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Thompson

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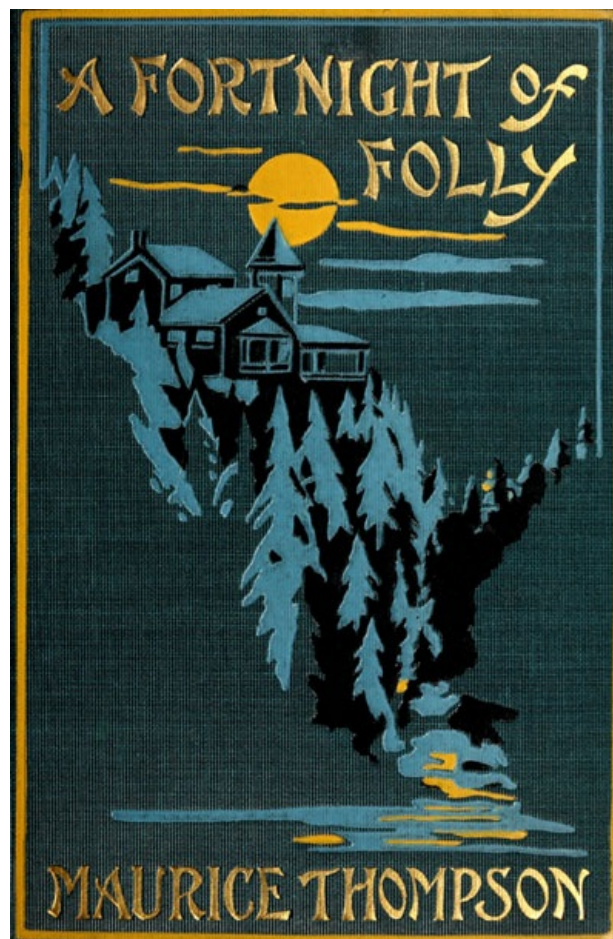
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*** START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK A FORTNIGHT OF FOLLY ***



A Fortnight of Folly

BY

MAURICE THOMPSON

AUTHOR OF

"Alice of Old Vincennes," "A Banker of Bankersville," etc.



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A Fortnight of Folly

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A FORTNIGHT OF FOLLY.

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I.

THE Hotel Helicon stood on a great rock promontory that jutted far out into a sea of air whose currents and eddies filled a wide, wild valley in the midst of our southern mountain region. It was

a new hotel, built by a Cincinnati man who founded his fortune in natural gas speculations, and who had conceived the bright thought of making the house famous at the start by a stroke of rare liberality.

Viewing the large building from any favorable point in the valley, it looked like a huge white bird sitting with outstretched wings on the gray rock far up against the tender blue sky. All around it the forests were thick and green, the ravines deep and gloomy and the rocks tumbled into fantastic heaps. When you reached it, which was after a whole day of hard zig-zag climbing, you found it a rather plain three-story house, whose broad verandas were worried with a mass of jig-saw fancies and whose windows glared at you between wide open green Venetian shutters. Everything look new, almost raw, from the stumps of fresh-cut trees on the lawn and the rope swings and long benches, upon which the paint was scarcely dry, to the resonant floor of the spacious halls and the cedar-fragrant hand-rail of the stairway.

There were springs among the rocks. Here the water trickled out with a red gleam of iron oxide, there it sparkled with an excess of carbonic acid, and yonder it bubbled up all the more limpid and clear on account of the offensive sulphuretted hydrogen it was bringing forth. Masses of fern, great cushions of cool moss and tangles of blooming shrubs and vines fringed the sides of the little ravines down which the spring-streams sang their way to the silver thread of a river in the valley.

It was altogether a dizzy perch, a strange, inconvenient, out-of-the-way spot for a summer hotel. You reached it all out of breath, confused as to the points of the compass and disappointed, in every sense of the word, with what at first glance struck you as a colossal pretense, empty, raw, vulgar, loud—a great trap into which you had been inveigled by an eloquent hand-bill! Hotel Helicon, as a name for the place, was considered a happy one. It had come to the proprietor, as if in a dream, one day as he sat smoking. He slapped his thigh with his hand and sprang to his feet. The word that went so smoothly with hotel, as he fancied, had no special meaning in his mind, for the gas man had never been guilty of classical lore-study, but it furnished a taking alliteration.

“Hotel Helicon, Hotel Helicon,” he repeated; “that’s just a dandy name. Hotel Helicon on Mount Boab, open for the season! If that doesn’t get ‘em I’ll back down.”

His plans matured themselves very rapidly in his mind. One brilliant idea followed another in swift succession, until at last he fell upon the scheme of making Hotel Helicon free for the initial season to a select company of authors chosen from among the most brilliant and famous in our country.

“Zounds!” he exclaimed, all to himself, “but won’t that be a darling old advertisement! I’ll have a few sprightly newspaper people along with ‘em, too, to do the interviewing and puffing. By jacks, it’s just the wrinkle to a dot!”

Mr. Gaslucky was of the opinion that, like Napoleon, he was in the hands of irresistible destiny which would ensure the success of whatever he might undertake; still he was also a realist and depended largely upon tricks for his results. He had felt the great value of what he liked to term legitimate advertising, and he was fond of saying to himself that any scheme would succeed if properly set before the world. He regarded it a maxim that anything which can be clearly described is a fact. His realism was the gospel of success, he declared, and needed but to be stated to be adopted by all the world.

From the first he saw how his hotel was to be an intellectual focus; moreover he designed to have it radiate its own glory like a star set upon Mt. Boab.

The difficulties inherent in this project were from the first quite apparent to Mr. Gaslucky, but he was full of expedients and cunning. He had come out of the lowest stratum of life, fighting his way up to success, and his knowledge of human nature was accurate if not very broad.

Early in the summer, about the first days of June, in fact, certain well-known and somewhat distinguished American authors received by due course of mail an autograph letter from Mr. Gaslucky, which was substantially as follows:

CINCINNATI, O., May 30, 1887.

MY DEAR SIR:

The Hotel Helicon, situated on the Lencadian promontory, far up the height of Mt. Boab and overlooking the glorious valley of the Big Mash River, amid the grandest scenery of the Cumberland Mountains, where at their southern extremity they break into awful peaks, chasms and escarpments, is now thrown open to a few favored guests for the summer. The proprietor in a spirit of liberality (and for the purpose of making this charming hotel known to a select public) is issuing a few special invitations to distinguished people to come and spend the summer free of charge. You are cordially and urgently invited. The Hotel Helicon is a place to delight the artist and the *litterateur*. It is high, airy, cool, surrounded by wild scenes, good shooting and fishing at hand, incomparable mineral springs, baths, grottos, dark ravines and indeed everything engaging to the imagination. The proprietor will exhaust effort to make his chosen guests happy. The rooms are new, sweet, beautifully furnished and altogether comfortable, and the table will have every delicacy of the season served in the best style. There will be no uninvited guests, all will be chosen from the most exalted class. Come, and for one season taste the sweets of the dews of Helicon, without money and without price.

If you accept this earnest and cordial invitation, notify me at once. Hotel Helicon is at your command.

Truly yours,
ISAIAH R. GASLUCKY.

It is needless to say that this letter was the product of a professional advertising agent employed for the occasion by the proprietor of Hotel Helicon. The reader will observe the

earmarks of the creation and readily recognize the source. Of course, when the letter was addressed to a woman there was a change, not only in the gender of the terms, but in the tone, which took on a more persuasive color. The attractions of the place were described in more poetic phrasing and a cunningly half-hidden thread of romance, about picturesque mountaineers and retired and reformed bandits, was woven in.

Naturally enough, each individual who received this rather uncommon letter, read it askance, at first, suspecting a trick, but the newspapers soon cleared the matter up by announcing that Mr. Isaiah Gaslucky, of Cincinnati, had "conceived the happy idea of making his new and picturesque Hotel Helicon free this season to a small and select company of distinguished guests. The hotel will not be open to the public until next year."

And thus it came to pass that in midsummer such a company as never before was assembled, met on Mt. Boab and made the halls of Hotel Helicon gay with their colors and noisy with their mirth. The woods, the dizzy cliffs, the bubbling springs, the cool hollows, the windy peaks and the mossy nooks were filled with song, laughter, murmuring under-tones of sentiment, or something a little sweeter and warmer, and there were literary conversations, and critical talks, and jolly satire bandied about, with some scraps of adventure and some bits of rather ludicrous mishap thrown in for variety.

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Over all hung a summer sky, for the most part cloudless, and the days were as sweet as the nights were delicious.

II.

IN the afternoon of a breezy day, at the time when the shadows were taking full possession of the valley, the coach arrived at Hotel Helicon from the little railway station at the foot of Mt. Boab.

A man, the only passenger, alighted from his perch beside the driver and for a moment stood as if a little dazed by what he saw.

He was very short, rather round and stout, and bore himself quietly, almost demurely. His head was large, his feet and hands were small and his face wore the expression of an habitual good humor amounting nearly to jolliness, albeit two vertical wrinkles between his brows hinted of a sturdy will seated behind a heavy Napoleonic forehead. The stubby tufts of grizzled hair that formed his mustaches shaded a mouth and chin at once strong and pleasing. He impressed the group of people on the hotel veranda most favorably, and at once a little buzz of inquiry circulated. No one knew him.

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That this was an important arrival could not be doubted; it was felt at once and profoundly. Great men carry an air of individuality about with them; each, like a planet, has his own peculiar atmosphere by which his light is modified. There was no mistaking the light in this instance; it indicated a luminary of the first magnitude.

Unfortunately the guests at Hotel Helicon were not required to record their names in a register, therefore the new comer could bide his own time to make himself known.

Miss Alice Moyne, of Virginia, the beautiful young author of two or three picturesque short stories lately published in a popular magazine, was in conversation with Hartley Crane, the rising poet from Kentucky, just at the moment when this new arrival caused a flutter on the veranda.

"Oh, I do wonder if he can be Edgar De Vere?" she exclaimed.

"No," said Hartley Crane, "I have seen De Vere; he is as large and as fascinating as his romances. That little pudgy individual could never make a great romantic fiction like *Solway Moss*, by De Vere."

"But that is a superb head," whispered Miss Moyne, "the head of a master, a genius."

"Oh, there are heads and heads, genius and genius," replied Crane. "I guess the new-comer off as a newspaper man from Chicago or New York. It requires first-class genius to be a good reporter."

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The stranger under discussion was now giving some directions to a porter regarding his luggage. This he did with that peculiar readiness, or sleight, so to call it, which belongs to none but the veteran traveler. A moment later he came up the wooden steps of the hotel, cast a comprehensive but apparently indifferent glance over the group of guests and passed into the hall, where they heard him say to the boy in waiting: "My room is 24."

"That is the reserved room," remarked two or three persons at once.

Great expectations hung about room 24; much guessing had been indulged in considering who was to be the happy and exalted person chosen to occupy it. Now he had arrived, an utter stranger to them all. Everybody looked inquiry.

"Who can he be?"

"It must be Mark Twain," suggested little Mrs. Philpot, of Memphis.

"Oh, no; Mark Twain is tall, and very handsome; I know Mark," said Crane.

"How strange!" ejaculated Miss Moyne, and when everybody laughed, she colored a little and added hastily:

"I didn't mean that it was strange that Mr. Crane should know Mr. Twain, but——"

They drowned her voice with their laughter and hand-clapping.

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They were not always in this very light mood at Hotel Helicon, but just now they all felt in a trivial vein. It was as if the new guest had brought a breath of frivolous humor along with him and had blown it over them as he passed by.

Room 24 was the choice one of Hotel Helicon. Every guest wanted it, on account of its convenience, its size and the superb view its windows afforded; but from the first it had been reserved for this favored individual whose arrival added greater mystery to the matter.

As the sun disappeared behind the western mountains, and the great gulf of the valley became a sea of purplish gloom, conversation clung in half whispers to the subject who meantime was arraying himself in evening dress for dinner, posing before the large mirror in room 24 and smiling humorously at himself as one who, criticising his own foibles, still holds to them with a fortitude almost Christian.

He parted his hair in the middle, but the line of division was very slight, and he left a pretty, half-curved short wisp hanging over the centre of his forehead. The wide collar that hid his short neck creased his heavy well-turned jaws, giving to his chin the appearance of being propped up. Although he was quite stout, his head was so broad and his feet so small that he appeared to taper from top to toe in a way that emphasized very forcibly his expression of blended dignity and jollity, youth and middle age, sincerity and levity. When he had finished his toilet, he sat down by the best window in the best room of Hotel Helicon, and gazed out over the dusky valley to where a line of quivering silver light played fantastically along the line of peaks that notched the delicate blue of the evening sky. The breeze came in, cool and sweet, with a sort of champagne sparkle in its freshness and purity. It whetted his appetite and blew the dust of travel out of his mind. He was glad when the dinner hour arrived.

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The long table was nearly full when he went down, and he was given a seat between Miss Moyne and little Mrs. Philpot. By that secret cerebral trick we all know, but which none of us can explain, he was aware that the company had just been discussing him. In fact, someone had ventured to wonder if he were Mr. Howells, whereupon Mr. Crane had promptly said that he knew Mr. Howells quite well, and that although in a general way the new-comer was not unlike the famous realist, he was far from identical with him.

Laurens Peck, the bushy-bearded New England critic, whispered in someone's ear that it appeared as if Crane knew everybody, but that the poet's lively imagination had aided him more than his eyes, in all probability. "Fact is," said he, "a Kentuckian soon gets so that he *thinks* he has been everywhere and seen everybody, whether he has or not."

Out of this remark grew a serious affair which it will be my duty to record at the proper place.

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Little Mrs. Philpot, who wore gold eye-glasses and had elongated dimples in her cheeks and chin, dexterously managed to have a word or two with the stranger, who smiled upon her graciously without attempting to enter into a conversation. Miss Moyne fared a little better, for she had the charm of grace and beauty to aid her, attended by one of those puffs of good luck which come to none but the young and the beautiful. Mr. B. Hobbs Lucas, a large and awkward historian from New York, knocked over a bottle of claret with his elbow, and the liquor shot with an enthusiastic sparkle diagonally across the table in order to fall on Miss Moyne's lap.

With that celerity which in very short and stout persons appears to be spontaneous, a sort of elastic quality, the gentleman from room 24 interposed his suddenly outspread napkin. The historian flung himself across the board after the bottle, clawing rather wildly and upsetting things generally. It was but a momentary scene, such as children at school and guests at a summer hotel make more or less merry over, still it drew forth from the genial man of room 24 a remark which slipped into Miss Moyne's ear with the familiarity of well trained humor.

"A deluge of wine in a free hotel!" he exclaimed, just above a whisper. "Such generosity is nearly shocking."

"I am sorry you mention it," said Miss Moyne, with her brightest and calmest smile; "I have been idealizing the place. A gush of grape-juice on Helicon is a picturesque thing to contemplate."

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"But a lap-full of claret on Mt. Boab is not so fine, eh? What a farce poetry is! What a humbug is romance!"

The historian had sunk back in his chair and was scowling at the purple stain which kept slowly spreading through the fiber of the cloth.

"I always do something," he sighed, and his sincerity was obvious.

"And always with *aplomb*," remarked little Mrs. Philpot.

"It would be a genius who could knock over a claret bottle with grace," added Peck. "Now a jug of ale——"

"I was present at table once with Mr. Emerson," began the Kentucky poet, but nobody heard the rest. A waiter came with a heavy napkin to cover the stain, and as he bent over the table he forced the man from room 24 to incline very close to Miss Moyne.

"To think of making an instance of Emerson!" he murmured. "Emerson who died before he discovered that men and women have to eat, or that wine will stain a new dress!"

"But then he discovered so many things——" she began.

"Please mention one of them," he glibly interrupted. "What did Emerson ever discover? Did he ever pen a single truth?"

"Aloft in secret veins of air
Blows the sweet breath of song,"

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she replied. "He trod the very headlands of truth. But you are not serious——" she checked herself, recollecting that she was speaking to a stranger.

"Not serious but emphatically in earnest," he went on, in the same genial tone with which he had begun. "There isn't a thing but cunning phrase-form in anything the man ever wrote. He didn't know how to represent life."

"Oh, I see," Miss Moyne ventured, "you are a realist."

It is impossible to convey any adequate idea of the peculiar shade of contempt she conveyed through the words. She lifted her head a little higher and her beauty rose apace. It was as if she had stamped her little foot and exclaimed: "Of all things I detest realism—of all men, I hate realists."

"But I kept the wine off your dress!" he urged, as though he had heard her thought. "There's nothing good but what is real. Romance is lie-tissue. Reality is truth-tissue."

"Permit me to thank you for your good intentions," she said, with a flash of irony; "you held the napkin just in the right position, but the wine never fell from the table. Still your kindness lost nothing in quality because the danger was imaginary."

When dinner was over, Miss Moyne sought out Hartley Crane, the Kentucky poet who knew everybody, and suggested that perhaps the stranger was Mr. Arthur Selby, the analytical novelist whose name was on everybody's tongue.

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"But Arthur Selby is thin and bald and has a receding chin. I met him often at the—I forget the club in New York," said Crane. "It's more likely that he's some reporter. He's a snob, anyway."

"Dear me, no, not a snob, Mr. Crane; he is the most American man I ever met," replied Miss Moyne.

"But Americans are the worst of all snobs," he insisted, "especially literary Americans. They adore everything that's foreign and pity everything that's home-made."

As he said this he was remembering how Tennyson's and Browning's poems were overshadowing his own, even in Kentucky. From the ring of his voice Miss Moyne suspected something of this sort, and adroitly changed the subject.

III.

It might be imagined that a hotel full of authors would be sure to generate some flashes of disagreement, but, for a time at least, everything went on charmingly at Hotel Helicon. True enough, the name of the occupant of room 24 remained a vexatious secret which kept growing more and more absorbing as certain very cunningly devised schemes for its exposure were easily thwarted; but even this gave the gentleman a most excellent excuse for nagging the ladies in regard to feminine curiosity and lack of generalship. Under the circumstances it was not to be expected that everybody should be strictly guarded in the phrasing of speech, still so genial and good-humored was the nameless man and so engaging was his way of evading or turning aside every thrust, that he steadily won favor. Little Mrs. Philpot, whose seven year old daughter (a bright and sweet little child) had become the pet of Hotel Helicon, was enthusiastic in her pursuit of the stranger's name, and at last she hit upon a plan that promised immediate success. She giggled all to herself, like a high-school girl, instead of like a widow of thirty, as she contemplated certain victory.

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"Now do you think you can remember, dear?" she said to May, the child, after having explained over and over again what she wished her to do.

"Yeth," said May, who lisped charmingly in the sweetest of child voices.

"Well, what must you say?"

"I muth thay: Pleathe write your—your——"

"Autograph."

"Yeth, your au—to—graph in my album."

"That's right, autograph, autograph, don't forget. Now let me hear you say it."

"Pleathe write your autograph in my book."

Mrs. Philpot caught the child to her breast and kissed it vigorously, and not long afterward little May went forth to try the experiment. She was armed with her mother's autograph album. When she approached her victim he thought he never had seen so lovely a child. The mother had not spared pains to give most effect to the little thing's delicate and appealing beauty by an artistic arrangement of the shining gold hair and by the simplest but cunningest tricks of color and drapery.

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With that bird-like shyness so winning in a really beautiful little girl, May walked up to the stranger and made a funny, hesitating courtesy. He looked at her askance, his smiling face shooting forth a ray of tenderness along with a gleam of shrewd suspicion, as he made out the album in her dimpled little hand.

"Good morning, little one," he said cheerily. "Have you come to make a call?"

He held out both hands and looked so kindly and good that she smiled until dimples just like her mother's played over her cheeks and chin. Half sidewise she crept into his arms and held up the book.

"Please write your photograph in my book," she murmured.

He took her very gently on his knee, chuckling vigorously, his heavy jaws shaking and coloring.

"Who told you to come?" he inquired, with a guilty cunning twinkle in his gray eyes.

"Mama told me," was the prompt answer.

Again the man chuckled, and, between the shame he felt for having betrayed the child and delight at the success of his perfidy, he grew quite red in the face. He took the autograph album and turned its stiff, ragged-edged leaves, glancing at the names. [21]

"Ah, this is your mama's book, is it?" he went on.

"Yeth it is," said May.

"And I must write my name in it?"

"No, your—your——"

"Well what?"

"I don't 'member."

He took from his pocket a stylographic pen and dashed a picturesque sign manual across a page.

While the ink was drying he tenderly kissed the child's forehead and then rested his chin on her bright hair. He could hear the clack of balls and mallets and the creak of a lazy swing down below on the so-called lawn, and a hum of voices arose from the veranda. He looked through the open window and saw, as in a dream, blue peaks set against a shining rim of sky with a wisp of vultures slowly wheeling about in a filmy, sheeny space.

"Mama said I muthn't stay," apologized the child, slipping down from his knee, which she had found uncomfortably short.

He pulled himself together from a diffused state of revery and beamed upon her again with his cheerful smile.

She turned near the door and dropped another comical little courtesy, bobbing her curly head till her hair twinkled like a tangle of starbeams on a brook-ripple, then she darted away, book in hand. [22]

Little Mrs. Philpot snatched the album from May, as she ran to her, and greedily rustled the leaves in search of the new record, finding which she gazed at it while her face irradiated every shade of expression between sudden delight and utter perplexity. In fact she could not decipher the autograph, although the handwriting surely was not bad. Loath as she naturally was to sharing her secret with her friends, curiosity at length prevailed and she sought help. Everybody in turn tried to make out the two short words, all in vain till Crane, by the poet's subtle vision, cleared up the mystery, at least to his own satisfaction.

"Gaspard Dufour is the name," he asserted, with considerable show of conscious superiority. "A Canadian, I think. In fact I imperfectly recall meeting him once at a dinner given by the Governor General to Lord Rosenthal at Quebec. He writes plays."

"Another romance out of the whole cloth by the Bourbon æsthete!" whispered the critic. "There's no such a Canadian as Gaspard Dufour, and besides the man's a Westerner rather over-Bostonized. I can tell by his voice and his mixed manners."

"But Mrs. Hope would know him," suggested the person addressed. "She meets all the Hub *literati*, you know."

"*Literati!*" snarled the critic, putting an end to further discussion.

A few minutes later Mr. Gaspard Dufour came down and passed out of the hotel, taking his way into the nearest ravine. He wore a very short coat and a slouch hat. In his hand he carried a bundle of fishing-rod joints. A man of his build looks far from dignified in such dress, at best; but nothing could have accentuated more sharply his absurd grotesqueness of appearance than the peculiar waddling gait he assumed as he descended the steep place and passed out of sight, a fish basket bobbing beside him and a red kerchief shining around his throat. [23]

Everybody looked at his neighbor and smiled inquisitively. Now that they had discovered his name, the question arose: What had Gaspard Dufour ever done that he should be accorded the place of honor in Hotel Helicon. No one (save Crane, in a shadowy way) had ever heard of him before. No doubt they all felt a little twinge of resentment; but Dufour, disappearing down the ravine, had in some unaccountable way deepened his significance.

EVERYBODY knows that a mountain hotel has no local color, no sympathy with its environment, no gift of making its guests feel that they are anywhere in particular. It is all very delightful to be held aloft on the shoulder of a giant almost within reach of the sky; but the charm of the thing is not referable to any definite, visible cause, such as one readily bases one's love of the sea-side on, or such as accounts for our delight in the life of a great city. No matter how fine the effect of clouds and peaks and sky and gorge, no matter how pure and exhilarating the air, or how blue the filmy deeps of distance, or how mossy the rocks, or how sweet the water, or how cool the wooded vales, the hotel stands there in an indefinite way, with no *raison d'être* visible in its make-up, but with an obvious impudence gleaming from its windows. One cannot deport one's self at such a place as if born there. The situation demands—nay, exacts behavior somewhat special and peculiar. No lonely island in the sea is quite as isolated and out of the world as the top of any mountain, nor can any amount of man's effort soften in the least the savage individuality of mountain scenery so as to render those high places familiar or homelike or genuinely habitable. Delightful enough and fascinating enough all mountain hotels surely are; but the sensation that living in one of them induces is the romantic consciousness of being in a degree "out of space, out of time." No doubt this feeling was heightened and intensified in the case of the guests at Hotel Helicon who were enjoying the added novelty of entire freedom from the petty economies that usually dog the footsteps and haunt the very dreams of the average summer sojourner. At all events, they were mostly a light-hearted set given over to a freedom of speech and action which would have horrified them on any lower plane. [24]

Scarcely had Gaspard Dufour passed beyond sight down the ravine in search of a trout-brook, than he became the subject of free discussion. Nothing strictly impolite was said about him; but everybody in some way expressed amazement at everybody's ignorance of a man whose importance was apparent and whose name vaguely and tauntingly suggested to each one of them a half-recollection of having seen it in connection with some notable literary sensation. [25]

"Is there a member of the French institute by the name of Dufour?" inquired R. Hobbs Lucas, the historian, thoughtfully knitting his heavy brows.

"I am sure not," said Hartley Crane, "for I met most of the members when I was last at Paris and I do not recall the name."

"There goes that Bourbon again," muttered Laurens Peck, the critic; "if one should mention Xenophon, that fellow would claim a personal acquaintance with him!"

It was plain enough that Peck did not value Crane very highly, and Crane certainly treated Peck very coolly. Miss Moyne, however, was blissfully unaware that she was the cause of this trouble, and for that matter the men themselves would have denied with indignant fervor any thing of the kind. Both of them were stalwart and rather handsome, the Kentuckian dark and passionate looking, the New Yorker fair, cool and willful in appearance. Miss Moyne had been pleased with them both, without a special thought of either, whilst they were going rapidly into the worry and rapture of love, with no care for anybody but her. [26]

She was beautiful and good, sweet-voiced, gentle, more inclined to listen than to talk, and so she captivated everybody from the first.

"I think it would be quite interesting," she said, "if it should turn out that Mr. Dufour is a genuine foreign author, like Tolstoï or Daudet or——"

"Realists, and nobody but realists," interposed Mrs. Philpot; "why don't you say Zola, and have done with it?"

"Well, Zola, then, if it must be," Miss Moyne responded; "for, barring my American breeding and my Southern conservatism, I am nearly in sympathy with—no, not that exactly, but we are so timid. I should like to feel a change in the literary air."

"Oh, you talk just as Arthur Selby writes in his critical papers. He's all the time trying to prove that fiction is truth and that truth is fiction. He lauds Zola's and Dostoieffsky's filthy novels to the skies; but in his own novels he's as prudish and Puritanish as if he had been born on Plymouth Rock instead of on an Illinois prairie."

"I wonder why he is not a guest here," some one remarked. "I should have thought that our landlord would have had *him* at all hazards. Just now Selby is monopolizing the field of American fiction. In fact I think he claims the earth." [27]

"It is so easy to assume," said Guilford Ferris, whose romances always commanded eulogy from the press, but invariably fell dead on the market; "but I am told that Selby makes almost nothing from the sales of his books."

"But the magazines pay him handsomely," said Miss Moyne.

"Yes, they do," replied Ferris, pulling his long brown mustache reflectively, "and I can't see why. He really is not popular; there is no enthusiasm for his fiction."

"It's a mere vogue, begotten by the critics," said Hartley Crane. "Criticism is at a very low ebb in America. Our critics are all either ignorant or given over to putting on English and French airs."

Ferris opened his eyes in a quiet way and glanced at Peck who, however, did not appear to notice the remark.

"There's a set of them in Boston and New York," Crane went on, "who watch the *Revue de Deux Mondes* and the London *Athenaeum*, ready to take the cue from them. Even American books must stand or fall by the turn of the foreign thumb."

"That is a very ancient grumble," said Ferris, in a tone indicative of impartial indifference.

"Take these crude, loose, awkward, almost obscene Russian novels," continued Crane, "and see what a furor the critics of New York and Boston have fermented in their behalf, all because it chanced that a *coterie* of Parisian literary *roués* fancied the filthy imaginings of Dostoieffsky and the raw vulgarity of Tolstoi. What would they say of *you*, Ferris, if *you* should write so low and dirty a story as *Crime and Its Punishment* by Dostoieffsky?" [28]

"Oh, I don't know, and, begging your grace, I don't care a straw," Ferris replied; "the publishers would steal all my profits in any event."

"Do you really believe that?" inquired Peck.

"Believe it? I know it," said Ferris. "When did you ever know of a publisher advertising a book as in its fiftieth thousand so long as the author had any royalty on the sales? The only book of mine that ever had a run was one I sold outright in the manuscript to George Dunkirk & Co., who publish all my works. That puerile effort is now in its ninetieth thousand, while the best of the other six has not yet shown up two thousand! Do you catch the point?"

"But what difference can printing a statement of the books sold make, anyway?" innocently inquired Miss Moyne.

Ferris laughed.

"All the difference in the world," he said; "the publisher would have to account to the author for all those thousands, don't you see."

"But they have to account, anyhow," replied Miss Moyne, with a perplexed smile.

"Account!" exclaimed Ferris, contemptuously; "account! yes, they have to account."

"But they account to me," Miss Moyne gently insisted.

"Who are your publishers?" he demanded. [29]

"George Dunkirk & Co.," was the answer.

"Well," said he, "I'll wager you anything I can come within twenty of guessing the sales up to date of your book. It has sold just eleven hundred and forty copies."

She laughed merrily and betrayed the dangerous closeness of his guess by coloring a little.

"Oh, its invariably just eleven hundred and forty copies, no matter what kind of a book it is, or what publisher has it," he continued; "I've investigated and have settled the matter."

The historian was suddenly thoughtful, little Mrs. Philpot appeared to be making some abstruse calculation, Crane was silently gazing at the ground and Peck, with grim humor in his small eyes, remarked that eleven hundred and forty was a pretty high average upon the whole.

Just at this point a figure appeared in the little roadway where it made its last turn lapsing from the wood toward the hotel. A rather tall, slender and angular young woman, bearing a red leather bag in one hand and a blue silk umbrella in the other, strode forward with the pace of a *tragedienne*. She wore a bright silk dress, leaf-green in color, and a black bonnet, of nearly the Salvation Army pattern, was set far back on her head, giving full play to a mass of short, fine, loosely tumbled yellow hair.

She was very much out of breath from her walk up the mountain, but there was a plucky smile on her rather sallow face and an enterprising gleam in her light eyes.

She walked right into the hotel, as if she had always lived there, and they heard her talking volubly to the servant as she was following him to a room. [30]

Everybody felt a waft of free Western air and knew that Hotel Helicon had received another interesting guest, original if not typical, with qualities that soon must make themselves respected in a degree.

"Walked from the station?" Mrs. Philpot ventured, in querulous, though kindly interrogation.

"Up the mountain?" Miss Moyne added, with a deprecatory inflection.

"And carried that bag!" exclaimed all the rest.

V

GASPARD DUFOUR, whose accumulations of adipose tissue appeared to serve him a good turn, as he descended the steep, rocky ravine, hummed a droll tune which was broken at intervals by sundry missteps and down-sittings and side-wise bumps against the jutting crags. He perspired freely, mopping his brow meantime with a vast silk kerchief that hung loosely about his short neck.

The wood grew denser as he descended and a damp, mouldy odor pervaded the spaces underneath the commingling boughs of the oaks, pines, cedars, and sassafras. Here and there a lizard scampered around a tree-hole or darted under the fallen leaves. Overhead certain shadowy flittings betrayed the presence of an occasional small bird, demurely going about its business of [31]

food-getting. The main elements of the surroundings, however, were gloom and silence. The breeze-currents astir in the valley and rippling over the gray peaks of Mt. Boab could not enter the leafy chambers of this wooded gorge. Heat of a peculiarly sultry sort seemed to be stored here, for as Dufour proceeded he began at length to gasp for breath, and it was with such relief as none but the suffocating can fully appreciate, that he emerged into an open space surrounded, almost, with butting limestone cliffs, but cut across by a noisy little stream that went bubbling down into the valley through a cleft bedecked with ferns and sprinkled with perennial dew from a succession of gentle cascades. The ideal trout-brook was this, so far as appearances could go. At the foot of each tiny water-fall was a swirling pool, semi-opaque, giving forth emerald flashes and silver glints, and bearing little cones of creamy foam round and round on its bosom. A thousand noises, every one a water-note, rising all along the line of the brook's broken current, clashed together with an effect like that of hearing a far-off multitude applauding or some distant army rushing on a charge.

So much out of breath and so deluged with perspiration was Dufour that he flung himself upon the ground beside the brook and lay there panting and mopping his face. Overhead the bit of sky was like turquoise, below a slender glimpse of the valley shone between the rock walls, like a sketch subdued almost to monochrome of crepuscular purple. A fitful breath of cool air fell into the place, fanning the man's almost purple cheeks and forehead, while a wood-thrush, whose liquid voice might have been regarded as part of the water-tumult, sang in a thorn tree hard by. [32]

In a half-reclining attitude, Dufour gave himself over to the delicious effect of all this, indulging at the same time in the impolite and ridiculous, but quite Shakespearian, habit of soliloquizing.

"Jingo!" he remarked, "Jingo! but isn't this a daisy prospect for trout! If those pools aren't full of the beauties, then there's nothing in Waltonian lore and life isn't worth living. Ha! Jingo! there went one clean above the water—a ten ounce, at least!"

He sprang at his rod as if to break it to pieces, and the facility with which he fitted the joints and the reel and run the line and tied the cast was really a wonder.

"I knew they were here," he muttered, "just as soon as I laid my eyes on the water. Who ever did see such another brook!"

At the third cast of the fly, a brown hackle, by the way, up came a trout with a somersault and a misty gleam of royal purple and silver, attended by a spray of water and a short bubbling sound. Dufour struck deftly, hooking the beautiful fish very insecurely through the edge of the lower lip. Immediately the reel began to sing and the rod to quiver, while Dufour's eyes glared almost savagely and his lips pursed with comical intensity. [33]

Round and round flew the trout, now rushing to the bottom of the pool, now whisking under a projecting ledge and anon flinging itself clean above the water and shaking itself convulsively.

The angler was led hither and thither by his active prey, the exercise bedewing his face again with perspiration, whilst his feet felt the cool bath of water and the soothing embrace of tangled water-grass. The mere switch of a bamboo rod, bent almost into a loop, shook like a rush in a wind.

Dufour was ill prepared to formulate a polite response when, at the height of his sport, a gentle but curiously earnest voice exclaimed:

"Snatch 'im out, snatch 'im out, dog gone yer clumsy hide! Snatch 'im out, er I'll do it for ye!"

The trout must have heard, for as the angler turned to get a hasty glance at the stranger, up it leaped and by a desperate shake broke the snell.

"Confound you!" cried Dufour, his face redder than ever. "Confound your meddlesome tongue, why didn't you keep still till I landed him?"

There was a tableau set against the gray, lichen-bossed rocks. Two men glaring at each other. The new-comer was a tall, athletic, brown-faced mountaineer, bearing a gun and wearing two heavy revolvers. He towered above Dufour and gazed down upon him as if about to execute him. The latter did not quail, but grew angrier instead. [34]

"You ought to have better sense than to interfere with my sport in such a way! Who are you, anyway?" he cried in a hot, fierce tone.

The mountaineer stood silent for a moment, as if collecting words enough for what he felt like saying, then:

"See yer," he drawled, rather musically, "ef I take ye by the scruff o' yer neck an' the heel o' yer stockin' an' jest chuck ye inter thet puddle, ye'll begin to surmise who I air, ye saucy little duck-legged minny-catcher, you!"

Dufour, remembering his long training years ago at the Gentlemen's Glove-Club, squared himself with fists in position, having flung aside his tackle. In his righteous rage he forgot that his adversary was not only his superior in stature but also heavily armed.

"Well, thet' ther' do beat me!" said the mountaineer, with an incredulous ring in his voice. "The very idee! W'y ye little aggervatin' banty rooster, a puttin' up yer props at me! W'y I'll jest eternally and everlastin'ly wring yer neck an' swob the face o' nature wi' ye!"

What followed was about as indescribable as a whirlwind in dry grass. The two men appeared to coalesce for a single wild, whirling, resounding instant, and then the mountaineer went over headlong into the middle of the pool with a great splash and disappeared. Dufour, in a truly [35]

gladiatorial attitude, gazed fiercely at the large dimple in which his antagonist was buried for the instant, but out of which he presently projected himself with great promptness, then, as a new thought came to him, he seized the fallen gun of the mountaineer, cocked it and leveled it upon its owner. There was a peculiar meaning in his words as he stormed out:

"Lie down! down with you, or I blow a hole clean through you instantly!"

Promptly enough the mountaineer lay down until the water rippled around his chin and floated his flaxen beard. Some moments of peculiar silence followed, broken only by the lapsing gurgle and murmur of the brook.

Dufour, with arms as steady as iron bars, kept the heavy gun bearing on the gasping face of the unwilling bather, whilst at the same time he was dangerously fingering the trigger. The stout, short figure really had a muscular and doughty air and the heavy face certainly looked warlike.

"Stranger, a seein' 'at ye've got the drap onto me, 'spose we swear off an' make up friends?" The man in the water said this at length, in the tone of one presenting a suggestion of doubtful propriety.

"Don't hardly think you've cooled off sufficiently, do you?" responded Dufour.

"This here's spring warter, ye must 'member," offered the mountaineer.

The gun was beginning to tire Dufour's arms.

"Well, do you knock under?" he inquired, still carelessly fumbling the trigger.

"Great mind ter say yes," was the shivering response.

"Oh, take your time to consider, I'm in no hurry," said Dufour.

If the man in the water could have known how the supple but of late untrained arms of the man on shore were aching, the outcome might have been different; but the bath was horribly cold and the gun's muzzle kept its bearing right on the bather's eye.

"I give in, ye've got me, stranger," he at last exclaimed.

Dufour was mightily relieved as he put down the gun and watched his dripping and shivering antagonist wade out of the cold pool. The men looked at each other curiously.

"Ye're the dog gone'dest man 'at ever I see," remarked the mountaineer; "who air ye, anyhow?"

"Oh, I'm a pretty good fellow, if you take me on the right tack," said Dufour.

The other hesitated a moment, and then inquired:

"Air ye one o' them people up at the tavern on the mounting?"

"Yes."

"A boardin' there?"

"Yes."

"For all summer?"

"Possibly."

Again there was a silence, during which the water trickled off the mountaineer's clothes and ran over the little stones at his feet.

"Goin' ter make fun o' me when ye git up thar?" the catechism was at length resumed. Dufour laughed.

"I could tell a pretty good thing on you," he answered, taking a sweeping observation of the stalwart fellow's appearance as he stood there with his loose jeans trousers and blue cotton shirt clinging to his shivering limbs.

"See yer, now," said the latter, in a wheedling tone, and wringing his light, thin beard with one sinewy dark hand, "see yer, now, I'd like for ye not ter do thet, strengener."

"Why?"

"Well," said the mountaineer, after some picturesque hesitation and faltering, "'cause I hev a 'quaintance o' mine up ther' at thet tavern."

"Indeed, have you? Who is it?"

"Mebbe ye mought be erquainted with Miss Sarah Anna Crabb?"

"No."

"Well, she's up ther', she stayed all night at our house las' night an' went on up ther' this mornin'; she's a literary woman an' purty, an' smart, an' a mighty much of a talker."

"Ugh!"

"Jest tell her 'at ye met me down yer, an' 'at I'm tol'ble well; but don't say nothin' 'bout this 'ere duckin' 'at ye gi' me, will ye?"

