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CONISTON

By Winston Churchill

BOOK III

CHAPTER I

One day, in the November following William Wetherell's death, Jethro Bass astonished Coniston by moving to the little cottage in the village which stood beside the disused tannery, and which had been his father's. It was known as the tannery house. His reasons for this step, when at length discovered, were generally commended: they were, in fact, a disinclination to leave a girl of Cynthia's tender age alone on Thousand Acre Hill while he journeyed on his affairs about the country. The Rev. Mr. Satterlee, gaunt, red-faced, but the six feet of him a man and a Christian, from his square-toed boots to the bleaching yellow hair around his temples, offered to become her teacher. For by this time Cynthia had exhausted the resources of the little school among the birches.

The four years of her life in the tannery house which are now briefly to be chronicled were, for her, full of happiness and peace. Though the young may sorrow, they do not often mourn. Cynthia missed her father; at times, when the winds kept her wakeful at night, she wept for him. But she loved Jethro Bass and served him with a devotion that filled his heart with strange ecstasies—yes, and forebodings. In all his existence he had never known a love like this. He may have imagined it once, back in the bright days of his youth; but the dreams of its fulfilment had fallen far short of the exquisite touch of the reality in which he now spent his days at home. In summer, when she sat, in the face of all the conventions of the village, reading under the butternut tree before the house, she would feel his eyes

upon her, and the mysterious yearning in them would startle her. Often during her lessons with Mr. Satterlee in the parlor of the parsonage she would hear a noise outside and perceive Jethro leaning against the pillar. Both Cynthia and Mr. Satterlee knew that he was there, and both, by a kind of tacit agreement, ignored the circumstance.

Cynthia, in this period, undertook Jethro's education, too. She could have induced him to study the making of Latin verse by the mere asking. During those days which he spent at home, and which he had grown to value beyond price, he might have been seen seated on the ground with his back to the butternut tree while Cynthia read aloud from the well-worn books which had been her father's treasures, books that took on marvels of meaning from her lips. Cynthia's powers of selection were not remarkable at this period, and perhaps it was as well that she never knew the effect of the various works upon the hitherto untamed soul of her listener. Milton and Tennyson and Longfellow awoke in him by their very music troubled and half-formed regrets; Carlyle's "Frederick the Great" set up tumultuous imaginings; but the "Life of Jackson" (as did the story of Napoleon long ago) stirred all that was masterful in his blood. Unlettered as he was, Jethro had a power which often marks the American of action—a singular grasp of the application of any sentence or paragraph to his own life; and often, about this time, he took away the breath of a judge or a senator by flinging at them a chunk of Carlyle or Parton.

It was perhaps as well that Cynthia was not a woman at this time, and that she had grown up with him, as it were. His love, indeed, was that of a father for a daughter; but it held within it as a core the revived love of his youth for Cynthia, her mother. Tender as were the manifestations of this love, Cynthia never guessed the fires within, for there was in truth something primeval in the fierceness of his passion. She was his now—his alone, to cherish and sweeten the declining years of his life, and when by a chance Jethro looked upon her and thought of the suitor who was to come in the fulness of her years, he burned with a hatred which it is given few men to feel. It was well for Jethro that these thoughts came not often.

Sometimes, in the summer afternoons, they took long drives through the town behind Jethro's white horse on business. "Jethro's gal," as Cynthia came to be affectionately called, held the reins while Jethro went in to talk to the men folk. One August evening found Cynthia thus beside a poplar in front of Amos Cuthbert's farmhouse, a poplar that shimmered green-gold in the late afternoon, and from the buggy-seat Cynthia looked down upon a thousand purple hilltops and mountain peaks of another state. The view aroused in the girl visions of the many wonders which life was to hold, and she did not hear the sharp voice beside her until the woman had spoken twice. Jethro came out in the middle of the conversation, nodded to Mrs. Cuthbert, and drove off.

"Uncle Jethro," asked Cynthia, presently, "what is a mortgage?"

Jethro struck the horse with the whip, an uncommon action with him, and the buggy was jerked forward sharply over the boulders.

"Er—who's b'en talkin' about mortgages, Cynthy?" he demanded.

"Mrs. Cuthbert said that when folks had mortgage held over them they had to take orders whether they liked them or not. She said that Amos had to do what you told him because there was a mortgage. That isn't so is it?"

Jethro did not speak. Presently Cynthia laid her hand over his.

"Mrs. Cuthbert is a spiteful woman," she said. "I know the reason why people obey you—it's because you're so great. And Daddy used to tell me so."

A tremor shook Jethro's frame and the hand on which hers rested, and all the way down the mountain valleys to Coniston village he did not speak again. But Cynthia was used to his silences, and respected them.

To Ephraim Prescott, who, as the days went on, found it more and more difficult to sew harness on account of his rheumatism, Jethro was not only a great man but a hero. For Cynthia was vaguely troubled at having found one discontent. She was wont to entertain Ephraim on the days when his hands failed him, when he sat sunning himself before his door; and she knew that he was honest.

"Who's b'en talkin' to you, Cynthia?" he cried. "Why, Jethro's the biggest man I know, and the best. I don't like to think where some of us would have b'en if he hadn't given us a lift."

"But he has enemies, Cousin Eph," said Cynthia, still troubled. "What great man hain't?" exclaimed the soldier. "Jethro's enemies hain't worth thinkin' about."

The thought that Jethro had enemies was very painful to Cynthia, and she wanted to know who they were that she might show them a proper contempt if she met them. Lem Hallowell brushed aside the subject with his usual bluff humor, and pinched her cheek and told her not to trouble her head; Amanda Hatch dwelt upon the inherent weakness in the human race, and the Rev. Mr. Satterlee faced the question once, during a history lesson. The nation's heroes came into inevitable comparison with Jethro Bass. Was Washington so good a man? and would not Jethro have been as great as the Father of his Country if he had had the opportunities?

The answers sorely tried Mr. Satterlee's conscience, albeit he was not a man of the world. It set him thinking. He liked Jethro, this man of rugged power whose word had become law in the state. He knew best that side of him which Cynthia saw; and—if the truth be told—as a native of Coniston Mr. Satterlee felt in the bottom of his heart a certain pride in Jethro. The minister's opinions well represented the attitude of his time. He had not given thought to the subject—for such matters had come to be taken for granted. A politician now was a politician, his ways and standards set apart from those of other citizens, and not to be judged by men without the pale of public life. Mr. Satterlee in his limited vision did not then trace the matter to its source, did not reflect that Jethro Bass himself was almost wholly responsible in that state for the condition of politics and politicians. Coniston was proud of Jethro, prouder of him than ever since his last great victory in the Legislature, which brought the Truro Railroad through to Harwich and settled their townsman more firmly than ever before in the seat of power. Every statesman who drove into their little mountain village and stopped at the tannery house made their blood beat faster. Senators came, and representatives, and judges, and governors, "to get their orders," as Rias Richardson briefly put it, and Jethro could make or unmake them at a word. Each was scanned from the store where Rias now reigned supreme, and from the harness shop across the road. Some drove away striving to bite from their lips the tell-tale smile which arose in spite of them; others tried to look happy, despite the sentence of doom to which they had listened.

Jethro Bass was indeed a great man to make such as these tremble or rejoice. When he went abroad with Cynthia awheel or afoot, some took off their hats—an unheard-of thing in Coniston. If he stopped at the store, they scanned his face for the mood he was in before venturing their remarks; if he lingered for a moment in front of the house of Amanda Hatch, the whole village was advised of the circumstance before nightfall.

Two personages worthy of mention here visited the tannery house during the years that Cynthia lived with Jethro. The Honorable Heth Sutton drove over from Clovelly attended by his prime minister, Mr. Bijah Bixby. The Honorable Heth did not attempt to conceal the smile with which he went away, and he stopped at the store long enough to enable Rias to produce certain refreshments from depths unknown to the United States Internal Revenue authorities. Mr. Sutton shook hands with everybody, including Jake Wheeler. Well he might. He came to Coniston a private citizen, and drove away to all intents and purposes a congressman: the darling wish of his life realized after heaven knows how many caucuses and conventions of disappointment, when Jethro had judged it expedient for one reason or another that a north countryman should go. By the time the pair reached Brampton, Chamberlain Bixby was introducing his chief as Congressman Sutton, and by this title he was known for many years to come.

Another day, when the snow lay in great billows on the ground and filled the mountain valleys, when the pines were rusty from the long winter, two other visitors drove to Coniston in a two-horse sleigh. The sun was shining brightly, the wind held its breath, and the noon-day warmth was almost like that of spring. Those who know the mountain country will remember the joy of many such days. Cynthia, standing in the sun on the porch, breathing deep of the pure air, recognized, as the sleigh drew near, the somewhat portly gentleman driving, and the young woman beside him regally clad in furs who looked patronizingly at the tannery house as she took the reins. The young woman was Miss Cassandra Hopkins, and the portly gentleman, the Honorable Alva himself, patron of the drama, who had entered upon his governorship and now wished to be senator.

"Jethro Bass home?" he called out.

"Mr. Bass is home," answered Cynthia. The girl in the sleigh murmured something, laughing a little, and Cynthia flushed. Mr. Hopkins gave a somewhat peremptory knock at the door and was admitted by Millicent Skinner, but Cynthia stood staring at Cassandra in the sleigh, some instinct warning her of a coming skirmish.

"Do you live here all the year round?"

"Of course," said Cynthia.

Miss Cassandra shrugged as though that were beyond her comprehension.

"I'd die in a place like this," she said. "No balls, or theatres. Doesn't your father take you around the

state?"

"My father's dead," said Cynthia.

"Oh! Your name's Cynthia Wetherell, isn't it? You know Bob Worthington, don't you? He's gone to Harvard now, but he was a great friend of mine at Andover."

Cynthia didn't answer. It would not be fair to say that she felt a pang, though it might add to the romance of this narrative. But her dislike for the girl in the sleigh decidedly increased. How was she, in her inexperience, to know that the radiant beauty in furs was what the boys at Phillips Andover called an "old stager."

"So you live with Jethro Bass," was Miss Cassandra's next remark. "He's rich enough to take you round the state and give you everything you want."

"I have everything I want," replied Cynthia.

"I shouldn't call living here having everything I wanted," declared Miss Hopkins, with a contemptuous glance at the tannery house.

"I suppose you wouldn't," said Cynthia.

Miss Hopkins was nettled. She was out of humor that day, besides she shared some of her father's political ambition. If he went to Washington, she went too.

"Didn't you know Jethro Bass was rich?" she demanded, imprudently. "Why, my father gave twenty thousand dollars to be governor, and Jethro Bass must have got half of it."

Cynthia's eyes were of that peculiar gray which, lighted by love or anger, once seen, are never forgotten. One hand was on the dashboard of the cutter, the other had seized the seat. Her voice was steady, and the three words she spoke struck Miss Hopkins with startling effect.

Miss Hopkins's breath was literally taken away, and for once she found no retort. Let it be said for her that this was a new experience with a new creature. A demure country girl turn into a wildcat before her very eyes! Perhaps it was as well for both that the door of the house opened and the Honorable Alva interrupted their talk, and without so much as a glance at Cynthia he got hurriedly into the sleigh and drove off. When Cynthia turned, the points of color still high in her cheeks and the light still ablaze in her eyes, she surprised Jethro gazing at her from the porch, and some sorrow she felt rather than beheld stopped the confession on her lips. It would be unworthy of her even to repeat such slander, and the color surged again into her face for very shame of her anger. Cassandra Hopkins had not been worthy of it.

Jethro did not speak, but slipped his hand into hers, and thus they stood for a long time gazing at the snow fields between the pines on the heights of Coniston.

The next summer, was the first which the painter—pioneer of summer visitors there—spent at Coniston. He was an unsuccessful painter, who became, by a process which he himself does not to-day completely understand, a successful writer of novels. As a character, however, he himself confesses his inadequacy, and the chief interest in him for the readers of this narrative is that he fell deeply in love with Cynthia Wetherell at nineteen. It is fair to mention in passing that other young men were in love with Cynthia at this time, notably Eben Hatch—history repeating itself. Once, in a moment of madness, Eben confessed his love, the painter never did: and he has to this day a delicious memory which has made Cynthia the heroine of many of his stories. He boarded with Chester Perkins, and he was humored by the village as a harmless but amiable lunatic.

The painter had never conceived that a New England conscience and a temper of no mean proportions could dwell together in the body of a wood nymph. When he had first seen Cynthia among the willows by Coniston Water, he had thought her a wood nymph. But she scolded him for his impropriety with so unerring a choice of words that he fell in love with her intellect, too. He spent much of his time to the neglect of his canvases under the butternut tree in front of Jethro's house trying to persuade Cynthia to sit for her portrait; and if Jethro himself had not overheard one of these arguments, the portrait never would have been painted. Jethro focussed a look upon the painter.

"Er—painter-man, be you? Paint Cynthia's picture?"

"But I don't want to be painted, Uncle Jethro. I won't be painted!"

"H-how much for a good picture? Er—only want the best—only want the best."

The painter said a few things, with pardonable heat, to the effect—well, never mind the effect. His remarks made no impression whatever upon Jethro.

"Er—paint the picture—paint the picture, and then we'll talk about the price. Er—wait a minute."

He went into the house, and they heard him lumbering up the stairs. Cynthia sat with her back to the artist, pretending to read, but presently she turned to him.

"I'll never forgive you—never, as long as I live," she cried, "and I won't be painted!"

"N-not to please me, Cynthy?" It was Jethro's voice.

Her look softened. She laid down the book and went up to him on the porch and put her hand on his shoulder.

"Do you really want it so much as all that, Uncle Jethro?" she said.

"Callate I do, Cynthy," he answered. He held a bundle covered with newspaper in his hand, he looked down at Cynthia.

He seated himself on the edge of the porch and for the moment seemed lost in reverie. Then he began slowly to unwrap the newspaper from the bundle: there were five layers of it, but at length he disclosed a bolt of cardinal cloth.

"Call this to mind, Cynthy?"

"Yes," she answered with a smile.

"H-how's this for the dress, Mr. Painter-man?" said Jethro, with a pride that was ill-concealed.

The painter started up from his seat and took the material in his hands and looked at Cynthia. He belonged to a city club where he was popular for his knack of devising costumes, and a vision of Cynthia as the daughter of a Doge of Venice arose before his eyes. Wonder of wonders, the daughter of a Doge discovered in a New England hill village! The painter seized his pad and pencil and with a few strokes, guided by inspiration, sketched the costume then and there and held it up to Jethro, who blinked at it in astonishment. But Jethro was suspicious of his own sensations.

"Er—well—Godfrey—g-guess that'll do." Then came the involuntary: "W-wouldn't a-thought you had it in you. How about it, Cynthy?" and he held it up for her inspection.

"If you are pleased, it's all I care about, Uncle Jethro," she answered, and then, her face suddenly flushing, "You must promise me on your honor that nobody in Coniston shall know about it, 'Mr. Painter-man'."

After this she always called him "Mr. Painter-man,"—when she was pleased with him.

So the cardinal cloth was come to its usefulness at last. It was inevitable that Sukey Kittredge, the village seamstress, should be taken into confidence. It was no small thing to take Sukey into confidence, for she was the legitimate successor in more ways than one of Speedy Bates, and much of Cynthia and the artist's ingenuity was spent upon devising a form of oath which would hold Sukey silent. Sukey, however, got no small consolation from the sense of the greatness of the trust confided in her, and of the uproar she could make in Coniston if she chose. The painter, to do him justice, was the real dressmaker, and did everything except cut the cloth and sew it together. He sent to friends of his in the city for certain paste jewels and ornaments, and one day Cynthia stood in the old tannery shed—hastily transformed into a studio—before a variously moved audience. Sukey, having adjusted the last pin, became hysterical over her handiwork, Millicent Skinner stared openmouthed, words having failed her for once, and Jethro thrust his hands in his pockets in a quiet ecstasy of approbation.

"A-always had a notion that cloth'd set you off, Cynthy," said he, "er—next time I go to the state capital you come along—g-guess it'll surprise 'em some."

"I guess it would, Uncle Jethro," said Cynthia, laughing.

Jethro postponed two political trips of no small importance to be present at the painting of that picture, and he would sit silently by the hour in a corner of the shed watching every stroke of the brush. Never stood Doge's daughter in her jewels and seed pearls amidst stranger surroundings,—the beam, and the centre post around which the old white horse had toiled in times gone by, and all the piled-up, disused machinery of forgotten days. And never was Venetian lady more unconscious of her environment than Cynthia.

The portrait was of the head and shoulders alone, and when he had given it the last touch, the painter knew that, for once in his life, he had done a good thing. Never before; perhaps, had the fire of such inspiration been given him. Jethro, who expressed himself in terms (for him) of great enthusiasm, was for going to Boston immediately to purchase a frame commensurate with the importance of such a work of art, but the artist had his own views on that subject and sent to New York for this also.

The day after the completion of the picture a rugged figure in rawhide boots and coonskin cap approached Chester Perkins's house, knocked at the door, and inquired for the "Painter-man." It was Jethro. The "Painter-man" forthwith went out into the rain behind the shed, where a somewhat curious colloquy took place.

"G-guess I'm willin' to pay you full as much as it's worth," said Jethro, producing a cowhide wallet. "Er—what figure do you allow it comes to with the frame?"

The artist was past taking offence, since Jethro had long ago become for him an engrossing study.

"I will send you the bill for the frame, Mr. Bass," he said, "the picture belongs to Cynthia."

"Earn your livin' by paintin', don't you—earn your livin'?"

The painter smiled a little bitterly.

"No," he said, "if I did, I shouldn't be—alive. Mr. Bass, have you ever done anything the pleasure of doing which was pay enough, and to spare?"

Jethro looked at him, and something very like admiration came into the face that was normally expressionless.

He put up his wallet a little awkwardly, and held out his hand more awkwardly.

"You be more of a feller than I thought for," he said, and strode off through the drizzle toward Coniston. The painter walked slowly to the kitchen, where Chester Perkins and his wife were sitting down to supper.

"Jethro got a mortgage on you, too?" asked Chester.

The artist had his reward, for when the picture was hung at length in the little parlor of the tannery house it became a source of pride to Coniston second only to Jethro himself.

CHAPTER II

Time passes, and the engines of the Truro Railroad are now puffing in and out of the yards of Worthington's mills in Brampton, and a fine layer of dust covers the old green stage which has worn the road for so many years over Truro Gap. If you are ever in Brampton, you can still see the stage, if you care to go into the back of what was once Jim Sanborn's livery stable, now owned by Mr. Sherman of the Brampton House.

Conventions and elections had come and gone, and the Honorable Heth Sutton had departed triumphantly to Washington, cheered by his neighbors in Clovelly. Chamberlain Bixby was left in charge there, supreme. Who could be more desirable as a member of Congress than Mr. Sutton, who had so ably served his party (and Jethro) by holding the House against the insurgents in the matter of the Truro Bill? Mr. Sutton was, moreover, a gentleman, an owner of cattle and land, a man of substance whom lesser men were proud to mention as a friend—a very hill-Rajah with stock in railroads and other enterprises, who owed allegiance and paid tribute alone to the Great Man of Coniston.

Mr. Sutton was one who would make himself felt even in the capital of the United States—felt and heard. And he had not been long in the Halls of Congress before he made a speech which rang under the very dome of the Capitol. So said the Brampton and Harwich papers, at least, though rivals and detractors of Mr. Sutton declared that they could find no matter in it which related to the subject of a bill, but that is neither here nor there. The oration began with a lengthy tribute to the resources and history of his state, and ended by a declaration that the speaker was in Congress at no man's bidding, but as the servant of the common people of his district.

Under the lamp of the little parlor in the tannery house, Cynthia (who has now arrived at the very

serious age of nineteen) was reading the papers to Jethro and came upon Mr. Sutton's speech. There were four columns of it, but Jethro seemed to take delight in every word; and portions of the noblest parts of it, indeed, he had Cynthia read over again. Sometimes, in the privacy of his home, Jethro was known to chuckle, and to Cynthia's surprise he chuckled more than usual that evening.

"Uncle Jethro," she said at length, when she had laid the paper down, "I thought that you sent Mr. Sutton to Congress."

Jethro leaned forward.

"What put that into your head, Cynthy?" he asked.

"Oh," answered the girl, "everybody says so,—Moses Hatch, Rias, and Cousin Eph. Didn't you?"

Jethro looked at her, as she thought, strangely.

"You're too young to know anything about such things, Cynthy," he said, "too young."

"But you make all the judges and senators and congressmen in the state, I know you do. Why," exclaimed Cynthia, indignantly, "why does Mr. Sutton say the people elected him when he owes everything to you?"

Jethro, arose abruptly and flung a piece of wood into the stove, and then he stood with his back to her. Her instinct told her that he was suffering, though she could not fathom the cause, and she rose swiftly and drew him down into the chair beside her.

"What is it?" she said anxiously. "Have you got rheumatism, too, like Cousin Eph? All old men seem to have rheumatism."

"No, Cynthy, it hain't rheumatism," he managed to answer; "wimmen folks hadn't ought to mix up in politics. They—they don't understand 'em, Cynthy."

"But I shall understand them some day, because I am your daughter—now that—now that I have only you, I am your daughter, am I not?"

"Yes, yes," he answered huskily, with his hand on her hair.

"And I know more than most women now," continued Cynthia, triumphantly. "I'm going to be such a help to you soon—very soon. I've read a lot of history, and I know some of the Constitution by heart. I know why old Timothy Prescott fought in the Revolution—it was to get rid of kings, wasn't it, and to let the people have a chance? The people can always be trusted to do what is right, can't they, Uncle Jethro?"

Jethro was silent, but Cynthia did not seem to notice that. After a space she spoke again:—"I've been thinking it all out about you, Uncle Jethro."

"A-about me?"

"Yes, I know why you are able to send men to Congress and make judges of them. It's because the people have chosen you to do all that for them—you are so great and good."

Jethro did not answer.

Although the month was March, it was one of those wonderful still nights that sometimes come in the mountain-country when the wind is silent in the notches and the stars seem to burn nearer to the earth. Cynthia awoke and lay staring for an instant at the red planet which hung over the black and ragged ridge, and then she arose quickly and knocked at the door across the passage.

"Are you ill, Uncle Jethro?"

"No," he answered, "no, Cynthy. Go to bed. Er—I was just thinkin'—thinkin', that's all, Cynthy."

Though all his life he had eaten sparingly, Cynthia noticed that he scarcely touched his breakfast the next morning, and two hours later he went unexpectedly to the state capital. That day, too, Coniston was clothed in clouds, and by afternoon a wild March snowstorm was sweeping down the face of the mountain, piling against doorways and blocking the roads. Through the storm Cynthia fought her way to the harness shop, for Ephraim Prescott had taken to his bed, bound hand and foot by rheumatism.

Much of that spring Ephraim was all but helpless, and Cynthia spent many days nursing him and

reading to him. Meanwhile the harness industry languished. Cynthia and Ephraim knew, and Coniston guessed, that Jethro was taking care of Ephraim, and strong as was his affection for Jethro the old soldier found dependence hard to bear. He never spoke of it to Cynthia, but he used to lie and dream through the spring days of what he might have done if the war had not crippled him. For Ephraim Prescott, like his grandfather, was a man of action—a keen, intelligent American whose energy, under other circumstances, might have gone toward the making of the West. Ephraim, furthermore, had certain principles which some in Coniston called cranks; for instance, he would never apply for a pension, though he could easily have obtained one. Through all his troubles, he held grimly to the ideal which meant more to him than ease and comfort,—that he had served his country for the love of it.

With the warm weather he was able to be about again, and occasionally to mend a harness, but Doctor Rowell shook his head when Jethro stopped his buggy in the road one day to inquire about Ephraim. Whereupon Jethro went on to the harness shop. The inspiration, by the way, had come from Cynthia.

"Er—Ephraim, how'd you like to, be postmaster? H-haven't any objections to that kind of a job, hev you?"

"Why no," said Ephraim. "We hain't agoin' to hev a post-office at Coniston—air we?"

"H-how'd you like to be postmaster at Brampton?" demanded Jethro, abruptly.

Ephraim dropped the trace he was shaving.

"Postmaster at Brampton!" he exclaimed.

"H-how'd you like it?" said Jethro again.

"Well," said Ephraim, "I hain't got any objections."

Jethro started out of the shop, but paused again at the door.

"W-won't say nothin' about it, will you, Eph?" he inquired.

"Not till I git it," answered Ephraim. The sorrows of three years were suddenly lifted from his shoulders, and for an instant Ephraim wanted to dance until he remembered the rheumatism and the Wilderness leg. Suddenly a thought struck him, and he hobbled to the door and called out after Jethro's retreating figure. Jethro returned.

"Well?" he said, "well?"

"What's the pay?" said Ephraim, in a whisper.

Jethro named the sum instantly, also in a whisper.

"You don't tell me!" said Ephraim, and sank stupefied into the chair in front of the shop, where lately he had spent so much of his time.

Jethro chuckled twice on his way home: he chuckled twice again to Cynthia's delight at supper, and after supper he sent Millicent Skinner to find Jake Wheeler. Jake as usual, was kicking his heels in front of the store, talking to Rias and others about the coming Fourth of July celebration at Brampton. Brampton, as we know, was famous for its Fourth of July celebrations. Not neglecting to let it be known that Jethro had sent for him, Jake hurried off through the summer twilight to the tannery house, bowed ceremoniously to Cynthia under the butternut tree, and discovered Jethro behind the shed. It was usually Jethro's custom to allow the other man to begin the conversation, no matter how trivial the subject—a method which had commended itself to Mr. Bixby and other minor politicians who copied him. And usually the other man played directly into Jethro's hands. Jake Wheeler always did, and now, to cover the awkwardness of the silence, he began on the Brampton celebration.

"They tell me Heth Sutton's a-goin' to make the address—seems prouder than ever sence he went to Congress. I guess you'll tell him what to say when the time comes, Jethro."

"Er—goin' to Clovelly after wool this week, Jake?"

"I kin go to-morrow," said Jake, scenting an affair.

"Er—goin' to Clovelly after wool this week, Jake?"

Jake reflected. He saw it was expedient that this errand should not smell of haste.

"I was goin' to see Cutter on Friday," he answered.

"Er—if you should happen to meet Heth—"

"Yes," interrupted Jake.

"If by chance you should happen to meet Heth, or Bije" (Jethro knew that Jake never went to Clovelly without a conference with one or the other of these personages, if only to be able to talk about it afterward at the store), "er—what would you say to 'em?"

"Why," said Jake, scratching his head for the answer, "I'd tell him you was at Coniston."

"Think we'll have rain, Jake?" inquired Jethro, blandly.

Jake wended his way back to the store, filled with renewed admiration for the great man. Jethro had given him no instructions whatever, could deny before a jury if need be that he had sent him (Jake) to Clovelly to tell Heth Sutton to come to Coniston for instructions on the occasion of his Brampton speech. And Jake was filled with a mysterious importance when he took his seat once more in the conclave.

Jake Wheeler, although in many respects a fool, was one of the most efficient pack of political hounds that the state has ever known. By six o'clock on Friday morning he was descending a brook valley on the Clovelly side of the mountain, and by seven was driving between the forest and river meadows of the Rajah's domain, and had come in sight of the big white house with its somewhat pretentious bay-windows and Gothic doorway; it might be dubbed the palace of these parts. The wide river flowed below it, and the pastures so wondrously green in the morning sun were dotted with fat cattle and sheep. Jake was content to borrow a cut of tobacco from the superintendent and wonder aimlessly around the farm until Mr. Sutton's family prayers and breakfast were accomplished. We shall not concern ourselves with the message or the somewhat lengthy manner in which it was delivered. Jake had merely dropped in by accident, but the Rajah listened coldly while he picked his teeth, said he didn't know whether he was going to Brampton or not—hadn't decided; didn't know whether he could get to Coniston or not—his affairs were multitudinous now. In short, he set Jake to thinking deeply as his horse walked up the western heights of Coniston on the return journey. He had, let it be repeated, a sure instinct once his nose was fairly on the scent, and he was convinced that a war of great magnitude was in the air, and he; Jake Wheeler, was probably the first in all the elate to discover it! His blood leaped at the thought.

The hill-Rajah's defiance, boiled down, could only mean one thing,—that somebody with sufficient power and money was about to lock horns with Jethro Bass. Not for a moment did Jake believe that, for all his pomp and circumstance, the Honorable Heth Sutton was a big enough man to do this. Jake paid to the Honorable Heth all the outward respect that his high position demanded, but he knew the man through and through. He thought of the Honorable Heth's reform speech in Congress, and laughed loudly in the echoing woods. No, Mr. Sutton was not the man to lead a fight. But to whom had he promised his allegiance? This question puzzled Mr. Wheeler all the way home, and may it be said finally for many days thereafter. He slid into Coniston in the dusk, big with impending events, which he could not fathom. As to giving Jethro the careless answer of the hill-Rajah, that was another matter.

