unfounded, she retired to the diet kitchen from which hearty laughter immediately thereafter resounded.

“Good bye,” she told him almost shyly.

His good spirits had returned. “You and I are friends, and remember, we are always going to be friends.”

She nodded and said again, “Good bye, Mr. Curtis.”

“My friends call me Joe,” he reminded her.

Virginia hesitated, and then, “Good bye–Joe,” she whispered and left the ward with a sweet little smile.

In the hall Miss Knight rejoined her. “Before you go I want to show you something which is our pride and joy at the present moment,” she explained to the girl. She opened a door and displayed a beautifully furnished room which glistened in its cleanliness.

“It is very attractive, but why is the room different?” asked Virginia.

The nurse pointed to a bronze tablet. It bore the name of the donor, one well known in South 90

Ridgefield.

“What a beautiful idea,” the girl exclaimed.

“Isn’t it?” responded the nurse. “The gift includes not only the furniture but the endowment of the bed for five years.” She laughed. “The man who gave it is ahead of the game. He was hurt in a railroad accident and was here for a couple of months. He sued the railroad company and collected more than enough from them to do this.”

Afterwards, by Virginia’s express wish, she was taken to the nursery and permitted to hold a recently arrived guest in her arms, who happened at the moment to be awake. She was allowed to peek into the maternity ward with its beds filled with women, and her tour ended in the dispensary where she met Dr. Jackson and a nurse who were busily engaged in caring for the ailments of the sick babies the mothers brought in from outside. At last she left for home, and on the way she thought of this strange new world she had been shown in this big brick building, but principally she thought of a pair of black eyes that laughed and of the gross injustices to which down trodden motorcyclists were the victims.

Later that afternoon, Miss Knight was very busy among the shining utensils in the diet kitchen when she was disturbed by another visitor.

“I beg your pardon,” said a voice, “but could you direct me to a patient? My name,” he continued suavely, “is Wilkins–Hezekiah Wilkins.” He wiped his bald head, and went on. “It’s very warm today–extremely so.”

“Sure, it’s warm,” agreed Miss Knight, “and this electric heater makes it a darn sight warmer.” 91

Hezekiah intended to give the nurse a look of sympathetic understanding, but ended by giving her a friendly grin. “I comprehend your point of view,” he added. “A trip to a pleasant resort would be more agreeable, don’t you think?”

Miss Knight viewed his words in the sense of a tentative invitation and considered the merriment in his eyes suspicious in one of his age. She froze and demanded with the utmost frigidity, “Whom do you wish to see?”

Utterly innocent that he had all but persuaded this sophisticated nurse that he was one of those aged profligates of whom young women had best beware, Hezekiah drew forth an envelope upon which he had entered certain notes which he now found difficult to decipher, and told her.

She led the way and the lawyer followed through the ranks of curious eyes. He vigorously mopped at his shining cranium and held his inverted panama before him as if taking a collection of errant drops of moisture that they might not mar the polished floor. This detracted from the dignity of Hezekiah’s progress.

Seating himself by Joe Curtis’s bed, the attorney gazed at the youth for a few moments in polite curiosity.

The motorcyclist returned the look with one of undisguised distrust.

“My name is Hezekiah Wilkins,” announced the lawyer when the mutual scrutiny had continued so long that it threatened to become embarrassing. “I have reasons to believe that I am speaking 92 to Mr. Joseph Tolliver Curtis.”

“You’ve got me, Steve,” responded Joe.

“I’ve what?” inquired Hezekiah, much perplexed. Light dawned upon him. “Oh, yes–quite so–assuredly,” he indulged in a soft chuckle. “I am dense at times. Slow might be better, eh?” Again he chuckled. “Slow for the rising generations, particularly–” he smiled genially at Joe–“when they ride motorcycles.”

Joe abated none of his vigilance. His policy was that of watchful waiting.

“The day is very warm,” continued Hezekiah, looking about the ward with interest. “This is a delightfully cool and pleasant place. You are to be congratulated upon having such comfortable quarters in which to recuperate.”

“Say!” Joe’s voice was distinctly hostile. “Are you the advertising agent for this hospital?”

Hezekiah’s trained ear sensed unfriendliness abroad. He changed his manner of approach with the quickness of a skilled strategist. “Mr. Curtis,” he went on briskly, “I represent Mr. Obadiah Dale. You have no doubt heard of him?”

Joe nodded.

“Your motorcycle ran into Mr. Dale’s automobile yesterday,” the lawyer resumed. “I do not come to seek compensation for the injury to his car. I am delighted, finding you as I do upon a bed of pain, to be upon a much pleasanter mission.” Hezekiah smiled benignantly. “There was a witness to the accident. With some difficulty, I have located him and procured his statement. While it may 93 be conceded that this person has no special skill or training in estimating the speed of moving vehicles, he is” (the attorney’s manner expressed assurance) “prepared to testify that you were operating your machine at a speed in excess of that permitted by law.” He paused as if awaiting an incriminating admission.

“Go on,” snapped Joe.

Hezekiah continued with increased emphasis. “Assuming this to be true, it appears that you were entirely or in part responsible for the accident and the consequent damage to Mr. Dale’s car and

your own person."

"Not on your life," cried Joe with great excitement. "I have a witness who says the Dale car was to blame for the accident and that it was exceeding the speed limit."

"Surely." Mr. Wilkins chuckled. "There are always witnesses for both sides. My gracious, if this were not true how could we have law suits? It's the reputation of a witness for truth and veracity which counts in court, my boy."

"I know it."

"Admitting your witness," Hezekiah resumed with great cheerfulness, "the speed of your own machine is certain to be the subject of controversy. My client has no desire to enter into this. He waives it." Hezekiah likewise waved his glasses and then went on speaking much more rapidly as one hurrying to be rid of a task in which he has no heart. "My client not only waives your personal responsibility and the material damage suffered by him, but authorizes me, in his behalf, to tender you this check in the sum of twenty-five dollars to assist in the defrayment of your hospital expenses." 94

Joe Curtis's eyes flashed with temper. "Obadiah Dale and his money can go straight to the devil," he roared, in a voice which startled the entire ward and made the lawyer jump.

"Calm yourself, Sir," urged Hezekiah. "Undue excitement is injudicious in your physical condition. Bless my soul, there may be grounds for differences over the sum tendered, but I can see no reason for intense anger."

Down the aisle came Miss Knight, stern of face. "Say," she demanded, "do you think that this is a livery stable, Joe? If you do, you had better wake up. That rough stuff doesn't go around here. Do you get me?"

He gave her a most sheepish glance. "Sister," he began.

The nurse's eyes flashed. "Must I speak to you again about that 'sister' habit. I won't stand for it." She explained to the lawyer, "I not only have to nurse these men but I have to teach them manners, too."

Before her righteous indignation, a great meekness descended upon Joe. "I am sorry, Miss Knight. I didn't mean to start a rough house, only I–got mad." He smiled at her.

She surrendered to his humility and that smile. She adjusted his pillow and brushed the hair back from his eyes with her hand. "You are a bad boy, Joe. I am going to forgive you for this, but the next time you start anything, you will be punished." She shook a threatening finger at him. "Do you understand?"

"Yes'm," he answered in the tone and manner of a naughty small boy. He rolled his head towards the lawyer. "I owe you an apology for losing my temper." 95

"Never mind, my boy," said Hezekiah, who had viewed the calming of the storm with relief. "A gale clears the atmosphere. Plain speaking begets clear understanding." Resuming his glasses, the lawyer regarded the youth with great friendliness, and, after a moment, deemed it safe to go on. "You expressed yourself so–ah–" (he sought for an inoffensive term) "with such certainty of feeling that I assume that you have determined upon some measure of adjustment yourself."

Again Joe Curtis's eyes flashed. "There can be no adjustment between Obadiah Dale and me," he answered coldly.

"No?" Hezekiah's regret had the ring of sincerity. "In a friendly spirit towards you, my boy," he urged, "I would advise against the development of an hostile feeling towards Mr. Dale. He had no more to do with that accident than the man in the moon."

"I know it," admitted Joe.

"The institution of an action at law is an expensive proceeding. As a lawyer I warn you that the outcome would be extremely uncertain. Who can tell what a jury will do?" Hezekiah shook his head solemnly, thereby registering his grave doubts of the action of twelve men good and true.

"Institute an action," repeated Joe, his eyes dancing with mischief. "Say, Uncle, when I sue that old skate, it sure is going to be some case."

Hezekiah waxed indignant. This may have been due either to Joe's intimation of relationship to himself or to the opprobrious designation of his client as an old skate. "Don't mislead yourself," he exclaimed peevishly. "You will be thrown out of court." 96

Joe ruffled visibly. "Who is going to throw me out of court?" he demanded. "Obadiah Dale?" Another idea struck him. He gave the lawyer a most threatening and pugnacious glance. "Maybe you think *you* can do it?"

Hezekiah's amazement at the suspicion that either he or his client contemplated physical violence upon this young giant, swathed in bandages, was extreme. "Gorry diamonds, you must be crazy," he gasped, and then the other's point of view came to him. He burst into a big booming peal of honest amusement, an infectious laugh which brought instant peace. "My friend," he chuckled, "you misunderstand me. I attempted to suggest that in view of the evidence which I can produce, a court would refuse to consider your claim."

"Not with the witness I have," Joe insisted.

"Well, what about this wonderful witness of yours?" chuckled Hezekiah, comfortable in the

assurance of holding the master hand.

“My witness” (the calmness of his voice did not quite conceal a note of exultation in it) “is Virginia Dale.”

CHAPTER VIII
ANOTHER OPPORTUNITY

In the Dale home, dinner was served in the middle of the day on Sunday, and Serena caused the meal to partake of the nature of a banquet. Abstemious in week day luncheons, Obadiah succumbed to the flesh pots on the seventh day and thereafter relapsed into slumber during digestion even as a boa-constrictor.

He was sleeping off his Sunday engorgement in a porch chair. His head drooped awkwardly and he had slumped into his best clothes, while from time to time he choked and coughed and made weird noises. All about him lay the peace of a summer Sabbath broken only by the low hum of the bees gathering sweetness from the blooming honeysuckle vine near by. Only the energetic resisted the combined attacks of plenteousness and the somnolent afternoon.

Virginia had not surrendered to the soporific tendencies of the hour. She had conversed with her father until made aware that, mentally speaking, he was no longer with her. Such knowledge is discouraging even to the most enthusiastic of female dialogists, and so, as the minutes passed, her words lost force and her sentences fire. Compelled to seek other fields of interest, the girl strolled aimlessly about the lawn until she came to the gate. The street looked cool and inviting beneath its arching elms and she moved down it slowly. She had almost reached the corner when a woman’s voice sounded from an awning shaded porch, “Virginia, come here. Don’t you pass my house without stopping.” It was Mrs. Henderson.

“Yes, Hennie, I’m coming. I was sure that you were taking a nap.” The girl turned up a walk, bordered with blooming rose bushes, towards an old-fashioned house. “You are as busy as usual, I suppose?” she continued, after she had been affectionately greeted by her hostess.

Mrs. Henderson nodded. No other woman in South Ridgefield gave as much of her time and, proportionately, of her wealth to help others as did this strangely constituted widow. Hers was a frank nature, given to the expression of its views without regard to time or place. She had the faculty of so phrasing her remarks that they cut their victim cruelly and convulsed her hearers. So, respected for her innate goodness, and feared for her sharp tongue, Mrs. Henderson had many acquaintances but few friends. She was judged in the light of a magazine of high explosives, dangerous to those near, but likely to blow up if left without attention. Many were her friends because they were afraid not to be, but there were those who appreciated her character. Strangely, these were they who had waged mighty battles with her, to emerge from strife her devoted adherents. Having felt her sting, they dubbed her harmless as a dove, delighting in her intimate companionship. Such a one had been Virginia’s mother.

But Obadiah had no place in this category. Soon after the death of his wife, Mrs. Henderson had discovered that a girl who worked in his mill was sick and in dire want. She asked him to assist the sufferer, but, to her surprise, the mill owner refused. Thereupon, Mrs. Henderson, without mincing words, expressed her opinion of him. Also, she repeated her remarks to a friend.

Obadiah’s legs were thin, and under stress of excitement he pitched his voice high. When it became known that Mrs. Henderson had likened the mill owner, to his face, to a mosquito sucking blood from his employees, the whole town laughed. The tale spread to his mill, during a time of labor unrest, and a cartoon portraying the manufacturer as a mosquito hovering about emaciated workers was circulated.

A strike followed in which the employees were successful and Obadiah never forgave Mrs. Henderson for giving a weapon to his opponents. Yet, strangely enough, he had never attempted to interfere with her friendship for his daughter. Possibly, knowing the widow, he feared that she would openly defy him, and, abetted by Serena, carry the war into his own house, to the greater enjoyment of his fellow townsmen.

As Mrs. Henderson welcomed Virginia, she was thinking of other things than Obadiah. She was filled with amusement and gave vent to laughter. “Dearie, how on earth did you get mixed up with that minstrel parade? I never dreamed that my little girl would startle this town.” Again the widow gave way to merriment. She was thinking of a group of women she had caught discussing with great unkindness the outcome of the girl’s efforts to make the pickaninnies happy. Hennie’s championship of her favorite had been unusually vigorous, and the endeavors of the critics to reverse themselves had resembled a stampede.

“We had nothing to do with the parade,” Virginia told her. “We followed it so that the orphans might enjoy the music. As we had nearly frightened them out of their wits, I took them for a ride to make up.”

“I heard how you came to take the orphans for a ride. I could understand that, but the minstrel part puzzled me,” Mrs. Henderson’s amusement faded into seriousness. “That ride idea is a splendid one. It would add so much to the happiness of those children.” She continued, “I have

been on the Board of that Home for years. There are so many things to be done over there and so little to do with. No one is particularly interested in the place. We must find some way, though, to arrange rides for those orphans now that you have started things going."

Virginia was instantly fired with great enthusiasm. "I'll take them out each week, myself," she promised.

Mrs. Henderson smiled. "We can't allow you to continue to excite too much interest in this town."

The girl disregarded the objection. "But I started it, Hennie."

"That is very true, but you can't expect your father to let you use his fine car for those children. Anyway, it is not necessary to bother about that, because it is entirely too small. We need a truck. Something in which movable seats can be placed."

"Like those at the mill? Why not ask Daddy for one of them?" suggested Virginia.

"They would be the very thing," Mrs. Henderson admitted, but she shook her head hopelessly. 101
"Your father would never let you have one of them. We must look elsewhere."

"Oh, yes, he will, Hennie," Virginia assured her with great confidence. The widow's doubting eye moved the girl to remonstrate, "You don't know him at all. I think that it is the strangest thing, that you have been my father's neighbor all of these years and don't understand him better."

Mrs. Henderson displayed sudden stern-eyed interest in a flower bed upon her lawn, and the toe of her shoe softly tapped the floor of the porch.

The girl leaned towards the older woman, her face aglow with pride and admiration, as she searched for some acknowledgment of her words. "Daddy is so noble and so good," she explained in a voice modulated by tenderness. "He spends all of his time thinking about other people."

The lines of Mrs. Henderson's mouth relaxed, and the tempo of the tapping toe slowed. Her eyes twinkled merrily.

"Isn't it wonderful, Hennie?" and Virginia looked up to a face for a moment puzzled.

"Very wonderful, child," responded the widow, and Virginia never dreamed that there was a delicate note of sarcasm in the voice. Leaning forward, Mrs. Henderson clasped the girl's hand. "Your father is a lucky man to have such love and affection," she said, and then as though thinking aloud, she murmured, "I hope that he appreciates it." After a pause she returned to the subject of the orphans with great vigor. "Some one in this town must loan us a truck. That is all 102
there is about it."

"Let Daddy do it. He will love to."

The hopeful enthusiasm of the girl was lost upon the older woman. "Well, it will do no harm to give him the opportunity," she conceded dryly; "but I wouldn't count on it too much if I were you." Suddenly, she remembered something. "Dear me, I almost forgot it. I must run over to the Lucinda Home a minute. You come along, dear," she urged.

"Hennie, I can't. I haven't a hat. I am not dressed to go out."

Mrs. Henderson smiled. "It doesn't make any difference what you wear over there. Most of the old ladies are so nearly blind that they can't tell what you have on."

So Virginia agreed to go, and, as the distance to the institution was short, in a few minutes they entered the grounds.

The Lucinda Home for Aged Women occupied a large brick building. A triple-decked porch, supported by posts and brackets of ornamental iron work covered the entire front of the edifice and afforded delightful resting places from which to view the beautiful grounds.

The two women ascended the steps to the lower porch. On either side of the entrance stretched a line of chairs occupied by old ladies. They rocked and fanned and stared across the grounds with dulled, unseeing eyes, as if watching and waiting for something.

The afternoon light flashed against the spectacles. It brought out the snow of the moving heads. 103
It showed the deep carved lines of age and it disclosed the hands, knotted and toil worn.

Once these faces were soft and full; these eyes snapped with health and joy. Love showered its kisses. The world showed wondrously beautiful in the tender light of romance and the voice of hope rang clear and strong. Came babies for these hands to fondle and caress, and tiny forms to be upheld as little feet struggled in first steps upon the rough and hilly path. Noble deeds of unselfishness gleamed in the shadowed lives of these women as they battled with the adversities which all who live must face. Slowly their beauty faded; their eyes no longer sparkled; their hands were red and hard. Little ones grew into men and women and went away, filled with hope and proud in their strength, leaving loneliness behind. Through the years, a shadow, almost indiscernible to youthful eyes, drew ever closer. One by one, they had seen friends and loved ones pass behind the black veil, until they were alone in a world, cold, loveless, without hope, waiting––

Waiting. Yes, waiting–slowly rocking and fanning–living anew the past, and peering out into the sunshine as if they sought with their poor eyes to glimpse the approach of that enfolding shadow of mystery.

The visitors paused for a moment at the entrance, sobered by the tragedy of age. Near them, an old woman became suddenly active. The sweep of her chair increased as she glanced at Virginia.

She stopped and whispered to her neighbor.

104 This aged one started, as if awakened from slumber, and she, too, inspected the girl. Then, she placed her lips by the ear of her deaf companion and in a shrill voice of great carrying power, cried, “Powder makes her look pale. They all use it nowadays.” She stopped for breath and screamed, “Her dress is too short. Her mother ought to have better sense than to let her run around that way.”

Luckily for the embarrassed girl, at this moment Mrs. Henderson led her into the reception room and left her to regain her composure while she transacted her business with the matron in an adjoining room.

The remarkable quiet which reigned in this home of age oppressed Virginia, so that when Mrs. Henderson returned with the matron, she cried, impulsively, “Oh, Hennie, I am glad that you are back. This place is so still that it is lonesome.”

Mrs. Henderson turned to Mrs. Smith, the matron. “That is what I have always said,” she argued. “The old ladies like it quiet, but we overdo it here. The place is a grave. We should have more entertainment.” She looked questioningly at the girl. “What do you think should be done, child?”

Virginia’s blue eyes were very serious as she answered, “I hardly know–almost anything which would make it happier. It needs something to stir it up,” she ended impulsively.

The older woman laughed and Mrs. Henderson put her arm about the girl’s waist, and suggested, “You have nothing on your hands, child. Why can’t you arrange some sort of an entertainment for these elderly women?”

“Oh, I couldn’t,” she demurred shyly.

105 “Certainly you can, you are quite old enough to undertake the task of making these old people happier for an afternoon.”

Into the girl’s mind came a remembrance of her birthday gift. “I will be glad to do it, Hennie,” she agreed with great seriousness.

They paused at Mrs. Henderson’s gate as they returned from the Lucinda Home. “Won’t you come in, dear?” urged the older woman.

The girl, dreamily engaged in planning marvelous but impossible entertainments for the stirring up of the old ladies, did not hear.

“Come and have tea with a solitary somebody?” the widow begged the girl wistfully. “You think that the Lucinda Home is lonesome, but don’t forget that an old lady who loved your mother and who loves you is lonesome, too.”

“Dearest Hennie, you haven’t the slightest idea of what loneliness is.” Virginia smiled sweetly at the older woman and kissed her. “I would enjoy taking tea with you but I must not forget my father. Probably all afternoon he has been making plans to help the people who work in his mill. I think he is so like my mother–always trying to make other people happier. You loved her, Hennie, and you know him. I want you to help me to be unselfish like them.”

During this recital, Mrs. Henderson underwent a severe test in self-repression, the high praise of Obadiah’s disinterestedness nearly causing severe internal injury. There was yet an ominous flash in her eye as she bade the girl farewell.

106 Virginia found her father awaiting her. His digestive organs were protesting by certain unpleasant twinges, against the extra work he had forced upon them.

“Where have you been?” he demanded of her sharply.

She dropped into the chair by his side. “At Mrs. Henderson’s, Daddy.”

“You left me alone,” he complained.

“You went to sleep and I was so lonesome, Daddy dear.”

“That makes no difference. You should not have left me. You have the week days to yourself. I ought to have your Sundays.”

“Oh, I am sorry that I was so thoughtless,” Virginia reproached herself, with a suspicion of tears in her eyes.

“Yes, you were thoughtless,” Obadiah grumbled. “You must learn to think of others. Don’t get teary. That always disturbs me.”

Virginia was engaged in a battle to keep back her tears when the notes of a ragtime melody resounded through the calm of the Sabbath evening. Ike approached. The gorgeousness of his apparel eliminated every variety of lily, except the tiger, from consideration. His suit was of electric blue. His shirt was white, broadly striped with royal purple, and it peeped modestly from beneath a tie of crimson. His hat was straw, decorated with a sash of more tints than the bow of promise.

Ike was happy. He had loitered through the afternoon before the meeting house of his faith, impressing the brethren and the sisters with the magnificence of his attire. He deemed it, socially 107 speaking, to have been a perfect day.

It was now his intention to partake of refreshment before returning again into the shadow of the sacred edifice, not then, however, to give pleasure to the faithful in general, but rather for the

special and particular delight of an amber hued maiden who at the moment held his flitting fancy.

Filled with pleasant anticipations and in cadence with his melody, Ike approached the house.

Obadiah arose hastily as the sweet tones struck his ear and awaited the arrival of the musical one at the edge of the porch.

At the sight of the gaunt form of the manufacturer, a dulcet timbre departed from Ike's performance and as he approached, the volume of sound diminished in proportion to the square of the distance. Opposite the mill owner it ceased.

"Good evening Misto Dale." The voice was humbly courteous.

Disdaining the kindly salutation of his hireling, Obadiah made outcry. "I want the car. Get the car," he commanded.

Ike halted.

These were portentous words. The Dale car was not often used on the seventh day. Ike himself was opposed to the Sunday riding habit. Assuming a confidential attitude towards his employer as if imparting a secret of moment, he intimated, "Ah ain' got no confidence in dat lef' han' hin' tiah, Misto Dale, a tall."

Obadiah glared at the tasty garb of his minion with disgust, and flew into a rage. "I pay you to 108
put confidence in that tire," he bleated.

"Yas'r, yas'r," Ike surrendered hurriedly. "Ah gwine pump er li'l aiah in dat tiah. Dat fix 'im."

When Ike, shorn of his finery, returned with the car, Virginia, in obedience to an abrupt invitation from her father, was prepared to join him for the ride.

Obadiah's conscience did not usually trouble him; but today, as the machine started and he settled himself by his daughter, it struck him that she seemed unusually pale. He could not well overlook, either, the note of sadness which had played about the girl's mouth and eyes since his remarks to her. These things made Obadiah uncomfortable. His explosion at Ike had acted as a counter-irritant to his indigestion, and he felt relieved.

They passed a woman driving a pretty runabout. In times of great good feeling Obadiah had avowed his intention of purchasing Virginia a light car which she could drive herself. However, it took direct affirmative action to persuade the mill owner to open his check book even for his own family; and, as Virginia had been contented with the big car and Ike to drive it, nothing had ever come of the intention.

"Did you notice that runabout?" Obadiah inquired. "How would one of that type suit you?" If he could get Virginia to chatter along as usual, he could enjoy his evening.

"Oh, I'd like it," she exclaimed. The girl was thinking rapidly. Not for nothing was she Obadiah's daughter when it was necessary to take advantage of a situation. "I thought that you had given 109
up the idea of getting me a car, Daddy."

"No, indeed. It seemed to me that you were not particularly interested in one." He shrewdly placed the responsibility for delay upon her.

"I am *now*. More so than ever," Virginia declared. "I wasn't sure before what kind of a car I wanted. Now I know."

"Well?" Obadiah's enthusiasm in the proposed purchase had cooled as hers increased.

She squeezed his arm up against her and announced breathlessly, "I want a truck, Daddy."

"A truck!" Obadiah viewed his daughter as if he deemed the immediate attentions of an alienist essential in her case. "What on earth would you do with a truck?"

"I need it to take those colored orphans out for a ride each week," she explained, full of the plan. "I am going to have benches made to fit on each side of the truck so that it will take them all comfortably. Isn't it a fine idea?"

Obadiah, dumfounded for the moment, regained speech and sought information as one who had not heard aright. "Do you mean to say that you want me to buy a truck to haul those negro children around town?"

"Yah–yah–yah." Upon the front seat, Ike so far forgot the proprieties of his station that he gave vent to noisy merriment at the domestic perplexities of gentlefolk.

"Keep your mind on your business," Obadiah commanded, glaring at his chauffeur's neck.

Virginia, disregarding the *faux pas* of the chauffeur and its condign reproof, proceeded to explain 110
her plans. "We have decided, Daddy, that those orphans must be taken for a ride every week."

"Who has decided that?"

"Hennie and I have worked it all out."

"What has that woman got to do with it?" he snapped. "Does she expect me to buy trucks to haul all the negro children in town on pleasure trips?"

Violent paroxysms beset Ike and bent him as a sapling in a gale.

Obadiah's eyes glared at the black neck as if, discharging X-rays, they might expose the chauffeur's malady.

Heedless of disturbing influences, Virginia went on, “Hennie thought that this car was too small. She felt that it would be better to get a truck which would carry all the orphans than to use this.”

“Indeed!” interjected Obadiah.

“I suggested to her that I would get you to loan us a truck from the mill; but Hennie said that she was sure that you wouldn’t let us have it.”

“Ahem–ahem,” choked the mill owner, getting red in the face.

“I told her that I knew you would be glad to let us have it because you did so love to help people,” explained Virginia with great pride.

Obadiah shifted uneasily in his seat. “What did she say?”

“Hennie said that she wished me success.”

Obadiah relaxed as one relieved from strain.

Sensing the change in him, Virginia cuddled up to her father full of happiness and contentment as if the purchase of the truck was settled. “Isn’t it sweet, Daddy dear,” she murmured gently, “within an hour after I talked to Hennie you offer to buy me a car? Of course, you don’t care, so long as I am satisfied, whether I choose a runabout or a truck.” She took his hand and held it in her own, pressing it. 111

Obadiah appeared greatly interested in something upon the skyline.

“A truck,” Virginia continued thoughtfully, “especially a fine large one such as we would need–” Obadiah flinched–“would be in the way. Our garage wouldn’t hold it and Serena would object to it being left in the yard.” She arrived at a sudden determination. “Choose, Daddy, whether you will buy me a truck or loan me one from the mill.”

Obadiah’s response was not delayed. “You had better use a mill truck,” he agreed with a sigh which might have been of relief.

“Thank you, Daddy. I can hardly wait to tell Hennie,” she exclaimed, highly delighted at the outcome of her efforts.

Obadiah leaned towards his chauffeur. “Ike,” he ordered, “you get the new truck down at the mill, the first thing in the morning. Run it out to Mrs. Henderson’s house. Make all the row around her place you wish. Tell her,” Obadiah continued, “that it is there by my instructions, to take those negro orphans riding.” He paused. “Ike,” he resumed more forcibly, “don’t you forget the noise.”

“Yas’r,” promised Ike with happy smiles of anticipation.

“That will be a dandy joke on Hennie,” giggled Virginia. “Go very early, Ike.” 112

They were following a boulevard which now brought them to the Soldiers’ Home. Its fine buildings and large acreage were matters of great pride to South Ridgefield. As they approached the central group of edifices, they heard music.

“Let’s stop for the band concert,” suggested Virginia.

Obadiah, much relieved physically and mentally from recent disquietude, was unusually complaisant. “Drive in, Ike,” he directed.

They turned into a broad, paved road which followed the sides of a square about which were located the principal buildings of the institution. It bounded a tree shaded park with a band-stand in the center. Walks radiating to the sides and corners of the square were lined with benches occupied by veterans in campaign hats and blue uniforms, smoking, chatting, and enjoying the music.

The inner edge of the roadway was lined with automobiles full of visitors. Ike stopped upon the opposite side, in front of the quarters of the Commanding Officer.

Hardly had they paused when a tall, fine looking man of a distinctly military bearing, despite his white hair, hurried out to meet them.

“Mr. Dale,” he greeted the manufacturer in a big booming voice, “I am glad to welcome you to the Home.”

Obadiah genially returned the salutation of Colonel Ryan. That officer, being a man of rank, in charge of the Soldiers’ Home, with power of recommendation in government purchases, was one whose acquaintance it was wise for even wealthy mill owners to cultivate. 113

When presented to Virginia, the Colonel bowed deeply. “I want you to come up to the house and meet Mrs. Ryan,” he urged. “You can hear the music more comfortably there. I am proud of my band. They are old fellows like you and me, Dale, but give them a horn and they have lots of musical ‘pep’ left.”

Mrs. Ryan met them at the head of the porch steps. “You have often heard me speak of Mr. Dale,” the Colonel, discreetly noncommittal as to his manner of speaking, reminded her.

“Oh, yes, and I have heard of you, too.” She smiled at Virginia and explained to Obadiah, “I happen to have a good friend in that splendid Mrs. Henderson, your neighbor.”

The mill owner received this information with little enthusiasm, but, learning that Mrs. Ryan was a victim of rheumatism, he advocated the use of a liniment prepared by his father and applied

with remarkable results to both man and beast. Obadiah was hazy upon the mixture's ingredients but was clear upon its curative qualities. Mrs. Ryan evincing marked interest, the manufacturer entertained her with the intimate details of miraculous recoveries.

Neither Virginia nor the Colonel being rheumatic, they failed to give Obadiah's discourse the rapt interest of a true brother in pain. Their attention wavered, wandered and failed, and the band played a crashing air; but the rheumatic heeded not.

All hope of a general conversation having departed, the Colonel praised his band to Virginia. 114
"Every man in that organization is over sixty years old," he bragged. "They get as much pleasure out of playing as their audience does from their concert. It's a great band."

"They *do* play well," the girl agreed. "I don't wonder that you are proud of them. I love a brass band, myself. You do, too, Colonel Ryan. I can tell by your face, when they play."

The Colonel grinned boyishly. "Yes," he admitted, "I think a band is one of humanity's boons. I can't get close enough to one, when they are playing, to satisfy me. I have to have some sort of an excuse to do that, now-a-days–you'll do fine–let's go nearer."

The medical lecture was disturbed, that the audience might nod understandingly to its husband, as they departed.

The Colonel chatted gaily. In the presence of a pretty woman he was a typical soldier. About them were the benches filled with the white headed veterans, as they entered the square. But a few years and these had been the fighting men of the country–its defence–playing parts modest or heroic on a hundred half forgotten battle fields. Now, they, too, bowed with age, rested in their years, and waited–waited calmly, as true soldiers should, with the taste of good tobacco upon their lips and the blare of martial music in their ears, the coming of the ever nearing shadow.

"Why have I never heard this band down town, Colonel Ryan? It is a shame when they play so beautifully. Do they charge for concerts?" asked Virginia, as an idea developed behind the blue eyes.

"People want young and handsome men to play for them if they pay for it," laughed Colonel Ryan. 115
"So my old codgers don't get many chances of that sort."

"Who has charge of the band?" Virginia's manner meant business.

The Colonel loved a pretty face. He was enjoying himself. "Do you want to object to the leader about his interpretation of a favorite air?"

"Don't tease, Colonel Ryan," she protested. "I want to know who has authority to make engagements for the band. Please be serious."

"You frighten me into submission, Miss Dale. Do you wish to engage the band?"

"I do, Colonel Ryan." The girl's voice was almost imploring.

He looked down into the depths of the pleading eyes. Never in his long life had he refused a pretty woman anything, and it is doubtful if he could have done so. Yet, he desired to prolong the pleasure of the moment. "May I ask, without undue curiosity, for what purpose you desire the organization?"

"I want them to give a concert for the old ladies at the Lucinda Home," she explained.

Colonel Ryan choked. He recovered himself quickly. Military training is of value in difficult moments.

"I was over there this afternoon, Colonel Ryan. The place was so lonesome that I thought it needed some excitement. They asked me to give an entertainment. Your band would be the very thing. It plays so loud that even the deaf ladies could hear."

He who had borne the burden of a regiment of men bowed sympathetically, but his face and neck 116
displayed symptoms of apoplexy.

"The Lucinda Home is a graveyard, Colonel Ryan. When I see all of these old men sitting around and talking and smoking while the band plays lively airs to them, it makes me sorry for those women. I should love to live here. But I should die over there. It is dreadful to be lonesome."

Colonel Ryan agreed with great gravity.

Virginia waxed forceful. "Those old ladies should be made as happy as these soldiers," she argued. "Isn't a woman as good as a man, Colonel Ryan?"

The Commandant by his silence refused this challenge to a discussion upon woman's rights.

"Those old ladies should have everything that these men have," maintained the girl, with great emphasis.

"Including tobacco?" suggested the Colonel solicitously.

"Of course not." Blue eyes snapped indignantly.

The boyish look was back in the Colonel's face. "I only wanted to be sure," he explained soberly. "It has a very important place here."

"Oh, Colonel Ryan, you will joke, and I am so in earnest." Her eyes were dark and tender and a soft pink flushed her cheeks. "A concert at the Lucinda Home would be a wonderful thing if I

could get your band."

"You can," the Colonel promised, laconically, "and it won't cost you a cent." He became enthusiastic, "It will be a fine treat for the old ladies and my boys will enjoy it, too. I'll have to warn the old rascals about flirting," he chuckled. "They think that they are regular devils among the ladies. I think that I will have to come along myself to keep the old boys from breaking any ancient hearts."

"Will you come, Colonel Ryan?"

"Surely. You may count on me. Are there to be refreshments?"

"Why–yes!" She had never given a thought to them before, and when she considered the food that it would take it almost frightened her.

"My old boys can eat as well as ever, particularly if it is soft stuff. That band has less teeth than any similar organization in the world. It is the toothless wonder," chuckled the Colonel. "Be sure that you have plenty to eat."

As they ascended the steps of the Colonel's porch, Virginia warned him, "Don't mention the concert to my father. I want to surprise him."

They found that Obadiah had exhausted his praises of the marvelous liniment. Mrs. Ryan was now talking, and, though the subject-matter was the same, the mill owner was not a reciprocal listener. He felt that an immediate departure for home was necessary.

The Dale car rolled away from the Soldiers' Home, leaving the Commanding Officer standing, hat in hand, upon the curb. A broad smile broke over his face. "A band concert at the Lucinda Home," he chuckled. "You might as well give one out in the cemetery." His face softened. "Bless her heart," he whispered, as he turned back towards his house.

CHAPTER IX
HEZEKIAH HAS A SOLUTION

Mr. Jones had finished transcribing Obadiah Dale's morning dictation and awaited a fitting moment to place the letters before the manufacturer to receive his signature. Meanwhile, he smoked a cigarette and, with his face sadly distorted on account of the smoke, manicured his nails with his pocket knife.

This important part of a gentleman's toilet would gladly have been left by Mr. Jones to a professional manicurist, because of the more skilled attention and the valuable social privileges attached to such services, had not the chronically depleted condition of his purse demanded the exercise of rigorous economy.

In the glare of the pendant bulb, Kelly was engaged artistically in the preparation of a crude but libelous cartoon of the stenographer.

A moment of rest and mental relaxation had descended upon the personal staff of Obadiah. His hive of commercial industry had, for the moment, ceased to buzz. Suddenly, the hall door was thrown open. Mr. Jones suffered a severe laceration from the point of his own blade. Even the artistic soul of Kelly was shaken by the abrupt intrusion.

Hezekiah Wilkins entered. His manner was hurried. Not as a messenger bearing joyous news of great triumphs, but rather as an emissary charged with intelligence of bitter flavor, who desires to get rid of it, that he may turn to happier matters.

Having been courteously advised by the bleeding outer guard that the manufacturer was not engaged at the moment, Hezekiah entered the inner citadel. Obadiah was reading a voluminous mass of typewritten pages which he laid aside at the coming of his attorney. Waving the lawyer to a chair, he intimated that he awaited the further pleasure of his legal adviser.

Seating himself, Hezekiah shoved both of his feet as far in front of him as his short legs would permit. He studied the aspect of his shoes thus presented, as if he had never before appreciated their beauty.

"Well?" Obadiah spoke curtly.

"I wish to discuss the matter of that young man in the hospital. Curtis is his name–I think."

"All right," Obadiah agreed.

Hezekiah placed his palms together and gazed upwards as if in pious meditation upon the words which he was about to utter.

Obadiah viewed the attitude of his adviser with disapprobation. "Go ahead," he urged roughly. "Don't take all day."

The lawyer gave his employer a look of reproof. "It is very important," he announced with great calmness, "that legal matters be accurately presented so that the facts deduced shall afford a sound basis for correct judgment when appearing in court." Hezekiah explained with dignity. "I have found that a moment given to the correct logical presentation of facts tends to expedite a

just solution of perplexing questions." As he ceased speaking, he appeared to drift away into a condition of deep cogitation under the very eyes of his employer.

Before this display of profound thought, Obadiah was helpless. Properly chastened, he awaited in patience the outcome of the mental processes of his learned subordinate.

After a period in which no sound was heard but the ticking of the clock, Hezekiah recovered from his abstraction with a start, and announced, "This young Curtis refuses to accept your check."

"Bigger fool he," Obadiah responded with indifference.

Hezekiah turned sharply upon the mill owner, "I don't agree with you at all," he rapped.

Obadiah had great confidence in the judgment of his legal adviser. There had been times when failing to follow it had cost him money. He became uneasy. "Do you think that he has a case against me?"

"I would rather have his chances before a jury than yours."

"Is he going to bring suit?" Obadiah's uneasiness increased. He did not care to be at the mercy of a South Ridgefield jury. He usually was stuck.

"Yes, it's my opinion that he intends to bring an action against you. He displayed marked animus."

"He displayed what?"

"Animus–unfriendliness," Hezekiah interpreted.

Obadiah's uneasiness affected his temper. "Why don't you speak English?" he demanded, the pitch of his voice getting higher.

For an instant there was a flash in Hezekiah's eyes but when he spoke he was perfectly calm. "I beg pardon, I failed to make allowances for–your understanding." 121

Obadiah regarded his attorney angrily but made no reply. Years of experience had warned him against verbal combat with this man. Usually he did not awaken to the danger until he rankled under one of Hezekiah's darts.

Disregarding the exchange of compliments, the lawyer went on, perfectly unruffled, "Is there a reason for this young man to entertain ill will against you?"

"I never heard of the fellow before," protested Obadiah.

"Is he acquainted with your daughter?"

"No." Obadiah hesitated after his denial and modified it. "She helped to take him to the hospital and she has visited him since, I understand."

"Ah!" Comprehension lighted Hezekiah's face. "You told me," he suggested, "that your daughter considered herself to be to blame for the accident."

"Yes," Obadiah agreed with reluctance. "Virginia has a silly idea that she was at fault. She felt very badly over the matter."

"And went to the hospital to express her regret and conceded responsibility for the accident to the injured man. He told me that he could rely on your daughter as a witness in his behalf."

"I'll be hanged," cried Obadiah, the tone of his voice reminding one of Hennie's likening of him to a mosquito.

"You'll be stung with a fat verdict if he gets you into court with your own daughter testifying against you. That's what will happen to you. Probably she admitted responsibility in the presence of witnesses," Hezekiah pointed out with deepest pessimism. 122

"I won't have my daughter dragged into court as a witness against me," groaned Obadiah.

"How are you going to stop it? Ship her out of the state?" Hezekiah suggested with a promptness which displayed unethical resourcefulness in the suppression of embarrassing witnesses.

"Can't you arrange a compromise?" begged Obadiah.

"Not after this mistake." Hezekiah returned the check for twenty-five dollars. "I'm as popular as a mouse in a pantry with that young fellow after attempting to pass that on him." He gave the mill owner a glance of curiosity. "How far would you let me go now?"

"Use your own judgment, only keep Virginia out of court."

Both men were silent for a time and then the lawyer spoke. "I tried to sound young Curtis. I endeavored to discover if he had any settlement in mind. All I found was a pronounced hostility to you personally and," Hezekiah smiled reminiscently, "to me as your representative."

"That's your imagination," exclaimed Obadiah and then, after the custom of a malefactor of great wealth, went on, "How can we get at him? He must be got at."

"I might suggest something–," Hezekiah appeared doubtful, lacking in his usual assurance.

It irritated Obadiah to have this man upon whose judgment he had staked his fortune display indecision in this trivial affair. "Out with it! What's the matter with you? Have you got cold feet?" he stormed. 123

Hezekiah chuckled. “This case is complicated. The other side is most unfriendly. It’s pretty hard to keep out of court when the other fellow wants to put you there,” he argued, “I believe that I see a way if you will give me full authority to make such settlement as I deem advisable and,” Hezekiah shifted uneasily, “allow me the assistance of counsel.”

“Hezekiah Wilkins, have you gone crazy? Do you mean to ask me to hire another lawyer to help you in this insignificant automobile case?” groaned Obadiah.

“I haven’t asked you to employ a lawyer. I asked for counsel.”

“For the love of Mike, whose counsel do you require in this tempest in a teapot?” shouted the exasperated mill owner.

“I wish, with your permission, to ask your daughter Virginia to be of counsel.”

“Thunderation,” bawled Obadiah, shrilly, exploding with pent up aggravation. “Have you gone out of your wits?” He surveyed the lawyer as if he really believed his legal mentality to be addled. “Can’t I get it into your head–” he cast a look of utter contempt at the massive cranium of the lawyer–“that my interest in this case is to keep my daughter out of court? If it wasn’t for her, I’d let that brittle shanked motorcycling ass sue until they grow bananas in Canada.”

“Your verbal pyrotechnics are interesting but hardly germane to the subject,” Hezekiah reproved 124
his employer. “I have no intention of dragging your daughter into court in the guise of a Portia, although her beauty would––”

Obadiah’s temper was on edge. “Come to the point, sir,” he demanded. “Cut out the hot air. My time is worth money.”

For a moment Hezekiah gazed thoughtfully out of a window making strange gestures with his glasses. Then, turning to the mill owner he smilingly agreed. “As much valuable time has been utilized by you in prolix descriptions, possibly amusing, assuredly slanderous and not tending in the slightest degree to shed light upon our problem, I admit a necessity for expedition.”

Obadiah viewed his attorney with wrathful eyes but remained silent.

Even under the angry eyes of his employer a benignant look lighted the countenance of the lawyer and his voice was very gentle as he resumed, “It’s an old adage–‘Youth will be served.’ In its arrogance, youth defies the wisdom of age and the judgment of the ages. In its careless irresponsibility, it knows not danger. In its assurance and self-confidence it knows not fear. Clad in the armor of health, it basks in the sunshine of its strength and blatantly rejoices in its hopes.”

“Hezekiah Wilkins, are you sick, or what in the devil is the matter with you?” inquired the overwrought manufacturer.

“No, not sick, Obadiah,” Hezekiah explained placidly, “not sick, but happy–happy in that thought– 125
a distinctly attractive one, and exceptionally well-developed for your benefit. I regret,” the lawyer lamented, “that a stenographer was not present to preserve it. It is a pity that the world should lose it–that it should be lost to those who would understand and appreciate it–even love it.”

Obadiah sank deep into his chair, encircled by gloom, as, appreciating his inability to direct the train of his legal adviser’s thought, he allowed that worthy to pursue his own course.

“Youth calls to youth,” the sentimental Hezekiah continued. “Youth understands youth. Youth can persuade youth.” Suddenly the attorney seemed to thrust aside the gentle atmosphere in which he had been immersed, and, fixing a most crafty look upon Obadiah, he snapped, “You and I can’t handle that fellow, but your daughter can. It’s going to cost you some money, though.” He suffered a relapse. “Youth knows neither the value of time nor money.”

Obadiah was filled with relief. “By gum, you’ve hit it,” he shouted. “But why couldn’t you get that off your chest without throwing a fit?” he complained, ill-humoredly.

Once more Hezekiah reverted to sentiment. “The language of youth is song, and its thought poetry,” he sighed, after which he arose and faced the manufacturer across his desk. “I am authorized to proceed in accordance with my plan?” he asked–“to make the best settlement which in my judgment can be made in the premises, through,” he chuckled, “the extraordinary channels to which I have recourse?”

“Go the limit, only keep it out of court,” grumbled Obadiah. “Give such instructions as you wish 126
to Virginia and let her understand that I am only interested in an amicable adjustment and do not care to be bothered with details.”

As Hezekiah departed through the outer office, he interrupted a conversation between Mr. Jones and Kelly.

The stenographer met the intrusion with characteristic activity. Rushing to his desk, he seized the recently typed letters and bore them into Obadiah’s presence. His haste, if noted by the attorney, should have indicated that prolonged presence in the throne room had resulted in marked delay to the normal performance of imperial functions.