"Oh, of course, that's all right," Dufour hastened to say, feeling an indescribable thrill of sympathy for the man.

"Yer's my hand, strengener, an' w'en Wesley Tolliver gives a feller his hand hit means all there air ter mean," exclaimed the latter, as warmly as his condition would permit, "an' w'en ye need er

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friend in these parts jest come ter me.”

He shouldered his gun, thereupon, and remarking that he might as well be going, strode away over a spur of the mountain, his clothes still dripping and sticking close to his muscular limbs. Dufour found his rod broken and his reel injured, by having felt the weight of Wesley Tolliver’s foot, and so he too turned to retrace his steps.

Such an adventure could not fail to gain in spectacular grotesqueness as it took its place in the memory and imagination of Dufour. He had been in the habit of seeing such things on the stage and of condemning them out of hand as the baldest melodramatic nonsense, so that now he could not fairly realize the matter as something that had taken place in his life.

He was very tired and hungry when he reached Hotel Helicon.

VI.

“Oh, yes, I walked all the way up the mountain from the railroad depot,” explained the young woman whose arrival we chronicled in another chapter, “but I stopped over night at a cabin on the way and discovered some just delightful characters—the Tollivers—regular Craddock sort of people, an old lady and her son.”

[39]

By some method known only to herself she had put herself upon a speaking-plane with Dufour, who, as she approached him, was standing in an angle of the wide wooden veranda waiting for the moon to rise over the distant peaks of the eastern mountains.

“I saw Mr. Tolliver to-day while whipping a brook down here,” said he, turning to look her squarely in the face.

“Oh, did you! Isn’t he a virile, villainous, noble, and altogether melodramatic looking man? I wish there was some one here who could sketch him for me. But, say, Mr. Dufour, what do you mean, please, when you speak of *whipping* a brook?”

She took from her pocket a little red note-book and a pencil as he promptly responded: “Whipping a brook? oh, that’s angler’s nonsense, it means casting the line into the water, you know.”

“That’s funny,” she remarked, making a note.

She was taller than Dufour, and so slender and angular that in comparison with his excessive plumpness she looked gaunt and bony. In speaking her lips made all sorts of wild contortions showing her uneven teeth to great effect, and the extreme rapidity of her utterance gave an explosive emphasis to her voice. Over her forehead, which projected, a fluffy mass of pale yellow hair sprang almost fiercely as if to attack her scared and receding chin.

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“You are from Michigan, I believe, Miss Crabb,” remarked Dufour.

“Oh, dear, no!” she answered, growing red in the face, “No, indeed. I am from Indiana, from Ringville, associate editor of the *Star*.”

“Pardon, I meant Indiana. Of course I knew you were not from Michigan.”

“Thanks,” with a little laugh and a shrug, “I am glad you see the point.”

“I usually do—a little late,” he remarked complacently.

“You are from Boston, then, I infer,” she glibly responded.

“Not precisely,” he said, with an approving laugh, “but I admit that I have some Bostonian qualities.”

At this point in the conversation she was drooping over him, so to say, and he was sturdily looking up into her bright, insistent face.

“What a group!” said Crane to Mrs. Bridges, a New York fashion editor. “I’d give the best farm in Kentucky (so far as my title goes) for a photograph of it! Doesn’t she appear to be just about to peck out his eyes!”

“Your lofty imagination plays you fantastic tricks,” said Mrs. Bridges. “Is she the famous Western *lady* reporter?”

“The same, of the *Ringville Star*. I met her at the Cincinnati convention. It was there that Bascom of the *Bugle* called her a bag of gimlets, because she bored him so.”

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“Oh!”

This exclamation was not in response to what Crane had said, but it was an involuntary tribute to the moon-flower just flaring into bloom between twin peaks lying dusky and heavy against the mist of silver and gold that veiled the sweet sky beyond. A semi-circle of pale straw-colored fire gleamed in the lowest angle of the notch and sent up long, wavering lines of light almost to the zenith, paling the strongest stars and intensifying the shadows in the mountain gorges and valleys. Grim as angry gods, the pines stood along the slopes, as if gloomily contemplating some dark scheme of vengeance.

“A real Sapphic,” said Crane, dropping into a poetical tone, as an elocutionist does when he is hungry for an opportunity to recite a favorite sketch.

“Why a Sapphic?” inquired the matter-of-fact fashion-editor.

"Oh, don't you remember that fragment, that glorious picture Sappho's divine genius has made for us—"

He quoted some Greek.

"About as divine as Choctaw or Kickapoo," she said. "I understand the moon-shine better. In fact I have a sincere contempt for all this transparent clap-trap you poets and critics indulge in when you got upon your Greek hobby. Divine Sappho, indeed! A lot of bald bits of jargon made famous by the comments of fogies. Let's look at the moon, please, and be sincere."

[42]

"Sincere!"

"Yes, you know very well that if you had written the Sapphic fragments the critics would——"

"The critics! What of them? They are a set of disappointed poetasters themselves. Blind with rage at their own failures, they snap right and left without rhyme or reason. Now there's Peck, a regular——"

"Well, sir, a regular *what?*" very coolly demanded the critic who had stepped forth from a shadowy angle and now stood facing Crane.

"A regular star-gazer," said Mrs. Bridges. "Tell us why the planets yonder all look so ghastly through the shimmering moonlight."

Peck, without reply, turned and walked away.

"Is he offended?" she asked.

"No, he gives offence, but can not take it."

Mrs. Bridges grew silent.

"We were speaking of Sappho," observed Crane, again gliding into an elocutionary mood. "I have translated the fragment that I repeated a while ago. Let me give it to you.

"When on the dusky violet sky
The full flower of the moon blooms high
The stars turn pale and die!"

Just then Miss Moyne, dressed all in white, floated by on Peck's arm, uttering a silvery gust of laughter in response to a cynical observation of the critic.

"What a lovely girl she is," said Mrs. Bridges. "Mr. Peck shows fine critical acumen in being very fond of her."

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Crane was desperately silent. "He's a handsome man, too, and I suspect it's a genuine love affair," Mrs. Bridges went on, fanning herself complacently. Back and forth, walking slowly and conversing in a soft minor key, save when now and then Miss Moyne laughed melodiously, the promenaders passed and repassed, Peck never deigning to glance toward Crane, who had forgotten both Sappho and the moon. Miss Moyne did, however, once or twice turn her eyes upon the silent poet.

"Oh," went on Miss Crabb, filling Dufour's ears with the hurried din of her words, "Oh, I'm going to write a novel about this place. I never saw a better chance for local color, real transcripts from life, original scenes and genuine romance all tumbled together. Don't you think I might do it?"

"It does appear tempting," said Dufour. "There's Tolliver for instance, a genuine Chilhowee moonshiner." He appeared to laugh inwardly as he spoke. Indeed he heard the splash of water and the dripping, shivering mountaineer stood forth in his memory down there in the gorge.

"A moonshiner!" gasped Miss Crabb, fluttering the leaves of her note-book and writing by moonlight with a celerity that amazed Dufour.

"Potentially, at least," he replied evasively. "He looks like one and he don't like water."

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"If he *does* turn out to be a real moonshiner," Miss Crabb proceeded reflectively to say, "it will be just too delicious for anything. I don't mind telling you, confidentially, Mr. Dufour, that I am to write some letters while here to the *Chicago Daily Lightning Express*. So I'd take it as a great favor if you'd give me all the points you get."

"That's interesting," he said, with a keen scrutiny of her face for a second. "I shall be glad to be of assistance to you."

He made a movement to go, but lingered to say: "Pray give me all the points, too, will you?"

"Oh, are you a journalist too?" she inquired, breathlessly hanging over him. "What paper—"

"I'm not much of anything," he hurriedly interposed, "but I like to know what is going on, that's all."

He walked away without further excuse and went up to his room.

"I've got to watch him," soliloquized Miss Crabb, "or he'll get the scoop of all the news. Give him points, indeed! Maybe so, but not till after I've sent them to the *Lightning Express*! I'll keep even with him, or know the reason why."

It was a grand panorama that the climbing moon lighted up all around Mount Boab, a vast billowy sea of gloom and sheen. Here were shining cliffs, there dusky gulches; yonder the pines

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glittered like steel-armed sentinels on the hill-tops, whilst lower down they appeared to skulk like cloaked assassins. Shadows came and went, now broad-winged and wavering, again slender and swift as the arrows of death. The hotel was bright within and without. Some one was at the grand piano in the hall making rich music—a fragment from Beethoven,—and a great horned owl down the ravine was booming an effective counterpoint.

Crane stood leaning on the railing of the veranda and scowling savagely as Peck and Miss Moyne continued to promenade and converse. He was, without doubt, considering sinister things. Mrs. Bridges, finding him entirely unsympathetic, went to join Miss Crabb, who was alone where she had been left by Dufour. Meantime, up in his room, with his chair tilted far back and his feet thrust out over the sill of an open window, Dufour was smoking a fragrant Cuban cigar, (fifty cents at retail) and alternating smiles with frowns as he contemplated his surroundings.

“Authors,” he thought, “are the silliest, the vainest, and the most impractical lot of human geese that ever were plucked for their valuable feathers. And newspaper people! Humph!” He chuckled till his chin shook upon his immaculate collar. “Just the idea, now, of that young woman asking me to furnish her with points!”

There was something almost jocund blent with his air of solid self-possession, and he smoked the precious cigars one after another with prodigal indifference and yet with the perfect grace of him to the manner born. [46]

“Hotel Helicon on Mt. Boab!” he repeated, and then betook himself to bed.

VII.

SOME people are born to find things out—to overhear, to reach a place just at the moment in which an event comes to pass there—born indeed, with the news-gatherer’s instinct perfectly developed. Miss Crabb was one of these. How she chanced to over-hear some low-spoken but deadly sounding words that passed between Peck and Crane, it would be hard to say; still she overheard them, and her heart jumped almost into her mouth. It was a thrillingly dramatic passage, there under the heavy-topped oak by the west veranda in the gloom.

“Villain!” exclaimed Crane, in the hissing voice of a young tragedy-player at rehearsal,

“Villain! you shall not escape me. Defend yourself!”

“Nonsense,” said Peck, “you talk like a fool. I don’t want to fight! What’s that you’ve got in your hand?”

“A sword, you cowardly craven!”

“You call me a coward! If I had a good club I should soon show you what I could do, you sneaking assassin!”

More words and just as bitter followed, till at last a fight was agreed upon to take place immediately, at a certain point on the verge of a cliff not far away. There were to be no seconds and the meeting was to end in the death of one or both of the combatants. [47]

To Miss Crabb all this had a sound and an appearance as weird as anything in the wildest romance she ever had read. It was near mid-night; the hotel was quite soundless and the moon on high made the shadows short and black.

“Meet me promptly at the Eagle’s Nest in ten minutes,” said Crane, “I’ll fetch my other sword and give you choice.”

“All right, sir,” responded Peck, “but a club would do.”

The peculiar hollowness of their voices affected the listener as if the sounds had come from a tomb. She felt clammy. Doubtless there is a considerable element of humorous, almost ludicrous bravado in such a scene when coolly viewed; but Miss Crabb could not take a calm, critical attitude just then. At first she was impelled almost irresistibly toward interfering and preventing a bloody encounter; but her professional ambition swept the feeling aside. Still, being a woman, she was dreadfully nervous. “Ugh!” she shuddered, “it will be just awful, but I can’t afford to miss getting the full particulars for the *Lightning Express*. A sure enough duel! It will make my fortune! Oh, if I were a man, now, just only for a few hours, what a comfort it would be! But all the same I must follow them—I must see the encounter, describe it as an eye-witness and send it by wire early in the morning.” [48]

It occurred to her mind just then that the nearest telegraph station was twelve miles down the mountain, but she did not flinch or waver. The thought that she was required to do what a man might well have shrunk from gave an element of heroism to her pluck. She was conscious of this and went about her task with an elasticity and facility truly admirable.

Eagle’s Nest was the name of a small area on the top of a beetling cliff whose almost perpendicular wall was dotted with clumps of sturdy little cedar trees growing out of the chinks. It was a dizzy place at all times, but by night the effect of its airy height was very trying on any but the best nerves. Crane and Peck both were men of fine physique and were possessed of stubborn courage and great combativeness. They met on the spot and after choosing swords, coolly and promptly proceeded to the fight. On one hand, close to the cliff’s edge, was a thick mass of small oak bushes, on the other hand lay a broken wall of fragmentary stones. The footing-space was fairly good, though a few angular blocks of stone lay here and there, and some brushes of stiff wood-grass were scattered around.

Crane led with more caution than one would have expected of an irate Kentuckian, and Peck responded with the brilliant aplomb of an enthusiastic duelist.

The swords were neither rapiers nor broad-swords, being the ordinary dress-weapons worn by Confederate Infantry officers in the war time—weapons with a history, since they had been at the thigh of father and son, the bravest of Kentucky Cranes, through many a stormy battle. [49]

Peck's back was toward the precipice-brink at the commencement of the engagement, but neither had much the advantage, as the moon was almost directly overhead. As their weapons began to flash and clink, the slender keen echoes fell over into the yawning chasm and went rattling down the steep, ragged face of the precipice. They were vigorous and rather good fencers and it would have been evident to an onlooker of experience that the fight was to be a long one, notwithstanding the great weight of the swords they were using. They soon began to fight fiercely and grew more vehemently aggressive each second, their blows and thrusts and parries and counter-cuts following each other faster and faster until the sounds ran together and the sparks leaped and shone even in the bright moonlight. They mingled broad-sword exercise with legitimate rapier fencing and leaped about each other like boxers, their weapons whirling, darting, rising, falling, whilst their breathing became loud and heavy. It was a scene to have stirred the blood of men and women four hundred years ago, when love was worth fighting for and when men were quite able and willing to fight for it.

The combatants strained every point of their strength and skill, and not a drop of blood could either draw. Slash, thrust, whack, clink, clank, clack, click, cling! Round and round they labored, the fury of their efforts flaming out of their eyes and concentrating in the deep lines of their mouths. As if to listen, the breeze lay still in the trees and the great owl quit hooting in the ravine. Faster and faster fell the blows, swifter and keener leaped the thrusts, quicker and surer the parries were interposed. The swords were hacked and notched like hand-saws, the blades shook and hummed like lyre-cords. Now close to the cliff's edge, now over by the heap of broken stones and then close beside the clump of oak bushes, the men, panting and sweating, their muscles knotted, their sinews leaping like bow-strings, their eyes standing out, as if starting from their sockets, pursued each other without a second's rest or wavering. [50]

At last, with an irresistible spurt of fury, Crane drove Peck right into the bushes with a great crash and would not let him out. The critic was not vanquished, however, for, despite the foliage and twigs, he continued to parry and thrust with dangerous accuracy and force.

Just at this point a strange thing happened. Right behind Peck there was a tearing, crashing sound and a cry, loud, keen, despairing, terrible, followed immediately by the noise of a body descending among the cedars growing along the face of the awful precipice.

It was a woman's voice, shrieking in deadly horror that then came up out of the dizzy depth of space below! [51]

The men let fall their swords and leaped to the edge of the cliff with the common thought that it was Miss Moyne who had fallen over. They reeled back giddy and sick, staggering as if drunken.

Far down they had seen something white fluttering and gleaming amid a tuft of cedars and a quavering voice had cried:

"Help, help, oh, help!"

And so the duel was at an end.

VIII.

HOTEL HELICON was shaken out of its sleep by the startling rumor to the effect that Miss Moyne had fallen down the precipice at Eagle's Nest.

Of all the rudely awakened and mightily frightened inmates, perhaps Miss Moyne herself was most excited by this waft of bad news. She had been sleeping very soundly in dreamless security and did not at first feel the absurdity of being told that she had just tumbled down the escarpment, which in fact she never yet had summoned the courage to approach, even when sustained by a strong masculine arm.

"O dear! how did it happen?" she demanded of her aunt, Mrs. Coleman Rhodes, who had rushed upon her dainty couch with the frightful announcement of her accident.

"Oh, Alice! you are here, you are not hurt at all! Oh!" Mrs. Rhodes went on, "and what *can* it all mean!"

Everybody rushed out, of course, as soon as hurried dressing would permit, and fell into the confusion that filled the halls and main veranda. [52]

Crane was talking in a loud, but well modulated strain, explaining the accident:

"Mr. Peck and I," he went on to say, "were enjoying a friendly turn at sword-play up here at Eagle's Nest; couldn't sleep, needed exercise, and went up there so as not to disturb any one. While we were fencing she came rushing past through those bushes and leaped right over with a great shriek. She—"

"Don't stop to talk," cried Mr. E. Hobbs Lucas, with a directness and clearness quite unusual in a historian. "Don't stop to talk, let's go do something!"

"Yes, come on," quavered poor Peck, his face whiter than the moon and his beard quivering in sympathy with his voice.

"Oh, it's dreadful, awful!" moaned little Mrs. Philpot, "poor, dear Miss Moyne, to think that she is gone!" and she leaned heavily on Miss Moyne's shoulder as she spoke.

It was a strange scene, too confused for the best dramatic effect, but spectacular in the extreme. Servants swarmed out with lights that wavered fantastically in the moonshine, while the huddled guests swayed to and fro in a body. Every face was pinched with intense excitement and looked haggard under its crown of disheveled hair. Even the hotel windows stared in stupid horror, and the kindly countenances of the negro waiters took on a bewildered and meaningless grin set in a black scowl of superstition and terror. [53]

When Dufour came upon the scene, he did not appear in the least flurried, and the first thing he did was to lay his hand on Miss Moyne's shoulder and exclaim in a clear tenor strain:

"Why, here! it's all a mistake! What are you talking about? Here's Miss Moyne! Here she stands!"

"Mercy! where?" enquired little Mrs. Philpot, who was still leaning on her friend and shedding bitter tears.

Dufour, with a quiet: "Please don't take offence," put a hand on either side of Miss Moyne and lifted her so that she stood in a chair looking very sweetly down over the crowd of people.

Few indeed are they who can look beautiful under such circumstances, but Miss Moyne certainly did, especially in the eyes of Crane and Peck as they gazed up at her.

Forthwith the tragedy became a farce.

"That Kentuckian must romance, I suppose," grumbled R. Hobbs Lucas. "Wonder what he'll tell next."

"I don't see how I could be so mistaken," said Peck, after quiet had been somewhat restored, "I would have willingly been sworn to—"

He was interrupted by a dozen voices hurling ironical phrases at him.

"It is every word truth," exclaimed Crane testily. "Do you suppose I would trifle with so—" [54]

"Oh, don't you absolutely know that we suppose just that very thing?" said Lucas.

With the return of self-consciousness the company began to scatter, the ladies especially scampering to their rooms with rustling celerity. The men grumbled not a little, as if being deprived of a shocking accident touched them with a sting.

"The grotesque idea!" ejaculated Dufour. "Such a practical joke—impractical joke, I might better say, could originate only between a poet and a critic."

Everybody went back to bed, feeling more or less injured by Crane and Peck, who shared in their own breasts the common impression that they had made great fools of themselves. If these crest-fallen knights, so lately militant and self-confident, had any cause of quarrel now it was based upon a question as to which should feel the meaner and which should more deeply dread to meet Miss Moyne on the morrow.

As for Miss Moyne herself she was indignant although she tried to quiet her aunt, who was ready to shake the dust of Mt. Boab from her feet at once.

Next morning, however, when it was discovered that Miss Crabb was missing and that after all something tragic probably had happened, everybody felt relieved. [55]

IX

MR. WESLEY TOLLIVER might well have served the turn of romancer or realist, as he stood in the shadow of a cedar-clump with the mysterious stillness of midnight all around him. He was a very real and substantial looking personage, and yet his gun, his pistols, his fantastic mountain garb and the wild setting in which he was framed gave him the appearance of a strong sketch meant to illustrate a story by Craddock. Above him towered the cliff at Eagle's Nest and near by was the mountain "Pocket" in which nestled the little distillery whose lurking-place had long been the elusive dream of utopian revenue officers. In a space of brilliant moonlight, Tolliver's dog, a gaunt, brindle cur, sat in statuesque worthlessness, remembering no doubt the hares he never had caught and the meatless bones he had vainly buried during a long ignoble life.

The hotel and its inmates had rendered the distillery and its furtive operatives very uneasy of late, and now as Tolliver in his due turn stood guard by night he considered the probability of having to look for some better situation for his obscure manufactory with a species of sadness which it would be impossible to describe. He thought with deep bitterness of all the annoyance he had suffered at the hands of meddling government agents and from the outside world in general and he tried to understand how any person could pretend to see justice in such persecution. What had he done to merit being hunted like a wild beast? Nothing but buy his neighbor's apples at the fair price of twenty cents a bushel and distil them into apple brandy! Could this possibly be any injury to any government official, or to anybody else? He paid for his still, he paid for the apples, he paid fair wages to the men who worked for him, what more could be justly demanded of him? [56]

It was while he was wholly absorbed in trying to solve this knotty problem that far above a strange clink and clatter began, which sounded to him as if it were falling from among the stars. Nothing within his knowledge or experience suggested an explanation of such a phenomenon. He felt a thrill of superstitious terror creep through his iron nerves as the aerial racket increased and seemed to whisk itself from place to place with lightning celerity. An eccentric echo due to the angles and projections of the cliff added weird effect to the sounds.

The dog uttered a low plaintive whine and crept close to his master, and even wedged himself with tremulous desperation between the knees of that wondering and startled sentinel.

The clinking and clanging soon became loud and continuous, falling in a cataract down the escarpment, accompanied now and again by small fragments of stone and soil.

At last Tolliver got control of himself sufficiently, and looked out from his shadowy station and up towards the dizzy crown of Eagle's Nest. [57]

Just at that moment there was a crash and a scream. He saw a wide-winged, ghostly object come over the edge and swoop down. Another scream, another and another, a tearing sound, a crushing of cedar boughs, a shower of small stones and lumps of soil.

Tolliver, frightened as he never before had been, turned and fled, followed by his ecstatic dog.

A voice, keen, clear, high, beseeching pursued him and reached his ears.

"Help! help! Oh, help!"

Surely this was the "Harnt that walks Mt. Boab!" This syren of the mountains had lured many a hunter to his doom.

"Oh, me! Oh, my! Oh, mercy on me! Help! help!"

Tolliver ran all the faster, as the voice seemed to follow him, turn as he would. He bruised his shins on angular rocks, he ran against trees, he fell over logs, and at last found himself hopelessly entangled in a net of wild grape-vines, with his enthusiastic dog still faithfully wriggling between his knees.

The plaintive voice of the syren, now greatly modified by distance, assailed his ears with piteous persistence, as he vainly struggled to free himself. The spot was dark as Erebus, being in the bottom of a ravine, and the more he exerted himself the worse off he became.

It was his turn to call for help, but if any of his friends heard they did not heed his supplications, thinking them but baleful echoes of the Harnt's deceitful voice. [58]

It was at the gray of dawn when at last Tolliver got clear of the vines and made his way out of the ravine. By this time he had entirely overcome his fright, and with that stubbornness characteristic of all mountain men, he betook himself back to the exact spot whence he had so precipitately retreated. His dog, forlornly nonchalant, trotted behind him to the place and resumed the seat from which the Harnt had driven him a few hours ago. In this attitude, the animal drooped his nose and indifferently sniffed a curious object lying near.

"What's thet ther' thing, Mose?" inquired Tolliver, addressing the dog.

"Well I'll ber dorg-goned!" he added, as he picked up a woman's bonnet. "If this here don't beat the worl' an' all camp meetin'! Hit air—well, I'll ber dorged—hit air—I'm er ghost if hit aint Miss Sara' Anna Crabb's bonnet, by Ned!"

He held it up by one silk string and gazed at it with a ludicrously puzzled stare. The dog whined and wagged his tail in humble sympathy with his master's bewilderment.

"Hit's kinder interestin', haint it, Mose?" Tolliver went on dryly. "We'll hev ter look inter this here thing, won't we, Mose?"

As for Mose, he was looking into it with all his eyes. Indeed he was beginning to show extreme interest, and his tail was pounding the ground with great rapidity. [59]

Suddenly a thought leaped into Tolliver's brain and with a start he glanced up the escarpment, his mouth open and his brown cheeks betraying strong emotion. Mose followed his master's movements with kindling eyes, and whined dolefully, his wolfish nose lifted almost vertically.

"Is that you, Mr. Tolliver?" fell a voice out of a cedar clump a little way up the side of the cliff.

"Hit air me," he responded, as he saw Miss Crabb perched among the thick branches. She had her little red note-book open and was writing vigorously. Her yellow hair was disheveled so that it appeared to surround her face with a flickering light which to Tolliver's mind gave it a most beautiful and altogether lovely expression.

"Well, I'll ber—" he checked himself and stood in picturesque suspense.

"Now, Mr. Tolliver, won't you please help me down from here?" she demanded, closing her note-book and placing her pencil behind her ear. "I'm awfully cramped, sitting in this position so long."

The chivalrous mountaineer did not wait to be appealed to a second time, but laying down his gun to which he had clung throughout the night, he clambered up the steep face of the rock, from projection to projection, until he reached the tree in which Miss Crabb sat. Meantime she watched him with admiring eyes and just as he was about to take her in his arms and descend with her she exclaimed: [60]

"Wait a moment, I might lose the thought, I'll just jot it down."

She took her note-book and pencil again and hurriedly made the following entry: *Sinewy, virile, lithe, hirsute, fearless, plucky, bronzed, vigorous, lank, Greek-eyed, Roman-nosed, prompt, large-eared, typical American. Good hero for dramatic, short, winning dialect story. The magazines never refuse dialect stories.*

"Now, if you please, Mr. Tolliver, I will go with you."

It was an Herculean labor, but Tolliver was a true hero. With one arm wound around her, after the fashion of the serpent in the group of the Laocoön, and with her long yellow hair streaming in crinkled jets over his shoulder, he slowly made his way down to the ground.

Meantime Mose, the dog, with true canine sympathy and helpfulness, had torn the bonnet into pathetic shreds, and was now lying half asleep under a tree with a bit of ribbon in his teeth.

"Well, I'll jest ber—beg parding Miss Crabb, but thet ther dog hev et up yer head-gear," said Tolliver as he viewed with dilating eyes the scattered fragments.

She comprehended her calamity with one swift glance, but she had caught a new dialect phrase at the same time.

"Head-gear, you call it, I believe?" she inquired, again producing book and pencil. [61]

"Beg parding all over, Miss Crabb, I meant bonnet," he hurried to say.

"Oh, it's all right, I assure you," she replied, writing rapidly, "it's a delightfully fresh and artistic bit of special coloring."

Miss Crabb's clothes were badly torn and she looked as if she had spent the night wretchedly, but with the exception of a few slight scratches and bruises she was unhurt.

"Well jes' look a there, will ye!" exclaimed Tolliver as he spied Mose. There was more of admiration than anger in his voice. "Ef thet ther 'fernal dog haint got yer chin-ribbon in his ole mouth, I'm er rooster!"

"Chin-ribbon," repeated Miss Crabb, making a note, "I'm er rooster," and she smiled with intense satisfaction. "You don't know, Mr. Tolliver, how much I am indebted to you."

"Not a tall, Miss Crabb, not a tall. Don't mention of it," he humbly said, "hit taint wo'th talkin' erbout."

The morning was in full blow now and the cat-birds were singing sweetly down the ravine. Overhead a patch of blue sky gleamed and burned with the true empyrean glow. Far away, down in the valley by the little river, a breakfast horn was blown with many a mellow flourish and a cool gentle breeze with dew on its wings fanned Miss Crabb's sallow cheeks and rustled Tolliver's tawny beard. At the sound of the horn Mose sprang to his feet and loped away with the bit of ribbon fluttering from his mouth. [62]

X.

It was late in the forenoon before it was discovered at Hotel Helicon that Miss Crabb was missing, and even then there arose so many doubts about the tragic side of the event that before any organized search for her had been begun, she returned, appearing upon the scene mounted behind Wesley Tolliver on a small, thin, wiry mountain mule.

Crane and Peck each drew a deep, swift sigh of relief upon seeing her, for the sense of guilt in their breasts had been horrible. They had by tacit conspiracy prevented any examination of Eagle's Nest, for they dreaded what might be disclosed. Of course they did not mean to hide the awful fate of the poor girl, nor would they willingly have shifted the weight of their dreadful responsibility, but it was all so much like a vivid dream, so utterly strange and theatrical as it arose in their memories, that they could not fully believe in it.

Miss Crabb looked quite ludicrous perched behind the tall mountaineer on such a dwarfish mule. Especially comical was the effect of the sun-bonnet she wore. She had accepted this article of apparel from Tolliver's mother, and it appeared to clutch her head in its stiff folds and to elongate her face by sheer compression.

Everybody laughed involuntarily, as much for joy at her safe return as in response to the demand of her melodramatic appearance. [63]

"I've brung back yer runerway," said Tolliver cheerily, as he helped the young woman to dismount. "She clim down the mounting by one pertic'ler trail an' I jes' fotch her up by t'other."

Miss Crabb spoke not a word, but ran into the hotel and up to her room without glancing to the right or to the left. In her great haste the stiff old sun-bonnet fell from her head and tumbled upon the ground.

"Wush ye'd jes' be erbligin' enough ter han' thet there head-gear up ter me, Mister," said Tolliver addressing Crane, who was standing near. "My mammy'd raise er rumpage ef I'd go back 'thout thet ther bonnet."

With evident reluctance and disgust Crane gingerly took up the fallen article and gave it to Tolliver, who thanked him so politely that all the onlooking company felt a glow of admiration for the uncouth and yet rather handsome cavalier.

"Thet gal," he observed, glancing in the direction that Miss Crabb had gone, "she hev the winnin'est ways of any gal I ever seed in my life. Ye orter seen 'er up inter thet there bush a

writin' in 'er book! She'd jes' tumbled kerwhummox down the clift an' hed lodged ther' in them cedars; but as she wer' a writin' when she started ter fall w'y she struck a writin' an' jes' kep' on at it same's if nothin' had happened. She's game, thet ole gal air, I tell ye! She don't propose for any little thing like fallin' off'n a clift, ter interfere with w'at she's a doin' at thet time, le' me say ter ye. Lord but she wer' hongry, though, settin' up ther a writin' all night, an' it'd a done ye good to a seen 'er eat thet chicken and them cake-biscuits my mammy cooked for breakfast. She air a mos' alarmin' fine gal, for a fac'."

[64]

At this point Dufour came out of the hotel, and when Tolliver saw him there was an instantaneous change in the expression of the mountaineer's face.

"Well I'll ber dorged!" he exclaimed with a smile of delight, "ef ther' haint the same leetle John the Baptis' what bapsonsed me down yer inter the branch! Give us yer baby-spanker, ole feller! How air ye!"

Dufour cordially shook hands with him, laughing in a jolly way.

"Fust an' only man at ever ducked me, I'm here ter say ter ye," Tolliver went on, in a cheery, half-bantering tone, and sitting sidewise on the mule. "Ye mus' hev' a sight o' muscle onto them duck legs and bantam arms o' your'n."

He had the last word still in his mouth when the little beast suddenly put down its head and flung high its hind feet.

"Woirp!" they heard him cry, as he whirled over in the air and fell sprawling on the ground.

Dufour leaped forward to see if the man was hurt, but Tolliver was upright in an instant and grinning sheepishly.

[65]

"Thet's right, Bonus," he said to the mule which stood quite still in its place, "thet's right ole fel, try ter ac' smart in comp'ny. Yer a beauty now, ain't ye?"

He replaced his hat, which had fallen from his head, patted the mule caressingly on the neck, then lightly vaulting to the old saddle-tree, he waved his hand to the company and turning dashed at a gallop down the mountain road, his spurs jingling merrily as he went.

"What a delicious character!"

"What precious dialect!"

"How typically American!"

"A veritable hero!"

Everybody at Hotel Helicon appeared to have been captivated by this droll fellow.

"How like Tolstoi's lovely Russians he is!" observed Miss Fidelia Arkwright, of Boston, a near-sighted maiden who did translations and who doted on virile literature.

"When I was in Russia, I visited Tolstoi at his shoe-shop—" began Crane, but nobody appeared to hear him, so busy were all in making notes for a dialect story.

"Tolstoi is the greatest fraud of the nineteenth century," said Peck. "That shoe-making pretence of his is about on a par with his genius in genuineness and sincerity. His novels are great chunks of raw filth, rank, garlic garnished and hideous. We touch them only because the French critics have called them savory. If the *Revue de Deux Mondes* should praise a Turkish novel we could not wait to read it before we joined in. Tolstoi is remarkable for two things: his coarseness and his vulgar disregard of decency and truth. His life and his writings are alike crammed with absurdities and contradictory puerilities which would be laughable but for their evil tendencies."

[66]

"But, my dear sir, how then do you account for the many editions of Tolstoi's books?" inquired the historian, R. Hobbs Lucas.

"Just as I account for the editions of Cowper and Montgomery and Wordsworth and even Shakespeare," responded Peck. "You put a ten per cent. author's royalty on all those dear classics and see how soon the publishers will quit uttering them! If Tolstoi's Russian raw meat stories were put upon the market in a fair competition with American novels the latter would beat them all hollow in selling."

"Oh, we ought to have international copyright," plaintively exclaimed a dozen voices, and so the conversation ended.

Strangely enough, each one of the company in growing silent did so in order to weigh certain suggestions arising out of Peck's assertions. It was as if a score of semi-annual statements of copyright accounts were fluttering in the breeze, and it was as if a score of wistful voices had whispered:

"How in the world do publishers grow rich when the books they publish never sell?"

Perhaps Gaspard Dufour should be mentioned as appearing to have little sympathy with Peck's theory or with the inward mutterings it had engendered in the case of the rest of the company.

[67]

If there was any change in Dufour's face it was expressed in a smile of intense self-satisfaction.

XI.

It was, of course, not long that the newspapers of our wide-awake country were kept from giving their readers very picturesque glimpses of what was going on among the dwellers on Mt.

Boab. The humorists of the press, those charming fellows whose work is so enjoyable when performed upon one's neighbor and so excruciating when turned against oneself, saw the vulnerable points of the situation and let go a broadside of ridicule that reverberated from the Atlantic to the Pacific. It became a matter of daily amusement among the inmates of Hotel Helicon to come together in little groups and discuss these humorous missiles fired upon them from California, Texas, Arkansas and Wisconsin, from Brooklyn, Pittsburgh, Atlanta, and Oil-City, Detroit and—, but from everywhere, indeed.

When it came to Miss Crabb's adventure, every humorist excelled himself in descriptive smartness and in cunning turns of ironical phrasing. The head-line experts did telling work in the same connection. All this was perfectly understood and enjoyed at home, but foreigners, especially the English, stubbornly insisted upon viewing it as the high-water mark of American refinement and culture. [68]

When that genial periodical, the Smartsburgh *Bulldozer*, announced with due gravity that Miss Crabb, a Western journalist, had leaped from the top of Mt. Boab to the valley below, and had been caught in the arms of a stalwart moonshiner, where she safely reposed, etc., the London *Times* copied the paragraph and made it a text for a heavy editorial upon the barbaric influences of Republican institutions, to which the American Minister felt bound to advert in a characteristic after-dinner speech at a London club. So humorous, however, were his remarks that he was understood to be vigorously in earnest, and the result was perfect confirmation of the old world's opinion as to the rudimentary character of our national culture.

Meantime Hotel Helicon continued to be the scene of varied if not startling incidents. In their search for local color and picturesque material, the litterateurs invaded every nook and corner of the region upon and round about Mt. Boab, sketching, making notes, recording suggestions, studying dialect, and filling their minds with the uncouth peculiarities of the mountain folk.

"It has come to this," grumbled Peck, "that American literature, its fiction I mean, is founded on dialect drivel and vulgar yawp. Look at our magazines; four-fifths of their short stories are full of negro talk, or cracker lingo, or mountain jibberish, or New England farm yawp, or Hoosier dialect. It is horribly humiliating. It actually makes foreigners think that we are a nation of green-horns. Why, a day or two ago I had occasion to consult the article on American literature in the Encyclopædia Britannica and therein I was told in one breath how great a writer and how truly American Mr. Lowell is, and in the next breath I was informed that a poem beginning with the verse, 'Under the yaller pines I house' is one of his master-pieces! Do you see? Do you catch the drift of the Englishman's argument? To be truly great, *as an American*, one must be surpassingly vulgar, even in poetry!" [69]

This off-hand shower of critical observation had as little effect upon the minds of Peck's hearers as a summer rain has on the backs of a flock of ducks. They even grew more vehement in their pursuit of local color.

"When I was spending a month at Rockledge castle with Lord Knownaught," said Crane, "his lordship frequently suggested that I should make a poem on the life of Jesse James."

"Well, why didn't you do it?" inquired Miss Crabb with a ring of impatience in her voice, "if you had you might have made a hit. You might have attracted some attention."

Dufour laughed heartily, as if he had caught some occult humor from the young woman's words.

"I did write it," said Crane retrospectively, "and sent it to George Dunkirk & Co." [70]

"Well?" sighed Miss Crabb with intense interest.

"Well," replied Crane, "they rejected the MS. without reading it."

Again Dufour laughed, as if at a good joke.

"George Dunkirk & Co.!" cried Guilford Ferris, the romancer, "George Dunkirk & Co.! They are thieves. They have been making false reports on copyright to me for five years or more!"

Dufour chuckled as if his jaws would fall off, and finally with a red face and gleaming humorous eyes got up from the chair he was filling on the veranda, and went up to his room.

The rest of the company looked at one another inquiringly.

"Who is he, anyhow?" demanded Peck.

"That's just my query," said Ferris.

"Nobody in the house knows anything definite about him," remarked R. Hobbs Lucas. "And yet he evidently is a distinguished person, and his name haunts me."

"So it does me," said Miss Moyne.

"I tell you he's a newspaper reporter. His cheek proves that," remarked Peck.

Miss Crabb made a note, her own cheek flaming. "I presume you call that humor," she observed, "it's about like New York's best efforts. In the West reporters are respectable people."

"I beg pardon," Peck said hastily, "I did not mean to insinuate that anybody is not respectable. Everybody is eminently respectable if I speak of them. I never trouble myself with the other kind." [71]

"Well, I don't believe that Mr. Dufour is a reporter at all," replied Miss Crabb, with emphasis, "for he's not inquisitive, he don't make notes, and he don't appear to be writing any."

"In my opinion he's a realist—a genuine analytical, motive-dissecting, commonplace-recording, international novelist in disguise," said Ferris.

"Oh!"

"Ah!"

"Dear me!"

"But who?"

"It may be Arthur Selby himself, incog. Who knows?"

"Humph!" growled Crane with a lofty scowl, "I should think I ought to know Selby. I drank wine with him at—"

His remark was cut short by the arrival of the mail and the general scramble that followed.

Upon this occasion the number of newspapers that fell to the hand of each guest was much greater than usual, and it was soon discovered that Miss Crabb's latest letter had been forwarded to a "syndicate" and was appearing simultaneously in ninety odd different journals.

No piece of composition ever was more stunningly realistic or more impartially, nay, abjectly truthful than was that letter. It gave a minute account of the quarrel between Peck and Crane over their attentions to Miss Moyne, the fight, Miss Crabb's fall, the subsequent adventures and all the hotel gossip of every sort. It was personal to the last degree, but it was not in the slightest libelous. No person could say that any untruth had been told, or even that any tinge of false-coloring had been laid upon the facts as recorded; and yet how merciless!