The Fourth of July came at last, nor was any contradiction made in the Brampton papers that the speech of the Honorable Heth Sutton had been cancelled. Instead, advertisements appeared in the 'Brampton Clarion' announcing the fact in large letters. When Cynthia read this advertisement to Jethro, he chuckled again. They were under the butternut tree, for the evenings were long now.

"Will you take me to Brampton, Uncle Jethro?" said she, letting fall the paper on her lap.

"W-who's to get in the hay?" said Jethro.

"Hay on the Fourth of July!" exclaimed Cynthia, "why, that's—sacrilege! You'd much better come and hear Mr. Sutton's speech—it will do you good."

Cynthia could see that Jethro was intensely amused, for his eyes had a way of snapping on such occasions when he was alone with her. She was puzzled and slightly offended, because, to tell the truth, Jethro had spoiled her.

"Very well, then," she said, "I'll go with the Painter-man."

Jethro came and stood over her, his expression the least bit wistful.

"Er—Cynthy," he said presently, "hain't fond of that Painter-man, be you?"

"Why, yes," said Cynthia, "aren't you?"

"He's fond of you," said Jethro, "sh-shouldn't be surprised if he was in love with you."

Cynthia looked up at him, the corners of her mouth twitching, and then she laughed. The Rev. Mr. Satterlee, writing his Sunday sermon in his study, heard her and laid down his pen to listen.

"Uncle Jethro," said Cynthia, "sometimes I forget that you're a great, wise man, and I think that you are just a silly old goose."

Jethro wiped his face with his blue cotton handkerchief.

"Then you hain't a-goin' to marry the Painter-man?" he said.

"I'm not going to marry anybody," cried Cynthia, contritely; "I'm going to live with you and take care of you all my life."

On the morning of the Fourth, Cynthia drove to Brampton with the Painter-man, and when he perceived that she was dreaming, he ceased to worry her with his talk. He liked her dreaming, and stole many glances at her face of which she knew nothing at all. Through the cool and fragrant woods, past the mill-pond stained blue and white by the sky, and scented clover fields and wayside flowers nodding in the morning air—Cynthia saw these things in the memory of another journey to Brampton. On that Fourth her father had been with her, and Jethro and Ephraim and Moses and Amanda Hatch and the children. And how well she recalled, too, standing amidst the curious crowd before the great house which Mr. Worthington had just built.

There are weeks and months, perhaps, when we do not think of people, when our lives are full and vigorous, and then perchance a memory will bring them vividly before us—so vividly that we yearn for them. There rose before Cynthia now the vision of a boy as he stood on the Gothic porch of the house, and how he had come down to the wondering country people with his smile and his merry greeting, and how he had cajoled her into lingering in front of the meeting-house. Had he forgotten her? With just a suspicion of a twinge, Cynthia remembered that Janet Duncan she had seen at the capital, whom she had been told was the heiress of the state. When he had graduated from Harvard, Bob would, of course, marry her. That was in the nature of things.

To some the great event of that day in Brampton was to be the speech of the Honorable Heth Sutton in the meeting-house at eleven; others (and this party was quite as numerous) had looked forward to the base-ball game between Brampton and Harwich in the afternoon. The painter would have preferred to walk up meeting-house hill with Cynthia, and from the cool heights look down upon the amphitheatre in which the town was built. But Cynthia was interested in history, and they went to the meeting-house accordingly, where she listened for an hour and a half to the patriotic eloquence of the representative. The painter was glad to see and hear so great a man in the hour of his glory, though so much as a fragment of the oration does not now remain in his memory. In size, in figure, in expression, in the sonorous tones of his voice, Mr. Sutton was everything that a congressman should be. "The people," said Isaac D. Worthington in presenting him, "should indeed be proud of such an able and high-minded representative." We shall have cause to recall that word high-minded.

Many persons greeted Cynthia outside the meetinghouse, for the girl seemed genuinely loved by all who knew her—too much loved, her companion thought, by certain spick-and-span young men of Brampton. But they ate the lunch Cynthia had brought, far from the crowd, under the trees by Coniston Water. It was she who proposed going to the base-ball game, and the painter stifled a sigh and acquiesced. Their way brought them down Brampton Street, past a house with great iron dogs on the lawn, so imposing and cityfied that he hung back and asked who lived there.

"Mr. Worthington," answered Cynthia, making to move on impatiently.

Her escort did not think much of the house, but it interested him as the type which Mr. Worthington had built. On that same Gothic porch, sublimely unconscious of the covert stares and subdued comments of the passers-by, the first citizen himself and the Honorable Heth Sutton might be seen. Mr. Worthington, whose hawklike look had become more pronounced, sat upright, while the Honorable Heth, his legs crossed, filled every nook and cranny of an arm-chair, and an occasional fragrant whiff from his cigar floated out to those on the tar sidewalk. Although the pedestrians were but twenty feet away, what Mr. Worthington said never reached them; but the Honorable Heth on public days carried his voice of the Forum around with him.

"Come on," said Cynthia, in one of those startling little tempers she was subject to; "don't stand there like an idiot."

Then the voice of Mr. Sutton boomed toward them.

"As I understand, Worthington," they heard him say, "you want me to appoint young Wheelock for the Brampton post-office." He stuck his thumb into his vest pocket and recrossed his legs "I guess it can be arranged."

When the painter at last overtook Cynthia the jewel paints he had so often longed to catch upon a canvas were in her eyes. He fell back, wondering how he could so greatly have offended, when she put her hand on his sleeve.

"Did you hear what he said about the Brampton postoffice?" she cried.

"The Brampton post-office?" he repeated; dazed.

"Yes," said Cynthia; "Uncle Jethro has promised it to Cousin Ephraim, who will starve without it. Did you hear this man say he would give it to Mr. Wheelock?"

Here was a new Cynthia, aflame with emotions on a question of politics of which he knew nothing. He did, understand, however, her concern for Ephraim Prescott, for he knew that she loved the soldier. She turned from the painter now with a gesture which he took to mean that his profession debarred him from such vital subjects, and she led the way to the fair-grounds. There he meekly bought tickets, and they found themselves hurried along in the eager crowd toward the stand.

The girl was still unaccountably angry over that mysterious affair of the post-office, and sat with flushed cheeks staring out on the green field, past the line of buggies and carryalls on the farther side to the southern shoulder of Coniston towering, above them all. The painter, already, beginning to love his New England folk, listened to the homely chatter about him, until suddenly a cheer starting in one corner ran like a flash of gunpowder around the field, and eighteen young men trotted across the turf. Although he was not a devotee of sport, he noticed that nine of these, as they took their places on the bench, wore blue,—the Harwich Champions. Seven only of those scattering over the field wore white; two young gentlemen, one at second base and the other behind the batter, wore gray uniforms with crimson stockings, and crimson piping on the caps, and a crimson H embroidered on the breast—a sight that made the painter's heart beat a little faster, the honored livery of his own college.

"What are those two Harvard men doing here?" he asked.

Cynthia, who was leaning forward, started, and turned to him a face which showed him that his question had been meaningless. He repeated it.

"Oh," said she, "the tall one, burned brick-red like an Indian, is Bob Worthington."

"He's a good type," the artist remarked.

"You're right, Mister, there hain't a finer young feller anywhere," chimed in Mr. Dodd, a portly person with a tuft of yellow beard on his chin. Mr. Dodd kept the hardware store in Brampton.

"And who," asked the painter, "is the bullet-headed little fellow, with freckles and short red hair, behind the bat?"

"I don't know," said Cynthia, indifferently.

"Why," exclaimed Mr. Dodd, with just a trace of awe in his voice, "that's Somers Duncan, son of Millionaire Duncan down to the capital. I guess," he added, "I guess them two will be the richest men in the state some day. Duncan come up from Harvard with Bob."

In a few minutes the game was in full swing, Brampton against Harwich, the old rivalry in another form. Every advantage on either side awoke thundering cheers from the partisans; beribboned young women sprang to their feet and waved the Harwich blue at a home run, and were on the verge of tears when the Brampton pitcher struck out their best batsman. But beyond the facts that the tide was turning in Brampton's favor; that young Mr. Worthington stopped a ball flying at a phenomenal speed and batted another at a still more phenomenal speed which was not stopped; that his name and Duncan's were mingled generously in the cheering, the painter remembered little of the game. The exhibition of human passions which the sight of it drew from an undemonstrative race: the shouting, the comments wrung from hardy spirits off their guard, the joy and the sorrow,—such things interested him more. High above the turmoil Coniston, as through the ages, looked down upon the scene impassive.

He was aroused from these reflections by an incident. Some one had leaped over the railing which

separated the stand from the field and stood before Cynthia,—a tanned and smiling young man in gray and crimson. His honest eyes were alight with an admiration that was unmistakable to the painter—perhaps to Cynthia also, for a glow that might have been of annoyance or anger, and yet was like the color of the mountain sunrise, answered in her cheek. Mr. Worthington reached out a large brown hand and seized the girl's as it lay on her lap.

"Hello, Cynthia," he cried, "I've been looking for you all day. I thought you might be here. Where were you?"

"Where did you look?" answered Cynthia, composedly, withdrawing her hand.

"Everywhere," said Bob, "up and down the street, all through the hotel. I asked Lem Hallowell, and he didn't know where you were. I only got here last night myself."

"I was in the meeting-house," said Cynthia.

"The meeting-house!" he echoed. "You don't mean to tell me that you listened to that silly speech of Sutton's?"

This remark, delivered in all earnestness, was the signal for uproarious laughter from Mr. Dodd and others sitting near by, attending earnestly to the conversation.

Cynthia bit her lip.

"Yes, I did," she said; "but I'm sorry now."

"I should think you would be," said Bob; "Sutton's a silly, pompous old fool. I had to sit through dinner with him. I believe I could represent the district better myself."

"By gosh!" exploded Mr. Dodd, "I believe you could!"

But Bob paid no attention to him. He was looking at Cynthia.

"Cynthia, you've grown up since I saw you," he said. "How's Uncle Jethro."

"He's well—thanks," said Cynthia, and now she was striving to put down a smile.

"Still running the state?" said Bob. "You tell him I think he ought to muzzle Sutton. What did he send him down to Washington for?"

"I don't know," said Cynthia.

"What are you going to do after the game?" Bob demanded.

"I'm going home of course," said Cynthia.

His face fell.

"Can't you come to the house for supper and stay for the fireworks?" he begged pleadingly. "We'd be mighty glad to have your friend, too."

Cynthia introduced her escort.

"It's very good of you, Bob," she said, with that New England demureness which at times became her so well, "but we couldn't possibly do it. And then I don't like Mr. Sutton."

"Oh, hang him!" exclaimed Bob. He took a step nearer to her. "Won't you stay this once? I have to go West in the morning."

"I think you are very lucky," said Cynthia.

Bob scanned her face searchingly, and his own fell.

"Lucky!" he cried, "I think it's the worst thing that ever happened to me. My father's so hard-headed when he gets his mind set—he's making me do it. He wants me to see the railroads and the country, so I've got to go with the Duncans. I wanted to stay—" He checked himself, "I think it's a blamed nuisance."

"So do I," said a voice behind him.

It was not the first time that Mr. Somers Duncan had spoken, but Bob either had not heard him or pretended not to. Mr. Duncan's freckled face smiled at them from the top of the railing, his eyes were

on Cynthia's face, and he had been listening eagerly. Mr. Duncan's chief characteristic, beyond his freckles, was his eagerness—a quality probably amounting to keenness.

"Hello," said Bob, turning impatiently, "I might have known you couldn't keep away. You're the cause of all my troubles—you and your father's private car."

Somers became apologetic.

"It isn't my fault," he said; "I'm sure I hate going as much as you do. It's spoiled my summer, too."

Then he coughed and looked at Cynthia.

"Well," said Bob, "I suppose I'll have to introduce you. This," he added, dragging his friend over the railing, "is Mr. Somers Duncan."

"I'm awfully glad to meet you, Miss. Wetherell," said Somers, fervently; "to tell you the truth, I thought he was just making up yarns."

"Yarns?" repeated Cynthia, with a look that set Mr. Duncan floundering.

"Why, yes," he stammered. "Worthy said that you were up here, but I thought he was crazy the way he talked—I didn't think—"

"Think what?" inquired Cynthia, but she flushed a little.

"Oh, rot, Somers!" said Bob, blushing furiously under his tan; "you ought never to go near a woman—you're the darndest fool with 'em I ever saw."

This time even the painter laughed outright, and yet he was a little sorrowful, too, because he could not be even as these youths. But Cynthia sat serene, the eternal feminine of all the ages, and it is no wonder that Bob Worthington was baffled as he looked at her. He lapsed into an awkwardness quite as bad as that of his friend.

"I hope you enjoyed the game," he said at last, with a formality that was not at all characteristic.

Cynthia did not seem to think it worth while to answer this, so the painter tried to help him out.

"That was a fine stop you made, Mr. Worthington," he said; "wasn't it, Cynthia?"

"Everybody seemed to think so," answered Cynthia, cruelly; "but if I were a man and had hands like that" (Bob thrust them in his pockets), "I believe I could stop a ball, too."

Somers laughed uproariously.

"Good-by," said Bob, with uneasy abruptness, "I've got to go into the field now. When can I see you?"

"When you get back from the West—perhaps," said Cynthia.

"Oh," cried Bob (they were calling him), "I must see you to-night!" He vaulted over the railing and turned. "I'll come back here right after the game," he said; "there's only one more inning."

"We'll come back right after the game," repeated Mr. Duncan.

Bob shot one look at him,—of which Mr. Duncan seemed blissfully unconscious,—and stalked off abruptly to second base.

The artist sat pensive for a few moments, wondering at the ways of women, his sympathies unaccountably enlisted in behalf of Mr. Worthington.

"Weren't you a little hard on him?" he said.

For answer Cynthia got to her feet.

"I think we ought to be going home," she said.

"Going home!" he ejaculated in amazement.

"I promised Uncle Jethro I'd be there for supper," and she led the way out of the grand stand.

So they drove back to Coniston through the level evening light, and when they came to Ephraim

Prescott's harness shop the old soldier waved at them cheerily from under the big flag which he had hung out in honor of the day. The flag was silk, and incidentally Ephraim's most valued possession. Then they drew up before the tannery house, and Cynthia leaped out of the buggy and held out her hand to the painter with a smile.

"It was very good of you to take me," she said.

Jethro Bass, rugged, uncouth, in rawhide boots and swallowtail and coonskin cap, came down from the porch to welcome her, and she ran toward him with an eagerness that started the painter to wondering afresh over the contrasts of life. What, he asked himself, had Fate in store for Cynthia Wetherell?

CHAPTER III

"H-have a good time, Cynthy?" said Jethro, looking down into her face. Love had wrought changes in Jethro; mightier changes than he suspected, and the girl did not know how zealous were the sentries of that love, how watchful they were, and how they told him often and again whether her heart, too, was smiling.

"It was very gay," said Cynthia.

"P-painter-man gay?" inquired Jethro.

Cynthia's eyes were on the orange line of the sunset over Coniston, but she laughed a little, indulgently.

"Cynthy?"

"Yes."

"Er—that Painter-man hain't such a bad fellow—w-why didn't you ask him in to supper?"

"I'll give you three guesses," said Cynthia, but she did not wait for them. "It was because I wanted to be alone with you. Milly's gone out, hasn't she?"

"G-gone a-courtin'," said Jethro.

She smiled, and went into the house to see whether Milly had done her duty before she left. It was characteristic of Cynthia not to have mentioned the subject which was agitating her mind until they were seated on opposite sides of the basswood table.

"Uncle Jethro," she said, "I thought you told Mr. Sutton to give Cousin Eph the Brampton post-office? Do you trust Mr. Sutton?" she demanded abruptly.

"Er—why?" said Jethro. "Why?"

"Because I don't," she answered with conviction; "I think he's a big fraud. He must have deceived you, Uncle Jethro. I can't see why you ever sent him to Congress."

Although Jethro was in no mood for mirth, he laughed in spite of himself, for he was an American. His lifelong habit would have made him defend Heth to any one but Cynthia.

"D you see Heth, Cynthy?" he asked. "Yes," replied the girl, disgustedly, "I should say I did, but not to speak to him. He was sitting on Mr. Worthington's porch, and I heard him tell Mr. Worthington he would give the Brampton post-office to Dave Wheelock. I don't want you to think that I was eavesdropping," she added quickly; "I couldn't help hearing it."

Jethro did not answer.

"You'll make him give the post-office to Cousin Eph, won't you, Uncle Jethro?"

"Yes;" said Jethro, very simply, "I will." He meditated awhile, and then said suddenly, "W-won't speak about it—will you, Cynthy?"

"You know I won't," she answered.

Let it not be thought by any chance that Coniston was given over to revelry and late hours, even on the Fourth of July. By ten o'clock the lights were out in the tannery house, but Cynthia was not asleep. She sat at her window watching the shy moon peeping over Coniston ridge, and she was thinking, to be exact, of how much could happen in one short day and how little in a long month. She was aroused by the sound of wheels and the soft beat of a horse's hoofs on the dirt road: then came stifled laughter, and suddenly she sprang up alert and tingling. Her own name came floating to her through the darkness.

The next thing that happened will be long remembered in Coniston. A tentative chord or two from a guitar, and then the startled village was listening with all its might to the voices of two young men singing "When I first went up to Harvard"—probably meant to disclose the identity of the serenaders, as if that were necessary! Coniston, never having listened to grand opera, was entertained and thrilled, and thought the rendering of the song better on the whole than the church choir could have done it, or even the quartette that sung at the Brampton celebrations behind the flowers. Cynthia had her own views on the subject.

There were five other songs—Cynthia remembers all of them, although she would not confess such a thing. "Naughty, naughty Clara," was another one; the other three were almost wholly about love, some treating it flippantly, others seriously—this applied to the last one, which had many farewells in it. Then they went away, and the crickets and frogs on Coniston Water took up the refrain.

Although the occurrence was unusual,—it might almost be said epoch-making,—Jethro did not speak of it until they had reached the sparkling heights of Thousand Acre Hill the next morning. Even then he did not look at Cynthia.

"Know who that was last night, Cynthy?" he inquired, as though the matter were a casual one.

"I believe," said Cynthia heroically, "I believe it was a boy named Somers Duncan—and Bob Worthington."

"Er—Bob Worthington," repeated Jethro, but said nothing more.

Of course Coniston, and presently Brampton, knew that Bob Worthington had serenaded Cynthia—and Coniston and Brampton talked. It is noteworthy that (with the jocular exceptions of Ephraim and Lem Hallowell) they did not talk to the girl herself. The painter had long ago discovered that Cynthia was an individual. She had good blood in her: as a mere child she had shouldered the responsibility of her father; she had a natural aptitude for books—a quality revered in the community; she visited, as a matter of habit; the sick and the unfortunate; and lastly (perhaps the crowning achievement) she had bound Jethro Bass, of all men, with the fetters of love. Of course I have ended up by making her a paragon, although I am merely stating what people thought of her. Coniston decided at once that she was to marry the heir to the Brampton Mills.

But the heir had gone West, and as the summer wore on, the gossip died down. Other and more absorbing gossip took its place: never distinctly formulated, but whispered; always wishing for more definite news that never came. The statesmen drove out from Brampton to the door of the tannery house, as usual, only it was remarked by astute observers and Jake Wheeler that certain statesmen did not come who had been in the habit of coming formerly. In short, those who made it a custom to observe such matters felt vaguely a disturbance of some kind. The organs of the people felt it, and became more guarded in their statements. What no one knew, except Jake and a few in high places, was that a war of no mean magnitude was impending.

There were three men in the State—and perhaps only three—who realized from the first that all former political combats would pale in comparison to this one to come. Similar wars had already started in other states, and when at length they were fought out another twist had been given to the tail of a long-suffering Constitution; political history in the United States had to be written from an entirely new and unforeseen standpoint, and the unsuspecting people had changed masters.

This was to be a war of extermination of one side or the other. No quarter would be given or asked, and every weapon hitherto known to politics would be used. Of the three men who realized this, and all that would happen if one side or the other were victorious, one was Alexander Duncan, another Isaac D. Worthington, and the third was Jethro Bass.

Jethro would never have been capable of being master of the state had he not foreseen the time when the railroads, tired of paying tribute, would turn and try to exterminate the boss. The really astonishing thing about Jethro's foresight (known to few only) was that he perceived clearly that the time would come when the railroads and other aggregations of capital would exterminate the boss, or at least

subserviate him. This alone, the writer thinks, gives him some right to greatness. And Jethro Bass made up his mind that the victory of the railroads, in his state at least, should not come in his day. He would hold and keep what he had fought all his life to gain.

Jethro knew, when Jake Wheeler failed to bring him a message back from Clovelly, that the war had begun, and that Isaac D. Worthington, commander of the railroad forces in the field, had captured his pawn, the hill-Rajah. By getting through to Harwich, the Truro had made a sad muddle in railroad affairs. It was now a connecting link; and its president, the first citizen of Brampton, a man of no small importance in the state. This fact was not lost upon Jethro, who perceived clearly enough the fight for consolidation that was coming in the next Legislature.

Seated on an old haystack on Thousand Acre Hill, that sits in turn on the lap of Coniston, Jethro smiled as he reflected that the first trial of strength in this mighty struggle was to be over (what the unsuspecting world would deem a trivial matter) the postmastership of Brampton. And Worthington's first move in the game would be to attempt to capture for his faction the support of the Administration itself.

Jethro thought the view from Thousand Acre Hill, especially in September, to be one of the sublimest efforts of the Creator. It was September, first of the purple months in Coniston, not the red-purple of the Maine coast, but the blue-purple of the mountain, the color of the bloom on the Concord grape. His eyes, sweeping the mountain from the notch to the granite ramp of the northern buttress, fell on the weather-beaten little farmhouse in which he had lived for many years, and rested lovingly on the orchard, where the golden early apples shone among the leaves. But Jethro was not looking at the apples.

"Cynthy," he called out abruptly, "h-how'd you like to go to Washington?"

"Washington!" exclaimed Cynthia. "When?"

"N-now—to-morrow." Then he added uneasily, "C-can't you get ready?"

Cynthia laughed.

"Why, I'll go to-night, Uncle Jethro," she answered.

"Well," he said admiringly, "you hain't one of them clutterin' females. We can get some finery for you in New York, Cynthy. D-don't want any of them town ladies to put you to shame. Er—not that they would," he added hastily—"not that they would."

Cynthia climbed up beside him on the haystack.

"Uncle Jethro," she said solemnly, "when you make a senator or a judge, I don't interfere, do I?"

He looked at her uneasily, for there were moments when he could not for the life of him make out her drift.

"N-no," he assented, "of course not, Cynthy."

"Why is it that I don't interfere?"

"I callate," answered Jethro, still more uneasily, "I callate it's because you're a woman."

"And don't you think," asked Cynthia, "that a woman ought to know what becomes her best?"

Jethro reflected, and then his glance fell on her approvingly.

"G-guess you're right, Cynthy," he said. "I always had some success in dressin' up Listy, and that kind of set me up."

On such occasions he spoke of his wife quite simply. He had been genuinely fond of her, although she was no more than an episode in his life. Cynthia smiled to herself as they walked through the orchard to the place where the horse was tied, but she was a little remorseful. This feeling, on the drive homeward, was swept away by sheer elation at the prospect of the trip before her. She had often dreamed of the great world beyond Coniston, and no one, not even Jethro, had guessed the longings to see it which had at times beset her. Often she had dropped her book to summon up a picture of what a great city was like, to reconstruct the Boston of her early childhood. She remembered the Mall, where she used to walk with her father, and the row of houses where the rich dwelt, which had seemed like palaces. Indeed, when she read of palaces, these houses always came to her mind. And now she was to behold a palace even greater than these,—and the house where the President himself dwelt. But why was Jethro going to Washington?

As if in answer to the question, he drove directly to the harness shop instead of to the tannery house. Ephraim greeted them from within with a cheery hail, and hobbled out and stood between the wheels of the buggy.

"That bridle bust again?" he inquired.

"Er—Ephraim," said Jethro, "how long since you b'en away from Coniston—how long?"

Ephraim reflected.

"I went to Harwich with Moses before that bad spell I had in March," he answered.

Cynthia smiled from pure happiness, for she began to see the drift of things now.

"H-how long since you've b'en in foreign parts?" said Jethro.

"Sixty-five," answered Ephraim, with astonishing promptness.

"Er—like to go to Washington with us to-morrow like to go to Washington?"

Ephraim gasped, even as Cynthia had.

"Washin'ton!" he ejaculated.

"Cynthy and I was thinkin' of takin' a little trip," said Jethro, almost apologetically, "and we kind of thought we'd like to have you with us. Didn't we, Cynthy? Er—we might see General Grant," he added meaningly.

Ephraim was a New Englander, and not an adept in expressing his emotions. Both Cynthia and Jethro felt that he would have liked to have said something appropriate if he had known how. What he actually said was:—"What time to-morrow?"

"C-callate to take the nine o'clock from Brampton," said Jethro.

"I'll report for duty at seven," said Ephraim, and it was then he squeezed the hand that he found in his. He watched them calmly enough until they had disappeared in the barn behind the tannery house, and then his thoughts became riotous. Rumors had been rife that summer, prophecies of changes to come, and the resignation of the old man who had so long been postmaster at Brampton was freely discussed—or rather the matter of his successor. As the months passed, Ephraim had heard David Wheelock mentioned with more and more assurance for the place. He had had many nights when sleep failed him, but it was characteristic of the old soldier that he had never once broached the subject since Jethro had spoken to him two months before. Ephraim had even looked up the law to see if he was eligible, and found that he was, since Coniston had no post-office, and was within the limits of delivery of the Brampton office.

The next morning Coniston was treated to a genuine surprise. After loading up at the store, Lem Hollowell, instead of heading for Brampton, drove to the tannery house, left his horses standing as he ran in, and presently emerged with a little cowhide trunk that bore the letter W. Following the trunk came a radiant Cynthia, following Cynthia, Jethro Bass in a stove-pipe hat, with a carpetbag, and hobbling after Jethro, Ephraim Prescott, with another carpet-bag. It was remarked in the buzz of query that followed the stage's departure that Ephraim wore the blue suit and the army hat with a cord around it which he kept for occasions. Coniston longed to follow them, in spirit at least, but even Milly Skinner did not know their destination.

Fortunately we can follow them. At Brampton station they got into the little train that had just come over Truro Pass, and steamed, with many stops, down the valley of Coniston Water until it stretched out into a wide range of shimmering green meadows guarded by blue hills veiled in the morning haze. Then, bustling Harwich, and a wait of half an hour until the express from the north country came thundering through the Gap; then a five-hours' journey down the broad river that runs southward between the hills, dinner in a huge station amidst a pleasant buzz of excitement and the ringing of many bells. Then into another train, through valleys and factory towns and cities until they came, at nightfall, to the metropolis itself.

Cynthia will always remember the awe with which that first view of New York inspired her, and Ephraim confessed that he, too, had felt it, when he had first seen the myriad lights of the city after the long, dusty ride from the hills with his regiment. For all the flags and bunting it had held in '61,

Ephraim thought that city crueller than war itself. And Cynthia thought so too, as she clung to Jethro's arm between the carriages and the clanging street-cars, and looked upon the riches and poverty around her. There entered her soul that night a sense of that which is the worst cruelty of all—the cruelty of selfishness. Every man going his own pace, seeking to gratify his own aims and desires, unconscious and heedless of the want with which he rubs elbows. Her natural imagination enhanced by her life among the hills, the girl peopled the place in the street lights with all kinds of strange evil-doers of whose sins she knew nothing, adventurers, charlatans, alert cormorants, who preyed upon the unwary. She shrank closer to Ephraim from a perfumed lady who sat next to her in the car, and was thankful when at last they found themselves in the corridor of the Astor House standing before the desk.

Hotel clerks, especially city ones, are supernatural persons. This one knew Jethro, greeted him deferentially as Judge Bass, and dipped the pen in the ink and handed it to him that he might register. By half-past nine Cynthia was dreaming of Lem Hallowell and Coniston, and Lem was driving a yellow street-car full of queer people down the road to Brampton.