Apparently Hezekiah’s mind was engrossed by lighter matters. He moved spryly, whistling a cheery melody not at present in vogue but much in favor in his youth.

Mr. Jones came out of Obadiah’s room hurriedly. The sound of stern reproof came also, until it was shut off by the closing of the door. It seemed as if the spirit of the stenographer expanded in relief, in the familiar atmosphere of his own domain; as one who, having accomplished a hazardous journey, returns to the peace of his own fireside.

He entered Kelly's room with great dignity. Taking a position in the center, he raised his arms horizontally, inhaled a deep breath, bowed deeply, straightened up, exhaled, rose on his toes, descended, and dropped his arms.

The massive Kelly viewed this athletic exhibition with interest. "What's that exercise for?" he demanded. 127

Mr. Jones yawned. "It gives me relaxation from the strain," he answered.

"What strain? Where did you strain yourself?" asked Kelly with kindly interest in his friend's welfare.

"The office responsibility," explained the stenographer. "It knocks the sap out of a fellow." He lighted a cigarette.

"Oh, is that it?" Kelly gave a cruel laugh. "I thought you had sprung something. If you do that exercise often, young fellow, you'll bust a lung. Let's see you do it again," urged the bookkeeper, as if desirous of witnessing the fulfillment of his prophecy.

Without fear, Mr. Jones laid aside his cigarette with care, and gulped such a deep draught of air that he became red in the face and gave other evidences of being about to burst from undue pneumatic pressure.

Kelly viewed with undisguised amusement the undeveloped protuberance thrust forward in pride by the stenographer. "You haven't the chest expansion of a lizard," he told him.

Mr. Jones received this deadly insult in the midst of deep bowing. He exploded, and, leaning against a desk, breathed rapidly while the injured look in his eyes attempted to carry that reproof which his speechlessness otherwise forbade.

"If you do that exercise much," Kelly gloomily predicted, "you are going to relax in a wooden box. Who gave you that stuff? You must have been getting your ideas from the gymnasium of a bug house."

For obvious reasons Mr. Jones failed to reply.

"There is no sense in the thing. What you need is–" Kelly descended from his perch and seizing him, only that instant recovered from speechlessness, in his strong grasp, made exploratory investigations with his fingers throughout the panting one's anatomy. 128

"Ouch," wailed the pained Mr. Jones.

"Shut up. Do you want the old man out here? I'm not going to hurt you. I want to find out what ails you."

"Leggo, you are nearly killing me."

Mr. Jones rubbed himself ruefully when Kelly loosed him. "You big stiff, ain't you got no sense, gouging around in a fellow's insides that way? You are liable to put a man out of business," he protested.

Utterly indifferent to these complaints, Kelly was judging the stenographer coldly and dispassionately. "You've got no bone. You've got no muscle. You've got no fat." Kelly forgot that pride and dignity are intangible assets. "You'd better take correct breathing exercises or you'll get T. B.," he told him. "I shouldn't be surprised if you've got it now."

Naturally, Mr. Jones was greatly alarmed and showed it.

"Here's the way to take a breathing exercise." Kelly slowly inhaled a mighty volume of air until his chest arched forth in all of its magnificent development. He held it so for a moment and beat upon it resoundingly in accordance with the supposed custom of the orang-outang in moments of victory. "No tuberculosis there," he boasted, after exhaling with the rush of a gale of wind.

"That's some expansion, Kelly," the stenographer admitted, and he continued as in excuse for his own physical deficiencies, "I should take more exercise. My work is confining, and the strain is heavy. I'm all run down. The old man must have noticed it, too, because the other day he says to me, 'Mr. Jones, you're working too hard–it's telling on you–I'd give you a good rest if I could manage to get along without you.'" 129

Kelly burst into a roar of laughter. "If you wait for the old man to give you a rest, my son, you are going to get tired, believe me. Cut out the bluff for a minute. I want to talk seriously to you. You're in rotten physical condition and you owe it to yourself to keep from playing leading man at a funeral."

Mr. Jones's countenance registered horror.

Kelly went on. "I happen to know a darn sight more about physical training than I do about book-keeping. I ought to–I spent enough time around a college gymnasium when I should have been some place else."

Even Mr. Jones's alarm faded before this astounding information. "College," he remarked in surprise.

"Sure," Kelly grinned, "I spent a couple of years in college. I'm proud of them. I nearly flunked out before I learned that I leaned to muscle instead of to literature." He returned to the subject under discussion. "I can give you a bunch of exercises which will do you a lot of good in six months if you are faithful. I'll give you gentle exercises at first, darn gentle," he laughed,

"otherwise you'll snap something. I believe that I'll make a man out of you, young grasshopper." He shook his head wearily. "Gosh, but it's going to take a lot of work." 130

Mr. Jones flushed hotly. "Say," he said, "it's not necessary to insult me, is it?"

"Yes, you've got to use a harpoon to get anything through that rhinoceros' hide of egotism of yours." He fastened a stern and foreboding eye upon Mr. Jones. "Do you want to die?" he inquired.

Mr. Jones sought the motive behind the startling question. "What's going to kill me?" he demanded.

"Lack of air." Kelly's answer was obscure. It was too general. He thought it necessary to restate it with modifying amendments. "The lack of good fresh air," he concluded.

"Oh," said Mr. Jones, apparently much relieved at the distinction made.

"You want to get out into the air and breathe," Kelly explained as if the stenographer were carelessly given to omit this function.

"I don't have the time." Mr. Jones visualized a dignified stroll over a golf links.

Kelly gave thought to the difficulty. "A motorcycle would be the thing," he decided.

The effect upon Mr. Jones would have been no different if Kelly had prescribed an aeroplane or a submarine. "I can't ride a motorcycle, and even if I could, where can I get one?" he objected.

"That's the point." Kelly was as enthusiastic as a life insurance agent. "I have a friend who has one. He nearly killed himself on it and now he is in the hospital. I'll bet that he is tired of it and will sell it cheap."

"What do I want with the thing if it nearly killed him?" Mr. Jones protested logically. 131

"Don't be a fool. The motorcycle never hurt him. He ran into an automobile and hurt himself."

Mr. Jones believed the difference to be immaterial. "I won't ride a motorcycle," he declared obstinately.

Kelly clung to his scheme with constructive pride. "It's up to you, my friend," he argued. "You are going to die unless you get out into the air. I suggest the way to do it."

"Yes, and I'll get killed on the blamed old motorcycle," predicted Mr. Jones mournfully.

"Take your choice!" the generous Kelly invited. "I am going up to the hospital to see that fellow after office hours. Why don't you come along and meet him and then you can decide about the machine."

Mr. Jones, fearful that he might overlook an important engagement, consulted a note-book with care. After concluding his investigation of the records, he said, "Well, as I don't happen to have anything on, I don't mind going up there with you, but you can write it in your hat that I'm not strong for any motorcycle business."

Within a few moments after the prescribed closing hour, Obadiah's official staff appeared upon the streets of South Ridgefield. Their steps lead them towards the hospital and on the way they passed Mr. Vivian's cool oasis of refreshment amidst the burning sands of the town's business section.

Here, the confectioner and his assistants arrayed in pure white moved gracefully about, serving the guests with cooling drink or, from time to time, gave attention to the adjustment of the mechanical piano which furnished melody for the lovers of music. 132

Mr. Jones feasted his eyes upon this scene of innocent revelry and good fellowship. "Come on," he said to Kelly, "have a drink?"

Kelly received the invitation with insulting words. "That's your trouble," he exclaimed in a voice which carried far. "That's what makes your complexion so fierce."

The sensitive soul of Mr. Jones rebelled at this public outcry of his physical defects. "Say, you big chump," he burst out, "don't you know any better than to bawl a fellow out that way in a place where everybody can hear you? That's a dickens of a thing to do."

"Come on. Nobody was listening." Kelly looked about as if disappointed at failing to find an audience awaiting other personal allusions. "It's the truth," he maintained vigorously.

Mr. Jones hesitated, torn as many another good man, between his vanity and his appetite. Before his eyes flowed a tantalizing stream of those delicacies so dear to his palate. In his pocket reposed two dimes, his wealth until pay day on the morrow would replenish his purse. Why should not a good fellow entertain his friends even though they resort to personal comments? Rent by conflicting desires, he jingled the coins. As he fingered them, there flashed the remembrance of the war tax. He turned to Kelly and his voice was very sad, as he murmured, "I guess that you're right, old man. We'll cut out the sweet stuff."

They had no difficulty in locating Joe Curtis. His sunny characteristics had won him already wide spread friendships among the hospital staff, so that the way to his bed was indicated as the path to a neighbor's door. 133

Kelly grinned amiably at Miss Knight, and inquired, "May I speak to Joe Curtis?"

The nurse looked at the big fellow with the appraising eye of a connoisseur of men. "Sure," she

retorted, “if you can talk and he will give you a chance to.”

The participants in this repartee were much pleased with its cleverness. They laughed loudly.

Mr. Jones, considering the remarks frivolous, did not deign to unbend from a stately poise assumed by him when in the presence of ladies. Miss Knight was evidently a person of ordinary origin, lacking in discrimination. She had failed to notice the stenographer, confining her attentions, including her smiles, to the husky Kelly.

“Here’s another friend, Joe,” the nurse told the injured motorcyclist when they arrived at his bedside. She failed to take account of Mr. Jones who had progressed down the aisle with mien of great distinction. His entrance was marred only by a remark of a vulgar patient who in a coarse whisper desired to be advised, “Who let Charlie Chaplin in?” much to the amusement of other low fellows.

“Hello, Joe, how’s business?” asked Kelly.

“Fine, Mike, fine. Never better,” responded the patient.

“Meet my friend, Mr. Percy Jones.” The introduction was impaired as the stenographer’s attention was devoted to frowning down masculine giggles reminiscent of the reference to the illustrious movie star. 134

That the social exigencies of the moment might not be overlooked, Kelly dug a finger into the stenographer’s side.

Mr. Jones undulated as to a measure of the Hula Hula. “Wough,” he yelled. “Wot cher doin’?”

Happy laughter arose from nearby beds.

Miss Knight swept her recumbent charges with a glance of stern reproof. “Where’s your manners?” she demanded. “Cut out this rough stuff or–” she paused for effect and then launched this terrifying threat–“you’ll get no ice cream on Wednesday.” The male surgical cases quailed before this menace of cruel and unusual punishment. Peace reigned.

“Gentlemen, be seated,” invited Joe, in the rich and mellow tones of an interlocutor.

Miss Knight departed. Mr. Jones sat down in the only chair and Kelly made preparations to rest his huge form on the bed of the injured one.

Joe viewed this arrangement with alarm. “Don’t you sit on my broken leg, you hippopotamus,” he protested.

Kelly withdrew so hastily that he nearly knocked Mr. Jones off his chair.

“Mike, go over there and get that other chair. Don’t try to rob a little fellow like Jonesy,” Joe told him.

Pain swathed the features of Mr. Jones. To be publicly addressed as “Jonesy” was bad enough, but when coupled with an insulting reference to his size, it was too much.

Kelly finally seated himself by the invalid’s head and remarked with a smile of pleasure, “Joe, they tell me you’re about dead. Is there anything in it?” 135

“Listen to words of warning,” suggested the injured man. “Even with my game leg, it would take a bigger man than you to put me out of business.”

Kelly disregarded the challenge. “Is there any truth in the report that landing on your head is all that saved you?”

Joe grunted in disdain and Mr. Jones openly yawned at such commonplace humor.

Regardless of popular displeasure, Kelly went on. “I understand that your head ruined the truck?”

“Mike, you are a heavy kidder.” Joe smiled affectionately at his big friend. “Your conversation is usually agreeable, sometimes interesting, but never reliable. You guessed wrong about a truck. I ran into a seven passenger touring car.”

“Ha, a chariot of the awful rich. In the excitement did you surreptitiously abstract any diamonds, tires, gasoline or other valuables shaken loose by your dome?”

“No such luck, Mike. There was only a girl in the car.”

“The priceless jewel of the Isle of Swat and you did not kidnap it?” exclaimed Kelly.

Mr. Jones displayed a superior interest. “Was she beautiful?” he inquired.

“Was she beautiful?” mimicked Kelly. “She must have been. That’s why Joe tried to make a hit.” He leaned over the motorcyclist. “For once I am proud of you, young man. You used your head.”

Mr. Jones displayed extreme animation. “By Jove,” he laughed. “Possibly the lady thought that Mr. Curtis was butting in.” 136

Kelly inspected the stenographer with great intentness. “Good morning, old top. When did you wake up?”

“Your kidding is contagious, Mike. Jonesy has caught it,” chuckled Joe.

“No, you don’t understand the nature of the brute. It’s not me–it’s the ladies. Jones awakens at a reference to them and blossoms beneath their smiles,” explained Kelly.

A gentle look spread over Joe's face. "The girl I ran into happened to be the right sort. She stuck by me when I was hurt and helped to bring me here–" He paused for a moment and then continued, "Let's not talk about her in this room full of men."

"Sure," boomed Kelly. "You're right as usual, Joe. Never stopped to think myself." He turned and pointed to the stenographer. "My old friend Jones is on the edge of a decline." The bookkeeper disregarded the presence of the private secretary as if he were deaf. "If he starts to slide he hasn't far to go to land in a cemetery."

Mr. Jones displayed no marked pleasure in the conversation. He maintained a dignified aloofness.

"I have decided to train him," Kelly explained. "It's going to be a hard job. He's got no bone. He's got no muscle. He's got no fat. He's got nothin'."

Again Kelly overlooked the proud and sensitive spirit which protested against this public dissection of physical defects.

The eyes of Kelly and Joe viewed the puny figure of the stenographer in the manner of disgusted 137
farmers examining a runt which resists their efforts to fatten it.

"To get flesh and muscle and bone on him I must give him plenty of exercise and get him out into the air. That will make him eat," Kelly went on.

"His present diet is mostly cigarettes, isn't it?" Joe inquired.

"He eats them by the bale," confessed Kelly.

Apparently Joe deemed himself invited into the case as a consulting specialist. "Make him cut them out," he prescribed. "Take the little fellow out for a run every night and give him a good sweat out. Give him a bath and a rub down and get him in bed by ten o'clock. Watch your distances at first. Jonesy is full of dope. Look at his eyes."

Mr. Jones quailed under this keen scrutiny of experts.

"He'll fall dead if he runs a block," predicted Joe. "He'll be able to cover some ground, though, after a couple of weeks of plugging. You can speed him up, then." He studied the stenographer with impersonal interest. "Make a feather weight boxer of him, Mike, if he isn't yellow. Get him in shape for the fall meet of the Athletic Club. If he can't box, make him run. He's built like a jack rabbit."

The course of treatment outlined by the consulting specialist filled Mr. Jones with undisguised alarm. His mind and body alike protested against the indignities which threatened him. To him came recognition that immediate resistance was necessary to prevent the advent of a gruelling 138
course of physical training, repugnant to his flesh and revolting to his soul. "S-s-s-say," he stammered in the intenseness of his opposition, "I don't want––"

"Look here," Joe interrupted with fierceness, "you asked Mike to train you, didn't you?"

Mr. Jones's mental anguish did not make for quick thinking. He worked his lips but emitted no sound.

To Joe this silence acquiesced in his assumption and he went on, "You begged him to train you and he finally consented. You have shown judgment in selecting him–you couldn't find a better man. But, remember this, my friend. Training is hard work. You are in for a rough time of it, Jonesy, and don't you forget it. Remember this–it's not what you want–it's what Mike wants that is going to count. He has undertaken the devil's own job to make a man out of a shrimp like you. Do you get me?" he concluded ferociously.

Before the sheer brute masculinity of the attack, the gentle courage of Mr. Jones gave way. "Yes, sir," he agreed meekly.

"Now, that's all settled, Mike," Joe indicated with satisfaction. "Jonesy knows where he gets off. How about the grub?"

"No trouble there," Kelly explained. "We board at the same place. The food is plain enough and I can eat his dessert and make him fill up on solid stuff. I wanted to ask about your motorcycle."

"You are welcome to use it, Mike. It will be fine to chase Jonesy on or to get ahead of him if you want to time him. The machine was badly smashed in my crash. There is a repair bill of seven 139
dollars against it. If you will pay that, you can use it until I need it again. Put Jones up on it, too, if you like."

There was a rustling of skirts and the sound of soft footsteps. Virginia came towards the young men. Mr. Jones and Kelly instantly recognized their employer's daughter. They came to their feet as kitchen police in the presence of the Commanding General, which is with the speed of the lightning.

Virginia smiled sweetly at the invalid. "I am sorry to intrude," she explained, "but the hospital closes to visitors in ten minutes; so I had to come now or not see Joe today."

"It is fine of you to come even for a minute." Joe smiled happily and then attempted to present Kelly and Mr. Jones to her.

She gave them a friendly smile. "I know you both. I have seen you in my father's office so often that we are really old acquaintances."

Kelly looked her squarely in the eyes and beamed, "Thanks, I like that."

Mr. Jones assumed a manner containing all that was best from the several books upon social usages he had perused. Often had he longed for an opportunity to show the manufacturer's daughter that at least her father's private secretary was well versed in such matters. His chance had come and he must make the most of it. He bowed profoundly, "I am honored, indeed," he murmured gently. "Permit me to express the extreme pleasure Miss Dale's presence gives me." Apparently, at this point, Mr. Jones expected Virginia to extend her lily white hand to be kissed.

She, being a young thing, a mere chit as it were, was unversed in this procedure. She looked at 140
the low-bowed Mr. Jones and then at Joe and Kelly with a somewhat puzzled expression.

The athletes, being men of vulgar minds, burst into a roar of laughter which shocked Mr. Jones exceedingly. Finding nothing better to do, he was forced to join in amusement at his own expense.

"Gee, I'm going to miss my supper," cried Kelly, and, with a breezy "Good bye" to Virginia and Joe, and a hurried "Come on" to Mr. Jones, he rushed away.

Mr. Jones was astounded at this exhibition of haste and ill-breeding, before this lady of position. However, he found himself torn between conflicting desires. He would have gladly spent some hours in the company of Miss Dale engaged in elegant conversation, but, at the moment, for the life of him, he could recall no subject of sufficient gentility for discussion.

"Come on, Jones," came Kelly's voice from the hall.

Virginia had taken Kelly's chair and, leaning over the bed, was engrossed in conversation with the injured man.

The presence of Mr. Jones was being overlooked. He deemed it better to depart with Kelly. Immediate action was essential. He arose and again bowed deeply. "Allow me," he pleaded, in dulcet tones, "to express my delight and joy in meeting Miss Dale and to inform her that circumstances beyond my individual control require my withdrawal from her company."

"Blow, Jonesy, before your beans get cold," suggested Joe. 141

At this low remark, Mr. Jones straightened up to his full height very suddenly and stepped backwards with dignity. Unhappily, his heel hooked against the leg of his chair and twisted the piece of furniture beneath him so that, tripping, he lost his balance upon the waxed floor. Simultaneously, Mr. Jones lost his dignity and waved his arms wildly in a frantic endeavor to recover himself.

"Come on," Kelly urged again.

Mr. Jones obeyed the words of his trainer literally. Coming on over the chair, he landed with a crash between the beds on the other side of the aisle.

"Bring the ambulance up here," suggested a facetious patient.

Sore in mind and body, Mr. Jones was assisted to his feet by the helpful Miss Knight. "I stumbled," he explained to her in excuse.

"It's a darn good thing you didn't fall," replied the nurse with ill-concealed sarcasm.

Virginia had watched Mr. Jones's acrobatic performances with mixed emotions. She glanced at her wrist watch and, rising, leaned over to bid Joe farewell.

He caught her hand and held it. For a moment the black eyes were gazing squarely into the depths of the blue ones, and no word passed between the two, yet they were filled with a new, strange joyousness.

"I must go," she whispered gently, and pulled her hand from Joe's as she turned towards the stricken Mr. Jones. "I hope you are not hurt," she told him and left the ward with a nod at Kelly at 142
the door.

Seizing his hat, Mr. Jones limped slowly after her.

"You'll get better control of your muscles after Mike handles you a bit," Joe called after him.

"Didn't I tell you fellows that was Charlie Chaplin?" came a voice from one of the beds. Amidst the merriment aroused by this sally Mr. Jones joined Kelly and took his departure.

CHAPTER X 143
AN AFTERNOON OFF

"Dis yere fambly ain' nevah ready to eat. Dey allers has sumpin else dey gotta do," grumbled Serena as she moved out upon the front porch of the Dale home.

Virginia stood upon the greensward listening to the call of a song sparrow in the tree above her head. The notes of the bird rang clear upon the morning air in all of their sweetness, until overwhelmed in competition with a jazz melody whistled by Ike as he moved about dragging a serpent-like length of hose behind him.

"Cum in to you' breakfus, chil'," commanded Serena.

“In a moment. Isn’t it a beautiful day for the concert?”

Although Virginia’s tardiness was yet uppermost in her mind, Serena deigned to examine the heavens above and the earth beneath with a critical eye which proposed to allow no fault to escape it. Then she made answer in a cryptic reply, “You ain’ said nothin’ chil’, you ain’ said nothin’ a tall.”

“Virginia,” said Obadiah, when they met at the breakfast table, “Mr. Wilkins was here again yesterday afternoon and you were not at home.”

The girl laughed. “I know it, Daddy,” she confessed, as she poured a generous measure of thick cream over her dish of sliced peaches. The charge of absenteeism made against her did not appear to be affecting her appetite as she began to eat. 144

“I warned you that he was coming,” Obadiah continued, impressively.

“Yes, Daddy.” The girl was enjoying her peaches and cream. “After you told me about it I waited for him and he didn’t come,” she explained virtuously. “The next afternoon, I had to go out and–of course, he had to come. The afternoon after that, I waited at home expecting Mr. Wilkins and he never came near. Yesterday I had to go out–and he had to come.” She laughed gaily. “We have been playing a game of hide and seek. Mr. Wilkins has been it and hasn’t caught me yet.”

“It’s been an expensive game for me,” protested Obadiah. “I pay Mr. Wilkins a large salary for his time and services and I can use them to better advantage than in making calls upon you.”

“That’s an ungallant speech. I am filled with shame for my own father.” She shook her head sadly in token of her disgrace. “If Mr. Wilkins wants to see me, why doesn’t he arrange to come when I am home?” she argued stoutly.

Obadiah became stern. “You should have remained home for Mr. Wilkins. You are out a great deal, anyway.”

A look of mock horror came into Virginia’s face. “Would you have me sit alone in this big house, waiting with folded arms for Mr. Wilkins?” she giggled.

Even Obadiah relented before this sorrowful picture. “Who said anything about folded arms,” he demanded shortly, “or about sitting alone, either? You are out some place in that machine every day. It won’t hurt you to remain at home until Mr. Wilkins has seen you. My affairs are of more importance than yours.” 145

Virginia looked at him with great solemnity. “You want to be cross at me, Daddy, and you can’t make yourself,” she laughed. “These peaches and cream are protecting me. If they didn’t taste so good to you, I would get a scolding. I don’t deserve it, though, because, after all, my affairs are always your affairs. Ike says that the machine runs better if it is used every day. I keep it in splendid order for you.”

The efforts of his daughter did not appear to impress Obadiah.

She went on with an air of pride, “Lately, I have been busy on a surprise for you.” She assumed an air of dignity. “I am giving an entertainment to the old ladies of the Lucinda Home this afternoon. I planned it all by myself and I invite you to be present. There’ll be a concert by a brass band. Aren’t you surprised, Daddy?”

Obadiah was surprised. Without reference to natural perplexity as to why festivities for the benefit of the old ladies should be a matter of astonishment to him, there were ample grounds for amazement in the knowledge that his youthful daughter had assumed management of a production involving a brass band. It was as if she had announced her connection with a circus for the aged.

“Where did you get the band?” demanded Obadiah, in the tone of an anxious parent whose infant has returned bearing personal property suspected of belonging to a neighbor. 146

“Colonel Ryan loaned it to me. He is coming, too. Won’t you come, Daddy dear, please?” There was a wistful look in the girl’s face. “It’s going to be lovely.”

Obadiah was uncomfortable. “I can’t come today,” he replied, finally.

“Oh Daddy–” her disappointment showed in every note of her voice–“I have counted so much on having you. I would be so proud of you.” She glanced imploringly at him.

“I’m going out of town,” he said.

“Can’t you put it off?”

“No, Virginia, I have made my plans to go today. I can’t let anything interfere with business arrangements. They mean dollars and cents.”

“All right, Daddy,” she surrendered with a sad little sigh and tried to cheer herself. “Some day when I have something else you’ll plan to come, won’t you, dear?”

He was interested in his newspaper now. “Perhaps,” he finally answered absently without looking up.

For a time they ate in silence. “The afternoon frightens me, Daddy,” she told him with a worried air. “It’s a big responsibility. What if it should be a failure?”

He crushed his paper down by his plate and snapped, “You got into the thing of your own accord. It’s up to you to see it through. To make a success of it–a Dale success. You can do it.” 147

His assurance braced the girl. “I’ll make a go of it, Daddy,” she promised, and then, “It’s wrong for me to expect Mr. Wilkins to run after me. I will go to his office this morning and see him.”

He gave her a look of approval. “That’s business,” he agreed.

She hovered about him after they rose from the table. “Could I ask Mr. Wilkins to come to my concert, Daddy?” There was an appealing look in the big blue eyes. “I don’t want it to seem as if I have no friends.”

He gave her an uneasy glance and there was almost a note of regret in his voice when he answered, “I am sorry that I can’t come. Certainly, you may ask Mr. Wilkins. Tell him that I want him to go. Ask any one you like.” Yet in spite of these concessions his conscience disturbed him. “How will you meet the expenses of the entertainment,” he inquired.

“They won’t be much. Serena had the things which I needed charged at the store.”

Obadiah appeared about to protest but changed his mind.

“I can pay for anything else I need out of my allowance,” she went on.

An unusual wave of generosity engulfed Obadiah, due, no doubt, to pricks of his unquiet conscience. “Don’t do that,” he objected. “Send the bills to me.”

A delighted Virginia lifted up her voice, joyously, “How perfectly grand! I’ll order ice cream for everybody.”

Pain rested upon Obadiah’s countenance, due, no doubt, rather to a twinge of indigestion at the mention of a large quantity of ice cream during the breakfast hour than to regret at the result of his unusual liberality. He sought relief in reproving Ike sternly, ere departing for his office. 148

Virginia spent a busy morning. She telephoned to Colonel Ryan, visited Mrs. Henderson and conferred at length with Mrs. Smith, the matron at the Lucinda Home, regarding the approaching festivities.

Later, she repaired to the establishment of Mr. Vivian, glittering brilliantly in the morning sun and graced even at this early hour by thirsty members of South Ridgefield’s younger set.

Her deliberations with the genial proprietor were prolonged. Complex factors hindered the meeting of minds regarded as essential to the contractual relationship of commerce. Mr. Vivian’s knowledge of the law of probabilities as applied to the consumption of ice cream and cake by infants, by adults, or by infants and adults together, was as deep as the information of an insurance actuary on the mortality of fellow men. But specialists gain their reputation through years of toil, and they object to risking it on the uncertain. To Mr. Vivian the capacity of old ladies and aged soldiers for delicate confections was an unknown factor. He had no digest of leading cases to consult, no vital statistics to inspect, no medical journals to study. He was venturing into unexplored territory. Without premises he was asked to deduct a conclusion. Mr. Vivian was reduced to an unscientific guess.

Yet, if necessary, guesses can be made. So it came to pass that Mr. Vivian bowed the manufacturer’s daughter from his emporium, and, with the sweet smell of his wares in his nostrils, raised eyes of loving kindness from the profitable order in his hand, due account thereof to be rendered unto Obadiah for payment, and gazed after her in respectful admiration. 149

Shortly after this, the judicial solemnity of the chamber of Hezekiah Wilkins, Attorney at Law, situate and being, opposite the suite of Obadiah, was disturbed by a timid knock. It failed to attract Hezekiah’s attention. This was strange. The room was not unusually large. Also, its size was diminished by cases of reports, digests and encyclopedias covering the walls, except where they were pierced by the windows and door or broken by the fireplace and its broad chimney face. Upon this hung a picture of the Supreme Court and on the mantel below stood a bust of John Marshall, the stern eyes of which viewed the polished back of Hezekiah’s head as he sat at his desk.

It is possible that the lawyer was preoccupied through profound consideration of some abstract point of law. Before him lay an open court report and his desk was littered with documents. His head was bowed forward, his hands clasped over his abdomen and his eyes closed.

“Tap–tap,” sounded again at the door. Hezekiah brushed at his face as if to shoo a disturbing fly. Yet, so deep were his meditations that he failed to note the interruption.

“Knock–knock–bang.” The noise swelled to a well-defined blow of sufficient authority to recall the greatest mental concentration from the most tortuous legal labyrinth of the most learned court in the world. 150

Hezekiah jumped. He raised his head with a jerk and his eyes opened. One unacquainted with the abysmal excogitations of judicial mentalities might describe them as having a startled look. He rubbed them with his fists, stroked his smooth shaven cheeks and replaced his glasses on his nose. Having by such simple expedients withdrawn his mind from the fathomless depths of legal lore into which it seemingly had been plunged, he shouted, “Come in.”

Virginia entered.

Hezekiah, recognizing the daughter of his employer, sprang to his feet, greeting her, “I am honored, indeed, Miss Dale.”

“Mr. Wilkins, my father says that I have done wrong in allowing you to come to our house twice and not find me at home.” She smiled sweetly at him as she held out her hand to him. “I am

sorry. I thought that my best apology would be to save you another trip by coming to see you."

"You are very considerate, Miss Dale," he responded, as he offered her his visitor's chair.

She sat down filled with great curiosity as to his business with her.

He did not approach it directly. "We are having beautiful weather, Miss Dale. Being given to out of door pursuits and pastimes–athletic, as it were–you must find it very agreeable."

"I do enjoy these beautiful spring days. I like to be out of doors, too. But I am not what they call an athletic girl, Mr. Wilkins."

"I plead guilty to an inaccuracy of nomenclature," Hezekiah responded with great solemnity, 151
removing his glasses and flourishing them.

"What did you say, Mr. Wilkins?" asked Virginia in smiling bewilderment.

His eyes began to twinkle and in spite of his serious face she caught his mood and they burst into a peal of laughter.

"Miss Dale–" he began.

She interrupted him. "Call me Virginia as you always have done, Mr. Wilkins," she urged. "Please do."

"It will be easier," he admitted, and then for a moment he studied her face thoughtfully. "You are looking more like your mother, every day, Virginia. She was a beautiful woman–a very beautiful woman," he continued dreamily. "As good, too, as she was beautiful. It seems to me, now, that her life was given up to doing kindnesses to others. I have always been proud that your mother accepted me as one of her friends."

His words awakened eager interest in the girl. "Tell me about her, please, Mr. Wilkins," she begged, as he paused.

He smiled gently into the wistful eyes of blue, as happy remembrances of the past returned to him. "Your mother came into our lives as a gentle zephyr from her own beautiful Southland. With her came memories of bright sunshine, growing flowers and perfumed air. These things radiated from her–a part of her life. Happiness and joy were ever her constant companions and the gifts she would shower."

Virginia's eyes were big with the tender longings of her heart. "My mother tried to make every 152
one else happy, didn't she?"

The countenance of Hezekiah softened and his voice was tempered by gentle memories as he said, "If she tried to do that, she succeeded. Every one who knew your mother was the happier for it."

"Oh–what a beautiful thing to say about her, Mr. Wilkins," she whispered.

After a few moments of silence, Hezekiah resolutely thrust aside the reveries into which he and his visitor had plunged. "Ahem," he coughed and then he polished his scalp so vigorously that it became suffused with a purplish tinge. "Virginia," he inquired sternly, "are you acquainted with one Joseph Tolliver Curtis?"

For an instant Virginia was unable to identify Joe under his formal appellation. "Yes, he is the man at the hospital who was hurt by our machine," she answered finally.

"You have visited him?"

She nodded.

He removed his glasses and tapped his teeth. "Did you ever discuss with the said Joseph Tolliver Curtis the accident heretofore referred to?"

"What did you say, Mr. Wilkins?" worried Virginia.

"Will you please state," demanded Hezekiah absently, "whether at any time or any place you discussed the subject matter of this action with the plaintiff."

"Mr. Wilkins, what are you talking about?" Virginia cried in dismay.

Hezekiah came out of his preoccupation. "I beg your pardon," he said hastily. "I asked if you ever 153
talked over the accident with Curtis."

"Is that the question you asked me, Mr. Wilkins?"

"Honest," he chuckled.

"Oh, I can answer that easily. I talked it all over with him."

"Have you objection to advising me of the substance–" Hezekiah stopped and restated his question–"Will you tell what you said, Virginia?"

"Certainly, I told Mr. Curtis that I was to blame for the accident and he said it was his own fault."

The lawyer was surprised. "Did he admit negligence?"

Virginia deemed this question to imply danger to Joe and she remembered her promise. "I am not at liberty to say, Mr. Wilkins," she answered stoutly. "I can't discuss Mr. Curtis's part in the accident."

For a moment Hezekiah eyed the girl thoughtfully. He arose and took a turn up and down the room while his eyes danced with mischief. He reached a decision which changed his line of questioning when he reseated himself. “Virginia, do you think that you were to blame for that accident?” he asked the girl.

“I know that I was.”

“If you were a witness in court, would you testify that the accident was your fault?”

“I would admit my blame anywhere and any place, Mr. Wilkins.”

“Did Mr. Curtis say anything to you about bringing a suit for damages against your father?”

“No, he wouldn’t do that, I’m sure.”

“Why are you sure?” 154

“I told him that I believed my father should pay him damages.”

“What did he say to that?” asked Hezekiah with interest.

“He said that he wouldn’t take money from my father.”

“Was he angry, Virginia?”

“Oh, no indeed.” She hesitated for a moment. “He seemed tired and worn out and so I left him.”

“Well, Virginia, what would you say if I told you that I tried to reach an agreement with Mr. Curtis the other day and he refused to accept anything in settlement?”

“I say that my father is just the dearest and noblest man that ever lived. He sent you to do that, didn’t he, Mr. Wilkins, and never said a word about it to me? Isn’t that just like Daddy?”

Hezekiah smiled but said no word. Possibly he remembered the amount of the check. Professional confidences make lawyers cynical. He drummed a spirited march upon his desk with his fingers and took no other part in the acclaim of Obadiah.

“Mr. Wilkins,” worried Virginia, “do you suppose that you could have hurt Mr. Curtis’s feelings?”

“I did not intend to. Men are never as gentle as women, though.” Hezekiah was playing a foxy game. “A man is rougher. It is easy for him to hurt the feelings of a sensitive person without having the slightest intention of doing so.”

“This request appeared to require deep thought”

Virginia gave serious regard to memories of a pair of black eyes. “I think Joe Curtis is very sensitive,” she said softly. 155

“Probably,” agreed the crafty Hezekiah.

“Would you mind, Mr. Wilkins–” she gave the lawyer an appealing glance after some moments of consideration–“if I talked with Mr. Curtis about it?”

This request appeared to require deep thought, judging from the seriousness of Hezekiah’s face for a few moments. Then it lightened as he decided, “I can see no objection to your talking to Mr. Curtis.” The attorney’s manner became cheery and hopeful. “Now, if you two could arrive at a friendly settlement, it might be a most satisfactory arrangement.” Hezekiah slapped his palms together and squeezed his own fingers as if shaking hands with himself at the successful outcome of his benevolent moves. Then he chuckled softly and went on, “Let’s see what kind of an

adjustment you two youngsters can make. If I can approve it, I will be glad to submit it to your father."

"I will see him as soon as I can, Mr. Wilkins. I can't go to the hospital this afternoon." Virginia's manner became very dignified, as she continued, "I am giving a concert, at the Lucinda Home."

"Delightful." Hezekiah bowed low at the news.

"I can see Mr. Curtis in the morning."

"That will be quite time enough. Don't inconvenience yourself, Virginia." Hezekiah smiled as they arose.

"Mr. Wilkins, won't you come to my concert?" asked Virginia, shyly.

"It would be a pleasure, indeed, but, business first, you know." He waved his hands, palms upward, as if protesting the lowness of his profit. 156

"My father said that I might tell you that he would be glad if you could arrange to come. He is out of town."

"Oh, in that case–" Hezekiah's manner was courtly–"I deem myself highly privileged in accepting your invitation."

As Virginia left Hezekiah's office, she found herself facing the open door of her father's suite. Through it Mr. Jones was visible at his desk, improving his mind in Obadiah's absence by reading a refined story by a polished author concerning genteel people. Mr. Jones needed physical rest and mental recreation. Upon the previous evening, Mike Kelly had seized his person and regardless of vigorous protests had put him through such a series of calisthenics, runnings, jumpings and rubbings that the particular soreness of each bone and muscle had merged into one great and common ache.

At the opening of Hezekiah's door, Mr. Jones raised his eyes and, consequently, his head. A wave of pain swept his muscles. He grimaced frightfully. It was upon this distorted countenance that Virginia gazed. The terrifying effect of the face held the girl for a second, but believing it occasioned by grievous illness she hastened to the aid of the stricken one.

Mr. Jones instantly recognized her and the course of destiny was made manifest. Regardless of untoward events, his social merit was appreciated and now one approached seeking counsel or bearing invitations to social festivities. She should not seek in vain. Percy Jones, private secretary and social adviser, was at her service. He sprang from his chair to meet the maid of blood with knightly bow and courtly grace. Alack and aday, that snare of the devil, his waste basket, was misplaced. He tripped against it. To avoid the thing, he raised his foot only to step into the throat-like neck of the monster which instantly clove to his shoe. Simultaneously, a flood of pain protested against his violent movements. In his agony, Mr. Jones lost his balance and fell over his desk. His outstretched hands sought safe anchorage amidst ink stands and mucilage bottles to rest finally in an ever spreading lake of ink. 157

Virginia halted. Mr. Jones's face, rent by emotion and struggle, convinced her that he must be in parlous case.

Kelly hurried in at the crash. He observed Mr. Jones's predicament with great calmness. Nodding to Virginia, he held the basket until the stenographer could extract his foot. Then he turned to the girl and said very soberly, in spite of the glint of amusement in his eye, "Mr. Jones is the victim of an accident and requests permission to retire and cleanse himself."

As the crestfallen private secretary departed, Kelly and Virginia moved over to a window. The summer day in all of its beauty fought back the ugliness of the tin roofs and chimneys. The bookkeeper viewed the prospect. "By gum," he asked, "how'd you like to go snowshoeing?" This marvelous witticism was greeted by a burst of laughing applause from its author and the girl, far in excess of its merit.

"Jones doesn't feel very well today," Kelly explained to her. "He is the victim of unusual exercise."

"He doesn't look like a man who would over-exercise. He does not strike me as a man who is in the best of health," she responded. 158

"He isn't. That's why he's so stiff and sore after a few little stunts. He doesn't get enough fresh air." Kelly cast a longing glance out of the window and turned to inspect the room. "There isn't enough fresh air in this place, anyway. Jones has sat in here day after day, sucking on cigarettes and beating on that typewriter, until good health no longer knows him. But," announced the bookkeeper with great confidence, "I am old Doctor Fix'em. I'm giving him a course in physical training which will fix him. I'm going to make that lad forget his present pains by giving him worse ones."

"I think it is perfectly fine of you, Mr. Kelly, to help Mr. Jones," exclaimed Virginia, highly interested in the bookkeeper's plans for the benefit of the stenographer. "It must make you very happy to be able to do it."

"Sure," he agreed. "I laugh myself sick every time I give him a new stunt to do. That fellow has good points. One of these days he's going to have the smile on some one else. You can't keep a good man down."

"Couldn't I help Mr. Jones, too?" asked the girl eagerly.

Kelly stared at her in amazement. “No, it can’t be done,” he cried, emphatically. “Whoever heard of a woman trainer? You’ve had no experience anyway.”

Virginia blushed. “I didn’t mean to help train him.” She waxed indignant at the thought. “I only offered to do those things which I could do.” 159

“Oh–” Kelly was relieved–“go as far as you like. There is plenty of chance for all on that fellow. It would be dandy if you could work it to get him out of doors once in awhile.”

“Watch me,” she promised.

Mr. Jones reentered the room physically clean and mentally chastened but deep in gloom. He had forgotten that the darkest hour comes just before dawn. Yet, a private secretary must not allow his personal feelings to interfere with duty. He approached Virginia in what might be described as a graceful manner marred by lameness. “I regret the unfortunate occurrence which delayed me,” he apologized. “If Miss Dale wishes to see her father–”

A pair of blue eyes rested upon him in the kindest manner and a most attractive mouth said, “I know that my father is away today and that neither of you has much to do.”

Obadiah’s official staff looked guilty.

Virginia went on with enthusiasm. “We are going to give a concert this afternoon for the old ladies at the Lucinda Home. It will be lovely. A brass band–ice cream–Mr. Wilkins–”

The high interest of the young man cooled slightly at the lawyer’s name, regardless of the pleasing company in which he was mentioned.

“Won’t you both come? You could help me so much.”

“We can’t get off,” declared the practical Kelly.

“Yes, you can. My father said that I could invite whom I pleased.” She turned pleadingly to Mr. Jones. “You’ll come and bring Mr. Kelly, won’t you?” 160

The victim of disaster was as one hypnotized by the charm of her presence. Before the wiles of women, his gallant soul became as putty. Mr. Jones stammered, he stuttered, he blushed–and from his lips came the whispered answer, “Yes, Ma’am.”

CHAPTER XI 161

OLD HEARTS MADE YOUNG

Nature left nothing to be desired in the weather as the hour approached for the concert at the Lucinda Home. Over the closely shaven lawn and beneath the shade of the trees lay the tranquillity of a summer’s afternoon.

This was disturbed, shortly after lunch, by the roaring of the Dale car as it rushed up the curving driveway to the main building. It was driven by Ike, and Serena sat beside him in the purity of apparel, freshly laundered and starched.

But, even at this hour, the aged ladies had retired to their apartments to make ready for the gaieties of the late afternoon.

The coming of the Dale car was the beginning of a series of commotions in this haven of peace. A big army truck arrived with a noise of thunder bringing trestles and plank for a temporary band stand. It stopped, and through the balmy silence sounded a rough, coarse, masculine voice, “Where in the devil do they want this blame thing?” Answered his companion, “You can search me.”

A window closed with a crash to shut out contamination from such vulgar sources.

As the army truck and its crew noisily departed, another machine entered the grounds. It was a quiet car, not given to loud or uncouth uproar. Stealing up the driveway, it stopped. Mr. Vivian emerged, garbed in spotless white. Other soft stepping, mild mannered men, similarly clothed, accompanied him, bearing freezers of cream and boxes of cake. 162

Serena entered into conference with the caterer. “Des ole ladies dey wants der tea mo’e den yo’alls sweet stuff.”

Mr. Vivian appeared pained at such taste.

Serena went on, “Ah’s gwine mek de tea in de kitchen an’ surve it an’ de sandwiches outen de side do’.”

Disgust sat upon Mr. Vivian’s features. “I shall serve the cream from under the trees, in the cool fresh air,” he announced.

“You gwine surve it full o’ bugs an’ flies den,” predicted Serena.

Mr. Vivian, through the exercise of self-control, stood mute.

Serena sought information. “Who gwine surve ma tea an’ ma sandwiches?” she inquired.

Mr. Vivian whistled a few measures of melody, softly. Being thus engaged, he could not respond.

Serena pressed for an answer. “Ain’ yo’all do dat?”

“Possibly my men may assist you,” the caterer conceded, as he glanced at his assistants grouped at his back.

Serena was supported by Ike and several colored females, employees of the Home, into whose good graces the chauffeur was endeavoring to ingratiate himself.

The situation was tense. 163

Serena’s hands were upon her hips and her entire body vibrated. Her eyes glistened with rage and rested menacingly upon the caterer. She was clothed in an air of mystery. Her opponent could not determine whether she proposed to rely upon logical argument, abusive language, or physical violence.

Mr. Vivian noted uneasily the mass of vibrant temper he had aroused. He stood his ground, however, and did not retreat.

“Whoall is er givin’ dis yere sociable? Whoall pays fo’ dis yere ’tainment? Ah asts you dat? Answer me, whiteman?”

Ike drew nigh, inclining an ear that he might miss no word of the altercation. “Dats right,” he interjected in a rich mellow voice.

Mr. Vivian gave no heed to the aid and comfort vouchsafed his adversary.

“Ah tells you who pays. Ah’m right yere to tell yo’all who pays,” proclaimed Serena. “Miss Virginy done pay. Dat who.” Hers was a song of triumph now. “Ahs her nu’se. Ah’s her housekeeper.” She shook a great fist at the caterer. “Whiteman, wot ah sez, ah means. Ef yo’all ain’ gwine surve ma sandwiches an’ ma tea, jes tek yo’se’f an’ des yere white waiters away f’om yere.”

“Dat’s right,” concurred Ike, confident that he appeared to good advantage before the employees of the Home and that, through his stalwart support of Serena, he was laying up treasure for a rainy day.