[72]

Of course Miss Crabb's name did not appear with the article, save as one of its subjects, and she saw at once that she had better guard her secret.

That was a breeze which rustled through Hotel Helicon. Everybody was supremely indignant; but there was no clue to the traitor who had thus betrayed everybody's secrets. It would be absurd to suppose that Miss Crabb was not suspected at once, on account of her constant and superfluous show of note-making, still there were others who might be guilty. Crane and Peck were indignant, the former especially ready to resent to the death any allusion to the details of the duel. Miss Moyne with the quick insight of a clever and gifted young woman, comprehended the situation in its general terms and was vexed as much as amused. The whole thing had to her mind the appearance of a melodramatic, broadly sensational sketch, in which she had played the part of the innocent, unconscious, but all-powerful heroine. Indeed the newspaper account placed her in this unpleasant attitude before a million readers.

[73]

"A lucky affair for you, Miss Moyne," said Dufour to her, a few days later, "you cannot over-reckon the boom it will give to your latest book. You may expect a pretty round sum with your next copyright statement."

He spoke with the voice and air of one who knew how to read the signs of the day.

"But the ridiculous idea of having all this stuff about me going the rounds of the newspapers!" she responded, her beautiful patrician face showing just a hint of color.

"Don't care for it a moment," said Dufour, "it will not hurt you."

"The thought of having that hideous picture in all the patent inside pages of the cheap press, with my name under it, *en toutes lettres*, and—why it is horrible!" she went on, with trembling lips.

Dufour smiled upon her, as if indulgently, a curious, tender gleam in his eyes.

"Wait," he said, "and don't allow it to trouble you. The world discriminates pretty well, after all. It will not hurt you. It's a mighty boom for you."

She looked at him with a sudden flash in her cheeks and eyes, and exclaimed almost vehemently: "I will not permit it! They shall not do it. I cannot bear to be treated as if—as if I were a theatrical person—a variety actress!"

"My dear Miss Moyne," he hurriedly said, his own face showing a tinge of embarrassment, "you are taking a wrong point of view, indeed you are. Wait till you see the out-come." His tone was humble and apologetic as he continued—"My opinion is that this very thing will quadruple the sales of your book."

[74]

"I don't want them quadrupled," she cried, "just look at that front hair and that nose!" She held up a newspaper for him to inspect a picture of herself, a miserable, distorted thing. "It is absolutely disgraceful. My dresses never fit like that, and who ever saw me with a man's collar on!"

Tears were in her beautiful eyes.

Dufour consoled her as best he could, though he could not resist the temptation to suggest that even a caricature of her face was sure to have in it the fascination of genuine loveliness, a suggestion which was phrased with consummate art and received with an appearance of innocence that was beyond all art.

XII.

SUMMER on Mt. Boab was much like summer on any other mountain, and life at Hotel Helicon

was very like life at any other mountain hotel, save that a certain specialization due to the influence of literature and art was apparent in the present instance, giving to the house, the landscape and the intercourse of the guests a peculiar tinge, so to say, of self-consciousness and artificiality. Not that these authors, thus drawn together by the grace of a man grown suddenly rich, were very different from men and women of other lines in life, the real peculiarity sprang out of the obligation by which every one felt bound to make the most, in a professional way, of the situation and the environment. Perhaps there was not a soul under the broad roof of Hotel Helicon, servants excepted, that did not secrete in its substance the material for a novel, a poem, or an essay which was to brim with the local life and flash with the local color of the region of Mt. Boab. Yes, there appeared to be one exception. Dufour constantly expressed a contempt for the mountaineers and their country.

[75]

"To be sure," he conceded, "to be sure there is a demand for dialect stories, and I suppose that they must be written; but for my part I cannot see why we Americans must stultify ourselves in the eyes of all the world by flooding our magazines, newspapers and books with yawp instead of with a truly characteristic American literature of a high order. There is some excuse for a quasi-negro literature, and even the Creoles might have a niche set apart for them, but dialect, on the whole, is growing to be a literary bore."

"But don't you think," said Miss Crabb, drawing her chin under, and projecting her upper teeth to such a degree that anything like realistic description would appear brutal, "don't you think, Mr. Dufour, that Mr. Tolliver would make a great character in a mountain romance?"

"No. There is nothing great in a clown, as such," he promptly answered. "If Tolliver is great he would be great without his jargon."

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"Yes," she admitted, "but the picturesqueness, the color, the contrast, you know, would be gone. Now Craddock—"

"Craddock is excellent, so long as there is but one Craddock, but when there are some dozens of him it is different," said Dufour, "and it is the process of multiplication that I object to. There's Cable, who is no longer a genius of one species. The writers of Creole stories are swarming by the score, and, poor old Uncle Remus! everybody writes negro dialect now. Literary claim-jumpers are utterly conscienceless. The book market will soon be utterly ruined."

Miss Crabb puffed out her lean sallow cheeks and sighed heavily.

"I had hoped," she said, "to get my novel on the market before this, but I have not yet found a publisher to suit me."

She winced inwardly at this way of expressing the fact that every publisher, high and low, far and near, had declined her MS. out of hand; but she could not say the awful truth in its simplest terms, while speaking to one so prosperous as Dufour. She felt that she must at all hazards preserve a reasonable show of literary independence. Crane came to her aid.

"One publisher is just as good as another," he said almost savagely. "They are all thieves. They report every book a failure, save those they own outright, and yet they all get rich. I shall publish for myself my next volume."

Dufour smiled grimly and turned away. It was rather monotonous, this iteration and reiteration of so grave a charge against the moral character of publishers, and this threat of Crane's to become his own publisher was a bit of unconscious and therefore irresistible humor.

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"It's too pathetic to be laughed at," Dufour thought, as he strolled along to where Miss Moyne sat under a tree, "but that Kentuckian actually thinks himself a poet!"

With all his good nature and kind heartedness, Dufour could be prejudiced, and he drew the line at what he called the "prevailing tendency toward boastful prevarication among Kentucky gentlemen."

As he walked away he heard Crane saying:

"George Dunkirk & Co. have stolen at least twenty thousand dollars in royalties from me during the past three years."

It was the voice of Ferris that made interrogative response:

"Is Dunkirk your publisher?"

"Yes, or rather my robber."

"Glad of it, misery loves company."

Dufour half turned about and cast a quick glance at the speakers. He did not say anything, however, but resumed his progress toward Miss Moyne, who had just been joined by Mrs. Nancy Jones Black, a stoutish and oldish woman very famous on account of having assumed much and done little. Mrs. Nancy Jones Black was from Boston. She was president of the Woman's Antiquarian Club, of the Ladies' Greek Association, of The Sappho Patriotic Club, of the Newport Fashionable Near-sighted Club for the study of Esoteric Transcendentalism, and it may not be catalogued how many more societies and clubs. She was a great poet who had never written any great poem, a great essayist whom publishers and editors avoided, whom critics regarded as below mediocrity, but of whom everybody stood in breathless awe, and she was an authority in many literary and philosophical fields of which she really knew absolutely nothing. She was a reformer and a person of influence who had made a large number of her kinsfolk famous as poets and novelists without any apparent relevancy between the fame and the literary work done. If

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your name were Jones and you could trace out your relationship to Mrs. Nancy Jones Black and could get Mrs. Nancy Jones Black interested in your behalf, you could write four novels a year with great profit ever afterward.

As Dufour approached he heard Miss Moyne say:

"I publish my poor little works with George Dunkirk & Co. and the firm has been very kind to me. I feel great encouragement, but I don't see how I can bear this horrible newspaper familiarity and vulgarity."

"My dear child," said Mrs. Nancy Jones Black, placing her plump, motherly hand on the young woman's arm, "you must not appear to notice it. Do as did my daughter Lois when they assailed her first little novel with sugar-plum praise. Why, when it began to leak out that Lois was the author of *A Sea-Side Symphony* the poor girl was almost smothered with praise. Of course I had to take the matter in hand and under my advice Lois went abroad for six months. When she returned she found herself famous."

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"Talking shop?" inquired Dufour, accepting the offer of a place on the bench beside Mrs. Black.

"Yes," said she, with a comprehensive wave of her hand, "I am taking Miss Moyne under my wing, so to say, and am offering her the comfort of my experience. She is a genius whom it doesn't spoil to praise. She's going to be the next sensation in the East."

"I suggested as much to her," said Dufour. "She is already on a strong wave, but she must try and avoid being refractory, you know." He said this in a straightforward, business way, but his voice was touched with a certain sort of admirable tenderness.

Miss Moyne was looking out over the deep, hazy valley, her cheeks still warm with the thought of that newspaper portrait with its shabby clothes and towsled bangs. What was fame, bought at such a price! She bridled a little, but did not turn her head as she said.

"I am not refractory, I am indignant, and I have a right to be. They cannot justify the liberty they have taken, besides I will not accept notoriety—I—"

"There, now, dear, that is what Lois said, and Milton John Jones, my nephew, was at first bound that he wouldn't let Tom, my brother, advertise him; but he soon saw his way clear, I assure you, and now he publishes four serials at once. Be prudent, dear, be prudent."

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"But the idea of picturing me with great barbaric rings in my ears and with a corkscrew curl on each side and—"

Dufour interrupted her with a laugh almost hearty enough to be called a guffaw, and Mrs. Black smiled indulgently as if at a clever child which must be led, not driven.

"Being conscious that you really are stylish and beautiful, you needn't care for the picture," said Dufour, in a tone of sturdy sincerity.

"There is nothing so effective as a foil," added Mrs. Black.

Miss Moyne arose and with her pretty chin slightly elevated walked away.

"How beautiful she is!" exclaimed Dufour, gazing after her, "and I am delighted to know that you are taking an interest in her."

Mrs. Black smiled complacently, and with a bland sidewise glance at him, remarked:

"She grows upon one."

"Yes," said he, with self-satisfied obtuseness, "yes, she is magnetic, she is a genuine genius."

"Precisely, she stirs one's heart strangely," replied Mrs. Black.

"Yes, I have noted that; it's very remarkable."

"You should speak of it to her at the first opportunity."

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Dufour started a little, flushed and finally laughed as one does who discovers a bit of clever and harmless treachery.

"If I only dared," he presently said, with something very like fervor in his tone. "If I only dared."

Mrs. Black looked at him a moment, as if measuring in her mind his degree of worthiness, then with a wave of her hand she said:

"Never do you dare to dare. Mr. Crane stands right in your path."

Dufour leaped to his feet with the nimbleness and dangerous celerity of a tiger.

"Crane!" he exclaimed with a world of contempt in his voice, "If he—" but he stopped short and laughed at himself.

Mrs. Black looked at him with a patronizing expression in her eyes.

"Leave it to me," she said, in her most insinuating tone.

XIII.

CRANE tried not to show the bitterness he felt as he saw his hope of winning the favor of Miss Moyne fading rapidly out, but now and again a cloud of irresistible melancholy fell upon him.

At such times it was his habit to lean upon the new fence that circumscribed Hotel Helicon and

dreamily smoke a cigar. He felt a blind desire to assassinate somebody, if he could only know who. Of course not Peck, for Peck, too, was disconsolate, but somebody, anybody who would claim the place of a successful rival.

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One morning while he stood thus regaling himself with his tobacco and his misery, Tolliver rode up, on a handsome horse this time, and, lifting his broad hat, bowed picturesquely and said:

"Good mornin,' Kyernel, how're ye this mornin'?"

"Good morning," growled Crane.

Tolliver looked off over the valley and up at the sky which was flecked with tags of fleece-cloud.

"Hit look like hit mought rain in er day er two," he remarked.

"Yes, I don't know, quite likely," said Crane, gazing evasively in another direction.

"Ever'bodys well, I s'pose, up ther' at the tavern?" inquired Tolliver.

"I believe so," was the cold answer.

Tolliver leaned over the pommel of his saddle-tree and combed his horse's mane with his sinewy fingers. Meantime the expression in his face was one of exceeding embarrassment blent with cunning.

"Kyernel, c'u'd ye do a feller a leetle yerrent what's of importance?" he asked with peculiar faltering.

"Do what?" inquired Crane lifting his eye-brows and turning the cigar in his mouth.

"Jest a leetle frien'ly job o' kindness," said Tolliver, "jest ter please ask that young leddy—thet Miss Crabb 'at I fotch up yer on er mule tother day, ye know; well, jest ax her for me ef I moughtn't come in an' see 'er on pertic'lar an' pressin' business, ef ye please, sir."

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By this time the mountaineer's embarrassment had become painfully apparent. Any good judge of human nature could have seen at once that he was almost overcome with the burden and worry of the matter in hand. His cheeks were pale and his eyes appeared to be fading into utter vacancy of expression. Crane told him that there was no need to be particularly formal, that if he would go in and ask for Miss Crabb she would see him in the parlor.

"But, Kyernel, hit's er private, sort er confidential confab 'at I must hev wi' 'er, an'—"

"Oh, well, that's all right, you'll not be interrupted in the parlor."

"Air ye pine blank shore of it, Kyernel?"

"Certainly."

"Dead shore?"

"Quite, I assure you."

Crane had become interested in Tolliver's affair, whatever it might be. He could not keep from sharing the man's evident intensity of mood, and all the time he was wondering what the matter could be. Certainly no common-place subject could so affect a man of iron like Tolliver. The poet's lively imagination was all aglow over the mystery, but it could not formulate any reasonable theory of explanation.

Miss Crabb appeared in the parlor promptly and met Tolliver with a cordiality that, instead of reassuring him, threw him into another fit of embarrassment from which he at first made no effort to recover. His wide-brimmed hat, as he twirled it on his knees, quivered convulsively in accord with the ague of excitement with which his whole frame was shaking. He made certain soundless movements with his lips, as if muttering to himself.

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Miss Crabb at first did not notice his confusion, and went on talking rapidly, reiterating thanks for the kindness he had shown her in her recent mishap, and managing to put into her voice some tones that to him sounded very tender and sweet.

"You don't know—you can't imagine, Mr. Tolliver, what I suffered during that awful night," she said, turning her head to one side and drawing her chin under until it almost disappeared in the lace at her throat. "It was horrible."

Tolliver looked at her helplessly, his mouth open, his eyes dull and sunken.

"How did you happen to discover me up there, anyway, Mr. Tolliver?" she demanded, leaning toward him and laughing a little.

"The dog he treed ye, an' then I seed ye settin' up ther' er writin' away," he managed to say, a wave of relief passing over his face at the sound of his own voice.

"It was perfectly ridiculous, perfectly preposterous," she exclaimed, "but I'm mighty thankful that I was not hurt."

"Yes, well ye mought be, Miss Crabb," he stammered out. "Wonder ye wasn't scrunched inter pieces an' scattered all eround ther'."

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She slipped out her book, took a pencil from over her ear and made a note.

Tolliver eyed her dolefully. "How do you spell scrunched, Mr. Tolliver, in your dialect?" she paused to inquire.

His jaw fell a little lower for a moment, then he made an effort:

"S—q—r—u—" he paused and shook his head, "S—q—k—no thet's not hit—s—k—q—r—dorg ef I ken spell thet word—begging yer parding, hit air 'tirely too hard for me." He settled so low in his chair that his knees appeared almost as high as his head.

"All right," she cheerily exclaimed, "I can get it phonetically. It's a new word. I don't think either Craddock or Johnson uses it, it's valuable."

There was a silence during which Miss Crabb thoughtfully drummed on her projecting front teeth with the end of her pencil.

Tolliver nerved himself and said:

"Miss Crabb I—I, well, ye know, I—that is, begging yer parding, but I hev something' I want er say ter ye, ef ye please." He glanced furtively around, as if suspecting that some person lay secreted among the curtains of a bay window hard by. And indeed, Dufour was there, lightly indulging in a morning nap, while the mountain breeze flowed over him. He was in a deep bamboo chair behind those very curtains.

"Oh, certainly, certainly, Mr. Tolliver, go on, I shall be delighted, charmed indeed, to hear what you have to say," Miss Crabb responded, turning a fresh leaf of her note-book and putting on a hopeful look. [86]

"I hope ye'll stick ter thet after I've done said it ter ye," he proceeded to say, "but dorg on me ef I know how ter begin sayin' it."

"Oh, just go right on, it's all right; I assure you, Mr. Tolliver, I am very anxious to hear."

"Mebbe ye air, I don't dispute yer word, but I feel mighty onery all the same."

"Onery is a Western word," mused Miss Crabb, making a note.

"Proceed, Mr. Tolliver," she continued after a pause, "proceed, I am listening with great interest."

"What I'm ergwine ter state ter ye mought mek ye mad, but hit can't be holp, I jest hev ter say it—I air jest erbleeged ter say it."

His voice was husky and he was assuming a tragic air. Miss Crabb felt a strange thrill creep throughout her frame as a sudden suspicion seemed to leap back and forth between her heart and her brain.

"No, I assure you that I could not be angry with you, Mr. Tolliver, under any circumstances," she murmured, "you have been so very kind to me."

"Hit air awful confusin' an' hit mek a feller feel smaller 'n a mouse ter speak it right out, but then hit air no foolishness, hit air pine blank business."

"Of course," said Miss Crabb pensively, "of course you feel some embarrassment." [87]

He hitched himself up in his chair and crossed his legs.

"Ef ye don't like w'at I say, w'y I won't blame ye a bit. I feel jest as if I wer a doin' somethin' 'at I hadn't orter do, but my mammy she say I must, an' that do everlastin'ly settle it."

"Yes, your mother's advice is always safe."

"Safe, I shed say so! Hit's mighty onsafe fer me not ter foller it, I kin tell ye. She'd thump my old gourd fer me in ermazin' style ef I didn't."

"Thump my old gourd," repeated Miss Crabb, making a note. "Go on, Mr. Tolliver, please."

"S'pose I mought as well, seein' 'at it has ter be said." He paused, faltered, and then proceeded: "Well, beggin' yer parding, Miss Crabb, but ever sence ye wer' down ther' ter we all's cabin, hit's been a worryin' my mammy and me, an' we hev' talked it all over an' over."

"Yes," sighed Miss Crabb.

"Hit's not the cost of them beads, Miss Crabb, they air not wo'th much, but they was guv ter mammy by her aunt Mandy Ann Bobus, an' she feel like she jest can't give 'em up."

Miss Crabb looked puzzled.

"Ef ye'll jest erblige me an' hand them beads over ter me, I'll never say er wo'd ter nobody ner nothin'."

"Mr. Tolliver, what in the world do you mean?" cried Miss Crabb, rising and standing before him with a face that flamed with sudden anger. [88]

"Ye mought er tuck 'em kinder accidentally, ye know," he suggested in a conciliatory tone, rising also.

"Mr. Tolliver!" she almost screamed.

"Ther' now, be still, er ye'll let ever'body know all erbout it," he half whispered. "Hit'd be disgraceful."

"Mr. Tolliver!"

"Sh-h-h! They'll hear ye!"

"Get right out of this room, you—"

Just then Dufour, who had been slowly aroused from his nap and who while yet half asleep had

overheard much of what had been said, stepped forth from behind the curtains and stood looking from one to the other of the excited actors in the little drama.

"What's up?" he, demanded bluntly.

"He's accusing me of stealing beads!" cried Miss Crabb. "He's insulting me!"

"What!" exclaimed Dufour, glaring at Tolliver.

"I feel mighty onery a doin' it," said Tolliver, "but hit air pine blank mighty suspicious, Kyernel, hit air for a fac'."

Dufour looked as if he hardly knew which he should do, laugh boisterously, or fling Tolliver out of the window, but he quickly pulled himself together and said calmly:

"You are wrong, sir, and you must apologize."

"Certingly, certingly," said Tolliver, "thet air jest what I air a doin'. I beg parding er thousan' times fer sayin' what I hev, but, Kyernel, hit air a Lor' a mighty's truth, all the same, le' me tell ye. Them beads was ther' w'en she come, an' they was gone w'en she was gone, an'—"

"Stop that! Take back those words or I'll throw you—"

Dufour took a step towards Tolliver, but stopped suddenly when the latter drew a huge revolver with one hand and a long crooked bowie-knife with the other and said:

"No yer don't, Kyernel, not by er good deal. Jest ye open yer bread-trap ergain an' I'll jest clean up this ole shanty in erbout two minutes."

It may not be inferred how this bit of dramatic experience would have ended had not a lean, wizzen-faced mountain lad rushed in just then with a three-cornered piece of paper in his hand upon which was scrawled the following message:

"I hev fown them beeds. They wus in mi terbacker bag."

Tolliver read this and wilted.

The boy was panting and almost exhausted. He had run all the way up the mountain from the Tolliver cabin.

"Yer mammy say kum home," he gasped.

"Hit air jest as I 'spected," said Tolliver. "Mammy hev made a pine blank eejit of me again." He handed the message to Dufour as he spoke. His pistol and knife had disappeared.

A full explanation followed, and at the end of a half-hour Tolliver went away crest-fallen but happy.

As for Miss Crabb she had made a number of valuable dialect notes.

Dufour promised not to let the rest of the guests know what had just happened in the parlor.

XIV.

"LITERATURE-MAKING has not yet taken the rank of a profession, but of late the world has modified its opinion as to the ability of literary people to drive a close bargain, or to manage financial affairs with success. Many women and some men have shown that it is possible for a vivid imagination and a brilliant style in writing to go close along with a practical judgment and a fair share of selfish shrewdness in matters of bargain and sale. Still, after all, it remains true that a strong majority of literary people are of the Micawber genus, with great faith in what is to turn up, always nicely balancing themselves on the extreme verge of expectancy and gazing over into the promise-land of fame and fortune with pathetically hopeful, yet awfully hollow eyes. Indeed there is no species of gambling more uncertain in its results or more irresistibly fascinating to its victims than literary gambling. Day after day, month after month, year after year, the deluded, enthusiastic, ever defeated but never discouraged writer plies his pen, besieges the publishers and editors, receives their rebuffs, rough or smooth, takes back his declined manuscripts, tries it over and over, sweats, fumes, execrates, coaxes, bullies, raves, re-writes, takes a new *nom de plume* and new courage, goes on and on to the end. Here or there rumor goes that some fortunate literator has turned the right card and has drawn a great prize; this rumor, never quite authentic, is enough to re-invigorate all the fainting scribblers and to entice new victims into the gilded casino of the Cadmean vice. The man who manipulates the literary machine is the publisher, that invisible person who usually grows rich upon the profits of unsuccessful books. He it is who inveigles the infatuated young novelist, essayist, or poet, into the beautiful bunco-den of the book business and there fastens him and holds him as long as he will not squeal; but at the first note of remonstrance he kicks him out and fills his place with a fresh victim. The literary Micawber, however, does not despair. He may be a little silly from the effect of the summersault to which the publisher's boot has treated him, but after a distraught look about him he gets up, brushes the dust off his seedy clothes and goes directly back into the den again with another manuscript under his arm and with a feverish faith burning in his deep-set eyes. What serene and beautiful courage, by the way, have the literary women! Of course the monster who resides at the publisher's desk cannot be as brutal to her as he is to men, but he manipulates her copyright statements all the same, so that her book never passes the line of fifteen hundred copies sold. How can we ever account for a woman who has written forty-three novels under such circumstances and has died, finally, a devout Christian and a staunch friend of her publisher? Poor thing! up to the hour of her demise, white-haired, wrinkled, over-worked, nervous and semi-

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paralytic, she nursed the rosy hope that to-morrow, or at the very latest, the day after to-morrow, the reward of all her self-devotion would come to her in the form of a liberal copyright statement from her long-suffering and charitable publisher.

“Out in the West they have a disease called milk-sickness, an awful malady, of which everybody stands in deadly terror, but which nobody has ever seen. If you set out to find a case of milk-sickness it is like following a *will-o'-the-wisp*, it is always just a little way farther on, over in the next settlement; you never find it. The really successful author in America is, like the milk-sickness, never visible, except on the remote horizon. You hear much of him, but you never have the pleasure of shaking his cunning right hand. The fact is, he is a myth. On the other hand, however, the American cities are full of successful publishers who have become millionaires upon the profits of books which have starved their authors. Of course this appears to be a paradox, but I suppose that it can be explained by the rule of profit and loss. The author's loss is the publisher's profit.”

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The foregoing is, in substance, the opening part of an address delivered by Ferris before the assembled guests of Hotel Helicon.

Mrs. Nancy Jones Black presided at the meeting; indeed she always presided at meetings. On this occasion, which was informal and impromptu, Ferris was in excellent mood for speaking, as he just had been notified by a letter from Dunkirk & Co. that he was expected to pay in advance for the plates of his new romance, *A Mysterious Missive*, and that a personal check would not be accepted—a draft on New York must be sent forthwith. Although Ferris was a thoroughly good fellow, who cared nothing for money as money, this demand for a sum the half of which he could not command if his life were at stake, hit him like a bullet-stroke. A chance to talk off the soreness of the wound was accepted with avidity. He felt guilty of a meanness, it is true, in thus stirring up old troubles and opening afresh ancient hurts in the breasts of his listening friends; but the relief to him was so great that he could not forego it. “The American publisher,” he went on, “proclaims himself a fraud by demanding of the author a contract which places the author's business wholly in the control of the publisher. I take it that publishers are just as honest and just as dishonest, as any other class of respectable men. You know and I know, that, as a rule, the man who trusts his business entirely to others will, in the long run, be robbed. Administrators of estates rob the heirs, in two-thirds of the instances, as every probate lawyer well knows. Every merchant has to treat his clerks and salesmen as if they were thieves, or if he do not they will become thieves. The government has to appoint bank examiners to watch the bankers, and yet they steal. The Indian agents steal from the government. Senators steal, aldermen steal, Wall street men steal from one another and from everybody else. Canada is overflowing with men who have betrayed and robbed those who trusted their business with them. Even clergymen (that poorly paid and much abused class) now and again fall before the temptation offered by the demon of manipulated returns of trust funds. The fact is, one may feel perfectly safe in saying that in regard to all the professions, trades, and occupations, there is absolutely no safety in trusting one's affairs wholly in the hands of another. (Great applause). Even your milkman waters the milk and the dairyman sells you butter that never was in a churn. If you neglect to keep a pass-book your grocer runs up the bill to—(a great rustle, and some excited whispering) up to something enormous. Of course it is not everybody that is dishonest, but experience shows that if a man has the temptation to defraud his customers constantly before him, with absolutely no need to fear detection, he will soon reason himself into believing it his right to have the lion's share of all that goes into his hands.

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“Now isn't it strange, in view of the premises, that nobody ever heard of such a thing as a publisher being convicted of making false returns? Is it possible that the business of book-publishing is so pure and good of itself that it attracts to it none but perfect men? (Great applause). Publishers do fail financially once in a while, but their books of accounts invariably show that just eleven hundred and forty copies of each copyrighted book on their lists have been sold to date, no more, no less. (Suppressed applause). Nobody ever saw cleaner or better balanced books of accounts than those kept by the publishers. They foot up correctly to a cent. Indeed it would be a very strange thing if a man couldn't make books balance under such circumstances! (Prolonged hand-clapping). I am rather poor at double entry, but I fancy I could make a credit of eleven hundred and forty copies sold, so as to have it show up all right. (Cheers). I must not lose my head in speaking on this subject, for I cannot permit you to misunderstand my motive. So long as authors submit to the per centum method of publication, so long they will be the prey of the publishers. The only method by which justice can be assured to both author and publisher is the cash-sale method. If every author in America would refuse to let his manuscript go out of hand before he had received the cash value for it, the trade would soon adjust itself properly. In that case the author's reputation would be his own property. So soon as he had made an audience his manuscripts would command a certain price. If one publisher would not pay enough for it another would. As the method now is, it makes little difference whether the author have a reputation or not. Indeed most publishers prefer to publish the novels, for example, of clever tyros, because these fledglings are so proud of seeing themselves in print that they never think of questioning copyright statements. Eleven hundred and forty copies usually will delight them almost beyond endurance. (Laughter and applause). Go look at the book lists of the publishers and you will feel the truth of what I have said.

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“Now let me ask you if you can give, or if any publisher can give one solitary honest reason why the publishing business should not be put upon a cash basis—a manuscript for so much money? The publisher controls his own business, he knows every nook and corner, every leaf and every line of it, and he should be able to say, just as the corn-merchant does, I will give you so much, to

which the author would say: I will take it, or I will not take it. But what is the good of standing here and arguing? You believe every word I speak, but you don't expect to profit by it. You will go on gambling at the publisher's faro table just as long as he will smile and deal the cards. Some of these days you will win, you think. Poor deluded wretches, go on and die in the faith!"

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No sooner had Ferris ended than Lucas the historian arose and expressed grave doubts as to the propriety of the address. He was decidedly of the opinion that authors could not afford to express themselves so freely and, if he must say it, recklessly. How could Mr. Ferris substantiate by proof any of the damaging allegations he had made against publishers of high standing? What Mr. Ferris had said might be strictly true, but the facts were certainly, very hard to come at, he thought. He hoped that Mr. Ferris's address would not be reported to the press (here he glanced appealingly at Miss Crabb), at least not as the sense of the meeting. Such a thing would, in his opinion, be liable to work a great harm to all present. He felt sure that the publishers would resent the whole thing as malicious and libellous.

Throughout the audience there was a nervous stirring, a looking at one another askance. It was as if a cold wave had flowed over them. Nobody had anything further to say, and it was a great relief when Dufour moved an adjournment *sine die*, which was carried by a vote that suggested a reserve of power. Every face in the audience, with the exception of Dufour's, wore a half-guilty look, and everybody crept silently out of the room.

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XV.

It caused quite a commotion on Mt. Boab when Bartley Hubbard and Miss Henrietta Stackpole, newspaper people from Boston, arrived at Hotel Helicon. Miss Stackpole had just returned from Europe, and Bartley Hubbard had run down from Boston for a week to get some points for his paper. She had met Mr. Henry James on the continent and Hubbard had dined with Mr. Howells just before leaving Boston.

No two persons in all the world would have been less welcome among the guests at the hotel, just then, than were these professional reporters. Of course everybody tried to give them a cordial greeting, but they were classed along with Miss Crabb as dangerous characters whom it would be folly to snub. Miss Moyne was in downright terror of them, associating the thought of them with those ineffable pictures of herself which were still appearing at second and third hand in the "patent insides" of the country journals, but she was very good to them, and Miss Stackpole at once attached herself to her unshakably. Hubbard did likewise with little Mrs. Philpot, who amused him mightily with her strictures upon analytical realism in fiction.

"I do think that Mr. Howells treated you most shamefully," she said to him. "He had no right to represent you as a disagreeable person who was cruel to his wife and who had no moral stamina."

Hubbard laughed as one who hears an absurd joke. "Oh, Howells and I have an understanding. We are really great friends," he said. "I sat to him for my portrait and I really think he flattered me. I managed to keep him from seeing some of my ugliest lines."

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"Now you are not quite sincere," said Mrs. Philpot, glancing over him from head to foot. "You are not so bad as he made you out to be. It's one of Mr. Howells's hobbies to represent men as rather flabby nonentities and women as invalids or dolls."

"He's got the men down fine," replied Hubbard, "but I guess he is rather light on women. You will admit, however, that he dissects feminine meanness and inconsequence with a deft turn."

"He makes fun of women," said Mrs. Philpot, a little testily, "he caricatures them, wrecks his humor on them; but you know very well that he misrepresents them even in his most serious and *quasi* truthful moods."

Hubbard laughed, and there was something essentially vulgar in the notes of the laugh. Mrs. Philpot admitted this mentally, and she found herself shrinking from his steadfast but almost conscienceless eyes.

"I imagine I shouldn't be as bad a husband as he did me into, but—"

Mrs. Philpot interrupted him with a start and a little cry.

"Dear me! and aren't you married?" she asked in exclamatory deprecation of what his words had implied.

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He laughed again very coarsely and looked at her with eyes that almost lured. "Married!" he exclaimed, "do I look like a marrying man? A newspaper man can't afford to marry."

"How strange," reflected Mrs. Philpot, "how funny, and Mr. Howells calls himself a realist!"

"Realist!" laughed Hubbard, "why he does not know enough about the actual world to be competent to purchase a family horse. He's a capital fellow, good and true and kind-hearted, but what does he know about affairs? He doesn't even know how to flatter women!"

"How absurd!" exclaimed little Mrs. Philpot, but Hubbard could not be sure for the life of him just what she meant the expression to characterize.

"And you like Mr. Howells?" she inquired.

"Like him! everybody likes him," he cordially said.

"Well, you are quite different from Miss Crabb. *She* hates Maurice Thompson for putting *her*

into a story."

"Oh, well," said Hubbard, indifferently, "women are not like men. They take life more seriously. If Thompson had had more experience he would not have tampered with a newspaper woman. He's got the whole crew down on him. Miss Stackpole hates him almost as fiercely as she hates Henry James."

"I don't blame her," exclaimed Mrs. Philpot, "it's mean and contemptible for men to caricature women."

"Oh, I don't know," yawned Hubbard, "it all goes in a lifetime."

At this opportune moment Miss Crabb and Miss Stackpole joined them, coming arm in arm. Miss Crabb looking all the more sallow and slender in comparison with the plump, well-fed appearance of her companion.

"May I introduce you to Miss Crabb of the Ringville *Star*, Mr. Hubbard," Miss Stackpole asked, in a high but by no means rich voice, as she fastened her steady, button-like eyes on Mrs. Philpot.

Hubbard arose lazily and went through the process of introduction perfunctorily, giving Miss Crabb a sweeping but indifferent glance.

"There's an impromptu pedestrian excursion on hand," said Miss Stackpole, "and I feel bound to go. One of the gentlemen has discovered a hermit's cabin down a ravine near here, and he offers to personally conduct a party to it. You will go, Mr. Hubbard?"

"Go! I should remark that I will. You don't get a scoop of that item, I assure you."

Miss Stackpole was a plump and rather pretty young woman, fairly well dressed in drab drapery. She stood firmly on her feet and had an air of self-reliance and self-control in strong contrast with the fussy, nervous manner of Miss Crabb.

Mrs. Philpot surveyed the two young women with that comprehensive, critical glance which takes in everything that is visible, and quickly enough she made up her comparison and estimate of them.

She decided that Miss Crabb had no style, no *savoir faire*, no repose; but then Miss Stackpole was forward, almost impudent in appearance, and her greater ease of manner was really the ease that comes of a long training in intrusiveness, and of rubbing against an older civilization. She felt quite distinctly the decided dash of vulgarity in the three newspaper representatives before her, and she could not help suspecting that it would not be safe to judge the press reporters by these examples.

The question arose in her mind whether after all Howells and Henry James and Maurice Thompson had acted fairly in taking these as representative newspaper people.

She had met a great many newspaper people and had learned to like them as a class; she had many good and helpful friends among them.

Unconsciously she was showing to all present that she was dissecting the three reporters. Her unfavorable opinion of them slowly took expression in her tell-tale face. Not that she wholly disliked or distrusted them; she really pitied them. How could they be content to live such a life, dependent upon what they could make by meddling, so to speak?

Then too, she felt a vague shame, a chagrin, a regret that real people must be put into works of fiction with all the seamy side of their natures turned out to the world's eye.

"We're in for it," exclaimed Hubbard, "Mrs. Philpot is making a study of us as a group. See the dreaming look in her eyes!"

"Oh, no! she never studies anybody or anything," said Miss Crabb. "Poor little woman, real life is a constant puzzle to her, and she makes not the slightest effort to understand it."

Hubbard and Miss Stackpole glanced curiously at each other and then at Miss Crabb. Evidently their thought was a common one.

XVI.

THE pedestrian excursion spoken of by Miss Stackpole promised to be an enjoyable affair to those of the Helicon guests who could venture upon it. A writer of oddly entertaining and preposterously impossible short stories, John B. Cattleton, had been mousing among the ravines of Mt. Boab, and had stumbled upon what he described as a "very obscure little cabin, jammed under a cliff in an angle of the cañon and right over a bright stream of cold, pure spring-water. It's a miserably picturesque and forlornly prepossessing place," he went on in his droll way, "where all sorts of engaging ghosts and entertaining ogres might be supposed to congregate at midnight. I didn't go quite down to it, but I was near enough to it to make out its main features, and I saw the queerest being imaginable poking around the premises. A veritable hermit, I should call him, as old as the rocks themselves. His dress was absurdly old-fashioned, a caricature of the uniform of our soldier sires of revolutionary renown. A long spike-tailed blue coat with notable brass buttons, a triangular hat somewhat bell-crowned and tow or cotton trousers. Shirt? Vest? Yes, if I remember well they were of copperas homespun. His hair and beard were white, fine and thin, hanging in tags and wisps as fluffy as lint. I sat upon a rock in the shadow of a cedar tree and watched his queer manœuvres for a good while. All his movements were furtive and peculiar, like those of a shy, wild beast."

"It's the Prophet of the Smoky Mountain," said Miss Crabb in an earnest stage whisper. "He's Craddock's material, we can't touch him."

"Touch him! I'll interview him on dialect in politics," said Hubbard, "and get his views on sex in genius."

"I should like a sketch of his life. There must be a human interest to serve as straw for my brick," remarked Miss Stackpole. "The motive that induced him to become a hermit, and all that."

Miss Crabb dared not confess that she desired a sketch of the old man for the newspaper syndicate, so she merely drummed on her front teeth with her pencil.

Dufour joined the pedestrian party with great enthusiasm, having dressed himself for the occasion in a pair of tennis trousers, a blue flannel shirt, a loose jacket and a shooting cap.

His shoes were genuine alpine foot-gear with short spikes in their heels and soles.

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"Lead on Cattleton," he cried jovially, "and let our motto be, 'On to the hut of Friar Tuck!'"

"Good," answered Cattleton in like spirit, "and you shall be my lieutenant, come, walk beside me."

"Thank you, from the bottom of my heart," replied Dufour, "but I cannot accept. I have contracted to be Miss Moyne's servant instead."

That was a gay procession filing away from Hotel Helicon through the thin forest that fringed one shoulder of stately Mt. Boab. Cattleton led the column, flinging back from time to time his odd sayings and preposterous conceits.

The day was delightfully cool with a steady wind running over the mountain and eddying in the sheltered coves where the ferns were thick and tall. In the sky were a few pale clouds slowly vanishing, whilst some broad-pinioned buzzards wheeled round and round above the blue-green abyss of the valley. There were sounds of a vague, dreamy sort abroad in the woods, like the whisperings and laughter of legions of invisible beings. Everybody felt exhilarated and buoyant, tramping gaily away to the hut of the hermit.

At a certain point Cattleton commanded a halt, and pointing out the entrance to the ravine, said:

"Now, good friends, we must have perfect silence during the descent, or our visit will be all in vain. Furthermore, the attraction of gravitation demands that, in going down, we must preserve our uprightness, else our progress may be facilitated to an alarming degree, and our advent at the hut be far from becomingly dignified."

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Like a snake, flecked with touches of gay color, the procession crawled down the ravine, the way becoming steeper and more tortuous at every step. Thicker and thicker and thicker grew the trees, saving where the rock broke forth from the soil, and closer drew the zig-zags of the barely possible route. Cattleton silenced every voice and rebuked every person who showed signs of weakening.

"It's just a few steps farther," he whispered back from his advanced position, "don't make the least sound."

But the ravine proved, upon this second descent much more difficult and dangerous than it had appeared to Cattleton at first, and it was with the most heroic exertions that he finally led the party down to the point whence he had viewed the cabin. By this time the column was pressing upon him and he could not stop. Down he went, faster and faster, barely able to keep his feet, now sliding, now clutching a tree or rock, with the breathless and excited line of followers gathering dangerous momentum behind him.