There were few guests in the great dining room when they breakfasted at seven the next morning. New York, in the sunlight, had taken on a more kindly expression, and those who were near by smiled at them and seemed full of good-will. Persons smiled at them that day as they walked the streets or stood spellbound before the shop windows, and some who saw them felt a lump rise in their throats at the memories they aroused of forgotten days: the three seemed to bring the very air of the hills with them into that teeming place, and many who, had come to the city with high hopes, now in the shackles of drudgery; looked after them. They were a curious party, indeed: the straight, dark girl with the light in her eyes and the color in her cheeks; the quaint, rugged figure of the elderly man in his swallow-tail and brass buttons and square-toed, country boots; and the old soldier hobbling along with the aid of his green umbrella, clad in the blue he had loved and suffered for. Had they remained until Sunday, they might have read an amusing account of their visit,—of Jethro's suppers of crackers and milk at the Astor House, of their progress along Broadway. The story was not lacking in pathos, either, and in real human feeling, for the young reporter who wrote it had come, not many years before, from the hills himself. But by that time they had accomplished another marvellous span in their journey, and were come to Washington itself.

CHAPTER IV

Cynthia was deprived, too, of that thrilling first view of the capital from the train which she had pictured, for night had fallen when they reached Washington likewise. As the train slowed down, she leaned a little out of the window and looked at the shabby houses and shabby streets revealed by the flickering lights in the lamp-posts. Finally they came to a shabby station, were seized upon by a grinning darky hackman, who would not take no for an answer, and were rattled away to the hotel. Although he had been to Washington but once in his life before, as a Lincoln elector, Jethro was greeted as an old acquaintance by this clerk also.

"Glad to see you, Judge," said he, genially. "Train late? You've come purty nigh, missin' supper."

A familiar of great men, the clerk was not offended when he got no response to his welcome. Cynthia and Ephraim, intent on getting rid of some of the dust of their journey, followed the colored hallboy up the stairs. Jethro stood poring over the register, when a distinguished-looking elderly gentleman with a heavy gray beard and eyes full of shrewdness and humor paused at the desk to ask a question.

"Er—Senator?"

The senator (for such he was, although he did not represent Jethro's state) turned and stared, and then held out his hand with unmistakable warmth.

"Jethro Bass," he exclaimed, "upon my word! What are you doing in Washington?"

Jethro took the hand, but he did not answer the question.

"Er—Senator—when can I see the President?"

"Why," answered the senator, somewhat taken aback, "why, to-night, if you like. I'm going to the

White House in a few minutes and I think I can arrange it."

"T-to-morrow afternoon—t-to-morrow afternoon?"

The senator cast his eye over the swallow-tail coat and stove-pipe hat tilted back, and laughed.

"Thunder!" he exclaimed, "you haven't changed a bit. I'm beginning to look like an old man; but that milk-and-crackers diet seems to keep you young, Jethro. I'll fix it for to-morrow afternoon."

"W-what time—two?"

"Well, I'll fix it for two to-morrow afternoon. I never could understand you, Jethro; you don't do things like other men. Do I smell gunpowder? What's up now—what do you want to see Grant about?"

Jethro cast his eye around the corridor, where a few men were taking their ease after supper, and looked at the senator mysteriously.

"Any place where we can talk?" he demanded.

"We can go into the writing room and shut the door," answered the senator, more amused than ever.

When Cynthia came downstairs, Jethro was standing with the gentleman in the corridor leading to the dining room, and she heard the gentleman say as he took his departure:—"I haven't forgotten what you did for us in '70, Jethro. I'll go right along and see to it now."

Cynthia liked the gentleman's looks, and rightly surmised that he was one of the big men of the nation. She was about to ask Jethro his name when Ephraim came limping along and put the matter out of her mind, and the three went into the almost empty dining room. There they were served with elaborate attention by a darky waiter who had, in some mysterious way, learned Jethro's name and title. Cynthia reflected with pride that Jethro, too, was one of the nation's great men, who could get anything he wanted simply by coming to the capital and asking for it.

Ephraim was very much excited on finding himself in Washington, the sight of the place reviving in his mind a score of forgotten incidents of the war. After supper they found seats in a corner of the corridor, where a number of people were scattered about, smoking and talking. It did not occur to Jethro or Cynthia, or even to Ephraim, that these people were all of the male sex, and on the other hand the guests of the hotel were apparently used once in a while to see a lady from the country seated there. At any rate, Cynthia was but a young girl, and her two companions, however unusual their appearance, were clearly most respectable. Jethro, his hands in his pockets and his hat tilted, sat on the small of his back rapt in meditation; Cynthia, her head awhirl, looked around her with sparkling eyes; while Ephraim was smoking a cigar he had saved for just such a festal occasion. He did not see the stout man with the button and corded hat until he was almost on top of him.

"Eph Prescott, I believe!" exclaimed the stout one. "How be you, Comrade?"

Heedless of his rheumatism, Ephraim sprang to his feet and dropped the cigar, which the stout one picked up with much difficulty.

"Well," said Ephraim, in a voice that shook with unwonted emotion, "you kin skin me if it ain't Amasy Beard!" His eye travelled around Amasa's figure. "Wouldn't a-knowed you, I swan, I wouldn't. Why, when I seen you last, Amasy, your stomach was havin' all it could do to git hold of your backbone."

Cynthia laughed outright, and even Jethro sat up and smiled.

"When was it?" said Amasa, still clinging on to Ephraim's hand and incidentally to the cigar, which Ephraim had forgotten; "Beaver Creek, wahn't it?"

"July 10, 1863," said Ephraim, instantly.

Gradually they reached a sitting position, the cigar was restored to its rightful owner, and Mr. Beard was introduced, with some ceremony, to Cynthia and Jethro. From Beaver Creek they began to fight the war over again, backward and forward, much to Cynthia's edification, when her attention was distracted by the entrance of a street band of wind instruments. As the musicians made their way to another corner and began tuning up, she glanced mischievously at Jethro, for she knew his peculiarities by heart. One of these was a most violent detestation of any but the best music. He had often given her this excuse, laughingly, for not going to meeting in Coniston. How he had come by his love for good music, Cynthia never knew—he certainly had not heard much of it.

Suddenly a great volume of sound filled the corridor, and the band burst forth into what many

supposed to be "The Watch on the Rhine." Some people were plainly delighted; the veterans, once recovered from their surprise, shouted their reminiscences above the music, undismayed; Jethro held on to himself until the refrain, when he began to squirm, and as soon as the tune was done and the scattering applause had died down, he reached over and grabbed Mr. Amasa Beard by the knee. Mr. Beard did not immediately respond, being at that moment behind logworks facing a rebel charge; he felt vaguely that some one was trying to distract his attention, and in some lobe of his brain was registered the fact that that particular knee had gout in it. Jethro increased the pressure, and then Mr. Beard abandoned his logworks and swung around with a snort of pain.

"H-how much do they git for that noise—h-how much do they git?"

Mr. Beard tenderly lifted the hand from his knee and stared at Jethro with his mouth open, like a man aroused from a bad dream.

"Who? What noise?" he demanded.

"The Dutchmen," said Jethro. "H-how much do they git for that noise?"

"Oh!" Mr. Beard glanced at the band and began to laugh. He thought Jethro a queer customer, no doubt, but he was a friend of Comrade Prescott's. "By gum!" said Mr. Beard, "I thought for a minute a rebel chain-shot had took my leg off. Well, sir, I guess that band gets about two dollars. They've come in here every evening since I've been at the hotel."

"T-two dollars? Is that the price? Er—you say two dollars is their price?"

"Thereabouts," answered Mr. Beard, uneasily. Veteran as he was, Jethro's appearance and earnestness were a little alarming.

"You say two dollars is their price?"

"Thereabouts," shouted Mr. Beard, seating himself on the edge of his chair.

But Jethro paid no attention to him. He rose, unfolding by degrees his six feet two, and strode diagonally across the corridor toward the band leader. Conversation was hushed at the sight of his figure, a titter ran around the walls, but Jethro was oblivious to these things. He drew a great calfskin wallet from an inside pocket of his coat, and the band leader, a florid German, laid down his instrument and made an elaborate bow. Jethro waited until the man had become upright and then held out a two-dollar bill.

"Is that about right for the performance?" he said "is that about right?"

"Ja, mein Herr," said the man, nodding vociferously.

"I want to pay what's right—I want to pay what's right," said Jethro.

"I thank you very much, sir," said the leader, finding his English, "you haf pay for all."

"P-paid for everything—everything to-night?" demanded Jethro.

The leader spread out his hands.

"You haf pay for one whole evening," said he, and bowed again.

"Then take it, take it," said Jethro, pushing the bill into the man's palm; "but don't you come back to-night—don't you come back to-night."

The amazed leader stared at Jethro—and words failed him. There was something about this man that compelled him to obey, and he gathered up his followers and led the way silently out of the hotel. Roars of laughter and applause arose on all sides; but Jethro was as one who heard them not as he made his way back to his seat again.

"You did a good job, my friend," said Mr. Beard, approvingly. "I'm going to take Eph Prescott down the street to see some of the boys. Won't you come, too?"

Mr. Beard doubtless accepted it as one of the man's eccentricities that Jethro did not respond to him, for without more ado he departed arm in arm with Ephraim. Jethro was looking at Cynthia, who was staring toward the desk at the other end of the corridor, her face flushed, and her fingers closed over the arms of her chair. It never occurred to Jethro that she might have been embarrassed.

"W-what's the matter, Cynthia?" he asked, sinking into the chair beside her.

Her breath caught sharply, but she tried to smile at him. He did not discover what was the matter until long afterward, when he recalled that evening to mind. Jethro was a man used to hotel corridors, used to sitting in an attitude that led the unsuspecting to believe he was half asleep; but no person of note could come or go whom he did not remember. He had seen the distinguished party arrive at the desk, preceded by a host of bell-boys with shawls and luggage. On the other hand, some of the distinguished party had watched the proceeding of paying off the band with no little amusement. Miss Janet Duncan had giggled audibly, her mother had smiled, while her father and Mr. Worthington had pretended to be deeply occupied with the hotel register. Somers was not there. Bob Worthington laughed heartily with the rest until his eye, travelling down the line of Jethro's progress, fell on Cynthia, and now he was striding across the floor toward them. And even in the horrible confusion of that moment Cynthia had a vagrant thought that his clothes had an enviable cut and became him remarkably.

"Well, of all things, to find you here!" he cried; "this is the best luck that ever happened. I am glad to see you. I was going to steal away to Brampton for a couple of days before the term opened, and I meant to look you up there. And Mr. Bass," said Bob, turning to Jethro, "I'm glad to see you too."

Jethro looked at the young man and smiled and held out his hand. It was evident that Bob was blissfully unaware that hostilities between powers of no mean magnitude were about to begin; that the generals themselves were on the ground, and that he was holding treasonable parley with the enemy. The situation appealed to Jethro, especially as he glanced at the backs of the two gentlemen facing the desk. These backs seemed to him full of expression. "Th-thank you, Bob, th-thank you," he answered.

"I like the way you fixed that band," said Bob; "I haven't laughed as much for a year. You hate music, don't you? I hope you'll forgive that awful noise we made outside of your house last July, Mr. Bass."

"You—you make that noise, Bob, you—you make that?"

"Well," said Bob, "I'm afraid I did most of it. There was another fellow that helped some and played the guitar. It was pretty bad," he added, with a side glance at Cynthia, "but it was meant for a compliment."

"Oh," said she, "it was meant for a compliment, was it?"

"Of course," he answered, glad of the opportunity to turn his attention entirely to her. "I was for slipping away right after supper, but my father headed us off."

"Slipping away?" repeated Cynthia.

"You see, he had a kind of a reception and fireworks afterward. We didn't get away till after nine, and then I thought I'd have a lecture when I got home."

"Did you?" asked Cynthia.

"No," said Bob, "he didn't know where I'd been."

Cynthia felt the blood rush to her temples, but by habit and instinct she knew when to restrain herself.

"Would it have made any difference to him where you had been?" she asked calmly enough.

Bob had a presentiment that he was on dangerous ground. This new and self-possessed Cynthia was an enigma to him—certainly a fascinating enigma.

"My father would have thought I was a fool to go off serenading," he answered, flushing. Bob did not like a lie; he knew that his father would have been angry if he had heard he had gone to Coniston; he felt, in the small of his back, that his father was angry now, and guessed the reason.

She regarded him gravely as he spoke, and then her eyes left his face and became fixed upon an object at the far end of the corridor. Bob turned in time to see Janet Duncan swing on her heel and follow her mother up the stairs. He struggled to find words to tide over what he felt was an awkward moment.

"We've had a fine trip;" he said, "though I should much rather have stayed at home. The West is a wonderful country, with its canons and mountains and great stretches of plain. My father met us in Chicago, and we came here. I don't know why, because Washington's dead at this time of the year. I suppose it must be on account of politics." Looking at Jethro with a sudden inspiration, "I hadn't thought of that."

Jethro had betrayed no interest in the conversation. He was seated, as usual, on the small of his back. But he saw a young man of short stature, with a freckled face and close-cropped, curly red hair, come into the corridor by another entrance; he saw Isaac D. Worthington draw him aside and speak to him, and he saw the young man coming towards them.

"How do you do, Miss Wetherell?" cried the young man joyously, while still ten feet away, "I'm awfully glad to see you, upon my word; I am. How long are you going to be in Washington?"

"I don't know, Mr. Duncan," answered Cynthia.

"Did Worthy know you were here?" demanded Mr. Duncan, suspiciously.

"He did when he saw me," said Cynthia, smiling.

"Not till then?" asked Mr. Duncan. "Say, Worthy; your father wants to see you right away. I'm going to be in Washington a day or two—will you go walking with me to-morrow morning, Miss Wetherell?"

"She's going walking with me," said Bob, not in the best of tempers.

"Then I'll go along," said Mr. Duncan, promptly.

By this time Cynthia got up and was holding out her hand to Bob Worthington. "I'm not going walking with either of you," she said "I have another engagement. And I think I'll have to say good night, because I'm very tired."

"When can I see you?" Both the young men asked the question at once.

"Oh, you'll have plenty of chances," she answered, and was gone.

The young men looked at each other somewhat blankly; and then down at Jethro, who did not seem to know that they were there, and then they made their way toward the desk. But Isaac D. Worthington and his friends had disappeared.

A few minutes later the distinguished-looking senator with whom Jethro had been in conversation before supper entered the hotel. He seemed preoccupied, and heedless of the salutations he received; but when he caught sight of Jethro he crossed the corridor rapidly and sat down beside him. Jethro did not move. The corridor was deserted now, save for the two.

"Bass," began the senator, "what's the row up in your state?"

"H-haven't heard of any row," said Jethro.

"What did you come to Washington for?" demanded the senator, somewhat sharply.

"Er—vacation," said Jethro, "vacation—to show my gal, Cynthy, the capital."

"Now see here, Bass," said the senator, "I don't forget what happened in '70. I don't object to wading through a swarm of bees to get a little honey for a friend, but I think I'm entitled to know why he wants it."

"G-got the honey?" asked Jethro.

The senator took off his hat and wiped his brow, and then he stole a look at Jethro, with apparently barren results.

"Jethro," he said, "people say you run that state of yours right up to the handle. What's all this trouble about a two-for-a-cent postmastership?"

"H-haven't heard of any trouble," said Jethro.

"Well, there is trouble," said the senator, losing patience at last. "When I told Grant you were here and mentioned that little Brampton matter to him,—it didn't seem much to me,—the bees began to fly pretty thick, I can tell you. I saw right away that somebody had been stirring 'em up. It looks to me, Jethro," said the senator gravely, "it looks to me as if you had something of a rebellion on your hands."

"W-what'd Grant say?" Jethro inquired.

"Well, he didn't say a great deal—he isn't much of a talker, you know, but what he did say was to the point. It seems that your man, Prescott, doesn't come from Brampton, in the first place, and Grant says that while he likes soldiers, he hasn't any use for the kind that want to lie down and make the government support 'em. I'll tell you what I found out. Worthington and Duncan wired the President

this morning, and they've gone up to the White House now. They've got a lot of railroad interests back of them, and they've taken your friend Sutton into camp; but I managed to get the President to promise not to do anything until he saw you tomorrow afternoon at two."

Jethro sat silent so long that the senator began to think he wasn't going to answer him at all. In his opinion, he had told Jethro some very grave facts.

"W-when are you going to see the President again?" said Jethro, at last.

"To-morrow morning," answered the senator; "he wants me to walk over with him to see the postmaster-general, who is sick in bed."

"What time do you leave the White House?—"

"At eleven," said the senator, very much puzzled.

"Er—Grant ever pay any attention to an old soldier on the street?"

The senator glanced at Jethro, and a twinkle came into his eye.

"Sometimes he has been known to," he answered.

"You—you ever pay any attention to an old soldier on the street?"

Then the senator's eyes began to snap.

"Sometimes I have been known to."

"Er—suppose an old soldier was in front of the White House at eleven o'clock—an old soldier with a gal suppose?"

The senator saw the point, and took no pains to restrain his admiration.

"Jethro," he said, slapping him on the shoulder, "I'm willing to bet a few thousand dollars you'll run your state for a while yet."

CHAPTER V

"Heard you say you was goin' for a walk this morning, Cynthy," Jethro remarked, as they sat at breakfast the next morning.

"Why, of course," answered Cynthia, "Cousin Eph and I are going out to see Washington, and he is to show me the places that he remembers." She looked at Jethro appealingly. "Aren't you coming with us?" she asked.

"M-meet you at eleven, Cynthy," he said.

"Eleven!" exclaimed Cynthia in dismay, "that's almost dinner-time."

"M-meet you in front of the White House at eleven," said Jethro, "plumb in front of it, under a tree."

By half-past seven, Cynthia and Ephraim with his green umbrella were in the street, but it would be useless to burden these pages with a description of all the sights they saw, and with the things that Ephraim said about them, and incidentally about the war. After New York, much of Washington would then have seemed small and ragged to any one who lacked ideals and a national sense, but Washington was to Cynthia as Athens to a Greek. To her the marble Capitol shining on its hill was a sacred temple, and the great shaft that struck upward through the sunlight, though yet unfinished, a fitting memorial to him who had led the barefoot soldiers of the colonies through ridicule to victory. They looked up many institutions and monument, they even had time to go to the Navy Yard, and they saved the contemplation of the White House till the last. The White House, which Cynthia thought the finest and most graceful mansion in all the world, in its simplicity and dignity, a fitting dwelling for the chosen of the nation. Under the little tree which Jethro had mentioned, Ephraim stood bareheaded before the walls which had sheltered Lincoln, which were now the home of the greatest of his captains, Grant: and wondrous emotions played upon the girl's spirit, too, as she gazed. They forgot the present in the past and the future, and they did not see the two gentlemen who had left the portico some minutes before

and were now coming toward them along the sidewalk.

The two gentlemen, however, slowed their steps involuntarily at a sight which was uncommon, even in Washington. The girl's arm was in the soldier's, and her face, which even in repose had a true nobility, now was alight with an inspiration that is seen but seldom in a lifetime. In marble, could it have been wrought by a great sculptor, men would have dreamed before it of high things.

The two, indeed, might have stood for a group, the girl as the spirit, the man as the body which had risked and suffered all for it, and still held it fast. For the honest face of the soldier reflected that spirit as truly as a mirror.

Ephraim was aroused from his thoughts by Cynthia nudging his arm. He started, put on his hat, and stared very hard at a man smoking a cigar who was standing before him. Then he stiffened and raised his hand in an involuntary salute. The man smiled. He was not very tall, he had a closely trimmed light beard that was growing a little gray, he wore a soft hat something like Ephraim's, a black tie on a white pleated shirt, and his eyeglasses were pinned to his vest. His eyes were all kindness.

"How do you do, Comrade?" he said, holding out his hand.

"General," said Ephraim, "Mr. President," he added, correcting himself, "how be you?" He shifted the green umbrella, and shook the hand timidly but warmly.

"General will do," said the President, with a smiling glance at the tall senator beside him, "I like to be called General."

"You've growed some older, General," said Ephraim, scanning his face with a simple reverence and affection, "but you hain't changed so much as I'd a thought since I saw you whittlin' under a tree beside the Lacy house in the Wilderness."

"My duty has changed some," answered the President, quite as simply. He added with a touch of sadness, "I liked those days best, Comrade."

"Well, I guess!" exclaimed Ephraim, "you're general over everything now, but you're not a mite bigger man to me than you was."

The President took the compliment as it was meant.

"I found it easier to run an army than I do to run a country," he said.

Ephraim's blue eyes flamed with indignation.

"I don't take no stock in the bull-dogs and the gold harness at Long Branch and—and all them lies the dratted newspapers print about you,"—Ephraim hammered his umbrella on the pavement as an expression of his feelings,—and what's more, the people don't."

The President glanced at the senator again, and laughed a little, quietly.

"Thank you; Comrade," he said.

"You're a plain, common man," continued Ephraim, paying the highest compliment known to rural New England; "the people think a sight of you, or they wouldn't hev chose you twice, General."

"So you were in the Wilderness?" said the President, adroitly changing the subject.

"Yes, General. I was pressed into orderly duty the first day—that's when I saw you whittlin' under the tree, and you didn't seem to have no more consarn than if it had been a company drill. Had a cigar then, too. But the second day; May the 6th, I was with the regiment. I'll never forget that day," said Ephraim, warming to the subject, "when we was fightin' Ewell up and down the Orange Plank Road, playin' hide-and-seek with the Johnnies in the woods. You remember them woods, General?"

The President nodded, his cigar between his teeth. He looked as though the scene were coming back to him.

"Never seen such woods," said Ephraim, "scrub oak and pine and cedars and young stuff springin' up until you couldn't see the length of a company, and the Rebs jumpin' and hollerin' around and shoutin' every which way. After a while a lot of them saplings was mowed off clean by the bullets, and then the woods caught afire, and that was hell."

"Were you wounded?" asked the President, quickly.

"I was hurt some, in the hip," answered Ephraim.

"Some!" exclaimed Cynthia, "why, you have walked lame ever since." She knew the story by heart, but the recital of it never failed to stir her blood! They carried him out just as he was going to be burned up, in a blanket hung from rifles, and he was in the hospital nine months, and had to come home for a while."

"Cynthy," said Ephraim in gentle reproof, "I callate the General don't want to hear that."

Cynthia flushed, but the President looked at her with an added interest.

"My dear young lady," he said, "that seems to me the vital part of the story. If I remember rightly," he added, turning again to Ephraim, "the Fifth Corps was on the Orange turnpike. What brigade were you in?"

"The third brigade of the First Division," answered Ephraim.

"Griffin's," said the President. "There were several splendid New England regiments in that brigade. I sent them with Griffin to help Sheridan at Five Forks."

"I was thar too," cried Ephraim.

"What!" said the President, "with the lame hip?"

"Well, General, I went back, I couldn't help it. I couldn't stay away from the boys—just couldn't. I didn't limp as bad then as I do now. I wahn't much use anywhere else, and I had l'arned to fight. Five Forks!" exclaimed Ephraim. "I call that day to mind as if it was yesterday. I remember how the boys yelled when they told us we was goin' to Sheridan. We got started about daylight, and it took us till four o'clock in the afternoon to git into position. The woods was just comin' a little green, and the white dogwoods was bloomin' around. Sheridan, he galloped up to the line with that black horse of his'n and hollered out, 'Come on, boys, go in at a clean, jump or You won't ketch one of 'em.' You know how men, even veterans like that Fifth Corps, sometimes hev to be pushed into a fight. There was a man from a Maine regiment got shot in the head fust thing. 'I'm killed,' said he. 'Oh, no, you're not,' says Sheridan, 'pickup your gun and go for 'em.' But he was killed. Well, we went for 'em through all the swamps and briers and everything, and Sheridan, thar in front, had got the battle-flag and was rushin' round with it swearin' and prayin' and shoutin', and the first thing we knowed he'd jumped his horse clean over their logworks and landed right on top of the Johnnie's."

"Yes," said the President, "that was Sheridan, sure enough."

"Mr. President," said the senator, who stood by wonderingly while General Grant had lost himself in this conversation, "do you realize what time it is?"

"Yes, yes," said the President, "we must go on. What was your rank, Comrade?"

"Sergeant, General."

"I hope you have got a good pension for that hip," said the President, kindly. It may be well to add that he was not always so incautious, but this soldier bore the unmistakable stamp of simplicity and sincerity on his face.

Ephraim hesitated.

"He never would ask for a pension, General," said Cynthia.

"What!" exclaimed the President in real astonishment, "are you so rich as all that?" and he glanced at the green umbrella.

"Well, General," said Ephraim, uncomfortably, "I never liked the notion of gittin' paid for it. You see, I was what they call a war-Democrat."

"Good Lord!" said the President, but more to himself. "What do you do now?"

"I callate to make harness," answered Ephraim.

"Only he can't make it any more on account of his rheumatism, Mr. President," Cynthia put in.

"I think you might call me General, too," he said, with the grace that many simple people found

inherent in him. "And may I ask your name, young lady?"

"Cynthia Wetherell—General," she said smiling.

"That sounds more natural," said the President, and then to Ephraim, "Your daughter?"

"I couldn't think more of her if she was," answered Ephraim; "Cynthy's pulled me through some tight spells. Her mother was my cousin, General. My name's Prescott—Ephraim Prescott."

"Ephraim Prescott!" ejaculated the President, sharply, taking his cigar from his mouth, "Ephraim Prescott!"

"Prescott—that's right—Prescott, General," repeated Ephraim, sorely puzzled by these manifestations of amazement.

"What did you come to Washington for?" asked the President.

"Well, General, I kind of hate to tell you—I didn't intend to mention that. I guess I won't say nothin' about it," he added, "we've had such a sociable time. I've always b'en a little mite ashamed of it, General, ever since 'twas first mentioned."

"Good Lord!" said the President again, and then he looked at Cynthia. "What is it, Miss Cynthia?" he asked.

It was now Cynthia's turn to be a little confused.

"Uncle Jethro—that is, Mr. Bass" (the President nodded), "went to Cousin Eph when he couldn't make harness any more and said he'd give him the Brampton post-office."

The President's eyes met the senator's, and both gentlemen laughed. Cynthia bit her lip, not seeing any cause for mirth in her remark, while Ephraim looked uncomfortable and mopped the perspiration from his brow.

"He said he'd give it to him, did he?" said the President. "Is Mr. Bass your uncle?"

"Oh, no, General," replied Cynthia, "he's really no relation. He's done everything for me, and I live with him since my father died. He was going to meet us here," she continued, looking around hurriedly, "I'm sure I can't think what's kept him."

"Mr. President, we are half an hour late already," said the senator, hurriedly.

"Well, well," said the President, "I suppose I must go. Good-by, Miss Cynthia," said he, taking the girl's hand warmly. "Good-by, Comrade. If ever you want to see General Grant, just send in your name. Good-by."

The President lifted his hat politely to Cynthia and passed. He said something to the senator which they did not hear, and the senator laughed heartily. Ephraim and Cynthia watched them until they were out of sight.

"Godfrey!" exclaimed Ephraim, "they told me he was hard to talk to. Why, Cynthy, he's as simple as a child."

"I've always thought that all great men must be simple," said Cynthia; "Uncle Jethro is."

"To think that the President of the United States stood talkin' to us on the sidewalk for half an hour," said Ephraim, clutching Cynthia's arm. "Cynthy, I'm glad we didn't press that post-office matter it was worth more to me than all the post-offices in the Union to have that talk with General Grant."

They waited some time longer under the tree, happy in the afterglow of this wonderful experience. Presently a clock struck twelve.

"Why, it's dinner-time, Cynthy," said Ephraim. "I guess Jethro haint' a-comin'—must hev b'en delayed by some of them politicians."

"It's the first time I ever knew him to miss an appointment," said Cynthia, as they walked back to the hotel.

Jethro was not in the corridor, so they passed on to the dining room and looked eagerly from group to

group. Jethro was not there, either, but Cynthia heard some one laughing above the chatter of the guests, and drew back into the corridor. She had spied the Duncans and the Worthingtons making merry by themselves at a corner table, and it was Somers's laugh that she heard. Bob, too, sitting next to Miss Duncan, was much amused about something. Suddenly Cynthia's exaltation over the incident of the morning seemed to leave her, and Bob Worthington's words which she had pondered over in the night came back to her with renewed force. He did not find it necessary to steal away to see Miss Duncan. Why should he have "stolen away" to see her? Was it because she was a country girl, and poor? That was true; but on the other hand, did she not live in the sunlight, as it were, of Uncle Jethro's greatness, and was it not an honor to come to his house and see any one? And why had Mr. Worthington turned his back on Jethro, and sent for Bob when he was talking to them? Cynthia could not understand these things, and her pride was sorely wounded by them.

"Perhaps Jethro's in his room," suggested Ephraim.

And indeed they found him there seated on the bed, poring over some newspapers, and both in a breath demanded where he had been. Ephraim did not wait for an answer.

"We seen General Grant, Jethro," he cried; "while we was waitin' for you under the tree he come up and stood talkin' to us half an hour. Full half an hour, wahn't it, Cynthy?"

"Oh, yes," answered Cynthia, forgetting her own grievance at the recollection; "only it didn't seem nearly that long."