“What’s all this talk about?” Mr. Vivian demanded suddenly as if being a stranger to the controversy he sought enlightenment. “Who said that I wouldn’t serve your sandwiches and tea?” 164

Serena, after the manner of her generation, was wise. She understood the whiteman and knew when to stop war and resort to diplomacy. She whirled upon the hapless Ike. “Ain’ yo’all got no bettah manners an’ to stan’ der er listin’ at dis gent’men an’ me a talkin’. You ’minds me o’ er ole turkey gobbler er standin der wid you’ haid twisted.”

Such an unlooked-for attack, from one with whom he had publicly allied himself, grieved Ike sorely. He retreated crestfallen and humiliated.

When Virginia entered the kitchen she found Serena and Mr. Vivian laboring diligently and as intimate friends, decrying the efficiency of their assistants without regard to color or previous condition of servitude.

Another army truck brought the band. White collars and ties showed festively above brass buttoned blue coats. Hair, mustaches, and whiskers had been dressed with extraordinary care, and aged musicians looked from beneath campaign hats worn at a most rakish angle. As they took possession of the stand, there ensued a period of melancholy tootings as instruments were adjusted and lips made supple.

Excitement seized the old ladies at their toilets, as these isolated blarings smote their ears. Certain partially deaf ones, confident that the concert had begun and desirous of missing no note of it, descended, minus switches, false fronts and, indeed, in one case, an over-skirt. These omissions became the subject of great embarrassment when discovered later.

As three o’clock approached, a prim calmness fell upon the inmates of the home when they assembled stiffly gowned in best apparel. 165

Hezekiah Wilkins, in holiday garb of silk hat and cutaway frock, arrived. Mrs. Henderson came a few moments later. Certain uninvited ancient men dressed as for a fiesta followed. Mr. Jones and Kelly entered the grounds with an air of having casually dropped in and not intending to stay long. The stenographer wore a natty suit, the check of which caught the discriminating eye of Ike as it rounded the gate. At the scheduled moment for the concert, Colonel Ryan approached and, after saluting Virginia, seated himself upon the porch and viewed the band with the pride and pleasure of its proprietor.

At the tap of the leader, the onlookers were dazzled by golden reflections as the musicians lifted their instruments. With a burst of harmony, Virginia’s concert was on. Even at the first note, the stiff dignity of the audience melted and they conversed. Women whose taciturnity had been remarked for years in that place of silence became loquacious.

The concert made an attractive picture. The band was upon the lawn in front of the building. On the lower porch and in shady places about the grounds were groups of aged women. Their white hair blended softly with the dresses of grey and black, and soft fichus or treasured bits of lace were drawn about wrinkled necks by cameos and big brooches.

Mr. Wilkins conducted Mrs. Henderson to several spots from which to hear the music. They were rejected summarily by the fastidious widow on the grounds of ants below or spiders above and

the general presence of bugs. Finally she made her own selection, confessing a suspicion of the presence in concealment of grasshoppers and the fear that the place was attractive to frogs and grass snakes. 166

Perceiving Hezekiah's holiday attire and Mrs. Henderson's manner, Mr. Vivian deemed them important personages and served them bountifully with his own hands. He was rewarded by hearing the widow tell her escort, "You can't buy decent ice cream in South Ridgefield. It's all adulterated and unfit for human consumption. The people who make such stuff should be put in jail for life."

Hezekiah chuckled contentedly. "Why not chop off their heads?" he suggested kindly.

Mr. Vivian departed hastily.

From their position they could see Virginia moving busily about from group to group.

Mrs. Henderson indicated her. "There is a dear girl," she said fondly. "It's Elinor Dale come back again."

"Virginia is very like her mother," he agreed.

"Why did Elinor ever marry a man like Obadiah?" she sighed.

Hezekiah liked sandwiches. Particularly lettuce sandwiches with mayonnaise dressing. Mrs. Henderson's question caught him unawares. "Wanted to," he mumbled through his mouthful.

"Hezekiah Wilkins, an answer of that sort kills conversation. You give me a sociable reply."

The muffling sandwiches had been gotten rid of. "Fascinated," he suggested.

"Fascinated by a serpent," sniffed Mrs. Henderson.

The inference that Obadiah was a reptile failed to effect the appetite of his legal adviser. He appropriated another sandwich. 167

"Why do you work for him, anyway?" she demanded sharply.

"Money," confessed Hezekiah, between bites.

"Hezekiah, there is something about your conversation which irritates me. I think that its brevity gets on my nerves." She gave him a questioning look. "I want to talk seriously with an old friend, Hezekiah. I want to ask him to do something for me."

He stopped eating and turned towards her. The humor had faded from his face and in its place was a certain sweetness with much of sorrow in it. "Over twenty years ago, you asked me to be a brother to you, Mary," he said softly. "I have always tried to be a good one–to be ready to obey your slightest wish."

There was pain and pity in her countenance as she reached over and patted his hand. "I know it, Hezekiah," she whispered. "You have been too good a brother to me. You should have married." There was a catch in her voice and her eyes were moist, when she continued, "I never intended to condemn you to a life of loneliness when I married Tom Henderson."

His thoughts flew back over the long years. "It has been lonely, Mary," he admitted. "Are you sorry that I could not forget?"

"No," she whispered, winking back her tears. "It has been a beautiful tribute–too beautiful for me. I was never worthy of it."

"I am the better judge of that," he murmured quietly.

For a time they were lost in the dreams of what might have been, when they were disturbed by the big booming laugh of Colonel Ryan. 168

"Hezekiah Wilkins," exclaimed Mrs. Henderson with some sharpness, "we are a pair of sentimental old fools to dig up the past. We should save our strength for the future."

"Implying that we might better be preparing to dig our own graves. Is that your idea?" he demanded.

Indignant eyes in which but little sentiment lingered, rested upon the lawyer. "I suppose that you wished to be amusing, Hezekiah, but for a man noted for his tact that was an inexcusably gruesome speech. We may be old, as you intimate," she snapped, "but we have work to do before–we get busy on our own graves." Her gaze traveled across the lawn and came to rest upon the girlish figure of Virginia standing beside the Colonel. Hennie's mood softened, and when she spoke, it was as if she were thinking aloud. "If we have met sorrow and disillusionment in our own lives, Hezekiah, and with smiling lips have swallowed the bitter mouthful, should we not be willing to keep those whom we love from a similar experience?"

Hezekiah bowed in sober agreement.

"Virginia Dale is very happy this afternoon," Mrs. Henderson went on, "because she is doing what her mother, Elinor, always loved to do–make others happy. It has never entered her head that her father is not generous and kind–that he is the mean and selfish man that you and I know."

The widow reached over and laid her hand upon that of the lawyer. "I am going to tell you a story, Hezekiah. It is about those good old days when you and I used to dance and do other gay and frivolous things–before we laid ourselves on the shelf." Her face saddened. "My story is 169

mostly a guess," she continued, "and it is about what I think happened to Elinor Dale in those long bedridden hours before she died."

Again, he bowed and he was saddened, too, by the memories she recalled.

"It is my guess, Hezekiah," she resumed, "that before Elinor Dale died, the scales fell from her eyes and she knew the true Obadiah." Mrs. Henderson sighed. "Poor Elinor knew that she had to go. Too loyal to confide in any one, she wanted to fight his selfish influence over her baby girl after she had gone. Let me tell you what she did–the poor weapon she was forced to resort to, Hezekiah." The widow shook her head sorrowfully. "Elinor marked a poem in a book and pledged me to give it to Virginia on her eighteenth birthday.

"This afternoon is one of the first fruits of the seed poor Elinor sowed years ago. Her daughter has grown, thanks to poor Serena's efforts–they ought to be successful because I don't believe that old negro ever bought the child a hat without taking it up in her prayers–into a beautiful woman. Fertile soil for the crop her mother would harvest, but–" Mrs. Henderson paused and her eyes flashed–"there is that Obadiah. Only the kindness of fate has kept Virginia from understanding him. When she does there will be a day of reckoning."

Mrs. Henderson leaned towards Hezekiah and looked into his eyes with her own overflowing with 170
a great tenderness. "My faithful brother," she whispered, "when that day comes won't you do your part in keeping that sweet girl happy even as she is trying to do it for these old ladies? In your way you can do more than I can, Hezekiah. Won't you do it for Elinor?" She hesitated for a moment and continued, very softly, very gently, "Won't you do it for me?"

He returned Hennie's look, his face alight with tenderness. "I will, Mary," he promised.

The activities of Mr. Jones at this period were interesting. Regardless of his aches and pains, he deemed it his duty, as Obadiah's private secretary, to assume an active part in making the entertainment a success. With this in mind, he had volunteered his services to Virginia. Rewarding him with a sweet smile, she had sent him for a cup of tea. Mr. Jones performed this errand with great expedition and dispatch, thereby winning the gratitude of an aged tea drinker. Virginia being busy, Mr. Jones determined to exhibit his zeal in so signal a manner that it might not be overlooked. Returning to the kitchen, he seized a tray of edibles and, bearing it forth, began to distribute its contents with great energy.

Instantly, excitement seized the white coated waiters. They laid aside their trays and conferred. Soon, above the music, even above conversation, the notes of a whistle sounded. It was not the piercing call of a policeman or of a referee, it was not the pipe of a boatswain, it was rather the low, mourning call of a dove. As it smote the ears of Mr. Vivian he became as one transfixed with horror. He became ghastly pale as he recognized that the earnest efforts of Mr. Jones alone stood 171
between the guests and famine.

Recovering himself, the caterer hurried towards his assembled employees. From his manner it appeared he hoped for the best but suspected the worst. "What's the matter here?" he demanded in low, tense tones.

"We have struck," murmured the waiters.

Mr. Vivian's worst expectations were confirmed. "Why?" he inquired, with the usual interest of employers under similar circumstances.

The strikers turned and pointed at the form of Mr. Jones as he distributed a tray of viands with such marvelous rapidity that the effect of the walkout was as yet unnoticed by the aged. "Scab," they hissed in hostile sibilation. "Strikebreaker," they groaned, impressed by the wonderful dexterity of the stenographer.

"Where did that bird come from?" demanded the amazed Mr. Vivian as he viewed the skill of the gratuitous laborer.

"You know," taunted an irate waiter; but Mr. Vivian's honest countenance gave him the lie in his teeth, noiselessly.

Curiosity held the little group. They examined Mr. Jones's work with professional interest, making surmises as to his identity. "Looks like a jockey," said one. "More like a barber," urged another. "I'll bet ten cents he is an ex-bartender," wagered a sportive character.

Even as they watched, Mr. Jones approached Virginia, offering her food with profound bows and courtly manners.

"He is a waiter," declared the strikers with one accord, and again they rested suspicious eyes 172
upon Mr. Vivian.

"That dub ain't working for me," affirmed the caterer.

Much elated at successfully allaying famine, Mr. Jones turned anew towards the kitchen. Had not Virginia smiled upon him? He swung his tray and whistled a merry tune. In the pleasure of serving others, the aches and pains of the athlete were forgotten. At the kitchen door he was surrounded by resolute men.

"Make no resistance," a determined voice warned.

The white coated mob moved away escorting Mr. Jones as towards summary execution.

Scenting happenings of interest, Ike followed.

From the kitchen Serena sought information. “Whar yo’all gwine?” she demanded.

“Dey done struck. Yah–yah–yah,” laughed Ike.

“Shut you’ big mouf. Ah ain’ er astin’ you nothin’.” Serena reproved the chauffeur and then she charged into the midst of the mob. “Wot yo’all mean a leavin’ ma trays an’ dirty dishes out in dat ya’d? Ain’ you know how to wait?” Her eyes flashed her indignation. “Go git ma dishes an’ ma trays afo’e ah meks you move fas’er den you lak.”

As snow before an April sun the strike melted. The waiters departed hastily for their field of duty, leaving Mr. Jones alone with Serena. She glared at him fiercely. “How cum you mek ma waiters mad?” she demanded.

Amazed at the strange results of his diligence, Mr. Jones stood silent under her accusation. 173

She inspected his slight figure contemptuously. “Clea’ out,” she commanded, “afo ah lays ma han’ on you an’ breks you, boy.”

This last victim of woman’s tongue moved rapidly towards the front lawn seeking safety amidst aged women. On the way he passed a fellow sufferer.

Serena’s cutting remarks had, for Ike, turned an afternoon of pleasure and recreation into a time of humiliation. Here was music, food, agreeable company, all turned into dust by public reprimands. Yet the inextinguishable fire of hope burned in his breast. In the fullness of time, Serena might forget, allow him to enter the kitchen as one in good standing and, in the alluring company of the colored maids, to partake of refreshments. Until then he must wait. Doing this, he watched the assemblage with melancholy eyes. He considered the band futile. It played no jazz. In an unhappy hour, tobacco brings solace to man. Ike produced a cigarette. Lighting it, he puffed nervously, suspecting the use of the weed in this haunt of aged women to be taboo. Happy laughter arose in the kitchen easily identified as the hearty tones of Serena, amused, a favorable augury to the courtier cooling his heels in the ante room. Casting down his cigarette, Ike turned to reconnoiter. The butt dropped beneath the porch into some ancient leaves, damp but inflammable.

The leaves ignited and smouldered. Fanned by a gentle breeze the fire grew into a burning which produced much smoke and little flame.

Upon the porch sat Mrs. Comfort Bean. Life to her was an open book. She had survived three 174
husbands. The first, a drunkard, had drowned, not in rum, but in the river into which he had the misfortune to fall while returning home from a convivial evening enjoyed with other gay lads at the village tavern. The second, a gambler, was shot in an altercation over the ill-timed presence of five aces in a card game. The third, a fragile thing, had faded like a flower. Mrs. Bean had neither regrets for, nor fear of, man. She knew him too well. She had come to anchor in the Lucinda Home like a storm ridden ship seeking safe harbor after a stormy passage. Here lay a peace the like of which she had never known.

But one cloud rested upon her horizon. Mrs. Bean was afraid of fire. She considered that because the inmates could not dwell upon the ground floor of the Home, the place was a fire trap and the most horrible holocaust, not only possible but probable. To inure herself to the inevitable, she read the harrowing details of every fire involving fatalities.

Having enjoyed refreshments, Mrs. Bean had retired to the porch that she might listen to the music in the peace of her own thoughts. She sniffed. It was but a tentative sniff. Not a full, deep whiff. Such sniffs she gave many times each day. “Somethin’s burnin’,” said Mrs. Comfort Bean. Hearers being absent, there was no sympathetic response. “I smell fire,” she announced in louder tones. A phenomenon puzzled Mrs. Bean’s highly developed olfactory nerves. Her nostrils were assailed by the odor of ignited hay instead of the fateful smell of burning wood.

The fire smouldered and spread. A gust of wind came. Mrs. Comfort Bean, sniffing expectantly, 175
was enveloped in a thin cloud of smoke. It caught her when, dissatisfied by preliminary investigations, she had taken a full, deep whiff. Mrs. Bean was almost asphyxiated. Gasping and choking she strangled in the efficient smudge of Ike’s preparing. A change in the wind relieved her. “Fire!” she screamed.

As this fateful cry, anguish-toned, rang over the festive throng, many an aged heart stood still. Shrieks arose as well as answering alarms. For the moment terror held them, and then certain women rushed for the building that they might ascend to their apartments and rescue choice possessions. Other more hardened spirits removed their chairs to positions of advantage that in greater comfort, they might “Watch the blamed old thing burn down.”

The coolness of military men was well exemplified by Colonel Ryan. He arose from his chair at the first alarm and shouted, “Sit down,” in a voice which had arisen above the roar of cannon. Perceiving the stampede towards the building, he thundered, “Two of you waiters keep those women out of there.” In utter disregard of the high cost of shoes, he roared, “Stamp that fire out!” In searching tones, he demanded, “Who set it?” No guilty man confessed, but Ike became ill at ease and sought retirement in the crowd.

The Colonel turned to the leader of the band which rested between numbers. “Play!” he commanded. These ancient musicians had little regard for modern music. They loved the tuneful airs of the past and were about to render some selections from “The Serenade.” At the word of 176
the leader, the chorus from “Don Jose of Seville,” the words of which run, “Let her go, piff, paff,” pealed forth.

To avert impending peril, Mrs. Comfort Bean had remained upon the porch emitting loud screams at intervals as if they were minute guns. She disappeared into the hall. She was back in a moment. Kelly was gazing beneath the porch at the smouldering leaves. She called to him, “You big red-headed feller,” and when he looked up, she screamed, “Fire extinguisher.”

He nodded understandingly and in a moment had procured the apparatus from the hall and carried it to the end of the porch where a group of waiters, assisted by their late enemy, Mr. Jones, were endeavoring to stamp the fire out.

For an instant Kelly perused the directions. Then he inverted the extinguisher. There was a hissing as of a monstrous snake. From the nozzle gushed a fizzing, sizzling jet like a soda fountain in action. Kelly whirled about to bring the stream to bear upon the conflagration. As he turned, the frothing liquid circled with him and cut the check suit of Mr. Jones, the white coats of the waiters, and the Norfolk jacket of Ike, at the waist line. Now arose the protests and violent language of angry men.

“You big chump, ain’t you got no sense?” gasped Mr. Jones, ungrammatically.

“Get out of the way so that I can put this fire out. You are kicking it all over the place,” the bookkeeper responded.

“I have as much right here as you–you big lump of grease,” proclaimed Mr. Jones as he inspected with indignation the dark colored belt with which he had been invested. 177

Kelly cast a menacing look at the stenographer. “If you don’t shut up, I am going to stick this nozzle down your throat,” he threatened.

Mr. Jones watched the fizzling stream as if estimating its physiological effect under the conditions named, and remained silent.

Loud laughter sounded in the kitchen. Ike, cooled by his bath, had presented himself for comforting.

Serena thus welcomed him. “Dey souse you in saltpeter an’ you done smoke youse’f so you mus’ be cu’ed lak er ham. Sit by de stove. Ah gwine give you er cup o’ coffee,” she chuckled, “ef yo’all smells ham er feels youse’f er beginnin’ to fry, git out o’ yere afo you greases de flo.”

So Ike rested in comfort, sandwiches and coffee at his side, and smiled pleasantly upon the maids. Truly, after affliction, he had entered into the blessings of the promised land.

The fire was out. Kelly moved to return the extinguisher to its place. With a thud, a white bundle dropped from the third floor upon his head. It appeared soft but upon its touch Kelly sank to the ground, blinking vacantly.

Forgetful of their recent altercation, Mr. Jones rushed to his fellow worker’s assistance. “What’s the matter?” he demanded.

Kelly rubbed his head. “Somebody hit me with a rock,” he answered, observing Mr. Jones meanwhile with suspicion.

The stenographer kicked the bundle open. Then, howling with pain, he grabbed his toe. In the 178
center of the bundle lay a mantel clock. “Might have killed you–easy,” he spluttered at Kelly, and raised indignant eyes to where an old woman, her wrinkled face filled with anxiety, leaned over the railing. “Did you throw that clock?” demanded Mr. Jones.

She held her hand to her ear and smiled sweetly. “What?” she called.

“Clock,” bawled Mr. Jones. “Did you drop that clock?”

“I can’t hear you,” she answered.

“Clock,” yelled the private secretary.

“Yes, it’s mine. Thank you for telling me that it is not hurt,” she responded in great contentment to the vexed Mr. Jones.

The reunited official staff of Obadiah moved on, one member limping, the other caressing his head.

Gentle peace returned for the moment to the emotion-swept aged ones. But now, through the gates of the Home rushes the fire department of South Ridgefield. With awe inspiring roar and mighty clangor of bells the engines advance, reflecting gorgeously in the afternoon sun. Taxpayers must have thrilled with pride as they remarked the speed of approach and energy with which these public servants entered upon their duties. Even as they halt, powerful pumps sound, ready to deluge the edifice with water while enthusiastic men with axes rush into the halls and upon the roof, prepared to hew.

“Where is the fire?” demanded the chief in a voice of authority.

Silently, Mrs. Bean led him to the blackened leaves.

“Who turned in that alarm?” he asked with great sternness. 179

“I did,” calmly replied the widow of three.

For a moment he looked down into the wrinkled face filled with the pride and satisfaction of duty well done. He raised his helmet and scratched his head. “The whole department out for a bonfire,” he grumbled.

Virginia came and smiled timidly at this burly man. “I am sorry that you have been given all of this trouble,” she said. “I have arranged to serve refreshments to your men, if you don’t object.”

When his little hostess left him, the grim old fire fighter stood at the head of the steps and gazed at the waiters ministering with energy to the voracious appetites of his men. “Huh,” he chuckled, “looks like that blame bonfire cooked up a pretty good feed for my boys.”

The concert ended and the musicians awaited, in a group, the truck which was to take them back to the Soldiers’ Home. Colonel Ryan went to speak to the leader. As he turned to Virginia, who had been at his side, he discovered her thanking the members of the organization individually for their part in the concert.

“Your music was beautiful,” she told a cornet player. “Every one enjoyed it so much.” She made apology to the entire number. “It is too bad that the fire alarm disturbed you.”

“That weren’t no disturbance, Ma’am,” the cornetist reassured her. He was bowed with age and had a shrill cracked voice. Tucking his instrument under his arm, he filled a disreputable pipe and went on. “No, Ma’am, that weren’t what I’d call no disturbance. In the war our old Colonel 180
used to make us go out on the skirmish line and play. Our leader allowed that the rattle of bullets on the drum heads ruined the time.”

“How brave of you,” Virginia marveled at this thumping tale of war.

“Had to be brave in my regiment, Ma’am. Old Colonel Dean was a bob-cat and he expected his men to be catamounts,” he cackled.

A clarionetist chewed a stubby mustache and listened to the remarks of the cornet player with a hostile air. “They ain’t over their squallin’ yit,” he proclaimed, and the musicians roared with laughter.

Shaking his old pipe wrathfully at his fellows, the man with the cornet challenged them. “Colonel Dean was a bob-cat,” he maintained. “A ragin’, clawin’, scratchin’, bob-cat of a fighter and the whole regiment was just like the old man.”

As the name Dean was mentioned, an old lady arose from a group with whom she had been chatting and drew near the musicians. She was tall and dignified and a cap of lace was pinned upon her snowy head. She peered at the cornetist through her spectacles. “Were you speaking of Colonel Dean of the Infantry?” she asked sweetly.

“Yes, Ma’am,” the cornet player growled. “I was a talkin’ about old Colonel Dean of my regiment, a ragin’, clawin’, scratchin’, fightin’ man.” His bellicose tones indicated the danger of contradiction and displayed a suspicion that his questioner lifted her voice in behalf of his opponents.

“Colonel Dean,” she said gently, “was my husband. Were you with him at Shiloh?”

A great change swept over the cornetist. He bowed deeply, his hat sweeping the ground. His 181
voice was reverential, even tender, as he replied, “I was behind him there, Ma’am–his bugler. I helped to carry him from the field.”

The group was very serious now. When the old veteran spoke again he could not conceal the emotion which shook him. “Colonel Dean lived a brave man, Ma’am, and he died–” he hesitated, seeking words–“just like a soldier orter die.” He straightened proudly, his old eyes flashing. “Boys,” he called, “my Colonel’s lady. Attention!” As one man they stiffened. Each hand sought the rim of a hat and together swept forward in the old time salute.

Mrs. Dean acknowledged the honor with a bow of great dignity, but the wrinkled hand at her side was shaking. For an instant the frail body held its poise and then broke beneath the storm of feeling which beset it. She seemed to shrink and would have fallen had not Virginia caught the withered form in her arms and helped the old lady to a seat. After a time the tears were fewer and the sobs lessened.

Mrs. Dean turned to the girl. “Forgive me, child,” she begged. “Forgive the weakness of an old woman.” A withered hand stroked a soft white one. “You have given me great happiness today, dearie.” Her eyes returned to the waiting members of the band. “I think,” she said very gently, “my soldier boys wish to speak to me.” She arose and one by one and silently the musicians came forward and took her hand.

A little later Mrs. Henderson and Hezekiah found Virginia at the foot of the steps where she had just left Mrs. Dean. The girl was gazing off into the distance. 182

“Virginia Dale, you have been crying,” Hennie said, as she noted a telltale moisture of the eyes.

“No, Hennie, I am wonderfully happy.”

“So much so that you had to cry, dearie?” The older woman smiled tenderly. Raising her hands she caught Virginia’s cheeks between them and looked down into the big blue eyes. “It was a success, dear–a great success,” she giggled mischievously for one of her years. “You told us, remember, that the place needed stirring up. Bless your heart, you shook it with an earthquake.”

CHAPTER XII 183

“It is a fine form of advertisement and comes cheap,” thought Obadiah as he read, with pleasure, certain laudatory references to himself and his daughter, in an article regarding the concert at the Lucinda Home, prominently displayed in the morning paper.

He told her about it. “There is a very nice account of your concert at the Lucinda Home. They give you great credit.” He glanced at her proudly. “You made a Dale success of it, didn’t you?”

His words as well as her own satisfaction at the outcome of the concert made Virginia very happy. All that morning she sang as she went about her various affairs in the big house until Serena smiled to herself and muttered, “Dat chil’ is a mekin mo’e noise an’ er jay bird er yellin’ caze de cher’ies is ripe.”

The joyous mood was yet upon the girl when she went to the hospital that afternoon and found Joe Curtis sitting up in bed for the first time. “You are looking fine,” she told him.

“Don’t make me blush. I am a modest youth,” he protested.

Her cheeks flushed prettily. “I am not complimenting your looks but your health.”

“It is all due to the shave, anyway,” he grinned. “The fatal symptoms are not so apparent.”

She observed his face with interest. “It does look smoother,” she admitted. “Who shaved you? Did Miss Knight?” 184

“Hush!” he whispered in mock terror. “Don’t let her hear you. She didn’t shave me, but she might want to. That would be the last straw. My proud spirit would never survive the outrage of that woman wielding a razor over my tender skin.”

“I will ask her to shave you. Perhaps she may let me help,” giggled Virginia.

“I have always looked forward to your visits.”

“You wouldn’t be glad to see me even if I came to shave you?” she demanded with severity.

He closed his eyes.

“Answer me,” she commanded in a stern voice.

“I suffer great pain,” he groaned.

“You are pretending. Answer my question.”

With closed eyes he pondered aloud. “If she shaved me, her hands would touch my face. They would caress my cheeks, softly–”

Virginia blushed. “I wouldn’t touch your face for–for–anything,” she interrupted.

“How would you shave me then? Who ever heard of a barber who did not touch the face of the people he shaved?”

“I won’t do the shaving. I’ll bring the hot water. It will be scalding hot, too,” she promised.

“Coward,” he taunted her, “to scald a man with three ribs and a leg broken.”

She gave him a very friendly look for one supposed to harbor such brutal intentions; but as he referred to his injuries the fun died out of her face. “It is unfair for you to suffer while I bear no part of the punishment for my own thoughtlessness.” Her lips trembled. 185

Joe reached over and patted her hand. “It was my own fault, I tell you,” he argued. “I am all hunky dory now, anyway.”

“I know that my father would be glad to help you. Won’t you let him, please?” she begged.

“I want no help.” His reply was brusque. “I am able to take care of myself.”

Virginia viewed him with thoughtful eyes. “I am afraid, Joe,” she protested, “that you only look at this matter from your own point of view. There is my side, too. I want my conscience cleared of that old accident. Every time I think of it, I am miserable. Is it nice that I should be unhappy every time I think of the first time I met you?”

His mood softened and his eyes showed it by their tenderness. “I want every minute of your life to be happy,” he said with warmth.

She reddened under his words but was quick to follow up her advantage. “Help me to be, then,” she pleaded.

“There should be a way to satisfy us both,” he admitted. He dropped his head back upon his pillow and studied the ceiling for a time. He made a suggestion but she shook her head violently.

She urged something and watched him expectantly.

All at once he began to chuckle. “I have it,” he cried.

She leaned towards him and for a long time they were engaged in a conversation which gave them both great pleasure and aroused their enthusiasm to the highest degree. 186

Miss Knight came along the aisle and stopped at Joe’s bedside. “You people are having such a good time that I have to come and get into it.”

They welcomed her as an intimate friend.

“We’ll have Joe out in a roller chair before long,” the nurse boasted. “That will be pleasanter because he can receive his visitors on the lawn these fine days,” she giggled. “After that it won’t be long until the hour of sad farewells, will it, Joe?”

“Don’t you worry, there will be no tears in my farewell I can tell you. I shall be so delighted to get from under your tyrannical sway that I am afraid my joy will give me a relapse and keep me in your clutches.”

Miss Knight shook her head at the depravity of men. “How’s that for ungratefulness? They bring him to me helpless with pain and I bring him back to health. Now he calls me a tyrant. Is that the way to reward a faithful and devoted nurse?”

“Listen a minute, Knightie,” begged Joe.

Virginia laughed barefacedly.

Miss Knight squelched the motorcyclist with a look, and addressed her remarks to Virginia. “Did you hear that, now? *Knightie*–what kind of a way is that to address a lady? The minute you utter a kind word near him, he gets gay. He’s the freshest thing I ever had in this ward.” She shook her head with weariness. “I’ve done my part. I have tried to train him.”

Joe attempted to smooth the ruffled feelings of the nurse. “Sister,” he expostulated, “you don’t 187
get me–”

“Say,” snapped Miss Knight, “if you don’t cut out that ‘sister’ habit I’ll get you all right before I am done with you.”

“Help!” groaned Joe. “What kind of a dump is this anyway? They cure my leg but ruin my disposition. No one could ever be the same after two months in this ward.”

“I improve them in mind and body,” Miss Knight boasted.

“You don’t improve a thing,” he retorted. “This place is a mad house. I am kept awake by the voices of patients asking for poison to put them out of their misery.”

“Those voices are calling for cooling drinks these warm nights, which,” the nurse declared ruefully, “I have to prepare in the hot afternoons.” Determination seized her. “Joe Curtis,” she exclaimed, “you have had enough lemonade this week to bathe in and I have carried it to you. Unless you apologize immediately you will get no more. There now.”

Before such a threat, Joe meekly surrendered and thus addressed the stern-faced nurse. “Miss Knight, after listening to your bawling out, I know that I should have called you ‘Rapper’ instead of ‘Knightie,’ and I wouldn’t have you as a sister at any price.”

The nurse tossed her head in disdain. “I don’t care to be related to a motorcyclist,” she announced.

Joe grinned at Virginia. “What did I tell you? No one cares for a motorcyclist. They have no friends, even in a hospital.”

“Why should any one care about them? Their troubles are due to their own foolishness. They are 188
a noisy pest in the streets and they get themselves hurt and take up bed space in hospitals which might be devoted to better uses.” Miss Knight’s seriousness gave way and her eyes danced. “And they make their nurses like them in spite of it all,” she laughed as she hurried away to another patient.

Virginia watched Joe thoughtfully. “You take a strange way to show Miss Knight that you like her,” she told him. “You are always in an argument with her.”

“She starts the scrap, not I.”

“But you make her do it!”

“No,” he declared with earnestness, “she jumps on me to stir things up and give her something to talk about.”

“I don’t understand you at all, Joe. You treat Miss Knight so differently from the way you treat me. Yet, you like her,” Virginia urged.

“It’s such great sport teasing her.”

“Why don’t you tease me?”

Joe considered the question. “I don’t know,” he answered frankly. “I suppose it is because you are different.”

Curiosity seized her. “How am I different?”

Great embarrassment held his tongue.

She was insistent. “Won’t you answer my question?” she begged.

“It’s a hard one. Perhaps I can’t answer it.”

“Oh, yes, you can. Try.”

He made the attempt. “Perhaps it is because I have known girls like Miss Knight all of my life. I 189
played with them when I was a kid, went to school with them, and, since I have been older, called

on them and took them to dances."

"Did you ever take them out on your motorcycle?" demanded Virginia almost sharply.

The question surprised him. "No, I never had another seat on my wheel. Why?"

"Oh, nothing." She was very indifferent now. "I don't think that I approve of girls on motorcycles. Go on," she urged. "You were telling about taking girls to dances. Where else did you take them?"

He thought a moment. "Sometimes I took them to Vivian's and had ice cream or took them to a motion picture show."

"Oh, what fun." Virginia was thinking aloud.

"What?" he asked.

She very calmly disregarded his question. "You haven't told me how I am different," she relentlessly persisted. "Please do."

"It was the way we met, I suppose–the way I saw you first," he confessed, fighting back his embarrassment.

"Tell me about it, Joe," she pleaded softly.

"I was regaining consciousness after the accident. My whole body was a great pain. I was trying to understand what had happened." He hesitated and then went on. "I opened my eyes. For an instant everything was blurred and indistinct. Things were whirling about in mists and billowy clouds. They rolled apart and through them, constantly growing clearer, came your face." He was almost whispering now. "You looked too beautiful for this world and I believed that I was dead." 190
A little smile like a wavelet before a summer's zephyr swept over his face. "You are a girl from the clouds to me," he said gently.

A very flushed Virginia leaned towards him. A great tenderness for this big fellow held her, and for a moment she could not trust herself to speak. She reached for his hand and held it in her own. "I must go," she murmured, as if driven away by her own timidity, and then, giving him a smile of ineffable sweetness, she left him.

Joe Curtis was so tumultuously happy for the rest of that afternoon that it was necessary for Miss Knight to reprove him on no less than three occasions.

Virginia called again upon Mr. Wilkins after leaving the hospital. Her business with the lawyer was speedily dispatched, and upon her departure for home, Hezekiah presented himself before Obadiah for conference.

The manufacturer glanced at his counsel and indicated a seat. "I was on the point of sending for you," he told Hezekiah, and in a characteristic way went right to the matter upon his mind. "The river water is bothering somebody again. They have started that old row about the chemicals and dyes in the waste from the dye-house at the mill poisoning the water. The State Board of Health is trying to tell me that it makes the water unfit for consumption in the towns below and is responsible for certain forms of sickness which have appeared."

"That's bad." Hezekiah looked at the ceiling.

"What's bad?" demanded Obadiah with asperity.

"The sickness," the lawyer explained thoughtfully.

"Oh, I thought you meant the waste from the dye-house," snarled Obadiah. 191

"Well, isn't that bad, too? I certainly am glad that South Ridgefield doesn't take the water for its supply below your mill. I shouldn't care to drink it, would you?" Hezekiah could be frank.

"What I want to drink is not the question," snapped Obadiah, raising his voice a tone. The attitude of his attorney had aroused his displeasure.

"No," Hezekiah went on, "it's what you can make the other fellow drink which interests you."

Obadiah considered the lawyer's remarks unfortunate even if true. "I am not trying to make anybody drink. These people have been drinking the same water for years and now some troublemaker stirs up a hornets' nest," he stormed. "They want to force me to build three thousand feet of sewer to connect up with the city system and its new fangled sewage disposal plant. I suppose this town would want rent for that, too. Did you ever hear of such foolishness?"

The lawyer cast a keen glance at his employer. "Don't forget," he suggested, "that you have doubled the capacity of your mill in the last few years and are running twice as much waste into the river as formerly."

"I don't care," roared Obadiah, in a high key. "It will cost several thousand dollars to do what they want. Let those towns take care of themselves. They must mistake me for a philanthropist trying to give my money away."

Hezekiah removed his glasses and closed his eyes as if desirous that no point, in the interesting 192
thought of Obadiah giving anything away, might perchance escape him.

"I won't do it," bleated Obadiah, striking the desk a resounding thump which made Hezekiah open his eyes with a start. "I have been running waste into that river for years and I intend to keep on doing it." He glared at the lawyer. "You look up the decisions and be prepared to make

those people drink ink if I want to put it into the river."

Hezekiah arose and moved over to the window. Possibly the ascertainment of a legal method to force citizens to accept writing fluid as a beverage perplexed him. Yet, it couldn't have been that, because his eyes danced with the glee of a mischievous school boy, and he seemed to have difficulty in suppressing inward mirth, as one wishing to perpetrate a huge joke with appropriate gravity.

In a moment he came back and faced Obadiah. "You will be glad to know that a settlement has been reached with young Curtis," he announced impressively.

"You have kept Virginia out of court proceedings?"

Hezekiah nodded.

Obadiah appeared relieved. "That is fine. I would look like a fool with my own daughter testifying against me in court."

Hezekiah was trying to catch Obadiah's eye. "It is going to cost you some money," he explained. "I warned you that young people have no idea of the value of money. Remember, you authorized me to make the best settlement that I could," he sternly reminded the mill owner. 193

Obadiah shrugged his shoulders irritably. "Yes, I am bound by any nonsensical agreement you have made."

The attorney's voice was cold, and there was a glint of steel in his eyes as he answered, "If you don't care to accept the compromise for which I accept sole responsibility, it is your privilege to reject it and take–the consequences."

Obadiah leaped to his feet and rushing to his lawyer patted him upon the shoulder. "Don't be so touchy, Hezekiah," he exclaimed. "Have I ever failed to support you?"

"No," Hezekiah admitted, "and you never will–but once."

Obadiah was desirous of placating his counsel. "You misunderstand me."

"I probably understand you better than any one else on earth."

The remark made the manufacturer uncomfortable. "Forget it," he pleaded. "I agree to any arrangement which you have made, because of my friendship, if for no other reason." He shook the lawyer's hand. "Explain the agreement. I consent."

Hezekiah's manner was too calm. It was like the lull before a storm. "You pay no money to the injured man," he announced.

Obadiah's face registered his surprise. "What the devil?" he cried.

Hezekiah gave no heed to this remark but went on with the solemnity of a judge sentencing a prisoner. "You have agreed to furnish and to endow for a period of five years, a private room at 194
the South Ridgefield Hospital to be used exclusively for the care and treatment of injured motorcyclists."

CHAPTER XIII 195

VIRGINIA HELPS AGAIN

When Obadiah received the formal notice from the hospital authorities of the acceptance of his gift, being unversed in the ways of philanthropists, he sent for Hezekiah and handed him the letter. "I want nothing to do with this matter," he snapped.

The lawyer bowed with great complacency.

"You may be interested to know, as you didn't take the trouble to find out," the mill owner sneered, "that this fellow, Joseph Tolliver Curtis, is employed by the State Board of Health. He spent his time prior to the accident riding up and down the river taking samples of the water to make a case against me."

"Ahem," coughed the lawyer.

"If that fellow were getting a cent out of the agreement," Obadiah threatened, "I would break it."

"No, you wouldn't," replied the lawyer calmly. "I drew it and it's enforceable. If necessary I would go into court myself to make you keep it."

Obadiah glowered, but his eyes fell before those of his attorney. "Well," he growled finally, "we won't quarrel over it. You handle the matter." A look of distress came into his face. "I'll sign the checks but I don't want to talk about it."

So, even though her father refused to discuss the subject Virginia took up the matter of 196
furnishing the room with great enthusiasm. She sought advice from many persons but particularly from Joe Curtis, who was deemed, through sad experience, capable of expressing the desires of injured motorcyclists, and Miss Knight, who by long service had learned those things which were not good for them.

After prolonged discussion, Virginia and Joe decided that the room should be papered in an old fashioned design with a background of egg-shell blue. The windows were to be curtained with a fine net having a filet edge, and the furniture was to be of massive mahogany. Pictures portraying sporting scenes believed suitable by Joe and of gentle landscapes considered appropriate by the girl were to adorn the walls in equal number. A harmonizing smoking set was added, and the floor was to be strewn with Oriental rugs. Thus furnished, it was confidently argued, the room would be restful and agreeable to the most discriminating of motorcyclists.

When this plan was presented with pride to Miss Knight, she addressed the pair in a sarcastic manner, “Did you by chance have in mind the furnishing of a bridal suite? Haven’t you forgotten a breakfast room and a pipe organ?”

Reduced to a fitting condition of humbleness they sat at her feet, so to speak, as she discoursed. “The room set aside is bright and cheery. Its walls, windows and floor need no treatment. Put in a double enameled bedstead–a brass one if you like. Have an enameled dresser and a plain rocker and chairs of similar type. You may have a plain wardrobe and an enameled medicine table, too. That’s all.” She smiled at them. “I have conceded a lot, too.”

“You have beautiful taste, Miss Knight. Don’t you think so, Joe?” remarked Virginia with great solemnity.

The motorcyclist nodded a vigorous agreement.

Thus encouraged the nurse became didactic. “The furnishing of a room for the sick,” she lectured, “is not a matter of taste. It is a question of cleanliness. Give me a clean place with plenty of fresh air and sunshine–nothing else counts.” Before such simplicity the pretentious plans faded, and in the end the wisdom of the nurse prevailed.

When Virginia left the ward that day it had grown extremely warm. “Hotter than fiddlers in Tophet,” Miss Knight called it.

“Where are those poor babies?” Virginia asked, as from a distant part of the building came the petulant sound of infants protesting in the only way they could against the high temperature.

“They are in the Free Dispensary,–the cases which are brought in from the outside. They would wring your heart,” the nurse answered.

Distress showed in Virginia’s face. “I am going there and see if I can help,” she cried, and with a parting smile at Miss Knight she hurried to the Dispensary.

Doctor Jackson nodded to her as she entered. “Every degree that the temperature rises means more sick babies,” he worried.

The peevish, fretful cries of the infants and the troubled looks of the worn mothers filled the girl with pity. “How dreadful, Doctor. The poor darlings. I wish I could help them,” she said.

The medical man glanced at her with new interest. “Miss Dale, didn’t you give that concert at the Lucinda Home?” he asked.

When she answered him in the affirmative he came over to her. His duck suit was rumpled and his collar wilted. His hair was mussed where he had mopped it back. In his hand was a clinical thermometer and an odor of drugs surrounded him. “Miss Dale,” he urged, “why don’t you get up a picnic and take these mothers and babies into the country for a few hours? You entertained the old ladies but you would save lives if you could arrange to get some of these babies into a cool place for awhile.” He became apologetic. “I don’t mean to be insistent but I am interested in my work and if I can keep any of them from dying in this heat spell, I want to do it. You understand me, don’t you?”

“Indeed I do, Doctor Jackson. I will be only too glad to get up a picnic.” A note of anxiety crept into her voice. “There isn’t much time to prepare. If it is to do good, we must have it at once.”

“Tomorrow, by all means,” urged the physician. “Let’s go to it.”

His enthusiasm filled her with energy. “It will be dandy,” she cried, her eyes sparkling with pleasure. “It will be difficult to arrange for, but we can do it.”

The young medical man gave this pretty girl, flushed with interest and confidence, a look of frank admiration. “That’s the ticket,” he shouted, tossing professional dignity to the winds for the moment. “You can make things hum. Hop to it, kiddo.” Then more seriously, “Let me know late this afternoon the arrangements you have made. Call me by phone. I’ll get word to the mothers if I have to carry it myself this evening.”

Virginia’s head was awhirl with vague plans when she left the hospital.

On the way she espied Mrs. Henderson hurrying down the street in utter disregard of the fiery heat.

“Get in, Hennie,” called Virginia, when Ike stopped the car. “I must talk to you and I want to make you as comfortable as I can.”

“Don’t mind me, child,” protested the widow. “I am a hardened sinner whom it behooves to become accustomed to heat.”

In a few words the girl explained the plan for the picnic.

“It is a splendid thing to do,” Mrs. Henderson agreed. “Of course I’ll be glad to help. Good gracious, sick babies all around us and at our church we are dawdling over a new bell rope and a

lock for the front door."

"It is such a relief to know that you are going to help," exclaimed Virginia; "but away down in my heart I knew that you would."

"There, there, dearie, I'm an old crank who is always minding other people's business–and getting kicked for it," she ended petulantly. "Hereafter," she affirmed emphatically, "I am going to attend to my own affairs." A great energy filled her and she turned to Virginia, her own words forgotten. "What can I do? If you will let Serena help me, I will attend to the refreshments." 200

"Hennie, you are a dear–that much is settled." Virginia sighed with relief. "Now where can we have the picnic? Parks which have bands and dancing won't do at all."

"You are right. These mothers and babies need rest and quiet. A grove by the river would be ideal."

"Oh, surely, that is where we must go." The girl waxed enthusiastic. "The babies can roll upon the grass and play together."

"Fiddlesticks," objected Mrs. Henderson. "If you put babies on the ground they will eat bugs, and if you allow them to roll they will go into the river."

"But they must be entertained."

"Proper entertainment for babies," observed the childless widow sagely, "is eating and sleeping with crying to while away leisure moments." She leaned towards Ike. "Young man, do you know of a shady place along the river where we can have a picnic?"

"Yas'm," responded the ever courteous chauffeur. "Elgin's Grove is er nice place fo' er picnic or a barbecue. Heaps o' shade an' de aiah is mighty cool."

"Who goes there?"

"Ah ain' heard about nobody gwine dyah lately, Ma'm."

"What made people stop going?" asked the widow, suspiciously.

"Dey fou't dyah. Er man got killed in er fight an' de she'iff close de gamblin' house. Ain' nothin' to go dyah fo' now."

"It is very strange that I never heard of the place."

"Maybe dey done specify it to you by de common folk's name?" 201

"What's that?"

"Some folks calls it Faro Beach."

Mrs. Henderson gasped. The name recalled shocking stories of a river resort where games of chance had flourished in open disregard of the law until a murder had awakened public conscience and it had been closed. "I wouldn't think of going there," she objected, and suddenly she began to laugh. "We are creatures of convention. What difference does it make what the place was? Indeed, if they were gambling now it wouldn't hurt these mothers and their babies." Her manner became decisive. "Virginia, as soon as you have your lunch, go and see the place. If it is what we want, make arrangements for the use of it. We don't care about its history."