It was too late now to command silence or to control the company in any way. An avalanche of little stones, loosened by scrambling feet, swept past him and went leaping on down below. He heard Miss Moyne utter a little scream of terror that mingled with many exclamations from both men and women, and then he lost his feet and began to slide. Down he sped and down sped the party after him, till in a cataract of mightily frightened, but unharmed men and women, they all went over a little precipice and landed in a scattered heap on a great bed of oak leaves that the winds had drifted against the rock.

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A few moments of strange silence followed, then everybody sprang up, disheveled and red-faced, to look around and see what was the matter.

They found themselves close to the long, low cabin, from under which flowed a stream of water. A little column of smoke was wandering out of a curious clay chimney. Beside the low door-way stood a long, deep trough filled with water in which a metal pipe was coiled fantastically. Two earthen jugs with cob stoppers sat hard by. A sourish smell assaulted their sense and a faint spirituous flavor burdened the air.

Cattleton, who was first upon his feet, shook himself together and drolly remarked:

"We have arrived in good order, let's interview the——"

Just then rushed forth from the door the old man of the place, who halted outside and snatched from its rack on the wall a long tin horn, which he proceeded to blow vigorously, the echoes prowling through the woods and over the foot-hills and scampering far away up and down the valley.

[108]

Not a soul present ever could forget that sketch, the old man with his shrunken legs bent and

wide apart, his arms akimbo as he leaned far back and held up that wailing, howling, bellowing horn, and his long coat-tail almost touching the ground, whilst his fantastic hat quivered in unison with the strain he was blowing. How his shriveled cheeks puffed out, and how his eyes appeared to be starting from their bony sockets!

"That is what I call a fitting reception," said Cattleton, gazing at the trumpeter.

"See here," exclaimed Crane with evident excitement, "I smell whisky! This——"

"Hyer! what d'ye mean hyer, you all a comin' down hyer?" broke forth a wrathful voice, and Wesley Tolliver rushed with melodramatic fierceness upon the scene.

"Oh! I—I—wa—want to g—go home!" cried little Mrs. Philpot, clutching Bartley Hubbard's arm.

"So do I," said he with phlegmatic cleverness. "I should like to see my mother. I'm feeling a little lonely and——"

"What upon yearth do this yer mean, anyhow?" thundered Tolliver. "Who invited you all down yer, tell me thet, will ye?"

"Oh, Mr. Tolliver, Mr. Tolliver!" exclaimed Miss Crabb, rushing upon him excitedly, "I'm so glad you are here!"

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"Well, I'll ber dorged!" he ejaculated, "you down hyer again! Well, I never seed the like afore in all my born days."

He gazed at first one and then another of the party, and a sudden light flashed into his face.

"Well I'll ber dorged ef ther whole kepoodle of 'em hain't done jest gone and tumbled off'n the mounting an' jest rolled down hyer!"

"You're a very accurate reasoner, my friend," said Cattleton, trying to get his hat into shape. "I think we touched at two or three points as we came down, however."

About this time four or five more mountaineers appeared bearing guns and looking savage.

"Bandits," said Miss Stackpole with a shudder.

"Moonshiners," muttered Crane.

"Oh, for heaven's sake, Mr. Hubbard, do t—t—take m—me home!" wailed Mrs. Philpot.

"I should be delighted," said Hubbard, his voice concealing the uneasiness he felt. "Indeed I should."

More men appeared and at the same time a roll of thunder tumbled across the darkening sky. A sudden mountain storm had arisen.

The pedestrians found themselves surrounded by a line of grim and silent men who appeared to be waiting for orders from Tolliver.

A few large drops of rain come slanting down from the advancing fringe of the sable-cloud, and again the thunder bounded across the heavens.

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"I guess you'd better invite us in," suggested Cattleton, turning to the old man, who stood leaning on his tin horn. "The ladies will get wet."

"I say, Cattleton," called out Bartley Hubbard, "if a fellow only had a little supply of Stockton's negative gravity he could ameliorate his condition, don't you think?"

"Yes, I'd like to fall up hill just now. The excitement would be refreshing."

There came a spiteful dash of rain and a flurry of wind.

"You'ns had better go inter the still-house," said Tolliver. "Hit air goin' ter rain yearlin' calves. Go right erlong in, ye sha'n't be hurt."

Another gush of rain enforced the invitation, and they all scrambled into the cabin pell-mell, glad of the relief from a strain that had become almost unbearable to some of them, but they stared at each other when they found the door closed and securely locked on the outside.

"Prisoners!" cried some one whose voice was drowned by a deafening crash of thunder and a mighty flood of rain that threatened to crush in the rickety roof of the house.

"The treacherous villain!" exclaimed Dufour, speaking of Tolliver and holding Miss Moyne's hand. The poor girl was so frightened that it was a comfort to her to have her hand held.

"How grand, how noble it is in Mr. Tolliver and his friends," said Miss Crabb, "to stand out there in the rain and let us have the shelter! I never saw a more virile and thoroughly unselfish man than he is. He is one of Nature's unshorn heroes, a man of the ancient god-like race."

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Mrs. Nancy Jones Black gave the young woman a look of profound contempt.

Then a crash of thunder, wind, and rain scattered everybody's thoughts.

XVII.

THE storm was wild enough, but of short duration, and it came to its end as suddenly as it had begun. As the black cloud departed from the sky, the darkness, which had been almost a solid inside the still-house, was pierced by certain lines of mild light coming through various chinks in the walls and roof. Our friends examined one another curiously, as if to be sure that it was not all

a dream.

Cattleton found himself face to face with a demure-looking young man, whom he at once recognized as Harry Punner, a writer of delicious verses and editor of a rollicking humorous journal at New York.

"Hello, Hal! you here?" he cried. "Well how does it strike your funny bone? It insists upon appearing serious to me."

"I'm smothering for a whiff of fresh air," said Punner, in a very matter-of-fact tone. "Can't we raise a window or something?"

"The only window visible to the naked eye," said Cattleton, "is already raised higher than I can reach," and he pointed to a square hole in the wall about seven and a-half feet above the ground and very near the roof. [112]

Crane went about in the room remarking that the aroma floating in the air was the bouquet of the very purest and richest copper-distilled corn whisky and that if he could find it he was quite sure that a sip of it would prove very refreshing under the peculiar circumstances of the case, an observation which called forth from Mrs. Nancy Jones Black a withering temperance reprimand.

"As the presiding officer of the *Woman's Prohibition Promulgation Society* I cannot let such a remark pass without condemning it. If this really is a liquor establishment I desire to be let out of it forthwith."

"So do I!" exclaimed little Mrs. Philpot with great vehemence. "Open the door Mr. Hubbard, please."

Hubbard went to the door and finding that it was constructed to open outwardly, gave it a shove with all his might. There was a short tussle and he staggered back.

"Why don't you push it open?" fretfully exclaimed Mrs. Nancy Jones Black.

"The gentlemen outside object, for reasons not stated," was the rather stolidly spoken answer.

Cattleton had taken off his hat and was going about through the company soliciting handkerchiefs.

"Drop them in, drop them in," he urged, "I need all of them that I can get." [113]

He offered his hat as a contribution box as he spoke, and nearly every-one gave a handkerchief, without in the least suspecting his purpose.

When he had collected a round dozen, Cattleton crammed them all down in the crown of his hat which he then put on his head.

"Now Hal," he said, addressing Punner, "give me a boost and I'll make an observation through that window."

The rain was now entirely ended and the wind had fallen still.

With Punner's help Cattleton got up to the window and poked out his head.

"Git back ther'!" growled a vicious voice, and at the same time the dull sound of a heavy blow was followed by the retreat of Cattleton from the window to the floor in a great hurry.

Upon top of his hat was a deep trench made by a club.

"The handkerchiefs did their duty nobly," he remarked. "Let everybody come forward and identify his property."

"What did you see?" asked Punner.

"A giant with an oak tree in his hand and murder in his eye," said Cattleton, busily selecting and returning the handkerchiefs. "This eleemosynary padding was all that saved me. The blow was aimed at my divine intellect."

"See here," cried Peck, in great earnest, "this is no joking matter. We're in the power of a set of mountain moonshiners, and may be murdered in cold blood. We'd better do something." [114]

Crane had prowled around until he had found a small jug of fragrant mountain dew whisky, which he was proceeding to taste in true Kentucky style, when a gaunt form rose in a corner of the room, and tottering forward seized the jug and took it out of his hand.

"No ye don't, sonny, no ye don't! This yer mounting jew air not ever'body's licker 'at wants it. Not by er half er mile at the littlest calc'lation!"

Miss Crabb made a note. Crane gazed pathetically at the fantastic old man before him, and brushed his handkerchief across his lips, as if from habit, as he managed to say:

"I meant no undue liberty, I assure you. That whisky is——"

"Overpowerin'," interrupted the old man, taking a sip from the vessel. "Yes, I don't blame ye fur a wantin' of it, but this yer licker air mine."

"Up in Kentucky," said Crane, "we are proud to offer——"

"Kaintucky! did ye say ole Kaintuck? Air ye from ther', boy?"

The octogenarian leaned forward as he spoke and gazed at Crane with steadfast, rheumy eyes.

Miss Henrietta Stackpole came forward to hear what was to follow, her instinct telling her that a point of human interest was about to be reached. [115]

"Yes," said Crane, "I was born and reared on Lulbegrud creek."

"Lulbegrud!"

"Yes."

"How fur f'om Wright's mill?"

"Close by, at Kiddville," said Crane.

"Ye 'member Easton's Springs close by an' Pilot Knob away off in the distance?"

"Very well, indeed, and Guoff's pond."

"Boy, what mought yer name be?"

"Crane."

"Crane!"

"Yes."

"Well, I'll ber dorg!"

The old man stood gazing and grinning at Crane for some moments, and then added:

"What's yer pap's name?"

"Eliphaz Crane."

"Liphaz Crane yore pap!"

"Yes."

"Child, I air yer pap's uncle."

"What!"

"I air Peter Job Crane."

"You!"

"Sartin es anything."

"Are you my father's uncle Peter?"

"I air yer pap's uncle Pete."

"How strange!"

Miss Stackpole did not permit a word, a look, or a shade of this interview to escape her. She now turned to Bartley Hubbard and said:

"We Americans are the victims of heterogeneous consanguinity. Such an incident as this could not happen in England. It will be a long time before we can get rid of our ancestors."

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"Yes," assented Hubbard, nonchalantly, "Yer pap's uncle certainly is a large factor in American life."

"How many men did you see when you looked out?" Peck inquired, addressing Cattleton.

"I saw only one, but he was a monster," was the ready reply. "It's no use brooding over trying to escape by force. We're utterly helpless, and that jolt on my head has rendered me unfit for diplomatic efforts."

"What do you suppose they will do with us?"

"They won't dare let us go."

"Why?"

"They'd be afraid that we would report their illicit distillery."

"Ah, I see."

The affair began to take on a very serious and gloomy aspect, and the room was growing oppressively hot, owing to the presence of a small but energetic furnace that glowed under a sighing boiler. Outside, with the clearing sky and refreshed air, there arose a clamor of bird-song in the dripping trees. Under the floor the spring-stream gurgled sweetly.

"Ye 'member Abbott's still house on ole Lulbegrud?" said the old man, pursuing his reminiscences, after he had permitted his grand-nephew to taste the "mounting jew," "an' Dan Rankin's ole bob-tail hoss?"

[117]

"Very well, indeed," responded Crane, "and Billy Pace's blackberry fields where I picked berries in summer and chased rabbits in winter."

"Take er nother drop o' the jyful juice, boy, fur the mem'ry o' ole Kaintuck!"

"Oh dear! but isn't it incomparably awful?" exclaimed Mrs. Nancy Jones Black, gazing in horrified fascination upon the two Kentuckians, as they bowed to each other and drank alternately from the little jug.

"Characteristic Southern scene not used by Craddock," murmured Miss Crabb, making a whole page of a single note.

"Don't this yere liquor taste o' one thing an' smell o' another an' jes' kinder git ter the lowest p'int o' yer appetite?" continued Crane's great uncle Peter.

"Delicious beyond compare," responded the young man, drinking again, "it is nectar of the gods."

Mrs. Nancy Jones Black groaned, but could not withdraw her eyes from the scene.

"Good deal like ole times down to Abbott's still-house on Lulbegrud, boy," the old man suggested, "ye don't forgit erbout Dan Rankin's mule a-kickin' ole man Hornback's hat off?"

The poet laughed retrospectively and mopped his glowing face with his handkerchief. The heat from the furnace and the stimulus of the excellent beverage were causing him to feel the need of fresh air.

Indeed, everybody was beginning to pant. Miss Moyne was so overcome with excitement and with the heat of the place, that she was ready to faint, when the door was flung open and Tolliver appeared. A rush of sweet cool air, flooding the room, revived her, just as she was sinking into Dufour's arms.

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XVIII.

AUTHORS who have added the vice of elocution to the weakness of dialect verse-making, are often at a loss for a sympathetic audience. Whilst it is true that literary people are apt to bear with a good deal of patience the mutually offered inflictions incident to meeting one another, they draw the line at dialect recitations; and, as a rule, stubbornly refuse to be bored with a fantastic rendition of "When Johnny got spanked by a mule," or "Livery-stable Bob," or "Samantha's Courtin'," or "Over the Ridge to the Pest-house," no matter how dear a friend may offer the scourge. Circumstances alter cases, however, and although neither Carleton, nor Riley, nor yet Burdette, nor Bill Nye (those really irresistible and wholly delightful humorists), had come to Hotel Helicon, there was a certain relief for those of the guests who had not joined the luckless pedestrians, in hearing Miss Amelia Lotus Nebeker recite a long poem written in New Jersey patois.

Miss Nebeker was very hard of hearing, almost stone deaf, indeed, which affliction lent a pathetic effect even to her humor. She was rather stout, decidedly short, and had a way of making wry faces with a view to adding comicality to certain turns of her New Jersey phraseology, and yet she was somewhat of a bore at times. Possibly she wished to read too often and sometimes upon very unsuitable occasions. It was Mrs. Bridges who once said that, if the minister at a funeral should ask some one to say a few appropriate words, Miss Nebeker, if present, would immediately clear her throat and begin reciting "A Jerseyman's Jewsharp." "And if she once got started you'd never be able to stop her, for she's as deaf as an adder."

[119]

It was during the rainstorm, while those of the guests who had not gone to the hermit's hut with Cattleton, were in the cool and spacious parlor of the hotel, that something was said about Charles Dickens reading from his own works. Strangely enough, although the remark was uttered in a low key and at some distance from Miss Nebeker, she responded at once with an offer to give them a new rendering of *The Jerseyman's Jewsharp*. Lucas, the historian, objected vigorously, but she insisted upon interpreting his words and gestures as emphatic applause of her proposition. She arose while he was saying:

"Oh now, that's too much, we're tired of the jangling of that old harp; give us a rest!"

This unexpected and surprising slang from so grave and dignified a man set everybody to laughing. Miss Nebeker bowed in smiling acknowledgement of what appeared to her to be a flattering anticipation of her humor, and taking her manuscript from some hiding-place in her drapery, made a grimace and began to read. Mrs. Philpot's cat, in the absence of its mistress, had taken up with the elocutionist and now came to rub and purr around her feet while she recited. This was a small matter, but in school or church or lecture-hall, small matters attract attention. The fact that the cat now and again mewed plaintively set some of the audience to smiling and even to laughing.

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Such apparent approval of her new rendition thrilled Miss Nebeker to her heart's core. Her voice deepened, her intonations caught the spirit of her mood, and she read wildly well.

Every one who has even a smattering of the *patois* current in New Jersey, will understand how effective it might be made in the larynx of a cunning elocutionist; and then whoever has had the delicious experience of hearing a genuine Jerseyman play on the jewsharp will naturally jump to a correct conclusion concerning the pathos of the subject which Miss Nebeker had in hand. She felt its influence and threw all her power into it. Heavy as she was, she arose on her tip-toes at the turning point of the story and gesticulated vehemently.

The cat, taken by surprise, leaped aside a pace or two and glared in a half-frightened way, with each separate hair on its tail set stiffly. Of course there was more laughter which the reader took as applause.

"A brace of cats!" exclaimed the historian. "A brace of cats!"

[121]

Nobody knew what he meant, but the laughing increased, simply for the reason that there was nothing to laugh at.

Discovering pretty soon that Miss Nebeker really meant no harm by her manœuvres, the cat went back to rub and purr at her feet. Then Miss Nebeker let down her heel on the cat's tail, at the same time beginning with the pathetic part of *The Jerseyman's Jewsharp*.

The unearthly squall that poor puss gave forth was wholly lost on the excited elocutionist, but it

quite upset the audience, who, not wishing to appear rude, used their handkerchiefs freely.

Miss Nebeker paused to give full effect to a touching line.

The cat writhed and rolled and clawed the air and wailed like a lost spirit in its vain endeavor to free its tail; but Miss Nebeker, all unconscious of the situation, and seeing her hearers convulsed and wiping tears from their faces, redoubled her elocutionary artifices and poured incomparable feeling into her voice.

Suddenly the tortured and writhing animal uttered a scream of blood-curdling agony and lunged at Miss Nebeker's ankles with tooth and claw.

She was in the midst of the passage where the dying Jerseyman lifts himself on his elbow and calls for his trusty Jewsharp:

"Gi' me my juice-harp, Sarah Ann——" she was saying, when of a sudden she screamed louder than the cat and bounded into the air, sending her manuscript in fluttering leaves all over the room. [122]

The cat, with level tail and fiery eyes, sailed through the door-way into the hall, and went as if possessed of a devil, bounding up the stairway to Mrs. Philpot's room.

Congratulations were in order, and Lucas insisted upon bellowing in Miss Nebeker's ear his appreciation of the powerful effect produced by the last scene in the little drama.

"If our friends who are out in this rain are finding anything half as entertaining," he thundered, "they needn't mind the drenching."

"But I'm bitten, I'm scratched, I'm hurt," she exclaimed.

Lucas suddenly realized the brutality of his attitude, and hastened to rectify it by collecting the leaves of her manuscript and handing them to her.

"I beg pardon," he said sincerely, "I hope you are not hurt much."

"Just like a cat," she cried, "always under somebody's feet! I do despise them!"

With a burning face and trembling hands she swiftly rearranged the manuscript and assuming the proper attitude asked the audience to be seated again.

"I am bitten and scratched quite severely," she said, "and am suffering great pain, but if you will resume your places I will begin over again."

"Call that cat back, then, quick!" exclaimed Lucas, "it's the star performer in the play." [123]

She proceeded forthwith, setting out on a new journey through the tortuous ways of the poem, and held up very well to the end. What she called New Jersey patois was a trifle flat when put into verse and she lacked the polished buffoonery of a successful dialect reader, wherefore she failed to get along very successfully with her audience in the absence of the cat; still the reading served to kill a good deal of time, by a mangling process.

The storm was over long ago when she had finished, and the sun was flooding the valley with golden splendor. Along the far away mountain ridges some slanting wisps of whitish mist sailed slowly, like aerial yachts riding dark blue billows. The foliage of the trees, lately dusky and drooping, twinkled vividly with a green that was almost dazzling, and the air was deliciously fresh and fragrant.

Everybody went out on the veranda for a turn and a deep breath.

The mail had arrived and by a mistake a bundle of letters bearing the card of George Dunkirk & Co., and addressed to "George Dunkirk, Esq., Hotel Helicon, room 24," was handed to Lucas.

The historian gazed at the superscription, adjusted his glasses and gazed again, and slowly the truth crept into his mind. There were ten or fifteen of the letters. Evidently some of them, as Lucas's experience suggested, had alien letters inclosed within their envelopes, and thus forwarded by the mailing clerk of the firm had at last come to the senior partner at room 24. [124]

"Gaspard Dufour, indeed!" Lucas exclaimed inwardly. "George Dunkirk, rather. This is a pretty kettle of fish!"

He sent the letters up to room 24, to await the return of their proper recipient, and fell to reflecting upon the many, very many and very insulting things that he and nearly all the rest of the hotel guests as well had said in Dufour's hearing about publishers in general and about George Dunkirk & Co., in particular. His face burned with the heat of the retrospect, as he recalled such phrases as "sleek thief," "manipulator of copy-right statements," "Cadmean wolf" "ghoul of literary grave-yards," and a hundred others, applied with utter unrestraint and bandied around, while George Dunkirk was sitting by listening to it all!

He called Ferris to him and imparted his discovery in a stage whisper.

"The dickens!" was all that gentleman could say, as the full text of his address of the other evening rushed upon him.

"It is awkward, devilish awkward," remarked Lucas, wiping his glasses and nervously readjusting them.

A few minutes later two men rode up to the hotel. One of them was a very quiet-looking fellow who dryly stated that he was the high sheriff of Mt. Boab county. [125]

MEANTIME down the ravine in the obscure little still-house our pedestrians were held in durance vile by Tolliver and his obedient moon-shiners.

It was a puzzling situation to all concerned. Far from wishing or intending to harm his prisoners, Tolliver still could not see his way clear to setting them at liberty. On the other hand he was clever enough to perceive that to hold them very long would be sure to lead to disaster, for their friends would institute a search and at the same time telegraph an account of their disappearance all over the country.

"Pears ter me like I've ketched bigger game 'an my trap'll hold," he thought, as he stood in the door-way surveying his victims.

"What ye all a doin' a monkeyin' round' these yer premerses, anyhow?" he demanded. "W'y c'udn't ye jest wait 'll I sent for ye ter kem yer?"

"It's a sort of surprise party, my dear sir," said Cattleton. "Don't you see?"

"S'prise set o' meddlin' Yankees a foolin' roun' wher' they air not got no business at," responded Tolliver, "that's w'at I calls it."

"Where's your pantry?" inquired Punner, "I'm as hungry as a wolf."

"Hongry, air ye? What'd ye 'spect ter git ter eat at er still-house, anyhow? Hain't ye got no sense er tall? Air ye er plum blasted eejit?"

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Tolliver made these inquiries in a voice and manner suggestive of suppressed but utter wrath.

"Oh he's *always* hungry, he would starve in a feed-store," exclaimed Cattleton. "Don't pay the least attention to him, Mr. Tolliver. He's incurably hungry."

"W'y ef the man's really hongry——" Tolliver began to say in a sympathetic tone.

"Here," interrupted Hubbard gruffly, "let us out of this immediately, can't you? The ladies can't bear this foul air much longer, it's beastly."

"Mebbe hit air you 'at air a running this yer chebang," said Tolliver with a scowl. "I'll jes' let ye out w'en I git ready an' not a minute sooner, nother. So ye've hearn my tin horn."

Miss Stackpole and Miss Crabb made notes in amazing haste.

Hubbard shrugged his heavy shoulders and bit his lip. He was baffled.

"Do you think they'll kill us?" murmured Miss Moyne in Dufour's ear.

Dufour could not answer.

Crane and his "pap's uncle Pete" were still hobnobbing over the jug.

"Yer's a lookin' at ye, boy, an' a hopin' agin hope 'at ye may turn out ter be es likely a man es yer pap," the old man was saying, preliminary to another draught.

Crane was bowing with extreme politeness in acknowledgement of the sentiment, and was saying:

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"I am told that I look like my father——"

"Yes, ye do look a leetle like im," interrupted the old man with a leer over the jug, "but l'me say at it air dern leetle, boy, dern leetle!"

Punner overhearing this reply, laughed uproariously. Crane appeared oblivious to the whole force of the joke, however. He was simply waiting for his turn at the jug.

"As I wer' a sayin'," resumed the old man, "yer's er hopin' agin' hope, an' a lookin' at ye——"

"How utterly brutal and disgusting!" cried Mrs. Nancy Jones Black. "I must leave here, I cannot bear it longer! This is nothing but a low, vile dram-shop! Let me pass!"

She attempted to go through the doorway, but Tolliver interfered.

"Stay wher' ye air," he said, in a respectful but very stern tone. "Ye can't git out o' yer jist yit."

"Dear me! Dear me!" wailed Mrs. Black, "what an outrage, what an insult! Are you men?" she cried, turning upon the gentlemen near her, "and will you brook this?"

"Give me your handkerchiefs again," said Cattleton, "and I will once more poke out my head; 'tis all that I can do!"

"Shoot the fust head 'at comes out'n thet ther winder, Dave!" ordered Tolliver, speaking to some one outside.

"I don't care for any handkerchiefs, thank you," said Cattleton, "I've changed my mind."

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Miss Moyne was holding Dufour's arm with a nervous clutch, her eyes were full of tears, and she was trembling violently. He strove to quiet her by telling her that there was no danger, that he would shield her, die for her and all that; but Tolliver looked so grim and the situation was so strange and threatening that she could not control herself.

"Goodness! but isn't this rich material," Miss Crabb soliloquized, writing in her little red book with might and main. "Bret Harte never discovered anything better."

Miss Henrietta Stackpole was too busy absorbing the human interest of the interview between the two Cranes, to be more than indirectly aware of anything else that was going on around her.

"Ye needn't be erfeard as ter bein' hurt, boy," said the old man, "not es long es yer pap's uncle Pete air eroun' yer. Hit ain't often 'at I meets up wi' kinfolks downyer, an' w'en I does meet up wi' 'em I treats 'em es er Southern gen'l'man orter treat his kinfolks."

"Precisely so," said Crane, taking another sip, "hospitality is a crowning Southern virtue. When I go up to Louisville Henry Watterson and I always have a good time."

"Spect ye do, boy, spect ye do. Louisville use ter be a roarin' good place ter be at."

Tolliver, whose wits had been hard at work, now proposed what he called "terms o' pay-roll, like what they hed in the war." [1329]

"Ef ye'll all take a oath an' swa' at ye'll never tell nothin' erbout nothin'," said he, "w'y I'll jest let ye off this yer time."

"That is fair enough," said Dufour, "we are not in the detective service."

"Then," observed Tolliver, "ef I ken git the 'tention of this yer meetin', I move 'at it air yerby considered swore 'at nothin' air ter be said erbout nothin' at no time an' never. Do ye all swa'?"

"Yes!" rang out a chorus of voices.

"Hit air cyarried," said Tolliver, "an' the meetin' air dismissed, sigh er die. Ye kin all go on erbout yer business."

The pedestrians filed out into the open air feeling greatly relieved. Crane lingered to have a few more passages with his sociable and hospitable grand-uncle. Indeed he remained until the rest of the party had passed out of sight up the ravine and he did not reach the hotel until far in the night, when he sang some songs under Miss Moyne's window.

Taken altogether, the pedestrians felt that they had been quite successful in their excursion.

Dufour was happiness itself. On the way back he had chosen for himself and Miss Moyne a path which separated them from the others, giving him an opportunity to say a great deal to her.

Now it is a part of our common stock of understanding that when a man has an excellent and uninterrupted opportunity to say a great deal to a beautiful young woman, he usually does not find himself able to say much; still he rarely fails to make himself understood. [1330]

They both looked so self-consciously happy (when they arrived a little later than the rest at Hotel Helicon) that suspicion would have been aroused but for two startling and all-absorbing disclosures which drove away every other thought.

One was the disclosure of the fact that Dufour was not Dufour, but George Dunkirk, and the other was the disclosure of the fact that the high sheriff of Mt. Boab County was in Hotel Helicon on important official business.

Little Mrs. Philpot was the first to discover that the great publisher really had not practiced any deception as to his name. Indeed her album showed that the signature therein was, after all, George Dunkirk and not Gaspard Dufour. The autograph was not very plain, it is true, but it was decipherable and the mistake was due to her own bad reading.

If the sheriff had been out of the question the humiliation felt by the authors, for whom Dunkirk was publisher and who had talked so outrageously about him, would have crushed them into the dust; but the sheriff was there in his most terrible form, and he forced himself upon their consideration with his quiet but effective methods of legal procedure. [1331]

XX.

"GASLUCKY has been caught in a wheat corner at Chicago," Lucas explained, "and has been squeezed to death."

"Dead!" cried Punner, "it's a great loss. We'll have to hold a meeting and pass res——"

"We'll have to get out of this place in short order," said Lucas, "the sheriff has levied an attachment on the hotel and all it contains."

"What!"

"How's that?"

"Do you mean that the house is to be shut up and we turned out?"

"Just that," said Lucas. "The sheriff has invoiced every thing, even the provisions on hand. He says that we can't eat another bite here."

"And I'm starving even now!" exclaimed Punner. "I could eat most anything. Let's walk round to Delmonico's, Cattleton."

"But really, what can we do?" demanded Ferris, dolefully enough.

"Go home, of course," said Cattleton.

Ferris looked blank and stood with his hands thrust in his pockets.

"I can't go home," he presently remarked.

"Why?"

"I haven't money enough to pay my way."

"By George! neither have I!" exclaimed Cattleton with a start.

"That is precisely my fix," said Lucas gravely.

"You echo my predicament," said Peck.

"My salary is suspended during my absence," said Punner, with his eyes bent on the floor.

Little Mrs. Philpot was speechless for a time as the force of the situation broke upon her.

"Squeezed in a wheat corner?" inquired Miss Stackpole, "what do you mean by that?"

"I mean that Gaslucky got sheared in the big deal the other day at Chicago," Lucas explained.

"Got sheared?"

"Yes, the bulls sat down on him."

"Oh, you mean a speculation—a—"

"Yes, Gaslucky was in for all he was worth, and they run it down on him and flattened him. A gas-man's no business in wheat, especially in Chicago; they spread him out, just as the sheriffs proceedings have flattened all our hopes for the present."

"It's just outrageous!" cried little Mrs. Philpot, finding her voice. "He should have notified us, so that—"

"They didn't notify him, I guess," said Cattleton.

"No, he found it out afterwards," remarked Lucas, glancing gloomily toward where Dunkirk and Miss Moyne stood, apparently in light and pleasant conversation.

Viewed in any light the predicament was a peculiar and distressing one to the guests of Hotel Helicon. The sheriff, a rather ignorant, but very stubborn and determined man, held executions and writs of attachment sued out by Gaslucky creditors, which he had proceeded to levy on the hotel and on all the personalty visible in it belonging to the proprietor.

"Course," said he, "hit'll be poorty hard on you'ns, but I can't help it, I've got ter do my juty, let it hurt whoever it will. Not er thing kin ye tech at's in this yer tavern, 'ceptin' what's your'n, that air's jest how it air. So now mind w'at yer a doin'."

The servants were idle, the dining-room closed, the kitchen and pantries locked up. Never was there a more doleful set of people. Mrs. Nancy Jones Black thought of playing a piece of sacred music, but she found the grand piano locked, with its key deep in the sheriff's pocket.

The situation was made doubly disagreeable when at last the officer informed the guests that they would have to vacate their rooms forthwith, as he should proceed at once to close up the building.

"Heavens, man, are you going to turn us out into the woods?" demanded Peck.

"Woods er no woods," he replied, "ye'll hev ter git out'n yer, right off."

"But the ladies, Mr. Sheriff," suggested Punner, "no Southern gentleman can turn a lady out of doors."

The officer actually colored with the force of the insinuation. He stood silent for some time with his eyes fixed on the floor. Presently he looked up and said:

"The weeming kin stay till mornin'."

"Well they must have something to eat," said Punner. "They can't starve."

"Thet's so," the sheriff admitted, "they kin hev a bite er so."

"And we——"

"You men folks cayn't hev a dorg gone mouthful, so shet up!"

"Well," observed Cattleton, dryly, "it appears the odds is the difference between falling into the hands of moonshiners and coming under the influence of a lawful sheriff."

"I know a little law," interposed Bartley Hubbard with a sullen emphasis, "and I know that this sheriff has no right to tumble us out of doors, and for my part——"

"Fur yer part," said the sheriff coolly, "fur yer part, Mister, ef ye fool erlong o' me I'll crack yer gourd fur ye."

"You'll do what?"

"I'll stave in yer piggin."

"I don't understand."

"W'y, blame yer ignorant hide, wha' wer' ye borned and fotch up? I'll jest knock the everlastin' head off'n ye, *thet's 'zac'ly* w'at I says. Mebbe ye don't understan' *thet*?"

"Yes," said Hubbard, visibly shrinking into himself, "I begin to suspect your meaning."

Miss Crabb was taking notes with enthusiastic rapidity.

Dunkirk called the sheriff to him and a long conference was held between them, the result of which was presently announced.

"I heve thort it over," said the quiet officer of the law, "an' es hit appear thet w'at grub air on han' an' done cooked might spile afore it c'u'd be sold, therefore I proclamate an' say at you'ns

kin stay yer tell termorrer an' eat w'at's cooked, but tech nothin' else."

Cattleton and Punner applauded loudly. To everybody the announcement was a reprieve of no small moment, and a sigh of relief rustled through the groups of troubled guests. Those who had been down the ravine were very tired and hungry; the thought of a cold luncheon to them was the vision of a feast.

Dunkirk had a basket of wine brought down from his room and he made the sheriff sit beside him at the table.

"We may as well make the most of our last evening together," he said, glancing jovially around.

"We shall have to walk down the mountain in the morning, I suppose," remarked Bartley Hubbard.

"That's jest w'at's the matter," observed the sheriff.

"But the ladies, my dear sir, the ladies——" began Punner.

"The weeming, they'll hev kinveyances, young man, so ye kin jest shet up ef ye please," the officer interrupted, with a good-natured wink and a knowing wag of his head.

A disinterested observer would have noted readily enough that the feast was far from a banquet. There was Ferris, for instance, munching a biscuit and sipping his wine and pretending to enjoy Punner's sallies and Cattleton's drolleries, while down in his heart lay the leaden thought, the hideous knowledge of an empty pocket. Indeed the reflection was a common one, weighting down almost every breast at the board. [136]

One little incident did make even Ferris forget himself for a moment or two, it was when deaf Miss Nebeker misinterpreted some remark made by Hubbard and arose with a view to reciting *The Jerseyman's Jewsharp*, with a new variation, "Oh, Jerseyman Joe had a Jewsharp of gold," she began, in her most melodious drawl. She could not hear the protesting voices of her friends and she misinterpreted the stare of the sheriff.

"For the good heaven's sake, Hubbard," cried Lucas, "do use your influence; quick, please, or I shall collapse."

Bartley Hubbard took hold of her dress and gently pulled her down into her chair.

"The sheriff objects!" he yelled in her ear.

"After dinner?" she resignedly inquired, "well, then after dinner, in the parlor."

When the feast had come to the crumbs, Dunkirk arose and said:

"We all have had a good time at the Hotel Helicon, but our sojourn upon the heights of Mt. Boab has been cut short by a certain chain of mishaps over which we have had no control, and tomorrow we go away, doubtless forever. I feel like saying that I harbor no unpleasant recollections of the days we have spent together." [137]

Cattleton sprung to his feet to move a vote of thanks "to the public-spirited and benevolent man who built this magnificent hotel and threw open its doors to us."

It was carried.

"Now then," said Lucas, adjusting his glasses and speaking in his gravest chest-tones, "I move that it be taken as the sense of this assembly, that it is our duty to draw upon our publisher for money enough to take us home."

The response was overwhelming.

Dunkirk felt the true state of affairs. He arose, his broad face wreathed with genial smiles, and said:

"To the certain knowledge of your unhappy publisher your accounts are already overdrawn, but in view of the rich material you have been gathering of late, your publisher will honor you draughts to the limit of your expenses home."

Never did happier people go to bed. The last sleep in Hotel Helicon proved to be the sweetest.

Far in the night, it is true, some one sang loudly but plaintively under Miss Moyne's window until the sheriff awoke and sallied forth to end the serenade with some remarks about "cracking that eejit's gourd;" but there was no disturbance, the sounds blending sweetly with the dreams of the slumberers. They all knew that it was Crane, poor fellow, who had finally torn himself away from his father's fascinating uncle. [138]

XXI.

THE retreat from Hotel Helicon was picturesque in the extreme. There had been much difficulty in finding vehicles to take the retiring guests down the mountain to the railway station, but Tolliver had come to the rescue with a mule, a horse, a cart, and an ox. These, when added to the rather incongruous collection of wagons and carts from every other available source, barely sufficed. Tolliver led the mule with Ferris on its back, while Miss Crabb and Miss Stackpole occupied the ox-cart, the former acting as driver.

"Good-bye and good luck to ye!" the sheriff called after them. "Mighty sorry ter discommode ye, but juty air juty, an' a officer air no respecer of persons."

Mrs. Nancy Jones Black sat beside Crane in a rickety wagon, and between jolts gave him many a word of wisdom on the subject of strong drink, which the handsome Bourbon poet stowed away for future consideration.

Dunkirk and Miss Moyne rode upon the "hounds" of a naked wood-wain, as happy as two blue-birds in April, while Bartley Hubbard, with little Mrs. Philpot and her child and some other ladies, was in an old weather-beaten barouche, a sad relic of the *ante-bellum* times. For the rest there were vehicles of every sort save the comfortable sort, and all went slowly winding and zig-zagging down Mt. Boab toward the valley and the river. Why pursue them? Once they all looked up from far down the slope and saw Hotel Helicon shining like a castle of gold in the flood of summer sunlight. Its verandas were empty, its windows closed, but the flag on its wooden tower still floated bravely in the breeze, its folds appearing to touch the soft gray-blue sky.

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* * * * *

A year later Crane and Peck met at Saratoga and talked over old times. At length coming down to the present, Crane said:

"Of all of us who were guests on Mt. Boab, Miss Moyne is the only one who has found success. Her story, *On The Heights*, is in its seventieth edition."

"Oh, well," said Peck, "that goes without the saying. Anybody could succeed with her chance."

"Her chance, why do you say that?"

"Haven't you heard? Ah, I see that the news has not yet penetrated the wilds of Kentucky. The open secret of Miss Moyne's success lies in the fact that she has married her publisher."

A silence of some minutes followed, during which Crane burned his cigar very rapidly.

"What fools we were," Peck presently ventured, "to be fighting a duel about her!"

"No, sir," said Crane, with a far-away look in his eyes, "no, sir, I would die for her right now."

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So the subject was dropped between them forever.

Some of Gaslucky's creditors bought Hotel Helicon at the sheriff's sale, but it proved a barren investment.

The house stands there now, weather-beaten and lonely on the peak of Mt. Boab, all tenantless and forlorn.

As to Tolliver's still-house I cannot say, but at stated intervals Crane receives a small cask marked: "J'yful juice, hannel with keer," which comes from his "Pap's uncle Pete."

THE END.

THE TALE OF A SCULPTOR

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BY HUGH CONWAY

THE TALE OF A SCULPTOR.

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CHAPTER I.

AFTER you pass the "Blue Anchor"—the sign of which swings from the branch of an elm tree older even than the house itself—a few steps along the road bring you in sight of the pinnacled, square tower of Coombe-Acton Church. You cannot see the church itself, as, with schools and rectory close by it, it lies at the back of the village, about two hundred yards up a lane. Like the village to whose spiritual needs it ministers, the church, to an ordinary observer, is nothing out of the common, although certain small peculiarities of architecture, not noticed by an uncultured eye, make it an object of some interest to archæologists. Visit it or not, according to your inclination, but afterwards keep on straight through the long, straggling village, until the houses begin to grow even more straggling, the gardens larger and less cared for as ornaments,

displaying more cabbages and scarlet runners than roses—keep on until the houses cease altogether and hawthorn hedges take the place of palings and crumbling walls, and at last you will come to Watercress Farm, a long, low white house, one side of which abuts on the highway, whilst the other looks over the three hundred acres of land attached to it.