"W-want to know!" exclaimed Jethro, in astonishment, putting down his paper. "H-how did it happen?"

"Come right up and spoke to us," said Ephraim, in a tone he might have used to describe a miracle, "jest as if he was common folk. Never had a more sociable talk with anybody. Why, there was times when I clean forgot he was President of the United States. The boys won't believe it when we git back at Coniston."

And Ephraim, full of his subject, began to recount from the beginning the marvellous affair, occasionally appealing to Cynthia for confirmation. How he had lived over again the Wilderness and Five Forks; how the General had changed since he had seen him whittling under a tree; how the General had asked about his pension.

"D-didn't mention the post-office, did you, Ephraim?"

"Why, no," replied Ephraim, "I didn't like to exactly. You see, we was havin' such a good time I didn't want to spoil it, but Cynthy—"

"I told the President about it, Uncle Jethro; I told him how sick Cousin Eph had been, and that you were going to give him the postmastership because he couldn't work any more with his hands."

The training of a lifetime had schooled Jethro not to betray surprise.

"K-kind of mixin' up in politics, hain't you, Cynthy? P-President say he'd give you the postmastership, Eph?" he asked.

"He didn't say nothin' about it, Jethro," answered Ephraim slowly; "I callate he has other views for the place, and he was too kind to come right out with 'em and spoil our mornin'. You see, Jethro, I wahn't only a sergeant, and Brampton's gittin' to be a big town."

"But, surely," cried Cynthia, who could scarcely wait for him to finish, "surely you're going to give Cousin Eph the post-office, aren't you, Uncle Jethro? All you have to do is to tell the President that you want it for him. Why, I had an idea that we came down for that."

"Now, Cynthy," Ephraim put in, deprecatingly.

"Who else would get the post-office?" asked Cynthia. "Surely you're not going to let Mr. Sutton have it for Dave Wheelock!"

"Er—Cynthy," said Jethro, slyly, "w-what'd you say to me once about interferin' with women's fixin's?"

Cynthia saw the point. She perceived also that the mazes of politics were not to be understood by a young woman, or even by an old soldier. She laughed and seized Jethro's hands and pulled him from the bed.

"We won't get any dinner unless we hurry," she said.

When they reached the dining room she was relieved to discover that the party in the corner had gone.

In the afternoon there were many more sights to be viewed, but they were back in the hotel again by half-past four, because Ephraim's Wilderness leg had its limits of endurance. Jethro (though he had not mentioned the fact to them) had gone to the White House.

It was during the slack hours that our friend the senator, whose interest in the matter of the Brampton post office out-weighed for the present certain grave problems of the Administration in which he was involved, hurried into the Willard Hotel, looking for Jethro Bass. He found him without much trouble in his usual attitude, occupying one of the chairs in the corridor.

"Well," exclaimed the senator, with a touch of eagerness he did not often betray, "did you see Grant? How about your old soldier? He's one of the most delightful characters I ever met—simple as a child," and he laughed at the recollection. "That was a masterstroke of yours, Bass, putting him under that tree with that pretty girl. I doubt if you ever did anything better in your life. Did they tell you about it?"

"Yes," said Jethro, "they told me about it."

"And how about Grant? What did he say to you?"

"W-well, I went up there and sent in my card. D-didn't have to wait a great while, as I was pretty early, and soon he came in, smokin' a black cigar, head bent forward a little. D-didn't ask me to sit down, and what talkin' we did we did standin'. D-didn't ask me what he could do for me, what I wanted, or anything else, but just stood there, and I stood there. F-fust time in my life I didn't know how to commerce or what to say; looked—looked at me—didn't take his eye off me. After a while I got started, somehow; told him I was there to ask him to appoint Ephraim Prescott to the Brampton postoffice—t-told him all about Ephraim from the time he was locked in the cradle—never was so hard put that I could remember. T-told him how Ephraim shook butternuts off my fathers tree—for all I know. T-told him all about Ephraim's war record—leastways all I could call to mind—and, by Godfrey! before I got through, I wished I'd listened to more of it. T-told him about Ephraim's Wilderness bullets—t-told him about Ephraim's rheumatism,—how it bothered him when he went to bed and when he got up again."

If Jethro had glanced at his companion, he would have seen the senator was shaking with silent and convulsive laughter.

"All the time I talked to him I didn't see a muscle move in his face," Jethro continued, "so I started in again, and he looked—looked—looked right at me. W-wouldn't wink—don't think he winked once while I was in that room. I watched him as close as I could, and I watched to see if a muscle moved or if I was makin' any impression. All he would do was to stand there and look—look—look. K-kept me there ten minutes and never opened his mouth at all. Hardest man to talk to I ever met—never see a man before but what I could get him to say somethin', if it was only a cuss word. I got tired of it after a while, made up my mind that I had found one man I couldn't move. Then what bothered me was to get out of that room. If I'd a had a Bible I believe I'd a read it to him. I didn't know what to say, but I did say this after a while:—"W-well, Mr. President, I guess I've kept you long enough—g-guess you're a pretty busy man. H-hope you'll give Mr. Prescott that postmastership. Er—er good-by.'"

"Wait, sir,' he said.

"Yes,' I said, 'I-I'll wait.'

"Thought you was goin' to give him that postmastership, Mr. Bass,' he said."

At this point the senator could not control his mirth, and the empty corridor echoed his laughter.

"By thunder! what did you say to that?"

"Er—I said, 'Mr. President, I thought I was until a while ago.'

"And when did you change your mind?' says he."

Then he laughed a little—not much—but he laughed a little.

"I understand that your old soldier lives within the limits of the delivery of the Brampton office,' said he."

"That's correct, Mr. President,' said I."

"Well,' said he, 'I will app'int him postmaster at Brampton, Mr. Bass.'"

"When?" said I."

Then he laughed a little more.

"I'll have the app'intment sent to your hotel this afternoon," said he."

"Then I said to him, 'This has come out full better than I expected, Mr. President. I'm much obliged to you.' He didn't say nothin' more, so I come out."

"Grant didn't say anything about Worthington or Duncan, did he?" asked the senator, curiously, as he rose to go.

"G-guess I've told you all he said," answered Jethro; "'twahn't a great deal."

The senator held out his hand.

"Bass," he said, laughing, "I believe you came pretty near meeting your match. But if Grant's the hardest man in the Union to get anything out of, I've a notion who's the second." And with this parting shot the senator took his departure, chuckling to himself as he went.

As has been said, there were but few visitors in Washington at this time, and the hotel corridor was all but empty. Presently a substantial-looking gentleman came briskly in from the street, nodding affably to the colored porters and bell-boys, who greeted him by name. He wore a flowing Prince Albert coat, which served to dignify a growing portliness, and his coal-black whiskers glistened in the light. A voice, which appeared to come from nowhere in particular, brought the gentleman up standing.

"How be you, Heth?"

It may not be that Mr. Sutton's hand trembled, but the ashes of his cigar fell to the floor. He was not used to visitations, and for the instant, if the truth be told, he was not equal to looking around.

"Like Washington, Heth—like Washington?"

Then Mr. Sutton turned. His presence of mind, and that other presence of which he was so proud, seemed for the moment to have deserted him.

"S-stick pretty close to business, Heth, comin' down here out of session time. S-stick pretty close to business, don't you, since the people sent you to Congress?"

Mr. Sutton might have offered another man a cigar or a drink, but (as is well known) Jethro was proof against tobacco or stimulants.

"Well," said the Honorable Heth, catching his breath and making a dive, "I am surprised to see you, Jethro," which was probably true.

"Th-thought you might be," said Jethro. "Er—glad to see me, Heth—glad to see me?"

As has been recorded, it is peculiarly difficult to lie to people who are not to be deceived.

"Why, certainly I am," answered the Honorable Heth, swallowing hard, "certainly I am, Jethro. I meant to have got to Coniston this summer, but I was so busy—"

"Peoples' business, I understand. Er—hear you've gone in for high-minded politics, Heth—r-read a highminded speech of yours—two high-minded speeches. Always thought you was a high-minded man, Heth."

"How did you like those speeches, Jethro?" asked Mr. Sutton, striving as best he might to make some show of dignity.

"Th-thought they was high-minded," said Jethro.

Then there was a silence, for Mr. Sutton could think of nothing more to say. And he yearned to depart with a great yearning, but something held him there.

"Heth," said Jethro after a while, "you was always very friendly and obliging. You've done a great many favors for me in your life."

"I've always tried to be neighborly, Jethro," said Mr. Sutton, but his voice sounded a little husky even to himself.

"And I may have done one or two little things for you, Heth," Jethro continued, "but I can't remember

exactly. Er—can you remember, Heth."

Mr. Sutton was trying with becoming nonchalance to light the stump of his cigar. He did not succeed this time. He pulled himself together with a supreme effort.

"I think we've both been mutually helpful, Jethro," he said, "mutually helpful."

"Well," said Jethro, reflectively, "I don't know as I could have put it as well as that—there's somethin' in being an orator."

There was another silence, a much longer one. The Honorable Heth threw his butt away, and lighted another cigar. Suddenly, as if by magic, his aplomb returned, and in a flash of understanding he perceived the situation. He saw himself once more as the successful congressman, the trusted friend of the railroad interests, and he saw Jethro as a discredited boss. He did not stop to reflect that Jethro did not act like a discredited boss, as a keener man might have done. But if the Honorable Heth had been a keener man, he would not have been at that time a congressman. Mr. Sutton accused himself of having been stupid in not grasping at once that the tables were turned, and that now he was the one to dispense the gifts.

"K-kind of fortunate you stopped to speak to me, Heth. N-now I come to think of it, I hev a little favor to ask of you."

"Ah!" exclaimed Mr. Sutton, blowing out the smoke; "of course anything I can do, Jethro—anything in reason."

"W-wouldn't ask a high-minded man to do anything he hadn't ought to," said Jethro; "the fact is, I'd like to git Eph Prescott appointed at the Brampton post-office. You can fix that, Heth—can't you—you can fix that?"

Mr. Sutton stuck his thumb into his vest pocket and cleared his throat.

"I can't tell you how sorry I am not to oblige you, Jethro, but I've arranged to give that post-office to Dave Wheelock."

"A-arranged it, hev You—a-arranged it?"

"Why, yes," said Mr. Sutton, scarcely believing his own ears. Could it be possible that he was using this patronizingly kind tone to Jethro Bass?

"Well, that's too bad," said Jethro; "g-got it all fixed, hev you?"

"Practically," answered Mr. Sutton, grandly; "indeed, I may go as far as to say that it is as certain as if I had the appointment here in my pocket. I'm sorry not to oblige you, Jethro; but these are matters which a member of Congress must look after pretty closely." He held out his hand, but Jethro did not appear to see it,—he had his in his pockets. "I've an important engagement," said the Honorable Heth, consulting a large gold watch. "Are you going to be in Washington long?"

"G-guess I've about got through, Heth—g-guess I've about got through," said Jethro.

"Well, if you have time and there's any other little thing, I'm in Room 29," said Mr. Sutton, as he put his foot on the stairway.

"T-told Worthington you got that app'intment for Wheelock—t-told Worthington?" Jethro called out after him.

Mr. Sutton turned and waved his cigar and smiled in acknowledgment of this parting bit of satire. He felt that he could afford to smile. A few minutes later he was ensconced on the sofa of a private sitting room reviewing the incident, with much gusto, for the benefit of Mr. Isaac D. Worthington and Mr. Alexander Duncan. Both of these gentlemen laughed heartily, for the Honorable Heth Sutton knew the art of telling a story well, at least, and was often to be seen with a group around him in the lobbies of Congress.

CHAPTER VI

About five o'clock that afternoon Ephraim was sitting in his shirt-sleeves by the window of his room, and Cynthia was reading aloud to him an article (about the war, of course) from a Washington paper, which his friend, Mr. Beard, had sent him. There was a knock at the door, and Cynthia opened it to discover a colored hall-boy with a roll in his hand.

"Mistah Ephum Prescott?" he said.

"Yes," answered Ephraim, "that's me."

Cynthia shut the door and gave him the roll, but Ephraim took it as though he were afraid of its contents.

"Guess it's some of them war records from Amasy," he said.

"Oh, Cousin Eph," exclaimed Cynthia, excitedly, "why don't you open it? If you don't I will."

"Guess you'd better, Cynthy," and he held it out to her with a trembling hand.

Cynthia did open it, and drew out a large document with seals and printing and signatures.

"Cousin Eph," she cried, holding it under his nose, "Cousin Eph, you're postmaster of Brampton!"

Ephraim looked at the paper, but his eyes swam, and he could only make out a dancing, bronze seal.

"I want to know!" he exclaimed. "Fetch Jethro."

But Cynthia had already flown on that errand. Curiously enough, she ran into Jethro in the hall immediately outside of Ephraim's door. Ephraim got to his feet; it was very difficult for him to realize that his troubles were ended, that he was to earn his living at last. He looked at Jethro, and his eyes filled with tears. "I guess I can't thank you as I'd ought to, Jethro," he said, "leastways, not now."

"I'll thank him for you, Cousin Eph," said Cynthia. And she did.

"D-don't thank me," said Jethro, "I didn't have much to do with it, Eph. Thank the President."

Ephraim did thank the President, in one of the most remarkable letters, from a literary point of view, ever received at the White House. For the art of literature largely consists in belief in what one is writing, and Ephraim's letter had this quality of sincerity, and no lack of vividness as well. He spent most of the evening in composing it.

Cynthia, too, had received a letter that day—a letter which she had read several times, now with a smile, and again with a pucker of the forehead which was meant for a frown. "Dear Cynthia," it said. "Where do you keep yourself? I am sure you would not be so cruel if you knew that I was aching to see you." Aching! Cynthia repeated the word, and remembered the glimpse she had had of him in the dining room with Miss Janet Duncan. "Whenever I have been free" (Cynthia repeated this also, somewhat ironically, although she conceded it the merit of frankness), "Whenever I have been free, I have haunted the corridors for a sight of you. Think of me as haunting the hotel desk for an answer to this, telling me when I can see you—and where. P.S. I shall be around all evening." And it was signed, "Your friend and playmate, R. Worthington."

It is a fact—not generally known—that Cynthia did answer the letter—twice. But she sent neither answer. Even at that age she was given to reflection, and much as she may have approved of the spirit of the letter, she liked the tone of it less. Cynthia did not know a great deal of the world, it is true, but she felt instinctively that something was wrong when Bob resorted to such means of communication. And she was positively relieved, or thought that she was, when she went down to supper and discovered that the table in the corner was empty.

After supper Ephraim had his letter to write, and Jethro wished to sit in the corridor. But Cynthia had learned that the corridor was not the place for a girl, so she explained—to Jethro that he would find her in the parlor if he wanted her, and that she was going there to read. That parlor Cynthia thought a handsome room, with its high windows and lace curtains, its long mirrors and marble-topped tables. She established herself under a light, on a sofa in one corner, and sat, with the book on her lap watching the people who came and went. She had that delicious sensation which comes to the young when they first travel—the sensation of being a part of the great world; and she wished that she knew these people, and which were the great, and which the little ones. Some of them looked at her intently, she thought too intently, and at such times she pretended to read. She was aroused by hearing some one saying:—"Isn't this Miss Wetherell?"

Cynthia looked up and caught her breath, for the young lady who had spoken was none other than Miss Janet Duncan herself. Seen thus startlingly at close range, Miss Duncan was not at all like what Cynthia had expected—but then most people are not. Janet Duncan was, in fact, one of those strange persons who do not realize the picture which their names summon up. She was undoubtedly good-looking; her hair, of a more golden red than her brother's, was really wonderful; her neck was slender; and she had a strange, dreamy face that fascinated Cynthia, who had never seen anything like it.

She put down her book on the sofa and got up, not without a little tremor at this unexpected encounter.

"Yes, I'm Cynthia Wetherell," she replied.

To add to her embarrassment, Miss Duncan seized both her hands impulsively and gazed into her face.

"You're really very beautiful," she said. "Do you know it?"

Cynthia's only answer to this was a blush. She wondered if all city girls were like Miss Duncan.

"I was determined to come up and speak to you the first chance I had," Janet continued. "I've been making up stories about you."

"Stories!" exclaimed Cynthia, drawing away her hands.

"Romances," said Miss Duncan—"real romances. Sometimes I think I'm going to be a novelist, because I'm always weaving stories about people that I see people who interest me, I mean. And you look as if you might be the heroine of a wonderful romance."

Cynthia's breath was now quite taken away.

"Oh," she said, "I—had never thought that I looked like that."

"But you do," said Miss Duncan; "you've got all sorts of possibilities in your face—you look as if you might have lived for ages."

"As old as that?" exclaimed Cynthia, really startled.

"Perhaps I don't express myself very well" said the other, hastily; "I wish you could see what I've written about you already. I can do it so much better with pen and ink. I've started quite a romance already."

"What is it?" asked Cynthia, not without interest.

"Sit down on the sofa and I'll tell you," said Miss Duncan; "I've done it all from your face, too. I've made you a very poor girl brought up by peasants, only you are really of a great family, although nobody knows it. A rich duke sees you one day when he is hunting and falls in love with you, and you have to stand a lot of suffering and persecution because of it, and say nothing. I believe you could do that," added Janet, looking critically at Cynthia's face.

"I suppose I could if I had to," said Cynthia, "but I shouldn't like it."

"Oh, it would do you good," said Janet; "it would ennoble your character. Not that it needs it," she added hastily. "And I could write another story about that quaint old man who paid the musicians to go away, and who made us all laugh so much."

Cynthia's eye kindled.

"Mr. Bass isn't a quaint old man," she said; "he's the greatest man in the state."

Miss Duncan's patronage had been of an unconscious kind. She knew that she had offended, but did not quite realize how.

"I'm so sorry," she cried, "I didn't mean to hurt you. You live with him, don't you—Coniston?"

"Yes," replied Cynthia, not knowing whether to laugh or cry.

"I've heard about Coniston. It must be quite a romance in itself to live all the year round in such a beautiful place and to make your own clothes. Yours become you very well," said Miss Duncan, "although I don't know why. They're not at all in style, and yet they give you quite an air of distinction. I wish I could live in Coniston for a year, anyway, and write a book about you. My brother and Bob Worthington went out there one night and serenaded you, didn't they?"

"Yes," said Cynthia, that peculiar flash coming into her eyes again, "and I think it was very foolish of them."

"Do you?" exclaimed Miss Duncan, in surprise; "I wish somebody would serenade me. I think it was the most romantic thing Bob ever did. He's wild about you, and so is Somers they have both told me so in confidence."

Cynthia's face was naturally burning now.

"If it were true," she said, "they wouldn't have told you about it."

"I suppose that's so," said Miss Duncan, thoughtfully, "only you're very clever to have seen it. Now that I know you, I think you a more remarkable person than ever. You don't seem at all like a country girl, and you don't talk like one."

Cynthia laughed outright. She could not help liking Janet Duncan, mere flesh and blood not being proof against such compliments.

"I suppose it's because my father was an educated man," she said; "he taught me to read and speak when I was young."

"Why, you are just like a person out of a novel! Who was your father?"

"He kept the store at Coniston," answered Cynthia, smiling a little sadly. She would have liked to have added that William Wetherell would have been a great man if he had had health, but she found it difficult to give out confidences, especially when they were in the nature of surmises.

"Well," said Janet, stoutly, "I think that is more like a story than ever. Do you know," she continued, "I saw you once at the state capital outside of our grounds the day Bob ran after you. That was when I was in love with him. We had just come back from Europe then, and I thought he was the most wonderful person I had ever seen."

If Cynthia had felt any emotion from this disclosure, she did not betray it. Janet, moreover, was not looking for it.

"What made you change your mind?" asked Cynthia, biting her lip.

"Oh, Bob hasn't the temperament," said Janet, making use of a word that she had just discovered; "he's too practical—he never does or says the things you want him to. He's just been out West with us on a trip, and he was always looking at locomotives and brakes and grades and bridges and all such tiresome things. I should like to marry a poet," said Miss Duncan, dreamily; "I know they want me to marry Bob, and Mr. Worthington wants it. I'm sure, of that. But he wouldn't at all suit me."

If Cynthia had been able to exercise an equal freedom of speech, she might have been impelled to inquire what young Mr. Worthington's views were in the matter. As it was, she could think of nothing appropriate to say, and just then four people entered the room and came towards them. Two of these were Janet's mother and father, and the other two were Mr. Worthington, the elder, and the Honorable Heth Sutton. Mrs. Duncan, whom Janet did not at all resemble was a person who naturally commanded attention. She had strong features, and a very decided, though not disagreeable, manner.

"I couldn't imagine what had become of you, Janet," she said, coming forward and throwing off her lace shawl. "Whom have you found—a school friend?"

"No, Mamma," said Janet, "this is Cynthia Wetherell." "Oh," said Mrs. Duncan, looking very hard at Cynthia in a near-sighted way, and, not knowing in the least who she was; "you haven't seen Senator and Mrs. Meade, have you, Janet? They were to be here at eight o'clock."

"No," said Janet, turning again to Cynthia and scarcely hearing the question.

"Janet hasn't seen them, Dudley," said Mrs. Duncan, going up to Mr. Worthington, who was pulling his chop whiskers by the door. "Janet has discovered such a beautiful creature," she went on, in a voice which she did not take the trouble to lower. "Do look at her, Alexander. And you, Mr. Sutton—who are such a bureau of useful information, do tell me who she is. Perhaps she comes from your part of the country—her name's Wetherell."

"Wetherell? Why, of course I know her," said Mr. Sutton, who was greatly pleased because Mrs. Duncan had likened him to an almanac: greatly pleased this evening in every respect, and even the diamond in his bosom seemed to glow with a brighter fire. He could afford to be generous to-night, and

he turned to Mr. Worthington and laughed knowingly. "She's the ward of our friend Jethro," he explained.

"What is she?" demanded Mrs. Duncan, who knew and cared nothing about politics, a country girl, I suppose."

"Yes," replied Mr. Sutton, "a country girl from a little village not far from Clovelly. A good girl, I believe, in spite of the atmosphere in which she has been raised."

"It's really wonderful, Mr. Sutton, how you seem to know every one in your district, including the women and children," said the lady; "but I suppose you wouldn't be where you are if you didn't."

The Honorable Heth cleared his throat.

"Wetherell," Mr. Duncan was saying, staring at Cynthia through his spectacles, "where have I heard that name?"

He must suddenly have remembered, and recalled also that he and his ally Worthington had been on opposite sides in the Woodchuck Session, for he sat down abruptly beside the door, and remained there for a while. For Mr. Duncan had never believed Mr. Merrill's explanation concerning poor William Wetherell's conduct.

"Pretty, ain't she?" said Mr. Sutton to Mr. Worthington. "Guess she's more dangerous than Jethro, now that we've clipped his wings a little." The congressman had heard of Bob's infatuation.

Isaac D. Worthington, however, was in a good humor this evening and was moved by a certain curiosity to inspect the girl. Though what he had seen and heard of his son's conduct with her had annoyed him, he did not regard it seriously.

"Aren't you going to speak to your constituent, Mr. Sutton?" said Mrs. Duncan, who was bored because her friends had not arrived; "a congressman ought to keep on the right side of the pretty girls, you know."

It hadn't occurred to the Honorable Heth to speak to his constituent. The ways of Mrs. Duncan sometimes puzzled him, and he could not see why that lady and her daughter seemed to take more than a passing interest in the girl. But if they could afford to notice her, certainly he could; so he went forward graciously and held out his hand to Cynthia; interrupting Miss Duncan in the middle of a discourse upon her diary.

"How do you do, Cynthia?" said Mr. Sutton. Had he been in Coniston, he would have said, "How be you?"

Cynthia took the hand, but did not rise, somewhat to Mr. Sutton's annoyance. A certain respect was due to a member of Congress and the Rajah of Clovelly.

"How do you do, Mr. Sutton?" said Cynthia, very coolly.

"I like her," remarked Mrs. Duncan to Mr. Worthington.

"This is a splendid trip for you, eh, Cynthia?" Mr. Sutton persisted, with a praiseworthy determination to be pleasant.

"It has turned out to be so, Mr. Sutton," replied Cynthia. This was not precisely the answer Mr. Sutton expected, and to tell the truth, he didn't know quite what to make of it.

"A great treat to see Washington and New York, isn't it?" said Mr. Sutton, kindly, "a great treat for a Coniston girl. I suppose you came through New York and saw the sights?"

"Is there another way to get to Washington?" asked Cynthia.

Mrs. Duncan nudged Mr. Worthington and drew a little nearer, while Mr. Sutton began to wish he had not been lured into the conversation. Cynthia had been very polite, but there was something in the quiet manner in which the girl's eyes were fixed upon him that made him vaguely uneasy. He could not back out with dignity, and he felt himself on the verge of becoming voluble. Mr. Sutton prided himself on never being voluble.

"Why, no," he answered, "we have to go to New York to get anywhere in these days." There was a slight pause. "Uncle Jethro taking you and Mr. Prescott on a little pleasure trip?" He had not meant to mention Jethro's name, but he found himself, to his surprise, a little at a loss for a subject.

"Well, partly a pleasure trip. It's always a pleasure for Uncle Jethro to do things for others," said Cynthia, quietly, "although people do not always appreciate what he does for them."

The Honorable Heth coughed. He was now very uncomfortable, indeed. How much did this astounding young person know, whom he had thought so innocent?

"I didn't discover he was in town until I ran across him in the corridor this evening. Should have liked to have introduced him to some of the Washington folks—some of the big men, although not many of 'em are here," Mr. Sutton ran on, not caring to notice the little points of light in Cynthia's eyes. (The idea of Mr. Sutton introducing Uncle Jethro to anybody!) "I haven't seen Ephraim Prescott. It must be a great treat for him, too, to get away on a little trip and see his army friends. How is he?"

"He's very happy," said Cynthia.

"Happy!" exclaimed Mr. Sutton. "Oh, yes, of course, Ephraim's always happy, in spite of his troubles and his rheumatism. I always liked Ephraim Prescott."

Cynthia did not answer this remark at all, and Mr. Sutton suspected strongly that she did not believe it, therefore he repeated it.

"I always liked Ephraim. I want you to tell Jethro that I'm downright sorry I couldn't get him that Brampton postmastership."

"I'll tell him that you are sorry, Mr. Sutton," replied Cynthia, gravely, "but I don't think it'll do any good."

Not do any good!—What did the girl mean? Mr. Sutton came to the conclusion that he had been condescending enough, that somehow he was gaining no merit in Mrs. Duncan's eyes by this kindness to a constituent. He buttoned up his coat rather grandly.

"I hope you won't misunderstand me, Cynthia," he said. "I regret extremely that my sense of justice demanded that I should make David Wheelock postmaster at Brampton, and I have made him so."

It was now Cynthia's turn to be amazed.

"But," she exclaimed, "but Cousin Ephraim is postmaster of Brampton."

Mr. Sutton started violently, and that part of his face not hidden by his whiskers seemed to pale, and Mr. Worthington, usually self-possessed, took a step forward and seized him by the arm.

"What does this mean, Sutton?" he said.

Mr. Sutton pulled himself together, and glared at Cynthia.

"I think you are mistaken," said he, "the congressman of the district usually arranges these matters, and the appointment will be sent to Mr. Wheelock to-morrow."

"But Cousin Ephraim already has the appointment," said Cynthia; "it was sent to him this afternoon, and he is up in his room now writing to thank the President for it."

"What in the world's the matter?" cried Mrs. Duncan, in astonishment.

Cynthia's simple announcement had indeed caused something of a panic among the gentlemen present. Mr. Duncan had jumped up from his seat beside the door, and Mr. Worthington, his face anything but impassive, tightened his hold on the congressman's arm.

"Good God, Sutton!" he exclaimed, "can this be true?"

As for Cynthia, she was no less astonished than Mrs. Duncan. by the fact that these rich and powerful gentlemen were so excited over a little thing like the postmastership of Brampton. But Mr. Sutton laughed; it was not hearty, but still it might have passed muster for a laugh.

"Nonsense," he exclaimed, making a fair attempt to regain his composure, "the girl's got it mixed up with something else—she doesn't know what she's talking about."

Mrs. Duncan thought the girl did look uncommonly as if she knew what she was talking about, and Mr. Duncan and Mr. Worthington had some such impression, too, as they stared at her. Cynthia's eyes flashed, but her voice was no louder than before.

"I am used to being believed, Mr. Sutton," she said, "but here's Uncle Jethro himself. You might ask him."

They all turned in amazement, and one, at least, in trepidation, to perceive Jethro Bass standing behind them with his hands in his pockets, as unconcerned as though he were under the butternut tree in Coniston.

"How be you, Heth?" he said. "Er—still got that appointment p-practically in your pocket?"

"Uncle Jethro," said Cynthia, "Mr. Sutton does not believe me when I tell him that Cousin Ephraim has been made postmaster of Brampton. He would like to have you tell him whether it is so or not."