Strange as it may seem, when Virginia arrived at Elgin's Grove that afternoon she found that Ike's description was not exaggerated. Great oaks towered towards the blue sky shading a green sod, clear of underbrush, rolling towards the river. The buildings were good, although locked, and there was a well with a pump at which Ike, much oppressed by the heat, refreshed himself, and recommended the water to Virginia as of superior quality, in these words. "It tast'tes lak de water f'om de seep back o' ma ole home in Tennessee. Dats de fines' water in de worl'."

The owner of the grove, a farmer, living a bachelor existence, after listening in a cold and suspicious manner to Virginia's enthusiastic description of the purposes of the picnic, suddenly thawed. Refusing pay for the grove, he announced his personal desire to be present. Having been straightway invited by Virginia, he agreed to unlock a building to afford shelter in case of rain, mow among the trees to scare out the snakes, and to clean out the well to insure a pure water supply. "Coming on the *Nancy Jane*?" he asked her. 202

"*The Nancy Jane?*" questioned the girl.

"Yes, the steamboat that used to run here."

Virginia became interested. "I didn't know that steamboats ran on this river."

"The *Nancy Jane* ain't exactly running," admitted the farmer. "She is tied up at South Ridgefield unless she's sunk since last week. The *Nancy Jane* is the best way to get to this grove and old Bill Quince is the man to bring the old boat here. Bill Quince knows this river."

"Would it be safe to bring the babies on it?" Virginia asked, troubled.

The farmer chuckled softly. "You ain't in nigh as much danger of drownin' on the old Lame Moose as of stickin'."

"That doesn't seem such a terrible calamity," laughed Virginia. "I will see Mr. Quince and inquire about his boat."

"It's a nice trip, Ma'am," the farmer encouraged her. "Bill Quince made it twice a day for two

years a-carrying drunks, mostly, with nary an accident. He is a fine man. A natural born sailor, Bill is. Takes to the water like a duck. You won't make no mistake a trustin' Bill Quince, I promise you, Ma'am."

"Dat Mr. Quince is er gran' man," Ike told Virginia, on their journey home. "He done save de life 203
o' er po' colored boy wot was er fishin' off de bank by his house. De pole dat de boy cut f'om de bresh ain' long 'nough to rech out to de deep water whar de big fishes is. He done git hisse'f er plank an' puts one end under er log an' rest'tes de middle on a rock at de aidge o' de bank. Den he clum out on tother en' ovah de water. Long come 'nother boy an' rolls de log. De fisherman draps in de river. He done sink de secon' time an' give er scan'lous yell. Mr. Quince rest'tes hisse'f by de house an' he hear 'im. Mr. Quince tek er quick look an' den he grab er pole wid er i'on hook off de house an hooks de boy in de britches an' hauls 'im out, jes as he sink de las' time. Den he stan's dat kid on his haid an' let de water run outen him an' puts ointment on his purson, whar de hook dig 'im. He ain' no time think 'bout de floater money."

"What money?" inquired Virginia, much interested.

"De floater money. Mr. Quince bein' er river man, he catches de daid wot floats down de river, an' de county dey give 'im ten dollars fo' each floater he git. Dat boy jes de same as daid. If Mr. Quince catch 'm er minute later, er hol' 'im undah er minute, dat boy die an' Mr. Quince git ten dollars. Dat man is er hero, Miss Virginy."

The girl shuddered. "Stop talking about dead people, Ike, you make me nervous," she remonstrated, and, as they crossed the bridge, a creepy Virginia thought she caught shadowy glimpses in the green depths of a gruesome opportunity for Mr. Quince to win anew a reward from his grateful county.

The habitation of Mr. Quince presented much of interest. It was airily although damply situated 204
at the point of a promontory where Hog Creek emptied its limited flow into the Lame Moose River. The site was desirable for a man of Mr. Quince's tastes and aspirations. Upon the one hand, the river afforded a pleasant marine foreground for the abattoirs and packing-houses, veiled in odoriferous smoke, upon the opposite shore. On the other hand, the quiet waters of Hog Creek offered a safe anchorage for the good ship *Nancy Jane* and a fleet of skiffs in various stages of decay.

Mr. Quince was a man of ingenuity and resourcefulness, and a natural forager. On the day that he selected this site, for the sojournment of himself and a stray youth who had elected to follow his fortunes, Mr. Quince built a fire and cooked some fish. The next sun saw a brush leanto constructed, shortly made impervious to rain by a covering of old canvas. This structure was followed in turn, as freshets deposited their beneficent fruits, by a board shack, a hut and at last a something which a charitable public called a house.

While the evolution of Mr. Quince's fireside furnished much of professional interest to sociologists, it was viewed by that soulless corporation which owned the land, a railroad company, as an attempt to establish adverse possession, by open, notorious, and hostile occupancy. Divers ejectments, although temporarily successful, failed of permanent effect and Mr. Quince dwelt in more or less of a state of siege.

Virginia found the riverman seated before his house, in a chair shaped out of a barrel, and prevented from being mislaid by its permanent attachment to a post in the ground. His 205
experienced eyes watched the surface of the river for signs of treasure trove awash. Upon the front of his residence, conveniently at hand, hung the pole with the iron hook, while, at the foot of a precipitous pathway, an old skiff bobbed, readily available to meet emergencies of the deep.

The arrival of the automobile startled Mr. Quince. To this aquatic man, a boat upon the river offered the more agreeable pathway to his home. He arose nervously, as one suspecting ejectment proceedings. The wind blew his patched overalls and flannel shirt about his tall, thin figure.

Ike, bowing respectfully, spoke words of greeting. "Howdy, Bill."

"Howdy," returned the mariner, calmed by the thought that it was not the custom of courts to rely upon such instrumentalities as negro chauffeurs and young maidens.

"We want to rent your boat for a picnic at Elgin's Grove tomorrow," called Virginia.

The tender of charter appeared to surprise Mr. Quince. He removed his ancient hat and scratched his scalp.

"Where is your boat?" Virginia looked about as if expecting to discover the *Priscilla* or *Commonwealth* at rest upon the bosom of Hog Creek.

The riverman pointed and the girl's eyes followed his finger.

On the creek floated a monument to the ingenuity of Bill Quince. Contrary to accepted naval traditions, the *Nancy Jane* was in two parts. A rusty traction engine rested upon a decked scow 206
almost square in form. It was geared by belt, chains and sprockets to a water wheel as wide as the scow and attached to its stern. This was the power plant, and, coupled to the front of it, was a second scow of like width but greater length. Decked over, railed, and covered by a wooden canopy, it furnished the passenger accommodations of the craft.

Such disappointment as Virginia felt was swept aside by the profound admiration of Ike for this vessel.

“Dat’s er fine boat,” he exclaimed. “Ah done had ma good times on dat ole boat. When you gits out on de cool river on dat ship you feels like er fightin’ cock on er hot night.”

Ike’s reference to the cool river encouraged his mistress to continue negotiations. “Can we rent it?” she asked.

“You kin rent it if you want to. They hain’t no law again it,” the mariner agreed. “But I hain’t sure that she’s goin’ to move none.” His sporting blood was aroused. “I’ll bet two bits that old engine is a-rusted tight.”

Virginia desired certainty. “How am I going to find out if the boat will go?” she worried.

Approaching the car, Mr. Quince rested an elbow upon the edge of the door and a huge foot upon the running board. His thin jaw wagged incessantly and his eyes viewed the distant reaches of the river as he pensively ruminated upon the problem. At last a solution came to him. “We mought hist ’er over by hand,” he told Ike.

“Do what?” the girl inquired anxiously, puzzled at what was to be “histed.” 207

“See if we can turn the old engine over,” explained Mr. Quince.

Ike having agreed to the suggestion, he and the riverman clambered down the bank and across a plank to the deck of the *Nancy Jane*. A period of silence ensued, broken by violent language when Mr. Quince put his confidence in and his weight against a rotten lever. There followed the sound of strong men grunting and breathing heavily. A sudden scramble took place and with a great splash the wheel of the *Nancy Jane* clove the amber surface of Hog Creek.

Mr. Quince and Ike returned, perspiring freely.

“She turned,” declared Mr. Quince with pride. “She hain’t rusted up much in nigh unto two year.”

“Is it settled? We can rent the boat?” demanded Virginia, all business.

“I hain’t so sure,” replied the mariner doubtfully. “This yere river bottom changes every day. I hain’t took the *Nancy Jane* to Elgin’s Grove in two year. I dunno as I knows where the old channel has gone. I guess I plum forgot.”

“Couldn’t we get some one who knows the river?” Virginia failed to reckon with the pride of seafaring men.

“There hain’t no man knows the Lame Moose like I knows her,” protested Mr. Quince greatly offended. “I allers was the pilot of the *Nancy Jane* and I still aims so to be.”

Virginia smiled sweetly at the hurt riverman. “Please take us up in your boat. It will be so much fun.” 208

Mr. Quince surrendered. “I’ll take the old boat to the grove if I have to wait for the spring freshets to do it.”

“It won’t be dangerous, will it?” cried Virginia, disturbed by the vigor of the mariner’s remarks. “The boat won’t sink, will it?”

“That wouldn’t make no odds, nohow,” Mr. Quince reassured her. “That bottom of the Lame Moose is so near the top you wouldn’t know no difference.”

It was finally agreed that the *Nancy Jane* should await the arrival of its passengers at a convenient place below the highway bridge at the hour of ten on the next morning. But, before they left, Mr. Quince, after inspecting the cars upon nearby switch tracks, announced, “I don’t seem to have no coal a layin’ around handy, so I better have five bucks on account in case I have to buy some.”

CHAPTER XIV 209
AN OUTING AND AN ACCIDENT

The heat wave had not broken in the morning. At eight o’clock South Ridgefield sweltered beneath a rising temperature with no promise of relief.

“The poor babies!” thought Virginia. “It is hotter than ever; but the picnic will help them.” She remembered how warm it had been at the hospital on the previous day and fell to thinking of Joe Curtis, and her eyes grew soft and dreamy as she wished that he was going on the river trip.

The high temperature had caused Obadiah to spend a restless night and he was peevish and irritable when Virginia told him of the plans for the day. “You should not have mixed up in such matters without consulting me,” he snapped. “It is indiscreet and may lead to your embarrassment. That hole up the river used to have a most unsavory reputation.” He paused as if seeking for other objections, and then went on. “You might get a sun stroke.”

In a moment she had her arms about his neck and kissed him. “There it is, Daddy. Thinking of me as usual.”

“How can I help–,” he grumbled.

She gave a joyous laugh and interrupted him. “I knew that you would want to help, too, Daddy. You may–allow Mr. Jones and Mr. Kelly to come to the picnic. It will be an outing which they will enjoy.” 210

Obadiah drew away from her caresses. “Don’t interfere with my office,” he snarled. “I was greatly embarrassed when I returned on the afternoon of the concert and found no one there. I spoke to them both about it.”

Virginia flushed with feeling. “Did they tell you that I asked them to come?” she demanded, and when his face admitted it, she continued, “Regardless of the permission you gave me in this very room to ask any one I wished to the concert, you criticised me, Daddy, to your employees. If you objected to my actions, why didn’t you come to me?”

The unwonted stand of his daughter made Obadiah ill at ease. He flushed angrily and then regained control of himself. “There, there, don’t get excited. I didn’t say much–a mere nothing.” He drew her towards him but she held her head stiffly, looking straight ahead. He kissed her cheek and whispered, “Don’t be cross, dear. Of course Kelly and Jones may go to your picnic, if you want them.”

She turned to him. The look of injury was gone. “I was cross, Daddy. I did wrong, and I beg your pardon.” She raised her lips for him to kiss and gave a little laugh in which there were memories of sadness.

That morning there was unusual activity on the South Ridgefield river front. The peace of Hog Creek was disturbed by the clang of shovels, the ring of slice bars, and the hissing of steam. Billowy clouds of smoke curling from the funnel of the *Nancy Jane* mixed with the river mist and gave variety to the smells emanating from the slaughter houses on the further shore. 211

As the sun dissipated the fog, the *Nancy Jane* left her anchorage, and, with much puffing and squeaking, breasted the sluggish current of the Lame Moose River. To the youth of the town, the reappearance of the craft was a matter of supreme interest, and, grouped along the bank, they gave voice to their pleasure in cheers. So, it is painted, the rural New Yorkers greeted the maiden voyage of the *Clermont*.

The *Nancy Jane* hove to and made fast at her appointed tryst with the babies. Thereafter, Mr. Quince, bearing the pole with the iron hook as arms, acted as a landing party, and dispersed groups of youth who displayed a disposition to visit the ship without invitation.

Dr. Jackson came aboard at an early hour, and caused a truck load of cots to be arranged in two long rows down the center of the deck. Upon these he prepared comfortable beds of blankets.

Mr. Quince viewed these activities in the light of his personal experiences. “I have seen ’em dance and sing and fight on the *Nancy Jane* but I hain’t never seen nobody sleep much, leastwise, if they was sober.” Suspicion entered his mind regarding the intentions of the physician. “You hain’t a thinkin’ of pullin’ off no booze party in these prohibition times, air yer?” he demanded. “I don’t want no law on me. I’m a respectable man and I runs a respectable boat.”

The distrust cast upon his efforts to relieve suffering disgusted the doctor. “You attend to your business and I’ll attend to mine. You can kick when I start something wrong,” he protested. 212

“All right, old hoss, I have warned yer. There’s a cop on the bridge a watching yer, now.” Mr. Quince pointed to where a policeman leaned lazily over the bridge rail and inspected the *Nancy Jane* with the mild curiosity aroused by its re-advent upon the river.

The absurd suggestion of the riverman irritated the doctor to redoubled energy. Jumping on the bank, he seized a carboy of lime water which he wrapped in a blanket and brought aboard, endeavoring to protect it from the sun’s rays by concealing it beneath a cot.

Mr. Quince’s worst suspicions were confirmed. He called to his follower. “Sim, come here!”

The lad approached. He was coolly attired in a worn shirt, overalls and a broken straw hat.

“Sim, be my witness.” The manner of Mr. Quince was dignified, as befitted one taking part in a legal ceremonial. He turned towards the busy medical man, a law-abiding citizen virtuously facing one of criminal desires. “I hereby warns yer agin’ putting any licker on this yere boat,” he cried in a stern voice.

“Oh, shut up,” shouted the aggravated Doctor. “Don’t be a fool.”

“You heard him and you heard me, Sim. Now I got the goods on that feller if we git pinched,” and, with an effort to engrave the matter upon the mind of his follower, the riverman concluded in the accepted tone of Hamlet’s ghost, “Remember.”

“Ayah,” responded the indifferent Sim.

The arrival of members of the picnic party prevented further discussion of this matter. 213

Down the steps from the bridge they came, a sisterhood of the tired, the worried, the anxious. The cruel strokes of labor and poverty were relentlessly erasing the softness of youth. The bearing of children and unceasing toil had destroyed their figures, and already the weariness of age was creeping into their movements.

Yet this was no gathering of the sorrowing. Upon each breast rested, in gentle embrace, the fulfillment of womanhood. Their pledge to the perpetuation of their kind, their duty to the responsibilities and opportunities of dawning centuries. The pride of motherhood was upon worn faces as coverings were adjusted about soft cheeks and tiny eyes twinkled and fat hands made

spasmodic efforts to grasp something where nothing was. Coarse and strident voices dropped to a musical tenderness as they harked to the mysterious language of baby land.

Even as the first mothers arrived, came Virginia followed by Serena and Ike, carrying food. Mr. Vivian appeared, bringing monstrous ice cream freezers. Mrs. Henderson headed a small procession consisting of a man bringing oceans of milk and another with perfect bergs of ice.

The mothers charged upon Dr. Jackson, the familiar friend of their households, in noisy confusion. In sharp and emphatic tones, he brought order out of this feminine chaos in a manner pleasing even to that marine disciplinarian, Mr. Quince, who had watched the arrival of his passengers with great astonishment. Two lines of kicking, struggling, emotion swept infants were 214
stretched upon the cots, and lifted their voices in a chorus which sounded above the hiss of steam from the boiler.

Mr. Quince was an adaptable man, and, regardless of his amazement at the character of his cargo, he rose to the occasion. Boarding his ship, he inspected the rows of infants. “Wisht I’d a knowed these yere kids,” he worried. “I mought a picked up some old trunk checks at the railroad station.”

“What for, Mr. Quince?” asked Virginia.

“Some of these yere kids a lyin’ around careless like is agoin’ to git mixed up and start the allfiredest fight amongst these women folks. Nothin’ makes a woman madder and want to fight quicker than to lose a kid.” Mr. Quince spoke in the tone of one accustomed to hailing the main top in the midst of storm, and his voice carried authoritative anxiety to the ears of every mother.

A scene of confusion ensued. The dire prophecy of the riverman caused each mother to seize her offspring and press it to her breast. The infants, having expressed acceptance of their new surroundings by falling asleep, were disturbed and made known their objections in loud wailings.

“Who stirred up those babies?” Dr. Jackson demanded, angrily.

“He did,” chorused the mothers, indicating the worthy seafaring man. “He said that they would get mixed up.” The hostile eyes of the matrons watched Mr. Quince as if suspicious that he might attempt personally to bring about the fulfillment of his prediction.

“Nonsense,” shouted Dr. Jackson. “You mothers ought to know your own babies by now, and, if 215
you don’t, you certainly know the clothes they have on.”

This assurance had a calming influence and quiet was slowly restored. For a time Dr. Jackson appeared about to reprimand the riverman, but hesitated, probably fearful of again being placed on record.

Mr. Quince perceived the evidences of his personal unpopularity with great coolness. Unabashed, he remarked, “You’re gettin’ all het up a layin’ around here with your kids. There’s nothing to it but a heap of sweating. Let’s go.”

“Wait a minute, please,” begged Virginia. “I think that some one else is coming. Won’t you blow your whistle, Mr. Quince?”

At this request, real embarrassment descended upon the skipper. After scratching his head reflectively, he went aft to the engine room, or, more accurately, climbed across to the rear barge and entered into conference with Sim. After a period of argument and persuasion, that young man took a slice bar and pounded at the lever of the whistle. A great cloud of steam hissed forth, from the midst of which came a thin wailing note very like in volume those advertising the presence of hot roasted peanuts.

Above the noise came a cry of “Whoa, hold on.” Kelly, followed by Mr. Jones, gallantly guarding Miss Knight, lest she inadvertently plunge headlong into the waves below, descended from the bridge. The stenographer was fittingly garbed for the occasion in flannel trousers, silk shirt, serge coat and yachting cap.

“We can go now, Mr. Quince,” cried Virginia, making herself heard with difficulty above the roar 216
of escaping steam.

“We hain’t a goin’ yet awhile,” bellowed the commander of the *Nancy Jane*. “The durned old whistle is stuck and a lettin’ all the steam out of the old biler.”

Dr. Jackson and Kelly repaired to the engine room to inspect conditions. In a moment the medical man returned, and, procuring his surgical case, hurried back towards the hissing boiler.

“It’s de fust time ah evah seed er Doctor called fo’ er enjine,” Ike told Serena. “Maybe it got de pip.”

“It soun’ mo’e lak de croup,” chuckled Serena.

With characteristic energy, the doctor applied a bandage to the whistle which so confined the steam that Sim was able, with sundry taps of a wrench, to abate “the hemorrhage of vapor,” as the medical man termed it.

There followed a pleasant period for friendly conversation, disturbed only by the cries of infants, the scrape of the shovel, and the clang of the furnace door.

During this time, the skipper sat on a box and pensively viewed the slow movement of the needle of the steam gauge. Finally he became energetic. Climbing upon the bank, he cast off the forward hawser of the *Nancy Jane*. Noting the eyes of the passengers to be upon him, he assumed a care

free air tinged with a certain dignity, as if the handling of the *Nancy Jane*, a perplexing problem to others, was a trifling matter to him. Likewise, he entered into explanations, ostensibly for Sim's benefit. "I've cast off the bow line. I'm agoin' to let the current swing er out, then we'll start ahead and you cast off that stern line."

Before the eyes of the marveling mothers, Mr. Quince assumed a position at the extreme front of 217
the boat, on a small deck beyond the railing. He held the pole across his body, as the balancing stick of a tightrope walker, and watched the current swing the *Nancy Jane* away from the bank.

Sim waited, motionless as a statue, with a grimy paw on the throttle.

"Let 'er go," sang Mr. Quince, as from the bridge of the *Leviathan*, his powerful voice echoing against the bluffs far up the river.

With much groaning and creaking the engine took up the play of its gearing, and choked down with a grunt as the paddles of the water wheel stuck in the clay bank.

Seizing their babies, the mothers arose and screamed. The infants also gave tongue.

As one man, Dr. Jackson and Kelly sprang to their feet. "Sit down," they shouted.

"Is de biler gwine blow up?" Serena asked Ike, nervously.

"Dat ole enjine jes balky. Dat's all," he reassured her.

In this moment of marine disaster, Mr. Quince displayed great coolness and judgment. "Look out," he shouted to Sim, and leaped ashore with great agility. From this position of vantage he commanded, "Stop 'er!" He then displayed wonderful presence of mind by casting off the stern line. Returning on board, he seized his pole and pushed the *Nancy Jane* out into the river.

Once more, upon signal, the engine strained and a large chunk of South Ridgefield soil splashed 218
into the river. The relieved paddle wheel caught the water and the *Nancy Jane* headed up the Lame Moose for Elgin's Grove. Mr. Quince plied his pole diligently, and, exerting his good muscles, shoved his craft into the channel it should follow.

The journey to the Grove was accomplished without notable incident. The sun shone upon the shallow water at such an angle that Mr. Quince was able to view the bottom of the river through the transparent liquid as a pathway stretching before him.

During the voyage the heat was not oppressive, and the infants slept while their mothers enjoyed a restful holiday. This peace was threatened only when an impromptu orchestra consisting of Sim on the harmonica and Ike on a pair of improvised bones showed a disposition to render some of the frivolous airs of the moment for the edification of the ladies.

Elgin's Grove lay cool and inviting as the *Nancy Jane* stood in towards the shore. The shallowness of the water made it necessary to reach the bank by a narrow gang plank, thoughtfully provided by the steam boat commander. As soon as this was in position, Virginia led the party ashore where the farmer cordially welcomed them with the original remark, "Ain't you folks afraid you're lost?" The supplies were landed amidst much boisterous excitement by Kelly, assisted by Mr. Quince, Sim and Ike.

Mr. Jones escorted Miss Knight ashore, bearing her parasol. She joined Dr. Jackson and Virginia, who were making plans for the general welfare.

Suddenly the mill owner's daughter turned to the stenographer and, smiling sweetly, said, "Mr. 219
Jones, may I depend upon you to see that the cots are brought up from the boat?"

Mr. Jones bowed with great dignity. "You will always find me at your service, Miss Dale," he responded, in dulcet tones. The day was rosy to him. The system of exercise, to which Kelly had unfeelingly condemned him, was having its effect. He felt better than he had for years. Likewise it appeared that his dreams were coming true. That very morning Obadiah had come to him and, in quite the approved manner of addressing private secretaries, saving a certain undue sharpness of tone, had said, "Jones, I wish you and Kelly to accompany my daughter on a picnic which she is giving today. The boat leaves the bridge at ten o'clock, I believe." Now, too, had his employer's daughter, aware of correct usages when private secretaries were about, singled him by name to assist her. It was of course to be regretted that this picnic was charitable in its nature and attended only by vulgar persons, but from the intimacy of such an occasion, it was but a step to the dances and dinners of his heart's desire.

Filled with joy, Mr. Jones cast aside his coat and ran across the greensward with the grace of a fawn. He shouted for Kelly and Ike, and in a moment had gathered about him the strong men of the party. He issued his instructions in the terse, certain words of a leader of men. Under his cheery encouragement, cots, with a man at each end, moved rapidly from the boat to their appointed place beneath the trees.

Perceiving the flushed face and the speed of the stenographer's movements, Virginia bestowed 220
upon him a glorious smile of approval and called, "Oh, Mr. Jones, what a help you are to me!"

The private secretary became proud nigh unto the bursting point. He redoubled his efforts, and in a moment all but the last cot was ashore. Kelly uplifted the far end and bawled for aid.

Instantly, Mr. Jones was at hand to seize upon the shore end of the cot. A leg caught upon a stanchion. The stenographer jerked at it. "Get a move on you!" he commanded Kelly.

"Wait, you cheese! What's your hurry?" retorted the bookkeeper, as he attempted to withdraw the cot from the stanchion to release the leg.

“Come on!” urged the strenuous Mr. Jones, turning and facing Kelly. The leg was freed. “Hustle, you big lobster! Can’t you lift your clumsy feet?” persisted the driver of men.

Before this admonishment Kelly advanced with alacrity.

Mr. Jones moved backwards, blindly, but with haste.

“Look out!” sounded Kelly’s warning; but alas, too late.

In his hurry Mr. Jones missed the gang plank and plunged backwards from the scow into three feet of mud and water. The screams of frightened women rent the air. A cry for the police arose from Mr. Vivian, while from the lips of that seasoned sailor, Sim, rang that terrifying cry, “Man overbo-o-o-ard.”

Mr. Quince sprang into action at the alarm as a fireman at the stroke of the gong. With a mighty leap he landed on the bow of the *Nancy Jane*. Seizing his pole, he ran along the edge of the barge 221
with the agility of a cat towards the circling waves which alone marked where the private secretary had disappeared. Mr. Quince reached forth tentatively with his pole, as Mr. Jones, having scrambled to his knees beneath the flood, emerged coughing and scrambling from the water.

The head of Mr. Jones came up, the pole of Mr. Quince went down. They met.

“*Wough!*” The stenographer lifted his voice in anguish and seated himself upon the river bottom, his head protruding above the surface of the water.

Undiscouraged, Mr. Quince, with practiced hand, continued to seek for Mr. Jones with the iron hook.

“Get off of me with that thing. It hurts,” protested the moist private secretary.

Regardless of these objections from his victim, Mr. Quince would have persisted in his efforts with a diligence certain of reward had not Kelly reached down from the bank, and, seizing the dripping and miserable stenographer by the hand, pulled him ashore.

Mr. Quince desisted from his fishing operations only when his prey was beyond his reach. Turning to Ike who had regarded his life saving with profound approval, he boasted, “I’d a got him by the britches sure, if he hadn’t a bin a settin’ down.” He rested upon his pole and his eagle eye swept the river, flashing brilliant in the sunshine. Into his face, but recently lighted with enthusiasm, came a look of dissatisfaction, of disappointment, as he confided his woe to the chauffeur. “There hain’t nobody ever gits drownded in the old Lame Moose,” he complained. “Hain’t ’nough water to drownd a weasel.”

To Ike came comprehension of the troubled soul of the river-man, and he endeavored to comfort 222
him. “Dey am’ ’nough water in dis yere river to slac’ de thirst o’ er g’asshopper,” he agreed.

Loud conversation took place among the mothers as Dr. Jackson announced his purpose of serving sustenance to those infants whose habit it was to resort to artificial sources for nourishment. Much attention was given to the sterilization of bottles, the measuring of milk, and the addition of lime water thereto. The medical man took the opportunity to deliver a lecture upon the feeding of infants with some reference to their early care and discipline, and Virginia took base advantage of her position as picnic manager to hold the babies while they enjoyed bottled refreshments. She would have also kissed each recipient of her favor had she not been sternly repressed by Dr. Jackson, much to the amusement of Mrs. Henderson.

“Let the child kiss the babies if she wants to, Doctor,” urged the widow.

“No,” he refused with firmness. “Kissing is dangerous. Now that we have prohibition, if we could get rid of smoking and kissing, things would be about right.”

“Are you engaged, Doctor?”

“No, certainly not. What made you ask me that, Mrs. Henderson?”

“I wonder why I did, myself, Doctor. It was a foolish question.”

At the close of the infantile banquet, the mothers returned their offspring to the line of cots, 223
where, protected by mosquito netting, they straightway relapsed into slumber.

Kelly, who had returned alone from the depths of the woods into which he had departed with the dripping Mr. Jones, was greatly interested, and addressed Miss Knight. “Watch those kids pound their ears! They sure eat sleep as soon as they hit the hay.”

The nurse looked at the bookkeeper inquiringly. “What are you? Wop, Guiney, Polock or Sheeny?”

“Why?”

“You must hate the English language. I thought that you must be foreign.”

His eyes were dancing when he looked at her and said, “My name is Kelly, Miss Knight.”

“That explains it,” she laughed.

The bachelor farmer who owned the grove watched the pleasant scene from a seat upon the well curb. Resting upon the damp planking, he philosophically sucked upon a black pipe, and gave ear to the prevalent wisdom on baby feeding. He modified this, no doubt, in his own mind, in the light of his own experience as a successful stock feeder.

With that social spirit always noticeable in his character, Ike joined the agriculturist and entered into casual conversation. “Dis is er fine grove you got yere, Misto Elgin.”

“It’s by long odds the best grove on the river.”

“Yas’r.” The chat languished until reopened by Ike on other lines. “You has er fine view, Misto Elgin, an’ you has got fine trees an’ you has got fine aiah.”

The farmer chuckled. “If you’d a bin ’round here yesterday afternoon when I cleaned out the well I’ll bet the air would have made you sick at your stomach, boy.” 224

“How cum?” Ike demanded sharply, his eyes rolling white with anxiety.

“The old hole was full of dead reptiles and varmints. I got a skunk, a rabbit, two frogs and three snakes out and a couple of things so far gone I couldn’t tell ’em. Gorry but they stunk.”

“You ’spec’ dey mek dat water bad?” pleaded Ike, in a voice pathetic in its intenseness.

“Water with things like that in it is deadly pizen, I cal’late,” the farmer told him, with a shudder at his own repulsive memories.

Ike leaped to his feet hurriedly. Fear lifted him “’Scuse me, Sar,” he murmured, as if he had been suddenly taken ill. A moment later, discovering the medical man resting in the shade of a great tree, the negro approached him with an air of indifference tempered with respect. For all that he knew this might be a dreaded “night doctor”–one of those fearful beings who steal about in the late hours of the night despoiling sepulchers and seizing late strollers for the benefit of science. It is obviously unwise to irritate such characters, lest evil befall one.

“Dis is er fine day, Doc,” Ike suggested.

“Yes.”

“Doc, do pizen hit er man suddin?”

The physician glanced lazily at the negro. The spirit of mischief seized him. “Look here, boy,” he cried, in a threatening manner, “I warn you as a friend as well as a medical man to keep away from poison. You are so tough, so ornery, so low down good for nothing and lazy, that poison 225 would have to work slow under your hide and you would die a lingering and painful death.”

Without another word Ike departed. The verdict had been handed down and sentence passed. Before him lay a dreadful death. He sought solitude in which to pass his few remaining hours and to prepare for his fearful end. Stumbling along, he came upon the ice cream freezers and the lunch baskets. Serena and Mr. Vivian sat among them, engaged in debate regarding the preparation of certain types of cake in view of the high cost of eggs.

To Ike’s mind, this was the kitchen. His home, his place of retirement, should logically be back of this. Within him burned increasing fear. Upon self-examination, he discovered that peculiar symptoms beset every part of his body. Unquestionably the fatal hour approached. The time of paroxysms and fits was at hand. Trembling and almost blind from apprehension, the chauffeur circled the refreshments and the culinary argument. He came upon a shady nook. The tall brush had been pulled aside and fashioned into a rude canopy which, with the tree branches overhead, afforded a double protection from the sun. Within it, his confused eyes made out that which appeared a couch decked forth with old blankets and gunny sacks. Ike sank upon this with a moan of anguish and, with his kinky head buried in the crook of his elbow, awaited the final agony which would herald the passing of his soul.

With that love for solitude and self-communion, so common to unusual minds, Mr. Quince had not mingled with the ladies. While technically a member of the picnic party, he was not one with it in 226 spirit, in taste or in aspiration. Those who go down to the sea in ships give but little heed to infant culture. Therefore, he strolled about the circumference of the festivities instead of in their midst and thus came upon the recumbent Ike.

“What’s the matter now?” he demanded in the rough manner of a man hardened by contact with nature in her wildest moods.

Ike emitted a dismal groan.

Mr. Quince, ever one of action, promptly applied that treatment deemed peculiarly efficacious in the treatment of those intoxicated. He seized the negro by his shoulders and shook him violently. “Come up!” he roared. “Git a move on yer, yer lazy bum.”

“Lemme go!” protested Ike, astounded at the administration of such radical restorative measures to one about to shuffle off. “Ah’m er dead man. Ah’m er gwine to pass away.”

Mr. Quince registered intense interest. “Yer don’t say?” He scratched his head reflectively and brought the cold light of reason to bear upon the problem. “Whatcher talkin’ about,” he went on in tones of regret. “Yer hain’t dead”; and concluded more hopefully, “Leastways not yit.”

“He’p,” moaned Ike, apparently in intense agony.

Mr. Quince pensively spat a stream of tobacco juice across the bier of the dying one. “Maybe that doctor mought give yer some dope,” he suggested, with great deliberation.

Ike’s answer was a sepulchral groan.

Dr. Jackson, with the utmost possible composure was receiving from a group of mothers that 227 feminine adulation usually accorded the members of his profession.

Mr. Quince slowly approached them. “That black boy is er dying over there,” he hailed, as an officer ex-changing casual greetings from his bridge with a passing ship.

The doctor leaped to his feet with a startled look. So did the mothers as well as every one else who was sitting down. They moved in a body to the side of the expiring chauffeur. About his couch they grouped, as it is painted that courts gather by the bedside of expiring monarchs to receive the royal farewell.

Before the assembled multitude, Ike moaned and groaned in anguish of mind and body.

Dr. Jackson examined him. “What’s the matter?” he asked.

“Ah done drink poison,” Ike whined. “De col’ chills is er runnin’ down ma back an’ ma laigs. Ah’s gwine ter die.”

Serena drew near. Her extensive acquaintance with the young man made her skeptical in all things concerning him. She examined his surroundings with interest and cried, “Ef dat fool ain’ got no bettah sense an’ to lay hisse’f out on ma ice why ain’ he got col’ chills?”

Lifting a sack, Dr. Jackson exposed the smooth surface of a block of ice.

Ike sprang from his chilly couch.

Serena made indignant outcry. “Howcum yo’all mek er coolin’ boa’d out er ma ice when ah needs it fo’ lemonade? Ah fin’ out mighty quick ef you is er dyin’ when ah surves de fried chicken.” 228

Disgust developed among the mothers; but Ike took no note of popular feeling. His was the joy of a reprieved man as his pains flew away before the reassuring laughter of the medical man.

“Let’s have something to eat,” suggested the chuckling practitioner, when he had completed this cure by faith.

As if by magic, the luncheon was spread, and how those blissfully contented mothers did eat and make the woods ring with the merriment of their holiday. The fun was given greater impetus by the reappearance of Mr. Jones who, pending the drying of his own more luxurious apparel, was clothed in garments of rural simplicity loaned by the farmer.

Embarrassment spoke from every feature of the stenographer as, in the midst of laughter, he approached the festive spread.

Virginia perceived his sad case and beckoned him to her side. “Here is Mr. Jones,” she announced. “He suffered for the cause and shall be our guest of honor.” With her own hands she arranged a place for him and saw that he had food enough for two men. This she made sweeter with smiles of approval and appreciation.

The private secretary said but little. Yet the day became beautiful, and once again joy rested in his heart.

In the coolness of Elgin’s grove, the afternoon of the hottest day South Ridgefield ever experienced passed lazily. The mothers chatted and laughed and some took naps; but best of all 229
the babies ate and slept in comfortable rotation as the hot hours passed.

Upon repeated urgings by Mr. Quince the tired party re-embarked upon the *Nancy Jane* after supper. The riverman explained gloomily, “I hain’t got no use for this old river after dark. The government hain’t hangin’ no lanterns on the snags in the Lame Moose, and I hain’t got nothin’ to steer by but the lightnin’ bugs.”

Regardless of the skipper’s attitude, the departure was delayed because a postprandial nap of Sim’s had allowed the steam to get low while the commanding officer persuaded the passengers to return aboard.

Becoming aware of this condition, rough language was used abaft the beam, as the Captain addressed the crew. Mutiny was evidently rampant, as the crew was heard to invite the Captain to return home on foot if dissatisfied with its efforts. Then came arbitration, and, after a time, above the noise of argument, the hissing of steam sounded in increasing volume.

The shadows of night lay upon the waters as the *Nancy Jane* left Elgin’s Grove. Since it was too dark for the navigator to procure his accustomed view of the river bottom, he peered into the gloom with anxious eyes. Upon the banks the tops of the trees showed clear against the evening sky; but the shadowy mass below was of a nature to baffle the judgment of all but the most experienced pilots.

Mr. Quince was not baffled. He laid the *Nancy Jane* upon a course down the middle of the stream, and, laying aside the tiller, he retired to the engine room where, in a voice which reached every ear upon the lightless deck, he conversed with the engineer regarding the more intimate details 230
of navigation. “How much steam have you got on the old tea pot?” he asked, and when Sim told him, complained, “That hain’t enough to make this yere turtle crawl home.”

“It’s all this leaky kettle kin hold,” objected the engineer.

Mr. Quince made technical explanations. “Steam is a blowin’ out of the safety valve. That’s where yer air losin’ power. I cal’late the old flat iron is er slippin’. I’ll fix ‘er.”

The shuffling of feet sounded.

“How kin you tell where you are a-puttin’ that flat iron?” protested Sim. “You’re a goin’ to bust the darned oil biler a foolin’ with that valve in the dark. You can’t see what you’re doin’ no more

than a mole."

"I hain't slipped 'er out er notch. She's where she orter be. This biler hain't er goin' to blow up. What's it to yer any way; it hain't your biler."

"Ain't I got to stand by the blame thing?"

"What's eatin' on yer?" asked Mr. Quince, a trifle obscurely. "Yer know dern well you're too blame lazy to shovel enough coal under the old wash biler to git her het up none before we git home."

This struck Sim as reasonable. He changed the subject and inquired, "Where are we?"

A voice remarkably like that of Mr. Quince, although it could not have been that experienced river man, responded, "I dunno."

Leaves rustled along the roof, and the skipper departed hurriedly for his post or, more accurately, his pole. For a time he wielded it energetically. The current was assisting the engine 231
and so they moved fairly rapidly. The glow of South Ridgefield showed above the trees, and, with ever greater frequency, the lights of scattered houses gleamed upon either bank. They passed the suburbs. Upon either shore lay dark masses of manufacturing plants lighted by isolated electric lights. They were abreast of Obadiah Dale's mill now, while a short block away stretched the ghostly fabric of the highway bridge, dimly traced by its own arch of lights. Beneath it was their landing place; so the mothers began to prepare to land and to thank Virginia for their pleasant day.

Mr. Quince, of course, was at his post. Resting himself upon his pole, he was enjoying that satisfaction over duty well performed which abides in the breasts of ships' captains and locomotive engineers when they bring their passengers to a safe journey's end.

Suddenly the bow of the *Nancy Jane* rose slowly and imperceptibly. There was a sizzling, grinding sound, and the boat stopped abruptly but softly as against a cushion, aground on a sand bar. As the craft struck there was a forward movement upon her deck, and a shifting of passengers and freight. A resounding splash sounded in front of the wrecked vessel. Mr. Quince, resting meditatively upon the pole, had been, sad to relate, hove over the bow of his own ship. At the moment of his departure he gave a diabolical yell.

A scene of terror ensued. Mothers sending forth wild screams hugged their babes to their bosoms as they faced the unknown perils of the night. They were not made calmer by a rhythmic 232
heaving of the deck, accompanied by a mighty boiling and beating of the water astern, as the paddle wheel exerted itself against the sand bar. Perhaps Sim wished to emulate "Jim Bludso" of heroic fame, and, in the absence of his pilot, keep the engine going "to hold her nozzle agin the bank."

With soothing and calming words, Kelly and Dr. Jackson finally brought a partial calm when panic seemed assured.

At the first alarm, Ike had leaped up from a box upon which he had been resting from the labors of the day. With rare presence of mind, Mr. Jones seized it for personal use as a life preserver in case of need. Reassured by the remoteness of danger, Ike endeavored to sit where no seat was, and, with a crash, measured his length upon the deck. This episode did not tend to allay the nervousness of female minds.

From the shadows of the night, a dripping figure scrambled over the bow of the ship. It was Mr. Quince returning from whence he had been hove. He reassumed command. "Stop the engine!" he squeaked, in a voice made husky by too much moisture. "Want to burn all the coal up for nothin'?" Obediently the engine slowed and stopped. Again the voice of the skipper sang out, "Better fix that old safety valve. I mought a shoved 'er too far in the dark." Suddenly a tremendous hissing of steam arose and then died softly away. Mr. Quince hurried to the engine room and addressed Sim at close quarters. "Yer dern fool, what made yer let all the steam outer the biler. We hain't got no power now. How're we goin' to git 'er off?" 233

"You ain't goin' to git 'er off. She's stuck for good," prophesied Sim.

It is not easy to discourage great spirits. "Ef I can't git 'er off now, I kin wait for high water. The old tub hain't hurt none," Mr. Quince made answer.

Basing the duration of their experience as castaways upon these remarks, the mothers gave away to tears. Babies awakened and wept also. A chorus of woe swept shoreward.

"Who knows how to swim?" Dr. Jackson asked in a sharp voice.

The ladies construed this remark as implying an early necessity for this accomplishment. The resulting increase in grief was with difficulty subdued.

From the information educed, it was clear that Sim was among the most experienced swimmer among those present. Being untrammeled by the mandates of fearful females, he had since his early youth spent much of the summer season in the water.

"Sim, you swim ashore and get help," ordered the doctor.

A difficulty arose, "I ain't a goin' to swim with my clothes on," objected Sim. "Maybe I only have to wade, but I might get into a hole and have to swim. Clothes drag a feller down."

"Very sensible," agreed the physician. "Take them off."

“I ain’t no heathen. I ain’t agoin’ to take my clothes off before all of these womenfolks.”

“Don’t be silly,” urged the doctor. “We will turn our heads.” 234

“Take ’em off behind the biler,” suggested Mr. Quince.

“Yes, fry myself on the durned old thing.” Additional complications struck the youth. “What am I goin’ to wear when I git ashore. The cops will git me sure, if I run around town naked.”

At last, a compromise was reached. Sim, simply attired in trousers, disappeared towards the shore. Then followed a long period of silence in which the babies slept in comfort and only the sobbing mothers were unhappy.

Voices sounded on the shore. Sim had carried the news of shipwreck to waiting husbands and succor drew near. They built a fire and shouted words of encouragement. A search was made for boats; but they were few in South Ridgefield and well protected from marauders. Even the only seaworthy skiff of Mr. Quince’s fleet was securely locked, and the key in his pocket, as Sim reminded him from the shore.

The night wore on. Great activity with little result took place about the fire. Policemen, firemen and newspapermen viewed the scene with interest. Such prominent men as Obadiah Dale and Hezekiah Wilkins exchanged ideas over the fire with factory employees and laborers. It was Pat Murphy, a teamster, who solved the problem of rescue. As the eastern sky was lighted by the first streaks of the coming day, a mule team and a wagon in a few trips landed the passengers of the *Nancy Jane*.

In accordance with the traditions of the sea, Mr. Quince stayed by his ship. The last load 235
departed leaving him drying himself before the furnace. The reflection of the fire lighted up the deep lines of his face, its pensive look and the rhythmic movement of the powerful jaws, as the faithful mariner kept vigil upon the waters.

But, as the rays of the rising sun turned the eastern horizon into gold, an early observer might have perceived Mr. Quince arise, stretch himself, and solace his palate with chewing tobacco. The same beholder might then have witnessed the riverman step overboard and wade slowly towards the shore, bearing his shoes, wrapped in his trousers, before him, while the morning breeze flapped the tails of his old flannel shirt about his thin legs.

CHAPTER XV 236
A MAN IN DISGRACE

“Virginia, come here!” roared Obadiah on the morning after the trip up the river.

There was a rough commanding note in his voice which made the girl spring to her feet, and, shaken by dread of impending calamity, with throbbing heart and startled eyes, hurry down stairs to where he awaited her in the living room.

He stood before the great mantel. The morning paper was stretched between his hands, his nervous fingers crushing its edges. His face was flushed with passion and his eyes, as they met those of his daughter, were cruel in their anger. “Look here! See what you have done,” he cried, in a voice which shook with the intenseness of his emotion. In his haste he tore a corner from the paper as he thrust it towards the trembling girl.

She accepted the sheet as if she were in a dream. Never had he spoken so to her. Never had she seen him in such a rage. Fear of him–of the primitive masculinity of the man–clutched at her heart. Everything seemed unreal. It was as if she were in the midst of a horrible nightmare from which she might, if she would, release herself. She sank into a chair, the paper across her knees. As her eyes dropped, the print danced queerly for a moment before her vision cleared. There, she 237
read in staring headlines, “The Wreck of the *Nancy Jane*.”

The comical side of the vicissitudes of the *Nancy Jane*, with its passenger list of mothers and babies had so impressed the reporter that he had prepared his story in a humorous vein. Unfortunately, he had elected to weave his story about Obadiah Dale, the manufacturer, and his daughter, instead of about Mrs. Henderson or any humble individual. The story was funny. The way the scribbler linked the generosity of Obadiah towards the babies, the navigation of the Lame Moose by the *Nancy Jane*, and Elgin’s Grove, was a scream to those who knew the selfishness of the mill owner, the shallow depth and harmlessness of the Lame Moose and the lurid history of the grove. The editor-owner of the paper had little use for Obadiah and in running this article–good natured and harmless on its face–he had hit the manufacturer in a vulnerable spot. Obadiah could not stand ridicule.