Not a very large acreage, it is true, but then it is all good land, for the most part such as auctioneers describe as rich, warm, deep, old pasture land; such land that, at the time this tale opens, any farmer, by thrift, knowledge of his business, and hard work, could make even more than a bare living out of, and could meet his landlord on rent day with a cheerful face, knowing that after rent and other outgoings were provided for something would yet be left for himself.

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Who occupies the Watercress Farm now, and whether in these days of depression his rent is forthcoming or not, matters little. At the time I write of it, it was rented by farmer Leigh, even as his forefathers, according to village tradition, had rented it for some two hundred years. In quiet, conservative places like Coombe-Acton, a farm of this kind often goes from father to son with more regularity than an entailed estate, landlord and tenant well knowing that their interests are identical.

It was a fine afternoon towards the end of June. Abraham Leigh was standing by the gate of the field known as the home meadow looking at the long, ripe grass rippling as the summer breeze swept across it. He was a thoroughly good specimen of the Somersetshire farmer. A big, sturdy man, whose movements were slow and deliberate. His face, if heavy and stolid, not by any means the face of a fool. No doubt, a man of circumscribed views—the world, for him, extending eastwards to Bristol market and westwards to the Bristol Channel. Nevertheless, respected in his little world as a wonderful judge of a beast, a great authority on tillages, and, above all, a man who always had a balance in his favor at the Somersetshire Bank; a type of that extinct race, the prosperous farmer, who looked on all townsmen with contempt, thinking, as all farmers should think, that the owners of broad acres, and those engaged in agriculture were alone worthy of respect.

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Yet, to-day, in spite of his advantages and acquirements, Farmer Leigh looked on the fifteen-acre meadow with a puzzled and discontented expression on his honest face; and, moreover, murmurs of dissatisfaction were proceeding from his lips. Farmers—Somersetshire farmers especially—are proverbial grumblers, but it is seldom they grumble without an audience. It is outsiders who get the benefit of their complaints. Besides, one would think that the tenant of Watercress Farm had little at present to complain of. The drop of rain so badly wanted had been long in coming, but it had come just in the nick of time to save the grass, and if the crop outwardly looked a little thin, Mr. Leigh's experienced eye told him that the undergrowth was thick, and that the quality of the hay would be first-class. Moreover, what corn and roots he had looked promising, so it seems strange that the farmer should be grumbling when he had no one to listen to him, and should lean so disconsolately upon the gate of the field when no one observed him.

"I can't make him out," he said. "Good boy he be, too; yet, instead o' helping me with the land, always going about dreaming or messing with mud. Can't think where he got his notions from. Suppose it must 'a been from the mother, poor thing! Always fond o' gimcracks and such like, she were. Gave the lad such an outlandish name I'm ashamed to hear it. Father's and grandfather's name ought to be good enough for a Leigh—good boy though he be, too!"

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A soft look settled on Abraham Leigh's face as he repeated the last words; then he went deeper into his slough of despond, where, no doubt, he battled as manfully as a Christian until he reached the other shore and fancied he had found the solution of his difficulties.

His face brightened. "Tell 'ee what," he said, addressing the waving grass in front of him, "I'll ask Mr. Herbert. Squire's a man who have seen the world. I'll take his advice about the boy. Seems hard like on me, too. Ne'er a Leigh till this one but what were a farmer to the backbone!"

His mind made up, the farmer strode off to make arrangement with mowers. Had he been troubled with twenty unnatural and incompetent sons, the hay must be made while the sun shines.

Although he had settled what to do, it was some time before the weighty resolve was carried into execution. Folks about Coombe-Acton do not move with the celerity of cotton brokers or other men of business. Sure they are, but slow. So it was not until the September rent day that the farmer consulted his landlord about his domestic difficulty—the possession of a son, an only child, of about fifteen, who, instead of making himself useful on the land, did little else save wander about in a dreamy way, looking at all objects in nature, animate or inanimate, or employed himself in the mysterious pursuit which his father described as "messing with mud." Such conduct was a departure from the respectable bucolic traditions of the Leigh family, so great, that at times the father thought it an infliction laid upon him for some cause or other by an inscrutable Providence.

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There are certain Spanish noblemen who, on account of the antiquity of their families and services rendered, are permitted to enter the royal presence with covered heads. It was, perhaps, for somewhat similar reasons, a custom handed down from father to son and established by time, that the tenant of Watercress Farm paid his rent to the landlord in person, not through the medium of an agent. Mr. Herbert being an important man in the West country, the Leigh family valued this privilege as highly as ever hidalgo valued the one above mentioned. Mr. Herbert, a refined, intellectual-looking man of about fifty, received the farmer kindly, and after the rent, without a word as to abatement or reduction, had been paid in notes of the county bank—dark

and greasy, but valued in this particular district far above Bank of England promises—landlord and tenant settled down to a few minutes' conversation on crops and kindred subjects. Then the farmer unburdened his mind.

"I've come to ask a favor of your advice, sir, about my boy, Jerry."

"Yes," said Mr. Herbert, "I know him—a nice, good-looking boy. I see him at church with you, and about your place when I pass. What of him?"

"Well, you zee, zur," said the farmer, speaking with more Somerset dialect than usual, "he've a been at Bristol Grammar School till just now. Masters all send good accounts of him. I don't hold wi' too much learning, so thought 'twere time he come home and helped me like. But not a bit o' good he be on the varm; not a bit, zur! Spends near all his time messing about wi' dirt."

"Doing what?" asked Mr. Herbert, astonished.

"A-muddling and a-messing with bits o' clay. Making little figgers, like, and tries to bake 'em in the oven."

"Oh, I see what you mean. What sort of figures?"

"All sorts, sir. Little clay figgers of horses, dogs, pigs—why, you'd scarce believe it, sir—last week I found him making the figger of a naked 'ooman! A naked 'ooman! Why, the lad could never a' seen such a thing."

Abraham Leigh waited with open eyes to hear Mr. Herbert's opinion of such an extraordinary, if not positively unusual, proceeding.

Mr. Herbert smiled. "Perhaps your son is a youthful genius."

"Genius or not, I want to know, sir, what to do wi' him. How's the boy to make a living? A farmer he'll never be."

"You follow me and I will show you something."

Mr. Herbert led his guest to his drawing-room—a room furnished with the taste of a travelled man. As the farmer gaped at its splendor, he directed his attention to four beautiful statues standing in the corners of the room.

"I gave the man who made those seven hundred pounds for them, and could sell them to-morrow for a thousand if I chose. That's almost as good as farming, isn't it?"

His tenant's eyes were wide with amazement. "A thousand pounds, sir!" he gasped. "Why, you might have bought that fourteen-acre field with that."

"These give me more pleasure than land," replied Mr. Herbert. "But about your boy; when I am riding by I will look in and see what he can do, then give you my advice."

The farmer thanked him and returned home. As he jogged along the road to Watercress Farm, he muttered at intervals: "A thousand pounds in those white figures! Well, well, well, I never did!"

Mr. Herbert was a man who kept a promise, whether made to high or low. Five days after his interview with Abraham Leigh he rode up to the door of the farm. He was not alone. By his side rode a gay, laughing, light-haired child of thirteen, who ruled an indulgent father with a rod of iron. Mr. Herbert had been a widower for some years; the girl, and a boy who was just leaving Harrow for the university, being his only surviving children. The boy was, perhaps, all that Mr. Herbert might have wished, but he could see no fault in the precocious, imperious, spoilt little maid, who was the sunshine of his life.

She tripped lightly after her father into the farm-house, laughing at the way in which he was obliged to bend his head to avoid damage from the low doorway; she seated herself with becoming dignity on the chair which the widowed sister, who kept house for Abraham Leigh, tendered her with many courtesies. A pretty child, indeed, and one who gave rare promise of growing into a lovely woman.

The farmer was away somewhere on the farm, but could be fetched in a minute if Mr. Herbert would wait. Mr. Herbert waited, and very soon his tenant made his appearance and thanked his visitor for the trouble he was taking on his behalf.

"Now let me see the boy," said Mr. Herbert, after disclaiming all sense of trouble.

Leigh went to the door of the room and shouted out, "Jerry, Jerry, come down. You're wanted, my man."

In a moment the door opened, and the cause of Mr. Leigh's discontent came upon the scene in the form of a dark-eyed, dark-haired, pale-faced boy, tall but slightly built; not, so far as physique went, much credit to the country-side. Yet in some respects a striking-looking if not handsome lad. The dark, eloquent eyes and strongly-marked brow would arrest attention; but the face was too thin, too thoughtful for the age, and could scarcely be associated with what commonly constitutes a good-looking lad. Yet regularity of feature was there, and no one would dare to be sure that beauty would not come with manhood.

He was not seen at that moment under advantageous circumstances. Knowing nothing about the distinguished visitors, he had obeyed his father's summons in hot haste; consequently he entered the room in his shirt sleeves, which were certainly not very clean, and with hands covered with red clay. Mr. Herbert looked amused, while the little princess turned up her nose in great disdain.

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Poor Abraham Leigh was much mortified at the unrepresentable state in which his son showed himself. To make matters worse, the boy was not soiled by honest, legitimate toil.

"Tut! tut!" he said, crossly. "All of a muck, as usual."

The boy, who felt that his father had a right to complain, hung his head and showed signs of retreating. Mr. Herbert came to the rescue.

"Never mind," he said, patting young Leigh on the shoulder, "he has been working in his own fashion. I have come on purpose to see those modellings of yours, my boy."

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The boy started as one surprised. His cheek flushed, and he looked at the speaker with incredulity yet hope in his eyes.

"Yes," said his father, sharply. "Go and put your hands under the pump, Jerry; then bring some of 'em down. Maybe, anyway, they'll amuse the little lady."

"No, no," said Mr. Herbert. "I'll come with you and see them for myself. Lead the way."

Young Leigh did not speak, but his eyes thanked Mr. Herbert. That gentleman followed him from the room, leaving the farmer to amuse the little maid. He did this so far as he was able by producing a well-thumbed copy of the "Pilgrim's Progress," the leaves of which Miss Herbert condescended to turn daintily over until she was quite terrified by the picture of the combat with Apollyon.

Meanwhile "Jerry," with a beating heart, led Mr. Herbert up-stairs to a room destitute of furniture save an old table and chair. A bucket half-full of common red clay stood in one corner, and on the table were several of the little clay figures which had excited the farmer's ire and consternation.

Crude, defective, full of faults as they were, there was enough power in them to make Mr. Herbert look at the lad in wonderment, almost envy. He was a man who worshipped art; who had dabbled as an amateur in painting and sculpturing for years; who considered a gifted artist the most fortunate of mankind. So the word envy is not ill-chosen. What he would have given half his wealth to possess came to this boy unsought for—to the son of a clod of a farmer the precious gift was vouchsafed!

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As he would have expected, the most ambitious efforts were the worst—the "naked 'ooman" was particularly atrocious—but, still wet, and not ruined by an abortive attempt at baking, was a group modelled from life; a vulgar subject, representing, as it did, Abraham Leigh's prize sow, surrounded by her ten greedy offspring. There was such power and talent in this production that, had he seen nothing else, Mr. Herbert would have been certain that the lad as a modeller and copyist must take the first rank. If, in addition to his manual dexterity, he had poetry, feeling, and imagination, it might well be that one of the greatest sculptors of the nineteenth century stood in embryo before him.

As Mr. Herbert glanced from the rough clay sketches to the pale boy who stood breathless, as one expecting a verdict of life or death, he wondered what could have been the cause of such a divergence from the traits habitual to the Leighs. Then he remembered that some twenty years ago Abraham Leigh had chosen for a wife, not one of his own kind, but a dweller in cities—a governess, who exchanged, no doubt, a life of penury and servitude for the rough but comfortable home the Somersetshire farmer was willing to give her. Mr. Herbert remembered her; remembered how utterly out of place the delicate, refined woman seemed to be as Leigh's wife; remembered how, a few years after the birth of the boy, she sickened and died. It was from the mother's side the artistic taste came.

Mr. Herbert, although a kind man, was cautious. He had no intention of raising hopes which might be futile. Yet he felt a word of encouragement was due to the lad.

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"Some of these figures show decided talent," he said. "After seeing them, I need scarcely ask you if you wish to be a sculptor?"

Young Leigh clasped his hands together. "Oh, sir!" he gasped. "If it could only be!"

"You do not care to be a farmer, like your father?"

"I could never be a farmer, sir. I am not fit for it."

"Yet, if you follow in your father's track, you will lead a comfortable, useful life. If you follow art, you may go through years of poverty and suffering before success is attained."

The boy raised his head and looked full at the speaker; there was almost passionate entreaty in his eyes.

"Oh, sir," he said, "if you would only persuade my father to let me try—even for a few years. If I did not succeed I would come back to him and work as a laborer for the rest of my life without a murmur."

Mr. Herbert was impressed by the boy's earnestness. "I will speak to your father," he said. Then the two went back to the sitting-room, where they found Abraham Leigh much exercised by some difficult questions propounded by Miss Herbert respecting the nature of Apollyon.

"Take my little girl for a walk round the garden," said Mr. Herbert to young Leigh. "I want to speak to your father."

In spite of the great gulf between her and the clay-bespattered boy in his shirt sleeves, the little princess was too glad of a change of scene to wish to disobey her father. She followed her

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conductor to the back of the house, and the boy and girl stepped out into the autumnal sunshine.

The little maid looked so trim and dainty in her neat riding-habit, coquettish hat and tiny gloves that his own draggled appearance struck the boy forcibly.

"If you will excuse me a minute," he said, "I will run and wash my hands."

"Yes; I think it will be better," said Miss Herbert, with dignity.

In a minute or two young Leigh returned. He had found time not only to wash the rich red clay from his long, well-shaped fingers, but to slip on his coat and generally beautify himself. His improved appearance had a great effect upon the child, who, like most of her age, was influenced by exteriors.

So Miss Herbert, this little great lady, unbent and allowed "Jerry" to lead her round the old-fashioned garden, to the out-houses and pigsties, where the obese pigs lay oblivious of what fate had in store for them; to the stables; to the dairy, where she condescended to drink a glass of new milk, and by the time they had returned to the garden the two were as good friends as their different stations in life would permit. Young Leigh, who saw in this dainty little maid the incarnation of fairies, nymphs, goddesses, and other ideals which, in a dim way, were forming themselves in his brain, endeavored, after his first shyness had passed away, to show her what beautiful shapes and forms could be found in flower, leaf, and tree, and other things in nature. His talk, indeed, soared far above her pretty little head, and when they returned to the garden he was trying to make her see that those masses of white clouds low down in the distance were two bodies of warriors just about to meet in deadly fray.

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"You are a very, very funny boy," said Miss Herbert, with such an air of conviction that he was startled into silence.

"Your name is Jerry, isn't it?" she continued. "Jerry's an ugly name."

"My name is Gerald—Gerald Leigh."

"Oh; Gerald!" Even this child could see the impropriety of a tenant farmer having a son named Gerald. No wonder Abraham Leigh addressed his boy as Jerry!

"Do you like being a farmer?" she asked.

"I am not going to be a farmer; I don't like it."

"What a pity! Farmers are such a worthy, respectable class of men," said the girl, using a stock phrase she had caught up somewhere.

The boy laughed merrily. Mr. Herbert's approbation sat newly upon him, and he was only talking to a child; so he said:

"I hope to be worthy and respectable, but a much greater man than a farmer."

"Oh! How great? as great as papa?"

"Yes; I hope so."

"That's absurd, you know," said Miss Herbert, with all the outraged family pride that thirteen years can feel; and, turning away, she switched at the flowers with her riding-whip.

However, a few words from Gerald made them friends once more, and she expressed her pleasure that he should pick her one of the few roses which remained in the garden.

"Roses are common," said the boy. "Every one gives roses. I will give you something prettier."

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He went to the sunny side of the house, and soon returned with half a dozen pale lavender stars in his hands. They were blossoms of a new sort of late clematis, which some one's gardener had given Abraham Leigh. Gerald's deft fingers arranged them into a most artistic bouquet, the appearance of which was entirely spoilt by Miss Herbert's insistence that two or three roses should be added. The bouquet was just finished and presented when Mr. Herbert, followed by the farmer, appeared.

Although he said nothing more to young Leigh on the subject which was uppermost in the boy's mind, the kindly encouraging look he gave him raised the widest hopes in his heart. Mr. Herbert bade the father and son a pleasant good-day, and rode off with his little daughter.

Miss Herbert carried the bunch of clematis for about two miles when, finding it rather encumbered her, tossed it over a hedge.

Gerald Leigh went back to his attic and commenced about half a dozen clay sketches of the prettiest object which as yet had crossed his path. For several days he was on thorns to hear what fate had in store for him; but fate, personified by his father, made no sign, but went about his work stolid and sphinx-like. Mr. Herbert, Gerald learned, had gone to London for a few days.

However, before a fortnight had gone by, Abraham Leigh received a letter from his landlord, and the same evening, whilst smoking his pipe in the farm kitchen, informed his son and his sister that to-morrow he was going into Gloucestershire to see if his brother Joseph could spare him one of his many boys to take Jerry's place. Jerry was to go to London the next day and meet Mr. Herbert. Most likely he'd stay there. 'Twas clear as noontide the boy would never make a farmer, and if there were fools enough in the world to buy white figures at hundreds of pounds apiece, Jerry might as well try to make his living that way as any other.

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The truth is, Mr. Herbert told Abraham Leigh that if he would not consent to pay for his son's art education, he, Mr. Herbert, would bear the expense himself. But the monetary part of it

troubled the substantial farmer little. He could pay for his child's keep if he could bring his mind to consent to his going. And now the consent was given.

Gerald heard his father's communication with glowing eyes. For shame's sake he hid his joy, for he knew that, with all his stolid demeanor, his father almost broke down as he contemplated the diverging paths his son and he must henceforward tread. The boy thanked him from his heart, and the rough farmer, laying his hand on his child's head, blessed him and bade him go and prosper.

In this way Gerald Leigh left Coombe-Acton. At long intervals he reappeared for a few days. The worthy villagers eyed him askance; the only conception they could form of his profession being connected with dark-skinned itinerants who bore double-tiered platforms on their heads, and earned a precarious livelihood by traversing the country selling conventional representations of angels and busts of eminent men.

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CHAPTER II.

SOME seven years after the ambitious boy left Coombe-Acton, honest farmer Abraham, just when the old-fashioned hawthorn hedges were in whitest bloom, sickened, turned his stolid face to the wall and died. Gerald had been summoned, but arrived too late to see his father alive. Perhaps it was as well it should be so, the farmer's last moments were troubled ones and full of regret that Watercress Farm would no longer know a Leigh. The nephew who had taken Gerald's place had turned out an utter failure, so much so that Abraham Leigh had roundly declared that he would be bothered with no more boys, and for the last few years had managed his business single-handed. However, although Gerald's upheaval of family traditions made the farmer's deathbed unhappy, he showed that his son had not forfeited his love. All he possessed, some three thousand pounds, was left to him. Mr. Herbert took the lease of the farm off the young man's hands, by and by the live and the dead stock were sold off, and Watercress Farm was waiting for another tenant.

The winding-up of the father's affairs kept Gerald in the neighborhood of some weeks, and when it became known that Mr. Herbert had insisted upon his taking up his quarters at the hall the simple Coombe-Acton folks were stricken with a great wonder. Knowing nothing of what is called the "aristocracy of art," their minds were much exercised by such an unheard of proceeding. What had "Jerry" Leigh been doing in the last seven years to merit such a distinction?

Nothing his agricultural friends could have understood. After picking up the rudiments of his art in a well-known sculptor's studio, young Leigh had been sent to study in the schools at Paris. Mr. Herbert told him that, so far as his art was concerned, Paris was the workshop of the world,—Rome its bazaar and showroom. So to Paris the boy went. He studied hard and lived frugally. He won certain prizes and medals, and was now looking forward to the time when he must strike boldly for fame. Even now he was not quite unknown. A couple of modest but very beautiful studies in low relief had appeared in last year's exhibition, and, if overlooked by the majority, had attracted the notice of a few whose praise was well worth winning. He was quite satisfied with the results of his first attempt. In all things that concerned his art he was wise and patient. No sooner had he placed his foot on the lowest step of the ladder than he realized the amount of work to be done—the technical skill to be acquired before he could call himself a sculptor. Even now, after seven years' study and labor, he had selfdenial enough to resolve upon being a pupil for three years longer before he made his great effort to place himself by the side of contemporary sculptors. Passionate and impulsive as was his true nature, he could follow and woo art with that calm persistency and method which seem to be the surest way of winning her smiles.

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He is now a man—a singularly handsome man. If not so tall as his youth promised, he is well built and graceful. Artist is stamped all over him. Brow, eyes, even the slender, well-shaped hands, proclaim it. The general expression of his face is one of calm and repose; yet an acute observer might assert that, when the moment came, that face might depict passions stronger than those which sway most men.

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His dark hair and eyes, and something in the style of his dress, gave him a look not quite that of an Englishman—a look that terribly vexed poor Abraham Leigh on those rare occasions when his erratic boy paid him a visit; but, nevertheless, it is a look not out of place on a young artist.

This is the kind of man Gerald Leigh has grown into; and, whilst his transformation has been in progress, Miss Eugenia Herbert has become a woman.

Although remembering every feature of the child, who seemed in some way associated with the day of his liberation, Gerald had not again seen her until his father's death called him back to England. Each time he had visited Coombe-Acton he had, of course, reported progress to Mr. Herbert; but, shortly after the change in his life, Mr. Herbert by a great effort of self-denial, had sent his darling away to school, and at school she had always been when Gerald called at the Hall; but now, when he accepted Mr. Herbert's hospitality, he found the fairy-like child grown, it seemed to him, into his ideal woman, and found, moreover, that there was a passion so intense that even the love of art must pale before it.

He made no attempt to resist it. He let it master him; overwhelm him; sweep him along. Ere a week had gone by, not only by looks, but also in burning words, he had told Eugenia he loved her. And how did he fare?

His very audacity and disregard of everything, save that he loved the girl, succeeded to a marvel. Eugenia had already met with many admirers, but not one like this. Such passionate pleading, such fiery love, such vivid eloquence were strange and new to her. There was an originality, a freshness, a thoroughness in the love he offered her. His very unreasonableness affected her reason. All the wealth of his imagination, all the crystallizations of his poetical dreams, he threw into his passion. His ecstasy whirled the girl from her mental feet; his warmth created an answering warmth; his reckless pleading conquered. She forgot obstacles as his eloquence overleaped them; she forgot social distinction as his great dark eyes looked into hers, and at last she confessed she loved him.

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Then Gerald Leigh came down from the clouds and realized what he had done, and as soon as he touched the earth and became reasonable Eugenia fancied she did not care for him quite so much.

His conscience smote him. Not only must Mr. Herbert be reckoned with, but a terrible interval must elapse before he had fame and fortune to lay before Eugenia. He could scarcely expect her to leave her luxurious home in order to live *au quatrieme* or *au cinquieme* in Paris whilst he completed his studies. He grew sad and downcast as he thought of these things, and Eugenia, who liked pleasant, bright, well-to-do people, felt less kindly disposed toward him and showed she did so.

This made him reckless again. He threw the future to the winds, recommenced his passionate wooing, recovered his lost ground and gained, perhaps, a little more.

But Abraham Leigh's affairs were settled up, and Gerald knew he must tear himself from Acton Hall and go back to work. He had lingered a few days to finish a bust of Mr. Herbert. This done he had no excuse for staying longer.

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The summer twilight deepened into night. The sculptor and Miss Herbert stood upon the broad and gravelled terrace-walk that runs along the stately front of Acton Hall. They leaned upon the gray stone balustrade; the girl with musing eye was looking down on shadowy lawn and flower-bed underneath; the young man looked at her, and her alone. Silence reigned long between them, but at last she spoke.

"You really go to-morrow?"

"Tell me to stay, and I will stay," he said, passionately, "but next week—next month—next year, the moment, when it does come, will be just as bitter."

She did not urge him. She was silent. He drew very near to her.

"Eugenia," he whispered, "you love me?"

"I think so." Her eyes were still looking over the darkening garden. She spoke dreamily, and as one who is not quite certain.

"You think so! Listen! Before we part let me tell you what your love means to me. If, when first I asked for it you had scorned me, I could have left you unhappy, but still a man. Now it means life or death to me. There is no middle course—no question of joy or misery—simply life or death! Eugenia, look at me and say you love me!"

His dark eyes charmed and compelled her. "I love you! I love you?" she murmured. Her words satisfied him; moreover, she let the hand he grasped remain in his, perhaps even returning the pressure of his own. So they stood for more than an hour, whilst Gerald talked of the future and the fame he meant to win—talked as one who has the fullest confidence in his own powers and directing genius.

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Presently they saw Mr. Herbert walking through the twilight towards them. Gerald's hand tightened on the girl's so as to cause her positive pain.

"Remember," he whispered; "life or death! Think of it while we are apart. Your love means a man's life or death!"

Many a lover has said an equally extravagant thing, but Eugenia Herbert knew that his words were not those of poetical imagery, and as she re-entered the house she trembled at the passion she had aroused. What if time and opposition should work a change in her feelings? She tried to reassure herself by thinking that if she did not love him in the same blind, reckless way, at any rate she would never meet another man whom she could love as she loved Gerald Leigh.

The sculptor went back to Paris—to his art and his dreams of love and fame. Two years slipped by without any event of serious import happening to the persons about whom we are concerned. Then came a great change.

Mr. Herbert died so suddenly that neither doctor nor lawyer could be summoned in time, either to aid him to live or to carry out his last wishes. His will gave Eugenia two thousand pounds and an estate he owned in Gloucestershire—everything else to his son. Unfortunately, some six months before, he had sold the Gloucestershire property, and, with culpable negligence, had not made a fresh will. Therefore, the small money bequest was all that his daughter could claim. However, this seemed of little moment, as her brother at once announced his intention of settling upon her the amount to which she was equitably entitled. He had given his solicitors instructions to prepare the deed.

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James Herbert, Eugenia's brother, was unmarried, and at present had no intention of settling down to the life of a country gentleman. Six weeks after Mr. Herbert's death the greater number of the servants were paid off, and Acton Hall was practically shut up. Eugenia, after spending

some weeks with friends in the north of England, came to London to live for an indefinite time with her mother's sister, a Mrs. Cathcart.

Since her father's death Gerald Leigh had written to her several times—letters full of passionate love and penned as if the writer felt sure of her constancy and wish to keep her promise. He, too, was coming to London. Had she wished it, he would at once have come to her side; but as it was he would take up his quarters in town about the same time Eugenia arrived there.

The hour was at hand—the hour to which Miss Herbert had for two years looked forward with strangely mingled feelings—when her friends must be told that she intended to marry the young, and as yet unknown sculptor, Gerald Leigh, the son of her father's late tenant farmer, Abraham.

She loved him still. She felt sure of that much. If time and absence had somewhat weakened the spell he had thrown over her proud nature, she knew that unless the man was greatly changed the magic of his words and looks would sway her as irresistibly as before. She loved him, yet rebelled against her fate.

Her father had died ignorant of what had passed between his daughter and the young artist. Many a time Eugenia had tried to bring herself to confess the truth to him. She now regretted she had not done so. Mr. Herbert's approval or disapproval would have been at least a staff by which to guide her steps. He had suspected nothing. The few letters which passed between the lovers had been unnoticed. Their love was as yet a secret known only to themselves.

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She loved him, but why had he dared to make her love him? Or, why was he not well-born and wealthy? Could she find strength to face, for his sake, the scorn of her friends?

She must decide at once. She is sitting and thinking all these things in her own room at Mrs. Cathcart's, and in front of her lies a letter in which Gerald announces his intention of calling upon her to-morrow. She knows that if she receives him she will be bound to proclaim herself his affianced wife.

He called. She saw him. Mrs. Cathcart was out, So Eugenia was alone when the servant announced Mr. Leigh. She started and turned pale. She trembled in every limb as he crossed the room to where she stood. He took her hand and looked into her face. He spoke, and his rich musical voice thrilled her.

"Eugenia, is it life or death?"

She could not answer. She could not turn her eyes from his. She saw the intensity of their expression deepen; saw a fierce yearning look come into them, a look which startled her.

"Is it life or death?" he repeated.

His love conquered. "Gerald, it is life," she said.

Drunk with joy, he threw his arms around her and kissed her until the blushes dyed her cheeks. He stayed with her as long as she would allow, but his delight was too delicious to permit him to say much about his plans for the future. When at last she made him leave her, he gave her the number of a studio at Chelsea, which he had taken, and she promised to write and let him know when he might call again.

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They parted. Eugenia walked to the window, and for a long time looked out on the gay thoroughfare, now full of carriages going to and returning from the park. Of course, she loved Gerald dearly; that was now beyond a doubt. But what would she have to go through when the engagement was announced? what had she to look forward to as his wife? Must love and worldly misery be synonymous?

The current of her thoughts was interrupted by the arrival of another visitor—her brother. James Herbert was a tall young man, faultlessly dressed, and bearing a general look of what is termed high breeding. He bore a likeness to his father, but the likeness was but an outward one. By this time he was a cold cynical man of the world. He had not lived the best of lives, but, being no fool, had gained experience and caution. He was clever enough to study human nature with a view of turning his knowledge to account. Eugenia had some pride of birth; her brother had, or affected, a great deal more. He was by no means unpopular; few men could make themselves more agreeable and fascinating than James Herbert when it was worth his while to be so. In his way he was fond of his sister; certainly proud of her beauty; and she, who knew nothing of his true nature, thought him as perfect as a brother can be.

He kissed her, complimented her on her good looks, then sat down and made himself pleasant. She answered his remarks somewhat mechanically, wondering all the time what effect her news would have upon him. She hated things hanging over her head, and had made up her mind to tell him of her intentions, if not to-day the next time she met him.

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"The lawyers have almost settled your little matter," he said. "It's lucky for you I made up my mind at once; things haven't turned out so well as we expected."

She thanked him—not effusively, as if he was doing no more than she had a right to expect. Yet the thought flashed across her that before she took his bounty she was by honor compelled to make him acquainted with what she proposed doing.

"By-the-bye, Eugenia," said Herbert, "you know Ralph Norgate?"

"Yes. He called a day or two ago. I did not see him."

"Well, I expect he'll soon call again. He has been forcing his friendship on me lately. In fact—I'd

better tell you—his mind is made up—you are to be the future Lady Norgate. Now you know what to look forward to.”

Her face flushed. Her troubles were beginning.

“But, James,” she stammered, “I was just going to tell you—I am already engaged.”

He raised his eyebrows. To express great surprise was against his creed, and the idea that Eugenia was capable of disgracing herself did not enter his head.

“So much the worse for Norgate,” he said. “Who is the happy man?”

“You will be angry, very angry, I fear.” She spoke timidly. His manner told her she had good grounds for fear. His mouth hardened, but he still spoke politely and pleasantly.

“My dear girl, don’t discount my displeasure; tell me who it is?”

“His name is Gerald Leigh.”

“A pretty name, and one which sounds familiar to me. Now, who is Gerald Leigh?”

“He is a sculptor.”

“Ah! now I know. Son of that excellent old tenant of my father’s. The genius he discovered on a dungheap. Eugenia, are you quite mad?”

“He will be a famous man some day.”

Herbert shrugged his shoulders in a peculiarly irritating way.

“Let him be as famous as he likes. What does it matter?”

“The proudest family may be proud of allying themselves to a great artist.”

Herbert looked at his sister with a pitying but amused smile. “My poor girl, don’t be led astray by the temporary glorification of things artistic. When these fellows grow talked about we ask them to our houses and make much of them. It’s the fashion. But we don’t marry them. Indeed, as they all begin in the lower ranks of life, like your friend, they are generally provided with wives of their own station, who stay at home and trouble no one.”

She winced under the sting of his scorn. He saw it, and knew he was pursuing the right treatment for her disease.

“Now, this young Leigh,” he continued. “What will he be for years and years? A sort of superior stone-cutter. He will make what living he can by going about and doing busts of mayors and mayoresses, and other people of that class, who want their common features perpetuated. Perhaps he might get a job on a tombstone for a change. Bah! Of course you have been jesting with me, Eugenia. I shall tell Norgate to call as soon as possible.”

“I shall marry Gerald Leigh,” said Eugenia, sullenly. All the same the busts and tombstones weighed heavily upon her.

“That,” said her brother, rising, and still speaking with a smile, “I am not the least afraid of, although you are of age and mistress of two thousand pounds. You are not cut out to ornament an attic. I need not say I must countermand that settlement. It must wait until you marry Norgate or some other suitable man.”

He kissed her and walked carelessly away. To all appearance the matter did not cause him a moment’s anxiety. He was a clever man, and flattered himself he knew how to treat Eugenia; human nature should be assailed at its weakest points.

His carelessness was, of course, assumed; for, meeting Mrs. Cathcart as she drove home, Eugenia’s news was sufficiently disturbing to make him stop the carriage, seat himself beside his aunt, and beg her to take another turn in the park, during which he told her what had transpired.

They were fitting coadjutors. Mrs. Cathcart was delighted to hear of Sir Ralph’s overtures, and was shocked to find that Eugenia was entangled in some low attachment. She quite agreed that the girl must be led, not driven; must be laughed, not talked, out of her folly. “Girls nearly always make fools of themselves once in their lives,” said Mr. Cathcart, cynically.

“They do,” said James Herbert, who knew something about the sex. “All the same, Eugenia shall not. Find out all about the fellow, where he lives, and all the rest of it. She doesn’t know I’ve told you about this. Keep a sharp lookout for any letters.”

So the next day, when Eugenia and her aunt were together, the latter, a skilled domestic diplomatist, commenced operations by regretting that Mr. Herbert, although so fond of statuary, had never employed a sculptor to make his own bust. Mrs. Cathcart spoke so naturally that Eugenia fell into the trap, and informed her that Mr. Herbert’s likeness had been taken in clay two years ago by a young sculptor then staying at Acton Hall. It had been done for pleasure, not profit, but her father had always intended to order a copy in marble. Mrs. Cathcart was delighted. Did Eugenia know where the young man could be found?

Eugenia did know. She told her with a tinge of color on her cheeks, and took advantage of the opportunity, and perhaps soothed her spirit somewhat by expatiating on what a great man her lover was to become. Mrs. Cathcart, in return, spoke of geniuses as struggling, poverty stricken persons, to befriend whom was the one great wish of her life. It was indeed pleasant for Miss Herbert to hear her aunt speak of her lover as she might of a hard-working seamstress or deserving laundress. She had not yet written to Gerald. She must find strength to throw off her brother’s scorn and the busts and tombstones before she again met her lover.

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Sir Ralph Norgate called that morning. He was a man of about forty. Not ill-looking, but with the unmistakable appearance of one who had led a hard life. He was rich, and of fine old family. It was clear to Mrs. Cathcart that he meant business. Eugenia had met him several times last year, and it was no news to her that he was her ardent admirer. She was very cold towards him to-day, but Mrs. Cathcart did not chide her. She, clever woman, knew that men like Norgate value a prize at what it costs them to win it. So the baronet came, stayed his appointed time, then went away, presumably in fair train to a declaration by and by.

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CHAPTER III.

THE next day, whilst driving with her niece, Mrs. Cathcart was seized by a sudden thought. "My dear," she said, "let us go and see about that bust. Where did you say the sculptor man was to be found? Nelson Studios, King's Road. What number?"

"No. 10," said Eugenia, wondering if her aunt's sudden resolve would be productive of good or evil.

The carriage went to Nelson Studios; the ladies dismounted, and Mrs. Cathcart tapped at the door of No. 10, a studio which, being a sculptor's, was of course on the ground-floor.

The door was opened by a handsome young man whose outside garb was a ragged old blouse, and whose hands were white with half-dried clay—one of those hands, moreover, held a short pipe. Indeed, Gerald Leigh was in as unpresentable trim as when years ago he first met Miss Herbert.

He did not at once see the girl. She was behind Mrs. Cathcart, and that lady's majestic presence absorbed all his attention. Mrs. Cathcart put up her eye-glass.

"Is your master in?" she asked.

Gerald laughed. "I am my own master," he said.

"This is Mr. Leigh, aunt," said Eugenia, coming forward.

"Oh!" said Mrs. Cathcart, and the palpable meaning of that exclamatory monosyllable sent the blood to Eugenia's cheek.

Gerald started as he heard the girl's voice and recognized her in the shadow. He stretched out his clay-covered hand, then withdrew it and laughed. Mrs. Cathcart, who saw the action, put on a look of supreme astonishment; then she recovered herself.

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"Oh, I forgot," she said to Eugenia. "Of course, you have seen Mr. Leigh before. May we come in, Mr. Leigh?"

He moved aside and the ladies entered the studio. He placed his two chairs at their disposal. He wondered the while what had brought Eugenia to him. He gave her a questioning glance, but her eyes avoided his. Then Mrs. Cathcart began. She spoke in that manner which certain persons assume towards those whom they are pleased to think their inferiors.

"I believe, some time ago, you made a bust of my late brother-in-law, Mr. Herbert, of Coombe-Acton."

Gerald bowed.

"I wish to have a copy of it. Can you make one?"

"Certainly. In marble?"

"In marble, of course. How much will it cost?"

It was a painful experience to Eugenia, to hear her future husband talked to by Mrs. Cathcart much as that lady talked to the obliging young men and women at the various emporiums which enjoyed her patronage.

"Mr. Herbert was my best friend," said Gerald. "My services are at your disposal."

"You do not understand me," said Mrs. Cathcart, coldly. "I asked you what it would cost."

Gerald colored and glanced at Eugenia. He was utterly puzzled. It could only have been through the agency of the girl he loved that this new patroness sought him.

"Mr. Leigh was my father's friend, aunt," said Eugenia.

"My dear! Mr. Leigh is not *my* friend. I want to know his terms for a marble bust."

"Eighty pounds, madam," said Gerald, rather shortly.

"Oh, much too much! Eugenia, do you not think such a price extortionate?"

Eugenia was silent, but her cheeks burned. Gerald's lip quivered with anger. Only Mrs. Cathcart was calm. "I will pay you forty pounds," she said, "but then it must be approved by a competent judge."

"You have heard my terms, madam," said Leigh curtly.

"Absurd! I will even say fifty pounds. If you like to take that you may call upon me. Good-morning. Come, Eugenia!"

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She swept out of the studio. Eugenia followed her. She looked back and saw Gerald's face wearing an expression of actual pain. For a moment her impulse was to run back, throw her arms

round his neck, and defy every one. However, she did not yield to it, but followed her aunt to the carriage.

"I call that young man a most common, ill-bred person," said Mrs. Cathcart.

Eugenia flushed. "He is not," she said hotly. "Your manner towards him must have been most mortifying."

"My dear child!" exclaimed Mrs. Cathcart, in innocent surprise, "and I was trying to befriend the young man? He presumes on his acquaintance with your father. I always told your poor father it was a mistake becoming intimate with persons of that class."

Eugenia said no more. If she had thought of so doing it was not the moment to open her heart to Mrs. Cathcart. She went to her room intending to write to Gerald; but no letter was written that day. How could she ask him to call at her aunt's after what had occurred?

"I love him," she said to herself, "but I am not brave enough to give up all for him. Oh, why did we ever meet?"