But this, as it happened, was exactly what the Honorable Heth did not want to have Jethro tell him. How he got out of the parlor of the Willard House he has not to this day a very clear idea. As a matter of fact, he followed Mr. Worthington and Mr. Duncan, and they made their exit by the farther door. Jethro did not appear to take any notice of their departure.

"Janet," said Mrs. Duncan, "I think Senator and Mrs. Meade must have gone to our sitting room." Then, to Cynthia's surprise, the lady took her by the hand. "I can't imagine what you've done, my dear," she said pleasantly, "but I believe that you are capable of taking care of yourself, and I like you."

Thus it will be seen that Mrs. Duncan was an independent person. Sometimes heiresses are apt to be.

"And I like you, too," said Janet, taking both of Cynthia's hands, "and I hope to see you very, very often."

Jethro looked after them.

"Er—the women folks seem to have some sense," he said. Then he turned to Cynthia. "B-be'n havin' some fun with Heth, Cynthy?" he inquired.

"I haven't any respect for Mr. Sutton," said Cynthia, indignantly; "it serves him right for presuming to think that he could give a post-office to any one."

Jethro made no remark concerning this presumption on the part of the congressman of the district. Cynthia's indignation against Mr. Sutton was very real, and it was some time before she could compose herself sufficiently to tell Jethro what had happened. His enjoyment as he listened may be imagined but presently he forgot this, and became aware that something really troubled her.

"Uncle Jethro," she asked suddenly, "why do they treat me as they do?"

He did not answer at once. This was because of a pain around his heart—had she known it. He had felt that pain before.

"H-how do they treat you, Cynthy?"

She hesitated. She had not yet learned to use the word patronize in the social sense, and she was at a loss to describe the attitude of Mrs. Duncan and her daughter, though her instinct had registered it. She was at a loss to account for Mr. Worthington's attitude, too. Mr. Sutton's she bitterly resented.

"Are they your enemies?" she demanded.

Jethro was in real distress.

"If they are," she continued, "I won't speak to them again. If they can't treat me as—as your daughter ought to be treated, I'll turn my back on them. I am—I am just like your daughter—am I not, Uncle Jethro?"

He put out his hand and seized hers roughly, and his voice was thick with suffering.

"Yes, Cynthy," he said, "you—you're all I've got in the world."

She squeezed his hand in return.

"I know it, Uncle Jethro," she cried contritely, "I oughtn't to have troubled you by asking. You—you have done everything for me, much more than I deserve. And I shan't be hurt after this when people are too small to appreciate how good you are, and how great."

The pain tightened about Jethro's heart—tightened so sharply that he could not speak, and scarcely breathe because of it. Cynthia picked up her novel, and set the bookmark.

"Now that Cousin Eph is provided for, let's go back to Coniston, Uncle Jethro." A sudden longing was upon her for the peaceful life in the shelter of the great ridge, and she thought of the village maples all

red and gold with the magic touch of the frosts. "Not that I haven't enjoyed my trip," she added; "but we are so happy there."

He did not look at her, because he was afraid to.

"C-Cynthy," he said, after a little pause, "th-thought we'd go to Boston."

"Boston, Uncle Jethro!"

"Er—to-morrow—at one—to-morrow—like to go to Boston?"

"Yes," she said thoughtfully, "I remember parts of it. The Common, where I used to walk with Daddy, and the funny old streets that went uphill. It will be nice to go back to Coniston that way—over Truro Pass in the train."

That night a piece of news flashed over the wires to New England, and the next morning a small item appeared in the Newcastle Guardian to the effect that one Ephraim Prescott had been appointed postmaster at Brampton. Copied in the local papers of the state, it caused some surprise in Brampton, to be sure, and excitement in Coniston. Perhaps there were but a dozen men, however, who saw its real significance, who knew through this item that Jethro Bass was still supreme—that the railroads had failed to carry this first position in their war against him.

It was with a light heart the next morning that Cynthia, packed the little leather trunk which had been her father's. Ephraim was in the corridor regaling his friend, Mr. Beard, with that wonderful encounter with General Grant which sounded so much like a Fifth Reader anecdote of a chance meeting with royalty. Jethro's room was full of visiting politicians. So Cynthia, when she had finished her packing, went out to walk about the streets alone, scanning the people who passed her, looking at the big houses, and wondering who lived in them. Presently she found herself, in the middle of the morning, seated on a bench in a little park, surrounded by colored mammies and children playing in the paths. It seemed a long time since she had left the hills, and this glimpse of cities had given her many things to think and dream about. Would she always live in Coniston? Or was her future to be cast among those who moved in the world and helped to sway it? Cynthia felt that she was to be of these, though she could not reason why, and she told herself that the feeling was foolish. Perhaps it was that she knew in the bottom of her heart that she had been given a spirit and intelligence to cope with a larger life than that of Coniston. With a sense that such imaginings were vain, she tried to think what she would do if she were to become a great lady like Mrs. Duncan.

She was aroused from these reflections by a distant glimpse, through the trees, of Mr. Robert Worthington. He was standing quite alone on the edge of the park, his hands in his pockets, staring at the White House. Cynthia half rose, and then sat down and looked at him again. He wore a light gray, loose-fitting suit and a straw hat, and she could not but acknowledge that there was something stalwart and clean and altogether appealing in him. She wondered, indeed, why he now failed to appeal to Miss Duncan, and she began to doubt the sincerity of that young lady's statements. Bob certainly was not romantic, but he was a man—or would be very soon.

Cynthia sat still, although her impulse was to go away. She scarcely analyzed her feeling of wishing to avoid him. It may not be well, indeed, to analyze them on paper too closely. She had an instinct that only pain could come from frequent meetings, and she knew now what but a week ago was a surmise, that he belonged to the world of which she had been dreaming—Mrs. Duncan's world. Again, there was that mysterious barrier between them of which she had seen so many evidences. And yet she sat still on her bench and looked at him.

Presently he turned, slowly, as if her eyes had compelled his. She sat still—it was too late, then. In less than a minute he was standing beside her, looking down at her with a smile that had in it a touch of reproach.

"How do you do, Mr. Worthington?" said Cynthia, quietly.

"Mr. Worthington!" he cried, "you haven't called me that before. We are not children any more," she said.

"What difference does that make?"

"A great deal," said Cynthia, not caring to define it.

"Cynthia," said Mr. Worthington, sitting down on the beach and facing her, "do you think you've treated me just right?"

"Of course I do," she said, "or I should have treated you differently."

Bob ignored such quibbling.

"Why did you run away from that baseball game in Brampton? And why couldn't you have answered my letter yesterday, if it were only a line? And why have you avoided me here in Washington?"

It is very difficult to answer for another questions which one cannot answer for one's self.

"I haven't avoided you," said Cynthia.

"I've been looking for you all over town this morning," said Bob, with pardonable exaggeration, "and I believe that idiot Somers has, too."

"Then why should you call him an idiot?" Cynthia flashed.

Bob laughed.

"How you do catch a fellow up!" said he; admiringly. "We both found out you'd gone out for a walk alone."

"How did you find it out?"

"Well," said Bob, hesitating, "we asked the colored doorkeeper."

"Mr. Worthington," said Cynthia, with an indignation that made him quail, "do you think it right to ask a doorkeeper to spy on my movements?"

"I'm sorry, Cynthia," he gasped, "I—I didn't think of it that way—and he won't tell. Desperate cases require desperate remedies, you know."

But Cynthia was not appeased.

"If you wanted to see me," she said, "why didn't you send your card to my room, and I would have come to the parlor."

"But I did send a note, and waited around all day."

How was she to tell him that it was to the tone of the note she objected—to the hint of a clandestine meeting? She turned the light of her eyes full upon him.

"Would you have been content to see me in the parlor?" she asked. "Did you mean to see me there?"

"Why, yes," said he; "I would have given my head to see you anywhere, only—"

"Only what?"

"Duncan might have come in and spoiled it."

"Spoiled what?"

Bob fidgeted.

"Look here, Cynthia," he said, "you're not stupid—far from it. Of course you know a fellow would rather talk to you alone."

"I should have been very glad to have seen Mr. Duncan, too."

"You would, would you!" he exclaimed. "I shouldn't have thought that."

"Isn't he your friend?" asked Cynthia.

"Oh, yes," said Bob, "and one of the best in the world. Only—I shouldn't have thought you'd care to talk to him." And he looked around for fear the vigilant Mr. Duncan was already in the park and had discovered them. Cynthia smiled, and immediately became grave again.

"So it was only on Mr. Duncan's account that you didn't ask me to come down to the parlor?" she said.

Bob was in a quandary. He was a truthful person, and he had learned something of the world through his three years at Cambridge. He had seen many young women, and many kinds of them. But the girl beside him was such a mixture of innocence and astuteness that he was wholly at a loss how to deal

with her—how to parry her searching questions.

"Naturally—I wanted to have you all to myself," he said; "you ought to know that."

Cynthia did not commit herself on this point. She wished to go mercilessly to the root of the matter, but the notion of what this would imply prevented her. Bob took advantage of her silence.

"Everybody who sees you falls a victim, Cynthia," he went on; "Mrs. Duncan and Janet lost their hearts. You ought to have heard them praising you at breakfast." He paused abruptly, thinking of the rest of that conversation, and laughed. Bob seemed fated to commit himself that day. "I heard the way you handled Heth Sutton," he said, plunging in. "I'll bet he felt as if he'd been dropped out of the third-story window," and Bob laughed again. "I'd have given a thousand dollars to have been there. Somers and I went out to supper with a classmate who lives in Washington, in that house over there," and he pointed casually to one of the imposing mansions fronting on the park. "Mrs. Duncan said she'd never heard anybody lay it on the way you did. I don't believe you half know what happened, Cynthia. You made a ten-strike."

"A ten-strike?" she repeated.

"Well," he said, "you not only laid out Heth, but my father and Mr. Duncan, too. Mrs. Duncan laughed at 'em—she isn't afraid of anything. But they didn't say a word all through breakfast. I've never seen my father so mad. He ought to have known better than to run up against Uncle Jethro."

"How did they run up against Uncle Jethro?" asked Cynthia, now keenly interested.

"Don't you know?" exclaimed Bob, in astonishment.

"No," said Cynthia, "or I shouldn't have asked."

"Didn't Uncle Jethro tell you about it?"

"He never tells me anything about his affairs," she answered.

Bob's astonishment did not wear off at once. Here was a new phase, and he was very hard put. He had heard, casually, a good deal of abuse of Jethro and his methods in the last two days.

"Well," he said, "I don't know anything about politics. I don't know myself why father and Mr. Duncan were so eager for this post-mastership. But they were. And I heard them say something about the President going back on them when they had telegraphed from Chicago and come to see him here. And maybe they didn't let Heth in for it. It seems Uncle Jethro only had to walk up to the White House. They ought to have sense enough to know that he runs the state. But what's the use of wasting time over this business?" said Bob. "I told you I was going to Brampton before the term begins just to see you, didn't I?"

"Yes, but I didn't believe you," said Cynthia.

"Why not?" he demanded.

"Because it's my nature, I suppose," she replied.

This was too much for Bob, exasperated though he was, and he burst into laughter.

"You're the queerest girl I've ever known," he said.

Not a very original remark.

"That must be saying a great deal," she answered.

"Why?"

"You must have known many."

"I have," he admitted, "and none of 'em, no matter how much they'd knocked about, were able to look out for themselves any better than you."

"Not even Cassandra Hopkins?" Cynthia could not resist saying. She saw that she had scored; his expressions registered his sensations so accurately.

"What do you know about her?" he said.

"Oh," said Cynthia, mysteriously, "I heard that you were very fond of her at Andover."

Bob could not help pluming himself a little. He thought the fact that she had mentioned the matter a flaw in Cynthia's armor, as indeed it was. And yet he was not proud of the Cassandra Hopkins episode in his career.

"Cassandra is one of the institutions at Andover," said he; "most fellows have to take a course in Cassandra to complete their education."

"Yours seems to be very complete," Cynthia retorted.

"Great Scott!" he exclaimed, looking at her, "no wonder you made mince-meat of the Honorable Heth. Where did you learn it all, Cynthia?"

Cynthia did not know. She merely wondered where she would be if she hadn't learned it. Something told her that if it were not for this anchor she would be drifting out to sea: might, indeed, soon be drifting out to sea in spite of it. It was one thing for Mr. Robert Worthington, with his numerous resources, to amuse himself with a girl in her position; it would be quite another thing for the girl. She got to her feet and held out her hand to him.

"Good-by," she said.

"Good-by?"

"We are leaving Washington at one o'clock, and Uncle Jethro will be worried if I am not in time for dinner."

"Leaving at one! That's the worst luck I've had yet. But I'm going back to the hotel myself."

Cynthia didn't see how she was to prevent him walking with her. She would not have admitted to herself that she had enjoyed this encounter, since she was trying so hard not to enjoy it. So they started together out of the park. Bob, for a wonder, was silent awhile, glancing now and then at her profile. He knew that he had a great deal to say, but he couldn't decide exactly what it was to be. This is often the case with young men in his state of mind: in fact, to be paradoxical again, he might hardly be said at this time to have had a state of mind. He lacked both an attitude and a policy.

"If you see Duncan before I do, let me know," he remarked finally.

Cynthia bit her lip. "Why should I?" she asked.

"Because we've only got five minutes more alone together, at best. If we see him in time, we can go down a side street."

"I think it would be hard to get away from Mr. Duncan if we met him—even if we wanted to," she said, laughing outright.

"You don't know how true that is," he replied, with feeling.

"That sounds as though you'd tried it before."

He paid no attention to this thrust.

"I shan't see you again till I get to Brampton," he said; "that will be a whole week. And then," he ventured to look at her, "I shan't see you until the Christmas holidays. You might be a little kind, Cynthia. You know I've—I've always thought the world of you. I don't know how I'm going to get through the three months without seeing you."

"You managed to get through a good many years," said Cynthia, looking at the pavement.

"I know," he said; "I was sent away to school and college, and our lives separated."

"Yes, our lives separated," she assented.

"And I didn't know you were going to be like—like this," he went on, vaguely enough, but with feeling.

"Like what?"

"Like—well, I'd rather be with you and talk to you than any girl I ever saw. I don't care who she is," Bob declared, "or how much she may have traveled." He was running into deep water. "Why are you so cold, Cynthia?" "Why can't you be as you used to be? You used to like me well enough."

"And I like you now," answered Cynthia. They were very near the hotel by this time.

"You talk as if you were ten years older than I," he said, smiling plaintively.

She stopped and turned to him, smiling. They had reached the steps.

"I believe I am, Bob," she replied. "I haven't seen much of the world, but I've seen something of its troubles. Don't be foolish. If you're coming to Brampton just to see me, don't come. Good-by." And she gave him her hand frankly.

"But I will come to Brampton," he cried, taking her hand and squeezing it. "I'd like to know why I shouldn't come."

As Cynthia drew her hand away a gentleman came out of the hotel, paused for a brief moment by the door and stared at them, and then passed on without a word or a nod of recognition. It was Mr. Worthington. Bob looked after his father, and then glanced at Cynthia. There was a trifle more color in her cheeks, and her head was raised a little, and her eyes were fixed upon him gravely.

"You should know why not," she said, and before he could answer her she was gone into the hotel. He did not attempt to follow her, but stood where she had left him in the sunlight.

He was aroused by the voice of the genial colored doorkeeper.

"Wal, suh, you found the lady, Mistah Wo'thington. Thought you would, suh. T'other young gentleman come in while ago—looked as if he was feelin' powerful bad, Mistah Wo'thington."

CHAPTER VII

When they reached Boston, Cynthia felt almost as if she were home again, and Ephraim declared that he had had the same feeling when he returned from the war. Though it be the prosperous capital of New England, it is a city of homes, and the dwellers of it have held stanchly to the belief of their forefathers that the home is the very foundation-rock of the nation. Held stanchly to other beliefs, too: that wealth carries with it some little measure of responsibility. The stranger within the gates of that city feels that if he falls, a heedless world will not go charging over his body: that a helping hand will be stretched out,—a helping and a wise hand that will inquire into the circumstances of his fall—but still a human hand.

They were sitting in the parlor of the Tremont House that morning with the sun streaming in the windows, waiting for Ephraim.

"Uncle Jethro," Cynthia asked, abruptly, "did you ever know my mother?"

Jethro started, and looked at her quickly.

"W-why, Cynthy?" he asked.

"Because she grew up in Coniston," answered Cynthia. "I never thought of it before, but of course you must have known her."

"Yes, I knew her," he said.

"Did you know her well?" she persisted.

Jethro got up and went over to the window, where he stood with his back toward her.

"Yes, Cynthy," he answered at length.

"Why haven't you ever told me about her?" asked Cynthia. How was she to know that her innocent questions tortured him cruelly; that the spirit of the Cynthia who had come to him in the tannery house had haunted him all his life, and that she herself, a new Cynthia, was still that spirit? The bygone Cynthia had been much in his thoughts since they came to Boston.

"What was she like?"

"She—she was like you, Cynthy," he said, but he did not turn round. "She was a clever woman, and a

good woman, and—a lady, Cynthy."

The girl said nothing for a while, but she tingled with pleasure because Jethro had compared her to her mother. She determined to try to be like that, if he thought her so.

"Uncle Jethro," she said presently, "I'd like to go to see the house where she lived."

"Er—Ephraim knows it," said Jethro.

So when Ephraim came the three went over the hill; past the State House which Bulfinch set as a crown on the crest of it looking over the sweep of the Common, and on into the maze of quaint, old-world streets on the slope beyond: streets with white porticos, and violet panes in the windows. They came to an old square hidden away on a terrace of the hill, and after that the streets grew narrower and dingier. Ephraim, whose memory never betrayed him, hobbled up to a shabby house in the middle of one of these blocks and rang the bell.

"Here's where I found Will when I come back from the war," he said, and explained the matter in full to the slatternly landlady who came to the door. She was a good-natured woman, who thought her boarder would not mind, and led the way up the steep stairs to the chamber over the roofs where Wetherell and Cynthia had lived and hoped and worked together; where he had written those pages by which, with the aid of her loving criticism, he had thought to become famous. The room was as bare now as it had been then, and Ephraim, poking his stick through a hole in the carpet, ventured the assertion that even that had not been changed. Jethro, staring out over the chimney tops, passed his hand across his eyes. Cynthia Ware had come to this!

"I found him right here in that bed," Ephraim was saying, and he poked the bottom boards, too. "The same bed. Had a shack when I saw him. Callate he wouldn't have lived two months if the war hadn't bust up and I hadn't come along."

"Oh, Cousin Eph!" exclaimed Cynthia.

The old soldier turned and saw that there were tears in her eyes. But, stranger than that, Cynthia saw that there were tears in his own. He took her gently by the arm and led her down the stairs again, she supporting him, and Jethro following.

That same morning, Jethro, whose memory was quite as good as Ephraim's, found a little shop tucked away in Cornhill which had been miraculously spared in the advance of prosperity. Mr. Judson's name, however, was no longer in quaint lettering over the door. Standing before it, Jethro told the story in his droll way, of a city clerk and a country bumpkin, and Cynthia and Ephraim both laughed so heartily that the people who were passing turned round to look at them and laughed too. For the three were an unusual group, even in Boston. It was not until they were seated at dinner in the hotel, Ephraim with his napkin tucked under his chin, that Jethro gave them the key to the characters in this story.

"And who was the locket for, Uncle Jethro?" demanded Cynthia.

Jethro, however, shook his head, and would not be induced to tell.

They were still so seated when Cynthia perceived coming toward them through the crowded dining room a merry, middle-aged gentleman with a bald head. He seemed to know everybody in the room, for he was kept busy nodding right and left at the tables until he came to theirs. He was Mr. Merrill who had come to see her father in Coniston, and who had spoken so kindly to her on that occasion.

"Well, well, well," he said; "Jethro, you'll be the death of me yet. 'Don't write-send,' eh? Well, as long as you sent word you were here, I don't complain. So you licked 'em again, eh—down in Washington? Never had a doubt but what you would. Is this the new postmaster? How are you, Mr. Prescott—and Cynthia—a young lady! Bless my soul," said Mr. Merrill, looking her over as he shook her hand. "What have you done to her, Jethro? What kind of beauty powder do they use in Coniston?"

Mr. Merrill took the seat next to her and continued to talk, scattering his pleasantries equally among the three, patting her arm when her own turn came. She liked Mr. Merrill very much; he seemed to her (as, indeed, he was) honest and kind-hearted. Cynthia was not lacking in a proper appreciation of herself—that may have been discovered. But she was puzzled to know why this gentleman should make it a point to pay such particular attention to a young country girl. Other railroad presidents whom she could name had not done so. She was thinking of these things, rather than listening to Mr. Merrill's conversation, when the sound of Mr. Worthington's name startled her.

"Well, Jethro," Mr. Merrill was saying, "you certainly nipped this little game of Worthington's in the bud. Thought he'd take you in the rear by going to Washington, did he? Ha, ha! I'd like to know how

you did it. I'll get you to tell me to-night—see if I don't. You're all coming in to supper to-night, you know, at seven o'clock."

Ephraim laid down his knife and fork for the first time. Were the wonders of this journey never to cease? And Jethro, once in his life, looked nervous.

"Er—er—Cyn'thy'll go, Steve—Cynthy'll go."

"Yes, Cynthy'll go," laughed Mr. Merrill, "and you'll go, and Ephraim'll go." Although he by no means liked everybody, as would appear at first glance, Mr. Merrill had a way of calling people by their first names when he did fancy them.

"Er—Steve," said Jethro, "what would your wife say if I was to drink coffee out of my saucer?"

"Let's see," said Mr. Merrill grave for once. "What's the punishment for that in my house? I know what she'd do if you didn't drink it. What do you think she'd do, Cynthy?"

"Ask him what was the matter with it," said Cynthia, promptly.

"Well, Cynthy," said he, "I know why these old fellows take you round with 'em. To take care of 'em, eh? They're not fit to travel alone."

And so it was settled, after much further argument, that they were all to sup at Mr. Merrill's house, Cynthia stoutly maintaining that she would not desert them. And then Mr. Merrill, having several times repeated the street and number, went, back to his office. There was much mysterious whispering between Ephraim and Jethro in the hotel parlor after dinner, while Cynthia was turning over the leaves of a magazine, and then Ephraim proposed going out to see the sights.

"Where's Uncle Jethro going?" she asked.

"He'll meet us," said Ephraim, promptly, but his voice was not quite steady.

"Oh, Uncle Jethro!" cried Cynthia, "you're trying to get out of it. You remember you promised to meet us in Washington."

"Guess he'll keep this app'intment," said Ephraim, who seemed to be full of a strange mirth that bubbled over, for he actually winked at Jethro. Cynthia's mind flew to Bunker Bill and the old North Church, but they went first to Faneuil Hall. Presently they found themselves among the crowd in Washington Street, where Ephraim confessed the trepidation which he felt over the coming supper party: a trepidation greater, so he declared many times, than he had ever experienced before any of his battles in the war. He stopped once or twice in the eddy of the crowd to glance up at the numbers; and finally came to a halt before the windows of a large dry-goods store.

"I guess I ought to buy a new shirt for this occasion, Cynthy," he said, staring hard at the articles of apparel displayed there: "Let's go in."

Cynthia laughed outright, since Ephraim could not by any chance have worn any of the articles in question.

"Why, Cousin Ephraim," she exclaimed, "you can't buy gentlemen's things here."

"Oh, I guess you can," said Ephraim, and hobbled confidently in at the doorway. There we will leave him for a while conversing in an undertone with a floor-walker, and follow Jethro. He, curiously enough, had some fifteen minutes before gone in at the same doorway, questioned the same floor-walker, and he found himself in due time walking amongst a bewildering lot of models on the third floor, followed by a giggling saleswoman.

"What kind of a dress do you want, sir?" asked the saleslady,—for we are impelled to call her so.

"S-silk cloth," said Jethro.

"What shades of silk would you like, sir?"

"Shades? shades? What do you mean by shades?"

"Why, colors," said the saleslady, giggling openly.

"Green," said Jethro, with considerable emphasis.

The saleslady clapped her hand over her mouth and led the way to another model.

"You don't call that green—do you? That's not green enough."

They inspected another dress, and then another and another,—not all of them were green,—Jethro expressing very decided if not expert views on each of them. At last he paused before two models at the far end of the room, passing his hand repeatedly over each as he had done so often with the cattle of Coniston.

"These two pieces same kind of goods?" he demanded.

"Yes."

"Er-this one is a little shinier than that one?"

"Perhaps the finish is a little higher," ventured the saleslady.

"Sh-shinier," said Jethro.

"Yes, shinier, if you please to call it so."

"W-what would you call it?"

By this time the saleslady had become quite hysterical, and altogether incapable of performing her duties. Jethro looked at her for a moment in disgust, and in his predicament cast around for another to wait on him. There was no lack of these, at a safe distance, but they all seemed to be affected by the same mania. Jethro's eye alighted upon the back of another customer. She was, apparently, a respectable-looking lady of uncertain age, and her own attention was so firmly fixed in the contemplation of a model that she had not remarked the merriment about her, nor its cause. She did not see Jethro, either, as he strode across to her. Indeed, her first intimation of his presence was a dig in her arm. The lady turned, gave a gasp of amazement at the figure confronting her, and proceeded to annihilate it with an eye that few women possess.

"H-how do, Ma'am," he said. Had he known anything about the appearance of women in general, he might have realized that he had struck a tartar. This lady was at least sixty-five, and probably unmarried. Her face, though not at all unpleasant, was a study in character-development: she wore ringlets, a peculiar bonnet of a bygone age, and her clothes had certain eccentricities which, for, lack of knowledge, must be omitted. In short, the lady was no fool, and not being one she glanced at the giggling group of saleswomen and—wonderful to relate—they stopped giggling. Then she looked again at Jethro and gave him a smile. One of superiority, no doubt, but still a smile.

"How do you do, sir?"

"T-trying to buy a silk cloth gown for a woman. There's two over here I fancied a little. Er—thought perhaps you'd help me."

"Where are the dresses?" she demanded abruptly.

Jethro led the way in silence until they came to the models. She planted herself in front of them and looked them over swiftly but critically.

"What is the age of the lady?"

"W-what difference does that make?" said Jethro, whose instinct was against committing himself to strangers.

"Difference!" she exclaimed sharply, "it makes a considerable difference. Perhaps not to you, but to the lady. What coloring is she?"

"C-coloring? She's white."

His companion turned her back on him.

"What size is she?"

"A-about that size," said Jethro, pointing to a model.

"About! about!" she ejaculated, and then she faced him. "Now look here, my friend," she said vigorously, "there's something very mysterious about all this. You look like a good man, but you may be a very wicked one for all I know. I've lived long enough to discover that appearances, especially where your sex is concerned, are deceitful. Unless you are willing to tell me who this lady is for whom you are buying silk dresses, and what your relationship is to her, I shall leave you. And mind, no evasions. I can

detect the truth pretty well when I hear it."

Unexpected as it was, Jethro gave back a step or two before this onslaught of feminine virtue, and the movement did not tend to raise him in the lady's esteem. He felt that he would rather face General Grant a thousand times than this person. She was, indeed, preparing to sweep away when there came a familiar tap-tap behind them on the bare floor, and he turned to behold Ephraim hobbling toward them with the aid of his green umbrella, Cynthia by his side.

"Why, it's Uncle Jethro," cried Cynthia, looking at him and the lady in astonishment, and then with equal astonishment at the models. "What in the world are you doing here?" Then a light seemed to dawn on her.

"You frauds! So this is what you were whispering about! This is the way Cousin Ephraim buys his shirts!"

"C-Cynthy," said Jethro, apologetically, "d-don't you think you ought to have a nice city dress for that supper party?"

"So you're ashamed of my country clothes, are you?" she asked gayly.

"W-want you to have the best, Cynthy," he replied. "I-I-meant to have it all chose and bought when you come, but I got into a kind of argument with this lady."

"Argument!" exclaimed the lady. But she did not seem displeased. She had been staring very fixedly at Cynthia. "My dear," she continued kindly, "you look like some one I used to know a long, long time ago, and I'll be glad to help you. Your uncle may be sensible enough in other matters, but I tell him frankly he is out of place here. Let him go away and sit down somewhere with the other gentleman, and we'll get the dress between us, if he'll tell us how much to pay."

"P-pay anything, so's you get it," said Jethro.

"Uncle Jethro, do you really want it so much?"

It must not be thought that Cynthia did not wish for a dress, too. But the sense of dependence on Jethro and the fear of straining his purse never quite wore off. So Jethro and Ephraim took to a bench at some distance, and at last a dress was chosen—not one of the gorgeous models Jethro had picked out, but a pretty, simple, girlish gown which Cynthia herself had liked and of which the lady highly approved. Not content with helping to choose it, the lady must satisfy herself that it fit, which it did perfectly. And so Cynthia was transformed into a city person, though her skin glowed with a health with which few city people are blessed.