While Virginia read, the wide toed shoes of her father resounded, as he tramped excitedly up and down the room. She finished the article and looked up at him. Little chills of fright thrilled up and down her spine, and yet she found no reason for it in the column she had been reading. That struck her as rather silly.

As she dropped the paper, Obadiah glowered down at her. “Now,” he yelled, in his high voice, “I hope that you are satisfied. You have made me the laughing stock of this town–made a perfect ass out of me.” He shook a long forefinger at her. “I’ve stood enough of your foolishness and it’s got

to stop." The old man was nearly frantic with anger as he scowled at her, a pale, crushed little thing in the big arm chair. "I'm tired of it," he raged. "You make me ridiculous by your failure to appreciate that there is such a thing as personal dignity. You've mixed me in the most nonsensical affairs. Think of it! Parading down the main street of this town behind a minstrel band with a load of negroes!" He almost gnashed his teeth at the thought. "You got up that fool band concert at the Old Ladies' Home. It was a farce with the fire department dashing up in the middle of it. Now," he bellowed, "you had to go and get mixed in this mess on the river." Obadiah had to pause in the catalogue of his grievances to catch his breath. His temper was choking him. "I've always tried to protect my reputation," he went on. "I've minded my business and let other people attend to theirs. But you have to drag me into this. My name is a hiss and a byword in this town today. I'll never hear the last of it. You are to blame for it all." Self-pity brought Obadiah to the verge of tears.

But immediately a returning wave of anger engulfed his sorrow. "You are extravagant–wickedly so. You force me to pay out large sums of money. You've made me buy ice cream for the old ladies, the veterans, the firemen and all the mothers and babies, too.–Pretty nearly the whole town has been entertained at my expense," he groaned. "Worst of all," he continued with renewed temper, "were your fool admissions and asinine agreement which forced me to endow that room at the hospital.

"It's time to call a halt," he raved. "I'll stand it no longer. It must stop." He paused before the shrinking girl and shook his fist in the air. "Hereafter you will mind your own business and not interfere in the troubles of others. You'll stay at home where you belong and quit gadding about."

Stunned by his vehemence and crushed by his words, the forlorn little figure raised pleading eyes to him as he strode out of the room. "Daddy," she cried after him, but he took no notice of it.

In her own room, tears brought relief to Virginia, and in time she was able to review her father's behavior with a degree of calmness. She trembled anew as she remembered his anger. Then, with a start, she awakened to the fact that he had forbidden her to continue to do those things which she had done in the spirit of her mother's message. Her mind traveled over his actions in the past and reconsidered remarks that he had made. Suddenly she realized that he had never been in sympathy with her, that he had frankly told her so, and that she had refused to believe him. With sickening alarm, she awakened to the conflict between the ideals of her father and her mother. She sat upon the bed, a dejected heap of sorrow, and gazed at the wall with dry eyes, frightened and unseeing. What must she do? That was the question. It smothered her acute grief at his angry words. Worshiping the mother whom she had never known with all the hunger of a lonely heart, it was a solemn and tragic decision which she forced upon herself. The gravity of it urged her to physical action. She could not bear to lie there, she must move about.

It was a sad eyed girl who went downstairs. From Serena she learned that her father had telephoned that he would not be home for lunch.

The old negress used all of her arts to persuade her mistress to eat something. "Ain' yo'all gwine pick at dis yere salad an' tast'tes some o' de custard ah fix special fo' ma honey chil'?" she begged. To comfort Virginia she belittled the episode of the morning. "You' Daddy done git mad fo' er minute caze dat ole boat stick in de mud. He gwine fo'git it quick. He ain' tek no 'count o' de babies wot 'joy deyse'fs er eatin' an' er sleepin'."

The girl ate sparingly as Serena forced food upon her.

Suddenly the old servant reached out and patted her mistress gently upon the shoulder, her black face filled with a great tenderness as she said, "You' Mammy done say, ef er pusson try to do right, dey ain' nothin' else wot mek no diffe'nce. Dat's jes wot Miss Elinor she say.

"Yas'm, she done say dat right befo' ma eyes," explained Serena, and then she hastened away to answer the door bell, leaving Virginia gazing dreamily out of a window, wonderfully comforted.

The shrill voice of a woman uplifted in excitement sounded in the hall. "We must see some one. We have come a long distance and Mr. Dale is not at his office."

"Dey ain' nobody heah fo' yo'all to talk no business to. You might jes as well go 'long," Serena answered with firmness.

"Mr. Dale has a daughter," the voice suggested.

"She ain' gwine be 'sturbed. She jes er chil' an' ain' know nothin' a tall 'bout her pappy's business. Bettah gwan away f'om heah."

"What is it, Serena?" asked Virginia, hurrying into the hall.

"Jes some pussons dat ain' know whar dey 'long," snarled the old negress, beginning to vibrate under the stress of anger as she glared at three highly indignant women waiting without.

Virginia felt that it was necessary to interfere in the tense situation. "I am Miss Dale. I shall be glad to talk to you if you wish to come in," she told the strangers, to Serena's disgust.

The hostility of these visitors melted in a degree at this display of hospitality; but their manner was cool as they followed the girl into the living room.

"We are a committee from the Women's Civic Club of Amity, a town situated ten miles below here on the river," explained Mrs. Duncan, a stern faced female, after they had introduced themselves. "We ask that you inform your father of our call."

"I shall be glad to do that," Virginia promised. "Am I to explain the purpose of your visit to him?"

Mrs. Duncan gazed questioningly at the girl. “We ask you to do that, and if you have a heart we hope that you will use your influence in our behalf. You may tell him–” her eyes blazed–“that we come on the part of the women of Amity to protest against his killing us by putting poison in our drinking water.”

“What?” gasped an astonished Virginia.

“We don’t propose to sit quiet and allow Obadiah Dale to murder our children.”

“I don’t understand.”

The very evident amazement and horror of the mill owner’s daughter at her words caused Mrs. Duncan to expand upon them in the cause of clearness. “Amity gets its water supply from the Lame Moose River,” she explained. “The waste from your father’s mill has made the water unfit for human consumption. It has been getting worse for years and now we have much sickness, especially among children, which the doctors trace to this cause.” 242

“Why, that is terrible. I am sure that my father knows nothing about it,” cried Virginia with great earnestness.

Mrs. Duncan gave an audible sniff of disbelief. “Oh, I think that he does. We tried to get him to do something before we took the matter up with the State Board of Health, but he wouldn’t. They have taken samples of the water and have decided that the waste makes it unfit for the use of human beings. So that is settled.”

“If that is true why don’t they take the matter up with my father? Why should you come to him?” asked Virginia, suspiciously.

“Because,” Mrs. Duncan continued, “your father is rich and powerful, and even if the Board of Health orders him to stop running waste into the river he may take the matter into court and fight it for years. That is what we are worrying about now. Must Amity go on drinking poisoned water while your father and the Board of Health fight in the court? Our purpose is to attempt to persuade him not to contest the decision of the Board.”

“If my father is certain that the waste from his mill is making people sick, he surely will stop running it into the river.” 243

“It is the only decent thing for him to do,” agreed Mrs. Duncan, greatly mollified by the attitude of the girl. “Perhaps the Board of Health has not notified him of its final decision,” she conceded. “Of course our Club is greatly interested and we have kept in close touch with the case. Our representatives have called frequently at the office of the Board.” She laughed. “We even had a committee which used to go with Mr. Joe Curtis, the Board’s representative, every time he took samples of water at Amity.”

“Who took the samples?” asked Virginia, instantly alert.

“A young man by the name of Curtis. He used to come out on a motorcycle. He worked for the Board of Health.”

“I’ll take the matter up with my father, tonight,” Virginia promised the women when they left. “You can be sure that he will do the right thing about it.”

Her old confidence in her father surged up in the presence of the callers; but after they had gone the remembrance of the morning’s episode, with her new realization of her father, persisted in returning. She caught herself wondering if it were possible that he, knowing that the waste from his mill was polluting the water and causing sickness, had done nothing about it. Loyally she fought back the thought. He wouldn’t do that–a wicked thing. He didn’t know the truth–if the water *was* bad. That was the point. Before she talked to him she ought to be certain about it. Joe Curtis knew and could tell her the truth. Her father, hearing it from her, would be glad to do the right thing. 244

Yet, regardless of her hopeful reasoning, the memories of the morning–of her father’s temper torn face in all of its selfish cruelty of expression–came back to her and filled her with strange indefinite forebodings of evil.

So, it was a different Virginia who came to Joe Curtis that afternoon. It was one in whose face there were vague shadows of anxiety and sadness which, regardless of pathetic efforts at disguise, spoke of an unquiet heart.

He sensed the change in her as she greeted him. But his cheery salutation and his boyish bursts of humor could not arouse the care free girl whom he had known.

She came quickly to the matter which was uppermost in her mind.

“Joe, you work for the State Board of Health, don’t you?”

His face sobered at her question, as if he recognized the approach of complications. He nodded affirmatively.

“You took samples of the river water to find out if it were made unfit for people to drink by the waste from my father’s mill, didn’t you?”

He delayed his response so long that she was forced to repeat her question before she could get even a nod of admission.

“Joe, does my father’s mill spoil the water?”

His head moved uneasily upon his pillow; but he was silent.

“Please answer me,” she urged. “It is very important.” 245

He turned upon her almost shortly. “How can I tell? I never analyzed the water. I couldn’t do it if I wanted to. You know that I am working my way through college. I have only had one year of chemistry. On the rolls of the Board of Health, I am carried as a laborer. I get samples and certify to the time and place I took them. The laboratory analyzes them.”

“You were around the laboratory. You brought in the samples. Naturally you must have had some interest in the matter–in your work. Won’t you tell me what you know?”

“Why ask me?” he complained sharply. “I shouldn’t discuss this matter with you, Virginia. Talk to your father. He knows all about the case. Let him tell you.”

“My father knows!” she exclaimed. She leaned over the bed and gazed down at him. Though she had guessed his answer, she must have it in words. “Joe,” she whispered, “you promised to be my friend. I must know the truth. I can trust you. Please tell me about the water.”

There was a pathetic pleading in her eyes which tore at his heart. He tried to resist the spell she cast about him but his face softened beneath her gaze. “I’m sorry, little girl,” he whispered, and then blurted suddenly, “Everybody connected with the Board of Health knows that the waste makes the water fierce. It’s not fit for a dog to drink.”

That afternoon Obadiah arrived home early. Perhaps he meant to patch up a peace with his daughter. He asked for her as soon as he entered the house and seemed disappointed when he learned that she had gone out. 246

Virginia came back from the hospital soon after the arrival of her father. Serena met her when she arrived, after having viewed her employer with great hostility through an opening in the portières. The old negress’ eyes were keen enough to read the shadow of apprehension lurking in the depths of the blue eyes. To the faithful servitor it indicated the approach of sorrow or tragedy to this peaceful domestic haven. She sought to intervene against fate. “Ain’ you bettah res’ youse’f befo’ dinner, honey chil’? You’ Daddy, he’s a readin’ his papah an’ ain’ want to be ’sturbed,” she urged.

There was determination in the girl’s face. She pushed aside the black hand which in kindness would have detained her. “No, Serena, I must see him at once,” she said, and passed on into the living room.

“Hello, Virginia. Where have you been hiding yourself?” was her father’s friendly greeting, but he gave her a sharp glance.

She sat down as she told him. “I have been to the hospital, Daddy.”

Obadiah’s face hardened and he scanned the page before him.

She watched his movements with unconcealed anxiety. She was very pale and it was only with an effort that she could calm herself to say, “A committee of ladies from Amity came to see you this afternoon.”

“What did any committee of women want with me? Money?” he suggested, with a suspicious eye upon his daughter. 247

“No, they came, they said, because the waste from the mill is spoiling the river water and causing sickness in their town.”

“Why didn’t they come to my office about that?”

“They did, but you were not in.”

He shifted uneasily in his chair. “Did you talk to them about it?”

“Yes. They explained the matter to me. They said that the Board of Health has found that the water is unfit to drink. They wanted to persuade you not to go into court about the decision. A law suit might last for years.”

He laughed harshly. “They are waking up, are they? They thought that they could scare me with the Board of Health. Did you say anything to them?”

“Yes, Daddy, I told them that if you were assured that the waste from your mill was making people sick you would stop running it into the river.”

There was a crackling sound as he crushed the paper in his hands.

“You see, Daddy,” she went on, “I was careful to make the point that you could not be expected to do anything unless you were sure that it was the waste from your mills which was responsible.”

Obadiah leaped to his feet. A smile of relief swept over his face. “You caught the point exactly, dear. How do I know that my mill is responsible for the trouble?”

She did not respond to his change of mood but continued, “The ladies assured me that the Board of Health, after a careful investigation, has decided that it is.” 248

“Is that so?” he sneered.

She looked up at the change in his tone. His manner seemed to make her more resolute as she spoke again. “The matter was so important that I wanted to be sure that you knew the truth about it.” Her voice was trembling now. “I went to the hospital and asked Mr. Curtis. It was he

who took the samples of water for the Board of Health, and I knew that he would tell me the truth."

"What?" demanded Obadiah, his voice pitched high.

"I asked him if the waste from your mill made the water bad."

"Well of all the preposterous interferences–"

"Joe said that it wasn't fit for a dog to drink."

"What does that booby know about it?"

"As he works for the Board of Health, even though he is only a laborer, he knows what they think about it, and–" she looked squarely at her father–"I believe him, Daddy."

"Believe that idiot?" shouted Obadiah, his face black as night. "He didn't have sense enough to gouge me when your fool admissions gave him the whip hand. He's a fine specimen of a man for you to be running after," declared the mill owner with scorn. "It's a nice thing for a respectable girl to be doing. You'll get yourself talked about if I don't watch you."

A change came over Virginia. She stiffened and her fear seemed to leave her. There was a glint of anger in her eyes as they showed large against her pale face. Her soft round chin set in an almost comical reflection of his obstinate jaw. She arose, and her level gaze met his angry glower, unafraid. "Stop, father." She spoke with wonderful self-restraint. "You have said quite enough about Mr. Curtis. We are talking about something else. The waste from your mill is making people sick. What are you going to do about it?" 249

"Nothing," cried Obadiah, in his wrathful falsetto, his face working convulsively. "I've been running waste into the river for years. If people don't like it, let them make the most of it–go thirsty for all I care. I'll give them a real fight."

"Do you mean that, knowing your mill is poisoning the water which people are forced to drink, you'll fight the matter in court as they were afraid you'd do?"

"I'll drag them through the courts until they get so warm that any water will look good to them." Suddenly his temper blazed anew. "What did I tell you this morning?" he demanded. "I warned you that I would no longer tolerate your silly interference in other people's business. I certainly will not permit you to butt into my affairs. You go too far–you and the friends whom you pick up in the street. Do you understand?"

"Yes, I understand. You spoke too plainly this morning for me to misunderstand your meaning–as you are doing now. Daddy, I know that I have made many mistakes. Yet, everything which you criticize was done to aid some one else and in a small way they did spread happiness." 250

"If you had minded your own business you'd be happier now."

"I was trying to help other people."

"God helps him who helps himself," quoted Obadiah, virtuously.

"That doesn't mean to think only of yourself."

Her quiet voiced argument infuriated him. "You'll attend to your own business in the future," he bellowed.

She did not flinch before his bluster but held her ground in white faced determination. "You want me to lead a life of selfishness when there are so many opportunities to help others?"

"Call it what you like, only get into your head the idea that hereafter you will attend to your own affairs and let the rest of the world do the same."

Abruptly her mood changed. She gazed at him with a great longing. "Oh, Daddy dear, surely you are not so selfish as all that. I know that deep in your heart you are not."

For an instant it seemed as if his mood were softening to hers; but his obstinacy reasserted itself and he hardened himself against her appeal. "I have always managed to take care of myself and I expect the other fellow to do the same," he rapped. "In the future, you and I will follow that course and avoid this sort of trouble."

"'I must choose between your way and the way of my Mother'"

For a moment the pleading look of the girl faded into one of utter helplessness. She fought to regain control of herself as if, having reached a decision, she needed to arouse the physical force to carry it out. Turning slowly, she moved over to the center table. From its drawer she took the book which had belonged to her mother. 251

He watched her, silenced, as he perceived the emotional conflict which was shaking the girl strangely.

When she confronted him again, her face was tragic in its sorrow. In those few seconds she had aged. She had leaped from a girl into womanhood. Her poise was maintained by sheer power of will. When she spoke it was in a forced voice, as if the muscles of her throat strained to hold back the sobs which her tones confessed to be near. "Daddy, there are two persons whom I should obey," she said. "You, my father, and–" her eyes filled with tears as she raised the book and clasped it to her breast and whispered ever so tenderly–"my mother."

Wonder held Obadiah speechless in its grasp.

"A moment ago," she went on, "you condemned me to a life of selfishness." She held the worn little volume towards him, and then clutched it to her heart. "In this book is a message from my mother. It is as plain and clear to me as if I had heard it from her own lips. She tells me to be unselfish and to think of others. I must choose between your way and the way of my mother. I do it now in your presence." The girl's voice softened into an ineffable sweetness. "Perhaps mother is here, too, and understands about it. I choose her way, Daddy."

Her manner was firmer now, except for the telltale twitchings of the muscles of her face, as she continued. "Knowing my mother's wishes, I could not live as you would have me. I must go away." Her voice caught. "I must go where I can try to be unselfish. You can't object to my going to Aunt Kate's–she has asked me to visit her so often." She swayed. Her hand clutched at the table for support. For an instant her face worked convulsively, and then, with a little cry of utter misery, she ran from the room, holding the book to her breast. 252

Late that evening Serena softly knocked at Virginia's door. When she was bidden to enter, the crumpled and disheveled form upon the bed and the tear streaked face told the story of grief to the big hearted negress. "Ain' you gwine eat er li'l suppah, honey chil'?" she urged.

"No, Serena, I'm not hungry." A great sob shook the girl.

"Bettah lemme han' yo'all er cup o' tea an' suthin' to pick on," the old darkey pleaded. "Ah fetch it in er minute."

"No, Serena, I can't eat. I don't believe that I will ever want to eat again." A paroxysm of sobs wrenched the little frame of the girl and she dabbed frantically with a moist handkerchief at the great tears which welled up in the blue eyes.

The springs of the bed groaned and strained as Serena seated herself upon its edge. A gentle mothering look was in her face, and she began to rub the white arm gently with her big black hand. "Res' youse'f, ma li'l honey baby," she murmured. "Serena ain' gwine let nobody hu't her baby gal." Suddenly she bristled. "Dis yere hu'tin' ma honey chil' bettah stop. Ah bus' somebody plum wide open," she growled ferociously. "Ah fights fo' ma baby agin de whole wo'ld." 253

The girl's sobs lessened enough for her to speak. "I am going away, Serena."

"Whar you gwine go, chil'?" exclaimed the old woman with much excitement.

“I am going to Aunt Kate’s home in Maine.”

“W’en is we gwine start?”

“I go day after tomorrow,” explained Virginia sorrowfully. “You stay here, Serena.”

“Howcum? Who plan dat foolishness? Wot gwine keep me heah w’en ma honey chil’ done leave? Ah bets ah follers ma baby ef ah has to clim’ ba’foot th’ough fiah an’ brimstone. Yas’r.”

“You must stay and take care of my father, Serena.”

“Wot ah wor’y ’bout him fo’? He done mek ma baby cry disaway. Ah follers yo’all.”

“But, Serena, he is my father.”

“Ain’ ah know dat? But ain’ you ma baby?” Serena arose in great excitement and pointed a quivering finger towards the hallway. “You’ Ma done give you to me,” she cried. But her voice softened tenderly as she resumed, “De day you’ Ma pass ovah de rivah, ah wuz er settin’ by de baid er tryin’ to ease ’er wid er fan. She know dat de good Lord gwine call ’er home presen’ly, an’ she wuz er waitin’ fo’ de soun’ o’ de angel’s voice. Her eyes wuz closed jes as dough she wuz er sleepin’. Jes afo dusk she open ’em an’ look up with er smile, jes like yourn, honey chil’. She say, ‘Is you still thar, Serena?’ Ah say, ‘Yas’m, Miss Elinor.’ She say, ‘Ain’ you bettah res’ youse’f on 254
dat pallet ovah thar.’ Ah say, ‘Ah ain’ ti’ed none, Miss Elinor.’ Den you’ ma she look at me kinder pleadin’ like, an’ say, ‘Serena, you is gwine tek good caah o’ ma li’l baby, ain’ yer?’ Ah answer, ‘Is ah gwine ’sert ma own baby?’ Den she ’pear mo’e at ’er ease. De smile come back ag’in. She whisper kinder sof like, ‘Yes, Serena, you' own baby,’ Den Miss Elinor close ’er eyes an’ in er li’l w’ile she heah de sweet voice er callin’ ’er home.” Great tears rolled down the black cheeks of the old negress. Burying her face in her apron, she began to sob, and a muffled voice pleaded pathetically, “Ah caint let ma own baby go away f’om me.”

Before the sorrow of her faithful servitor, Virginia’s own grief was temporarily subdued. She sat up on the bed and met the unexpected interference with her plans with firmness. “Serena, I must go. I know that my mother would want me to go.”

“How you know?” demanded the practical Serena.

“I am sure of it. Something deep in my spirit moves me.”

“Ef de spi’it move you chil’ you gotta go,” she admitted, greatly persuaded.

“But, Serena, even if my mother wants me to go, she wouldn’t want me to take you away and break up my father’s home. That would be dreadful. What would happen to the house? Ike would get into all sorts of mischief.”

Serena gave thoughtful heed to the catastrophe which her departure would bring down upon the house of Dale.

“I am not going to stay away from you forever, Serena,” Virginia continued, as she made a sorry 255
attempt to smile through her tear stained eyes. “You know that I wouldn’t desert you. Promise me to take good care of Daddy while I am gone, Serena,” pleaded the girl. “Nothing must happen to him. He must not be disturbed or made uncomfortable.”

“Why ah gwine wor’y ’bout him fo’?” demanded the old negress, obstinately.

“My mother loved him, Serena, and so do I. Won’t you take care of him for us?”

This plea weakened her stand. “Ah promises to do de bes’ ah knows how fo’ a w’ile but ef yo’all stays too long ah gwine pack ma duds an’ come whar you is. Yas’m.”

Virginia awakened the next morning with a bad headache. Serena busied herself around her mistress and finally persuaded her to take a long walk. The brisk exercise in the fresh air refreshed the girl, and she decided to go to the hospital and see Joe Curtis for the last time before she left South Ridgefield.

In the hall of the institution she met Dr. Jackson.

“You should have seen my patients this morning,” he told her. “Those infants are a gay lot. They cried so loud that they gave me a headache. None of that fretful weeping with which they serenaded me last week. That trip up the river helped those kids wonderfully, and, with the cool weather we are having now, some of those youngsters are going to see snow fly who never would have done so if it hadn’t been for the voyage of the *Nancy Jane*.”

Miss Knight came up and slipped an arm about Virginia’s waist. “Tell the doctor and his babies good bye. He will talk a week about them if you’ll stand and listen to him,” she laughed, and as 256
she drew the girl away, explained, “I have a surprise for you, dear.”

“I can guess it. The room for the motorcyclists is ready.”

“No, you’re wrong. I’ll have to show you.” The nurse led the girl through a door which opened upon a small porch and pointed over the railing at the grounds which, lay on the side of the building. “There,” she said proudly. “Look.”

Virginia did as she was told. In the shade of a tree was Joe Curtis seated with outstretched leg in a roller chair. He answered their waving hands, and his face lighted up with a smile of pleasure which still remained when the girl descended the stairs and came to him.

“Isn’t this fine!” she exclaimed, her delight at seeing him out of bed dwarfing her own anxieties. “It seems now as if you were getting better.”

His eyes danced with pleasure at her coming. Yet, when he recognized, regardless of her efforts at concealment, that the gloomy influence, the shadow of which had cloaked her spirits at their last meeting, had not departed, his face clouded. He was conscious that his own disclosures, even though forced from him by her, might have had some part in causing her unhappiness and he endeavored to make amends by cheering her. “I asked Miss Knight to send for my motorcycle engine,” he informed her. “I told her that I wanted to hitch it to this chair and get a little speed out of the thing. I promised her, ‘Whither thou goest, Knightie, thither will I roll.’”

Virginia expressed interest in the nurse’s reply.

“After bawling me out for calling her Knightie, she said that I was getting so attached to her that I spent my waking hours devising schemes to get hurt so as not to have to leave her.” 257

His visitor’s smile of appreciation comforted Joe greatly. He took a deep breath and flinched when his tender ribs rebelled. His eyes roamed over the grass and trees and he watched the fleecy clouds floating in the azure sky. He pursued his campaign of encouragement. “It is great to take a breath of air without the ether flavor. It’s a wonderful old world anyhow,” he announced, as he again viewed his surroundings with great complacency. “Gosh!” he went on, “I wish I may never again see the inside of a building. Me for a job in God’s own sunshine.”

In spite of the consolatory nature of Joe’s remarks, a great loneliness had descended upon her. As she looked at him it seemed impossible that such a change could have come into her life since they two had planned for the hospital room. Then she had everything to make her happy. Now she was pledged to leave her father, her home, the few friends of her childhood, to go to a relative who was almost a stranger except in name. As she pictured the future, its loneliness frightened her. There came the temptation to bow to her father’s will–to do anything to avoid that cheerless future.

Then, in a moment, she was filled with sweet and tender thoughts of her mother and the creed of unselfishness. Straightway her resolution was strengthened. She would follow the way of her mother and be true to the message, no matter what the cost. Surely, God would make her father understand. Until that time she must wait. 258

Joe’s eyes returned to the girl at his side, when, lost in her own thoughts, she was unconscious of his scrutiny. The unhappiness which he caught in her face troubled him anew. “What makes you so sad, little girl?” he demanded uneasily.

“Nothing,” she maintained, with a smile so forced that it pathetically denied the truth of the statement.

“There is something wrong, I know,” he worried. “Am I in any way to blame?”

She shook her head violently and then told him, “I am going away.”

“How long will you be gone?” He could not watch her averted face; but something told him that this was no ordinary trip.

“I can’t say, Joe. Perhaps always.”

As he watched the soft curls at the nape of her neck, the thought came to him that only owls and prairie dogs find lodgment in the same hole with a rattlesnake; whereupon the youth ceased to question and announced as a fact of noteworthy interest, “So long as nobody is dead, there is always a way to mend things.”

There was a suspicion of moisture in her eyes when she turned to him and said, “Joe Curtis, you are certainly a cheerful somebody.”

“Why shouldn’t I be? I might have been killed in the accident and I wasn’t. Now I’m nearly well.” Into his optimism came tenderness, as he whispered, “Best of all, I met you.”

“Was it worth it?” She was moody for the moment.

“You bet your life,” he exclaimed. “Aren’t you glad that you met me?” 259

Her eyes answered him.

After a moment, he went on. “Will you tell me where you are going, Virginia?”

“I am going to Maine. To Old Rock.”

“Old Rock, Maine!” he shouted in surprise.

“Yes. Why not?”

“It is near the home of my mother. The place is so small that it seems strange that, with all of the rest of the world to go to, you should be going there.”

Virginia arose from the bench and came over by his chair. “Good bye, Joe,” she said, very softly. “I hope that you will soon be well.” A sad little face looked down at him. “Please, forgive me for hurting you. I am so sorry.” Her lips trembled.

“Forget it,” he said roughly; but there was that in his face which contradicted his tone. “I ran into you.”

“We can’t agree, can we?” she said thoughtfully, and her voice broke as she continued, “I want to ask a favor of you, Joe.”

“Sure.” He eyed her expectantly.

“Will you see that the room–is nicely arranged?”

“You bet I will.”

“When I am gone there will be no one to care–but you.” She fought back the tears and put up a brave front. “Good bye, Joe.”

“Wait a minute,” he commanded.

She reached for his hand and repeated, very sweetly, very softly, “Good bye, Joe.” She moved away a few steps; but turned back to cry very tenderly, “Good bye, Joe.” 260

“Come back, please, Virginia,” wailed Joe.

She hesitated, battling with tears.

“Please, come back, Virginia. Remember, I am helpless. I can’t come after you.”

She retraced her steps. “What is it?” she asked, her averted gaze apparently interested in the street beyond the grounds.

“Perhaps this is not good bye.”

She looked at him now with great interest.

He seized her hand and drew her closer to the chair, smiling up into her face, as he explained, “It may not be good bye for us, because–if I were quite sure that you wanted to see me–I might come up to Old Rock.”

She smiled at him. It was as if storm clouds had broken and let the rays of the sun through. “Oh, Joe,” she cried, “it would be lovely if you came up. Old Rock seems to be a dreadfully lonesome place.”

“Old Rock lonesome!” he protested. “Not a bit of it, Virginia. There are lots of interesting things to do. We can take grand tramps.” In his enthusiasm for his home town, Joe forgot his game leg. “Some evening, I’ll take you down to the big granite bowlder, from which the town gets its name, on the shore of the pond. We can get on top of it and watch the moon come up over the tree covered hill on the other side until it makes a shimmering pathway across the water and turns the old white church on the hill into a castle of silver. I love to sit there and watch the lights of the village go out, one by one. It’s lovely then. The only sounds are the song of the crickets, the distant tinkle of a sheep bell, the splash of a leaping bass or maybe the hooting of an old owl. It is a beautiful place, Virginia, and with you there it would be wonderful.”

“‘I think that I shall love it,’ she said softly”

She listened to his words, her eyes big with interest, and a new happiness struggling in her heart. “I think that I shall love it,” she said softly, and, after a moment’s hesitation, “How long–how soon will you be able to come, Joe?” 261

An attendant approached to take the injured motorcyclist back to the ward.

Virginia hastily withdrew her hand from Joe’s grasp and immediately gave it back to him, when he cried, “Not good bye but until we meet in Old Rock.”

As she watched the attendant wheel the injured man away and turned to leave the hospital grounds, the girl was wonderfully cheered, and her mind accepted Joe Curtis’s picture of Old Rock by moonlight as conclusive evidence that this ancient village was not lonesome.

CHAPTER XVI
VIRGINIA MUST GO

Virginia sank limply into the parlor car seat. After a moment she raised herself and looked out through the wide window upon the busy platform of the South Ridgefield station. Serena and Ike waited by the car nervously, endeavoring to locate the position of their mistress by peering into the coach. The old negress was publicly weeping.

As they caught sight of the girl, the train started and with rapidly increasing speed moved down the platform. Ike grinned a cheerful farewell while Serena screamed her adieu, and, as if unable to bear the separation, started to waddle along with the train, frantically waving her black hands.

Virginia signaled back and shouted embarrassed little good byes, subconsciously aware that they would be heard by no one except her traveling companions. As the two negroes were swept from her sight, a feeling of utter loneliness wrapped her in its gloomy folds. Pent up tears flooded her eyes, and so, through a mist, she saw at the end of the platform a man and woman, waving handkerchiefs from an automobile, who looked remarkably like Hezekiah Wilkins and Mrs. Henderson. Likewise, through a curtain of moisture, when the train crossed the bridge, she perceived the stranded *Nancy Jane*, symbolical of her own wrecked efforts.

As the roar of the train upon the bridge died away, the girl sank back again into her seat and succumbed completely to her grief. During those last few hours at home she had steeled herself not to display her feelings. She had met her father on the previous day and explained her plans quite as calmly as if she were about to take an ordinary vacation trip.

The decision of his daughter to leave him, based as it was upon the inspiration of her mother, dead these seventeen years, had left him strangely helpless. In his passion he had thrust aside the cloak of idealism in which she had arrayed him and exposed his true character. She had struck back, unwittingly selecting a weapon which had swept aside his momentary anger and left him shaken and perplexed at the edge of the abyss which had opened between them. Obadiah, too, had been unhappy in those hours. He loved Virginia with all the affection of which his nature was capable. There had been moments when he would have surrendered abjectly to his daughter on her own terms but for the grim obstinacy which obsessed him.

It may be that she intuitively appreciated his mental struggles, because, excepting only her determination to leave home, she treated him with the tenderest consideration. In his perplexity, Obadiah drifted for the moment and blindly followed the girl’s lead, as if through her alone could come the solution of the problem which separated them. Their breakfast that morning had been a difficult ordeal as had been their leave taking. He had displayed no desire to accompany her to the train and had parted from her with a grim indifference which his troubled face belied.

Now, at least, there was relief in the luxury of a good cry; but after a time the tears ceased and a weary peace came. Resting her head against the back of her chair she gave herself up to thoughts of the few little happinesses which gleamed like bright stars in the darkness with which she was surrounded.

She thought of Joe Curtis and thrilled when she remembered the long hand clasp. His picture of Old Rock comforted her anew as she assured herself that such a place could not be lonely. She reviewed the few moments in which she had bidden farewell to Mrs. Henderson. She had dreaded Hennie’s embarrassing questions. But, strangely, Hennie was not inquisitive. She had broken away to rush into her kitchen crying loudly that something was burning. This belief, from certain remarks which had floated back, had irritated Carrie, her cook, exceedingly. Returning, she had enveloped the girl in a wealth of motherly tenderness, so that in reality the visit had consisted of much sobbing upon the older woman’s shoulder to an accompaniment of soothing endearments and a train of explosive exclamations from which little could be gathered.

Soon she began to think of her Aunt Kate and of the new home to which she was going. Little enough she knew. Once, shortly before the death of Elinor Dale, Mrs. Kate Baker had visited South Ridgefield. At the time, she had a baby daughter of Virginia’s age and was mourning the death of her husband. For years there had been irregular correspondence; but, as far as Virginia was concerned, her father’s sister and her cousin were merely names.

The day of tiresome travel slowly passed. There were times when, in a wave of despair, Virginia pictured herself adrift on a sea of sadness, where all was dark and cheerless; but there were moments when sweet thoughts of her mother strengthened her and made her resolve to stand by her colors, no matter what the cost.

It was late that evening when the train arrived at Old Rock. The unusual excitement and the fatigue of traveling had brought on a persistent headache, so that it was a most forlorn and miserable Virginia who was helped down from the car. Hardly had her bag been dropped at her side when the train moved on. As the metal doors clanged shut, it seemed to the girl as if it were the sound of the gates of her old life closing against her. She gazed timidly about the station. It was very dark to this girl of the city–this child of the electric lights. The fear of the unknown seized her. Sick, frightened, every limb of her trembling, she hesitated helplessly.

A figure approached through the gloom, and the soft, cheery voice of a girl inquired, “Cousin Virginia?”

Virginia's throat was dry and husky. "Yes." Her answer was only a whisper. A frightened little sound, but it was all that she could make.

Now a hand seized her arm and she was led along the platform. They came under a station lamp, and again the voice spoke as they faced a tall, angular, plainly dressed woman. "Here she is, mother."

Virginia looked up into a face which made her gasp in astonishment. In the eyes, the mouth, the deep cut lines, was resemblance to her father but, oh, with what a difference. It was Obadiah sweetened by love and affection. The harshness, the obstinacy, the selfishness of him were 266
memories here. In their place lay a gentle, motherly look beneath the soft, white hair and from the eyes beamed a tender welcome to the lonely girl.

As Virginia hesitated diffidently, the lamp overhead brought out the pallor and the pathos of her wan tired little face. With never a word but just a soft exclamation she sank into the outstretched arms of her aunt.

"You poor tired darling," whispered Aunt Kate. She fixed a look of great severity over Virginia's shoulder at her own daughter. "Helen," she cried, "do you expect visitors to carry their own baggage? Take Virginia's bag to the surrey." As Helen obediently departed, Aunt Kate gave her guest a motherly hug, meanwhile making strange noises in her throat. Releasing one arm with great care lest the girl be disturbed, she endeavored to wipe a tear from her wrinkled cheek with a finger. "Come, child," she said sharply. "You must get to bed. How do you feel?" When she learned of the headache she commiserated with her niece. "You poor child. Sleep is the best treatment for that."

A surrey drawn by a remarkably fat horse was waiting for them back of the station.

"Don't you feel well, Cousin Virginia?" inquired Helen from the front seat.

"It's only a headache, Cousin Helen."

There was sincere relief in Helen's voice as she replied, "I am so glad that it is nothing worse."

Virginia and her Aunt climbed into the back seat of the conveyance.

"Hush," cried Helen in a loud whisper. "Archimedes is asleep. It's a shame to disturb him. I 267
haven't the heart to hit him," she giggled.

"Be careful and don't strike that horse cruelly, Helen," Aunt Kate warned her daughter, as if that maiden were habitually guilty of cruelty to animals.

Helen disregarded her mother's remark. "Archimedes is dreaming of corn and oats and hay and green pastures. He must dream of such things, as he never thinks of anything else," she laughed.

"Stop your nonsense, Helen. I have a sick girl here who should be in bed."

"I'm better already," protested Virginia.

"Get up, Arch," cried Helen.

Archimedes stood fast.

"Arch," she called again.

No movement followed.

"Pull on the reins, Helen," suggested Aunt Kate.

"Mother, how many times must I tell you that to pull on the reins is no way to start a horse. A logical minded animal would expect you to push on the lines when you want him to stop, and that wouldn't do at all." That mischievous giggle came again and Helen gave the horse a smart tap with the whip.

The lazy steed flinched slightly and moved slowly forward.

"Don't be cruel, Helen, and keep in the gutter."

"Mother, there are no automobiles out at this time of night. For once, when we have company, we should drive in the middle of the road. As we pay taxes, we have a right there," argued Helen. "I am getting curvature of the spine from driving with one wheel in the gutter."

"It is so much safer, Helen. Archimedes can't get out of the way quickly." 268

"Why should he? Let the automobiles make room for us once. Are we frightened chickens to flee from them?"

"It makes the people in the machines so cross, Helen. They say such unkind things."

Delightful remembrances returned to Helen. "Mother, are you thinking of the man who offered to lend us his jack to move Archimedes out of the road?"

"That man was very angry."

"He was, mother. I hope that he has gotten over it by now," laughed Helen. She clucked energetically and went on, "As you are with us tonight, we will pursue our usual humble way in the gutter. But," she declared emphatically, "when Virginia and I go driving we will take the middle of the road and keep it in spite of all the horn-blowing goggle-eyed men in the state of Maine. Archimedes shall not be insulted. His proud spirit rebels."

They jogged along, the proud spirit of Archimedes being well content with a modest speed. Turning into a driveway, they ascended a slight incline and drove into a large barn.

“This is my department,” Helen told her cousin with pride as she unharnessed Archimedes. When he was safe in his stall she paused before the white face of a Holstein cow. “Cowslip,” she giggled, “this is your cousin Virginia who has come to visit you.”

A door opened and Aunt Kate called, “Helen, bring your cousin in. Don’t keep her out in that barn when she has a headache.”

So, with an arm about her cousin’s waist, Helen guided her on her first trip along a Maine 269
domestic pathway which begins in the stable, or even chicken house, and runs under one roof to the parlor.

Virginia paused in a doorway that opened into a large oblong room. In its center was a great, square, brick chimney which divided it into a cosy kitchen forming a most convenient part of the dining room, and a dining room which was a most pleasant part of the kitchen. The low room with its old-fashioned paper, its white-curtained, square-paned windows and its painted floor, was delightfully homey and cheerful. It seemed particularly so to Virginia, with the motherly face of her aunt smiling a kindly welcome and the arm of her pretty blonde cousin drawing her affectionately towards its comfort.

A few minutes later, with a bag in one hand and a candlestick in the other, Helen led her cousin up the stairs to the cosiest little bed room imaginable. Its low ceiling sloped with the roof except where broken by dainty curtained dormer windows. A mahogany four poster, a highboy and a table with some chairs constituted its furniture, while upon the floor were round rugs of woven rags.

After Helen had departed and she had removed the traces of her journey, Virginia seated herself in a rocker for a moment. She felt as if a weight had been lifted from her shoulders. The fear of the unknown, which had so terrified her, was gone. In spite of her sadness, when she thought of her father, she felt reassured and comforted. As the girl sat there, a tender dreamy look of indescribable sweetness crept into her face. Her lips moved and she whispered ever so softly, 270
“Mother, your way is not so hard.”

The simple little supper, to which the three women sat down that evening was delightful to Virginia. And afterwards, what a gay time they had with the dishes. The city cousin, whose headache was now a thing of the past, donned an apron and assisted in drying them. Never had Serena permitted her this proud privilege and how pleased she was to do it now. She polished the few plates upon which she had the time to apply her intensive treatment until they shone and sparkled bravely beneath the lamplight.

Aunt Kate watched her strenuous efforts for a time in silence and then burst forth, “Good land, if I weren’t sure that the blue on that old willow ware was burned deep, child, I’d be afraid you’d rub it off.”

“Virginia is exercising, mother,” laughed Helen.

“If she exercises that hard on each dish, she won’t have either the strength or time to do the rest of her work. No man would want to marry a girl who puts in her time wiping dishes. Most of them would rather look at good things to eat in their plates than at the reflection of their own faces, I’ll warrant you.”

How the two girls did enjoy Aunt Kate’s sage remark and what a pleasant little chat they had when supper was over.

Aunt Kate sat in her easy chair and sewed, and now and then interjected a word of wisdom into their conversation which convulsed them. Finally she yawned, and, looking at the old wooden cased clock upon the mantel, announced, “It’s time all honest folks were in bed and rogues were movin’.”

A short time after this pointed remark, Virginia, tingling with the chill of the northern night 271
which swept in as she opened her windows, climbed into bed, and, pulling the blankets about her, she gave a little sigh and, very much like her old self, plunged into a deep and dreamless slumber.

When she awakened the next morning, sunlight was streaming into the room. Filled with curiosity over her new surroundings, she sprang from her bed and gazed out of the window. Across the road, which ran in front of the house, a newly mowed meadow rolled down to the shore of a lake or pond a short distance away. Its surface, rippled by the morning breeze, glittered and sparkled in the sun. Beyond the water, rising abruptly from its edge, was a great hill, its slope covered with a forest of pine and fur and hemlock. The green expanse of the meadow was broken by islands of maple and oak while several huge granite bowlders stood forth against the sod in all of their grey majesty. The color of the soft, rich summer sky, dotted with floating masses of fleecy white, was reflected in the flashing water. The trees and grass, yet glistening with the morning dew, were a moist green, untouched by the yellow of sun scorch or drought. It was a restful verdancy which spoke of frequent rains, of cool days and of cooler nights.

“Virginia, are you awake?” came the voice of her aunt from the hall.

She climbed hastily back into bed as her aunt entered.

Aunt Kate smiled sweetly down at the girl whose serious eyes reflecting the color of the morning

sky, gazed at her from a mass of wavy black hair. “How is the headache?” she asked.

“It left last night, Aunt Kate, and hasn’t come back.”

“That’s good.” Aunt Kate’s voice was very gentle and sympathetic. She sat upon the edge of the bed and, leaning forward, patted the soft cheek of her niece.

Again, in the lined face of her aunt, Virginia recognized that resemblance to her father, so wonderfully softened by kindness and sweetness. The thought came to the girl that her mother would have had such a tenderness of look had she lived. A flood of memories swept down upon her and tears welled up in her eyes.

Her aunt gathered her into those mothering arms again, and almost before the girl appreciated what she was doing she had opened her heart and told her woes in the gloomiest way possible.

After she had soothed her niece, until she could give a teary little smile, Aunt Kate arose and, moving to the window, viewed the familiar landscape with a stern eye, sniffing portentously. In a moment she began to speak. “We Dales are a selfish and obstinate family. We were always so.” There was a note of pride in her voice. “The men are worse than the women–much worse–more obstinate and selfish, dear,” she repeated. “I know my brother Obadiah–better than he knows himself. I am very glad, child, that you told me about the whole thing.” Suddenly her voice became sharp and emphatic and she fastened a severe look upon Virginia. “Don’t you for a minute get it into your head that you have run away from home. If you had, I should take you back myself. You should have visited your cousin Helen and me a dozen times before, and now we will make up for your neglect and give brother Obadiah a chance to calm himself after the disturbances you have created.” She paused for a moment and then went on, smiling sweetly, “I want you to be your own sweet self here and have a jolly time with Helen.” Her tones became gentle. “Follow the way of your mother until the end of your life. Sometimes it will lead through gloomy valleys but it is the road which leads to the sunshine of the heights. Hum,” she cried sharply, “read ‘Pilgrim’s Progress,’ child. It says the same thing, but better.”

A much cheered Virginia came down to breakfast, and, like the very healthy young person she was, in obedience to her aunt’s command and the natural law of youth, forgot the unhappiness of yesterday in the joys of the present.

The days which followed were crowded with happy hours. There were drives long in time but short in mileage behind the majestic Archimedes over tree-shaded roads. Unaccompanied by the timid Aunt Kate, they forsook the humble gutter and seized the crown of the road. With peals of ringing laughter, they pursued their slow way, unmindful of irate tourists filled with the belief that the road and the width thereof was theirs to be covered at fifty scorching miles an hour, and that delays from slow moving taxpayers were an interference with their vested rights as well as to their progress towards the uttermost parts of the earth.