The next morning she received a letter from Gerald. It contained no reproach—only an entreaty that she would name a time when he might see her. Mrs. Cathcart was true to her duty. Before James Herbert was out of bed she had sent him word that a letter had come for Eugenia. He went at once to his sister. His greeting was quite friendly.

"Eugenia," he said presently, "of course by now you have put all that nonsense about that sculptor-fellow out of your pretty head?"

"It is no nonsense."

"Well, if you mean to be obstinate I must interfere. Have you seen him since?"

"Aunt went to his studio. I was with her."

"She ought to have known better. If she encourages you we shall quarrel. Do you correspond? Tell me the truth."

She offered him Gerald's letter. He waved it aside as a thing beneath his notice.

"Have you answered it?" he asked.

"Not yet. I am just going to."

Her brother still remained calm and polite, with that contemptuous, incredulous smile playing round his lips.

"If you will make a fool of yourself, I can't stop you. If you, with your beauty and position, choose to go and live in a garret, you must do so. Still, as your brother, I have certain responsibilities which would still be mine were your lover the highest in the land. I must make inquiries as to his character and moral worth—these fellows are generally a loose lot."

"You may make what inquiries you choose."

"Thank you. Now one favor—a command, the last I shall ask or give. You will not answer this letter—you will not see the man—until I have satisfied myself on these points. It is not too much to ask, Eugenia."

She felt the justice of his remarks—could it be she was weak enough to be glad of a little delay and breathing space? But Gerald's face, as last she saw it, rose before her.

"You must name a time," she said.

"So impatient for true love and social extinction," sneered Herbert. "Surely you can restrain yourself until this day week."

It was longer than she had meant. But her brother's bitter sneers settled it. "So be it," she said, "until this day week."

The promise given James Herbert dismissed the matter, but he filled up the next half-hour with the very cream of society gossip, which was undoubtedly as palatable to Eugenia as it would have been to any other woman. James Herbert lived within the inner circle, and as to-day, for purposes of his own, he spoke to Eugenia as if she were one of the initiated; his conversation was not without charm.

He was clever to know when to trust. He had not the slightest fear that Eugenia would break her promise. So he cautioned Mrs. Cathcart to keep the little fool well within sight, and thus avoid danger of a chance meeting; to order the servants to refuse the sculptor admission if he ventured to call—and above all to be sure that Norgate had every opportunity of pressing his suit. After this he waited calmly, and did nothing more in the matter for six whole days.

Days during which Gerald Leigh chafed and fretted. He refused to doubt, but his heart grew heavy within him. He felt sure that Mrs. Cathcart's visit boded no good. At last he could bear the suspense no longer. He called and asked for Eugenia. She was out. He called again—the same result. He went back to his studio and tried to conquer his growing uneasiness by hard work. One morning a gentleman called and introduced himself as James Herbert.

Gerald received him courteously. Herbert was suave, smiling and bland. He spoke of the interest he felt in the young sculptor for his father, Mr. Herbert's sake. He admired some embryo designs, and wished and prophesied all success. Then, as Gerald began to hope that Eugenia's brother might some day be his friend, he turned upon him and tore him to pieces.

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"But, after all, Mr. Leigh, my great object in calling concerns my sister."

Gerald grew very pale.

"She is a good girl, but weak. She has confessed to me that some sort of romantic nonsense had passed between you."

"She has vowed to be my wife—no more, no less."

His impetuosity seemed to amuse Herbert. "I am afraid such a thing is an impossibility," he said serenely. "I shall not insult you by telling you she is all but penniless—geniuses, I know, never think of money—but I fear I must pain you by saying she repents of her hasty words."

"That," said Gerald slowly, yet fiercely, "is a lie."

"My good sir, I cannot allow you to use such words. My temper is fair, but it has its limits."

"I apologize," said Gerald sullenly. "I should have said you were coercing her."

"I never coerced any one in my life; much less my sister. Naturally, I shall object to her marriage with you; but that makes no difference."

"Tell me what you have to tell," said Gerald nervously. He hated and feared this smooth, smiling man.

"In a few words, then, my sister is unhappy and unsettled. For several days she has been trying to answer a letter you sent her. At last she confided all to me. I am sure I am not going too far when I say she would be glad to think that all boy and girl promises between you were forgotten."

"She sent you to tell me this?" asked Gerald hoarsely.

"No. She knew I was coming. I am putting her thoughts in my own words."

"I don't expect you to understand what my love for your sister means; you could not," said Gerald. "But you know she has vowed to be my wife."

"Yes; and will keep her promise if you insist upon it." The emphasis Herbert laid on insist made Gerald's heart sick.

He said nothing; but, with a strange smile on his white face, he went to a table and wrote a few words. He handed the paper to his visitor. "Read," he said; "you say you are her messenger; now you can be mine." The words were:

"Eugenia: If this is unanswered I shall believe you wish to recall everything that has passed between us."

"Thank you," said Herbert. "This is all I could expect."

With trembling hands the sculptor placed the paper in an envelope, and once more tendered it to Herbert.

"No, thank you," said Herbert. "People have been tempted to suppress letters before now. Post it in the ordinary way."

Gerald left the room. He returned in a few moments, and Herbert knew that the letter had been posted. He had nothing further to do with Gerald, so held out his hand affably.

"No," said Gerald, "I would rather not." His eyes were gleaming strangely.

"As you will," said Herbert with indifference.

"I will change my mind," said Gerald in a low voice, and taking the other's hand; "condemned people always shake hands with the hangman, I think."

He spoke with a ghastly attempt at mirth. Herbert left the studio without another word, but, as he drove to Mrs. Cathcart's, said to himself, "The sooner that beggar shoots or hangs himself the better."

He went straight to his sister. He placed his hand on her shoulder, and, with a look she had never yet seen on his face, said in a cold, contemptuous manner:

"Eugenia, I have been taking some trouble on your behalf. To-day two things are going to happen which will settle your future. Norgate will be here presently and ask you to be his wife. By the next post you will get a letter from that stone-cutter. Before you answer it, shut yourself up and think until you are in a proper frame of mind. Women are fools, but surely you can't be the biggest among them."

"You have seen him?" asked Eugenia faintly.

"Yes. An extremely nice young man—in his place."

"Was he well?"

"Very well, and very comfortable. My dear girl, he quite won my respect—a thoroughly practical young man, with lots of common-sense. Now good-bye. Don't make any mistake."

Did she hear aright? Her brother found Gerald a thoroughly practical young man! The lie was so gigantic that it seemed impossible it could be all a lie. She was revolving it in her mind even when Sir Ralph Norgate was announced.

As for the practical young man, he had locked his door, and thrown himself on the ground. James Herbert's words had impressed him, and perhaps his faith in Eugenia's faith was not so

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great as he fancied. To-morrow he would know the verdict. He felt sure that if his letter remained unanswered for twenty-four hours James Herbert had spoken the truth.

Miss Herbert found her brother a true prophet. Sir Ralph Norgate offered his hand, and when the offer was refused, told her he did not mean to accept her answer as final. She did not, on her part, say anything about her love being given elsewhere. Then Gerald's letter came, and following her brother's advice she did think everything over; she sat for hours trying to nerve herself to answer the letter as love and faith demanded.

She loved him. Had he been present her indecision would soon have vanished; but, as it was, she could reflect fully on what an answer to his letter must mean—alienation of all her friends—an end of social ambition—many years, if not a life, of poverty. Eugenia shuddered as she thought of the consequences, and wished that she and Gerald had never met. She wished moreover, that the temptations of rank and wealth held out by her other suitor were less.

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What would Gerald do if his letter was not answered? If she could but persuade herself that her brother's estimate of his character was the right one! Possibly it might be; James knew mankind well. If she could but think so—could believe that Gerald would forget—she might then find it easier to be wise, and, by taking him at his word, save herself and perhaps him from what must insure unhappiness.

So she reasoned—so she excused her half-meditated treason—so she persuaded herself it would eventually be better for both if they parted. Yet all the while she knew she loved Gerald Leigh as she could love no other man. In this mental conflict the day passed and night found the letter unanswered. Then James Herbert came to her.

"Eugenia, have you replied to that letter?"

She shook her head.

"Give it to me," he said.

She did so. It was a relief to get rid of it. He tore it into fragments.

"There," he said. "I knew I could trust your good sense. There is an end of the affair. It is a secret between you and me, and I shall never again allude to it."

For good or ill the die was cast. She had freed herself. But she had left the room with swimming eyes, and went to Mrs. Cathcart.

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"Aunt," she cried, "will you take me abroad—for a long time?"

It was hard for Mrs. Cathcart to be called upon to give up the rest of the London season. But then Mr. Herbert's recent death prevented her going out much, and it was paramount that Eugenia's future should be satisfactorily disposed of. So the excellent woman sacrificed herself at once.

"I will take you abroad, Eugenia, if you will promise to be Sir Ralph's wife."

Eugenia had chosen her own path, and knew where it would lead; yet for very shame she would not show her thoughts to others.

"I can promise nothing," she said. "Take me away."

Three days afterward, Gerald Leigh learned that Eugenia had gone abroad with her aunt.

Although in his studio all day long, the sculptor did no work for weeks; at last he aroused himself, engaged a model and set to work with feverish energy. From morn to night he thumbed and pushed about the ductile clay. He laughed in a sort of bitter triumph. His hands had not lost their cunning. The work grew and grew apace until the clay was done with, and a fair white block of marble stood in the centre of the studio waiting to be hewn into the statue which was to be Gerald Leigh's first high bid for fame.

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CHAPTER IV.

It was early in May. The Academy had been open about a week, long enough for the newspaper critics to tell the public what it ought to admire. Strange to say, this year the critics were unanimous in bestowing their highest praises on a piece of statuary, and a great future for the sculptor was predicted.

No. 1460 in the catalogue appealed to no one by cheap sentiment or sensational treatment. It was but the lightly-draped figure of a beautiful girl; one in the first flush of womanhood. She was in the act of stepping hastily forward. Her arms were extended as if to welcome, perhaps embrace, some one who was coming towards her. Her face bore a smile of eager delight. The grace, the likeness, the life of the figure arrested each passer by. The fall of the drapery, the position of each well-rounded limb, conveyed the idea of rapid motion. It was indeed hard to believe that she was doomed to remain forever in one fixed attitude. The stock remark of the spectators was that in a minute they expected to see her at the other side of the room.

This statute bore no distinguishing title, but those persons who turned to their catalogues found, under the number and the artist's name, a few words of poetry:

"Her hands outstretched
To greet the new love; whilst her feet
Tread, scornful, on the old love's gifts."

After reading this one turned, of course, to her feet, and found that one of them was treading on flowers—roses and large star-shaped blossoms.

Several people, whilst admiring the statue, fancied they had somewhere seen the original of that beautiful face; but, save the sculptor, only one, James Herbert, knew the truth. He cursed Leigh's impertinence, but was too wise to take any notice of it. Yet he determined to keep Eugenia from the Academy, if possible.

She was in town, and in a week's time was to be married to Sir Ralph. Two months after Mrs. Cathcart had taken her niece abroad, the baronet joined them, and renewed his proposals; this time with success. The girl stipulated that the marriage should not take place until the spring. The truth is she wanted some months' delay in order to get rid of the memories of Gerald Leigh, and by the time she returned to England flattered herself she had successfully completed the operation.

She had in the last few days heard some talk about the statue, but had steadfastly kept her eyes from the art criticisms, fearing to see Gerald's name. Nevertheless, she wished to visit the Academy, and was surprised when James Herbert, now amiability itself, refused to take her there.

"You mustn't go this year," he said; "that fellow's statute is creating quite a furore."

"Well, what of that!" asked Eugenia, coldly.

"He has had bad taste enough to represent you. The likeness is unmistakable. It is a maudlin thing—a girl deserting her old love, or some such nonsense. Still, you'd better not go."

Eugenia said no more, but all day long she was thinking of her brother's words, and longing to see what Gerald had wrought. That evening she dined out. At the table were several persons who worshipped art, and Eugenia's cheek burned as she heard the praise bestowed on the new sculptor and the great future prophesied for him. Had she, after all, been wrong? Would it not have been better to have followed the mandates of her heart? Had she not been weak and mercenary? No matter; it was too late now to repent. Poor Gerald! She must see this wonderful image of herself.

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Early next morning she went alone to Burlington House. Unlike others, she knew the meaning of the statue, knew the mute reproach it conveyed, knew why the marble foot trod down those particular flowers. She had never told him the fate of his boyish gift; but Gerald had often and often recalled his first meeting with her. Eugenia's heart swelled as she remembered his brave words and confidence in himself—how sure he felt of success. He had, indeed, succeeded, but the first great work from his hands was a memento of his love for a faithless woman—herself.

Two gentlemen were at her side. They were talking of the work and the sculptor. One of them she knew. He was a lord, famous for his love of art and encouragement of rising artists.

"I tried to buy it," he said, "but found it was not for sale."

"Commercially speaking," said his companion, "it is as well you cannot buy it."

"Why? The man must go to the top of his profession."

"I think not. Indeed, my belief is he will do little more. I have inquired about him. He does not live the life a genius must live in these days if he wants to succeed."

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"I am sorry to hear it," said Lord —, moving away.

Miss Herbert left the Academy with an echo of Gerald's extravagant statement that life or death hung upon her love sounding in her ears. The conversation she had overheard distressed her greatly. The thought that her treachery had ruined a life full of promise would not be dismissed. She spent a most miserable day, and its misery was not diminished by the truth, which she could no longer conceal from herself, that she still loved Gerald. She loved him more than ever. Too late! too late! And Eugenia Herbert wept, as many others have wept, that the past could not be undone.

Sir Ralph Norgate and James Herbert dined that evening at Mrs. Cathcart's. Their society was little comfort to Eugenia. She felt now that she hated her lover—hated his polite, hollow society ways and expressions—hated that *blasé* look which so often settled on his face. She had never cared for him. Their love-making had been of a frigid kind—not, be it said, by Sir Ralph's wish. He was proud of, and perhaps really fond of, the beautiful girl he had bought; so it was scarcely fair that Eugenia should compare his polite wooing with that of the impassioned boy's, which recked no obstacles—heeded no consequences.

Her bitter thoughts made it impossible for her to sit out the dinner. Very soon she pleaded headache and went to her own room to resume her self-revilings. She made no further attempt to banish Gerald from her thoughts. She lived again every moment she had spent in his company—heard again every word of wild love—felt his hand close on hers—his lips press her own—and shuddered as the dismal words "Life or death," seemed echoing through her ears. If she could but undo the past!

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Why not! The thought rushed through her. What hindered her save the false gods to whom she had bent? She was still legally free. Gerald was in the same town. Why should she heed her friends? Why trouble as to what people would think or say? By one bold step she could right everything. If to-morrow—nay, this very hour—she went to Gerald and bade him take her and hold her against all, she knew he would do so. He would forgive. To him her action would not

seem bold or unmaidenly. In his eyes she would rank as high as ever; and what mattered the rest? To-morrow they might be miles away, and the bliss of being Gerald's wife might well compensate for what people would say about her conduct. She herself could forget all, save that she was now bound forever to the man she loved!

She would do it. With feverish impatience she threw off her rich dress and wrapped herself in a plain cloak. She put on the quietest hat she could find, stole down stairs, and was out of the house before second thoughts had time to bring irresolution. Her heart beat wildly. She hailed a cab and was driven to Nelson Studios. On the way she remembered it was an unlikely hour to find an artist in his studio, but, nevertheless, now she had set out, resolved to complete her journey.

She walked quickly to Gerald's door. She knocked softly, but met with no response. She dared not wait longer outside. The pictured consequences of her rash act were assuming tremendous proportions in her brain. Another minute's delay and she must leave the spot never to return. She turned the handle of the door and entered the room. [188]

Now, Miss Herbert's half-formed plan of action when she found herself face to face with her ill-treated lover, had been something like this—she would walk up to him and simply say, "Gerald, I am come." The rest must be left to him, but she believed, in spite of her weakness and treachery, he would freely forgive her all.

Gerald was not in the studio. The gas was half-turned down, and the clay casts on the wall looked grim and spectral. But, if Gerald was not in the room it was still inhabited. On a low couch—a couch covered by a rich Oriental rug—lay a woman, fast asleep.

She crept across the room and gazed on the sleeper. Even by the dim gas-light she knew that she gazed on beauty before which her own must pale. The woman might have been some five years older than herself, and those wonderful charms were at their zenith. The rich, clear, warm color on the cheek, the long black lashes, the arched and perfect eyebrows, told of Southern lands. The full, voluptuous figure, the shapely, rounded arms, the red lips, the soft creamy neck—before these the heart of man would run as wax before a fire. Eugenia, seeking her lover, found this woman in her stead.

A bitter, scornful smile played on Miss Herbert's lips as she gazed at the sleeper. Somehow that oval, sunny face seemed familiar to her. Well might it be. In London, Paris, everywhere, she had seen it in the shop windows. There were few people in France or England who had not heard the name of Mlle. Carlotta, singer, dancer, darling of opera-bouffe, whose adventures and amours were notorious, who had ruined more men than she could count on the fingers of her fair hands. [189]

Eugenia recognized her, and her smile of scorn deepened. The sight of a half-emptied champagne bottle close to the sleeper, a half-smoked cigarette lying on the floor just as it had fallen from her fingers, added nothing to the contempt Miss Herbert's smile expressed. Gathering her skirts together to avoid any chance of contamination by touch, she was preparing to leave the studio as noiselessly as she had entered it, when suddenly the sleeper awoke.

Awoke without any warning. Simply opened her splendid dark eyes, stared for half a second, then, with wonderful lightness and agility, sprang to her feet.

"*Que faites vous la?* Why are you here?" she cried.

Without a word Eugenia moved towards the door. Mlle. Carlotta was before her. She turned the key and placed her back against the door.

"*Doucement! doucement! ma belle,*" she said. "Permit me to know who honors me with a visit?"

"I wished to see Mr. Leigh. I suppose he is out. Be good enough to let me pass."

"Are you a model, then? But no; models look not as you look."

"I am not a model."

"Not! *fi donc!* You are, perhaps, one of those young misses who write Geraldo letters of love. *A la bonne heure!* I wish to see one of them—*moi.*" [190]

With a saucy smile Carlotta pocketed the key, turned up the gas, and commenced a cool scrutiny of her prisoner. Eugenia blushed crimson.

"*Qui vous etes belle, ma chere—belle mais blonde,* and Geraldo, he loves not the blonde."

"Let me pass!" said Eugenia, stamping her foot.

Her tormentor laughed, but not ill-temperedly.

"He will soon be here," she said mockingly. "Surely Mademoiselle will wait. He will be enchanted to see one of the young misses."

Mlle. Carlotta, when not injured, was not vindictive or unkindly; but she was as mischievous as a monkey. No doubt, having teased the girl to her satisfaction, she would have soon released her, but it happened that Eugenia turned her head, and for the first time the light shone full upon her face. Her gaoler started. She sprang towards her, seized her arm and dragged her across the room. Still holding her captive, she tore down a sheet and revealed the clay model of the statue which had made Gerald famous. She looked from the lifeless to the living face then burst into a peal of derisive laughter. Eugenia's secret was discovered.

"Ha! ha! ha! The young miss that Geraldo loved. The one who threw him away for a rich lover! Yet, she wishes to see him again—so at night she comes. Ah, Mademoiselle, you have w-r-r-

recked him, c-r-r-rushed him, r-r-ruined him, still would see him. Good; good! it is now his turn. My Gerald shall have revenge—revenge!”

Eugenia, thoroughly aroused, commanded her to let her go. Carlotta laughed in her face, was even ill-bred enough to snap her fingers and poke out her tongue at her prisoner. Eugenia humbled herself, and implored her by their common womanhood. Carlotta laughed the louder. Eugenia appealed to her venality, and tried to bribe her. Carlotta lowered her black eyebrows and scowled, but laughed louder than ever. “He will come very soon,” was all she said. “He will not stop long away from me—Carlotta.”

Miss Herbert was at her wit’s end. Yet, even through the shame of the situation, the anguish of her heart made itself felt. After having wrought herself up to make such a sacrifice, such an atonement, it was pitiable to find Gerald no better than the rest of his sex! She sat upon a chair longing for release, yet dreading to hear the step which would herald it.

Half an hour passed. Mlle. Carlotta whiled it away by emptying a glass of champagne, smoking a cigarette, and making comments upon Gerald’s prolonged absence. Presently she cried, “Ah, Mademoiselle, this is dull for you; see, I will dance to you,” and therewith she raised herself on her toes and went pirouetting round her captive, humming the while an air of Offenbach’s. Her dress was long, but she managed it with marvellous skill, and Eugenia, whilst loathing, could not help watching her with a sort of fascination. She was as agile as a panther; every attitude was full of grace, every gesture alluring.

Suddenly she stopped short. Her great eyes sparkled even more brightly. She glanced at her victim. “Hist!” she said. “I hear him. I know his step. He comes!”

A moment afterwards the door was tried. Eugenia covered her face with her hands. She knew not what the woman meant to do or say, but she felt that her crowning shame was at hand. Yet her heart beat at the thought of seeing Gerald once more, and a wild idea of forgiveness on either side passed through her.

Mlle. Carlotta turned down the gas, unlocked the door, and, as it opened, threw herself into the arms of the new-comer. Eugenia heard the sound of kisses given and returned, and her heart grew like stone.

“Geraldo, *mon ami*,” she heard the dancer say in passionate tones, “*dis moi, que tu m’aimes—que tu m’aimes toujours!*”

“*Je t’adore ma belle—tu es ravissante!*”

“Tell me in your own dear barbarous tongue. Swear it to me in English.”

“I swear it, my beautiful gipsy. I love you.”

“Me only?”

“You only;” and Eugenia heard him kiss her again and again.

“Dis done, my Geraldo. You love me more than the pale-faced miss who scorned you?” He laughed a wild, unpleasant sounding laugh.

“Why not? You can love or say you can love. She was the changeable white moon; you are the glorious Southern sun. She was ice; you are fire. Better be burnt to death than die of cold and starvation. Men have worshipped you—men have died for you. I love you.”

They came into the room. His arm was round her. Her radiant face rested on his shoulder. Again and again he kissed those beautiful lips. His eyes were only for her and saw not Eugenia.

Miss Herbert rose. Her face was as white as her marble prototype’s. She might have passed out unobserved by Gerald, but Mlle. Carlotta was on the watch. She pointed to her, and Gerald turned and saw Eugenia.

He had but time to realize it was no vision—then she was gone. With a wild cry he turned to follow her, but the woman twined her arms around him and restrained him. She was strong, and for some moments detained him. Her resistance maddened him. With a fierce oath he grasped her round arms and tore them from his neck, throwing her away with such force that she fell upon the floor. Then he rushed after Eugenia.

She was walking swiftly along the road. He soon reached her side; but, although aware of his presence, she neither spoke nor looked at him.

“What brought you here?” he said hoarsely.

She made no reply—only walked the faster.

“Tell me why you came?” he said. “I will never leave you until you answer me.”

She turned and looked at him. Fresh from that scene in the studio—with those words still ringing in her ears—even the great change she saw in his face did not move her to pity.

“I came,” she said, “on the eve of my marriage, to ask forgiveness of a man whom I fancied I had wronged. I am glad I came. I found him happy, and in society after his own heart.”

Her voice was cold and contemptuous. He quivered beneath her scorn. At that moment a cab passed. Eugenia called it.

“Leave me!” she said to Gerald. “Leave me! Our paths in life shall cross no more.”

He grasped her wrist. “Do you dare to reproach me? You! Eugenia, I told you it was life or

death.”

“Life or death!” she repeated. “Death, at any rate, seems made very sweet to you.”

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Still holding her wrist, he looked into her eyes in a strange, hopeless way. He saw nothing in them to help him. He leaned down to her ear.

“Yes, death,” he said in a solemn whisper; “but the moral and spiritual death comes first.”

His hand left her wrist. He turned, and without a word strode away. Whither? Even as Tannhauser returned to the Venusberg, so Gerald Leigh returned to his studio and Carlotta.

Eugenia wept all the way home. Wept for herself and Gerald. Wept for the shame she had endured. Wept for the uselessness of the contemplated atonement. Wept for the life before her, and for a man’s future and career wrecked by her weakness.

The next week she married Sir Ralph Norgate. The ceremony was surrounded by befitting splendor. Yet, even at the altar, Gerald Leigh’s pale passionate face rose before her, and she knew it would never leave her thoughts. She loved him still!

On her wedding morning she received many letters. She had no time to read them, so took them with her, and perused them as she went north with her husband. Among them was one in a strange handwriting; it ran thus:

“For your sake he struck me—Carlotta! But he came back to me and is mine again. Him I forgive; not you. We go abroad together to warm, sunny lands. Some day we shall quarrel and part. Then I shall remember you and take my revenge. How? That husband, for whom you deserted Gerald, I shall take from you.”

Eugenia’s lip curled. She tore the letter and threw the pieces out of the carriage window.

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Two years afterwards Lady Norgate was listlessly turning the leaves of a society journal. Although she was a great and fashionable lady she was often listless, and found life rather a dreary proceeding. She read to-day, among the theatrical notes, that Mlle. Carlotta, the divine opera bouffe actress, was engaged to appear next month at the “Frivolity.” Although the woman’s absurd threat was unheeded, if not forgotten, her name recalled too vividly the most painful episode in Lady Norgate’s life. She turned to another part of the paper and read that the gentleman who committed suicide under such distressing circumstances, at Monaco, had now been identified. He was Mr. Gerald Leigh, the sculptor, whose first important work attracted so much attention two years ago. It was hinted that his passion for a well-known actress was the cause of the rash deed.

Lady Norgate dropped the paper, and covered her face with her hands. He had spoken truly. Her love meant life or death!

Had she believed, or troubled about the concluding paragraph of the notice, had she ventured to tell herself it was true that Gerald had forgotten her, and Carlotta was responsible for his death, her mind would soon have been set at rest.

Like a courteous foe who gives fair warning, Mlle. Carlotta wrote once more:

“He is dead. He died for your sake, not mine. Your name, not mine, was on his lips. Look to yourself. I am coming to London.”

No doubt Carlotta meant this letter as a first blow towards revenge. She would hardly have written it had she known that Lady Norgate would cherish those words forever. Poor comfort as it was, they told her that Gerald had loved her to the last.

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Then Mlle. Carlotta, more beautiful, more enticing, more audacious than ever, came to London.

For some months it had been whispered in society that Sir Ralph Norgate was not so perfect a husband as such a wife as Eugenia might rightly expect. After Carlotta’s reappearance the whispers grew louder, the statements more circumstantial. Eugenia caught an echo of them and smiled disdainfully.

Then the name of Carlotta’s new victim became town-talk. Yet Eugenia made no sign.

Not even when she met her husband, in broad daylight, seated side by side with the siren. The man had the grace to turn his head away, but Carlotta shot a glance of malicious triumph at the pale lady who passed without a quiver of the lip. James Herbert was with his sister, and found this encounter too much even for his cynicism. He was bound to speak.

“The blackguard!” he said. “But Eugenia, I don’t think I would have a divorce or a separation. It makes such a scandal.”

“It is a matter of perfect indifference to me,” she said coldly.

She spoke the truth. Carlotta’s romantic vengeance was an utter failure. Lady Norgate and her husband were, in truth, no farther apart than they had been for many months. Eugenia was indifferent.

And, as time goes on, grows more and more so. Indifferent to wealth, indifferent to rank, to pleasure, even to pain. She cherishes nothing, cares for nothing, save the remembrance that she was once loved by Gerald Leigh—that he bade her give him life or death—that although she gave him death, he died with her name on his lips!

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CARRISTON'S GIFT.

PART I.

TOLD BY PHILIP BRAND, M.D., LONDON.

I.

I WISH I had the courage to begin this tale by turning to my professional visiting books, and, taking at random any month out of the last twenty years, give its record as a fair sample of my ordinary work. The dismal extract would tell you what a doctor's—I suppose I may say a successful doctor's—lot is, when his practice lies in a poor and densely-populated district of London. Dreary as such a beginning might be, it would perhaps allay some of the incredulity which this tale may probably provoke, as it would plainly show how little room there is for things imaginative or romantic in work so hard as mine, or among such grim realities of poverty, pain, and grief as those by which I have been surrounded. It would certainly make it appear extremely unlikely that I should have found time to imagine, much less to write, a romance or melodrama.

The truth is that when a man has toiled from nine o'clock in the morning until nine o'clock at night, such leisure as he can enjoy is precious to him, especially when even that short respite is liable to be broken in upon at any moment.

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Still, in spite of the doleful picture I have drawn of what may be called "the daily grind," I begin this tale with the account of a holiday.

In the autumn of 1864 I turned my back with right good-will upon London streets, hospitals, and patients, and took my seat in the North Express. The first revolution of the wheels sent a thrill of delight through my jaded frame. A joyful sense of freedom came over me. I had really got away at last! Moreover, I had left no address behind me, so for three blessed weeks might roam an undisputed lord of myself. Three weeks were not very many to take out of the fifty-two, but they were all I could venture to give myself; for even at that time my practice, if not so lucrative as I could wish, was a large and increasing one. Having done a twelvemonth's hard work, I felt that no one in the kingdom could take his holiday with a conscience clearer than mine, so I lay back in a peculiarly contented frame of mind, and discounted the coming pleasures of my brief respite from labor.

There are many ways of passing a holiday—many places at which it may be spent; but after all, if you wish to enjoy it thoroughly there is but one royal rule to be followed. That is, simply to please yourself—go where you like, and mount the innocent holiday hobby which is dearest to your heart, let its name be botany, geology, entomology, conchology, venery, piscation, or what not. Then you will be happy, and return well braced up for the battle of life. I knew a city clerk with literary tastes, who invariably spent his annual fortnight among the mustiest tomes of the British Museum, and averred that his health was more benefited by so doing than if he had passed the time inhaling the freshest sea-breezes. I dare say he was right in his assertion.

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Sketching has always been my favorite holiday pursuit. Poor as my drawings may be, nevertheless, as I turn them over in my portfolio, they bring to me at least vivid remembrances of many sweet and picturesque spots, happy days, and congenial companions. It was not for me to say anything of their actual merits, but they are dear to me for their associations.

This particular year I went to North Wales, and made Bettws-y-Coed my headquarters. I stayed at the Royal Oak, that well-known little inn dear to many an artist's heart, and teeming with reminiscences of famous men who have sojourned there times without number. It was here I made the acquaintance of the man with whose life the curious events here told are connected.

On the first day after my arrival at Bettws my appreciation of my liberty was so thorough, my appetite for the enjoyment of the beauties of nature so keen and insatiable, that I went so far and saw so much, that when I returned to the Royal Oak night had fallen and the hour of dinner had long passed by. I was, when my own meal was placed on the table, the only occupant of the coffee-room. Just then a young man entered, and ordered something to eat. The waiter knowing no doubt something of the frank *camaraderie* which exists, or should exist, between the followers of the painter's craft, laid his cover at my table. The new-comer seated himself, gave me a pleasant smile and a nod, and in five minutes we were in full swing of conversation.

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The moment my eyes fell upon the young man I had noticed how singularly handsome he was. Charles Carriston—for this I found afterwards to be his name—was about twenty-two years of age. He was tall, but slightly built; his whole bearing and figure being remarkably elegant and graceful. He looked even more than gentlemanly,—he looked distinguished. His face was pale, its features well-cut, straight, and regular. His forehead spoke of high intellectual qualities, and there was somewhat of that development over the eye-brows which phrenologists, I believe, consider as evidence of the possession of imagination. The general expression of his face was one

of sadness, and its refined beauty was heightened by a pair of soft, dark, dreamy-looking eyes.

It only remains to add that, from his attire, I judged him to be an artist—a professional artist—to the backbone. In the course of conversation I told him how I had classified him. He smiled.

“I am only an amateur,” he said; “an idle man, nothing more—and you?”

“Alas! I am a doctor.”

“Then we shall not have to answer to each other for our sins in painting.”

We talked on pleasantly until our bodily wants were satisfied. Then came that pleasant craving for tobacco, which after a good meal, is natural to a well-regulated digestion.

“Shall we go and smoke outside?” said Carriston. “The night is delicious.”

We went out and sat on one of the wooden benches. As my new friend said, the night was delicious. There was scarcely a breath of air moving. The stars and the moon shone brightly, and the rush of the not far distant stream came to us with a soothing murmur. Near us were three or four jovial young artists. They were in merry mood; one of them had that day sold a picture to a tourist. We listened to their banter until, most likely growing thirsty, they re-entered the inn.

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Carriston had said little since we had been out of doors. He smoked his cigar placidly and gazed up at the skies. With the white moonlight falling on his strikingly-beautiful face—the graceful pose into which he fell—he seemed to me the embodiment of poetry. He paid no heed to the merry talk or the artists, which so much amused me—indeed, I doubted if he heard their voices.

Yet he must have done so, for as soon as they had left us he came out of his reverie.

“It must be very nice,” he said, “to have to make one’s living by Art.”

“Nice for those who can make livings by it,” I answered.

“All can do that who are worth it. The day of neglected genius is gone by. Muller was the last sufferer, I think—and he died young.”

“If you are so sanguine, why not try your own luck at it?”

“I would; but unfortunately I am a rich man.”

I laughed at this misplaced regret. Then Carriston, in the most simple way, told me a good deal about himself. He was an orphan; an only child. He had already ample means; but fortune had still favors in store for him. At the death of his uncle, now an aged man, he must succeed to a large estate and a baronetcy. The natural, unaffected way in which he made these confidences, moreover made them not, I knew, from any wish to increase his importance in my eyes, greatly impressed me. By the time we parted for the night I had grown much interested in my new acquaintance—an interest not untinged by envy. Young, handsome, rich, free to come or go, work or play, as he listed! Happy Carriston!

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II.

I AM disposed to think that never before did a sincere friendship, one which was fated to last unbroken for years, ripen so quickly as that between Carriston and myself. As I now look back I find it hard to associate him with any, even a brief, period of time subsequent to our meeting, during which he was not my bosom friend. I forget whether our meeting at the same picturesque spot on the morning which followed our self-introduction was the result of accident or arrangement. Anyway, we spent the day together, and that day was the precursor of many passed in each other’s society. Morning after morning we sallied forth to do our best to transfer the same bits of scenery to our sketching-blocks. Evening after evening we returned to dine side by side, and afterward to talk and smoke together, indoors or outdoors as the temperature advised or our wishes inclined.

Great friends we soon became—inseparable as long as my short holiday lasted. It was, perhaps, pleasant for each to work in company with an amateur like himself. Each could ask the other’s opinion of the merits of the work done, and feel happy at the approval duly given. An artist’s standard of excellence is too high for a non-professional. When he praises your work he praises it but as the work of an outsider. You feel that such commendation condemns it and disheartens you.

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However, had Carriston cared to do so, I think he might have fearlessly submitted his productions to any conscientious critic. His drawings were immeasurably more artistic and powerful than mine. He had undoubtedly great talent, and I was much surprised to find that good as he was at landscape, he was even better at the figure. He could, with a firm, bold hand draw rapidly the most marvellous likenesses. So spirited and true were some of the studies he showed me, that I could without flattery advise him, provided he could finish as he began, to keep entirely to the higher branch of the art. I have now before me a series of outline faces drawn by him—many of them from memory; and as I look at them the original of each comes at once before my eyes.

From the very first I had been much interested in the young man, and as day by day went by, and the peculiarities of his character were revealed to me, my interest grew deeper and deeper. I flatter myself that I am a keen observer and skilful analyst of personal character, and until now fancied that to write a description of its component parts was an easy matter. Yet when I am put to the proof I find it no simple task to convey in words a proper idea of Charles Carriston’s

mental organization.

I soon discovered that he was, I may say, afflicted by a peculiarly sensitive nature. Although strong and apparently in good health, the very changes of the weather seemed to affect him almost to the same extent as they affect a flower. Sweet as his disposition always was, the tone of his mind, his spirits, his conversation, varied, as it were, with the atmosphere. He was full of imagination, and that imagination, always rich, was at times weird, even grotesquely weird. Not for one moment did he seem to doubt the stability of the wild theories he started, or the possibility of the poetical dreams he dreamed being realized. He had his faults, of course; he was hasty and impulsive; indeed to me one of the greatest charms about the boy was that, right or wrong, each word he spoke came straight from his heart.

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So far as I could judge, the whole organization of his mind was too highly strung, too finely wrought for every-day use. A note of joy, of sorrow, even of pity vibrated through it too strongly for his comfort or well-being. As yet it had not been called upon to bear the test of love, and fortunately—I use the word advisedly—fortunately he was not, according to the usual significance of the word, a religious man, or I should have thought it not unlikely that some day he would fall a victim to that religious mania so well known to my professional brethren, and have developed hysteria or melancholia. He might even have fancied himself a messenger sent from heaven for the regeneration of mankind. From natures like Carriston's are prophets made.

In short, I may say that my exhaustive study of my new friend's character resulted in a certain amount of uneasiness as to his future—an uneasiness not entirely free from professional curiosity.

Although the smile came readily and frequently to his lips, the general bent of his disposition was sad, even despondent and morbid. And yet few young men's lives promised to be so pleasant as Charles Carriston's.

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I was rallying him one day on his future rank and its responsibilities.

"You will, of course, be disgustingly rich?" I said.

Carriston sighed. "Yes, if I live long enough; but I don't suppose I shall."

"Why in the world shouldn't you? You look pale and thin, but are in capital health. Twelve long miles we have walked to-day—you never turned a hair."

Carriston made no reply. He seemed in deep thought.

"Your friends ought to look after you and get you a wife," I said.

"I have no friends," he said sadly. "No nearer relation than a cousin a good deal older than I am, who looks upon me as one who was born to rob him of what should be his."

"But by the law of primogeniture, so sacred to the upper ten thousand, he must know you are entitled to it."

"Yes; but for years and years I was always going to die. My life was not thought worth six months' purchase. All of a sudden I got well. Ever since then I have seemed, even to myself, a kind of interloper."

"It must be unpleasant to have a man longing for one's death. All the more reason you should marry, and put other lives between him and the title."

"I fancy I shall never marry," said Carriston, looking at me with his soft dark eyes. "You see, a boy who has waited for years expecting to die, doesn't grow up with exactly the same feelings as other people. I don't think I shall ever meet a woman I can care for enough to make my wife. No, I expect my cousin will be Sir Ralph yet."

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I tried to laugh him out of his morbid ideas. "Those who live will see," I said. "Only promise to ask me to your wedding, and better still, if you live in town, appoint me your family doctor. It may prove the nucleus of that West End practice which it is the dream of every doctor to establish."

I have already alluded to the strange beauty of Carriston's dark eyes. As soon as companionship commenced between us those eyes became to me, from scientific reasons, objects of curiosity on account of the mysterious expression which at times I detected in them. Often and often they wore a look the like to which, I imagine, is found only in the eyes of a somnambulist—a look which one feels certain is intently fixed upon something, yet upon something beyond the range of one's own vision. During the first two or three days of our new-born intimacy, I found this eccentricity of Carriston's positively startling. When now and then I turned to him, and found him staring with all his might at nothing, my eyes were compelled to follow the direction in which his own were bent. It was at first impossible to divest one's self of the belief that something should be there to justify so fixed a gaze. However, as the rapid growth of our friendly intercourse soon showed me that he was a boy of most ardent poetic temperament—perhaps even more a poet than an artist—I laid at the door of the Muse these absent looks and recurring flights into vacancy.