"My dear," said the lady, still staring at her, "you look very well. I should scarcely have supposed it." Cynthia took the remark in good part, for she thought the lady a character, which she was. "I hope you will remember that we women were created for a higher purpose than mere beauty. The Lord gave us brains, and meant that we should use them. If you have a good mind, as I believe you have, learn to employ it for the betterment of your sex, for the time of our emancipation is at hand." Having delivered this little lecture, the lady continued to stare at her with keen eyes. "You look very much like someone I used to love when I was younger. What is your name."

"Cynthia Wetherell."

"Cynthia Wetherell? Was your mother Cynthia Ware, from Coniston?"

"Yes," said Cynthia, amazed.

In an instant the strange lady had risen and had taken Cynthia in her embrace, new dress and all.

"My dear," she said, "I thought your face had a familiar look. It was your mother I knew and loved. I'm Miss Lucretia Penniman."

Miss Lucretia Penniman! Could this be, indeed, the authoress of the "Hymn to Coniston," of whom Brampton was so proud? The Miss Lucretia Penniman who sounded the first clarion note for the independence of American women, the friend of Bryant and Hawthorne and Longfellow? Cynthia had indeed heard of her. Did not all Brampton point to the house which had held the Social Library as to a shrine?

"Cynthia," said Miss Lucretia, "I have a meeting now of a girls' charity to which I must go, but you will come to me at the offices of the Woman's Hour to-morrow morning at ten. I wish to talk to you about your mother and yourself."

Cynthia promised, provided they did not leave for Coniston earlier, and in that event agreed to write. Whereupon Miss Lucretia kissed her again and hurried off to her meeting. On the way back to the Tremont House Cynthia related excitedly the whole circumstance to Jethro and Ephraim. Ephraim had heard of Miss Lucretia, of course. Who had not? But he did not read the *Woman's Hour*. Jethro was silent. Perhaps he was thinking of that fresh summer morning, so long ago, when a girl in a gig had overtaken him in the canon made by the Brampton road through the woods. The girl had worn a poke bonnet, and was returning a book to this same Miss Lucretia Penniman's Social Library. And the book was the "Life of Napoleon Bonaparte."

"Uncle Jethro, shall we still be in Boston to-morrow morning?" Cynthia asked.

He roused himself. "Yes," he said, "yes." "When are you going home?"

He did not answer this simple question, but countered. "Hain't you enjoyin' yourself, Cynthy?"

"Of course I am," she declared. But she thought it strange that he would not tell her when they would be in Coniston.

Ephraim did buy a new shirt, and also (in view of the postmastership in his packet) a new necktie, his old one being slightly frayed.

The grandeur of the approaching supper party and the fear of Mrs. Merrill hung very heavy over him; nor was Jethro's mind completely at rest. Ephraim even went so far as to discuss the question as to whether Mr. Merrill had not surpassed his authority in inviting him, and full expected to be met at the door by that gentleman uttering profuse apologies, which Ephraim was quite prepared and willing to take in good faith.

Nothing of the kind happened, however. Mr. Merrill's railroad being a modest one, his house was modest likewise. But Ephraim thought it grand enough, and yet acknowledged a homelike quality in its grandeur. He began by sitting on the edge of the sofa and staring at the cut-glass chandelier, but in five minutes he discovered with a shock of surprise that he was actually leaning back, describing in detail how his regiment had been cheered as they marched through Boston. And incredible as it may seem, the person whom he was entertaining in this manner was Mrs. Stephen Merrill herself. Mrs. Merrill was as tall as Mr. Merrill was short. She wore a black satin dress with a big cameo brooch pinned at her throat, her hair was gray, and her face almost masculine until it lighted up with a wonderfully sweet smile. That smile made Ephraim and Jethro feel at home; and Cynthia, too, who liked Mrs. Merrill the moment she laid eyes on her.

Then there were the daughters, Jane and Susan, who welcomed her with a hospitality truly amazing for city people. Jane was big-boned like her mother, but Susan was short and plump and merry like her father. Susan talked and laughed, and Jane sat and listened and smiled, and Cynthia could not decide which she liked the best. And presently they all went into the dining room to supper, where there was another chandelier over the table. There was also real silver, which shone brilliantly on the white cloth—but there was nothing to eat.

"Do tell us another story, Mr. Prescott," said Susan, who had listened to his last one.

The sight of the table, however, had for the moment upset Ephraim, "Get Jethro to tell you how he took dinner with Judge Binney," he said.

This suggestion, under the circumstances, might not have been a happy one, but its lack of appropriateness did not strike Jethro either. He yielded to the demand.

"Well," he said, "I supposed I was goin' to set down same as I would at home, where we put the vittles on the table. W-wondered what I was goin' to eat—wahn't nothin' but a piece of bread on the table. S-sat there and watched 'em—nobody ate anything. Presently I found out that Binney's wife ran her house same as they run hotels. Pretty soon a couple of girls come in and put down some food and took it away again before you had a chance. A-after a while we had coffee, and when I set my cup on the table, I noticed Mis' Binney looked kind of cross and began whisperin' to the girls. One of 'em fetched a small plate and took my cup and set it on the plate. That was all right. I used the plate.

"Well, along about next summer Binney had to come to Coniston to see me on a little matter and fetched his wife. Listy, my wife, was alive then. I'd made up my mind that if I could ever get Mis' Binney to eat at my place I would, so I asked 'em to stay to dinner. When we set down, I said: 'Now, Mis' Binney, you and the Judge take right hold, and anything you can't reach, speak out and we'll wait on you.' And Mis' Binney?"

"Yes," she said. She was a little mite scared, I guess. B-begun to suspect somethin'."

"Mis' Binney," said I, "y-you can set your cup and sarcer where you've a mind to.' O-ought to have heard the Judge laugh. Says he to his wife: 'Fanny, I told you Jethro'd get even with you some time for that sarcer business.'"

This story, strange as it may seem, had a great success at Mr. Merrill's table. Mr. Merrill and his daughter Susan shrieked with laughter when it was finished, while Mrs. Merrill and Jane enjoyed themselves quite as much in their quiet way. Even the two neat Irish maids, who were serving the supper very much as poor Mis' Binney's had been served, were fain to leave the dining room abruptly, and one of them disgraced herself at sight of Jethro when she came in again, and had to go out once more. Mrs. Merrill insisted that Jethro should pour out his coffee in what she was pleased to call the old-fashioned way. All of which goes to prove that table-silver and cut glass chandeliers do not invariably make their owners heartless and inhospitable. And Ephraim, whose plan of campaign had been to eat nothing to speak of and have a meal when he got back to the hotel, found that he wasn't hungry when he arose from the table.

There was much bantering of Jethro by Mr. Merrill, which the ladies did not understand—talk of a mighty coalition of the big railroads which was to swallow up the little railroads. Fortunately, said Mr. Merrill, humorously, fortunately they did not want his railroad. Or unfortunately, which was it? Jethro didn't know. He never laughed at anybody's jokes. But Cynthia, who was listening with one ear while Susan talked into the other, gathered that Jethro had been struggling with the railroads, and was sooner or later to engage in a mightier struggle with them. How, she asked herself in her innocence, was any one, even Uncle Jethro, to struggle with a railroad? Many other people in these latter days have asked themselves that very question.

All together the evening at Mr. Merrill's passed off so quickly and so happily that Ephraim was dismayed when he discovered that it was ten o'clock, and he began to make elaborate apologies to the ladies. But Jethro and Mr. Merrill were still closeted together in the dining room: once Mrs. Merrill had been called to that conference, and had returned after a while to take her place quietly again among the circle of Ephraim's listeners. Now Mr. Merrill came out of the dining room alone.

"Cynthia," he said, and his tone was a little more grave than usual, "your Uncle Jethro wants to speak to you."

Cynthia rose, with a sense of something in the air which concerned her, and went into the dining room. Was it the light falling from above that brought out the lines of his face so strongly? Cynthia did not know, but she crossed the room swiftly and sat down beside him.

"What is it, Uncle Jethro?"

"C-Cynthy," he said, putting his hand over hers on the table, "I want you to do something for me er—for me," he repeated, emphasizing the last word.

"I'll do anything in the world for you, Uncle Jethro," she answered; "you know that. What—what is it?"

"L-like Mr. Merrill, don't you?" "Yes, indeed."

"L-like Mrs. Merrill—like the gals—don't you?" "Very much," said Cynthia, perplexedly.

"Like 'em enough to—to live with 'em a winter?"

"Live with them a winter!"

"C-Cynthy, I want you should stay in Boston this winter and go to a young ladies' school."

It was out. He had said it, though he never quite knew where he had found the courage.

"Uncle Jethro!" she cried. She could only look at him in dismay, but the tears came into her eyes and sparkled.

"You—you'll be happy here, Cynthy. It'll be a change for you. And I shan't be so lonesome as you'd think. I'll—I'll be busy this winter, Cynthy."

"You know that I wouldn't leave you, Uncle Jethro," she said reproachfully. "I should be lonesome, if you wouldn't. You would be lonesome—you know you would be."

"You'll do this for me, Cynthy. S-said you would, didn't you—said you would?"

"Why do you want me to do this?"

"W-want you to go to school for a winter, Cynthy. Shouldn't think I'd done right by you if I didn't."

"But I have been to school. Daddy taught me a lot, and Mr. Satterlee has taught me a great deal more. I know as much as most girls of my age, and I will study so hard in Coniston this winter, if that is what you want. I've never neglected my lessons, Uncle Jethro."

"Tain't book-larnin'—'tain't what you'd get in book larnin' in Boston, Cynthy."

"What, then?" she asked.

"Well," said Jethro, "they'd teach you to be a lady, Cynthy."

"A lady!"

"Your father come of good people, and—and your mother was a lady. I'm only a rough old man, Cynthy, and I don't know much about the ways of fine folks. But you've got it in ye, and I want you should be equal to the best of 'em: You can. And I shouldn't die content unless I'd felt that you'd had the chance. Er—Cynthy—will you do it for me?"

She was silent a long while before she turned to him, and then the tears were running very swiftly down her cheeks.

"Yes, I will do it for you," she answered. "Uncle Jethro, I believe you are the best man, in the world."

"D-don't say that, Cynthy—d-don't say that," he exclaimed, and a sharp agony was in his voice. He got to his feet and went to the folding doors and opened them. "Steve!" he called, "Steve!"

"S-says she'll stay, Steve."

Mr. Merrill had come in, followed by his wife. Cynthia saw them but dimly through her tears. And while she tried to wipe the tears away she felt Mrs. Merrill's arm about her, and heard that lady say:—"We'll try to make you very happy, my dear, and send you back safely in the spring."

CHAPTER VIII

An attempt will be made in these pages to set down such incidents which alone may be vital to this chronicle, now so swiftly running on. The reasons why Mr. Merrill was willing to take Cynthia into his house must certainly be clear to the reader. In the first place, he was under very heavy obligations to Jethro Bass for many favors; in the second place, Mr. Merrill had a real affection for Jethro, which, strange as it may seem to some, was quite possible; and in the third place, Mr. Merrill had taken a fancy to Cynthia, and he had never forgotten the unintentional wrong he had done William Wetherell. Mr. Merrill was a man of impulses, and generally of good impulses. Had he not himself urged upon Jethro the arrangement, it would never have come about. Lastly, he had invited Cynthia to his house that his wife might inspect her, and Mrs. Merrill's verdict had been instant and favorable—a verdict not given in words. A single glance was sufficient, for these good people so understood each other that Mrs. Merrill had only to raise her eyes to her husband's, and this she did shortly after the supper party began; while she was pouring the coffee, to be exact. Thus the compact that Cynthia was to spend the winter in their house was ratified.

There was, first of all, the parting with Jethro and the messages with which he and Ephraim were laden for the whole village and town of Coniston. It was very hard, that parting, and need not be dwelt upon. Ephraim waved his blue handkerchief as the train pulled out, but Jethro stood on the platform, silent and motionless: more eloquent in his sorrow—so Mr. Merrill thought—than any human being he had ever known. Mr. Merrill wondered if Jethro's sorrow were caused by this parting alone; he believed it was not, and suddenly guessed at the true note of it. Having come by chance upon the answer to the riddle, Mr. Merrill stood still with his hand on the carriage door and marvelled that he had not seen it all sooner. He was a man to take to heart the troubles of his friends. A subtle change had indeed come over Jethro, and he was not the same man Mr. Merrill had known for many years. Would others, the men with whom Jethro contended and the men he commanded, mark this change? And what effect would it have on the conflict for the mastery of a state which was to be waged from now on?

"Father," said his daughter Susan, "if you don't get in and close the door, we'll drive off and leave you standing on the sidewalk."

Thus Cynthia went to her new friends in their own carriage. Mrs. Merrill was goodness itself, and loved the girl for what she was. How, indeed, was she to help loving her? Cynthia was scrupulous in her efforts to give no trouble, and yet she never had the air of a dependent or a beneficiary; but held her head high, and when called upon gave an opinion as though she had a right to it. The very first morning Susan, who was prone to be late to breakfast, came down in a great state of excitement and laughter.

"What do you think Cynthia's done, Mother?" she cried. "I went into her room a while ago, and it was all swept and aired, and she was making up the bed."

"That's an excellent plan," said Mrs. Merrill, "tomorrow morning you three girls will have a race to see who makes up her room first."

It is needless to say that the race at bed-making never came off, Susan and Jane having pushed Cynthia into a corner as soon as breakfast was over, and made certain forcible representations which she felt bound to respect, and a treaty was drawn up and faithfully carried out, between the three, that she was to do her own room if necessary to her happiness. The chief gainer by the arrangement was the chambermaid.

Odd as it may seem, the Misses Merrill lived amicably enough with Cynthia. It is a difficult matter to force an account of the relationship of five people living in one house into a few pages, but the fact that the Merrills had large hearts makes this simpler. There are few families who can accept with ease the introduction of a stranger into their midst, even for a time, and there are fewer strangers who can with impunity be introduced. The sisters quarrelled among themselves as all sisters will, and sometimes quarrelled with Cynthia. But oftener they made her the arbiter of their disputes, and asked her advice on certain matters. Especially was this true of Susan, whom certain young gentlemen from Harvard College called upon more or less frequently, and Cynthia had all of Susan's love affairs—including the current one—by heart in a very short time.

As for Cynthia, there were many subjects on which she had to take the advice of the sisters. They did not criticise the joint creations of herself and Miss Sukey Kittredge as frankly as Janet Duncan had done; but Jethro had left in Mrs. Merrill's hands a certain sufficient sum for new dresses for Cynthia, and in due time the dresses were got and worn. To do them justice, the sisters were really sincere in their rejoicings over the very wonderful transformation which they had been chiefly instrumental in effecting.

It is not a difficult task to praise a heroine, and one that should be indulged in but charily. But let some little indulgence be accorded this particular heroine by reason of the life she had led, and the situation in which she now found herself: a poor Coniston girl, dependent on one who was not her father, though she loved him as a father; beholden to these good people who dwelt in a world into which she had no reasonable expectations of entering, and which, to tell the truth, she now feared.

It was inevitable that Cynthia should be brought into contact with many friends and relations of the family. Some of these noticed and admired her; others did neither; others gossiped about Mrs. Merrill behind her back at her own dinners and sewing circles and wondered what folly could have induced her to bring the girl into her house. But Mrs. Merrill, like many generous people who do not stop to calculate a kindness, was always severely criticised.

And then there were Jane's and Susan's friends, in and out of Miss Sadler's school. For Mrs. Merrill's influence had been sufficient to induce Miss Sadler to take Cynthia as a day scholar with her own daughters. This, be it known, was a great concession on the part of Miss Sadler, who regarded Cynthia's credentials as dubious enough; and her young ladies were inclined to regard them so, likewise. Some of these young ladies came from other cities,—New York and Philadelphia and elsewhere,—and their fathers and mothers were usually people to be mentioned as a matter of course—were, indeed, frequently so mentioned by Miss Sadler, especially when a visitor called at the school.

"Isabel, I saw that your mother sailed for Europe yesterday," or, "Sally, your father tells me he is building a gallery for his collection." Then to the visitor, "You know the Broke house in Washington Square, of course."

Of course the visitor did. But Sally or Isabel would often imitate Miss Sadler behind her back, showing how well they understood her snobbishness.

Miss Sadler was by no means the type which we have come to recognize in the cartoons as the Boston school ma'am. She was a little, round person with thin lips and a sharp nose all out of character with her roundness, and bright eyes like a bird's. To do her justice, so far as instruction went, her

scholars were equally well cared for, whether they hailed from Washington Square or Washington Court House. There were, indeed, none from such rural sorts of places—except Cynthia. But Miss Sadler did not take her hand on the opening day—or afterward—and ask her about Uncle Jethro. Oh, no. Miss Sadler had no interest for great men who did not sail for Europe or add picture galleries on to their houses. Cynthia laughed, a little bitterly, perhaps, at the thought of a picture gallery being added to the tannery house. And she told herself stoutly that Uncle Jethro was a greater man than any of the others, even if Miss Sadler did not see fit to mention him. So she had her first taste of a kind of wormwood that is very common in the world though it did not grow in Coniston.

For a while after Cynthia's introduction to the school she was calmly ignored by many of the young ladies there, and once openly—snubbed, to use the word in its most disagreeable sense. Not that she gave any of them any real cause to snub her. She did not intrude her own affairs upon them, but she was used to conversing kindly with the people about her as equals, and for this offence; on the third day, Miss Sally Broke snubbed her. It is hard not to make a heroine of Cynthia, not to be able to relate that she instantly put Miss Sally's nose out of joint. Susan Merrill tried to do that, and failed signally, for Miss Sally's nose was not easily dislodged. Susan fought more than one of Cynthia's battles. As a matter of fact, Cynthia did not know that she had been affronted until that evening. She did not tell her friends how she spent the night yearning fiercely for Coniston and Uncle Jethro, at times weeping for them, if the truth be told; how she had risen before the dawn to write a letter, and to lay some things in the rawhide trunk. The letter was never sent, and the packing never finished. Uncle Jethro wished her to stay and to learn to be a lady, and stay she would, in spite of Miss Broke and the rest of them. She went to school the next day, and for many days and weeks thereafter, and held communion with the few alone who chose to treat her pleasantly. Unquestionably this is making a heroine of Cynthia.

If young men are cruel in their schools, what shall be written of young women? It would be better to say that both are thoughtless. Miss Sally Broke, strange as it may seem, had a heart, and many of the other young ladies whose fathers sailed for Europe and owned picture galleries; but these young ladies were absorbed, especially after vacation, in affairs of which a girl from Coniston had no part. Their friends were not her friends, their amusements not her amusements, and their talk not her talk. But Cynthia watched them, as was her duty, and gradually absorbed many things which are useful if not essential—outward observances of which the world takes cognizance, and which she had been sent there by Uncle Jethro to learn. Young people of Cynthia's type and nationality are the most adaptable in the world.

Before the December snows set in Cynthia had made one firm friend, at least, in Boston; outside of the Merrill family. That friend was Miss Lucretia Penniman, editress of the *Woman's Hour*. Miss Lucretia lived in the queerest and quaintest of the little houses tucked away under the hill, with the back door a story higher than the fronts an arrangement which in summer enabled the mistress to walk out of her sitting-room windows into a little walled garden. In winter that sitting room was the sunniest, cosiest room in the city, and Cynthia spent many hours there, reading or listening to the wisdom that fell from the lips of Miss Lucretia or her guests. The sitting room had uneven, yellow-white panelling that fairly shone with enamel, mahogany bookcases filled with authors who had chosen to comply with Miss Lucretia's somewhat rigorous censorship; there was a table laden with such magazines as had to do with the uplifting of a sex, a delightful wavy floor covered with a rose carpet; and, needless to add, not a pin or a pair of scissors out of place in the whole apartment.

There is no intention of enriching these pages with Miss Lucretia's homilies. Their subject-matter may be found in the files of the *Woman's Hour*. She did not always preach, although many people will not believe this statement. Miss Lucretia, too, had a heart, though she kept it hidden away, only to be brought out on occasions when she was sure of its appreciation, and she grew strangely interested in this self-contained girl from Coniston whose mother she had known. Miss Lucretia understood Cynthia, who also was the kind who kept her heart hidden, the kind who conceal their troubles and sufferings because they find it difficult to give them out. So Miss Lucretia had Cynthia to take supper with her at least once in the week, and watched her quietly, and let her speak of as much of her life as she chose—which was not much, at first. But Miss Lucretia was content to wait, and guessed at many things which Cynthia did not tell her, and made some personal effort, unknown to Cynthia, to find out other things. It will be said that she had designs on the girl. If so, they were generous designs; and perhaps it was inevitable that Miss Lucretia should recognize in every young woman of spirit and brains a possible recruit for the cause.

It has now been shown in some manner and as briefly as possible how Cynthia's life had changed, and what it had become. We have got her partly through the winter, and find her still dreaming of the sparkling snow on Coniston and of the wind whirling it on clear, cold days like smoke among the spruces; of Uncle Jethro sitting by his stove through the long evenings all alone; of Rias in his store and Moses Hatch and Lem Hallowell, and Cousin Ephraim in his new post-office. Uncle Jethro wrote for the first time in his life—letters: short letters, but in his own handwriting, and deserving of being read for

curiosity's sake if there were time. The wording was queer enough and guarded enough, but they were charged with a great affection which clung to them like lavender.

And Cynthia kept them every one, and read them over on such occasions when she felt that she could not live another minute out of sight of her mountain.

Such was the state of affairs one gray afternoon in December when Cynthia, who was sitting in Mrs. Merrill's parlor, suddenly looked up from her book to discover that two young men were in the room. The young men were apparently quite as much surprised as she, and the parlor maid stood grinning behind them.

"Tell Miss Susan and Miss Jane, Ellen," said Cynthia, preparing to depart. One of the young men she recognized from a photograph on Susan's bureau. He was, for the time being, Susan's. His name, although it does not matter much, was Morton Browne, and he would have been considerably astonished if he had guessed how much of his history Cynthia knew. It was Mr. Browne's habit to take Susan for a walk as often as propriety permitted, and on such occasions he generally brought along a good-natured classmate to take care of Jane. This, apparently, was one of the occasions. Mr. Browne was tall and dark and generally good-looking, while his friends were usually distinguished for their good nature.

Mr. Browne stood between her and the door and looked at her rather fixedly. Then he said:—"Excuse me."

A great many friendships, and even love affairs, have been inaugurated by just such an opening.

"Certainly," said Cynthia, and tried to pass out. But Mr. Browne had no intention of allowing her to do so if he could help it.

"I hope I am not intruding," he said politely.

"Oh, no," answered Cynthia, wondering how she could get by him.

"Were you waiting for Miss Merrill?"

"Oh, no," said Cynthia again.

The other young man turned his back and became absorbed in the picture of a lion getting ready to tear a lady to pieces. But Mr. Browne was of that mettle which is not easily baffled in such matters. He introduced himself, and desired to know whom he had the honor of addressing. Cynthia could not but enlighten him. Mr. Browne was greatly astonished, and showed it.

"So you are the mysterious young lady who has been staying here in the house this winter," he exclaimed, as though it were a marvellous thing. "I have heard Miss Merrill speak of you. She admires you very much. Is it true that you come from—Coniston?"

"Yes," she said.

"Let me see—where is Coniston?" inquired Mr. Browne.

"Do you know where Brampton is?" asked Cynthia. "Coniston is near Brampton."

"Brampton!" exclaimed Mr. Browne, "I have a classmate who comes from Brampton—Bob Worthington—You must know Bob, then."

Yes, Cynthia knew Mr. Worthington.

"His father's got a mint of money, they say. I've been told that old Worthington was the whole show up in those parts. Is that true?"

"Not quite," said Cynthia.

Not quite! Mr. Morton Browne eyed her in surprise, and from that moment she began to have decided possibilities. Just then Jane and Susan entered arrayed for the walk, but Mr. Browne showed himself in no hurry to depart: began to speak, indeed, in a deprecating way about the weather, appealed to his friend, Mr. King, if it didn't look remarkably like rain, or hail, or snow. Susan sat down, Jane sat down, Mr. Browne and his friend prepared to sit down when Cynthia moved toward the door.

"You're not going, Cynthia!" cried Susan, in a voice that may have had a little too much eagerness in it. "You must stay and help us entertain Mr. Browne." (Mr. King, apparently, was not to be entertained.)

"We've tried so hard to make her come down when people called, Mr. Browne, but she never would."

Cynthia was not skilled in the art of making excuses. She hesitated for one, and was lost. So she sat down, as far from Mr. Browne as possible, next to Jane. In a few minutes Mr. Browne was seated beside her, and how he accomplished this manoeuvre Cynthia could not have said, so skilfully and gradually was it done. For lack of a better subject he chose Mr. Robert Worthington. Related, for Cynthia's delectation, several of Bob's escapades in his freshman year: silly escapades enough, but very bold and daring and original they sounded to Cynthia, who listened (if Mr. Browne could have known it) with almost breathless interest, and forgot all about poor Susan talking to Mr. King. Did Mr. Worthington still while away his evenings stealing barber poles and being chased around Cambridge by irate policemen? Mr. Browne laughed at the notion. O dear, no! seniors never descended to that. Had not Miss Wetherell heard the song wherein seniors were designated as grave and reverend? Yes, Miss Wetherell had heard the song. She did not say where, or how. Mr. Worthington, said his classmate, had become very serious-minded this year. Was captain of the base-ball team and already looking toward the study of law.

"Study law!" exclaimed Cynthia, "I thought he would go into his father's mills."

"Do you know Bob very well?" asked Mr. Browne.

She admitted that she did not.

"He's been away from Brampton a good deal, of course," said Mr. Browne, who seemed pleased by her admission. To do him justice, he would not undermine a classmate, although he had other rules of conduct which might eventually require a little straightening out. "Worthy's a first-rate fellow, a little quick-tempered, perhaps, and inclined to go his own way. He's got a good mind, and he's taken to using it lately. He has come pretty near being suspended once or twice."

Cynthia wanted to ask what "suspended" was. It sounded rather painful. But at this instant there was the rattle of a latch key at the door, and Mr. Merrill walked in.

"Well, well," he said, spying Cynthia, "so you have got Cynthia to come down and entertain the young men at last."

"Yes," said Susan, "we have got Cynthia to come down at last."

Susan did not go to Cynthia's room that night to chat, as usual, and Mr. Morton Browne's photograph was mysteriously removed from the prominent position it had occupied. If Susan had carried out a plan which she conceived in a moment of folly of placing that photograph on Cynthia's bureau, there would undoubtedly have been a quarrel. Cynthia's own feelings—seeing that Mr. Browne had not dazzled her—were not—enviable.

But she held her peace, which indeed was all she could do, and the next time Mr. Browne called, though he took care to mention her name particularly at the door, she would not go down to entertain him: though Susan implored and Jane appealed, she would not go down. Mr. Browne called several times again, with the same result. Cynthia was inexorable—she would have none of him. Then Susan forgave her. There was no quarrel, indeed, but there was a reconciliation, which is the best part of a quarrel. There were tears, of Susan's shedding; there was a character-sketch of Mr. Browne, of Susan's drawing, and that gentleman flitted lightly out of Susan's life.

Some ten days subsequent to this reconciliation Ellen, the parlor maid, brought up a card to Cynthia's room. The card bore the name of Mr. Robert Worthington. Cynthia stared at it, and bent it in her fingers, while Ellen explained how the gentleman had begged that she might see him. To tell the truth, Cynthia had wondered more than once why he had not come before, and smiled when she thought of all the assurances of undying devotion she had heard in Washington. After all, she reflected, why should she not see him—once? He might give her news of Brampton and Coniston. Thus willingly deceiving herself, she told Ellen that she would go down: much to the girl's delight, for Cynthia was a favorite in the house.

As she entered the parlor Mr. Worthington was standing in the window. When he turned and saw her he started to come forward in his old impetuous way, and stopped and looked at her in surprise. She herself did not grasp the reason for this.

"Can it be possible," he said, "can it be possible that this is my friend from the country?" And he took her hand with the greatest formality, pressed it the least little bit, and released it. "How do you do, Miss Wetherell? Do you remember me?"

"How do you do—Bob," she answered, laughing in spite of herself at his banter. "You haven't changed, anyway."

"It was Mr. Worthington in Washington," said he. "Now it is 'Bob' and 'Miss Wetherell.' Rank patronage! How did you do it, Cynthia?"

"You are like all men," said Cynthia, "you look at the clothes, and not the woman. They are not very fine clothes; but if they were much finer, they wouldn't change me."