There were plunges into the cold depths of the pond followed by wild scrambles, when, with chilled muscles, they ran through the cool air over the meadow to the house.

There were long paddles in the canoe where every curve and bend of a stream opened a new vista of loveliness, of woods, of stream, of hill, of rolling meadow.

There were tramps through forests of fir and pine where their feet sank into the soft cushion of needles and they climbed until they came out on the rugged tops of hills where, resting in weariness, they drank deep of the pure air and feasted their eyes upon the pleasing prospect below them.

Tired and weary but happy beyond relief, they would return in the evening and, catching sight of Aunt Kate waiting upon the porch, greet her with gay shouts and, both speaking at once, relate stirring adventures of field and flood with cows and frogs and sheep and dogs.

Jolly feasts these three women had when sore muscles rested after the day’s effort. Never were such vegetables grown as came from the garden back of the barn. Where else, pray tell, could such desserts be found as Aunt Kate made? Or what could be more delicious than those big bowls of raspberries or blueberries afloat in Cowslip’s rich, thick contribution to the feast?

Afterwards, Virginia would write letters until too soon a nodding head and leaden eyelids would force her to bed. Her correspondence was large in those days. She wrote to Mrs. Henderson and Serena and Joe Curtis; but more often she wrote to her father, telling him all that she did.

Regularly to her, came letters from him. They were formal, precise epistles in a style which might be described as having commercial tendencies and obviously prepared by Mr. Jones at the dictation of Obadiah.

As the weeks passed “V,” as Helen nicknamed her cousin, developed muscle and flesh and grew amazingly, and the coat of tan she acquired would have been a scandalous thing in any beauty parlor in the land.

CHAPTER XVII

A FRIEND IN NEED

A weatherworn, disreputable hammock swung lazily between two big fruit laden apple trees beside Aunt Kate's home. Time was when it had been a gaudy, betasseled thing taken into the house each night. But familiarity breeds contempt for choice possessions as well as friends. Now the hammock hung unwatched from June until October. No longer a cherished chattel, it was left to face the ravages of time and weather and man.

Yet, in its ripe old age, it had achieved the goal of all good hammocks. It had found its place, not, of course, in the sun–that not being the custom of hammocks–but in Aunt Kate's household. It had become a place of conference, of discussion, aye, even of mutual confession for Helen and her cousin Virginia.

It swung lazily in the light breeze of the morning. Not slothfully, but in the relaxation of resting strength prepared instantly to meet its burdens and responsibilities. It was well that this was so. Upon the self-same breeze which swung it, came sounds of laughter and the patter of small feet. With sudden strain and elastic resistance, carried even to the uppermost twigs of the trees, the hammock received the two girls as they precipitated themselves into its lap.

"I beat," cried Helen with the pride of victory, changed suddenly into a wail of anguish as a 277
dislodged Bell-flower apple dropped upon her head. "Oh-o-o-o," she groaned; "those apples make me mad. This is the second time that one of them has struck me on the head and I am getting tired of it."

In her own end of the hammock Virginia was coiled in a most precarious position. She was so interested in her letter that she failed to give her cousin the full measure of tender sympathy to which that maiden felt herself entitled.

Helen rubbed her head with vigor. "Say something 'V.' Is anything the matter with your heart?" she exclaimed, fixing reproachful eyes upon her absorbed companion.

"Did it hurt?" Virginia, deep in her letter, politely inquired. Her words, however, lacked that warm condolence for which the head and heart of her cousin yearned.

"Did it hurt?" mimicked Helen in disgust. "What a question! It is exactly as bad as if a brick had fallen off the chimney on my head. Yet you sit there and ask if it hurt. What do you think my head is made of?"

"Fudge," cried Virginia as the wind twisted her letter so that she could not read it.

"Wh-a-at?" Helen was highly indignant until she discovered that her cousin's remark was not a personal allusion. "Never mind," she threatened; "see how I treat you the next time that you get hurt."

Virginia finished her letter. She wiggled over towards Helen, an operation which placed both
girls in imminent danger of being pitched upon their faces. "I am sorry for your poor head, dear," 278
she giggled, "or should I be sorry for the apple? Let me look."

Helen thrust aside the inquisitive fingers. "Let me alone, you unsympathetic wretch. Wait until my turn comes. Even if you writhe before me in great agony, I shall laugh. Laugh coldly–ha–ha."

Virginia disregarded future calamities. "I have a letter from Joe Curtis. It happens to be one which I might read to you, if you are real nice."

Instantly, feminine curiosity caused Helen to forget injuries and pledged vengeance. "Please, 'V.,' I should love to hear it," she begged, and then listened with rapt attention as her cousin read,

"*My dear little girl*:

"This morning Miss Knight brought your letter to me on the grounds where I had been taken in the roller chair. She was grumbling about it being the business of the Post Office Department to establish a rural free delivery route and not expect her to chase around with my mail.

"I spend most of my time in the chair, now. Soon I'll be on crutches, and after that it won't be long before I am discharged.

"But this letter is written to give you the big news. The room for motorcyclists is open for business. Miss Knight took me to see it and it is dandy. I asked her what she thought about it now, seeing that she had so much to say when we were planning it. Her answer was, 'It's the best cure for blues I know. If I am downhearted, all I have to do is to come up here and think about you two innocents and I laugh myself sick.' 279

"I told her that her ideas of humor led towards the psychopathic ward and warned her to beware of alienists or squirrels because they might develop a personal interest in her.

"What do you think? The very day they opened the room it had a patient. You never would guess who it was. It was that fellow Jones who works in your father's office. He must be a regular dare devil of a rider. When the accident happened, he had cut in front of a moving street car. The machine hung in the fender and Jones went on and landed in a city trash wagon at the curb. His head and face were cut but the trash was soft. He bled so that the by-standers decided that he was dying and sent him to the hospital. Of course, the doctors kept him.

"Miss Knight said that, from the odor about Jones when he came in, she guessed people were careless about separating trash from garbage. She told Jones that he must have thought he was among old home folks when he landed.

"To be neighborly, I called upon him. Everything was beautiful in the room but him. I

told him that he looked as out of place as a dead rat in a flour barrel. That peeved him, so I asked him if he hadn't felt more at home in the trash wagon. He got sore and grabbed up a glass. 'I'll bounce this off your ventilator if you don't get out of here,' he yelled.

"That made me mad. 'You can't put me out,' I told him. 'I've got more right in here than you. If you don't stop yapping around my heels I will pull you out of that bed and get in it myself.'

"He got crazy then and started to climb out of the bed but Miss Knight came in and shoved him down on his pillow. 'Take that big cheese out of here before I break his other leg,' he bawled. 280

"She began to laugh fit to kill herself and said, 'Joe, what kind of gentle sympathy do you give the weak and injured which makes them wish to rise up and fight?'–when she rolled me away from that wild man.

"Your letter made me homesick for the north country. I have fished all over that pond. You wouldn't catch hornpouts if you fished in the right place and used the proper kind of bait. I used to go to the north end of the pond by the lily pads. Bait your hook with a live minnow and drop it in there about sundown. The fun will come suddenly. Mr. Pickerel strikes with the speed of an express train. Try it. When I come up we will go fishing.

"A tray is coming my way so I must stop. I think of you every day and, believe me, just as soon as this hospital turns me loose I am going to go where I can see and talk to the nicest girl in all the world.

"Good bye, Miss Hornpout catcher.

"Affectionately,
"JOE."

Virginia's face was aglow with happiness as she finished reading and turned to Helen. "He is the nicest man. Doesn't he write interesting letters to me?" she murmured softly.

The sentimental Helen gazed into the distance, lost in dreams conjured by this epistle. "Yes, he does," she agreed. "You must adore him, dear." 281

Virginia's face crimsoned at this bold remark. "We are only friends," she protested.

"Sincere friendship and complete understanding between two is wonderful," sighed Helen from her eighteen years' experience of the vicissitudes of life, and she displayed further keen insight into the problems of existence, when she continued, "Sympathetic appreciation strengthens one to meet sorrow."

Virginia gazed raptly at her cousin.

"Such sincere friendship should be cherished as some tender flower," Helen went on. "Is it not written that from the mouths of babes shall come wisdom?"

"You do express yourself so well, Helen. You have so much feeling in your nature–such breadth to your character, dear," responded Virginia.

The two girls pensively viewed the pond, possibly recuperating from the strain of their conversation.

"It almost seems that I know him," Helen whispered.

Virginia turned suspiciously upon her cousin. "Did you know Joe Curtis? Did you go to school with him?" she demanded.

"I can't remember the name, 'V.' What does he look like?"

Very valiantly Virginia attempted a word picture of Joe. "He is a big fellow. His eyes are black–and large–and dreamy." She mused for a moment and resumed with animation. "His eyes are bright–and snapping–and brave–" again she paused and then she concluded very softly–"and sweet. He has a smile which tears your heart." 282

"How wonderful he must be!" sighed Helen. She shook her head emphatically. "If I had met him, I should have remembered him until the last hour of my life."

There followed a dreamy silence devoted to maidenly meditation concerning the manifold charms of Joe Curtis until an idea caused Helen to cry, "Virginia, you should go fishing in the place Joe wrote about. I know where it is. Think of it, you would fish in the same place, in the same water and by the same lily pads where he has been. We couldn't catch the same fish but we might catch relatives."

"Let's go now," agreed Virginia, moved greatly by Helen's sentimental suggestion.

It was a long pull in the row boat to the head of the pond; but they took turns at the oars and at last arrived at their destination. The day was warm and the exercise at the oars did not cool the girls.

Helen noted the position of the sun which yet hung high. "Nothing will bite, now 'V.,'" she objected. "We came hours too soon. He said to fish at sundown. We had better go ashore and wait."

Glad to get out of the burning sun, they rowed to the shore and, clambering up the bank, dropped

down in a shady spot.

Suddenly Helen became restless. “I hear a strange humming noise,” she worried.

Virginia was likewise nervously alert. “I hear it, too. It’s a low buzzing–much louder than mosquitoes,” she agreed.

“What can it be?” Helen troubled. 283

“It’s my hornets’ nest,” cried a childish voice behind them.

With startled exclamations, the girls turned their heads.

Looking over the top of a granite bowlder a short distance away was a small boy. He was a very thin and delicate child about five years old, wearing a pair of faded khaki rompers and a shirt of the same material.

“Don’t you know any better than to sit under a hornets’ nest?” he exclaimed in disgust. “Do you want to get yourselves stung to death?”

The two girls raised their eyes. Partially concealed by the lower branches of the tree, a great cone of clay hung above them. From it and the insects flying about it came the buzzing sound.

“Crawl, Virginia, and don’t you dare make a noise,” whispered Helen.

From the top of the rock the infant witnessed the ignominious retreat from dangerous territory. “Come over here,” he urged. “Much hornets never come near me.”

Relying upon the superior judgment of the masculine mind, the girls turned and humbly crept towards this place of refuge.

“I guess you might stand up, now,” the boy told them. “If the hornets had wanted to sting you, they’d have done it before.”

They arose and forthwith began to dust their skirts.

“Stop!” commanded the child in a voice of alarm. “Haven’t you got any sense? Want to get me stung? If you make a noise the hornets will come sneaking over to see what is going on.” His 284
manner changed to one of great politeness as he went on, “I have a house back here. You can come over there and dust yourselves if you want to.” He slid down back of the rock. When he reappeared around its corner, he made funny little skips and for the first time they noticed that he used a crutch. One of his legs was flexed by distorted muscles until he carried it a couple of inches above the ground. Notwithstanding this handicap, he moved rapidly along a pathway ahead of him. Where the grass of the meadow began at the edge of the woods, he waited for them and pointed with pride to a small opening in a clump of birches. “This is my house,” he told them.

Virginia dropped upon her knees and peeped in. “How lovely,” she cried.

Before her the flat top of a rock projecting slightly above the surface of the ground served as a floor. A thick hedge of birch saplings grew about it, constituting the walls. The branches arching it had been cut away as high as a man’s head. Above this they joined in a dense mass, forming the roof of the bower.

Following their little host, the girls entered.

“What a lovely house,” said Helen. “Did you make it?”

“God made most of it,” he answered with great solemnity. “Mother cut away the high branches and I cut the low ones and it was done. I didn’t have it all, at first, though.”

“How was that?” Helen inquired.

“Mr. Woodchuck lived in the cellar beneath the stone. There is his stairway.” He pointed to an 285
opening at the edge of the rock, surrounded by pebbles and clay. “As soon as I moved in Mr. Woodchuck moved out.”

“Are you all alone now?”

“Oh, no indeed, a chipmunk lives over there, who is very friendly. Up in that tree is a bird’s nest; but the young ones have gone away now. Then there are the hornets and a snake lives under the rock over there.”

“Snakes!” screamed both of the girls.

“Yes, a grass snake.” The infant was openly disgusted at the display of feminine timidity. “Who’s afraid of an old snake? I’m not. That snake is so afraid that I will catch him that he don’t dare come out.”

The neighborhood distrust relieved the fears of the visitors and they began to make themselves comfortable.

“Oh, ‘V.,’ this would be a grand place to eat our lunch,” suggested Helen and to the boy she said, “We have something to eat in our boat. May we bring it here and will you have lunch with us?”

“That would be fine,” he agreed. “You get your lunch and I will get some milk for us to drink from my mother.”

“Don’t disturb her,” protested Virginia. “We have plenty. And we have a thermos bottle of water, too.”

“My mother won’t care a bit. She loves to have me eat and she wants me to drink lots of milk so that I will grow big and strong to take care of her. I haven’t any father, you see.” Without further words the lad disappeared.

Taking care to avoid the hornets, the girls brought their lunch from the boat and were soon joined by the boy bringing a pitcher of milk and some tin cups.

“Mother said that she was glad for us to have the milk and that after lunch I am to bring you up to see her. Please come,” he begged. “I want my mother to know both of you so that after you are gone I can talk to her about you and she will understand. I don’t often have visitors at my house.” In a burst of confidence, “I never had any before. Please do come.”

The pleading face of the boy was very attractive to Virginia as she looked into it. Its wistfulness persuaded her. “We will go and see your mother,” she promised.

A happy, satisfied smile came into his face. There was something familiar about that to Virginia. Her eyes became dreamy.

“I’m going to kiss you,” Helen suddenly announced.

He resisted violently but was overpowered and force prevailed. “What do you want to do that for?” he objected, unappreciative of the favor so generously showered upon him by the fair Helen. “It spoils the fun. Don’t you know any better than to want to kiss a feller all the time?” he complained.

The sight of food pacified the infant as the girls spread the lunch. They all enjoyed the feast in the leafy bower and consumed a remarkable quantity of sandwiches, doughnuts, apple pie and milk. “My, but that was good!” he announced. “Don’t you think that my house is a good place to eat in? I told my mother that if I could eat here all of the time I would get fat; but she said that I would become a worse little savage than I am.”

The boy chattered on as he led them over the meadow towards the back of a weather-beaten farmhouse. “Moth-er, Moth-er,” he shouted, as they approached the back door.

A middle aged woman of good appearance came to the door. Trouble had deeply marked her face. “Won’t you come in?” she urged. “Charles Augustus,” she reproved her son, “you should bring ladies to the front of the house, not to the kitchen door.”

“What’s the difference?” he argued. “You can get in either way, mother, and this is the nearest.”

The girls, much amused at the reasoning of Charles Augustus, followed his mother through a spotless kitchen and dining room into a very plainly furnished front room.

For a time Charles Augustus sat most sedately in a chair, listening to the conversation of the girls with his mother; but as the minutes passed; he became restless.

Recognizing this, his mother suggested that he get some sweet apples from a tree in front of the house for their guests.

Passing out of the open front door, he paused upon the stoop and began a shrill little tuneless whistle. As he moved forward, his foot or his crutch slipped. He lurched forward as if about to plunge headlong down the flight of steps which led to the yard below.

The eyes of the women had followed the little fellow, and as he swung forward they were filled with alarm. With half suppressed screams they sprang to their feet, thrusting out their arms as if they might catch him.

By a marvelous effort, the boy recovered his balance. He resumed his whistling as if nothing had happened and clumped heavily down the steps, disappearing from their view.

With a sigh of relief the girls sank back into their chairs.

But the mother remained standing, her eyes yet upon the doorway through which her son had departed. Her raised hands dropped to her side and the look of horror passed from her face, leaving it old and tired looking.

Helen arose and, with a word of explanation, disappeared after Charles Augustus.

Virginia marked the hands of the woman yet trembling from her shock. She reached forward and, gently pulling her down into a chair, pressed her soft cheek against the wrinkled face.

The woman fought to control her emotion, but her face sank into her hands and she began to weep. After a time her sobs lessened and she became calmer. She tried to smile through her tears at the girl. “He is my baby,” she whispered; “my lame, helpless boy.” A change came over her. She threw back her head and resistance blazed in her eyes. “He shan’t be lame,” she cried, shaken by the intensity of her feelings. Quickly the mood merged into one of utter helplessness. “If I could get the money,” she groaned, but almost instantly her former temper returned. “I will get it,” she resolved. “My boy shall have a fair start in life if I have to crawl on my hands and knees to get it for him.”

Virginia endeavored to soothe the almost hysterical woman. At last the tense nerves relaxed and self-control returned.

“You must think me silly and weak,” the woman told her. “I have been worrying too much. I am so alone with my thoughts here.”

“You have Charles Augustus,” suggested Virginia, as she stroked the bent shoulders.

“Yes,” admitted the woman. “But he goes to bed at six o’clock and that leaves the long evening in which to sit and think–and hate,” she blazed. Yet, in an instant her anger had departed and she went on sadly, “It is very lonely after Charles Augustus is asleep.”

“Is he your only child?” the girl asked.

“No, I have another boy, much older. He is big and strong and handsome and can take care of himself and his mother,” she explained with pride. “But he is young and is working his way through college. His pay is small and he has had some bad luck, but he is a joy and happiness in my life.”

Virginia watched the woman as if fascinated.

Thought for the comfort of her callers returned with composure to the mother of Charles Augustus. “My dear,” she said kindly, “I suppose that you are in Maine for a vacation. You don’t look like a native. It’s a shame for me to spoil this beautiful afternoon for you with my tears and troubles. I am nervous and overwrought. I had wonderful news yesterday. News which may make me glad all of the rest of my days or make me always sad.”

“Please tell me about it,” begged Virginia. 290

The woman yielded to the girl’s entreaties and explained that, on the previous day, Charles Augustus had been taken to a physician in Old Rock because of some infantile disease. After treating the boy, the doctor had examined his leg with great interest. Hunting up a copy of a recent medical journal he had shown the mother a description of an operation for a similar case in a New York hospital. It had resulted in the complete recovery of the use of a crippled limb. “That boy’s leg could be cured if we could get him on an operating table before he is too old,” the doctor had declared with confidence.

The news of the possibility of her son’s cure had filled Charles Augustus’s mother with joy; but her inability to raise the money for such an operation had almost driven her frantic.

When she ended, Virginia took hold of her hands. “Won’t you let me help you?” she begged softly. “There must be a way to do it and I should like to, for–” she hesitated a moment and then–“the sake of Charles Augustus.”

The woman looked into the girl’s eyes. She found a sweetness there which appealed to her. “I would have no right to refuse any help which would rid my boy of that crutch,” she answered.

At the door Virginia glanced back. “Charles Augustus’s crutch would make nice kindling wood,” she called. “A motorcycle would be much nicer for him.”

A hopeful smile crept over the tired face of the woman. “Life would be very beautiful if my Charles Augustus could run and play and ride a wheel like other boys,” she said. 291

Virginia found her cousin and the lad in the midst of a great romp. He beamed at Helen, of whom he had become a great admirer, regardless of her sentimental tendencies. “We didn’t miss your cousin one bit, did we?” he announced, and then, “I don’t see anything in that to laugh at,” when the girls gave vent to their merriment.

“We are going now, Charles Augustus,” Helen told him. “Kiss me good bye.”

Regardless of his earlier attitude, the lad succumbed to the allure of a beautiful woman as has man since the beginning of things.

“Are you coming again soon?” he demanded.

“Yes,” Virginia answered. She was very serious and thoughtful as she followed the lad and the gay and talkative Helen another way to the pond. As she passed the mail box, she raised her eyes and upon it read the name, “Curtis.”

“I knew it,” she whispered. “Joe has his mother’s eyes.”

CHAPTER XVIII

292

AUNT KATE LENDS A HAND

The next morning Virginia wrote Mrs. Henderson about the case of Charles Augustus. She wrote also to Joe Curtis, but in her letter she did not refer to her meeting with his mother and lame brother or to her visit to his home. Afterwards she went out and sat in the hammock. Swinging gently, she gazed with serious eyes at the landscape; but her thoughts gave but little heed to the beautiful scenery which lay before her.

With motherly interest, Aunt Kate watched her niece through the kitchen window. Wise in the habits and customs of young women, she noted unfavorable portents. “Lands sakes,” she called to Helen, “Virginia is moping away in the hammock trying to make herself homesick. Hurry out and cheer the poor child up. Don’t let her get lonesome and unhappy.”

Helen obediently entered upon her kindly mission. Seating herself by her cousin, she put an arm about her and gave her cheery greeting, “Hello cuticomes. Of whom are you dreaming?”

“I am thinking of Charles Augustus.”

“He is a darling kid. I could eat him for candy.” The cannibalistic Helen smiled anything but fiercely at the thought of her tender prey.

“He is so sweet, Helen. That makes it sadder.” 293

“Makes what sad?”

“His lameness. It is dreadful. Think of it, Helen, never to be able to run and play in comfort.”

Shadows of unhappiness clouded the usual cheerfulness of Helen’s face. “It is terrible,” she sighed.

“All through his life,” the melancholy Virginia went on, “that crutch must be with him. Even when he proposes to a girl it will be beside him at her feet.”

“He could leave it in the hall with his hat.” Helen’s optimism attempted to thrust aside the enshrouding gloom.

“No.” Virginia was determined that no ray of light should brighten the dark picture she was painting. “When Charles Augustus proposes, unless the crutch is near, he can’t get from his knees.”

Helen conceded the point by a helpless nod. “It won’t be a bit romantic. It will be pathetic,” she whispered.

“Not if the girl loves him truly. Not if he is the answer to the call of her heart.”

“He would be the Knight of her thoughts then,–the Prince of her dreams,” interjected Helen, the sentimental.

“With a crutch. He will rest on it even at his wedding.”

“When they go away on their wedding trip, the rice and old shoes will beat against it,” groaned Helen.

“It will be at his bedside when he dies.” Virginia’s eyes filled with tears. “Were he a soldier it would be a badge of honor–a mark of patriotic suffering; but poor Charles Augustus was always that way and must always remain so unless some one will pay for an operation.” Virginia buried 294
her tear-drowned eyes in her handkerchief.

The sympathetic Helen succumbed to the prevailing sorrow of the occasion and wept also.

From her watch tower at the kitchen window, Aunt Kate espied the sorrowing ones. “My sakes alive, what has got into those girls?” she exclaimed. “They must be hankering for a funeral.” Hastening forth, she planted herself before them and viewed the weepers with stern eyes. “What is all of this crying about?” she demanded.

They told her, abating no jot or tittle of gloom.

“Was Charles Augustus unhappy yesterday?”

“No,” they admitted.

“Well then,” Aunt Kate’s voice rang forcefully, “what’s the use of crying over happiness? Tears are to wash sorrows away.” Her final remark pointed her thoughts in a practical direction. “You two can wash the surrey as well as for me to pay Tom fifty cents to do it. You can use some of those tears around here if you get tired of pumping water.”

So the grief stricken arrayed themselves in bathing suits and tugged the surrey into the sun. They hitched the hose to the force pump and labored diligently amidst floods of conversation and torrents of water. They polished and, inadvertently or with malice aforethought, turned water upon one another until peals of laughter echoed into the kitchen. A complacent Aunt Kate gave but little heed to them until they presented themselves before her, much bedrabbled but in an exceedingly cheerful frame of mind.

She gazed over her glasses at them and said, “Mercy sakes, I told you girls to wash the surrey 295
not yourselves. Get off those wet clothes before you catch your death of cold.” As they disappeared towards the stairs she called after them, “You girls were bound to have a moist morning. Now I hope that you are satisfied.”

Days passed which Aunt Kate, in her wisdom, saw were busy ones. At last an answer came to Virginia’s letter to Mrs. Henderson. Hennie had a habit of accomplishing the things which she undertook and her response was most satisfactory. She had arranged for the operation upon Charles Augustus at the New York hospital. A place had been found for Mrs. Curtis to stay and tickets had been placed at the Old Rock station for her and her son.

Sufficient funds had been raised to cover everything but the operating fee. But as soon as the case came to the attention of the surgeon, he had suggested that, as the matter of age was a very important factor in the ultimate success of his efforts, the operation be performed at once. He was quite willing to await the result of Mrs. Henderson’s further exertions for the payment of his bill.

A very happy and delighted Virginia cried the good news aloud to Aunt Kate and Helen. “Right after lunch we will go and see Mrs. Curtis and Charles Augustus and tell them the good news,” she planned. “Isn’t Hennie perfectly splendid?”

Aunt Kate was making pies. Her eyes twinkled as she told Virginia, “I don’t gather from this letter that your friend Mrs. Henderson spent much time weeping over Charles Augustus’s crutch. 296

She is going to get rid of the old thing. That line or two you wrote did the lame boy much more good than all the tears you and Helen wasted around here the other morning."

Virginia bobbed her head in agreement with the wisdom of her aunt. Then she climbed the stairs to make ready for her trip, lifting a sweet little voice in song.

As Aunt Kate heard her, she smiled gently; but her face grew suddenly stern as she muttered, "Until I settle brother Obadiah's hash, I'd better keep an umbrella and a mackintosh handy if I don't want to get wet"; after which she dusted the flour from her hands with great vigor.

The two girls gave little time to their lunch that noon, and soon afterwards started up the pond in a canoe. Helen was filled with energy. She dug her paddle into the water and pulled mightily.

"Stop, Helen, we are turning around," protested Virginia.

"Paddle your share, 'V.'," retorted Helen with an air of injury. "Remember, you are not a passenger."

By vigorously wielding her paddle, Virginia managed to hold the canoe on its course. "Please don't make me work so hard, Helen," she objected. "We want to hurry and get there."

"We are doing that splendidly, 'V.' We can't go very fast if you want to sit and dream. Paddle, dear heart–work your way."

"'You are my sweetheart,' the brazen Helen told him"

So it came to pass that Virginia paddled to keep up with Helen and that young woman paddled to make her cousin work, and thus the light canoe was driven over the water with speed and they soon reached the end of their voyage. 297

Charles Augustus espied their approach afar off and hobbled down the meadow path to meet them with joyous outcry. "Hello, you came to see me, didn't you?"

"Of course. You are my sweetheart," the brazen Helen told him.

"My!" he sighed, shaking his head after the manner of an elderly philosopher. "It's been a long time since I saw you. I expected you every day. Mother said that she guessed you were busy people."

Mrs. Curtis came to the door at the sound of voices. Her face lighted when she recognized them. "Charles has been watching for you each day," she told them. "I tried to persuade him that you might have interests besides visiting small boys; but I wasn't very successful."

Charles Augustus balked in the pathway, pulling at the hand of Helen. "Don't let's go in. It's much nicer out here. Let's play as we did the other day."

Mrs. Curtis nodded understandingly when Helen bowed to her admirer's wishes, and led Virginia into the house. "It is nice of you to come and see me again so soon," she told the girl when they were seated in the front room; "especially after the way I must have tired you with my troubles and drowned you with my tears." Her forced gaiety could not deceive one to whom she had opened her heart. The marks of trouble and anxiety showed too plainly in her face.

Virginia saw the opportunity to transmit the good tidings she had brought. Its very bigness embarrassed her. "I have some good news for you," she cried, and abruptly thrust the letter towards the older woman, her eyes big and tender with the joy of her message. "There!" she stammered. "Read–read that, please." 298

Mrs. Curtis took the letter from Mrs. Henderson and began to peruse it.

It seemed to Virginia that she would never finish.

At last Mrs. Curtis turned towards the girl. Her face was pale and the stress of her emotion weakened her. “I can’t thank you,” she whispered in a queer strained voice. Suddenly her strength swept back to her. Under the force of the joy which enveloped her she spoke in a dead monotone, staring ahead of her with unseeing eyes. “My Charles will walk and play like other boys. In a few weeks–perhaps before Thanksgiving Day–he can throw aside his crutch.”

Virginia, agitated by the intenseness of the other’s feelings, watched in silence.

Mrs. Curtis had forgotten her visitor now. She was thinking aloud. “What a happy day it will be for Joe and Charles and me,” she murmured,–“the happiest since my husband died.”

The gladness of the other thrilled the girl.

Like a flash there came a change in Mrs. Curtis’s mood. Her joy came into conflict with a defiant pride. Her face became cold and hard. “It’s charity,” she wailed, “just plain charity. Am I a beggar now?”

She turned furiously upon Virginia, transformed by passion, “If my husband had lived–if I, a weak 299
woman, had been given a fair chance to make an honest living in this land of the free,” she sneered, “I too would ride in my automobile in silks and diamonds and extend charity to the poor. If there were justice among men I would not be in a position where people could offer me charity.”

A bewildered Virginia listened timidly as the woman, almost beside herself, went on, “There is no justice–there is no right,” Her eyes seemed ablaze to the startled girl. She thrust her arms above her head. “The wicked prosper and the good are ruined. It’s all wrong–wickedly wrong,” she screamed and, rushing into an adjoining room, cast herself across the bed, sobbing convulsively.

Amazed at the effect of Hennie’s letter, Virginia was tempted to run away. She hesitated, however. Through the doorway she could see the shaking form of Joe’s mother upon the bed. Quickly the passion died out of the sobs of the weeping woman and in its place came a note of pathetic helplessness which clutched at the girl’s heart and seemed to call her.

In a moment Virginia was at the side of the bed. Leaning over, she took one of the toil worn hands into her own. There came an answering pressure and the girl seated herself by the bed-side holding the knotted fingers in her own. The sobs lessened, the quivering form became calmer, and at length Mrs. Curtis sat up and raised wet eyes to those of her visitor. “You must think me lacking in appreciation of the generosity of your friends,” she choked, still shaken by the reflex of her sobs. “It’s not true, though. That was a display of my silly pride. It’s about all 300
that I have left of the happiest days of my life. Forget my words, dear, and forgive me. From the bottom of my heart, I thank you for what you have done for my boy and me. To have him walk without a crutch, on my hands and knees I’d scrub the most crowded street in the world. There is no humiliation too great for me to undergo for him. I would glory in it.” In the glow of mother love her face softened and became beautiful. Now she seemed to grasp the full significance of the news and to be filled with unrest as if afraid that the opportunity might escape. “When can we go?” she worried–“tomorrow?”

“Today, if you wish,” Virginia explained.

Her woes cast aside and filled with excitement, Mrs. Curtis dried her tears and returned to the other room with the girl. Through the window Charles Augustus could be seen hobbling about in a game with the active Helen. His mother watched his awkward movements intently for a moment. “In a few months he will be running about without the crutch,” she whispered and, swinging about, she seized Virginia by her shoulders, looked deep into her eyes as she murmured gently, “May God bless you and yours for what you are doing for me and mine, and may happiness be yours and theirs until the end of time.”

Charles Augustus displayed greater interest in the journey he was about to take than in the fact that he might no longer need his crutch. As he passed through the meadow with the girls he explained his position. “It’s great fun to travel on the cars. I don’t care a bit where I go, so it’s some place else.” Possible objections arising from the change struck him. “When I come back, 301
will you come and see me, even if I don’t have a crutch?” he asked Helen.

The enchantress caught him in her arms and answered him with a kiss.

Regardless of this attention, dissatisfaction crept into his face. “If I don’t have my crutch, I will catch you all of the time. There’ll be no fun in playing with a girl who always has to be ‘it.’”

His fears did not impress Helen the agile. “When you are able to play without your crutch,” she promised him, “I shall fly with delight.”

“Like an aeroplane?” inquired Charles Augustus with great seriousness.

They left him standing upon the shore. As they paddled away he was leaning on his crutch, watching something. Suddenly he made a hopping dart and dropped to the ground. Instantly he was up again, shouting triumphantly, “Look–look at the old bullfrog I caught.” He held the slimy creature aloft, by one of its legs, for the admiration of the girls and asked, “Do you think that my mother will let me take him to New York with me?”

“Ask her,” suggested the diplomatic Helen.

Notwithstanding the happy outcome of her efforts to help Charles Augustus, Virginia was very silent and preoccupied that evening.

“That child is homesick,” Aunt Kate thought, as she kissed her good night and watched her slowly ascend the stairs, candlestick in hand.

As Virginia undressed, she was very thoughtful. She went over to the dresser and, holding Mrs. Henderson’s letter close to the candle’s flame, re-read it. There was a wistful, helpless look in her face when she was ready to climb into bed. “Oh, Daddy, Daddy,” she whispered sadly, “please believe as mother did, so that I can come back home.” An hour afterwards she fell asleep upon a pillow moistened with tears. 302

The two girls were at the station in the morning to say good bye to Charles Augustus and his mother as they departed for New York.

Before the train left Charles Augustus complained to Helen, “Mother wouldn’t let me take my frog to New York.”

“That is too bad,” commiserated the deceitful Helen.

“Mother said that the frog wouldn’t care for New York. He might get lonesome there.”

Helen gravely considered the problem. “Your mother is right, Charles. A frog would find few friends and little amusement in New York.”

Virginia bade Mrs. Curtis good bye at the car steps. “You will write and tell us about everything, won’t you?” she begged.

The older woman embraced her. “Good bye,” she murmured. “Words can’t tell what I would say to you, dear. Of course I will write.”

Again the days passed and the best of news came from New York. The operation was performed and the twisted muscles worked into place. The surgeon was confident of the success of his efforts and felt sure that, at the worst, Charles Augustus would only have a slight limp which would disappear with age.

Yet Virginia was not happy. Very sweet she was and thoughtful of others; but she was serious and often, too, a look of sadness rested on her face. 303

Aunt Kate watched her with the vigilant eye of a mother in those days. One afternoon she discovered her niece alone in the hammock, viewing the pond with a melancholy countenance. “Land sakes, that child is moping again,” she groaned. Leaving her work, she joined the girl and commanded, “Tell me your thoughts, Virginia?”

For the moment the girl was startled. “I was thinking about South Ridgefield,” she confessed timidly.

“I knew it,” Aunt Kate exclaimed, apparently much puffed up by her mind-reading ability. “You are trying to see how unhappy you can make yourself and every one else who looks at you.”

Virginia was mute before this accusation.

“Were you thinking of your father?” asked Aunt Kate, proceeding with her examination of the witness.

The girl nodded sadly.

“Why do you think of him?” Aunt Kate seemed shocked at the depraved taste of Obadiah’s daughter.

“Oh, Aunt Kate, I do wish that he would pay for Charles Augustus’s operation. I would feel as if there might be some chance of my going home some day.”

“I am sorry that you don’t care for the company of Helen and me, Virginia.”

The girl gave her aunt a pleading look. “You know what I mean. I love you and Helen dearly.”

The older woman softened, patting her niece upon the cheek; but she stuck to the business at hand. “That water business would cost your father a lot of money, wouldn’t it?” 304

“I think so,” Virginia agreed.

“Hum,” muttered Aunt Kate. “We’d better give Obadiah a light dose to begin on.”

“I don’t understand you, Aunt Kate,” said the girl.

“No matter,” responded the older woman. “What I want to know is, have you asked your father to pay for the operation on that lame boy?”

“No, he knows nothing about it,” admitted Virginia. “Aunt Kate, I would be afraid to ask him after the way he talked to me.”

“Afraid!” Aunt Kate was filled with astonishment. “Afraid of Obadiah? My stars and garters! You must begin some place! How on earth do you expect him to give to something he never heard of? Don’t you know child, that to get a Dale to do anything which costs money you must ask them not once, but thrice. Seventy times seven is about right for Obadiah.”

“But, Aunt Kate, after what my father said, I couldn’t ask him to help pay Charles Augustus’s bill.”

“Why not?” demanded Aunt Kate.

“I don’t know why. I am sure, though, that I couldn’t.”

“I know why,” declared Aunt Kate. “It is obstinacy–plain Dale obstinacy sticking out of you.”

Virginia was silent for a moment, possibly reviewing her personal characteristics as illuminated by her aunt. Then she asked, “You think that I should ask him?” 305

“Certainly, give brother Obadiah a chance.”

“But, Aunt Kate, he will refuse.”

“We will write him then that you are going to stay with me.”

“Oh,” groaned Virginia, great tears springing into her eyes opened wide with alarm. “Then I could never go home as long as I live. I’d never see Daddy or Serena or even Ike again.”

“Fiddlesticks, child, don’t be a weakling.” Her eyes twinkled. “This is no tragedy. It is only a difference of opinion, with brother Obadiah, as usual, wrong.”

“It would be a tragedy if I could never go and see my father.” Virginia shook her head sorrowfully. “I have been thinking about it lots lately, and sometimes I wonder if my mother would want me to stay away from home much longer.”

Aunt Kate put her arm about the girl. “Won’t you trust to the judgment of your old aunt, who knew your mother before you? I don’t want your efforts to help other people to be turned into a punishment.”

“I have thought of that, too.” Virginia was very solemn as she spoke. “Perhaps I went about it the wrong way. If I had done things differently perhaps I wouldn’t have made Daddy angry.”

“You must not allow yourself to worry, dear. We will give your father a chance to help Charles Augustus. If he doesn’t do it, something else will come up and we will keep on giving him the opportunity. In the end everything will work out for the best, I am sure.” 306

So that afternoon Virginia wrote to her father and asked him to contribute towards the expense of the operation upon Charles Augustus. It was a cheery letter and in no word of it could one guess the tears and longings between the lines.

Obadiah’s answer, as befitted a good business man, was prompt. While he admitted the sadness of the case he could see no reason why he should be asked to pay for an operation upon a boy of whom he knew nothing. He enclosed a small check and concluded his letter with directions that his daughter return home at once.

“Just as I expected,” announced Aunt Kate, when Virginia, the bewildered subject of conflicting emotions, brought it to her. “Obadiah is wild to have you home. That is our strength. Don’t you surrender to him, Virginia. I wouldn’t be a slave to any man and certainly not to brother Obadiah. I always made him step about, I can promise you. And if you follow my advice you can, too.”

Virginia’s face was wistful. “I don’t want to make Daddy step about, Aunt Kate.”

“You started this revolution, Virginia, and you must see it through. Now, I am in it. The only slave in that big house in South Ridgefield is going to be Obadiah. My dander is up, child, and I am going to make him sweat. I must finish the job of training which I started years ago. He never disobeyed me then and he had better not try it now.” Her eyes flashed and her manner was extremely menacing. “In the meantime,” she stormed, “he has brought you into the world, which 307 complicates matters but does not relieve me of my responsibilities.”

The second letter to Obadiah was in the hand of Virginia but it breathed the words and spirit of his sister Kate. It was an independent document. Every line of it bristled with the spirit of ’76. It regretted his decision not to help in the case of Charles Augustus and also that Virginia had not completed her visit so that she could return to South Ridgefield. In vague terms it referred to a home with her aunt, and discussed a career, as well as certain positions for teachers available in and about Old Rock.

Virginia copied the letter and signed her name. Then she re-read with increasing alarm the ultimatum which she had approved. Had she been alone it would have been instantly destroyed; but under the stern eye of her aunt she was helpless. Obediently she addressed the envelope and, shaking way down in her very boots, she watched her aunt fold, seal and bear away for personal mailing the bolt which was to be cast at her father’s head.

At the door Aunt Kate turned and, with the greatest assurance, told the fear-shaken girl, “Mark my words! This letter will make brother Obadiah sit up and take notice.”

CHAPTER XIX 308

OBADIAH “COMES TO”

As it is written that a prophet is not without honor save in his own country and in his own house, it is deemed just that such matters as have to do with the coming to pass of Aunt Kate’s prediction concerning her brother Obadiah should be duly set forth herein that they may be not

suppressed through local jealousy.

Obadiah received Virginia's letter late one afternoon as he was about to return home. He did not immediately read it, but carried it with him that he might enjoy it in the greater seclusion of his own domicile. What took place thereafter is best described in the words of a confidential communication from Serena to Ike. "Dat ole man is er ra'in' an' er ta'in' 'roun' in dyar jes lak sumpin done stung 'im. It's de badness er wo'kin' out. De hot fiah o' to'ment singe 'im an' de cont'ary spi'it cry aloud fo' he'p lak er lamb afo' er ragin' lion in de wilde'ness."

Ike received these tidings concerning the spiritual pass of his employer with an interest that lacked the kindly sympathy which should be extended to a brother struggling with the forces of evil. He made answer in a casual manner, "Mr. Devil done run dat ole man to ea'th er long time ergo. He jes er settin' back, lafin sof' to hisse'f, er watchin' de houn's er scratchin' an' er clawin'. 309
He gwine dig 'im out presently. Ah 'spects dat de 'pointed hour is at han'."

At dinner Obadiah was in a surly mood which he vented upon Serena by making cutting criticisms concerning the food and service. She received his comments in silence, storing them up until a more propitious hour of reckoning. Meanwhile she solaced herself by certain outbursts at Ike.

Unconscious of impending disaster, the chauffeur had seated himself adjacent to the range. Here he rested from the labors of the day, having in view a tempting repast of chicken and sweet potatoes. He endeavored by agreeable conversation, to make smooth, or grease if you wish, its pathway to his stomach. "Miss Sereny, yo'all is er movin' mighty peart dis evenin'," he remarked in tuneful tones, as the old negress hastily re-entered the kitchen, severely wounded by a barbed dart of Obadiah's temper.

She whirled upon him and snapped, "Shet up dat big mouf. Yer 'minds me o' er ole alligator er settin' thar workin' yer jaws an' ain' say nothin'."

A glance at Serena's face showed Ike that storm signals were unmistakably flying. He thought to assuage the tempest by the tender of assistance. "Caint ah he'p you, Miss Sereny? Ah 'spects dat yo'all is plum ti'ed er wo'kin' in dis yere hot kitchen."

She fixed him with smoldering eyes. "He'p me, he'p me," she repeated indignantly. "De onlies way er lazy nocount lummox lak yo'all kin he'p me is by er movin' yer triflin' carcass out o' ma kitchen stid o' layin' 'round ma stove lak er houn' dawg. Lif youse'f off dat chair, boy."

Ike, the indirect victim of Virginia's letter, removed himself in haste from his comfortable corner 310
and retired to the cool steps of the back stoop, to allow the domestic cyclone to blow itself out before attempting again to procure his evening's nourishment.

Obadiah had an uncomfortable night. A remembrance of the lance like thrusts of Aunt Kate, which, in the name of his daughter, had so cruelly lacerated him in spite of his armor of egotism, drove sleep away. Tossing upon a bed of discomfort, he heard the clocks toll out each passing hour until, weary and tired eyed, he left his bed, ill prepared to face the burdens and perplexities of the new day.

At breakfast, Serena served Obadiah efficiently; but her attitude was hostile. The wounds of the proceeding night were yet raw. When he had eaten, she faced him sternly and demanded, "When is yo'all 'spectin' Miss Virginy is er gwine come home?"

"One of these days," he answered with indifference.

She was not to be thus summarily dismissed. "Dat day bettah be er comin' mighty quick," she threatened. "Ah is er gittin ti'ed er waitin' 'roun' yere. Presen'ly, ah gwine pack ma duds an' go whar she at."

"You attend to your own business," he snarled petulantly.

His irritation was an elixir of strength to her. Hands on hips she gazed defiantly at him. "Ma business is whar Miss Virginy is. Ah ain' promise Miss Elinor dat ah tek care o' yo'all. Ah gives ma word to watch dat chil'. Ef you is er countin' on me er stayin' in dis yere house yo'all bettah git dat gal back quick. Ah ain' got no time fo' no man so se'fish dat 'is own kin folk done turn 311
again 'im."

Before the righteous indignation of his own servant Obadiah fled from his dining room, speechless with indignation.

He entered his office at nine o'clock. The sound of Mr. Jones's typewriter should have greeted him and he should have perceived Kelly recording profits in the great ledgers. This morning their seats were vacant. There was a lonesomeness about the place distasteful to the manufacturer. His sleepless night and the altercation with Serena had caused him to develop a fit of indigestion which was not allayed by the lack of punctuality on the part of his heretofore punctual subordinates.

Footsteps sounded in the hallway, also happy laughter. Tardy employees approached their work joyously, not stealthily, as is the normal custom of such miscreants. No cheery smile of cordial welcome mantled Obadiah's face. No well turned quip, to amuse his minions in their hours of toil, was upon his lip. He sternly awaited the coming of these frivolous and delinquent workers.

As Mr. Jones and Kelly entered, there were glad smiles upon their faces. There was something different about the stenographer. There was a marked outward change in him. His clear complexion proclaimed good health. He carried himself as if in complete control of his muscles.

In place of awkwardness had come a distinct grace of carriage.

There were more subtle changes in Mr. Jones, also. A clearness of eye, a steadiness of gaze and a quiet self-confidence were a novelty to his friends of other days. 312

But, strangest of all, the private secretary's old time beauty was marred by a discoloration of the right eye, poorly disguised with powder, by several small cuts upon his face and by certain bandages on his hands.