We were at the Fairy Glen one morning, sketching, to the best of our ability, the swirling stream, the gray rocks, and the overhanging trees, the last just growing brilliant with autumnal tints. So beautiful was everything around that for a long time I worked, idled, or dreamed in contented silence. Carriston had set up his easel at some little distance from mine. At last I turned to see how his sketch was progressing. He had evidently fallen into one of his brown studies, and, apparently, a harder one than usual. His brush had fallen from his fingers, his features were immovable, and his strange dark eyes were absolutely riveted upon a large rock in

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front of him, at which he gazed as intently as if his hope of heaven depended upon seeing through it.

He seemed for the while oblivious to things mundane. A party of laughing, chattering, terrible tourist girls scrambled down the rugged steps, and one by one passed in front of him. Neither their presence nor the inquisitive glances they cast on his statuesque face roused him from his fit of abstraction. For a moment I wondered if the boy took opium or some other narcotic on the sly. Full of the thought I rose, crossed over to him, and laid my hand upon his shoulder. As he felt my touch he came to himself, and looked up at me in a dazed, inquiring way.

"Really, Carriston," I said, laughingly, "you must reserve your dreaming fits until we are in places where tourists do not congregate, or you will be thought a madman, or at least a poet."

He made no reply. He turned away from me impatiently, even rudely; then, picking up his brush, went on with his sketch. After awhile he seemed to recover from his pettishness, and we spent the remainder of the day as pleasantly as usual.

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As we trudged home in the twilight, he said to me in an apologetic, almost penitent way,

"I hope I was not rude to you just now."

"When do you mean?" I asked, having almost forgotten the trivial incident.

"When you woke me from what you called my dreaming."

"Oh dear, no. You were not at all rude. If you had been, it was but the penalty due to my presumption. The flight of genius should be respected, not checked by a material hand."

"That is nonsense; I am not a genius, and you must forgive me for my rudeness," said Carriston simply.

After walking some distance in silence he spoke again. "I wish when you are with me you would try and stop me from getting into that state. It does me no good."

Seeing he was in earnest I promised to do my best, and was curious enough to ask him whither his thoughts wandered during those abstracted moments.

"I can scarcely tell you," he said. Presently he asked, speaking with hesitation, "I suppose you never feel that under certain circumstances—circumstances which you cannot explain—you might be able to see things which are invisible to others?"

"To see things. What things?"

"Things, as I said, which no one else can see. You must know there are people who possess this power."

"I know that certain people have asserted they possess what they call second-sight; but the assertion is too absurd to waste time in refuting."

"Yet," said Carriston dreamily, "I know that if I did not strive to avoid it some such power would come to me."

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"You are too ridiculous, Carriston," I said. "Some people see what others don't because they have longer sight. You may, of course, imagine anything. But your eyes—handsome eyes they are, too—contain certain properties, known as humors and lenses, therefore in order to see—"

"Yes, yes," interrupted Carriston; "I know exactly all you are going to say. You, a man of science, ridicule everything which breaks what you are pleased to call the law of Nature. Yet take all the unaccountable tales told. Nine hundred and ninety-nine you expose to scorn or throw grave doubt upon, yet the thousandth rests on evidence which cannot be upset or disputed. The possibility of that one proves the possibility of all."

"Not at all; but enough for your argument," I said, amused at the boy's wild talk.

"You doctors," he continued with that delicious air of superiority so often assumed by laymen when they are in good health, "put too much to the credit of diseased imagination."

"No doubt; it's a convenient shelf on which to put a difficulty. But go on."

"The body is your province, yet you can't explain why a cataleptic patient should hear a watch tick when it is placed against his foot."

"Nor you; nor any one. But perhaps it may aid you to get rid of your rubbishing theories if I tell you that catalepsy, as you understand it, is a disease not known to us; in fact, it does not exist."

He seemed crestfallen at hearing this. "But what do you want to prove?" I asked. "What have you yourself seen?"

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"Nothing, I tell you. And I pray I may never see anything."

After this he seemed inclined to shirk the subject, but I pinned him to it. I was really anxious to get at the true state of his mind. In answer to the leading questions with which I plied him, Carriston revealed an amount of superstition which seemed utterly childish and out of place beside the intellectual faculties which he undoubtedly possessed. So much so, that at last I felt more inclined to laugh at than to argue with him.

Yet I was not altogether amused by his talk. His wild arguments and wilder beliefs made me fancy there must be a weak spot somewhere in his brain—even made me fear lest his end might be madness. The thought made me sad; for, with the exception of the eccentricities which I have mentioned, I reckoned Carriston the pleasantest friend I had ever made. His amiable nature, his

good looks, and perfect breeding had endeared the young man to me; so much so, that I resolved, during the remainder of the time we should spend together, to do all I could toward talking the nonsense out of him.

My efforts were unavailing. I kept a sharp lookout upon him, and let him fall into no more mysterious reveries; but the curious idea that he possessed, or could possess, some gift above human nature, was too firmly rooted to be displaced. On all other subjects he argued fairly and was open to reason. On this one point he was immovable. When I could get him to notice my attacks at all, his answer was:

“You doctors, clever as you are with the body, know as little of psychology as you did three thousand years ago.”

When the time came for me to fold up my easel and return to the drudgery of life, I parted from Carriston with much regret. One of those solemn, but often broken, promises to join together next year in another sketching tour passed between us. Then I went back to London, and during the subsequent months, although I saw nothing of him, I often thought of my friend of the autumn.

III.

IN the spring of 1865 I went down to Bournemouth to see, for the last time, an old friend who was dying of consumption. During a great part of the journey down I had for a travelling companion a well-dressed gentlemanly man of about forty years of age. We were alone in the compartment, and after interchanging some small civilities, such as the barter of newspapers, slid into conversation. My fellow-traveller seemed to be an intellectual man, and well posted up in the doings of the day. He talked fluently and easily on various topics, and judging by his talk must have moved in good society. Although I fancied his features bore traces of hard living and dissipation, he was not unprepossessing in appearance. The greatest faults in his face were the remarkable thinness of the lips, and his eyes being a shade closer together than one cares to see. With a casual acquaintance such peculiarities are of little moment, but for my part I should not choose for a friend one who possessed them without due trial and searching proof.

At this time the English public were much interested in an important will case which was then being tried. The reversion to a vast sum of money depended upon the testator's sanity or insanity. Like most other people we duly discussed the matter. I suppose, from some of my remarks, my companion understood that I was a doctor. He asked me a good many technical questions, and I described several curious cases of mania which had come under my notice. He seemed greatly interested in the subject.

“You must sometimes find it hard to say where sanity ends and insanity begins,” he said thoughtfully.

“Yes. The boundary-line is in some instances hard to define. To give in such a dubious case an opinion which would satisfy myself I should want to have known the patient at the time he was considered quite sane.”

“To mark the difference?”

“Exactly. And to know the bent of the character. For instance, there is a friend of mine. He was perfectly sane when last I saw him, but for all I know he may have made great progress the other way in the interval.”

Then without mentioning names, dates, or places, I described Carriston's peculiar disposition to my intelligent listener. He heard me with rapt interest.

“You predict he will go mad?” he said.

“Certainly not. Unless anything unforeseen arises he will probably live and die as sane as you or I.”

“Why do you fear for him, then?”

“For this reason. I think that any sudden emotion—violent grief, for instance—any unexpected and crushing blow—might at once disturb the balance of his mind. Let his life run on in an even groove, and all will be well with him.”

My companion was silent for a few moments.

“Did you mention your friend's name?” he asked.

I laughed. “Doctors never give names when they quote cases.”

At the next station my companion left the train. He bade me a polite adieu, and thanked me for the pleasure my conversation had given him. After wondering what station in life he occupied I dismissed him from my mind, as one who had crossed my path for a short time and would probably never cross it again.

Although I did not see Charles Carriston I received several letters from him during the course of the year. He had not forgotten our undertaking to pass my next holiday together. Early in the autumn, just as I was beginning to long with a passionate longing for open air and blue skies, a letter came from Carriston. He was now, he said, roughing it in the Western Highlands. He reminded me of last year's promise. Could I get away from work now? Would I join him? If I did not care to visit Scotland, would I suggest some other place where he could join me? Still, the scenery by which he was now surrounded was superb, and the accommodation he had secured, if

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not luxurious, fairly comfortable. He thought we could not do better. A postscript to his letter asked me to address him as Cecil Carr, not Charles Carriston. He had a reason for changing his name; a foolish reason I should no doubt call it. When we met he would let me know it.

This letter at once decided me to accept his invitation. In a week's time my arrangements for leave of absence were complete, and I was speeding northward in the highest spirits, and well equipped with everything necessary for my favorite holiday pursuit. I looked forward with the greatest pleasure to again meeting Carriston. I found him at Callendar waiting for me. The coach did not follow the route we were obliged to take in order to reach the somewhat unfrequented part of the country in which our tent was pitched, so my friend had secured the services of a primitive vehicle and a strong shaggy pony to bear us the remainder of the journey.

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So soon as our first hearty greetings were over I proceeded to ascertain how the last year had treated Carriston. I was both delighted and astonished at the great change for the better which had taken place in his manner, no less than his appearance. He looked far more robust; he seemed happier, brighter; although more like ordinary humanity. Not only had he greeted me with almost boisterous glee, but during our drive through the wonderful scenery he was in the gayest of spirits and full of fun and anecdote. I congratulated him heartily upon the marked improvement in his health, both mentally and physically.

"Yes, I am much better," he said. "I followed a part of your advice; gave up moping, tried constant change of scene, interested myself in many more things. I am quite a different man."

"No supernatural visitations?" I asked, anxious to learn that his cure in that direction was complete.

His face fell. He hesitated a second before answering.

"No—not now," he said. "I fought against the strange feeling, and I believe have got rid of it—at least I hope so."

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I said no more on the subject. Carriston plunged into a series of vivid and mimetic descriptions of the varieties of Scotch character which he had met with during his stay. He depicted his experiences so amusingly that I laughed heartily for many a mile.

"But why the change in your name?" I asked, when he paused for a moment in his merry talk.

He blushed, and looked rather ashamed. "I scarcely like to tell you; you will think my reason so absurd."

"Never mind. I don't judge you by the ordinary standard."

"Well, the fact is, my cousin is also in Scotland. I feared if I gave my true name at the hotel at which I stayed on my way here, he might perchance see it, and look me up in these wild regions."

"Well, and what if he did?"

"I can't tell you. I hate to know I feel like it. But I have always, perhaps without cause, been afraid of him; and this place is horribly lonely."

Now that I understood the meaning of his words, I thought the boy must be joking; but the grave look on his face showed he was never further from merriment.

"Why, Carriston!" I cried, "you are positively ridiculous about your cousin. You can't think the man wants to murder you?"

"I don't know what I think. I am saying things to you which I ought not to say; but every time I meet him I feel he hates me, and wishes me out of the world."

"Between wishing and doing there is a great difference. I dare say all this 's fancy on your part."

"Perhaps so. Any way, Cecil Carr is as good a name up here as Charles Carriston, so please humor my whim and say no more about it."

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As it made no difference to me by what name he chose to call himself I dropped the subject. I knew of old that some of his strange prejudices were proof against anything I could do to remove them.

At last we reached our temporary abode. It was a substantial, low-built house, owned and inhabited by a thrifty middle-aged widow, who, although well-to-do so far as the simple ideas of her neighbors went, was nevertheless always willing to add to her resources by accommodating such stray tourists as wished to bury themselves for a day or two in solitude, or artists who, like ourselves, preferred to enjoy the beauties of Nature undisturbed by the usual ebbing and flowing stream of sightseers.

As Carriston asserted, the accommodation if homely was good enough for two single men; the fare was plentiful, and our rooms were the picture of cleanliness. After a cursory inspection I felt sure that I could for a few weeks make myself very happy in these quarters.

I had not been twenty-four hours in the house before I found out one reason for the great change for the better in Charles Carriston's demeanor; knew his step was lighter, his eye brighter, his voice gayer, and his whole bearing altered. Whether the reason was a subject of congratulation or not I could not as yet say.

The boy was in love; in love as only a passionate, romantic, imaginative nature can be; and even then only once in a lifetime. Heedless, headstrong, impulsive, and entirely his own master, he had given his very heart and soul into the keeping of a woman.

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THAT a man of Carriston's rank, breeding and refinement should meet his fate within the walls of a lonely farm-house, beyond the Trossachs, seems incredible. One would scarcely expect to find among such humble surroundings a wife suitable to a man of his stamp. And yet when I saw the woman who had won him I neither wondered at the conquest nor did I blame him for weakness.

I made the great discovery on the morning after my arrival. Eager to taste the freshness of the morning air, I rose betimes and went for a short stroll. I returned, and whilst standing at the door of the house, was positively startled by the beauty of a girl who passed me and entered, as if she was a regular inhabitant of the place. Not a rosy Scotch lassie, such as one would expect to find indigenous to the soil; but a slim, graceful girl, with delicate classical features. A girl with a mass of knotted light hair, yet with the apparent anomaly, dark eyes, eyelashes, and eyebrows—a combination which, to my mind, makes a style of beauty rare, irresistible, and dangerous above all others. The features which filled the exquisite oval of her face were refined and faultless. Her complexion was pale, but its pallor in no way suggested anything save perfect health. To cut my enthusiastic description short, I may at once say it has never been my good fortune to cast my eyes on a lovelier creature than this young girl.

Although her dress was of the plainest and simplest description, no one could have mistaken her for a servant; and much as I admire the bonny, healthy Scotch country lassie, I felt sure that mountain air had never reared a being of this ethereally beautiful type. As she passed me I raised my hat instinctively. She gracefully bent her golden head, and bade me a quiet but unembarrassed good-morning. My eyes followed her until she vanished at the end of the dark passage which led to the back of the house. [219]

Even during the brief glimpse I enjoyed of this fair unknown a strange idea occurred to me. There was a remarkable likeness between her delicate features and those, scarcely less delicate, of Carriston. This resemblance may have added to the interest the girl's appearance awoke in my mind. Any way I entered our sitting-room, and, a prey to curiosity, and perhaps, hunger, awaited with much impatience the appearance of Carriston—and breakfast.

The former arrived first. Generally speaking he was afoot long before I was, but this morning we had reversed the usual order of things. As soon as I saw him I cried,

"Carriston! tell me at once who is the lovely girl I met outside? An angel with dark eyes and golden hair. Is she staying here like ourselves?"

A look of pleasure flashed into his eyes—a look which pretty well told me everything. Nevertheless he answered as carelessly as if such lovely young women were as common to the mountain side as rocks and brambles.

"I expect you mean Miss Rowan; a niece of our worthy landlady. She lives with her."

"She cannot be Scotch, with such a face and eyes?"

"Half-and-half. Her father was called an Englishman; but was, I believe, of French extraction. They say the name was originally Rohan." [220]

Carriston seemed to have made close inquiries as to Miss Rowan's parentage.

"But what brings her here?" I asked.

"She has nowhere else to go. Rowan was an artist. He married a sister of our hostess, and bore her away from her native land. Some years ago she died, leaving this one daughter. Last year the father died, penniless, they tell me, so the girl has since then lived with her only relative, her aunt."

"Well," I said, "as you seem to know all about her, you can introduce me by and by."

"With the greatest pleasure, if Miss Rowan permits," said Carriston. I was glad to hear him give the conditional promise with as much respect to the lady's wishes as if she had been a duchess.

Then, with the liberty a close friend may take, I drew toward me a portfolio, full, I presumed, of sketches of surrounding scenery. To my surprise Carriston jumped up hastily and snatched it from me. "They are too bad to look at," he said. As I struggled to regain possession, sundry strings broke, and, lo and behold! the floor was littered, not with delineations of rock, lake, and torrent, but with images of the young girl I had seen a few minutes before. Full face, profile, three quarter face, five, even seven eight face, all were there—each study perfectly executed by Carriston's clever pencil. I threw myself into a chair and laughed aloud, whilst the young man, blushing and discomfited, quickly huddled the portraits between the covers, just as a genuine Scotch lassie bore in the plentiful and, to me, very welcome breakfast.

Carriston did favor me with his company during the whole of that day; but, in spite of my having come to Scotland to enjoy his society, that day, from easily-guessed reasons, was the only one in which I had undisputed possession of my friend. [221]

Of course I bantered him a great deal on the portfolio episode. He took it in good part, attempting little or no defence. Indeed, before night he had told me, with all a boy's fervor, how he had loved Madeline Rowan at first sight, how in the short space of time which had elapsed since that meeting he had wooed her and won her; how good and beautiful she was; how he worshipped her; how happy he felt; how, when I went south, he should accompany me; and, after making a few necessary arrangements, return at once and bear his bride away.

I could only listen to him, and congratulate him. It was not my place to act the elder, and advise him either for or against the marriage. Carriston had only himself to please, and, if he made a rash step, only himself to blame for the consequences. And why should I have dissuaded? I who, in two days, envied the boy's good fortune.

I saw a great deal of Madeline Rowan. How strange and out-of-place her name and face seemed amid our surroundings. If at first somewhat shy and retiring, she soon, if only for Carriston's sake, consented to look upon me as a friend, and talked to me freely and unreservedly. Then I found that her nature was as sweet as her face. Such a conquest did she make of me that, save for one chimerical reason, I should have felt quite certain that Carriston had chosen well, and would be happy in wedding the girl of his choice, heedless of her humble position in the world, and absence of fitting wealth. When once his wife, I felt sure that if he cared for her to win social success her looks and bearing would insure it, and from the great improvement which, as I have already said, I noticed in his health and spirits, I believed that his marriage would make his life longer, happier, and better.

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Now for my objection, which seems almost a laughable one. I objected on the score of the extraordinary resemblance which, so far as a man may resemble a woman, existed between Charles Carriston and Madeline Rowan. The more I saw them together, the more I was struck by it. A stranger might well have taken them for twin brother and sister. The same delicate features, drawn in the same lines; the same soft, dark, dreamy eyes; even the same shaped heads. Comparing the two, it needed no phrenologist or physiognomist to tell you that where one excelled the other excelled; where one failed, the other was wanting. Now, could I have selected a wife for my friend, I would have chosen one with habits and constitution entirely different from his own. She should have been a bright, bustling woman, with lots of energy and common-sense—one who would have rattled him about and kept him going—not a lovely, dark-eyed, dreamy girl, who could for hours at a stretch make herself supremely happy if only sitting at her lover's feet and speaking no word. Yet they were a handsome couple, and never have I seen two people so utterly devoted to each other as those two seemed to be during those autumn days which I spent with them.

I soon had a clear proof of the closeness of their mental resemblance. One evening Carriston, Madeline, and I were sitting out-of-doors, watching the gray mist deepening in the valley at our feet. Two of the party were, of course, hand-in-hand, the third seated at a discreet distance—not so far away as to preclude conversation, but far enough off to be able to pretend that he saw and heard only what was intended for his eyes and ears.

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How certain topics, which I would have avoided discussing with Carriston, were started I hardly remember. Probably some strange tale had been passed down from wilder and even more solitary regions than ours—some ridiculous tale of Highland superstition, no doubt embellished and augmented by each one who repeated it to his fellows. From her awed talk I soon found that Madeline Rowan, perhaps by reason of the Scotch blood in her veins, was as firm a believer in things visionary and beyond nature as ever Charles Carriston in his silliest moments could be. As soon as I could I stopped the talk, and the next day, finding the girl for a few minutes alone, told her plainly that subjects of this kind should be kept as far as possible from her future husband's thoughts. She promised obedience, with dreamy eyes which looked as far away and full of visions as Carriston's.

"By the by," I said, "has he ever spoken to you about seeing strange things?"

"Yes; he has hinted at it."

"And you believe him?"

"Of course I do; he told me so."

This was unanswerable. "A pretty pair they will make," I muttered, as Madeline slipped from me to welcome her lover who was approaching. "They will see ghosts in every corner, and goblins behind every curtain."

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Nevertheless, the young people had no doubts about their coming bliss. Everything was going smoothly and pleasantly for them. Carriston had at once spoken to Madeline's aunt, and obtained the old Scotchwoman's ready consent to their union. I was rather vexed at his still keeping to his absurd whim, and concealing his true name. He said he was afraid of alarming her aunt by telling her he was passing under an *alias*, whilst if he gave Madeline his true reason for so doing she would be miserable. Moreover, I found he had formed the romantic plan of marrying her without telling her in what an enviable position she would be placed so far as worldly gear went. A kind of Lord Burleigh surprise no doubt commended itself to his imaginative brain.

The last day of my holiday came. I bade a long and sad farewell to lake and mountain, and, accompanied by Carriston, started for home. I did not see the parting proper between the young people—that was far too sacred a thing to be intruded upon—but even when that protracted affair was over, I waited many, many minutes whilst Carriston stood hand-in-hand with Madeline, comforting himself and her by reiterating "Only six weeks—six short weeks! And then—and then!" It was the girl who at last tore herself away, and then Carriston mounted reluctantly by my side on the rough vehicle.

From Edinburgh we travelled by the night train. The greater part of the way we had the compartment to ourselves. Carriston, as a lover will, talked of nothing but coming bliss and his plans for the future. After a while I grew quite weary of the monotony of the subject, and at last dozed off, and for some little time slept. The shrill whistle which told us a tunnel was at hand

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aroused me. My companion was sitting opposite to me, and as I glanced across at him my attention was arrested by the same strange intense look which I had on a previous occasion at Bettws-y-Coed noticed in his eyes—the same fixed stare—the same obliviousness to all that was passing. Remembering his request, I shook him, somewhat roughly, back to his senses. He regarded me for a moment vacantly, then said:

“Now I have found out what was wanting to make the power I told you of complete. I could see her if I wished.”

“Of course you can see her—in your mind’s eye. All lovers can do that.”

“If I tried I could see her bodily—know exactly what she is doing.” He spoke with an air of complete conviction.

“Then I hope, for the sake of modesty, you won’t try. It is now nearly three o’clock. She ought to be in bed and asleep.”

I spoke lightly, thinking it better to try and laugh him out of his folly. He took no notice of my sorry joke.

“No,” he said, quietly, “I am not going to try. But I know now what was wanting. Love—such love as mine—such love as hers—makes the connecting link, and enables sight or some other sense to cross over space, and pass through every material obstacle.”

“Look here, Carriston,” I said seriously, “you are talking as a madman talks. I don’t want to frighten you, but I am bound both as a doctor and your sincere friend to tell you that unless you cure yourself of these absurd delusions they will grow upon you, develop fresh forms, and you will probably end your days under restraint. Ask any doctor, he will tell you the same.”

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“Doctors are a clever race,” answered my strange young friend, “but they don’t know everything.”

So saying he closed his eyes and appeared to sleep.

We parted upon reaching London. Many kind words and wishes passed between us, and I gave him some well-meant, and, I believed, needed warnings. He was going down to see his uncle, the baronet. Then he had some matters to arrange with his lawyers, and above all, had to select a residence for himself and his wife. He would, no doubt, be in London for a short time. If possible he would come and see me. Any way he would write and let me know the exact date of his approaching marriage. If I could manage to come to it, so much the better. If not he would try, as they passed through town, to bring his bride to pay me a flying and friendly visit. He left me in the best of spirits, and I went back to my patients and worked hard to make up lost ground, and counteract whatever errors had been committed by my substitute.

Some six weeks afterward—late at night—whilst I was deep in a new and clever treatise on zymotics, a man, haggard, wild, unshorn, and unkempt, rushed past my startled servant, and entered the room in which I sat. He threw himself into a chair, and I was horrified to recognize in the intruder my clever and brilliant friend, Charles Carriston!

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V.

“THE end has come sooner than I expected.” These were the sad words I muttered to myself as waving my frightened servant away I closed the door, and stood alone with the supposed maniac. He rose and wrung my hand, then without a word sank back into his chair and buried his face in his hands. A sort of nervous trembling seemed to run through his frame. Deeply distressed I drew his hands from his face.

“Now, Carriston,” I said, as firmly as I could, “look up, and tell me what all this means. Look up, I say, man, and speak to me.”

He raised his eyes to mine, and kept them there, whilst a ghastly smile—a phantom humor—flickered across his white face. No doubt his native quickness told him what I suspected, so he looked me full and steadily in the face.

“No,” he said, “not as you think. But let there be no mistake. Question me. Talk to me. Put me to any test. Satisfy yourself, once for all, that I am as sane as you are.”

He spoke so rationally, his eyes met mine so unflinchingly, that I was rejoiced to know that my fears were as yet ungrounded. There was grief, excitement, want of rest in his appearance, but his general manner told me he was, as he said, as sane as I was.

“Thank heaven you can speak to me and look at me like this,” I exclaimed.

“You are satisfied then?” he said.

“On this point, yes. Now tell me what is wrong?”

Now that he had set my doubts at rest his agitation and excitement seemed to return. He grasped my hand convulsively.

“Madeline!” he whispered; “Madeline—my love—she is gone.”

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“Gone!” I repeated. “Gone where?”

“She is gone, I say—stolen from me by some black-hearted traitor—perhaps forever. Who can tell?”

“But, Carriston, surely, in so short a time her love cannot have been won by another. If so, all I

can say is—”

“What!” he shouted. “You have seen her! You in your wildest dreams to imagine that Madeline Rowan would leave me of her own free-will! No, sir; she has been stolen from me—entrapped—carried away—hidden. But I will find her, or I will kill the black-hearted villain who has done this.”

He rose and paced the room. His face was distorted with rage. He clinched and unclined his long slender hands.

“My dear fellow,” I said; “you are talking riddles. Sit down and tell me calmly what has happened. But, first of all, as you look utterly worn out, I will ring for my man to get you some food.”

“No,” he said; “I want nothing. Weary I am, for I have been to Scotland and back as fast as man can travel. I reached London a short time ago, and after seeing one man have come straight to you, my only friend, for help—it may be for protection. But I have eaten and I have drank, knowing I must keep my health and strength.”

However, I insisted on some wine being brought. He drank a glass, and then with a strange enforced calm, told me what had taken place. His tale was this:

After we had parted company on our return from Scotland, Carriston went down to the family seat in Oxfordshire, and informed his uncle of the impending change in his life. The baronet, an extremely old man, infirm and all but childish, troubled little about the matter. Every acre of his large property was strictly entailed, so his pleasure or displeasure could make but little alteration in his nephew’s prospects. Still, he was the head of the family, and Carriston was in duty bound to make the important news known to him. The young man made no secret of his approaching marriage, so in a very short time every member of the family was aware that the heir and future head was about to ally himself to a nobody. Knowing nothing of Madeline Rowan’s rare beauty and sweet nature Carriston’s kinsmen and kinswomen were sparing with their congratulations. Indeed, Mr. Ralph Carriston, the cousin whose name was coupled with such absurd suspicions, went so far as to write a bitter, sarcastic letter, full of ironical felicitations. This, and Charles Carriston’s haughty reply, did not make the affection between the cousins any stronger. Moreover, shortly afterward the younger man heard that inquiries were being made in the neighborhood of Madeline’s home as to her position and parentage. Feeling sure that only his cousin Ralph could have had the curiosity to institute such inquiries, he wrote and thanked him for the keen interest he was manifesting in his future welfare, but begged that hereafter Mr. Carriston would apply to him direct for any information he wanted. The two men were now no longer on speaking terms.

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Charles Carriston in his present frame of mind cared little whether his relatives wished to bless or forbid the banns. He was passionately in love, and at once set about making arrangements for a speedy marriage. Although Madeline was still ignorant of the exalted position held by her lover—although she came to him absolutely penniless—he was resolved in the matter of money to treat her as generously as he would have treated the most eligible damsel in the country. There were several legal questions to be set at rest concerning certain property he wished to settle upon her. This of course caused delay. As soon as they were adjusted to his own, or rather to his lawyer’s satisfaction, he purposed going to Scotland and carrying away his beautiful bride. In the meantime he cast about for a residence.

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Somewhat Bohemian in his nature, Carriston had no intention of settling down just yet to live the life of an ordinary moneyed Englishman. His intention was to take Madeline abroad for some months. He had fixed upon Cannes as a desirable place at which to winter, but having grown somewhat tired of hotel life, wished to rent a furnished house. He had received from an agent to whom he had been advised to apply the refusal of a house, which, from the glowing description given, seemed the one above all others he wanted. As an early decision was insisted upon, my impulsive young friend thought nothing of crossing the Channel and running down to the south of France to see, with his own eyes, that the much-lauded place was worthy of the fair being who was to be its temporary mistress.

He wrote to Madeline, and told her he was going from home for a few days. He said he should be travelling the greater part of the time, so it should be no use her writing to him until his return. He did not reveal the object of his journey. Were Madeline to know it was to choose a winter residence at Cannes she would be filled with amazement, and the innocent deception he was still keeping up would not be carried through to the romantic end which he pictured to himself.

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The day before he started for France Madeline wrote that her aunt was very unwell, but said nothing as to her malady causing any alarm. Perhaps Carriston thought less about the old Scotch widow than her relationship and kindness to Miss Rowan merited. He started on his travels without any forebodings of evil.

His journey to Cannes and back was hurried; he wasted no time on the road, but was delayed for two days at the place itself before he could make final arrangements with the owner and the present occupier of the house. Thinking he was going to start every moment, he did not write to Madeline—at the rate at which he meant to return, a letter posted in England would reach her almost as quickly as if posted at Cannes.

He reached his home, which for the last few weeks had been Oxford, and found two letters waiting for him. The first, dated on the day he left England, was from Madeline. It told him that

her aunt's illness had suddenly taken a fatal turn—that she had died that day, almost without warning. The second letter was anonymous.

It was written apparently by a woman, and advised Mr. Carr to look sharply after his lady-love or he would find himself left in the lurch. The writer would not be surprised to hear some fine day that she had eloped with a certain gentleman who should be nameless. This precious epistle, probably an emanation of feminine spite, Carriston treated as it deserved—he tore it up and threw the pieces to the wind.

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But the thought of Madeline being alone at that lonely house troubled him greatly. The dead woman had no sons or daughters; all the anxiety and responsibility connected with her affairs would fall on the poor girl. The next day he threw himself into the Scotch Express and started for her far-away home.

On arriving there he found it occupied only by the rough farm servants. They seemed in a state of wonderment, and volubly questioned Carriston as to the whereabouts of Madeline. The question sent a chill of fear to his heart. He answered their questions by others, and soon learned all they had to communicate.

Little enough it was. On the morning after the old woman's funeral Madeline had gone to Callendar to ask the advice of an old friend of her aunt's as to what steps should now be taken. She had neither been to this friend, nor had she returned home. She had, however, sent a message that she must go to London at once, and would write from there. That was the last heard of her—all that was known about her.

Upon hearing this news Carriston became a prey to the acutest terror—an emotion which was quite inexplicable to the honest people, his informants. The girl had gone, but she had sent word whither she had gone. True, they did not know the reason for her departure, so sudden and without luggage of any description; true, she had not written as promised, but no doubt they would hear from her to-morrow. Carriston knew better. Without revealing the extent of his fears he flew back to Callendar. Inquiries at the railway station informed him that she had gone, or had purposed going, to London; but whether she ever reached it, or whether any trace of her could be found there, was at least a matter of doubt. No good could be gained by remaining in Scotland, so he travelled back at once to town, half-distracted, sleepless, and racking his brain to know where to look for her.

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"She has been decoyed away," he said in conclusion. "She is hidden, imprisoned somewhere. And I know, as well as if he told me, who has done this thing. I can trace Ralph Carriston's cursed hand through it all."

I glanced at him askance. This morbid suspicion of his cousin amounted almost to monomania. He had told the tale of Madeline's disappearance clearly and tersely; but when he began to account for it his theory was a wild and untenable one. However much he suspected Ralph Carriston of longing to stand in his shoes, I could see no object for the crime of which he accused him, that of decoying away Madeline Rowan.

"But why should he have done this?" I asked. "To prevent your marriage? You are young; he must have foreseen that you would marry some day."

Carriston leaned toward me, and dropped his voice to a whisper.

"This is his reason," he said; "this is why I come to you. You are not the only one who has entirely misread my nature, and seen a strong tendency to insanity in it. Of course I know that you are all wrong, but I know that Ralph Carriston has stolen my love—stolen her because he thinks and hopes that her loss will drive me mad—perhaps drive me to kill myself. I went straight to him—I have just come from him. Brand, I tell you that when I taxed him with the crime—when I raved at him—when I threatened to tear the life out of him—his cold, wicked eyes leaped with joy. I heard him mutter between his teeth, 'Men have been put in strait-waistcoats for less than this.' Then I knew why he had done this. I curbed myself and left him. Most likely he will try to shut me up as a lunatic; but I count upon your protection—count upon your help to find my love."

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That any man could be guilty of such a subtle refinement of crime as that of which he accused his cousin seemed to me, if not impossible, at least improbable. But as at present there was no doubt about my friend's sanity I promised my aid readily.

"And now," I said, "my dear boy, I won't hear another word to-night. Nothing can be done until to-morrow; then we will consult as to what steps should be taken. Drink this and go to bed; yes, you are as sane as I am, but, remember, insomnia soon drives the strongest man out of his senses."

I poured out an opiate. He drank it obediently. Before I left him for the night I saw him in bed and sleeping a heavy sleep.

VI.

THE advantage to one who writes, not a tale of imagination, but a simple record of events, is this: He need not be bound by the recognized canons of the story-telling art—need not exercise his ingenuity to mislead his reader—need not suppress some things and lay undue stress on others to create mysteries to be cleared up at the end of the tale. Therefore, using the privilege of a plain narrator, I shall here give some account of what became of Miss Rowan, as, so far as I can remember, I heard it some time afterward from her own lips.

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The old Scotchwoman's funeral over, and those friends who had been present departed, Madeline was left in the little farm-house alone, save for the presence of the two servants. Several kind bodies had offered to come and stay with her, but she had declined the offers. She was in no mood for company, and perhaps being of such a different race and breed, would not have found much comfort in the rough homely sympathy which was offered to her. She preferred being alone with her grief—grief which after all was bound to be much lightened by the thought of her own approaching happiness, for the day was drawing near when her lover would cross the border and bear his bonny bride away. She felt sure that she would not be long alone—that the moment Carriston heard of her aunt's death he would come to her assistance. In such a peaceful, God-fearing neighborhood she had no fear of being left without protection. Moreover, her position in the house was well-defined. The old woman, who was childless, had left her niece all of which she died possessed. So Madeline decided to wait quietly until she heard from her lover.

Still there were business matters to be attended to, and at the funeral Mr. Douglas, of Callendar, the executor under the will, had suggested that an early interview would be desirable. He offered to drive out to the little farm the next day, but Miss Rowan, who had to see to some feminine necessaries which could only be supplied by shops, decided that she would come to the town instead of troubling Mr. Douglas to drive so far out.

Madeline, in spite of the superstitious element in her character, was a brave girl, and in spite of her refined style of beauty, strong and healthy. Early hours were the rule in that humble home, so before seven o'clock in the morning she was ready to start on her drive to the little town. At first she thought of taking with her the boy who did the rough out-door work; but he was busy about something or other, and besides, was a garrulous lad who would be certain to chatter the whole way, and this morning Miss Rowan wanted no companions save her own mingled thoughts of sadness and joy. She knew every inch of the road; she feared no evil; she would be home again long before nightfall; the pony was quiet and sure-footed—so away went Madeline in the strong primitive vehicle on her lonely twelve miles' drive through the fair scenery.

She passed few people on the road. Indeed, she remembered meeting no one except one or two pedestrian tourists, who like sensible men were doing a portion of their day's task in the early morning. I have no doubt but Miss Rowan seemed to them a passing vision of loveliness.

But when she was a mile or two from Callendar, she saw a boy on a pony. The boy, who must have known her by sight, stopped and handed her a telegram. She had to pay several shillings for the delivery, or intended delivery of the message, so far from the station. The boy galloped away, congratulating himself on having been spared a long ride, and Miss Rowan tore open the envelope left in her hands.

The message was brief: "Mr. Carr is seriously ill. Come at once. You will be met in London."

Madeline did not scream or faint. She gave one low moan of pain, set her teeth, and with the face of one in a dream drove as quickly as she could to Callendar, straight to the railway station.

Fortunately, or rather unfortunately, she had money with her, so she did not waste time in going to Mr. Douglas. In spite of the crushing blow she had received the girl had all her wits about her. A train would start in ten minutes' time. She took her ticket, then found an idler outside the station, and paid him to take the pony and carriage back to the farm, with the message as repeated to Carriston.

The journey passed like a long dream. The girl could think of nothing but her lover, dying, dying—perhaps dead before she could reach him. The miles flew by unnoticed; twilight crept on; the carriage grew dark; at last—London at last! Miss Rowan stepped out on the broad platform, not knowing what to do or where to turn. Presently a tall well-dressed man came up to her, and removing his hat, addressed her by name. The promise as to her being met had been kept.

She clasped her hands. "Tell me—oh tell me, he is not dead," she cried.

"Mr. Carr is not dead. He is ill, very ill—delirious and calling for you."

"Where is he? Oh take me to him!"

"He is miles and miles from here—at a friend's house. I have been deputed to meet you and to accompany you, if you feel strong enough to continue the journey at once."

"Come," said Madeline. "Take me to him."

"Your luggage?" asked the gentleman.

"I have none. Come!"

"You must take some refreshment."

"I need nothing. Come!"

The gentleman glanced at his watch. "There is just time," he said. He called a cab, told the driver to go at top speed. They reached Paddington just in time to catch the mail.

During the drive across London Madeline asked many questions, and learned from her companion that Mr. Carr had been staying for a day or two at a friend's house in the west of England. That yesterday he had fallen from his horse and sustained such injuries that his life was despaired of. He had been continually calling for Madeline. They had found her address on a letter, and had telegraphed as soon as possible—for which act Miss Rowan thanked her companion with tears in her eyes.

Her conductor did not say much of his own accord, but in replying to her questions he was

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politely sympathetic. She thought of little outside the fearful picture which filled every corner of her brain, but from her conductor's manner received the impression that he was a medical adviser who had seen the sufferer, and assisted in the treatment of the case. She did not ask his name, nor did he reveal it.

At Paddington he placed her in a ladies' carriage and left her.

He was a smoker, he said. She wondered somewhat at this desertion. Then the train sped down West. At the large stations the gentleman came to her and offered her refreshments. Hunger seemed to have left her; but she accepted a cup of tea once or twice. At last sorrow, fatigue, and weakness produced by such a prolonged fast had their natural effect. With the tears still on her lashes the girl fell asleep, and must have slept for many miles: a sleep unbroken by stoppages at stations.

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Her conductor at last aroused her. He stood at the door of the carriage. "We must get out here," he said. All the momentarily-forgotten anguish came back to her as she stood beside him on the almost unoccupied platform.

"Are we there at last?" she asked.

"I am sorry to say we have still a long drive; would you like to rest first?"

"No—no. Come on, if you please." She spoke with feverish eagerness.

The man bowed. "A carriage waits," he said.

Outside the station was a carriage of some sort, drawn by one horse, and driven by a man muffled up to the eyes. It was still night, but Madeline fancied dawn could not be far off. Her conductor opened the door of the carriage and waited for her to enter.

She paused. "Ask him—that man must know if—"

"I am most remiss," said the gentleman. He exchanged a few words with the driver, and coming back, told Madeline that Mr. Carr was still alive, sensible, and expecting her eagerly.

"Oh, please, please drive fast," said the poor girl, springing into the carriage. The gentleman seated himself beside her, and for a long time they drove on in silence. At last they stopped. The dawn was just glimmering. They alighted in front of a house. The door was open. Madeline entered swiftly. "Which way—which way?" she asked. She was too agitated to notice any surroundings; her one wish was to reach her lover.