"Then it must be Miss Sadler."

"Miss Sadler would willingly change me—if she could," said Cynthia, a little bitterly. "How did you find out I was at Miss Sadler's?"

"Morton Browne told me yesterday," said Bob. "I felt like punching his head."

"What did he tell you?" she asked with some concern.

"He said that you were here, visiting the Merrills, among other things, and said that you knew me."

The "other things" Mr. Browne had said were interesting, but flippant. He had seen Bob at a college club and declared that he had met a witch of a country girl at the Merrills. He couldn't make her out, because she had refused to see him every time he called again. He had also repeated Cynthia's remark about Bob's father not being quite the biggest man in his part of the country, and ventured the surmise that she was the daughter of a rival mill owner.

"Why didn't you let me know you were in Boston?" said Bob, reproachfully.

"Why should I?" asked Cynthia, and she could not resist adding, "Didn't you find it out when you went to Brampton—to see me?"

"Well," said he, getting fiery red, "the fact is—I didn't go to Brampton."

"I'm glad you were sensible enough to take my advice, though I suppose that didn't make any difference. But—from the way you spoke, I should have thought nothing could have kept you away."

"To tell you the truth," said Bob, "I'd promised to visit a fellow named Broke in my class, who lives in New York. And I couldn't get out of it. His sister, by the way, is in Miss Sadler's. I suppose you know her. But if I'd thought you'd see me, I should have gone to Brampton, anyway. You were so down on me in Washington."

"It was very good of you to take the trouble to come to see me here. There must be a great many girls in Boston you have to visit."

He caught the little note of coolness in her voice. Cynthia was asking herself whether, if Mr. Browne had not seen fit to give a good report of her, he would have come at all. He would have come, certainly. It is to be hoped that Bob Worthington's attitude up to this time toward Cynthia has been sufficiently defined by his conversation and actions. There had been nothing serious about it. But there can be no question that Mr. Browne's openly expressed admiration had enhanced her value in his eyes.

"There's no girl in Boston that I care a rap for," he said.

"I'm relieved to hear it," said Cynthia, with feeling.

"Are you really?"

"Didn't you expect me to be, when you said it?"

He laughed uncomfortably.

"You've learned more than one thing since you've been in the city," he remarked, "I suppose there are a good many fellows who come here all the time."

"Yes, there are," she said demurely.

"Well," he remarked, "you've changed a lot in three months. I always thought that, if you had a chance, there'd be no telling where you'd end up."

"That doesn't sound very complimentary," said Cynthia. She had, indeed, changed. "In what terrible place do you think I'll end up?"

"I suppose you'll marry one of these Boston men."

"Oh," she laughed, "that wouldn't be so terrible, would it?"

"I believe you're engaged to one of 'em now," he remarked, looking very hard at her.

"If you believed that, I don't think you would say it," she answered.

"I can't make you out. You used to be so frank with me, and now you're not at all so. Are you going to Coniston for the holidays?"

Her face fell at the question.

"Oh, Bob," she cried, surprising him utterly by a glimpse of the real Cynthia, "I wish I were—I wish I were! But I don't dare to."

"Don't dare to?"

"If I went, I should' never come back—never. I should stay with Uncle Jethro. He's so lonesome up there, and I'm so lonesome down here, without him. And I promised him faithfully I'd stay a whole winter at school in Boston."

"Cynthia," said Bob, in a strange voice as he leaned toward her, "do you—do you care for him as much as all that?"

"Care for him?" she repeated.

"Care for—for Uncle Jethro?"

"Of course I care for him," she cried, her eyes flashing at the thought. "I love him better than anybody in the world. Certainly no one ever had better reason to care for a person. My father failed when he came to Coniston—he was not meant for business, and Uncle Jethro took care of him all his life, and paid his debts. And he has taken care of me and given me everything that a girl could wish. Very few people know what a fine character Uncle Jethro has," continued Cynthia, carried away as she was by the pent-up flood of feeling within her. "I know what he has done for others, and I should love him for that even if he never had done anything for me."

Bob was silent. He was, in the first place, utterly amazed at this outburst, revealing as it did a depth of passionate feeling in the girl which he had never suspected, and which thrilled him. It was unlike her, for she was usually so self-repressed; and, being unlike her, accentuated both sides of her character the more.

But what was he to say of the defence of Jethro Bass? Bob was not a young man who had pondered much over the problems of life, because these problems had hitherto never touched him. But now he began to perceive, dimly, things that might become the elements of a tragedy, even as Mr. Merrill had perceived them some months before. Could a union endure between so delicate a creature as the girl before him and Jethro Bass? Could Cynthia ever go back to him again, and live with him happily, without seeing many things which before were hidden by reason of her youth and innocence?

Bob had not been nearly four years at college without learning something of the world; and it had not needed the lecture from his father, which he got upon leaving Washington, to inform him of Jethro's political practices. He had argued soundly with his father on that occasion, having the courage to ask Mr. Worthington in effect whether he did not sanction his underlings to use the same tools as Jethro used. Mr. Worthington was righteously angry, and declared that Jethro had inaugurated those practices in the state, and had to be fought with his own weapons. But Mr. Worthington had had the sense at that time not to mention Cynthia's name. He hoped and believed that that affair was not serious, and merely a boyish fancy—as indeed it was.

It remains to be said, however, that the lecture had not been without its effect upon Bob. Jethro Bass, after all, was—Jethro Bass. All his life Bob had heard him familiarly and jokingly spoken of as the boss of the state, and had listened to the tales, current in all the country towns, of how Jethro had outwitted this man or that. Some of them were not refined tales. Jethro Bass as the boss of the state—with the tolerance with which the public in general regard politics—was one thing. Bob was willing to call him "Uncle Jethro," admire his great strength and shrewdness, and declare that the men he had outwitted had richly deserved it. But Jethro Bass as the ward of Cynthia Wetherell was quite another thing.

It was not only that Cynthia had suddenly and inevitably become a lady. That would not have mattered, for such as she would have borne Coniston and the life of Coniston cheerfully. But Bob

reflected, as he walked back to his rooms in the dark through the snow-laden streets, that Cynthia, young though she might be, possessed principles from which no love would sway her a hair's breadth. How, indeed, was she to live with Jethro once her eyes were opened?

The thought made him angry, but returned to him persistently during the days that followed,—in the lecture room, in the gymnasium, in his own study, where he spent more time than formerly. By these tokens it will be perceived that Bob, too, had changed a little. And the sight of Cynthia in Mrs. Merrill's parlor had set him to thinking in a very different manner than the sight of her in Washington had affected him. Bob had managed to shift the subject from Jethro, not without an effort, though he had done it in that merry, careless manner which was so characteristic of him. He had talked of many things,—his college life, his friends,—and laughed at her questions about his freshman escapades. But when at length, at twilight, he had risen to go, he had taken both her hands and looked down into her face with a very different expression than she had seen him wear before—a much more serious expression, which puzzled her. It was not the look of a lover, nor yet that of a man who imagines himself in love. With either of these her instinct would have told her how to deal. It was more the look of a friend, with much of the masculine spirit of protection in it.

"May I come to see you again?" he asked.

Gently she released her hands, and she did not answer at once. She went to the window, and stared across the sloping street at the grilled railing before the big house opposite, thinking. Her reason told her that he should not come, but her spirit rebelled against that reason. It was a pleasure to see him, so she freely admitted to herself. Why should she not have that pleasure? If the truth be told, she had argued it all out before, when she had wondered whether he would come. Mrs. Merrill, she thought, would not object to his coming. But—there was the question she had meant to ask him.

"Bob," she said, turning to him, "Bob, would your father want you to come?"

It was growing dark, and she could scarcely see his face. He hesitated, but he did not attempt to evade the question.

"No, he would not," he answered. And added, with a good deal of force and dignity: "I am of age, and can choose my own friends. I am my own master. If he knew you as I knew you, he would look at the matter in a different light."

Cynthia felt that this was not quite true. She smiled a little sadly.

"I am afraid you don't know me very well, Bob." He was about to protest, but she went on, bravely, "Is it because he has quarrelled with Uncle Jethro?"

"Yes," said Bob. She was making it terribly hard for him, sparing indeed neither herself nor him.

"If you come here to see me, it will cause a quarrel between you and your father. I—I cannot do that."

"There is nothing wrong in my seeing you," said Bob, stoutly; "if he cares to quarrel with me for that, I cannot help it. If the people I choose for my friends are good people, he has no right to an objection, even though he is my father."

Cynthia had never come so near real admiration for him as at that moment.

"No, Bob, you must not come," she said. "I will not have you quarrel with him on my account."

"Then I will quarrel with him on my own account," he had answered.
"Good-by. You may expect me this day week."

He went into the hall to put on his overcoat. Cynthia stood still on the spot of the carpet where he had left her. He put his head in at the door.

"This day week," he said.

"Bob, you must not come," she answered. But the street door closed after him as he spoke.

CHAPTER IX

"You must not come." Had Cynthia made the prohibition strong enough? Ought she not to have said, "If you do come, I will not see you?" Her knowledge of the motives of the men and women in the greater world was largely confined to that which she had gathered from novels—not trashy novels, but those by standard authors of English life. And many another girl of nineteen has taken a novel for a guide when she has been suddenly confronted with the first great problem outside of her experience. Somebody has declared that there are only seven plots in the world. There are many parallels in English literature to Cynthia's position,—so far as she was able to define that position,—the wealthy young peer, the parson's or physician's daughter, and the worldly, inexorable parents who had other plans.

Cynthia was, of course, foolish. She would not look ahead, yet there was the mirage in the sky when she allowed herself to dream. It can truthfully be said that she was not in love with Bob Worthington. She felt, rather than knew, that if love came to her the feeling she had for Jethro Bass—strong though that was—would be as nothing to it. The girl felt the intensity of her nature, and shrank from it when her thoughts ran that way, for it frightened her.

"Mrs. Merrill" she said, a few days later, when she found herself alone with that lady, "you once told me you would have no objection if a friend came to see me here."

"None whatever, my dear," answered Mrs. Merrill. "I have asked you to have your friends here."

Mrs. Merrill knew that a young man had called on Cynthia. The girls had discussed the event excitedly, had teased Cynthia about it; they had discovered, moreover, that the young man had not been a tiller of the soil or a clerk in a country store. Ellen, with the enthusiasm of her race, had painted him in glowing colors—but she had neglected to read the name on his card.

"Bob Worthington came to see me last week, and he wants to come again. He lives in Brampton," Cynthia explained, "and is at Harvard College."

Mrs. Merrill was decidedly surprised. She went on with her sewing, however, and did not betray the fact. She knew of Dudley Worthington as one of the richest and most important men in his state; she had heard her husband speak of him often; but she had never meddled with politics and railroad affairs.

"By all means let him come, Cynthia," she replied.

When Mr. Merrill got home that evening she spoke of the matter to him.

"Cynthia is a strange character," she said. "Sometimes I can't understand her—she seems so much older than our girls, Stephen. Think of her keeping this to herself for four days!"

Mr. Merrill laughed, but he went off to a little writing room he had and sat for a long time looking into the glowing coals. Then he laughed again. Mr. Merrill was a philosopher. After all, he could not forbid Dudley Worthington's son coming to his house, nor did he wish to.

That same evening Cynthia wrote a letter and posted it. She found it a very difficult letter to write, and almost as difficult to drop into the mail-box. She reflected that the holidays were close at hand, and then he would go to Brampton and forget, even as he had forgotten before. And she determined when Wednesday afternoon came around that she would take a long walk in the direction of Brookline. Cynthia loved these walks, for she sadly missed the country air,—and they had kept the color in her cheeks and the courage in her heart that winter. She had amazed the Merrill girls by the distances she covered, and on more than one occasion she had trudged many miles to a spot from which there was a view of Blue Hills. They reminded her faintly of Coniston.

Who can speak or write with any certainty of the feminine character, or declare what unexpected twists perversity and curiosity may give to it? Wednesday afternoon came, and Cynthia did not go to Brookline. She put on her coat, and took it off again. Would he dare to come in the face of the mandate he had received? If he did come, she wouldn't see him. Ellen had received her orders.

At four o'clock the doorbell rang, and shortly thereafter Ellen appeared, simpering and apologetic enough, with a card. She had taken the trouble to read it this time. Cynthia was angry, or thought she was, and her cheeks were very red.

"I told you to excuse me, Ellen. Why did you let him in?"

"Miss Cynthia, darlin'," said Ellen, "if it was made of flint I was, wouldn't he bring the tears out of me with his wheedlin' an' coaxin'? An' him such a fine young gintleman! And whin he took to commandin' like, sure I couldn't say no to him at all at all. 'Take the card to her, Ellen,' he says—didn't he know me name!—'an' if she says she won't see me, thin I won't trouble her more.' Thim were his words, Miss."

There he was before the fire, his feet slightly apart and his hands in his pockets, waiting for her. She

got a glimpse of him standing thus, as she came down the stairs. It was not the attitude of a culprit. Nor did he bear the faintest resemblance to a culprit as he came up to her in the doorway. The chief recollection she carried away of that moment was that his teeth were very white and even when he smiled. He had the impudence to smile. He had the impudence to seize one of her hands in his, and to hold aloft a sheet of paper in the other.

"What does this mean?" said he.

"What do you thicken it means?" retorted Cynthia, with dignity.

"A summons to stay away," said Bob, thereby more or less accurately describing it. "What would you have thought of me if I had not come?"

Cynthia was not prepared for any such question as this. She had meant to ask the questions herself. But she never lacked for words to protect herself.

"I'll tell you what I think of you for coming, Bob, for insisting upon seeing me as you did," she said, remembering with shame Ellen's account of that proceeding. "It was very unkind and very thoughtless of you."

"Unkind?" Thus she succeeded in putting him on the defensive.

"Yes, unkind, because I know it is best for you not to come to see me, and you know it, and yet you will not help me when I try to do what is right. I shall be blamed for these visits," she said. The young ladies in the novels always were. But it was a serious matter for poor Cynthia, and her voice trembled a little. Her troubles seemed very real.

"Who will blame you?" asked Bob, though he knew well enough. Then he added, seeing that she did not answer: "I don't at all agree with you that it is best for me not to see you. I know of nobody in the world it does me more good to see than yourself. Let's sit down and talk it all over," he said, for she still remained standing uncompromisingly by the door.

The suspicion of a smile came over Cynthia's face. She remembered how Ellen had been wheedled. Her instinct told her that now was the time to make a stand or never.

"It wouldn't do any good, Bob," she replied, shaking her head; "we talked it all over last week."

"Not at all," said he, "we only touched upon a few points last week. We ought to thrash it out. Various aspects of the matter have occurred to me which I ought to call to your attention."

He could not avoid this bantering tone, but she saw that he was very much in earnest too. He realized the necessity of winning; likewise, and he had got in and meant to stay.

"I don't want to argue," said Cynthia. "I've thought it all out."

"So have I," said Bob. "I haven't thought of anything else, to speak of. And by the way," he declared, shaking the envelope, "I never got a colder and more formal letter in my life. You must have taken it from one of Miss Sadler's copy books."

"I'm sorry I haven't been able to equal the warmth of your other correspondents," said Cynthia, smiling at the mention of Miss Sadler.

"You've got a good many degrees yet to go," he replied.

"I have no idea of doing so," said Cynthia.

If Cynthia had lured him there, and had carefully thought out a plan of fanning his admiration into a flame, she could not have done better than to stand obstinately by the door. Nothing appeals to a man like resistance—resistance for a principle appealed to Bob, although he did not care a fig about that particular principle. In his former dealings with young women—and they had not been few—the son of Dudley Worthington had encountered no resistance worth the mentioning. He looked at the girl before him, and his blood leaped at the thought of a conquest over her. She was often demure, but behind that demureness was firmness: she was mistress of herself, and yet possessed a marvellous vitality.

"And now," said Cynthia, "don't you think you had better go?"

Go! He laughed outright. Never! He would sit down under that fortress, and some day he meant to scale the walls. Like John Paul Jones, he had not yet begun to fight. But he did not sit down just yet, because Cynthia remained standing.

"I'm here now," he said, "what's the good of going away? I might as well stay the rest of the afternoon."

"You will find a photograph album on the table," said Cynthia, "with pictures of all the Merrill family and their friends and relations."

In spite of the threat this remark conveyed, he could not help laughing at it. Mrs. Merrill in her sitting room heard the laugh, and felt that she would like Bob Worthington.

"It's a heavy album, Cynthia," he said; "perhaps you would hold up one side of it."

It was Cynthia's turn to laugh. She could not decide whether he were a man or a boy. Sometimes, she had to admit, he was very much of a man.

"Where are you going?" he cried.

"Upstairs, of course," she answered.

This was really alarming. But fate thrust a final weapon into his hands.

"All right," said he, "I'll look at the album. What time does Mr. Merrill get home?"

"About six," answered Cynthia. "Why?"

"When he comes," said Bob, "I shall put on my most disconsolate expression. He'll ask me what I'm doing, and I'll tell him you went upstairs at half-past four and haven't come down. He'll sympathize, I'll bet anything."

Whether Bob were really capable of doing this, Cynthia could not tell. She believed he was. Perhaps she really did not intend to go upstairs just then. To his intense relief she seated herself on a straight-backed chair near the door, although she had the air of being about to get up again at any minute. It was not a surrender, not at all—but a parley, at least.

"I really want to talk to you seriously, Bob," she said, and her voice was serious. "I like you very much—I always have—and I want you to listen seriously. All of us have friends. Some people—you, for instance—have a great many. We have but one father." Her voice failed a little at the word. "No friend can ever be the same to you as your father, and no friendship can make up what his displeasure will cost you. I do not mean to say that I shan't always be your friend, for I shall be."

Young men seldom arrive at maturity by gradual steps—something sets them thinking, a week passes, and suddenly the world has a different aspect. Bob had thought much of his father during that week, and had considered their relationship very carefully. He had a few precious memories of his mother before she had been laid to rest under that hideous and pretentious monument in the Brampton hill cemetery. How unlike her was that monument! Even as a young boy, when on occasions he had wandered into the cemetery, he used to stand before it with a lump in his throat and bitter resentment in his heart, and once he had shaken his fist at it. He had grown up out of sympathy with his father, but he had never until now begun to analyze the reasons for it. His father had given him everything except that communion of which Cynthia spoke so feelingly. Mr. Worthington had acted according to his lights: of all the people in the world he thought first of his son. But his thoughts and care had been alone of what the son would be to the world: how that son would carry on the wealth and greatness of Isaac D. Worthington.

Bob had known this before, but it had had no such significance for him then as now. He was by no means lacking in shrewdness, and as he had grown older he had perceived clearly enough Mr. Worthington's reasons for throwing him socially with the Duncans. Mr. Worthington had never been a plain-spoken man, but he had as much as told his son that it was decreed that he should marry the heiress of the state. There were other plans connected with this. Mr. Worthington meant that his son should eventually own the state itself, for he saw that the man who controlled the highways of a state could snap his fingers at governor and council and legislature and judiciary: could, indeed, do more—could own them even more completely than Jethro Bass now owned them, and without effort. The dividends would do the work: would canvass the counties and persuade this man and that with sufficient eloquence. By such tokens it will be seen that Isaac D. Worthington is destined to become great, though the greatness will be akin to that possessed by those gentlemen who in past ages had built castles across the highway between Venice and the North Sea. All this was in store for Bob Worthington, if he could only be brought to see it. These things would be given him, if he would but confine his worship to the god of wealth.

We are running ahead, however, of Bob's reflections in Mr. Merrill's parlor in Mount Vernon Street,

and the ceremony of showing him the cities of his world from Brampton hill was yet to be gone through. Bob knew his father's plans only in a general way, but in the past week he had come to know his father with a fair amount of thoroughness. If Isaac D. Worthington had but chosen a worldly wife, he might have had a more worldly son. As it was, Bob's thoughts were a little bitter when Cynthia spoke of his father, and he tried to think instead what his mother would have him do. He could not, indeed, speak of Mr. Worthington's shortcomings as he understood them, but he answered Cynthia vigorously enough—even if his words were not as serious as she desired.

"I tell you I am old enough to judge for myself, Cynthia," said he, "and I intend to judge for myself. I don't pretend to be a paragon of virtue, but I have a kind of a conscience which tells me when I am doing wrong, if I listen to it. I have not always listened to it. It tells me I'm doing right now, and I mean to listen to it."

Cynthia could not but think there was very little self-denial attached to this. Men are not given largely to self-denial.

"It is easy enough to listen to your conscience when you think it impels you to do that which you want to do, Bob," she answered, laughing at his argument in spite of herself.

"Are you wicked?" he demanded abruptly.

"Why, no, I don't think I am," said Cynthia, taken aback. But she corrected herself swiftly, perceiving his bent. "I should be doing wrong to let you come here."

He ignored the qualification.

"Are you vain and frivolous?"

She remembered that she had looked in the glass before she had come down to him, and bit her lip.

"Are you given over to idle pursuits, to leading young men from their occupations and duties?"

"If you've come here to recite the Blue Laws," said she, laughing again, "I have something better to do than to listen to them."

"Cynthia," he cried, "I'll tell you what you are. I'll draw your character for you, and then, if you can give me one good reason why I should not associate with you, I'll go away and never come back."

"That's all very well," said Cynthia, "but suppose I don't admit your qualifications for drawing my character. And I don't admit them, not for a minute."

"I will draw it," said he, standing up in front of her. "Oh, confound it!"

This exclamation, astonishing and out of place as it was, was caused by a ring at the doorbell. The ring was followed by a whispering and giggling in the hall, and then by the entrance of the Misses Merrill into the parlor. Curiosity had been too strong for them. Susan was human, and here was the opportunity for a little revenge. In justice to her, she meant the revenge to be very slight.

"Well, Cynthia, you should have come to the concert," she said; "it was fine, wasn't it, Jane? Is this Mr. Worthington? How do you do. I'm Miss Susan Merrill, and this is Miss Jane Merrill." Susan only intended to stay a minute, but how was Bob to know that? She was tempted into staying longer. Bob lighted the gas, and she inspected him and approved. Her approval increased when he began to talk to her in his bantering way, as if he had known her always. Then, when she was fully intending to go, he rose to take his leave.

"I'm awfully glad to have met you at last," he said to Susan, "I've heard so much about you." His leave-taking of Jane was less effusive, and then he turned to Cynthia and took her hand. "I'm going to Brampton on Friday," he said, "for the holidays. I wish you were going."

"We couldn't think of letting her go, Mr. Worthington," cried Susan, for the thought of the hills had made Cynthia incapable of answering. "We're only to have her for one short winter, you know."

"Yes, I know," said Mr. Worthington, gravely. "I'll see old Ephraim, and tell him you're well, and what a marvel of learning, you've become. And—and I'll go to Coniston if that will please you."

"Oh, no, Bob, you mustn't do anything of the kind," answered Cynthia, trying to keep back the tears. "I—I write to Uncle Jethro very often. Good-by. I hope you will enjoy your holidays."

"I'm coming to see you the minute I get back and tell you all about everybody," said he.

How was she to forbid him to come before Susan and Jane! She could only be silent.

"Do come, Mr. Worthington," said Susan, warmly, wondering at Cynthia's coldness and, indeed, misinterpreting it. "I am sure she will be glad to see you. And we shall always make you welcome, at any rate."

As soon as he was out of the door, Susan became very repentant, and slipped her hand about Cynthia's waist.

"We shouldn't have come in at all if we had known he would go so soon, indeed we shouldn't, Cynthia." And seeing that Cynthia was still silent, she added: "I wouldn't do such a mean thing, Cynthia, I really wouldn't. Won't you believe me and forgive me?"

Cynthia scarcely heard her at first. She was thinking of Coniston mountain, and how the sun had just set behind it. The mountain would be ultramarine against the white fields, and the snow on the hill pastures to the east stained red as with wine. What would she not have given to be going back tomorrow—yes, with Bob. She confessed—though startled by the very boldness of the thought—that she would like to be going there with Bob. Susan's appeal brought her back to Boston and the gas-lit parlor.

"Forgive you, Susan! There's nothing to forgive. I wanted him to go."

"You wanted him to go?" repeated Susan, amazed. She may be pardoned if she did not believe this, but a glance at Cynthia's face scarcely left a room for doubt. "Cynthia Wetherell, you're the strangest girl I've ever known in all my life. If I had a—a friend" (Susan had another word on her tongue) "if I had such a friend as Mr. Worthington, I shouldn't be in a hurry to let him leave me. Of course," she added, "I shouldn't let him know it."

Cynthia's heart was very heavy during the next few days, heavier by far than her friends in Mount Vernon Street imagined. They had grown to love her almost as one of themselves, and because of the sympathy which comes of such love they guessed that her thoughts would be turning homeward at Christmastide. At school she had listened, perforce, to the festival plans of thirty girls of her own age; to accounts of the probable presents they were to receive, the cost of some of which would support a family in Coniston for several months; to arrangements for visits, during which there were to be theatre-parties and dances and other gaieties. Cynthia could not help wondering, as she listened in silence to this talk, whether Uncle Jethro had done wisely in sending her to Miss Sadler's; whether she would not have been far happier if she had never known about such things.

Then came the last day of school, which began with leave-takings and embraces. There were not many who embraced Cynthia, though, had she known it, this was largely her own fault. Poor Cynthia! how was she to know it? Many more of them than she imagined would have liked to embrace her had they believed that the embrace would be returned. Secretly they had grown to admire this strange, dark girl, who was too proud to bend for the good opinion of any one—even of Miss Sally Broke. Once during the term Cynthia had held some of them—in the hollow of her hand, and had incurred the severe displeasure of Miss Sadler by refusing to tell what she knew of certain mischief-makers.

Now, Miss Sadler was going about among them in the school parlor saying good-by, sending particular remembrance to such of the fathers and mothers as she thought worthy of that honor; kissing some, shaking hands with all. It was then that a dramatic incident occurred—dramatic for a girls' school, at least. Cynthia deliberately turned her back on Miss Sadler and looked out of the window. The chatter in the room was hushed, and for a moment a dangerous wrath flamed in Miss Sadler's eyes. Then she passed on with a smile, to send most particular messages to the mother of Miss Isabel Burrage.

Some few moments afterward Cynthia felt a touch on her arm, and turned to find herself confronted by Miss Sally Broke. Unfortunately there is not much room for Miss Broke in this story, although she may appear in another one yet to be written. She was extremely good-looking, with real golden hair and mischievous blue eyes. She was, in brief, the leader of Miss Sadler's school.

"Cynthia," she said, "I was rude to you when you first came here, and I'm sorry for it. I want to beg your pardon." And she held out her hand.

There was a moment's suspense for those watching to see if Cynthia would take it. She did take it.

"I'm sorry, too," said Cynthia, simply, "I couldn't see what I'd done to offend you. Perhaps you'll explain now."

Miss Broke blushed violently, and for an instant looked decidedly uncomfortable. Then she burst into laughter,—merry, irresistible laughter that carried all before it.

"I was a snob, that's all," said she, "just a plain, low down snob. You don't understand what that means, because you're not one." (Cynthia did understand,) "But I like you, and I want you to be my friend. Perhaps when I get to know you better, you will come home with me sometime for a visit."

Go home with her for a visit to that house in Washington Square with the picture gallery!

"I want to say that I'd give my head to have been able to turn my back on Miss Sadler as you did," continued Miss Broke; "if you ever want a friend, remember Sally Broke."

Some of Cynthia's trouble, at least, was mitigated by this episode; and Miss Broke having led the way, Miss Broke's followers came shyly, one by one, with proffers of friendship. To the good-hearted Merrill girls the walk home that day was a kind of a triumphal march, a victory over Miss Sadler and a vindication of their friend. Mrs. Merrill, when she heard of it, could not find it in her heart to reprove Cynthia. Miss Sadler had got her just deserts. But Miss Sadler was not a person who was likely to forget such an incident. Indeed, Mrs. Merrill half expected to receive a note before the holidays ended that Cynthia's presence was no longer desired at the school. No such note came, however.

If one had to be away from home on Christmas, there could surely be no better place to spend that day than in the Merrill household. Cynthia remembers still, when that blessed season comes around, how each member of the family vied with the others to make her happy; how they showered presents on her, and how they strove to include her in the laughter and jokes at the big family dinner. Mr. Merrill's brother was there with his wife, and Mrs. Merrill's aunt and her husband, and two broods of cousins. It may be well to mention that the Merrill relations, like Sally Broke, had overcome their dislike for Cynthia.