Obadiah gave Mr. Jones a sweeping glance which failed to grasp details essential to a clear understanding of a subordinate. "What do you mean, loafing in here at noon?" he demanded most inaccurately, "I pay you to get here at nine o'clock. What does this mean?" The cruel glance of Obadiah's eye pierced the optic of Mr. Jones as if to plumb the depths of his soul and wrest his innermost secrets forth to be exposed, naked and ashamed, in the pitiless light of publicity.

The mill owner's efforts to read the stenographer's mind through the eye were futile. Had he succeeded, the result of his research would have shocked him. Believing himself to be peeping into the eyes of a turtle dove, he would have become aware that he might, with greater safety, have attempted to stare down the baleful glare of a Bengal tiger.

Lacking in the ability to read the human mind, Obadiah could not know that Fate, seeking a recipient for her favor, had plucked a peaceful soul from in front of a typewriter and made it fierce.

Had the manufacturer been able to view Mr. Jones's mind as the scenes of a movie, he would have beheld thrilling events taking place upon the previous evening. He would have observed his stenographer simply arrayed in trunks, socks and shoes, with eight ounce gloves laced upon his 313 hands, give battle for the feather-weight championship of the Fifth ward, before a multitude of wildly excited male citizens.

Had Obadiah by similar means reviewed the mind of Kelly, he would have watched the battle as through the eyes of a second. He would have seen, beneath the electric lights, the muscles of the little fighting men play, panther like, under the healthy pink of their skins. If one drop of red blood remained in his anæmic old body, the mill owner would have thrilled as Mr. Jones, his arms playing smoothly as well oiled connecting rods, treading upon his toes softly as a cat, advanced, retreated and side stepped, ever warily studying the face of his opponent. He would have perceived that his stenographer ducked and dodged with incredible swiftness, his gloved hands playing always to feign, to ward and to deliver blows which resounded with the thud of leather against quivering flesh. Obadiah's eyes would have recognized the rich red of blood smearing the marble of human flesh, and he would have tingled at the excitement of the spectators when, rising from their seats, they tumultuously applauded the giver of a lucky blow.

Through five gruelling rounds of fighting the manufacturer would have followed the fortunes of his private secretary until that final moment when, panting and heaving, he stood over the prone form of his adversary, counting the motions of the referee's hands, whose voice could not be heard above the thunderous applause which acclaimed him victor.

But no picture of this battle could have told Obadiah that in the moment of triumph the spirit of 314 Mr. Jones was reborn; that from the building, into the portals of which he had been almost dragged by Kelly, he had come forth a red-blooded fighting man whose gore had mixed with that of his antagonist.

Ignorant of these happenings, Obadiah angrily awaited an answer from his unpunctual servants.

The smile had faded from the face of Mr. Jones at Obadiah's rough greeting. He failed to behave in accord with the best usages among private secretaries. Squaring his shoulders, he took a deep breath, thereby greatly straining a gusset only recently let into the back of his vest. Suddenly he shoved his head forward. As his face advanced, it changed into an ugly countenance with a nasty eye, such an one as would make its recipient ill at ease. This was Mr. Jones's fighting face, developed with care under the kindly advice of Kelly. Sporting characters considered it a valuable asset.

Mr. Jones's expression startled Obadiah. For years, when at a loss for words or thoughts, he had studied the lamb like face of his stenographer. That timid look was gone now, replaced by a countenance which had borrowed coldness from the glance of a rattlesnake and combined it with a grizzly bear's cruelty of aspect. To Obadiah it spoke of arson, of the assassination of capitalists, of the proletariat running mad. He quailed before it.

"Where do you get that noon stuff?" snarled Mr. Jones.

Obadiah turned towards the clock as if to place the blame for any misstatements of time upon that instrument. The hands pointed to five minutes past nine thereby also indicating their owner 315 to be a liar.

Again Mr. Jones spoke. Roughness replaced refinement.

"For five years I have worked overtime for you, two or three afternoons a week, sometimes fifteen minutes, sometimes an hour. I also put in many an evening and some Sundays for you. I never received a word of thanks for it. Now, because I am delayed by important business and come in five minutes late, you put up a squeal as if I'd stepped on your sore corn. Say, what kind of a cheap skate are you?" the stenographer roared in conclusion.

Obadiah ignored the question in haughty but uneasy silence.

“You think so much of your ugly old self that you can’t think of anything else. But believe me, everybody else has got your number and they’re wasting no time loving you. Say,” growled Mr. Jones so roughly that Obadiah jumped, “have you a friend in the world?”

For an instant it appeared that the manufacturer contemplated a hurried retreat from his own office, but the pugnacious stenographer barred the way.

“You hain’t,” announced Mr. Jones ungrammatically but emphatically, producing a gigantic roll of currency from his pocket. It was his share of the fight receipts, and, although the denominations averaged low, it bulked large to the surprised eyes of Obadiah. Mr. Jones shook the money in the face of his employer. “See that?” he inquired, as if suspecting that his employer suffered from failing eyesight. “I don’t care to hold it too near to you or you might try to pinch it.” 316

Obadiah viewed the roll of bills with a repugnance astounding in him.

“I had to work to get that money, last night,” Mr. Jones continued. “It wasn’t the easy kind of money that you pull down. But that isn’t the point. Kelly and I have bought a gymnasium up the street. We intended to treat you fair–to give you full notice so that you could fill our places before we left. But as you’ve had to be a little meaner than usual this morning, I think we’ll bid you good-bye right now. How about it, Kelly?”

“I say we will,” agreed that successful trainer with emphasis, and he and the fighter abruptly left the room.

Obadiah closed the door of the office with a resounding slam behind his departing staff and, taking a bunch of unopened letters from Mr. Jones’s former place of labor, he bore them into his own lair. As he sank down behind his desk he thumbed them over and, selecting one, opened and read the paper it contained. It was a formal order from the State Board of Health forbidding the further discharge of waste from the dye house at his mill into the Lame Moose River. As the manufacturer grasped the import of the document, his face purpled with rage and the paper shook in his hands. Finally he petulantly cast it aside and groaned aloud at a twinge of indigestion. Dropping back in his chair he took Virginia’s letter from his pocket and re-read it. “I’ve had bad luck ever since she left,” he growled. “Things don’t break right. I can’t keep my mind on my business. She must come home.” Unhooking his telephone, he asked Hezekiah 317
Wilkins to come to him.

Hezekiah responded, smiling pleasantly. “Good morning,” he exclaimed. “What has happened to the boys? Not sick, I hope.”

“I fired them,” Obadiah rapped. “They were too fresh around here and I let them go.” His anger and resentment displayed itself. “They are no good. I wouldn’t give them recommendations as dog catchers.”

“Hump,” ejaculated Hezekiah. “Both at once? It leaves you short handed.”

Obadiah invited the attention of his attorney to business by handing him the order of the Board of Health.

Hezekiah read the document with care and, returning it to the manufacturer, gazed at the ceiling reflectively.

“Well, what do you think of it?” Obadiah’s manner was short.

“I have been expecting it,” the lawyer replied with calmness. “What else could you expect? You are ruining the water that people have to drink.”

“I can’t be forced. They won’t drive me,” Obadiah maintained with his usual obstinacy.

“They’ll drive you into court fast enough, if you don’t obey that order,” Hezekiah warned him with a chuckle.

“That’s just where I want to be. It’s up to you to develop a plan to flim-flam that bunch of fool doctors. You’re losing your ‘pep’ or you’d have worked out something before this,” sneered Obadiah.

“Perhaps I am losing my ‘pep,’” Hezekiah mimicked, and his eyes flashed as he went on. “I have 318
enough mental alertness left to advise you not to bite off your nose to spite your face.”

Obadiah flushed angrily but controlled his temper. “Listen,” he snarled, “while I tell you what I pay you to tell me. The Lame Moose is a navigable stream, isn’t it?”

Hezekiah nodded, his eyes dancing with amusement.

Obadiah frowned at his attorney and continued, “We’ll raise a federal question and get the case into the U. S. Courts and with dilatory pleas, continuances and appeals it will take years before a final decision is handed down. How’s that?”

Hezekiah laughed. “As your legal adviser, I can’t approve it. The waste from the dye-house at your mill is spoiling the water that some thousands of people have to drink. There is a simple remedy open to you but they have none. Common justice demands that you consider the rights of these beings.” The attorney turned loose his oratorical voice. “Common justice demands it, sir.”

The manufacturer flushed and shifted uneasily. Quarrelsome as he was, he could not afford a break with this man.

Hezekiah relapsed into a careful study of the metal cornice over the way.

“Think it over. Think about it,” snapped Obadiah after a moment’s silence. “You may be able to catch my point of view. I have another subject which I want to discuss with you–an embarrassing personal matter.”

Hezekiah gave him a covert glance but immediately resumed inspection of the metal work across the street. 319

“It’s about my daughter,” continued Obadiah. “I have a letter from her which I wish you to read.”

Hezekiah perused Virginia’s letter with great care and attention. “Did she write that?” he asked abruptly, as he returned the communication.

“It’s in my daughter’s handwriting but I suspect that my sister Kate may have had a hand in it. Virginia never wrote such a letter to me before. It is an unusual letter.”

“Yes, it is an unusual letter,” Hezekiah agreed. There was merriment in his eyes but otherwise he presented the serious aspect befitting a counsellor in the presence of a client. “It is an implied threat to sever domestic relations. Such counsel as I give should have in contemplation the facts which led up to this–ahem–veiled ultimatum.”

This reasonable request embarrassed Obadiah greatly; but after some hesitation he explained the circumstances under which Virginia had left home as the act of a defiant, headstrong girl.

“Dear me, an exceedingly unfortunate matter,” exclaimed Hezekiah, as if astonished at the revelation. Therein his manner partook of deceit, as Hennie had favored him so often with the details of the matter, gathered from Virginia herself and more completely, through Carrie, from Serena, that he knew them by heart. The lawyer went on, “The adjustment of such family differences requires tact–the utmost tact and diplomacy.”

The happenings of the morning had sorely inflamed Obadiah’s indigestion. As he repeated his woes to the attorney, remembrances of the lonely hours he had spent since the girl’s departure 320 came to him and he believed himself a sadly ill-used man. Miserable in body and spirit, he flamed into tempestuous rebellion at the mild measures proposed by his legal adviser.

“Tact and diplomacy the devil!!” he exploded. “I’ll use force, if necessary. She is my daughter, isn’t she?”

Hezekiah gravely conceded Obadiah’s claim of paternity.

“The law gives me some control of her?”

“As an unmarried woman, you have certain rights over her,” Hezekiah admitted.

“Well then, I want her back,” bellowed Obadiah, the notes of his voice getting higher as the intensity of his feeling increased. “You go and get her and make her come home.”

“Did you have in mind legal proceedings to compel your daughter to return under your roof?” inquired Hezekiah in a suave manner, in marked contrast to the bluster of his employer.

“It doesn’t make any difference how you do it. Kidnap her for all I care. What I want is to get her back,” the mill owner stormed.

“Has it occurred to you, that in such matters care must be taken to avoid a serious rupture of those affectionate relations which, after all, are the basis of the home and the natural tie between a father and daughter?” Hezekiah suggested quietly.

Obadiah’s face was swollen with passion, his obstinacy written deep in it. “She must come home,” he proclaimed. “I want her. I’m tired of living alone. You go and make her come back.” 321

The smooth shaven countenance of the lawyer hardened. His usual good-humored expression melted into one of resolution as he said with great calmness, “I have thought, sometimes, Obadiah, that you fail to display a clear conception of an attorney’s duties.”

“What?”

“You don’t appreciate the scope of my employment.”

“What has that got to do with my daughter?”

“It has this. I do not conceive it my duty to force your daughter to return to your home against her wishes.”

“You refuse to obey my instructions?” Obadiah almost screamed, throwing discretion to the winds in the tumult of his wrath.

“Yes, I refuse,” answered the lawyer, leaping to his feet and talking down at his employer. “I refuse,” he repeated in a voice in which passion found no place, “as I have always refused when you would have seduced me into doing an unjust act. There are questions upon which fair minds may differ. Men of honor may argue for the side in which they believe or have been retained. From divers contentions, strongly maintained, comes the bright star of right, shining clear, in its purity, above the storm clouds of litigation. But, Your Hon–” Hezekiah paused and began anew–“But, sir, there are fundamental questions involving moral law upon which right minded men must agree.”

“What’s this tirade got to do with me?” Obadiah demanded.

Hezekiah silenced the mill owner with a gesture of great dignity. “Never interrupt counsel in the 322 midst of argument,” he protested, absently. “Undoubtedly you will be afforded ample time to

present your own views." He paused, blinking nervously. The interruption had disturbed his train of thought, but in a moment he continued. "At stated periods, prudent merchants take trial balances and invoices that they may know the condition of their business. It is likewise well for men at times to take account of their relations with their associates. It is my purpose to do that now, Obadiah Dale." In Hezekiah's eyes was a far away look now. "It's nearly thirty years since I entered your employ–thirty years, Obadiah, the cream of my life. Its period of highest power I have given to you. My life must be judged by my accomplishments for you. You and I alone know what part my judgment has had in the development of your great business. As a young man, I liked you, Obadiah. I admired your energy and perseverance and that combativeness which made you give battle in open competition for new fields of commercial activity. Success came to you in a measure permitted to but few, and the tremendous power of wealth accompanied it. Thoughts come to me of your wife, that fair rose of the Southland, who not only brought sunshine into your own house but spread it among all those who were privileged to know her. In her you were a twice blessed man. A daughter was born to you, the image of her mother, and so were you thrice blessed."

Hezekiah's face became stern. "I have tried to judge you fairly at the bar of my heart, Obadiah. 323
Old friendship has pleaded for you. Unhappiness over the loss of your wife may have swayed you. Yet, something tells me that you were always the man that you have been of late, concealing the evil in you that you might the better court success. At any rate, there has been a gradual outward change in you until here and now"–Hezekiah was very grave–"I impeach you before the high court of my heart for divers crimes and offenses, treasonable in their nature, against the good will and happiness of your fellowmen."

The prisoner at the bar gave a start, possibly remembering that the historical punishment for treason was the headsman's axe.

"You have hardened, Obadiah," the lawyer continued relentlessly, "until you have grown as icy cold as the winter hills of your native lands. You have become cruel and rapacious in your business dealings. Of late years your commercial pathway is strewn with the wrecks of enterprises, which in no sense affected your own safety but which you have ruined through a sheer desire to dominate, a naked lust for power. Controlled by greed and avarice, no generous thought for your fellowmen actuates you. Steeped in your own selfishness, you sit in this room like–" shaking a forefinger at Obadiah the attorney hesitated, seeking a fitting condemnatory simile. Suddenly he concluded–"like a fat hog," and struck the desk of the alleged swine such a thump that the pork jumped.

"Your memory will tell you how many times I have blocked your devilish schemes by convincing you that, if persisted in, the anti-trust laws must land you behind prison bars."

Hezekiah in the pose of a stout statue of liberty, thrust up his right arm and clasped his left hand 324
to his breast. He fixed accusing eyes upon the manufacturer and cried in a big voice, "If the world knew as much about you as I do, I am not so sure but they'd incarcerate you under the first law of nature–self-preservation."

"Hush!" Obadiah paled visibly and with great nervousness viewed the open transom.

Hezekiah leveled an arraigning hand at his employer. "Your actions should be such that you could rest in equanimity while they are cried aloud in the market places. The hour of reckoning is at hand, Obadiah. You believe yourself invincible. Blinded by a curtain of obstinacy you have not read your destiny. I tear it aside and expose your dark future. Your daughter, beautiful and affectionate, filled, as was her mother, with thoughts of others, discovers your true character and, turning from you, prefers the peace of a good conscience amidst humbler surroundings to a home of wealth in your company. She leaves you–alone."

Obadiah winced.

Hezekiah returned to his task with renewed vigor. "This morning your personal staff–men who have been with you for years–separate from you. I have no hesitation in assuming that they departed rankling beneath injustice. They leave you–alone. Now your attorney"–Hezekiah's voice was filled with feeling–"your adviser for years, tenders his resignation rather than to be a party to enforcing your selfish demands against your own daughter. He leaves you–alone."

Stunned by this unexpected shot, Obadiah appeared to shrink in his chair. 325

Highly pleased at the effect and sound of his own words, Hezekiah seized upon the order of the Board of Health and, shaking it in the face of the mill owner, waxed ever more eloquent. Floating away upon the wings of his own fervid oratory, he continued in ringing tones.

"The keen eye of this great Commonwealth has found you out. Now does its strong right arm, the law, reach forth to protect the weak and restrain the strong. In ardent pursuit of evil it draws ever nearer and nearer, until at last it embraces even the waste–"

Hezekiah stopped short. A look of horror, loathing and disgust swept his countenance. He was inexpressibly shocked at the extraordinary conclusion to which his simile hastened.

To Obadiah, the repugnance in Hezekiah's face depicted antipathy towards himself. For years the attorney had been the manufacturer's one friend. He had admired the lawyer's learning and leaned upon his judgment. For years he had known that words were playthings in his legal adviser's mouth; but that look was too much. The aversion and detestation displayed crushed the mill owner. Humbled to the dust he reviewed the calamities which Hezekiah had so ably painted. With due allowance for rhetorical exaggeration, they frightened him. He must save Hezekiah to

pilot him through the darkness.

Sick and weary and miserable but above all else lonely, Obadiah arose from his desk and confronted the lawyer. “Hezekiah, you will not leave me?” he begged, in pitiful humiliation, his anger gone. 326

The placid Hezekiah was shaken to the depths of his soul at the catastrophe which had befallen him. Vain of his oratorical ability, he regarded his address to Obadiah as a worthy effort until his final bull. Such slips are remembered by one’s professional brethren until the end of one’s life. He took his grievance out on the abased Obadiah.

“I’m tired,” he growled, “tired of your greed and selfishness, tired of your confounded pigheadedness and the continual scrap in which you live. You’re old, Obadiah. I bet you ten dollars that the hearse is in use which will haul you to the cemetery.”

Obadiah shuddered and displayed no disposition to take the wager.

Hezekiah went on testily. “You worry about money until every one hates and despises you. It’s bad for my reputation to work for you–to be caught in your company. I have saved enough to keep me comfortable until I die and I’m going to take it easy. I want to quit fighting law suits and go to compromising.” A glint of his usual humor flashed in Hezekiah’s eyes. “If you’d let me compromise your cases, I might stay.”

Obadiah made a quick motion as of consent.

Hezekiah viewed his shaking employer with great severity. “You must prove your conversion by your works,” he rapped. “You’ve got to show me.”

“What should I do, Hezekiah?” the manufacturer, looking helpless and old, begged. “Give me the benefit of your advice.”

“Do?” snapped Hezekiah petulantly. “Decide how you think a thing ought to be done and do the opposite. You’re always wrong.” 327

“Please be specific, Hezekiah.”

At the word “please,” the lawyer started in surprise. In a moment he growled, “Compromise. Learn to consider the rights and wishes of other people. The compromise is a most valuable instrument in bringing about domestic happiness,” and with this sage advice, Hezekiah, the bachelor, left his employer.

Stricken low by physical disorder and verbal assaults, it was a day of gloomy forebodings to Obadiah. After Hezekiah’s oration, the path ahead, usually certain and clear to him, seemed beset with obstacles and lined with eyes of hatred.

When he went home that night there seemed to be a stoop in his usually erect carriage and a deep anxiety dwelt in his eyes. Hardly touching his dinner, he sat through it, in his dining room, plunged in thought.

Serena marked the change in the behavior of her employer with great interest. Returning to the kitchen, she told Ike, “Mr. Devil done sna’ah dat ole man wid er bait o’ shinin’ gol’. Now he gwine hawg tie ’im wid hot chains outen de fu’nace o’ to’ment so dat he kin tote ’im to de aige o’ de bottomless pit an’ cas’ ’im into de fiah an’ brimstone. Dat ole man is er strivin’ mighty fie’ce to git loose. He’s er gnawin’ off er leg to git outen de sn’ah, as de hot i’on burns ’im an’ de brimstone smoke choke ’im.”

The chauffeur, being for the moment in high favor, was enjoying a piece of pie as a fitting appetizer for his later dinner. “He ain’ lif’ up his voice in prah or mek no sign er tall,” responded the youth, giving close attention to the pastry and but little heed to the demoniacal trapping going on in the neighborhood. 328

“Dey’s er fightin’ ete’nally, boy,” explained Serena with scorn.

Ike rolled his eyes, exposing large areas of white until they rested upon the woman. “Ain’ you mek er mistake, Miss Sereny?” he suggested respectfully. “Ain’ you mean infe’nally?”

“Look yere, boy,” she retorted with great dignity, “ah ain’ er astin’ no trash lak yo’all to teach me nothin’. Ah gits ma ’ligion f’om de good book in de chu’ch house. Min’ you’ own business.”

Obadiah retired early and again tossed backwards and forwards through long hours. Hezekiah had indeed torn aside a concealing veil from the manufacturer’s life. Obadiah was not a man given to introspection, but, for the first time in years, the words of his attorney had forced it upon him. Tonight his boasted accomplishments were nothing, while episodes which he would have gladly forgotten loomed large. Above all else a great loneliness and fear of the future crushed him.

In this hour of deepest humility, recollections of his wife and the far away days of his married life came to him. Sweet and tender memories these, of occurrences almost forgotten. He softened to them, and moments followed when it was as if the spirit of Elinor Dale had crossed the span of years and labored with the troubled soul of the selfish, obstinate, purse-proud old rich man until at last, Obadiah–slept in peace.

When he appeared in the morning, a change had taken place in him. There was strength and decision in his face; but it seemed as if the lines of cruelty and obstinacy were altered and smoothed away as the ruts and tracks upon a sandy beach after a great storm. 329

CHAPTER XX
HIS JOURNEY'S END

Excitement prevailed in the home of Aunt Kate in Old Rock. There was a soft sound of feminine feet rushing about. Much searching for mislaid articles of apparel was taking place and those hastening made nervous demands for assistance upon those hurrying.

The disturbance in this peaceful household was due to the receipt of knowledge that Charles Augustus and his mother had returned from New York during the preceding night. Preparations were now in progress for the departure of Virginia and Helen to greet the returned ones in a fitting manner.

At last the two girls were appropriately garbed and Aunt Kate kissed them good bye at the front door and, with a kindly smile upon her face, watched them run across the meadow towards the pond, making farewell signals with their canoe paddles.

An hour later there was a sharp rap of the old fashioned knocker on the front door. "Mercy sakes upon us," muttered Aunt Kate. "What business has anybody coming here at this time of day?" A look of aversion crept over her face. "I'll bet my boots it is an agent or a peddler. I'll send him packing pretty quick with a flea in his ear." Apparently bent upon carrying out this peculiar attention she hurried into the hall. Bending low, she pulled aside the curtain of a side light and peered out. The feet and legs before her advertised their owner as a man. "It is a peddler," she murmured. Her gentle face assumed a stern and forbidding aspect. Suddenly, she jerked the door open and, glowering at the intruder, cried, "Go away! I don't want–"

The victim of this unusual reception was her brother Obadiah.

"Land o' Goshen, how you frightened me, Obadiah Dale," Aunt Kate reproached him as soon as she recovered from her surprise. "Don't you know any better than to scare a body half to death?"

"I didn't intend to frighten you, Kate," Obadiah protested, when he got over his own astonishment.

"The bad place is paved with good intentions," she quoted with sternness and, as her brother hesitated upon the porch, puzzled at his extraordinary greeting, she commanded, "Come in. What are you waiting out there for? Must I lead you in?" Giving him a ceremonious kiss, she ushered him into the large back room where the table prepared for luncheon reminded her to be hospitable. "Have you had breakfast, Obadiah? I'll fix you something in a minute."

"Yes, on the train. I don't want anything to eat, Kate."

Satisfied that her brother was not starving, she gazed at him over the tops of her spectacles with a humorous twinkle in her eyes. "This *is* a surprise. It is the first time that you have visited me since–" She paused in sudden indignation. "Obadiah Dale," she went on sharply, "you have never deigned to honor me with a visit in my own home."

He was nervous and ill at ease as he answered, "I know, Kate, but I'm a very–"

She interrupted him, in a gentler mood. "Yes, I know, Obadiah. The years have run swiftly. Yesterday we were boy and girl together at the old home. Today we are old folks, the best part of our lives spent. The page of our earthly hour is nearly written and there is only room for a few more sentences." She glared at him with great severity and sniffed, "At least, we'd better see that these lines have something good about us."

"Yes, Kate," he agreed meekly.

"I know that you want to see–Virginia. She's not here, Obadiah. She has gone up to the head of the pond to see Charles Augustus, the lame boy who was operated upon," she told him.

Obadiah nodded. "How far is that from here? Can I walk it?"

Aunt Kate considered. "It's about three miles by road. You will get lost and never find the place. The girls will be back by two or three o'clock. Can't you make yourself comfortable and visit with me until then?"

"I do want to see Virginia. She has been away a long time." He jumped to his feet and moved nervously about. "I think that I shall walk there, if you don't mind, Kate."

His anxiety awakened the sympathy of his sister. "You are not used to strolls like that. I am afraid that it will not be good for you. I have a horse that is old and fat and slow but he can haul us there if you can hitch him up."

"That will do." Obadiah was much relieved. "I'll drive your horse. I used to do it when I was a boy."

"That was a long time ago. You may have forgotten." An idea struck her. "Do fashions change in harness? If so, you won't know a thing about it and it won't be safe to trust you."

The employer of hundreds was disgusted at his sister's display of lack of confidence in his abilities. "Harnesses haven't changed," he insisted, dryly.

At the barn, Archimedes was brought forth and Obadiah Dale, millionaire manufacturer, essayed

to harness the steed to the family vehicle. He displayed great energy and his enthusiasm increased with the passage of time. Archimedes was an ideal animal for the mill owner's experimentations. In all of his impressive dignity of weight and size, the animal waited motionless while Obadiah buckled and unbuckled straps in the making and correction of his errors. Minutes passed and disaster threatened only when, in slipping the bit between the massive teeth, a couple of the manufacturer's fingers inadvertently attended the linked metal. Being asleep, the animal failed to take advantage of it.

At last, Obadiah, viewing his handiwork with pride, signified that all things were in readiness for the journey. Aunt Kate had noted his prolonged efforts with grave suspicion. She now approached Archimedes in the critical mood of an irritated C. O. at Saturday morning inspection. Obadiah took humble position, two paces to her right and rear.

"That trace is twisted. Straighten it!" she commanded.

He corrected this oversight. 334

She surveyed the bridle and whirled upon him, horror depicted in her eyes. "Obadiah Dale," she exclaimed, "haven't you any better sense than to take your own sister driving without buckling the reins to the bit. Lands sakes, I might have been dragged to a terrible death."

Strange to relate, when this grave mistake had been overcome and all things were in order; in spite of the conclusive evidences of Obadiah's incompetence, Aunt Kate permitted him to drive. As she climbed into the surrey, she announced, "I'll sit back here where I can get out if anything goes wrong."

This precaution as well as the general attitude of his sister towards Archimedes, had persuaded Obadiah that he had to do with a fractious steed, notwithstanding that all outward appearances justified the conclusion that Archimedes was a cow in soul and action.

The mill owner shoved open the sliding door of the barn with an anxious eye upon the fat back as if fearful that he might gallop wildly forth even as a fire horse leaving a truck house in response to an alarm.

Archimedes never budged.

Obadiah climbed clumsily over the front wheel, the reins hanging loosely from his hands. Seating himself, he promptly drew them taut, prepared for any emergency.

"Be careful, Obadiah," Aunt Kate warned him from the back seat.

"Gid-ap!" Obadiah spoke in a soothing voice suitable to a high strung animal.

Archimedes held his ground.

Obadiah raised his voice in some degree, "Gid-ap!" he exclaimed. 335

Archimedes might have been cast in a supporting part in an equestrian statue for all the notice he took of what transpired about him.

In vain Obadiah amplified his efforts. "This fool horse is balky," he grumbled to Aunt Kate.

"Archimedes balky, fiddle-de-dee," she answered. "Maybe he's tied." Past experience caused her to examine the vicinity to be assured that through inadvertence they were not made fast to anything by chains or cables. Suddenly, she became aware of Obadiah's firm rein. "No wonder!" she cried, "You are holding him too tight. You don't know how to drive. Give me the lines." Leaning forward over the back of the front seat Aunt Kate seized the reins and gave three or four swinging pulls as a conductor signaling to the engineman ahead. Simultaneously she made clicking sounds with her lips reminiscent of swine enjoying a milky repast.

Archimedes responded readily to this treatment and moved slowly forward.

"There," Aunt Kate said with great satisfaction as she returned the reins to Obadiah. "That's the way to drive a horse." As they turned out of the driveway into the road, she warned him, "Do be careful of the automobiles."

"Why should I be careful of them? Can't they take care of themselves up here?" he demanded, meanwhile tugging at the reins, and then, "Who broke this fool horse?"

Aunt Kate leaned forward. "Where?" she asked with great anxiety only to quickly drop back into her seat with a suppressed, "Oh!" 336

Regardless of the efforts of the mill owner, the steed drifted gradually towards the gutter.

"This horse isn't bridlewise," Obadiah declared in disgust. "I might as well be trying to drive a cow."

"He has more sense than lots of people I know," Aunt Kate answered with a meaning look at her brother. "He wants to get out of the way of automobiles."

For a few minutes Archimedes was permitted to follow the way of the gutter in peace, then, "This is ridiculous," protested Obadiah. "I feel like a perfect idiot driving this way. I'll be hanged if I'll do it." He yanked and shouted at the horse until, fighting every inch of the way, the animal drifted towards the crown of the road.

With nervous eyes, Aunt Kate searched the highway back of them for signs of approaching machines. "Obadiah, look out. Here comes a car," she screamed.

Alarmed at her tone, his body stiffened to meet the shock of imminent collision. He jerked his head about fearfully to perceive a car following them a mile away. “Why did you startle me that way? I thought something was about to hit us,” he blurted.

The horn of the approaching machine demanded the road. Obadiah tugged at Archimedes anew. The horse answered but slowly.

“Hurry, Obadiah, they are running into us,” screamed Aunt Kate.

337 The mill owner redoubled his efforts to get out of the way as a series of frantic squawks and the grind of brakes sounded from behind them.

In desperation, Obadiah jerked out the whip and gave Archimedes a smart clip. The horse bounded clumsily and stopped in the middle of the road. The petted animal’s astonishment at this treatment was such that he had to pause for consideration.

“Don’t you strike my horse that way,” cried Aunt Kate indignantly, her mind diverted from the menacing automobile by the punishment of her property. “You ought to be ashamed of yourself.”

Obadiah put up the whip, leaving the motionless Archimedes to meditate upon his injuries in the center of the highway while the automobile worked its way around. It came opposite to them, a flivver of the cheapest type–mere dust beside Obadiah’s own car.

A rough, angry man glared at the mill owner and bawled, “You old moss-back, do you think that you own this road? When somebody takes a wheel off of that old ark, it may”–the voice was very doubtful–“knock some sense into your bean. Don’t you know enough to put out your hand when you stop, you mutton-headed fool. If there was a constable about I’d have you chucked into the calaboose.”

Obadiah sat speechless under this insolence. Possibly he was becoming inured to unkind words. As the car disappeared in the distance his tongue was loosened, “Kate, did you get their number?” he inquired with great anxiety.

“No. Why on earth should I want their number? I hope I never see them again.”

338 He almost stammered in the flood of his wrath. “If I had it, I’d prosecute them–have them fined and put in prison.”

“What for–scolding us?” inquired Aunt Kate softly.

He did not answer for a time. When he turned his temper had departed. “Kate, I was wrong, I suppose,” he said.

She looked at him curiously and there was affection in her glance; but her voice was stern as she replied, “Obadiah, you were headstrong and it led you into trouble, as it used to when you were a boy.”

“Yes, Kate.” In Obadiah’s tones was a new note.

Thereafter, Archimedes pursued his way in the safety of the gutter until they turned into a little used lane where great trees, decked in wonderful autumnal colors, arched overhead, and unkempt hedges brushed their wheels. The birds, disturbed in their preparations for their trip South, made short, noisy flights ahead of the vehicle, protesting against the intrusion.

Regardless of this, Obadiah and Archimedes, meditating upon recent injuries, pursued the path that fate would have them follow.

CHAPTER XXI

339

THE TRIUMPH

When Virginia and Helen came up the path towards the Curtis home, they missed the little figure of Charles Augustus hobbling forth to meet them with joyous greetings.

“We’ll go to the front door,” suggested Helen. So they passed around the house and, ascending the steps, knocked at the weather-beaten front entrance.

“Come in,” cried the shrill voice of Charles Augustus. “I can’t open the door.”

Virginia obeyed the command of the child with a smile of delight. As she swung the door back, the pleasant odor of frying doughnuts assailed her nostrils. Looking through the rooms, she could see Mrs. Curtis in the kitchen, fork in hand, awaiting their entrance with a look of inquiry which melted into a smile of welcome as she recognized them.

In the midst of pillows, Charles Augustus sat in one chair with his legs propped up upon another. As usual, he was bright, cheerful and talkative.

Virginia turned towards the child and then she gave a little gasp of joy as a big fellow with black eyes and a wonderful smile lifted himself with a cane and limped towards her.

340 “Joe!” she trilled, her sparkling blue eyes revealing her heart’s rejoicing. “Joe!” she repeated, in a voice which breathed its own enchantment.

He was almost to her, his face alight with his happiness.

“Joe!” she whispered again, and gave a startled glance of astonishment as this huge fellow with dancing eyes stood upon one leg, balanced himself with his cane and thrust forth an encircling arm. Rooted to the spot, she could not evade it as it drew her to him and, with fascinated eyes and curious thrills, she watched his head bend slowly towards her.

“Joe”–this time it was the voice of his mother speaking–“Where did you meet Virginia?”

His head went up and his arm dropped at his side. Virginia released his arms which she had clutched and, with reddened, telltale faces, they turned to Mrs. Curtis.

“We met in South Ridgefield, mother,” he told her, and the girl gave an embarrassed nod of agreement.

“Hum,” said Mrs. Curtis. The utterance meant little but her manner much. She disappeared only to return in a moment with a plate of doughnuts and a pitcher of milk. “Who is hungry?” she asked.

Among the young people, famine stalked abroad. In its relief, flushed faces regained their normal color and Helen’s mischievous giggles were quieted sufficiently for her to meet Joe with becoming gravity before giving her attention to her own sweetheart.

But alas, the course of true love is never smooth. Charles Augustus made energetic protest when he became aware that Helen proposed to offer him nourishment by hand after the manner in which infants but recently weaned are treated. “Lemme be! My hands aren’t lame,” he objected. 341
An unhappy look spread over his face. “I get so tired sitting in this old chair. Every little while, too, mother rubs my leg and works it up and down. Ding bust it, that hurts.”

Helen, giving up her attempt to feed the boy, endeavored to sooth and comfort him. “In a week or so you will be running about without a sign of a crutch. Think of that. Won’t that be fine?”

“I should be out now,” he grumbled. “Something might happen to my hornet’s nest.”

“Don’t you worry,” Helen laughed. “Neither man nor beast will interfere with that.”

“How is Miss Knight?” Virginia asked Joe.

“Bossy as ever,” he answered.

“She was a good nurse and she was nice to you, Joe.”

“Yes,” he admitted with a chuckle; “but she is a whole lot nicer to Mike Kelly these days.”

Virginia was all interest.

“He’s as pleased with her as a snow bird at a blizzard. Every time it was Miss Knight’s evening off, he would make an early call upon me dressed in his best clothes.”

There came a knock at the front door.

Hastening to it at a nod from Mrs. Curtis, Helen threw it wide open. Aunt Kate and Obadiah waited without.

“Daddy,” cried Virginia, for the moment blissfully forgetful as she tried to get around Joe without hurting his outstretched leg.

“Obadiah Dale!” It was Mrs. Curtis who spoke from the doorway into the dining room and there was something in her voice which held them all. The happiness had gone from her face, leaving it 342
cold and distorted with passion as Virginia had seen it.

“Obadiah Dale!”–she fairly hissed the words–“What do you want in my house? Would you like to do me greater harm–you robber?” She gave a shrill mirthless laugh and flung her hands towards the sides of the poorly furnished room. “Look about you. There isn’t much left since you got in your devil’s work.”

Mrs. Curtis’s eyes shifted to Virginia as, startled by this strange attack upon her father, she waited at Joe’s side. It was as if the woman struggled between aversion and regard. “I never thought you were his daughter,” she snarled.

White, tense and sickened to the depths of her being by the fear of shameful disclosures, the girl could make no reply.

Joe Curtis was watching his mother with worried eyes. The frightened faces of Helen and Charles Augustus peeped from behind Aunt Kate who, from the subdued exclamations and the indignant glances she gave her brother, was expecting to hear the worst of him.

Clearly, Obadiah was amazed at the woman’s words. He stood irresolute, his throat working as if he were trying to swallow something. At last he regained the power of speech. “Madam,” he began.

“Madam,” sneered the woman, “Octavia Curtis, the widow of Augustus Curtis, the man whose business you ruined by your infernal scheming, whose wife and two children were dragged by your greed and selfishness from a life of comfort–to this. What business have you in my house, 343
you thief?”

Obadiah flushed and quailed under her words. Bewildered and puzzled, a guilty conscience in business catastrophes made him feel it advisable to allow his opponent to develop her case.

Mrs. Curtis's words affected Virginia differently. Her face flushed and her fears passed. "Stop," she interrupted, her eyes flashing angrily. "What right have you to speak so to my father?"

"Right?" Again that ugly laugh came from Mrs. Curtis as she urged, "Ask him how he ruined the Curtis mill at Brenton."

Obadiah gave a start.

Aunt Kate, observing her brother through suspicious eyes, noted this. "As ye sow, so shall ye reap," she quoted, for his greater comfort.

The mill owner glanced hastily towards the door as if seeking a line of retreat from this assemblage of women and lame men. But Aunt Kate, the inner keeper of the outer gate, barred his way.

Pale of face but with a determined set to her mouth, Virginia said softly, "Daddy, explain please. You must Daddy."

"It was a perfectly legitimate business deal. The Curtis mill had notes upon the market, protected by a mortgage on the plant. I purchased them. When they became due and were not paid, to protect myself–and you–I foreclosed and took the mill. I suppose this woman was caught in the deal," Obadiah answered and moved as if to leave the room.

"Stop, Daddy," the girl commanded. "We must settle this matter now. Either too much or too little has been said." 344

"Settle?" Once more that acrimonious laugh came from Mrs. Curtis's lips. "How are you going to settle for sleepless nights, for worry and for tears? What can pay for those dreary days which grew into weeks and months since hope for my children was torn from my life?" She flung her arms wide in the anguish which tortured her. "How are you going to wipe out the fact that my poor lame baby"–she pointed at Charles Augustus–"had to depend upon charity to be able to play as other boys–plain charity," she almost screamed. "Or that he"–she indicated Joe–"has been forced into the world to struggle for an education he might have had in comfort."

"Oh," moaned Virginia. The misery of the story clouded her eyes as they turned from the passion-torn woman to her father.

The flood of the emotion-driven woman's words seemed to have made Obadiah helpless. He stood as if awaiting sentence for his evil doing, an old man abject and forlorn.

As she looked at him, a wave of pity swept over Virginia and her love for him struggled in her heart, regardless of all that had been said against him. "My father can't be to blame for all of this. I couldn't believe it of him," she cried.

It was as if the note of grief and entreaty in the girl's voice tempered the anger of Mrs. Curtis. She dropped into a chair and began to sob. Joe Curtis arose hastily, limped over to her side, and tried to sooth her. At the sound of his mother's grief, Charles Augustus put his head upon Helen's shoulder and wept also. 345

Virginia moved over and gently touched the shoulder of the sobbing woman, who, flinching from contact with the girl's hand, drew herself sharply away.

"Don't, mother," pleaded Joe.

Virginia withdrew her hand, yet she remained by Mrs. Curtis's chair. "Tell me the whole story," she begged. "I must know. I have the right to know."

Even through her own grief, the anxiety and unhappiness of the girl touched the older woman. She raised her brimming eyes. Her temper had died away and she spoke rapidly, almost in a monotone, broken by sob hiccoughs. "At my husband's death every thing that he left me was invested in our mill. It was a good business and should have given me and my boys the comforts and even the luxuries of life. Before his death, he had borrowed money to make improvements, giving notes secured by a mortgage upon the plant.

"After he had gone, I took charge of the mill and tried to run it myself. I was not a very good business woman. I had a hard time to pay the interest on our indebtedness. When the notes came due, I asked for a renewal but my request was refused. I was thunderstruck. I learned that your father had bought the notes, and wherever I tried to raise money I was refused because of his influence as a rival manufacturer. So I lost my mill and had to meet life, a widow with a baby and a young boy, a little money, and this old farm."

A flash of her anger returned and she pointed at Obadiah. "My boys are raised in poverty while *he* stands there in the pride of his wealth. When he got the mill he never used it. He closed it, throwing good people who had worked for us for years out of employment. They had to move away and sacrifice their little homes. It brought sorrow to them as well as to me. He, Obadiah Dale, is to blame for all of this." 346

Aunt Kate wiped a tear from her eye.

"Daddy," Virginia said softly, "did you know the harm that you were doing to all of these people?" Her eyes searched his, as if to discover his answer before he could utter it, and her tones beseeched him to justify her love at the altar of her heart.

Obadiah stiffened. He held up his head and returned the look of his daughter squarely. He knew that he was giving battle for her love, aye, even for her respect. The old man was a fighter. "No!" he cried. "It is unjust to charge me with all of the sorrows and tribulations of this family. I built

the first mill in this country–took the chances of opening the industry. The Brenton mill was established to compete with me. There was room for one big plant here and only one. Augustus Curtis knew it and expected to put me out of business. Mrs. Curtis"–Obadiah's voice was firm now–"you have said some hard things about me today in the presence of my daughter and sister. I am entitled in common justice to my defence. I started in business without a dollar. Much worse off, I think, than your husband. Business has been a battle of supremacy with me. I have taken hard licks and I have given them. I have fought my way. Remember, I had to. A man must win or lose in business and many are the weapons used. I struck with the first one at hand and hit the man in front of me. Do you blame a soldier for the suffering of the dependents of those he kills in battle? I think not. Mrs. Curtis," he continued, "you never met me before." 347

"No," she admitted.

"How did you recognize me?"

"My husband pointed you out to me in South Ridgefield," she sobbed.

"Did you ever advertise the fact that you were running that mill?"

"I was afraid to," she moaned. "I used my husband's name."

"You see," said Obadiah to Virginia. "I had no way of knowing that a woman was running the Brenton mill. I plead guilty to fighting *men*. When I get whipped I smile. When I put a man out of business he starts another. He doesn't sit down and cry and blame me for what happens to his family ever afterwards. I never fought a woman in all of my life."

"It's true, Obadiah. You used to talk back but you never fought with me. I am afraid that you are going to have to get a camel through a needle's eye; but you wouldn't fight a woman," interjected Aunt Kate.

Obadiah disregarded his sister's fears and went on, "Did you ever hear of Dalton, the New York manufacturer?"

Mrs. Curtis nodded.

"Five years ago, he started to put me out of business by buying up the small mills and pooling them against me. To protect myself, I bought negotiable paper, covering mills in this locality wherever I could get it. Where I could get control of the mills, I did it. They were my competitors and would have taken my business or combined against me gladly," Obadiah's eyes rested anxiously upon the face of his daughter as he concluded, "I was fighting Dalton, a more powerful man than myself, not widows and orphans." 348

Virginia's face had softened but there was yet a question in her manner.

"I am an old man," Obadiah continued. "I find that my ideas are changing and my view of life shifting. I have believed that the accumulation of wealth was everything. I know now that the happy man must accumulate other things or he will find himself deserted and miserable with his gold. In my life I have been guilty of many wrongs. I would right those wrongs if I could. Will you forgive me, Mrs. Curtis, for unknowingly harming you and yours?"

"No," she cried. "You explain your reasons for loosening the forces which injured me; but there is no regret in your heart. You'd do the same thing tomorrow."

He turned to his daughter. "At least, you understand me, Virginia?"

"I know what you have done, Daddy; but Mrs. Curtis has suffered, and she alone can wipe the slate clean." The girl's face had saddened again, and as she spoke it was as if she had forgotten that there were others in the room. "Mother wouldn't have wanted you to make all of this unhappiness. You brought sorrow and tears where she would have wanted you to carry laughter and joy. I can't judge you fairly. How I have longed for you during the past weeks and how I have wanted to go home. Unless Mrs. Curtis can forgive you, Daddy, you haven't found mother's way to settle this matter." She gave a queer strained little cry. "I can never go home with you, Daddy, until you learn to follow her way," she sobbed, and dropped into a chair. 349

At the girl's words, Mrs. Curtis had raised her eyes, and as she listened her face softened. As Virginia sank into the chair, the woman was beside her, petting and soothing her.

It seemed as if his daughter's words had taken the very heart out of Obadiah. It was a haggard old man bowed low with trouble who watched her, the greatness of his longing written plain upon his lined countenance.