There were eatables from Coniston on that board. A turkey sent by Jethro for which, Mr. Merrill declared, the table would have to be strengthened; a saddle of venison—Lem Hallowell having shot a deer on the mountain two Sundays before; and mince-meat made by Amanda Hatch herself. Other presents had come to Cynthia from the hills: a gorgeous copy of Mr. Longfellow's poems from Cousin Ephraim, and a gold locket from Uncle Jethro. This locket was the precise counterpart (had she but known it) of a silver one bought at Mr. Judson's shop many years before, though the inscription "Cynthy, from Uncle Jethro," was within. Into the other side exactly fitted that daguerreotype of her mother which her father had given her when he died. The locket had a gold chain with a clasp, and Cynthia wore it hidden beneath her gown—too intimate a possession to be shown.

There was still another and very mysterious present, this being a huge box of roses, addressed to Miss Cynthia Wetherell, which was delivered on Christmas morning. If there had been a card, Susan Merrill would certainly have found it. There was no card. There was much pretended speculation on the part of the Merrill girls as to the sender, sly reference to Cynthia's heightened color, and several attempts to pin on her dress a bunch of the flowers, and Susan declared that one of them would look stunning in her hair. They were put on the dining-room table in the centre of the wreath of holly, and under the mistletoe which hung from the chandelier. Whether Cynthia surreptitiously stole one has never been discovered.

So Christmas came and went: not altogether unhappily, deferring for a day at least the knotty problems of life. Although Cynthia accepted the present of the roses with such magnificent unconcern, and would not make so much as a guess as to who sent them, Mr. Robert Worthington was frequently in her thoughts. He had declared his intention of coming to Mount Vernon Street as soon as the holidays ended, and had been cordially invited by Susan to do so. Cynthia took the trouble to procure a Harvard catalogue from the library, and discovered that he had many holidays yet to spend. She determined to write another letter, which he would find in his rooms when he returned. Just what terrible prohibitory terms she was to employ in that letter Cynthia could not decide in a moment, nor yet in a day, or a week. She went so far as to make several drafts, some of which she destroyed for the fault of leniency, and others for that of severity. What was she to say to him? She had expended her arguments to no avail. She could wound him, indeed, and at length made up her mind that this was the only resource left her, although she would thereby wound herself more deeply. When she had arrived at this decision, there remained still more than a week in which to compose the letter.

On the morning after New Year's, when the family were assembled around the breakfast table, Mrs. Merrill remarked that her husband was neglecting a custom which had been his for many years.

"Didn't the newspaper come, Stephen?" she asked.

Mr. Merrill had read it.

"Read it!" repeated his wife, in surprise, "you haven't been down long enough to read a column."

"It was full of trash," said Mr. Merrill, lightly, and began on his usual jokes with the girls. But Mrs.

Merrill was troubled. She thought his jokes not as hearty as they were wont to be, and disquieting surmises of business worries filled her mind. The fact that he beckoned her into his writing room as soon as breakfast was over did not tend to allay her suspicions. He closed and locked the door after her, and taking the paper from a drawer in his desk bade her read a certain article in it.

The article was an arraignment of Jethro Bass—and a terrible arraignment indeed. Step by step it traced his career from the beginning, showing first of all how he had debauched his own town of Coniston; how, enlarging on the same methods, he had gradually extended his grip over the county and finally over the state; how he had bought and sold men for his own power and profit, deceived those who had trusted in him, corrupted governors and legislators, congressmen and senators, and even justices of the courts: how he had trafficked ruthlessly in the enterprises of the people. Instance upon instance was given, and men of high prominence from whom he had received bribes were named, not the least important of these being the Honorable Alva Hopkins of Gosport.

Mrs. Merrill looked up from the paper in dismay.

"It's copied from the Newcastle Guardian," she said, for lack of immediate power to comment. "Isn't the Guardian the chief paper in that state?"

"Yes, Worthington's bought it, and he instigated the article, of course. I've been afraid of this for a long time, Carry," said Mr. Merrill, pacing up and down. "There's a bigger fight than they've ever had coming on up there, and this is the first gun. Worthington, with Duncan behind him, is trying to get possession of and consolidate all the railroads in the western part of that state. If he succeeds, it will mean the end of Jethro's power. But he won't succeed."

"Stephen," said his wife, "do you mean to say that Jethro Bass will try to defeat this consolidation simply to keep his power?"

"Well, my dear," answered Mr. Merrill, still pacing, "two wrongs don't make a right, I admit. I've known these things a long time, and I've thought about them a good deal. But I've had to run along with the tide, or give place to another man who would; and—and starve."

Mrs. Merrill's eyes slowly filled with tears.

"Stephen," she began, "do you mean to say—?" There she stopped, utterly unable to speak. He ceased his pacing and sat down beside her and took her hand.

"Yes, my dear, I mean to say I've submitted to these things. God knows whether I've been right or wrong, but I have. I've often thought I'd be happier if I resigned my office as president of my road and became a clerk in a store. I don't attempt to excuse myself, Carry, but my sin has been in holding on to my post. As long as I remain president I have to cope with things as I find them."

Mr. Merrill spoke thickly, for the sight of his wife's tears wrung his heart.

"Stephen," she said, "when we were first married and you were a district superintendent, you used to tell me everything."

Stephen Merrill was a man, and a good man, as men go. How was he to tell her the degrees by which he had been led into his present situation? How was he to explain that these degrees had been so gradual that his conscience had had but a passing wrench here and there? Politics being what they were, progress and protection had to be obtained in accordance with them, and there was a duty to the holders of bonds and stocks.

His wife had a question on her lips, a question for which she had to summon all her courage. She chose that form for it which would hurt him least.

"Mr. Worthington is going to try to change these things?"

Mr. Merrill roused himself at the words, and his eyes flashed. He became a different man.

"Change them!" he cried bitterly, "change them for the worse, if he can. He will try to wrest the power from Jethro Bass. I don't defend him. I don't defend myself. But I like Jethro Bass. I won't deny it. He's human, and I like him, and whatever they say about him I know that he's been a true friend to me. And I tell you as I hope for happiness here and hereafter, that if Worthington succeeds in what he is trying to do, if the railroads win in this fight, there will be no mercy for the people of that state. I'm a railroad man myself, though I have no interest in this affair. My turn may come later. Will come later, I suppose. Isaac D. Worthington has a very little heart or soul or mercy himself; but the corporation which he means to set up will have none at all. It will grind the people and debase them and clog their progress a hundred times more than Jethro Bass has done. Mark my words, Carry. I'm running ahead of

the times a little, but I can see it all as clearly as if it existed now."

Mrs. Merrill went about her duties that morning with a heavy heart, and more than once she paused to wipe away a tear that would have fallen on the linen she was sorting. At eleven o'clock the doorbell rang, and Ellen appeared at the entrance to the linen closet with a card in her hand. Mrs. Merrill looked at it with a flurry of surprise. It read:—

MISS LUCRETIA PENNIMAN

The Woman's Hour

CHAPTER X

It was certainly affinity that led Miss Lucretia to choose the rosewood sofa of a bygone age, which was covered with horsehair. Miss Lucretia's features seemed to be constructed on a larger and more generous principle than those of women are nowadays. Her face was longer. With her curls and her bonnet and her bombazine,—which she wore in all seasons,—she was in complete harmony with the sofa. She had thrown aside the storm cloak which had become so familiar to pedestrians in certain parts of Boston.

"My dear Miss Penniman," said Mrs. Merrill, "I am delighted and honored. I scarcely hoped for such a pleasure. I have so long admired you and your work, and I have heard Cynthia speak of you so kindly."

"It is very good of you to say so, Mrs. Merrill" answered Miss Lucretia, in her full, deep voice. It was by no means an unpleasant voice. She settled herself, though she sat quite upright, in the geometrical centre of the horsehair sofa, and cleared her throat. "To be quite honest with you, Mrs. Merrill," she continued, "I came upon particular errand, though I believe it would not be a perversion of the truth if I were to add that I have had for a month past every intention of paying you a friendly call."

Good Mrs. Merrill's breath was a little taken away by this extremely scrupulous speech. She also began to feel a misgiving about the cause of the visit, but she managed to say something polite in reply.

"I have come about Cynthia," announced Miss Lucretia, without further preliminaries.

"About Cynthia?" faltered Mrs. Merrill.

Miss Lucretia opened a reticule at her waist and drew forth a newspaper clipping, which she unfolded and handed to Mrs. Merrill.

"Have you seen this?" she demanded.

Mrs. Merrill took it, although she guessed very well what it was, glanced at it with a shudder, and handed it back.

"Yes, I have read it," she said.

"I have come to ask you, Mrs. Merrill" said Miss Lucretia, "if it is true."

Here was a question, indeed, for the poor lady to answer! But Mrs. Merrill was no coward.

"It is partly true, I believe."

"Partly?" said Miss Lucretia, sharply.

"Yes, partly," said Mrs. Merrill, rousing herself for the trial; "I have never yet seen a newspaper article which was wholly true."

"That is because newspapers are not edited by women," observed Miss Lucretia. "What I wish you to tell me, Mrs. Merrill, is this: how much of that article is true, and how much of it is false?"

"Really, Miss Penniman," replied Mrs. Merrill, with spirit, "I don't see why you should expect me to know."

"A woman should take an intelligent interest in her husband's affairs,

Mrs. Merrill. I have long advocated it as an entering wedge."

"An entering wedge!" exclaimed Mrs. Merrill, who had never read a page of the *Woman's Hour*.

"Yes. Your husband is the president of a railroad, I believe, which is largely in that state. I should like to ask him whether these statements are true in the main. Whether this Jethro Bass is the kind of man they declare him to be."

Mrs. Merrill was in a worse quandary than ever. Her own spirits were none too good, and Miss Lucretia's eye, in its search for truth, seemed to pierce into her very soul. There was no evading that eye. But Mrs. Merrill did what few people would have had the courage or good sense to do.

"That is a political article, Miss Penniman," she said, "inspired by a bitter enemy of Jethro Bass, Mr. Worthington, who has bought the newspaper from which it was copied. For that reason, I was right in saying that it is partly true. You nor I, Miss Penniman, must not be the judges of any man or woman, for we know nothing of their problems or temptations. God will judge them. We can only say that they have acted rightly or wrongly according to the light that is in us. You will find it difficult to get a judgment of Jethro Bass that is not a partisan judgment, and yet I believe that that article is in the main a history of the life of Jethro Bass. A partisan history, but still a history. He has unquestionably committed many of the acts of which he is accused."

Here was talk to make the author of the "Hymn to Coniston" sit up, if she hadn't been sitting up already.

"And don't you condemn him for those acts?" she gasped.

"Ah," said Mrs. Merrill, thinking of her own husband. Yesterday she would certainly have condemned Jethro Bass. But now! "I do not condemn anybody, Miss Penniman."

Miss Lucretia thought this extraordinary, to say the least.

"I will put the question in another way, Mrs. Merrill," said she. "Do you think this Jethro Bass a proper guardian for Cynthia Wetherell?"

To her amazement Mrs. Merrill did not give her an instantaneous answer to this question. Mrs. Merrill was thinking of Jethro's love for the girl, manifold evidences of which she had seen, and her heart was filled with a melting pity. It was such a love, Mrs. Merrill knew, as is not given to many here below. And there was Cynthia's love for him. Mrs. Merrill had suffered that morning thinking of this tragedy also.

"I do not think he is a proper guardian for her, Miss Penniman."

It was then that the tears came to Mrs. Merrill's eyes for there is a limit to all human endurance. The sight of these caused a remarkable change in Miss Lucretia, and she leaned forward and seized Mrs. Merrill's arm.

"My dear," she cried, "my dear, what are we to do? Cynthia can't go back to that man. She loves him, I know, she loves him as few girls are capable of loving. But when she, finds out what he is! When she finds out how he got the money to support her father!" Miss Lucretia fumbled in her reticule and drew forth a handkerchief and brushed her own eyes—eyes which a moment ago were so piercing. "I have seen many young women," she continued; "but I have known very few who were made of as fine a fibre and who have such principles as Cynthia Wetherell."

"That is very true," assented Mrs. Merrill too much cast down to be amazed by this revelation of Miss Lucretia's weakness.

"But what are we to do?" insisted that lady; "who is to tell her what he is? How is it to be kept from her, indeed?"

"Yes," said Mrs. Merrill, "there will be more, articles. Mr. Merrill says so. It seems there is to be a great political struggle in that state."

"Precisely," said Miss Lucretia, sadly. "And whoever tells the girl will forfeit her friendship. I—I am very fond of her," and here she applied again to the reticule.

"Whom would she believe?" asked Mrs. Merrill, whose estimation of Miss Lucretia was increasing by leaps and bounds.

"Precisely," agreed Miss Lucretia. "But she must hear about it sometime."

"Wouldn't it be better to let her hear?" suggested Mrs. Merrill; "we cannot very well soften that shock: I talked the matter over a little with Mr. Merrill, and he thinks that we must take time over it, Miss Penniman. Whatever we do, we must not act hastily."

"Well," said Miss Lucretia, "as I said, I am very fond of the girl, and I am willing to do my duty, whatever it may be. And I also wished to say, Mrs. Merrill, that I have thought about another matter very carefully. I am willing to provide for the girl. I am getting too old to live alone. I am getting too old, indeed, to do my work properly, as I used to do it. I should like to have her to live with me."

"She has become as one of my own daughters," said Mrs. Merrill. Yet she knew that this offer of Miss Lucretia's was not one to be lightly set aside, and that it might eventually be the best solution of the problem. After some further earnest discussion it was agreed between them that the matter was, if possible, to be kept from Cynthia for the present, and when Miss Lucretia departed Mrs. Merrill promised her an early return of her call.

Mrs. Merrill had another talk with her husband, which lasted far into the night. This talk was about Cynthia alone, and the sorrow which threatened her. These good people knew that it would be no light thing to break the faith of such as she, and they made her troubles their own.

Cynthia little guessed as she exchanged raillery with Mr. Merrill the next morning that he had risen fifteen minutes earlier than usual to search his newspaper through. He would read no more at breakfast, so he declared in answer to his daughters' comments; it was a bad habit which did not agree with his digestion. It was something new for Mr. Merrill to have trouble with his digestion.

There was another and scarcely less serious phase of the situation which Mr. and Mrs. Merrill had yet to discuss between them—a phase of which Miss Lucretia Penniman knew nothing.

The day before Miss Sadler's school was to reopen nearly a week before the Harvard term was to commence—a raging, wet snowstorm came charging in from the Atlantic. Snow had no terrors for a Coniston person, and Cynthia had been for her walk. Returning about five o'clock, she was surprised to have the door opened for her by Susan herself.

"What a picture you are in those furs!" she cried, with an intention which for the moment was lost upon Cynthia. "I thought you would never come. You must have walked to Dedham this time. Who do you think is here? Mr. Worthington."

"Mr. Worthington!"

"I have been trying to entertain him, but I am afraid I have been a very poor substitute. However, I have persuaded him to stay for supper."

"It needed but little persuasion," said Bob, appearing in the doorway. All the snowstorms of the wide Atlantic could not have brought such color to her cheeks. Cynthia, for all her confusion at the meeting, had not lost her faculty of observation. He seemed to have changed again, even during the brief time he had been absent. His tone was grave.

"He needs to be cheered up, Cynthia," Susan went on, as though reading her thoughts. "I have done my best, without success. He won't confess to me that he has come back to make up some of his courses. I don't mind owning that I've got to finish a theme to be handed in tomorrow."

With these words Susan departed, and left them standing in the hall together. Bob took hold of Cynthia's jacket and helped her off with it. He could read neither pleasure nor displeasure in her face, though he searched it anxiously enough. It was she who led the way into the parlor and seated herself, as before, on one of the uncompromising, straight-backed chairs. Whatever inward tremors the surprise of this visit had given her, she looked at him clearly and steadily, completely mistress of herself, as ever.

"I thought your holidays did not end until next week," she said.

"They do not."

"Then why are you here?"

"Because I could not stay away, Cynthia," he answered. It was not the manner in which he would have said it a month ago. There was a note of intense earnestness in his voice—now, and to it she could make no light reply. Confronted again with an unexpected situation, she could not decide at once upon a line of action.

"When did you leave Brampton?" she asked, to gain time. But with the words her thoughts flew to the hill country.

"This morning," he said, "on the early train. They have three feet of snow up there." He, too, seemed glad of a respite from something. "They're having a great fuss in Brampton about a new teacher for the village school. Miss Goddard has got married. Did you know Miss Goddard, the lanky one with the glasses?"

"Yes," said Cynthia, beginning to be amused at the turn the conversation was taking.

"Well, they can't find anybody smart enough to replace Miss Goddard. Old Ezra Graves, who's on the prudential committee, told Ephraim they ought to get you. I was in the post-office when they were talking about it. Just see what a reputation for learning you have in Brampton!"

Cynthia was plainly pleased by the compliment.

"How is Cousin Eph?" she asked.

"Happy as a lark," said Bob, "the greatest living authority in New England on the Civil War. He's made the post-office the most popular social club I ever saw. If anybody's missing in Brampton, you can nearly always find them in the post-office. But I smiled at the notion of your being a school ma'am."

"I don't see anything so funny about it," replied Cynthia, smiling too.
"Why shouldn't I be? I should like it."

"You were made for something different," he answered quietly.

It was a subject she did not choose to discuss with him, and dropped her lashes before the plainly spoken admiration in his eyes. So a silence fell between them, broken only by the ticking of the agate clock on the mantel and the music of sleigh-bells in a distant street. Presently the sleigh-bells died away, and it seemed to Cynthia that the sound of her own heartbeats must be louder than the ticking of the clock. Her tact had suddenly deserted her; without reason, and she did not dare to glance again at Bob as he sat under the lamp. That minute—for it was a full minute—was charged with a presage which she could not grasp. Cynthia's instincts were very keen. She understood, of course, that he had cut short his holiday to come to see her, and she might have dealt with him had that been all. But—through that sixth sense with which some women are endowed—she knew that something troubled him. He, too, had never yet been at a loss for words.

The silence forced him to speak first, and he tried to restore the light tone to the conversation.

"Cousin Ephraim gave me a piece of news," he said. "Ezra Graves got it, too. He told us you were down in Boston at a fashionable school. Cousin Ephraim knows a thing or two. He says he always called you were cut out for a fine lady."

"Bob," said Cynthia, nerving herself for the ordeal, "did you tell Cousin Ephraim you had seen me?"

"I told him and Ezra that I had been a constant and welcome visitor at this house."

"Did, you tell your father that you had seen me?"

This was too serious a question to avoid.

"No, I did not. There was no reason why I should have."

"There was every reason," said Cynthia, "and you know it. Did you tell him why you came to Boston to-day?"

"No."

"Why does he think you came?"

"He doesn't think anything about it," said Bob. "He went off to Chicago yesterday to attend a meeting of the board of directors of a western railroad."

"And so," she said reproachfully, "you slipped off as soon as his back was turned. I would not have believed that of you, Bob. Do you think that was fair to him or me?"

Bob Worthington sprang to his feet and stood over her. She had spoken to a boy, but she had aroused

a man, and she felt an amazing thrill at the result. The muscles in his face tightened, and deepened the lines about his mouth, and a fire was lighted about his eyes.

"Cynthia," he said slowly, "even you shall not speak to me like that. If I had believed it were right, if I had believed that it would have done any good to you or me, I should have told my father the moment I got to Brampton. In affairs of this kind—in a matter of so much importance in my life," he continued, choosing his words carefully, "I am likely to know whether I am doing right or wrong. If my mother were alive, I am sure that she would approve of this—this friendship."

Having got so far, he paused. Cynthia felt that she was trembling, as though the force and feeling that was in him had charged her also.

"I did not intend to come so soon," he went on, "but—I had a reason for coming. I knew that you did not want me."

"You know that that is not true, Bob," she faltered. His next words brought her to her feet.

"Cynthia," he said, in a voice shaken by the intensity of his passion, "I came because I love you better than all the world—because I always will love you so. I came to protect you, and care for you whatever happens. I did not mean to tell you so, now. But it cannot matter, Cynthia!"

He seized her, roughly indeed, in his arms, but his very roughness was a proof of the intensity of his love. For an instant she lay palpitating against him, and as long as he lives he will remember the first exquisite touch of her firm but supple figure and the marvellous communion of her lips. A current from the great store that was in her, pent up and all unknown, ran through him, and then she had struggled out of his arms and fled, leaving him standing alone in the parlor.

It is true that such things happen, and no man or woman may foretell the day or the hour thereof. Cynthia fled up the stairs, miraculously arriving unnoticed at her own room, and locked the door and flung herself on the bed.

Tears came—tears of shame, of joy, of sorrow, of rejoicing, of regret; tears that burned, and yet relieved her, tears that pained while they comforted. Had she sinned beyond the pardon of heaven, or had she committed a supreme act of right? One moment she gloried in it, and the next upbraided herself bitterly. Her heart beat with tumult, and again seemed to stop. Such, though the words but faintly describe them, were her feelings, for thoughts were still to emerge out of chaos. Love comes like a flame to few women, but so it came to Cynthia Wetherell, and burned out for a while all reason.

Only for a while. Generations which had practised self-restraint were strong in her—generations accustomed, too, to thinking out, so far as in them lay, the logical consequences of their acts; generations ashamed of these very instants when nature has chosen to take command. After a time had passed, during which the world might have shuffled from its course, Cynthia sat up in the darkness. How was she ever to face the light again? Reason had returned.

So she sat for another space, and thought of what she had done—thought with a surprising calmness now which astonished her. Then she thought of what she would do, for there was an ordeal still to be gone through. Although she shrank from it, she no longer lacked the courage to endure it. Certain facts began to stand out clearly from the confusion. The least important and most immediate of these was that she would have to face him, and incidentally face the world in the shape of the Merrill family, at supper. She rose mechanically and lighted the gas and bathed her face and changed her gown. Then she heard Susan's voice at the door.

"Cynthia, what in the world are you doing?"

Cynthia opened the door and the sisters entered. Was it possible that they did not read her terrible secret in her face? Apparently not. Susan was busy commenting on the qualities and peculiarities of Mr. Robert Worthington, and showering upon Cynthia a hundred questions which she answered she knew not how; but neither Susan nor Jane, wonderful as it may seem, betrayed any suspicion. Did he send the flowers? Cynthia had not asked him. Did he want to know whether she read the newspapers? He had asked Susan that, before Cynthia came. Susan was ready to repeat the whole of her conversation with him. Why did he seem so particular about newspapers? Had he notions that girls ought not to read them?

The significance of Bob's remarks about newspapers was lost upon Cynthia then. Not till afterward did she think of them, or connect them with his unexpected visit. Then the supper bell rang, and they went downstairs.

The reader will be spared Mr. Worthington's feelings after Cynthia left him, although they were

intense enough, and absorbing and far-reaching enough. He sat down on a chair and buried his head in his hands. His impulse had been to leave the house and return again on the morrow, but he remembered that he had been asked to stay for supper, and that such a proceeding would cause comment. At length he got up and stood before the fire, his thoughts still above the clouds, and it was thus that Mr. Merrill found him when he entered.

"Good evening," said that gentleman, genially, not knowing in the least who Bob was, but prepossessed in his favor by the way he came forward and shook his hand and looked him clearly in the eye.

"I'm Robert Worthington, Mr. Merrill" said he.

"Eh!" Mr. Merrill gasped, "eh! Oh, certainly, how do you do, Mr. Worthington?" Mr. Merrill would have been polite to a tax collector or a sheriff. He separated the office from the man, which ought not always to be done. "I'm glad to see you, Mr. Worthington. Well, well, bad storm, isn't it? I had an idea the college didn't open until next week."

"Mr. Worthington's going to stay for supper, Papa," said Susan, entering.

"Good!" cried Mr. Merrill. "Capital! You won't miss the old folks after supper, will you, girls? Your mother wants me to go to a whist party."

"It can't be helped, Carry," said Mr. Merrill to his wife, as they walked up the hill to a neighbor's that evening.

"He's in love with Cynthia," said Mrs. Merrill, somewhat sadly; "it's as plain as the nose on your face, Stephen."

"That isn't very plain. Suppose he is! You can dam a mountain stream, but you can't prevent it reaching the sea, as we used to say when I was a boy in Edmundton. I like Bob," said Mr. Merrill, with his usual weakness for Christian names, "and he isn't any more like Dudley Worthington than I am. If you were to ask me, I'd say he couldn't do a better thing than marry Cynthia."

"Stephen!" exclaimed Mrs. Merrill. But in her heart she thought so, too. "What will Mr. Worthington say when he hears the young man has been coming to our house to see her?"

Mr. Merrill had been thinking of that very thing, but with more amusement than concern.

To return to Mr. Merrill's house, the three girls and the one young man were seated around the fire, and their talk, Merrill as it had begun, was becoming minute by minute more stilted. This was largely the fault of Susan, who would not be happy until she had taken Jane upstairs and left Mr. Worthington and Cynthia together. This matter had been arranged between the sisters before supper. Susan found her opening at last, and upbraided Jane for her unfinished theme; Jane, having learned her lesson well, accused Susan. But Cynthia, who saw through the ruse, declared that both themes were finished. Susan, naturally indignant at such ingratitude, denied this. The manoeuvre, in short, was executed very clumsily and very obviously, but executed nevertheless—the sisters marching out of the room under a fire of protests. The reader, too, will no doubt think it a very obvious manoeuvre, but some things are managed badly in life as well as in books.

Cynthia and Bob were left alone: left, moreover, in mortal terror of each other. It is comparatively easy to open the door of a room and rush into a lady's arms if the lady be willing and alone. But to be abandoned, as Susan had abandoned them, and with such obvious intent, creates quite a different atmosphere. Bob had dared to hope for such an opportunity: had made up his mind during supper, while striving to be agreeable, just what he would do if the opportunity came. Instead, all he could do was to sit foolishly in his chair and look at the coals, not so much as venturing to turn his head until the sound of footsteps had died away on the upper floors. It was Cynthia who broke the silence and took command—a very different Cynthia from the girl who had thrown herself on the bed not three hours before. She did not look at him, but stared with determination into the fire.

"Bob, you must go," she said.

"Go!" he cried. Her voice loosed the fetters of his passion, and he dared to seize the band that lay on the arm of her chair. She did not resist this.

"Yes, you must go. You should not have stayed for supper."

"Cynthia," he said, "how can I leave you? I will not leave you."

"But you can and must," she replied.

"Why?" he asked, looking at her in dismay.

"You know the reason," she answered.

"Know it?" he cried. "I know why I should stay. I know that I love you with my whole heart and soul. I know that I love you as few men have ever loved—and that you are the one woman among millions who can inspire such a love."

"No, Bob, no," she said, striving hard to keep her head, withdrawing her hand that it might not betray the treason of her lips. Aware, strange as it may seem, of the absurdity of the source of what she was to say, for a trace of a smile was about her mouth as she gazed at the coals. "You will get over this. You are not yet out of college, and many such fancies happen there."

For the moment he was incapable of speaking, incapable of finding an answer sufficiently emphatic. How was he to tell her of the rocks upon which his love was built?

How was he to declare that the very perils which threatened her had made a man of him, with all of a man's yearning to share these perils and shield her from them? How was he to speak at all of those perils? He did not declaim, yet when he spoke, an enduring sincerity which she could not deny was in his voice.

"You know in your heart that what you say is not true, Cynthia. Whatever happens, I shall always love you."

Whatever happens: She shuddered at the words, reminding her as they did of all her vague misgivings and fears.

"Whatever happens!" she found herself repeating them involuntarily.

"Yes, whatever happens I will love you truly and faithfully. I will never desert you, never deny you, as long as I live. And you love me, Cynthia," he cried, "you love me, I know it."

"No, no," she answered, her breath coming fast. He was on his feet now, dangerously near her, and she rose swiftly to avoid him.

She turned her head, that he might not read the denial in her eyes; and yet had to look at him again, for he was coming toward her quickly. "Don't touch me," she said, "don't touch me."

He stopped, and looked at her so pitifully that she could scarce keep back her tears.

"You do love me," he repeated.

So they stood for a moment, while Cynthia made a supreme effort to speak calmly.

"Listen, Bob," she said at last, "if you ever wish to see me again, you must do as I say. You must write to your father, and tell him what you have done and—and what you wish to do. You may come to me and tell me his answer, but you must not come to me before." She would have said more, but her strength was almost gone. Yes, and more would have implied a promise or a concession. She would not bind herself even by a hint. But of this she was sure: that she would not be the means of wrecking his opportunities. "And now—you must go."

He stayed where he was, though his blood leaped within him, his admiration and respect for the girl outran his passion. Robert Worthington was a gentleman.

"I will do as you say, Cynthia," he answered, "but I am doing it for you. Whatever my father's reply may be will not change my love or my intentions. For I am determined that you shall be my wife."

With these words, and one long, lingering look, he turned and left her. He had lacked the courage to speak of his father's bitterness and animosity. Who will blame him? Cynthia thought none the less of him for not telling her. There was, indeed, no need now to describe Dudley Worthington's feelings.

When the door had closed she stoke to the window, and listened to his footfalls in the snow until she heard them no more.

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