Suddenly Mrs. Curtis moved towards him. "Obadiah Dale"–she spoke so gently that it was hard to recognize her as the one who had so recently flung the accusations at him–"a moment ago I told you that I could not forgive you. I was wrong. Your daughter told you that it would have been her mother's way to have brought laughter and joy to me instead of sorrow and tears. That which your daughter has done for my son, Charles Augustus, fills my heart with joy and brings laughter to my lips. She has followed her mother's way. I can't believe that any man altogether bad could be the father of such a daughter." She held out her hand to him. "I forgive you." 350

"When I was at the office of the Board of Health, yesterday, Virginia," Joe announced, as one discussing a topic of great personal interest, "I was told that your father had agreed to keep the mill waste out of the river."

There was a scream of delight, and a teary Virginia launched herself into her father's arms, giving happy cries of endearment. In a moment she faced Mrs. Curtis, and cried, "He's perfectly

grand. He'll do anything to right your wrongs."

Mrs. Curtis smiled. "I think that we had better let your father forget my troubles for a moment," she urged.

"Land sakes," ejaculated Aunt Kate in a loud whisper, "I'm glad to see that woman laugh. I was afraid that she loved her troubles so much she wouldn't give them up."

"Hush, mother, she'll hear you," expostulated Helen.

Thus repressed, Aunt Kate delivered a moral lesson to Charles Augustus in a voice heard all over the room. "It is easier to receive thanks for doing nice things, Charles, than to have to beg forgiveness for doing mean ones."

Fortunately Obadiah, diligently engaged at that moment in erasing the past, was deaf to his sister's remarks. He told Mrs. Curtis, "I'll re-open the Brenton mill as soon as I can have it overhauled. I can use it on some contracts I have. The profits shall be yours. When you can repay the amount of the notes from them, I'll transfer the mill back to you. If you wish, I'll buy it from you or rent it until your son is capable of assuming charge of it."

He faced Joe and said, "I understand that you'll graduate from college this June. There'll be a position waiting for you in my mill."

"In South Ridgefield?" Virginia inquired anxiously.

Obadiah gave his daughter a keen glance and then stared at Joe appraisingly before he answered. "Yes, in South Ridgefield, until his mother wants him to take charge of her own business. By that time, if he has brains and follows my plans for him, he should be the finest young mill executive in this part of the country."

The youthful Charles Augustus came under the mill owner's eye. "I'll see that every expense connected with the operation upon this young man is paid. We don't want outsiders in on that."

He perceived Helen. "Well, well, how you have grown," he declared in surprise. "You want to be a teacher. I'll send you to college."

"Goodness knows, Obadiah," protested Aunt Kate, "a body would think it was Christmas." She viewed him doubtfully. "I am afraid that you were always inclined to be a little extravagant."

From the moment that his daughter embraced him, happiness had filled the soul of the mill owner. The difficulties of the past few days were forgotten. He beamed at his sister, generosity oozing from every pore. "Your house needs painting, Kate. I'll have it done. I'll sell that plug of a horse you have and buy you one that is broken or get you an automobile."

"Stop right there, Obadiah," she commanded. "I have managed my affairs for years without your help. When you talk about selling a horse like Archimedes, I doubt your judgment. Look there!" She pointed proudly through the window. "Who'd care to own a finer horse than that?"

Even as the assembled ones followed Aunt Kate's finger, Archimedes, wearied by the prolonged call, gathered his feet beneath him and with a care for the shafts evidencing practice, sank to the ground. From this position of comfort, usually reserved by most well bred horses for the privacy of the box stall, Archimedes viewed his surroundings apparently with great complacency.

CHAPTER XXII

NOBODY HOME, MR. DEVIL

The October night was clear, with a bite in the air which foretold sharp frosts and winter's snows. There was no wind, only a great silence, as if all nature had tucked itself away for a long night's rest.

On the eastern horizon, there was a dull glow as if it were the reflections of a great conflagration. The light of it brightened, and slowly over the edge of things arose a golden streak, the curved top of the moon. In stately dignity, it ascended towards the zenith, its gold changing to silver and its beams bathing the world in a flood of gentle light. Over field and forest and plain the soft veil advanced, spreading its magic silvery sheen until all it touched became a mysterious fairyland.

In this delicate mantle were enfolded the huts of the poor and the palaces of the rich, the lonely dwelling and the massed houses of great cities. The thriving municipality of South Ridgefield was lighted by this mild illumination which painted with a gleaming brush the residence of Mrs. Henderson, and even tinged the bald head of that learned lawyer, Hezekiah Wilkins, who, seated upon the porch railing, gazed heavenward and told the widow, "It's a beautiful moon, Mary. I have always admired the moon. It's the friend of youth. Since the beginning of time it has been the one welcome third party at sentimental trysts. If the moon were a gossip what stories it could tell. What vows have been uttered in its presence and signed and sealed–"

"And broken, Hezekiah?" suggested Hennie.

"What if the moon should turn tattletale, Mary?"

"Don't worry. It's blind or it would blush red with shame for the fickleness of men," Mrs.

Henderson told him and then went on, “Forget the moon and tell me what you did for Virginia that worked this miracle?”

He chuckled. “It was so easy. I told Obadiah that he made me think of a fat hog. As usual he displayed–ahem–confidence in my judgment.”

She leaned towards him, her face filled with delight. “Hezekiah Wilkins,” she whispered excitedly, “I could hug you for those words.”

“I’ve been waiting a good many years for you to do that, Mary.”

She dropped her head. “It’s the moon, Hezekiah,” she warned him. “I forgot how to embrace any one years ago.”

In the mysterious light, it seemed to him that a smile played about her mouth. His arm slipped about her waist. He tipped her chin gently and looked down into the face which for so long had meant to him the one woman. “Is it true, Mary? You’ll marry me?”

A stray cloud passed in front of the moon, and when it passed, the beams lighted the porch of Aunt Kate’s house at Old Rock.

The door opened and Obadiah came out, while his sister drew a shawl closer to her shoulders and 355
waited in the doorway. “It’s a beautiful night,” she said, “a perfect Fall night.”

“It’s chilly–it’s really cold,” he objected, shrugging his shoulders. He walked to the end of the porch and looked towards the apple tree where the hammock swung in lonesomeness. “Where is Virginia?” he asked.

“She went walking with Joe.”

“She’ll freeze,” he worried.

Humor glinted in Aunt Kate’s eyes. “Girls take moonlight walks on the coldest winter nights and I never heard of one freezing, Obadiah. Your blood is thin. Come in and I’ll build a fire of chips for you.”

“No,” protested Obadiah, “I’ll build one for you.”

The moonbeams bathed the meadow and the pond in their soft light. They silvered the great bowlder left by some glacier upon the edge of this inland water. On a depression in its side sat Joe, and Virginia was at his side. Before them stretched the shadowed mirror of the pond. Opposite loomed the tree clad hill in misty gloom. The moon clothed its summit in a mantle of light, reflected the tree-broken sky line in delicate tracery upon the water below, and pushed a shining pathway to their feet.

The spell of the night held the girl. It seemed wrong to speak aloud. “Listen, Joe,” she whispered, “the world is asleep.” From the hill came the sound of a cow bell sweetened by distance. Except for this and the crickets all was still. “It’s not a bit lonely,” she sighed.

“No, not nearly as lonely as South Ridgefield after you left,” he agreed. 356

“Did you miss me?” She was watching the pond.

He stole a glance at the curves of her face and the flash of her eyes. It seemed to him that never since the beginning of time could there have been such another. He had lured a spirit of the night to a seat beside him. “I nearly died of loneliness,” he answered.

“You poor boy.” Her voice was rich in tenderness. “Loneliness is dreadful, Joe. I don’t want you to feel that way.” Surely this was a nymph who had stolen forth to give him sympathy.

“I was miserable every moment after you left,” he told her pathetically.

She turned her face to him, wonderful in its mysterious moonlight beauty. “Joe,” she pleaded, “you must not be sad. Knowing me must not bring unhappiness to you.”

“You must never leave me again, Virginia. When I am away from you I can’t be happy.” Now the blue eyes were drawing a marvelous power of enchantment from the moonbeams, and the black eyes were reflecting the wonder of it. Under the charm of it, he dropped his cane.

With a little cry of tenderness she tried to catch it. Losing her balance she fell towards him. He caught her in his arms, and the only other cloud in all the heavens that night drifted before the moon and the world darkened. Yet, on this old rock, lips touched and love blazed and hearts whispered words of gladness.

The cloud passed on and the beams fell upon Serena, who had come forth upon the stoop of the 357
Dale kitchen for a breath of fresh air. She raised her eyes to the great orb hanging high above her. Its light displayed a look of great happiness and contentment upon her black face as she whispered into the night, “Praise be! Ma honey chil’ is er comin’ home. De ole man done conquah de evil spi’it which to’ment ’im. Dat fool Ike done heard de warnin’ dat come lak er cry in de night, an’ join de chu’ch. *Nobody home, Mr. Devil.*”

THE END

THE TRIUMPH OF VIRGINIA DALE

Another GLAD Book (Trade Mark)

By John Francis, Jr.

Cloth decorative, 12mo, illustrated, $1.90

This new novel, marking the advent of a hitherto unknown writer of fiction, offers, along with a delightful romance of youth, a tinge of scintillating humor that stamps itself indelibly on the mind of the reader, and evokes many a sympathetic chuckle. It fairly bubbles over with exuberant cheerfulness, and is sure to inject a good share of its unlimited store of "What's good for the world" into every one who is lucky enough to read it.

Furthermore, the peculiar magnetism of the characters is such that the reader cannot believe they are merely book creatures, *and*, we wager they are not. Virginia Dale, the heroine, is a Good Samaritan, Miss Sunshine, and Glad Heart–all of these–and yet the most natural young person imaginable, and as she progresses in her mission of "brightening up the corner" she builds for her own future one of the most beautiful characters fiction has ever claimed.

The story is essentially a "character" story, but this does not detract from the plot what it just seems to get in the natural course of things, for, as a venerable reader once aptly remarked: "When story folk act natural, we ain't goin' to forgit 'em."

THE PRINCESS NAIDA

By Brewer Corcoran

Author of "The Road to Le Rêve" etc.

Cloth decorative, 12mo, illustrated by H. Weston Taylor, $1.90

Adventure and romance are the keynotes of this new novel by Brewer Corcoran–adventure which will stir the blood of every lover of fast-moving action and culminative plot, and romance which will charm all who have a tender spot for a lovably beautiful girl and a regular "he" man. It is a tale of today, set amid the mountains of Switzerland and the ugly rocks of Bolshevism on which is wrecked the mythical principality of Nirgendsberg–a story of a brave little princess who puts unfaltering faith in American manhood and resourcefulness and finds a newer and a better throne. Bill Hale is the sort of hero who would win any girl's love–a clever, capable chap with two fists and a keen sense of humor. Whether he is matching wits with suave Count Otto, romping with tiny Janos, fighting for his life in the hunting lodge at Wolkensberg or pleading for the love of his "princess who is all girl," he is a man. The story of his fight for all that counts in life is told with a rush and sweep of action which will hold the reader breathless. The dialogue, like that in Mr. Corcoran's other books, sparkles with humor, but there is a certain pleasurable grimness in his method of handling the Bolshevik which will strike an answering note in every true American heart today.

"A romance of vivid interest, a love story full of youth and adventures that thrill. The dialogue is unusually clever, the characters delightfully real, the plot one that holds the reader's interest to the end." *New York Sun.*

A FLOWER OF MONTEREY

A Romance of the Californias

By Katherine B. Hamill

Cloth decorative, 12mo, illustrated, $1.90

The wealth, beauty and sunshine of the Californias in the days when Spain controlled our western coast and England looked with covetous eyes, form the setting for this beautiful and artistic romance by a new author. Mrs. Hamill has recreated vividly the little Spanish town where the mission bells rang silvery at dawn, where scarlet uniforms flashed in the stately drill of an afternoon dress parade and beautiful women wore lace mantillas. Pajarita, the "Flower of Monterey," is an American waif, cast up by the sea, who grows up among the senors and senoritas, happy as the sunshine, but with a healthy American disrespect for the Spanish modes of life. Two men love her–Don Jose, the *gobernador proprietaro* of all the Californias, and a young American sailor-adventurer, John Asterly.

John Asterly, the hero of A FLOWER OF MONTEREY, came to the Californias from Boston. He is perhaps thirty years old, adventurous and impetuous. At a dance on the beach at Monterey, shortly after his arrival in the Californias, he meets Pajarita, "the Flower of Monterey," and falls in love with the girl, although she is promised to her benefactor, the Spanish Governor. On the very night before her wedding, Asterly tries to dissuade Pajarita from her marriage with some one other than an American, and then the romance, rivalry and adventure begin. The historical setting of the story is correct and the romance unfolds with dash and symmetry.

WILD WINGS

Margaret R. Piper

Author of "Sylvia's Experiment," "The House on the Hill," "Sylvia Arden Decides," etc.

Cloth decorative, 12mo, illustrated, $1.90

In this "story of youth for grown-ups," the vigorous, happy Holiday youngsters who lived in the "House on the Hill" develop into keen, lovable young people, thoroughly worth knowing. To Tony, as brilliant and beautiful as a girl can well be and still be human, comes a successful theatrical career on Broadway, and a great love, and Larry grows into the industrious, reliant young doctor that one would expect him to be.

Few writers today display the ability which Miss Piper does to "grow up" a large family of boys and girls, each with an individuality well developed and attractive, and her Holiday family holds a distinctive place in American fiction for young people today.

As the charming characters work their way out of problems which face all young people of buoyant spirits and ambitions, WILD WINGS gives a definite message as to the happiest relationship between old and young.

"There is a world of human nature and neighborhood contentment in Margaret R. Piper's books of good cheer. Her tales are well proportioned and subtly strong in their literary aspects and quality." *North American, Philadelphia.*

Selections from The Page Company's List of Fiction

WORKS OF ELEANOR H. PORTER

POLLYANNA: The GLAD Book (500,000) (Trade Mark)

Cloth decorative, 12mo, illustrated, $1.90

Mr. Leigh Mitchell Hodges, The Optimist, in an editorial for the *Philadelphia North American*, says: "And when, after Pollyanna has gone away, you get her letter saying she is going to take 'eight steps' tomorrow–well, I don't know just what you may do, but I know of one person who buried his face in his hands and shook with the gladdest sort of sadness and got down on his knees and thanked the Giver of all gladness for Pollyanna."

POLLYANNA: The GLAD Book. Mary Pickford Edition (Trade Mark)

Illustrated with thirty-two half-tone reproductions of scenes from the motion picture production, and a jacket with a portrait of Mary Pickford in color.

Cloth decorative, 12mo, $2.25

While preparing "Pollyanna" for the screen, Miss Pickford said enthusiastically that it was the best picture she had ever made in her life, and the success of the picture on the screen has amply justified her statement. Mary Pickford's interpretation of the beloved little heroine as shown in the illustrations, adds immeasurably to the intrinsic charm of this popular story.

POLLYANNA GROWS UP: The Second GLAD Book, Trade Mark (250,000)

Cloth decorative, 12mo, illustrated, $1.90

When the story of Pollyanna told in The *Glad* Book was ended, a great cry of regret for the vanishing "Glad Girl" went up all over the country–and other countries, too. Now Pollyanna appears again, just as sweet and joyous-hearted, more grown up and more lovable.

"Take away frowns! Put down the worries! Stop fidgeting and disagreeing and grumbling! Cheer up, everybody! Pollyanna has come back!"–*Christian Herald.*

MISS BILLY (93rd thousand)

Cloth decorative, with a frontispiece in full color from a painting by G. Tyng, $1.90

"There is something altogether fascinating about 'Miss Billy,' some inexplicable feminine characteristic that seems to demand the individual attention of the reader from the moment we open the book until we reluctantly turn the last page."–*Boston Transcript.*

MISS BILLY'S DECISION (78th thousand)

Cloth decorative, with a frontispiece in full color from a painting by Henry W. Moore, $1.90

"The story is written in bright, clever style and has plenty of action and humor. Miss Billy is nice to know and so are her friends."–*New Haven Leader.*

MISS BILLY–MARRIED (86th thousand)

Cloth decorative, with a frontispiece in full color from a painting by W. Haskell Coffin, $1.90

“Although Pollyanna is the only copyrighted glad girl, Miss Billy is just as glad as the younger figure and radiates just as much gladness. She disseminates joy so naturally that we wonder why all girls are not like her.”–*Boston Transcript.*

SIX STAR RANCH (45th thousand)

Cloth decorative, 12mo, illustrated by R. Farrington Elwell, $1.90

“‘Six Star Ranch’ bears all the charm of the author’s genius and is about a little girl down in Texas who practices the ‘Pollyanna Philosophy’ with irresistible success. The book is one of the kindliest things, if not the best, that the author of the Pollyanna books has done. It is a welcome addition to the fast-growing family of *Glad* Books.”–*Howard Russell Bangs in the Boston Post.*

CROSS CURRENTS

Cloth decorative, illustrated, $1.50

“To one who enjoys a story of life as it is to-day, with its sorrows as well as its triumphs, this volume is sure to appeal.”–*Book News Monthly.*

THE TURN OF THE TIDE

Cloth decorative, illustrated, $1.50

“A very beautiful book showing the influence that went to the development of the life of a dear little girl into a true and good woman.”–*Herald and Presbyter, Cincinnati, Ohio.*

NOVELS BY

ELIOT HARLOW ROBINSON

A book which has established its author in the front rank of American novelists.

SMILES, A ROSE OF THE CUMBERLANDS (26th thousand)

Cloth decorative, 12mo, illustrated, $1.90

Smiles is a girl who has already made many friends and is destined to make many more. Her real name is Rose, but the rough folk of the Cumberlands preferred their own way of addressing her, for her smile was so bright and winning that no other name suited her so well.

“This is the best book I have ever illustrated for any publisher. I have tried to make the pictures all that you hoped for them.”–*H. Weston Taylor.*

E. J. Anderson, former managing Editor of the Boston *Advertiser* and *Record*, is enthusiastic over the story and says:

“I have read ‘Smiles’ in one reading. After starting it I could not put it down. Never in my life have I read a book like this that thrilled me half as much, and never have I seen a more masterful piece of writing.”

THE MAID OF MIRABELLE: A Romance of Lorraine

Illustrated with reproductions of sketches made by the author, and with a portrait of “The Maid of Mirabelle,” from a painting by Neale Ordayne, on the cover.

Cloth decorative, 12mo, $1.90

A story of human and heart interest. The “Maid,” Joan, is a personality just as real and lovable as was Smiles.

“The spirit of all the book is the bubbling, the irrepressibly indomitable, cheerful faith of the people, at their very best, against the grave Quakerism from the United States standing out grimly but faithfully. The tale is simply, but strongly told.”–*Montreal Family Herald and Weekly Star.*

MAN PROPOSES; Or, The Romance of John Alden Shaw

Cloth decorative, 12mo, illustrated, $1.90

“This is first of all a charming romance, distinguished by a fine sentiment of loyalty to an ideal, by physical courage, indomitable resolution to carry to success an altruistic undertaking, a splendid woman’s devotion, and by a vein of spontaneous, sparkling humor that offsets its more serious phases.”–*Springfield Republican.*

THE ROMANCES OF

L. M. MONTGOMERY

Each one volume, cloth decorative, 12mo, $1.90

ANNE OF GREEN GABLES (355th thousand)

Illustrated by M. A. and W. A. J. Claus.

“In ‘Anne of Green Gables’ you will find the dearest and most moving and delightful child since

the immortal Alice."–*Mark Twain in a letter to Francis Wilson.*

"I take it as a great test of the worth of the book that while the young people are rummaging all over the house looking for Anne, the head of the family has carried her off to read on his way to town."–*Bliss Carman.*

ANNE OF AVONLEA (255th thousand)

Illustrated by George Gibbs.

"Here we have a book as human as 'David Harum,' a heroine who outcharms a dozen princesses of fiction, and reminds you of some sweet girl you know, or knew back in the days when the world was young."–*San Francisco Bulletin.*

CHRONICLES OF AVONLEA (43d thousand)

Illustrated by George Gibbs.

"The author shows a wonderful knowledge of humanity, great insight and warmheartedness in the manner in which some of the scenes are treated, and the sympathetic way the gentle peculiarities of the characters are brought out."–*Baltimore Sun.*

ANNE OF THE ISLAND (65th thousand)

Illustrated by H. Weston Taylor.

"It has been well worth while to watch the growing up of Anne, and the privilege of being on intimate terms with her throughout the process has been properly valued. The once little girl of Green Gables should have a permanent fictional place of high yet tender esteem."–*New York Herald.*

FURTHER CHRONICLES OF AVONLEA (20th thousand).

Illustrated by John Goss.

Nathan Haskell Dole compares Avonlea to Longfellow's Grand Pre–and says, "There is something in these continued chronicles of Avonlea like the delicate art which has made Cranford a classic."

"The reader has dipped into but one or two stories when he realizes that the author is the most natural story teller of the day."–*Salt Lake City Citizen.*

WORKS OF L. M. MONTGOMERY (Continued)

ANNE OF GREEN GABLES: The Mary Miles Minter Edition

Illustrated with twenty-four half-tone reproductions of scenes from the motion picture production, and a jacket in colors with Miss Minter's portrait.

Cloth decorative, 12mo, $2.25

"You pass from tears to laughter as the story unfolds, and there is never a moment's hesitation in admitting that Anne has completely won your heart."–*Joe Mitchell Chapple, Editor, The National Magazine.*

"Mary Miles Minter's 'Anne' on the screen is worthy of Mark Twain's definition of her as the 'dearest and most moving and delightful child since the immortal "Alice."'"–*Cambridge Tribune.*

KILMENY OF THE ORCHARD (52d thousand)

Illustrated by George Gibbs. Cloth decorative, 12mo, $1.90

"A purely idyllic love story full of tender sentiment, redolent with the perfume of rose leaves and breathing of apple blossoms and the sweet clover of twilight meadow-lands."–*San Francisco Bulletin.*

"A story born in the heart of Arcadia and brimful of the sweet and simple life of the primitive environment."–*Boston Herald.*

THE STORY GIRL (46th thousand)

Illustrated by George Gibbs. Cloth decorative, 12mo, $1.90

"It will be read and, we venture to predict, reread many times, for there is a freshness and sweetness about it which will help to lift the load of care, to cheer the weary and to make brighter still the life of the carefree and the happy."–*Toronto, Can., Globe.*

"'The Story Girl' is of decidedly unusual conception and interest, and will rival the author's earlier books in popularity."–*Chicago Western Trade Journal.*

THE GOLDEN ROAD (28th thousand)

Illustrated by George Gibbs. Cloth decorative, 12mo, $1.90

In which it is proven that "Life was a rose-lipped comrade with purple flowers dripping from her fingers."

"It is a simple, tender tale, touched to higher notes, now and then, by delicate hints of romance, tragedy and pathos. Any true-hearted human being might read this book with enjoyment, no matter what his or her age, social status, or economic place."–*Chicago Record-Herald.*

NOVELS BY

ISLA MAY MULLINS

Each, one volume, cloth decorative, 12mo, illustrated, $1.75

THE BLOSSOM SHOP: A Story of the South

“Frankly and wholly romance is this book, and lovable–as is a fairy tale properly told.”–*Chicago Inter-Ocean.*

ANNE OF THE BLOSSOM SHOP: Or, the Growing Up of Anne Carter

“A charming portrayal of the attractive life of the South, refreshing as a breeze that blows through a pine forest.”–*Albany Times-Union.*

ANNE’S WEDDING

“Presents a picture of home life that is most appealing in love and affection.”–*Every Evening, Wilmington, Del.*

THE MT. BLOSSOM GIRLS

“In the writing of the book the author is at her best as a story teller. It is a fitting climax to the series.”–*Reader.*

TWEEDIE: The Story of a True Heart

“The story itself is full of charm and one enters right into the very life of Tweedie and feels as if he had indeed been lifted into an atmosphere of unselfishness, enthusiasm and buoyant optimism.”–*Boston Ideas.*

NOVELS BY

DAISY RHODES CAMPBELL

THE FIDDLING GIRL

Cloth decorative, illustrated $1.65

“A thoroughly enjoyable tale, written in a delightful vein of sympathetic comprehension.”–*Boston Herald.*

THE PROVING OF VIRGINIA

Cloth decorative, illustrated $1.65

“A book which contributes so much of freshness, enthusiasm, and healthy life to offset the usual offerings of modern fiction, deserves all the praise which can be showered upon it.”–*Kindergarten Review.*

THE VIOLIN LADY

Cloth decorative, illustrated $1.65

“The author’s style remains simple and direct, as in her preceding books.”–*Boston Transcript.*

DETECTIVE STORIES BY

GEORGE BARTON

Each one volume, cloth decorative, 12mo, illustrated, $1.75

THE PEMBROKE MASON AFFAIR

“Not until the end will the reader ever surmise how Mason was murdered. An absorbing and thrilling story.”–*Cleveland Topics.*

THE MYSTERY OF THE RED FLAME

“An admirable story–an engaging story of love, mystery and adventure.”–*The Philadelphia Inquirer.*

THE STRANGE ADVENTURES OF BROMLEY BARNES

“It would be difficult to find a collection of more interesting tales of mystery so well told. The author is crisp, incisive and inspiring. The book is the best of its kind in recent years and adds to the author’s already high reputation.”–*New York Tribune.*

THE AMBASSADOR’S TRUNK

“Mr. Barton is in the front rank of the writers of mystery stories, and this is one of his best.”–*Pittsburgh Chronicle.*

“The book is of the good red-blood type, with few dull lines and stirring action and episodes in almost every page.”–*Montreal Herald.*

BUSINESS NOVELS BY

HAROLD WHITEHEAD

Professor of Sales Relations, The College of Business Administration, Boston University

Each one volume, cloth, 12mo, illustrated, $1.75

DAWSON BLACK, RETAIL MERCHANT

“Contains much that it would profit a young merchant to know and its fictional interest makes a strong appeal.”–*New York Tribune.*

THE BUSINESS CAREER OF PETER FLINT

“Peter Flint is certainly a marvel.... His career reveals a most remarkable metamorphosis from incapacity, stubbornness, and what seemed a chronic inclination to fall down on every job which he undertook, to an amazing exposition of business capacity and skill.”–*Boston Transcript.*

NOVELS BY

MARGARET R. PIPER

SYLVIA’S EXPERIMENT: The Cheerful Book (Trade Mark)

Cloth decorative, with a frontispiece in full color $1.75

“An atmosphere of good spirits pervades the book; the humor that now and then flashes across the page is entirely natural.”–*Boston Post.*

SYLVIA OF THE HILL TOP: The Second Cheerful Book (Trade Mark)

Cloth decorative, with a frontispiece in full color $1.75

“There is a world of human nature and neighborhood contentment and quaint quiet humor in Margaret R. Piper’s second book of good cheer.”–*Philadelphia North American.*

“Sylvia proves practically that she is a messenger of joy to humanity.”–*The Post Express, Rochester, N. Y.*

SYLVIA ARDEN DECIDES: The Third Cheerful Book (Trade Mark)

Cloth decorative, with a frontispiece in full color $1.75

“Its ease of style, its rapidity, its interest from page to page, are admirable; and it shows that inimitable power–the storyteller’s gift of verisimilitude. Its sureness and clearness are excellent, and its portraiture clear and pleasing.”–*The Reader.*

FICTION FOR YOUNGER READERS BY

MARGARET R. PIPER

THE HOUSE ON THE HILL

By Margaret R. Piper.

Cloth decorative, illustrated $1.75

“‘The House on the Hill’ presents higher ideals of service and life for boys and girls, and the charming characters worked their way out of problems which face all young people of buoyant spirits and ambition.”–*Buffalo News.*

“The story is a delightful one, with all kinds of interesting adventures and characters.”–*Sunday Leader.*

THE PRINCESS AND THE CLAN

By Margaret R. Piper.

Cloth decorative, illustrated by John Goss $1.75

“This is a delightful story for young and old, wholesome and uplifting. The chief charm of the story lies in its simplicity,”–*Philadelphia North American.*

NOVELS BY

MARY ELLEN CHASE

THE GIRL FROM THE BIG HORN COUNTRY

Cloth, 12mo, illustrated by E. Farrington Elwell, $1.75

“‘The Girl from the Big Horn Country’ tells how Virginia Hunter, a bright, breezy, frank-hearted ‘girl of the Golden West’ comes out of the Big Horn country of Wyoming to the old Bay State. Then things begin, when Virginia–who feels the joyous, exhilarating call of the Big Horn wilderness and the outdoor life–attempts to become acclimated and adopt good old New England ‘ways.’”–*Critic.*

VIRGINIA, OF ELK CREEK VALLEY

Cloth, 12mo, illustrated by E. Farrington Elwell, $1.75

“This story is fascinating, alive with constantly new and fresh interests and every reader will enjoy the novel for its freshness, its novelty and its inspiring glimpses of life with nature.”–*The Editor.*

NOVELS BY OTHER AUTHORS

THE GOLDEN DOG. A Romance of Quebec

By William Kirby. (45th thousand.)

Cloth decorative, 12mo, illustrated by J. W. Kennedy, $1.90

“A powerful romance of love, intrigue and adventure in the times of Louis XV and Madame de Pompadour.”–*Boston Herald.*

SHE STANDS ALONE

Being the story of Pilate’s wife.

By Mark Ashton.

Cloth decorative, 12mo, illustrated, $1.75

Few novels of the present day can stand comparison with this remarkable book, which must be ranked in modern literature dealing with the early Christian era as only second to “Ben Hur.”

THE ROAD TO LE RÊVE

By Brewer Corcoran.

Cloth decorative, 12mo, illustrated by H. Weston Taylor, $1.90

“A romance of vivid interest, a love story full of youth, the great outdoors and adventures that thrill. The dialogue is unusually clever, the characters delightfully real, the plot one that holds the reader’s interest to the end.”–*New York Sun.*

THE FAMOUS SEA STORIES OF
HERMAN MELVILLE

MOBY DICK; Or, The White Whale

TYPEE. A Real Romance of the South Sea

OMOO. A Narrative of Adventures in the South Seas; a sequel to TYPEE

WHITE JACKET; Or, The World on a Man-of-War

Each one volume, cloth decorative, 12mo, illustrated $1.90

The recent centenary of Herman Melville created renewed interest in his famous sea stories.

“Melville wove human element and natural setting into recitals which aroused the enthusiasm of critics and sent a thrill of delight through the reading public when first published, and which both for form and matter have ever since held rank as classics in the literature of travel.”–*Boston Herald.*

DETECTIVE STORIES BY
ARTHUR MORRISON

Each one volume, cloth decorative, 12mo, illustrated, $1.75

THE GREEN DIAMOND

“A clever, ingenious story, with just the right combination of detective skill and mystery and with a touch of Oriental mysticism.”–*Kansas City Star.*

THE RED TRIANGLE

“The reader who has a grain of imagination may be defied to lay this book down, once he has begun it, until the last word has been reached.”–*Boston Journal.*

“It is a splendid story of the kind that cannot fail to interest.”–*Detroit Journal.*

THE CHRONICLES OF MARTIN HEWITT

“The story is told in a forceful, straightforward style, which gives it impressive realism.”–*Boston Herald.*

“The story is well-written, unique, quite out of the usual order, and a vein of mystery running through it that is most captivating.”–*Christian Intelligencer.*

HISTORICAL ROMANCES OF
NATHAN GALLIZIER

THE LEOPARD PRINCE

Cloth decorative, large 12mo, illustrated in color, $2.00

“With a vividness that is electrifying and a mastery of emotion that thrills, Mr. Gallizier has written this story of Italy–a romance of Venice in the fourteenth century.”–*The Lookout, Cincinnati, Ohio.*

UNDER THE WITCHES’ MOON

Cloth decorative, large 12mo, illustrated in color, $2.00

“A highly colored romance of mediaeval Italy with a most interesting background.”–*New York World.*

THE CRIMSON GONDOLA

Cloth decorative, large 12mo, illustrated in color, $2.00

“Mr. Gallizier is unusually strong in the use of description, and conveys vividly the gorgeous decadence and luxury of the sybaritic city.”–*Los Angeles Sunday Times.*

THE HILL OF VENUS

Cloth decorative, large 12mo, illustrated in color, $2.00

This is a vivid and powerful romance of the thirteenth century in the times of the great Ghibelline wars.

“It is vibrant with action and overflowing with human emotions throughout.”–*Wilmington Every Evening.*

THE COURT OF LUCIFER

Cloth decorative, large 12mo, illustrated in color, $2.00

“The book is breathless reading, as much for the adventures, the pageants, the midnight excursions of the minor characters, as for the love story of the prince and Donna Lucrezia.”–*Boston Transcript.*

THE SORCERESS OF ROME

Cloth decorative, large 12mo, illustrated in color, $2.00

“A splendid bit of old Roman mosaic, or a gorgeous piece of tapestry. Otto is a striking and pathetic figure. Description of the city, the gorgeous ceremonials of the court and the revels are a series of wonderful pictures.”–*Cincinnati Enquirer.*

CASTEL DEL MONTE

Cloth decorative, large 12mo, illustrated, $2.00

“There is color; there is sumptuous word-painting in these pages; the action is terrific at times; vividness and life are in every part; and brilliant descriptions entertain the reader and give a singular fascination to the tale.”–*Grand Rapids Herald.*

WORKS OF

GABRIELE D’ANNUNZIO

Signor d’Annunzio is known throughout the world as a poet and a dramatist, but above all as a novelist, for it is in his novels that he is at his best. In poetic thought and graceful expression he has few equals among the writers of the day.

He is engaged on a most ambitious work–nothing less than the writing of nine novels which cover the whole field of human sentiment. This work he has divided into three trilogies, and five of the nine books have been published. It is to be regretted that other labors have interrupted the completion of the series.

“This book is realistic. Some say that it is brutally so. But the realism is that of Flaubert, and not of Zola. There is no plain speaking for the sake of plain speaking. Every detail is justified in the fact that it illuminates either the motives or the actions of the man and woman who here stand revealed. It is deadly true. The author holds the mirror up to nature, and the reader, as he sees his own experiences duplicated in passage after passage, has something of the same sensation as all of us know on the first reading of George Meredith’s ‘Egoist.’ Reading these pages is like being out in the country on a dark night in a storm. Suddenly a flash of lightning comes and every detail of your surroundings is revealed.”–*Review of “The Triumph of Death” in the New York Evening Sun.*

The volumes published are as follows. Each 1 vol., library 12mo, cloth, $1.75

THE ROMANCES OF THE ROSE

THE CHILD OF PLEASURE (Il Piacere)
THE INTRUDER (L’Innocente)
THE TRIUMPH OF DEATH (Il Trionfo della Morte)

THE ROMANCES OF THE LILY

THE MAIDENS OF THE ROCKS (Le Vergini delle Rocce)

THE ROMANCES OF THE POMEGRANATE

THE FLAME OF LIFE (Il Fuoco)

*** END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK THE TRIUMPH OF VIRGINIA DALE ***

Updated editions will replace the previous one—the old editions will be renamed.

Gutenberg™ License must appear prominently whenever any copy of a Project Gutenberg™ work (any work on which the phrase “Project Gutenberg” appears, or with which the phrase “Project Gutenberg” is associated) is accessed, displayed, performed, viewed, copied or distributed:

> This eBook is for the use of anyone anywhere in the United States and most other parts of the world at no cost and with almost no restrictions whatsoever. You may copy it, give it away or re-use it under the terms of the Project Gutenberg License included with this eBook or online at www.gutenberg.org. If you are not located in the United States, you will have to check the laws of the country where you are located before using this eBook.

1.E.2. If an individual Project Gutenberg™ electronic work is derived from texts not protected by U.S. copyright law (does not contain a notice indicating that it is posted with permission of the copyright holder), the work can be copied and distributed to anyone in the United States without paying any fees or charges. If you are redistributing or providing access to a work with the phrase “Project Gutenberg” associated with or appearing on the work, you must comply either with the requirements of paragraphs 1.E.1 through 1.E.7 or obtain permission for the use of the work and the Project Gutenberg™ trademark as set forth in paragraphs 1.E.8 or 1.E.9.

1.E.3. If an individual Project Gutenberg™ electronic work is posted with the permission of the copyright holder, your use and distribution must comply with both paragraphs 1.E.1 through 1.E.7 and any additional terms imposed by the copyright holder. Additional terms will be linked to the Project Gutenberg™ License for all works posted with the permission of the copyright holder found at the beginning of this work.

1.E.4. Do not unlink or detach or remove the full Project Gutenberg™ License terms from this work, or any files containing a part of this work or any other work associated with Project Gutenberg™.

1.E.5. Do not copy, display, perform, distribute or redistribute this electronic work, or any part of this electronic work, without prominently displaying the sentence set forth in paragraph 1.E.1 with active links or immediate access to the full terms of the Project Gutenberg™ License.

1.E.6. You may convert to and distribute this work in any binary, compressed, marked up, nonproprietary or proprietary form, including any word processing or hypertext form. However, if you provide access to or distribute copies of a Project Gutenberg™ work in a format other than “Plain Vanilla ASCII” or other format used in the official version posted on the official Project Gutenberg™ website (www.gutenberg.org), you must, at no additional cost, fee or expense to the user, provide a copy, a means of exporting a copy, or a means of obtaining a copy upon request, of the work in its original “Plain Vanilla ASCII” or other form. Any alternate format must include the full Project Gutenberg™ License as specified in paragraph 1.E.1.

1.E.7. Do not charge a fee for access to, viewing, displaying, performing, copying or distributing any Project Gutenberg™ works unless you comply with paragraph 1.E.8 or 1.E.9.

1.E.8. You may charge a reasonable fee for copies of or providing access to or distributing Project Gutenberg™ electronic works provided that:

- You pay a royalty fee of 20% of the gross profits you derive from the use of Project Gutenberg™ works calculated using the method you already use to calculate your applicable taxes. The fee is owed to the owner of the Project Gutenberg™ trademark, but he has agreed to donate royalties under this paragraph to the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation. Royalty payments must be paid within 60 days following each date on which you prepare (or are legally required to prepare) your periodic tax returns. Royalty payments should be clearly marked as such and sent to the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation at the address specified in Section 4, “Information about donations to the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation.”
- You provide a full refund of any money paid by a user who notifies you in writing (or by e-mail) within 30 days of receipt that s/he does not agree to the terms of the full Project Gutenberg™ License. You must require such a user to return or destroy all copies of the works possessed in a physical medium and discontinue all use of and all access to other copies of Project Gutenberg™ works.
- You provide, in accordance with paragraph 1.F.3, a full refund of any money paid for a work or a replacement copy, if a defect in the electronic work is discovered and reported to you within 90 days of receipt of the work.
- You comply with all other terms of this agreement for free distribution of Project Gutenberg™ works.

1.E.9. If you wish to charge a fee or distribute a Project Gutenberg™ electronic work or group of works on different terms than are set forth in this agreement, you must obtain permission in writing from the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation, the manager of the Project Gutenberg™ trademark. Contact the Foundation as set forth in Section 3 below.

1.F.

1.F.1. Project Gutenberg volunteers and employees expend considerable effort to identify, do copyright research on, transcribe and proofread works not protected by U.S. copyright law in

creating the Project Gutenberg™ collection. Despite these efforts, Project Gutenberg™ electronic works, and the medium on which they may be stored, may contain “Defects,” such as, but not limited to, incomplete, inaccurate or corrupt data, transcription errors, a copyright or other intellectual property infringement, a defective or damaged disk or other medium, a computer virus, or computer codes that damage or cannot be read by your equipment.

1.F.2. LIMITED WARRANTY, DISCLAIMER OF DAMAGES - Except for the “Right of Replacement or Refund” described in paragraph 1.F.3, the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation, the owner of the Project Gutenberg™ trademark, and any other party distributing a Project Gutenberg™ electronic work under this agreement, disclaim all liability to you for damages, costs and expenses, including legal fees. YOU AGREE THAT YOU HAVE NO REMEDIES FOR NEGLIGENCE, STRICT LIABILITY, BREACH OF WARRANTY OR BREACH OF CONTRACT EXCEPT THOSE PROVIDED IN PARAGRAPH 1.F.3. YOU AGREE THAT THE FOUNDATION, THE TRADEMARK OWNER, AND ANY DISTRIBUTOR UNDER THIS AGREEMENT WILL NOT BE LIABLE TO YOU FOR ACTUAL, DIRECT, INDIRECT, CONSEQUENTIAL, PUNITIVE OR INCIDENTAL DAMAGES EVEN IF YOU GIVE NOTICE OF THE POSSIBILITY OF SUCH DAMAGE.

1.F.3. LIMITED RIGHT OF REPLACEMENT OR REFUND - If you discover a defect in this electronic work within 90 days of receiving it, you can receive a refund of the money (if any) you paid for it by sending a written explanation to the person you received the work from. If you received the work on a physical medium, you must return the medium with your written explanation. The person or entity that provided you with the defective work may elect to provide a replacement copy in lieu of a refund. If you received the work electronically, the person or entity providing it to you may choose to give you a second opportunity to receive the work electronically in lieu of a refund. If the second copy is also defective, you may demand a refund in writing without further opportunities to fix the problem.

1.F.4. Except for the limited right of replacement or refund set forth in paragraph 1.F.3, this work is provided to you ‘AS-IS’, WITH NO OTHER WARRANTIES OF ANY KIND, EXPRESS OR IMPLIED, INCLUDING BUT NOT LIMITED TO WARRANTIES OF MERCHANTABILITY OR FITNESS FOR ANY PURPOSE.

1.F.5. Some states do not allow disclaimers of certain implied warranties or the exclusion or limitation of certain types of damages. If any disclaimer or limitation set forth in this agreement violates the law of the state applicable to this agreement, the agreement shall be interpreted to make the maximum disclaimer or limitation permitted by the applicable state law. The invalidity or unenforceability of any provision of this agreement shall not void the remaining provisions.

1.F.6. INDEMNITY - You agree to indemnify and hold the Foundation, the trademark owner, any agent or employee of the Foundation, anyone providing copies of Project Gutenberg™ electronic works in accordance with this agreement, and any volunteers associated with the production, promotion and distribution of Project Gutenberg™ electronic works, harmless from all liability, costs and expenses, including legal fees, that arise directly or indirectly from any of the following which you do or cause to occur: (a) distribution of this or any Project Gutenberg™ work, (b) alteration, modification, or additions or deletions to any Project Gutenberg™ work, and (c) any Defect you cause.

Section 2. Information about the Mission of Project Gutenberg™

Project Gutenberg™ is synonymous with the free distribution of electronic works in formats readable by the widest variety of computers including obsolete, old, middle-aged and new computers. It exists because of the efforts of hundreds of volunteers and donations from people in all walks of life.

Volunteers and financial support to provide volunteers with the assistance they need are critical to reaching Project Gutenberg™’s goals and ensuring that the Project Gutenberg™ collection will remain freely available for generations to come. In 2001, the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation was created to provide a secure and permanent future for Project Gutenberg™ and future generations. To learn more about the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation and how your efforts and donations can help, see Sections 3 and 4 and the Foundation information page at www.gutenberg.org.

Section 3. Information about the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation

The Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation is a non-profit 501(c)(3) educational corporation organized under the laws of the state of Mississippi and granted tax exempt status by the Internal Revenue Service. The Foundation’s EIN or federal tax identification number is 64-6221541. Contributions to the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation are tax deductible to the full extent permitted by U.S. federal laws and your state’s laws.

The Foundation’s business office is located at 809 North 1500 West, Salt Lake City, UT 84116, (801) 596-1887. Email contact links and up to date contact information can be found at the Foundation’s website and official page at www.gutenberg.org/contact

Section 4. Information about Donations to the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation

Project Gutenberg™ depends upon and cannot survive without widespread public support and donations to carry out its mission of increasing the number of public domain and licensed works that can be freely distributed in machine-readable form accessible by the widest array of equipment including outdated equipment. Many small donations ($1 to $5,000) are particularly important to maintaining tax exempt status with the IRS.

The Foundation is committed to complying with the laws regulating charities and charitable donations in all 50 states of the United States. Compliance requirements are not uniform and it takes a considerable effort, much paperwork and many fees to meet and keep up with these requirements. We do not solicit donations in locations where we have not received written confirmation of compliance. To SEND DONATIONS or determine the status of compliance for any particular state visit www.gutenberg.org/donate.

While we cannot and do not solicit contributions from states where we have not met the solicitation requirements, we know of no prohibition against accepting unsolicited donations from donors in such states who approach us with offers to donate.

International donations are gratefully accepted, but we cannot make any statements concerning tax treatment of donations received from outside the United States. U.S. laws alone swamp our small staff.

Please check the Project Gutenberg web pages for current donation methods and addresses. Donations are accepted in a number of other ways including checks, online payments and credit card donations. To donate, please visit: www.gutenberg.org/donate

Section 5. General Information About Project Gutenberg™ electronic works

Professor Michael S. Hart was the originator of the Project Gutenberg™ concept of a library of electronic works that could be freely shared with anyone. For forty years, he produced and distributed Project Gutenberg™ eBooks with only a loose network of volunteer support.

Project Gutenberg™ eBooks are often created from several printed editions, all of which are confirmed as not protected by copyright in the U.S. unless a copyright notice is included. Thus, we do not necessarily keep eBooks in compliance with any particular paper edition.

Most people start at our website which has the main PG search facility: www.gutenberg.org.

This website includes information about Project Gutenberg™, including how to make donations to the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation, how to help produce our new eBooks, and how to subscribe to our email newsletter to hear about new eBooks.