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"Allow me," said the conductor, passing her. "This way; please follow me." He went up a short flight of stairs, then paused, and opened a door quietly. He stood aside for the girl to enter. The room was dimly lit, and contained a bed with drawn curtains. Madeline flew past her travelling companion, and as she threw herself on her knees beside the bed upon which she expected to see the helpless and shattered form of the man she loved, heard, or fancied she heard, the door locked behind her.

VII.

CARRISTON slept on late into the next day. Knowing that every moment of bodily and mental rest was a precious boon to him, I left him undisturbed. He was still fast asleep when, about mid-day, a gentleman called upon me. He sent up no card, and I supposed he came to consult me professionally.

The moment he entered my room I recognized him. He was the thin-lipped, gentlemanly person whom I had met on my journey to Bournemouth last spring—the man who had seemed so much impressed by my views on insanity, and had manifested such interest in the description I had given—without mentioning any name—of Carriston's peculiar mind.

I should have at once claimed acquaintanceship with my visitor, but before I could speak he advanced, and apologized gracefully for his intrusion.

"You will forgive it," he added, "when I tell you my name is Ralph Carriston."

Remembering our chance conversation, the thought that, after all, Charles Carriston's wild suspicion was well-founded, flashed through me like lightning. My great hope was that my visitor might not remember my face as I remembered his. I bowed coldly but said nothing.

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"I believe, Dr. Brand," he continued, "you have a young relative of mine at present staying with you?"

"Yes, Mr. Carriston is my guest," I answered. "We are old friends."

"Ah, I did not know that. I do not remember having heard him mention your name as a friend. But as it is so, no one knows better than you do the unfortunate state of his health. How do you find him to-day—violent?"

I pretended to ignore the man's meaning, and answered smilingly, "Violence is the last thing I should look for. He is tired out and exhausted by travel, and is in great distress. That, I believe, is the whole of his complaint."

"Yes, yes; to be sure, poor boy! His sweetheart has left him, or something. But as a doctor you must know that his mental condition is not quite what it should be. His friends are very anxious about him. They fear that a little restraint—temporary, I hope—must be put upon his actions. I called to ask your advice and aid."

"In what, Mr. Carriston?"

"In this. A young man can't be left free to go about threatening his friends' lives. I have brought Dr. Daley with me; you know him, of course. He is below in my carriage. I will call him up, with your permission. He could then see poor Charles, and the needful certificate could be signed by you two doctors."

"Mr. Carriston," I said decidedly, "let me tell you in the plainest words that your cousin is at present as fully in possession of his wits as you are. Dr. Daley, whoever he may be, could sign no certificate, and in our day no asylum would dare to keep Mr. Carriston within its walls."

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An unpleasant sinister look crossed my listener's face, but his voice still remained bland and suave. "I am sorry to differ from you, Dr. Brand," he said, "but I know him better than you do. I have seen him as you have never yet seen him. Only last night he came to me in a frantic state. I expected every moment he would make a murderous attack on me."

"Perhaps he fancied he had some reasons for anger," I said.

Ralph Carriston looked at me with those cold eyes of which his cousin had spoken. "If the boy has succeeded in converting you to any of his delusions I can only say that doctors are more credulous than I fancied. But the question is not worth arguing. You decline to assist me, so I must do without you. Good-morning, Dr. Brand."

He left the room as gracefully as he had entered it. I remained in a state of doubt. It was curious that Ralph Carriston turned out to be the man whom I had met in the train; but the evidence offered by the coincidence was not enough to convict him of the crime of endeavoring to drive his cousin mad by such a far-fetched stratagem as the inveigling away of Madeline Rowan. Besides, even in wishing to prove Charles Carriston mad he had much to say on his side. Supposing him to be innocent of having abducted Madeline, Carriston's violent behavior on the preceding evening must have seemed very much like insanity. In spite of the aversion with which Ralph Carriston inspired me, I scarcely knew which side to believe.

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Carriston still slept; so when I went out on my afternoon rounds I left a note, begging him to remain in the house until my return. Then I found him up, dressed, and looking much more like himself. When I entered, dinner was on the table; so not until that meal was over could we talk unrestrainedly upon the subject which was uppermost in both our minds.

As soon as we were alone I turned toward my guest. "And now," I said, "we must settle what to do. There seems to me to be but one course open. You have plenty of money, so your best plan is to engage skilled police assistance. Young ladies can't be spirited away like this without leaving a trace."

To my surprise Carriston flatly objected to this course. "No," he said, "I shall not go to the police. The man who took her away has placed her where no police can find her. I must find her myself."

"Find her yourself! Why, it may be months, years, before you do that! Good heavens, Carriston! She may be murdered, or worse—"

"I shall know if any further evil happens to her—then I shall kill Ralph Carriston."

"But you tell me you have no clew whatever to trace her by. Do talk plainly. Tell me all or nothing."

Carriston smiled very faintly. "No clew that you, at any rate, will believe in," he said. "But I know this much, she is a prisoner somewhere. She is unhappy, but not, as yet, ill-treated. Heavens! do you think if I did not know this I should keep my senses for an hour?"

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"How can you possibly know it?"

"By that gift—that extra sense or whatever it is—which you deride. I knew it would come to me some day, but I little thought how I should welcome it. I know that in some way I shall find her by it. I tell you I have already seen her three times. I may see her again at any moment when the strange fit comes over me."

All this fantastic nonsense was spoken so simply and with such an air of conviction that once more my suspicions as to the state of his mind were aroused. In spite of the brave answers which I had given Mr. Ralph Carriston, I felt that common-sense was undeniably on his side.

"Tell me what you mean by your strange fit," I said, resolved to find out the nature of Carriston's fancies or hallucinations. "Is it a kind of trance you fall into?"

He seemed loath to give any information on the subject, but I pressed him for an answer.

"Yes," he said at last. "It must be a kind of trance. An indescribable feeling comes over me. I know that my eyes are fixed on some object—presently that object vanishes, and I see Madeline."

"How do you see her?"

"She seems to stand in a blurred circle of light as cast by a magic lantern. That is the only way that I can describe it. But her figure is plain and clear—she might be close to me. The carpet on which she stands I can see, the chair on which she sits, the table on which she leans her hand, anything she touches I can see; but no more. I have seen her talking. I knew she was entreating some one, but that some one was invisible. Yet, if she touched that person, the virtue of her touch would enable me to see him."

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So far as I could see, Carriston's case appeared to be one of over-wrought, or unduly-

stimulated imagination. His I had always considered to be a mind of the most peculiar construction. In his present state of love, grief, and suspense these hallucinations might come in the same way in which dreams come. For a little while I sat in silence, considering how I could best combat with and dispel his remarkable delusions. Before I had arrived at any decision I was called away to see a patient. I was but a short time engaged. Then I returned to Carriston, intending to continue my inquiries.

Upon re-entering the room I found him sitting, as I had left him—directly opposite to the door. His face was turned fully toward me, and I trembled as I caught sight of it. He was leaning forward; his hands on the table-cloth, his whole frame rigid, his eyes staring in one direction, yet, I knew, capable of seeing nothing that I could see. He seemed even oblivious to sound, for I entered the room and closed the door behind me without causing him to change look or position. The moment I saw the man I knew that he had been overtaken by what he called the strange fit.

My first impulse—a natural one—was to arouse him; but second thoughts told me that this was an opportunity for studying his disease which should not be lost—I felt that I could call it by no other name than disease—so I proceeded to make a systematic examination of his symptoms.

I leaned across the table; and, with my face about a foot from his, looked straight into his eyes. They betrayed no sign of recognition—no knowledge of my presence. I am ashamed to say I could not divest myself of the impression that they were looking through me. The pupils were greatly dilated. The lids were wide apart. I lighted a taper and held it before them, but could see no expansion of the iris. It was a case, I confess, entirely beyond my comprehension. I had no experience which might serve as a guide as to what was the best course to adopt. All I could do was to stand and watch carefully for any change.

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Save for his regular breathing and a sort of convulsive twitching of his fingers, Carriston might have been a corpse or a statue. His face could scarcely grow paler than it had been before the attack. Altogether, it was an uncomfortable sight: a creepy sight—this motionless man, utterly regardless of all that went on around him, and seeing, or giving one the idea that he saw something far away. I sighed as I looked at the strange spectacle, and foresaw what the end must surely be. But although I longed for him to awake, I determined on this occasion to let the trance, or fit, run its full course, that I might notice in what manner and how soon consciousness returned.

I must have waited and watched some ten minutes—minutes which seemed to me interminable. At last I saw the lips quiver, the lids flicker once or twice, and eventually close wearily over the eyes. The unnatural tension of every muscle seemed to relax, and, sighing deeply, and apparently quite exhausted, Carriston sank back into his chair with beads of perspiration forming on his white brow. The fit was over.

In a moment I was at his side and forcing a glass of wine down his throat. He looked up at me and spoke. His voice was faint, but his words were quite collected.

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“I have seen her again,” he said. “She is well; but so unhappy. I saw her kneel down and pray. She stretched her beautiful arms out to me. And yet I know not where to look for her—my poor love! my poor love!”

I waited until I thought he had sufficiently recovered from his exhaustion to talk without injurious consequences. “Carriston,” I said, “let me ask you one question: Are these trances or visions voluntary or not?”

He reflected for a few moments. “I can’t quite tell you,” he said; “or, rather, I would put it in this way. I do not think I can exercise my power at will; but I can feel when the fit is coming on me, and, I believe, can if I choose stop myself from yielding to it.”

“Very well. Now listen. Promise me you will fight against these seizures as much as you can. If you don’t you will be raving mad in a month.”

“I can’t promise that,” said Carriston, quietly. “See her at times I must, or I shall die. But I promise to yield as seldom as may be. I know, as well as you do, that the very exhaustion I now feel must be injurious to any one.”

In truth, he looked utterly worn out. Very much dissatisfied with his concession, the best I could get from him, I sent him to bed, knowing that natural rest, if he could get it, would do more than anything else toward restoring a healthy tone to his mind.

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VIII.

ALTHOUGH Carriston stated that he came to me for aid, and, it may be, for protection, he manifested the greatest reluctance in following any advice I offered him. The obstinacy of his refusal to obtain the assistance of the police placed me in a predicament. That Madeline Rowan had really disappeared I was, of course, compelled to believe. It might even be possible that she was kept against her will in some place of concealment. In such a case it behooved us to take proper steps to trace her. Her welfare should not depend upon the hallucinations and eccentric ideas of a man half out of his senses with love and grief. I all but resolved, even at the risk of forfeiting Carriston’s friendship, to put the whole matter in the hands of the police, unless in the course of a day or two we heard from the girl herself, or Carriston suggested some better plan.

Curiously enough, although refusing to be guided by me, he made no suggestion on his own account. He was racked by fear and suspense, yet his only idea of solving difficulties seemed to be that of waiting. He did nothing. He simply waited, as if he expected that chance would bring

what he should have been searching for high and low.

Some days passed before I could get a tardy consent that aid should be sought. Even then he would not go to the proper quarter; but he allowed me to summon to our councils a man who advertised himself as being a private detective. This man, or one of his men, came at our call, and heard what was wanted of him. Carriston reluctantly gave him one of Madeline's photographs. He also told him that only by watching and spying on Ralph Carriston's every action could he hope to obtain the clew. I did not much like the course adopted, nor did I like the look of the man to whom the inquiry was intrusted; but at any rate something was being done. [249]

A week passed without any news from our agent. Carriston, in truth, did not seem to expect any. I believe he only employed the man in deference to my wishes. He moved about the house in a disconsolate fashion. I had not told him of my interview with his cousin, but had cautioned him on the rare occasions upon which he went out of doors to avoid speaking to strangers, and my servants had strict instructions to prevent any one coming in and taking my guest by surprise.

For I had during those days opened a confidential inquiry on my own account. I wanted to learn something about this Mr. Ralph Carriston. So I asked a man who knew everybody to find out all about him.

He reported that Ralph Carriston was a man well known about London. He was married and had a house in Dorsetshire; but the greater part of his time was spent in town. Once he was supposed to be well-off; but now it was the general opinion that every acre he owned was mortgaged, and that he was much pressed for money. "But," my informant said, "there is but one life between him and the reversion to large estates, and that life is a poor one. I believe even now there is talk about the man who stands in his way being mad. If so, Ralph Carriston will get the management of everything."

After this news I felt it more than ever needful to keep a watchful eye on my friend. So far as I knew there had been no recurrence of the trance, and I began to hope that proper treatment would effect a complete cure, when, to my great alarm and annoyance, Carriston, while sitting with me, suddenly and without warning fell into the same strange state of body and mind as previously described. This time he was sitting in another part of the room. After watching him for a minute or two, and just as I was making up my mind to arouse him and scold him thoroughly for his folly, he sprung to his feet, and shouting, "Let her go! Loose her, I say!" rushed violently across the room—so violently, that I had barely time to interpose and prevent him from coming into contact with the opposite wall. [250]

Upon returning to his senses he told me, with great excitement, that he had again seen Madeline; moreover, this time he had seen a man with her—a man who had placed his hand upon her wrist and kept it there; and so, according to Carriston's wild reasoning, became, on account of the contact, visible to him.

He told me he had watched them for some moments, until the man, tightening his grip on the girl's arm, endeavored, he thought, to lead her or induce her to follow him somewhere. At this juncture, unaware that he was gazing at a vision, he had rushed to her assistance in the frantic way I have described—then he awoke.

He also told me he had studied the man's features and general appearance most carefully with a view to future recognition. All these ridiculous statements were made as he made the former ones, with the air of one relating simple, undeniable facts—one speaking the plain, unvarnished truth, and expecting full credence to be given to his words. [251]

It was too absurd! too sad! It was evident to me that the barrier between his hallucinations, dreams, visions, or what he chose to call them, and pure insanity, was now a very slight and fragile one. But before I gave up his case as hopeless I determined to make another strong appeal to his common-sense. I told him of his cousin's visit to me—of his intentions and proposition. I begged him to consider what consequences his extraordinary beliefs and extravagant actions must eventually entail. He listened attentively and calmly.

"You see now," he said, "how right I was in attributing all this to Ralph Carriston—how right I was to come to you, a doctor of standing, who can vouch for my sanity."

"Vouch for your sanity! How can I when you sit here and talk such arrant nonsense, and expect me to believe it? When you jump from your chair and rush madly at some visionary foe? Sane as you may be in all else, any evidence I could give in your favor must break down in cross-examination if an inkling of these things got about. Come, Carriston, be reasonable, and prove your sanity by setting about this search for Miss Rowan in a proper way."

He made no reply, but walked up and down the room apparently in deep thought. My words seemed to have had no effect upon him. Presently he seated himself; and, as if to avoid returning to the argument, drew a book at hazard from my shelves and began to read. He opened the volume at random, but after reading a few lines seemed struck by something that met his eyes, and in a few minutes was deeply immersed in the contents of the book. I glanced at it to see what had so awakened his interest. By a curious fatality he had chosen a book the very worst for him in his present frame of mind—Gilchrist's recently published life of William Blake, that masterly memoir of a man who was on certain points as mad as Carriston himself. I was about to remonstrate, when he laid down the volume and turned to me. [252]

"Varley, the painter," he said, "was a firm believer in Blake's visions."

"Varley was a bigger fool than Blake," I retorted. "Fancy his sitting down and watching his clever but mad friend draw spectral heads, and believing them to be genuine portraits of dead

kings whose forms condescended to appear to Blake!"

A sudden thought seemed to strike Carriston. "Will you give me some paper and chalk?" he asked. Upon being furnished with these materials he seated himself at the table and began to draw. At least a dozen times he sketched, with his usual rapidity, some object or another, and a dozen times, after a moment's consideration, threw each sketch aside with an air of disappointment and began a fresh one. At last one of his attempts seemed to come up to his requirements. "I have it now, exactly!" he cried with joy—even triumph—in his voice. He spent some time in putting finishing touches to the successful sketch, then he handed me the paper.

"That is the man I saw just now with Madeline," he said. "When I find him I shall find her." He spoke with all sincerity and conviction. I looked at the paper with, I am bound to say, a great amount of curiosity.

No matter from what visionary source Carriston had drawn his inspiration, his sketch was vigorous and natural enough. I have already mentioned his wonderful power of drawing portraits from memory, so was willing to grant that he might have reproduced the outline of some face which had somewhere struck him. Yet why should it have been this one? His drawing represented the three quarter face of a man—an ordinary man—apparently between forty and fifty years of age. It was a coarse-featured, ill-favored face, with a ragged ruff of hair round the chin. It was not the face of a gentleman, nor even the face of a gentle-nurtured man; and the artist, by a few cunning strokes, had made it wear a crafty and sullen look. The sketch, as I write this, lies before me, so that I am not speaking from memory. [253]

Now, there are some portraits of which, without having seen the original, we say, "What splendid likenesses these must be." It was so with Carriston's sketch. Looking at it you felt sure it was exactly like the man whom it was intended to represent. So that, with the certain amount of art knowledge which I am at least supposed to possess, it was hard for me, after examining the drawing and recognizing the true artist's touch in every line, to bring myself to accept the fact that it was but the outcome of a diseased imagination. As, at this very moment, I glance at that drawing, I scarcely blame myself for the question that faintly frames itself in my innermost heart. "Could it be possible—could there be in certain organizations powers not yet known—not yet properly investigated?"

My thought, supposing such a thought was ever there—was not discouraged by Carriston, who, speaking as if his faith in the bodily existence of the man whose portrait lay in my hand was unassailable, said, [254]

"I noticed that his general appearance was that of a countryman—an English peasant; so in the country I shall find my love. Moreover, it will be easy to identify the man, as the top joint is missing from the middle finger of his right hand. As it lay on Madeline's arm I noticed that."

I argued with him no more. I felt that words would be but wasted.

IX.

A DAY or two after I had witnessed what I must call Carriston's second seizure we were favored with a visit from the man whose services we had secured to trace Madeline. Since he had received his instructions we had heard nothing of his proceeding until he now called to report progress in person. Carriston had not expressed the slightest curiosity as to where the man was or what he was about. Probably he looked upon the employment of this private detective as nothing more useful than a salve to my conscience. That Madeline was only to be found through the power which he professed to hold of seeing her in his visions was, I felt certain, becoming a rooted belief of his. Whenever I expressed my surprise that our agent had brought or sent no information, Carriston shrugged his shoulders, and assured me that from the first he knew the man's researches would be fruitless. However, the fellow had called at last, and, I hoped, had brought us good news.

He was a glib-tongued man, who spoke in a confident, matter-of-fact way. When he saw us he rubbed his hands as one who had brought affairs to a successful issue, and now meant to reap praise and other rewards. His whole bearing told me he had made an important discovery; so I begged him to be seated, and give us his news. [255]

Carriston gave him a careless glance, and stood at some little distance from us. He looked as if he thought the impending communication scarcely worth the trouble of listening to. He might, indeed, from his looks, have been the most disinterested person of the three. He even left me to do the questioning.

"Now, then, Mr. Sharpe," I said, "let us hear if you have earned your money."

"I think so, sir," replied Sharpe, looking curiously at Carriston, who, strange to say, heard this answer with supreme indifference.

"I think I may say I have, sir," continued the detective—"that is if the gentlemen can identify these articles as being the young lady's property."

Thereupon he produced from a thick letter-case a ribbon in which was stuck a silver pin, mounted with Scotch pebbles, an ornament that I remembered having seen Madeline wear. Mr. Sharpe handed them to Carriston. He examined them, and I saw his cheeks flush and his eyes grow bright.

"How did you come by this?" he cried, pointing to the silver ornament.

"I'll tell you presently, sir. Do you recognize it?"

"I gave it to Miss Rowan myself."

"Then we are on the right track," I cried, joyfully. "Go on, Mr. Sharpe."

"Yes, gentlemen, we are certainly on the right track; but after all, it isn't my fault if the track don't lead exactly where you wish. You see, when I heard of this mysterious disappearance of the lady, I began to concoct my own theory. I said to myself, when a young and beautiful—"

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"Confound your theories!" cried Carriston fiercely. "Go on with your tale."

The man gave his interrupter a spiteful glance. "Well, sir," he said, "as you gave me strict instructions to watch a certain gentleman closely, I obeyed those instructions, of course, although I knew I was on a fool's errand."

"Will you go on?" cried Carriston. "If you know where Miss Rowan is, say so; your money will be paid you the moment I find her."

"I don't say I exactly know where to find the lady, but I can soon know if you wish me to."

"Tell your tale your own way, but as shortly as possible," I said, seeing that my excitable friend was preparing for another outburst.

"I found there was nothing to be gained by keeping watch on the gentleman you mentioned, sir, so I went to Scotland and tried back from there. As soon as I worked on my own lay I found out all about it. The lady went from Callendar to Edinburgh, from Edinburgh to London, from London to Folkestone, and from Folkestone to Boulong."

I glanced at Carriston. All his calmness seemed to have returned. He was leaning against the mantelpiece, and appeared quite unmoved by Mr. Sharpe's clear statement as to the route Madeline had taken.

"Of course," continued Mr. Sharpe, "I was not quite certain I was tracking the right person, although her description corresponded with the likeness you gave me. But as you are sure this article of jewelry belonged to the lady you want, the matter is beyond a doubt."

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"Of course," I said, seeing that Carriston had no intention of speaking. "Where did you find it?"

"It was left behind, in a bedroom of one of the principal hotels in Folkestone. I did go over to Boulong, but after that I thought I had learned all you would care to know."

There was something in the man's manner which made me dread what was coming. Again I looked at Carriston. His lips were curved with contempt, but he still kept silence.

"Why not have pursued your inquiries past Boulong?" I asked.

"For this reason, sir. I had learned enough. The theory I had concocted was the right one after all. The lady went to Edinburgh alone, right enough: but she didn't leave Edinburgh alone, nor she didn't leave London alone, nor she didn't stay at Folkestone—where I found the pin—alone, nor she didn't go to Boulong alone. She was accompanied by a young gentleman who called himself Mr. Smith; and what's more, she called herself Mrs. Smith. Perhaps she was; as they lived like man and wife."

Whether the fellow was right or mistaken, this explanation of Madeline's disappearance seemed to give me what I can only compare to a smack in the face. I stared at the speaker in speechless astonishment. If the tale he told so glibly and circumstantially was true, farewell, so far as I was concerned, to belief in the love or purity of women. Madeline Rowan, that creature of a poet's dream, on the eve of her marriage with Charles Carriston to fly, whether wed or unwed mattered little, with another man! And yet, she was but a woman. Carriston—or Carr, as she only knew him—was in her eyes poor. The companion of her flight might have won her with gold. Such things have been. Still—

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My rapid and wrongful meditations were cut short in an unexpected way. Suddenly I saw Mr. Sharpe dragged bodily out of his chair and thrown on the floor, while Carriston, standing over him, thrashed the man vigorously with his own ash stick—a convenient weapon, so convenient that I felt Mr. Sharpe could not have selected a stick more appropriate for his own chastisement. So Carriston seemed to think, for he laid on cheerfully some eight or ten good cutting strokes.

Nevertheless, being a respectable doctor and a man of peace, I was compelled to interfere. I held Carriston's arm while Mr. Sharpe struggled to his feet, and after collecting his hat and his pocket-book, stood glaring vengefully at his assailant, and rubbing the while such of the weals on his back as he could reach. Annoyed as I felt at the unprofessional *fracas*, I could scarcely help laughing at the man's appearance. I doubt the possibility of any one looking heroic after such a thrashing.

"I'll have the law for this," he growled. "I ain't paid to be beaten by a madman."

"You're paid to do my work, not another's," said Carriston. "Go to the man who has over-bribed you and sent you to tell me your lies. Go to him, tell him that once more he has failed. Out of my sight."

As Carriston showed signs of recommencing hostile operations, the man flew as far as the doorway. There, being in comparative safety, he turned with a malignant look.

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"You'll smart for this," he said; "when they lock you up as a raving lunatic I'll try and get a post as keeper."

I was glad to see that Carriston paid no attention to this parting shaft. He turned his back scornfully, and the fellow left the room and the house.

"Now are you convinced?" asked Carriston, turning to me.

"Convinced of what? That his tale is untrue, or that he has been misled, I am quite certain."

"Tush! That is not worth consideration. Don't you see that Ralph has done all this? I set that man to watch him; he found out the espionage; suborned my agent, or your agent, I should say; sent him here with a trumped-up tale. Oh, yes; I was to believe that Madeline had deserted me—that was to drive me out of my senses. My cousin is a fool after all!"

"Without further proof I cannot believe that your suspicions are correct," I said; but I must own I spoke with some hesitation.

"Proof! A clever man like you ought to see ample proof in the fact of that wretch having twice called me a madman. I have seen him but once before—you know if I then gave him any grounds for making such an assertion. Tell me, from whom could he have learned the word except from Ralph Carriston?"

I was bound, if only to save my own reputation for sagacity, to confess that the point noted by Carriston had raised certain doubts in my mind. But if Ralph Carriston really was trying by some finely-wrought scheme to bring about what he desired, there was all the more reason for great caution to be exercised.

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"I am sorry you beat him," I said. "He will now swear right and left that you are not in your senses."

"Of course he will. What do I care?"

"Only remember this. It is easier to get put into an asylum than to get out of it."

"It is not so very easy for a sane man like myself to be put in, especially when he is on his guard. I have looked up the law. There must be a certificate signed by two doctors, surgeons—or, I believe, apothecaries will do—who have seen the supposed lunatic alone and together. I'll take very good care I speak to no doctor save yourself, and keep out of the way of surgeons and apothecaries."

It quite cheered me to hear him speaking so sensibly and collectedly about himself, but I again impressed upon him the need of great caution. Although I could not believe that his cousin had taken Madeline away, I was inclined to think, after the affair with the spy, that, as Carriston averred, he aimed at getting him, sane or insane, into a mad-house.

But after all these days we were not a step nearer to the discovery of Madeline's whereabouts. Carriston made no sign of doing anything to facilitate that discovery. Again I urged him to intrust the whole affair to the police. Again he refused to do so, adding that he was not quite ready. Ready for what, I wondered!

X.

I MUST confess, in spite of my affection for Carriston, I felt inclined to rebel against the course which matters were taking. I was a prosaic matter-of-fact medical man; doing my work to the best of my ability and anxious when that work was done that my hours of leisure should be as free from worry and care as possible. With Carriston's advent several disturbing elements entered into my quiet life.

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Let Ralph Carriston be guilty or innocent of the extraordinary crime which his cousin laid at his door, I felt that he was anxious to obtain possession of the supposed lunatic's person. It would suit his purposes for his cousin to be proved mad. I did not believe that even if the capture was legally effected Carriston's liberation would be a matter of great difficulty so long as he remained in his present state of mind; so long as I, a doctor of some standing, could go into the witness-box and swear to his sanity. But my old dread was always with me—the dread that any further shock would overturn the balance of his sensitive mind.

So it was that every hour that Carriston was out of my sight was fraught with anxiety. If Ralph Carriston was really as unscrupulous as my friend supposed; if he had really, as seemed almost probable, suborned our agent; he might by some crafty trick obtain the needful certificate, and some day I should come home and find Carriston had been removed. In such a case I foresaw great trouble and distress.

Besides, after all that had occurred, it was as much as I could do to believe that Carriston was not mad. Any doctor who knew what I knew would have given the verdict against him.

After dismissing his visions and hallucinations with the contempt which they deserved, the fact of a man who was madly, passionately in love with a woman, and who believed that she had been entrapped and was still kept in restraint, sitting down quietly, and letting day after day pass without making an effort toward finding her, was in itself *prima facie* evidence of insanity. A sane man would at once have set all the engines of detection at work.

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I felt that if once Ralph Carriston obtained possession of him he could make out a strong case in his own favor. First of all, the proposed marriage out of the defendant's own sphere of life; the passing under a false name; the ridiculous, or apparently ridiculous, accusation made against his kinsman; the murderous threats; the chastisement of his own paid agent who brought him a report which might not seem at all untrue to any one who knew not Madeline Rowan. Leaving out

the question what might be wrung from me in cross-examination, Ralph Carriston had a strong case, and I knew that, once in his power, my friend might possibly be doomed to pass years, if not his whole life, under restraint. So I was anxious—very anxious.

And I felt an anxiety, scarcely second to that which prevailed on Carriston's account, as to the fate of Madeline. Granting for sake of argument that Carriston's absurd conviction that no bodily harm had as yet been done her, was true, I felt sure that she with her scarcely less sensitive nature must feel the separation from her lover as much as he himself felt the separation from her. Once or twice I tried to comfort myself with cynicism—tried to persuade myself that a young woman could not in our days be spirited away—that she had gone by her own free-will—that there was a man who had at the eleventh hour alienated her affections from Carriston. But I could not bring myself to believe this. So I was placed between the horns of a dilemma.

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If Madeline had not fled of her own free-will, some one must have taken her away, and if so our agent's report was a coined one, and, if a coined one, issued at Ralph's instance; therefore Ralph must be the prime actor in the mystery.

But in sober moments such a deduction seemed an utter absurdity.

Although I have said that Carriston was doing nothing toward clearing up the mystery, I wronged him in so saying. After his own erratic way he was at work. At such work too! I really lost all patience with him.

He shut himself up in his room, out of which he scarcely stirred for three days. By that time he had completed a large and beautiful drawing of his imaginary man. This he took to a well-known photographer's, and ordered several hundred small photographs of it, to be prepared as soon as possible. The minute description which he had given me of his fanciful creation was printed at the foot of each copy. As soon as the first batch of these precious photographs was sent home, to my great joy he did what he should have done days ago; yielded to my wishes, and put the matter into the hands of the police.

I was glad to find that in giving details of what had happened he said nothing about the advisability of keeping a watch on Ralph Carriston's proceedings. He did, indeed, offer an absurdly large reward for the discovery of the missing girl; and, moreover, gave the officer in charge of the case a packet of photographs of his phantom man, telling him in the gravest manner that he knew the original of that likeness had something to do with the disappearance of Miss Rowan. The officer, who thought the portrait was that of a natural being, took his instructions in good faith, although he seemed greatly surprised when he heard that Carriston knew neither the name nor the occupation, in fact, knew nothing concerning the man who was to be sought for. However, as Carriston assured him that finding this man would insure the reward as much as if he found Madeline, the officer readily promised to combine the two tasks, little knowing what waste of time any attempt to perform the latter must be.

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Two days after this Carriston came to me. "I shall leave you to-morrow," he said.

"Where are you going?" I asked. "Why do you leave?"

"I am going to travel about. I have no intention of letting Ralph get hold of me. So I mean to go from place to place until I find Madeline."

"Be careful," I urged.

"I shall be careful enough. I'll take care that no doctors, surgeons, or even apothecaries get on my track. I shall go just as the fit seizes me. If I can't say one day where I shall be the next, it will be impossible for that villain to know."

This was not a bad argument. In fact, if he carried out his resolve of passing quickly from place to place I did not see how he could plan anything more likely to defeat the intentions with which we credited his cousin. As to his finding Madeline by so doing, that was another matter.

His idea seemed to be that chance would sooner or later bring him in contact with the man of his dream. However, now that the search had been intrusted to the proper persons his own action in the matter was not worth troubling about. I gave him many cautions. He was to be quiet and guarded in words and manner. He was not to converse with strangers. If he found himself dogged or watched by any one he was to communicate at once with me. But, above all, I begged him not to yield again to his mental infirmity. The folly of a man who could avoid it, throwing himself into such a state ought to be apparent to him.

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"Not oftener than I can help," was all the promise I could get from him. "But see her I must sometimes, or I shall die."

I had now given up as hopeless the combat with his peculiar idiosyncrasy. So, with many expressions of gratitude on his part, we bade each other farewell.

During his absence he wrote to me nearly every day, so that I might know his whereabouts in case I had any news to communicate. But I had none. The police failed to find the slightest clew. I had been called upon by them once or twice in order that they might have every grain of information I could give. I took the liberty of advising them not to waste their time in looking for the man, as his very existence was problematical. It was but a fancy of my friend's, and not worth thinking seriously about. I am not sure but what after hearing this they did not think the whole affair was an imagined one, and so relaxed their efforts.

Once or twice, Carriston, happening to be in the neighborhood of London, came to see me, and slept the night at my house. He also had no news to report. Still, he seemed hopeful as ever.

The weeks went by until Christmas was over and the New Year begun; but no sign, word, or trace of Madeline Rowan. "I have seen her," wrote Carriston, "several times. She is in the same place—unhappy, but not ill-treated."

Evidently his hallucinations were still in full force.

At first I intended that the whole of this tale should be told by myself; but upon getting so far it struck me that the evidence of another actor who played an important part in the drama would give certain occurrences to the reader at first instead of at second hand, so I wrote to my friend Dick Fenton, of Frenchay, Gloucestershire, and begged him, if he found himself capable of so doing, to put in simple narrative form his impressions of certain events which happened in January, 1866: events in which we two were concerned. He has been good enough to comply with my request. His communication follows.

PART II.

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TOLD BY RICHARD FENTON, OF FRENCHAY, GLOUCESTERSHIRE, ESQUIRE.

I.

As my old friend Phil Brand has asked me to do this, I suppose I must. Brand is a right good fellow and a clever fellow, but has plenty of crotchets of his own. The worst I know of him is that he insists upon having his own way with people. With those who differ from him he is as obstinate as a mule. Anyhow, he has always had his own way with me. This custom, so far as I am concerned, commenced years ago when we were boys at school together, and I have never been able to shake off the bad habit of giving in to him. He has promised to see that my queen's English is presentable: for, to tell the truth, I am more at home across country than across foolscap, and my fingers know the feel of the reins or the trigger better than that of the pen.

All the same I hope he won't take too many liberties with my style, bad though it may be; for old Brand at times is apt to get—well, a bit prosy. To hear him on the subject of hard work and the sanctity thereof approaches the sublime!

What freak took me to the little God-forsaken village of Midcombe in the depth of winter is entirely between myself and my conscience. The cause having no bearing upon the matters I am asked to tell you about, is no one's business but mine. I will only say that now I would not stay in such a place at such a time of the year for the sake of the prettiest girl in the world, let alone the bare chance of meeting her once or twice. But one's ideas change. I am now a good bit older, ride some two stones heavier, and have been married ever so many years. Perhaps, after all, as I look back I can find some excuse for being such an ass as to endure for more than a fortnight all the discomforts heaped upon me in that little village inn.

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A man who sojourns in such a hole as Midcombe must give some reason for doing so. My ostensible reason was hunting. I had a horse with me, and a second-rate subscription pack of slow-going mongrels did meet somewhere in the neighborhood, so no one could gainsay my explanation. But if hunting was my object, I got precious little of it. A few days after my arrival a bitter, biting frost set in—a frost as black as your hat and as hard as nails. Yet still I stayed on.

From private information received—no matter how, when or where—I knew that some people in the neighborhood had organized a party to go skating on a certain day at Lilymere, a fine sheet of water some distance from Midcombe. I guessed that some one whom I particularly desired to meet would be there, and as the skating at Lilymere was free to any one who chose to take the trouble of getting to such an out-of-the-way place, I hired a horse and an apology for a dog-cart, and at ten in the morning started to drive the twelve miles to the pond. I took no one with me. I had been to Lilymere once before, in bright summer weather, so fancied I knew the way well enough.

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The sky when I started was cloudy; the wind was chopping round in a way which made the effete rustic old hostler predict a change of weather. He was right. Before I had driven two miles light snow began to fall, and by the time I reached a little wretched wayside inn, about a mile from the Mere, a film of white covered the whole country. I stabled my horse as well as I could, then taking my skates with me walked down to the pond.

Now, whether I had mistaken the day, or whether the threatening fall of snow had made certain people change their minds, I don't know; but, to my annoyance and vexation, no skaters were to be seen, and moreover, the uncut, white surface told me that none had been on the pond that morning. Still hoping they might come in spite of the weather, I put on my skates and went outside-edging and grape-vining all over the place. But as there was no person in particular—in fact, no one at all—to note my powers, I soon got tired. It was, indeed, dreary, dreary work. But I waited and hoped until the snow came down so fast and furiously that I felt sure that waiting was in vain, and that I had driven to Lilymere for nothing.

Back I went to the little inn, utterly disgusted with things in general, and feeling that to break some one's head would be a relief to me in my present state of mind. Of course a sensible man would at once have got his horse between the shafts and driven home. But whatever I may be now, in those days I was not a sensible man—Brand will, I know, cordially indorse this remark—the accommodation of the inn was not such as to induce one to linger within its precincts; but the fire was a right good one, and a drink, which I skilfully manufactured out of some hot beer, not to be despised, and proved warming to the body and soothing to the ruffled temper. So I lingered over the big fire until I began to feel hungry, and upon the landlady assuring me that she could cook a rasher, decided it would be wiser to stay where I was until the violence of the snowstorm was over; for coming down it was now, and no mistake.

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And it kept on coming down. About half-past three, when I sorrowfully decided I was bound to make a move, it was snowing faster than ever. I harnessed my horse, and laughing at the old woman's dismal prophecy that I should never get to Midcombe in such weather, gathered up the reins, and away I went along the white road.

I thought I knew the way well enough. In fact I had always prided myself upon remembering any road once driven over by me; but does any one who has not tried it really know how a heavy fall of snow changes the aspect of the country, and makes landmarks snares and delusions? I learned all about it then, once and for all. I found, also, that the snow lay much deeper than I thought could possibly be in so short a time, and it still fell in a manner almost blinding. Yet I went on bravely and merrily for some miles. Then came a bit of uncertainty—

Which of those two roads was the right one? This one, of course—no, the other. There was no house near; no one was likely to be passing in such weather, so I was left to exercise my free, unbiased choice; a privilege I would willingly have dispensed with. However, I made the best selection I could, and followed it for some two miles. Then I began to grow doubtful, and soon persuading myself that I was on the wrong track, retraced my steps. I was by this time something like a huge white plaster of Paris figure, and the snow which had accumulated on the old dog-cart made it run heavier by half-a-ton, more or less. By the time I came to that unlucky junction of roads at which my misfortune began it was almost dark; the sky as black as a tarpaulin, yet sending down the white feathery flakes thicker and faster than ever. I felt inclined to curse my folly in attempting such a drive, at any rate I blamed myself for not having started two or three hours earlier. I'll warrant that steady-going old Brand never had to accuse himself of such foolishness as mine.

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Well, I took the other road; went on some way; came to a turning which I seemed to remember; and, not without misgivings, followed it. My misgivings increased when, after a little while, I found the road grew full of ruts, which the snow and the darkness quite concealed from me until the wheels got into them. Evidently I was wrong again. I was just thinking of making the best of my way out of this rough and unfrequented road, when—there, I don't know how it happened, such things seldom occur to me—a stumble, a fall on the part of my tired horse sent me flying over the dashboard, with the only consoling thought that the reins were still in my hand.

Luckily the snow had made the falling pretty soft. I soon picked myself up and set about estimating damages. With some difficulty I got the horse out of the harness, and then felt free to inspect the dog-cart. Alas! after the manner of the two-wheel kind whenever a horse thinks fit to fall, one shaft had snapped off like a carrot; so here was I, five miles apparently from anywhere, in the thick of a blinding snow-storm, left standing helpless beside a jaded horse and a broken cart—I should like to know what Brand would have done under the circumstances.

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As for me, I reflected for some minutes—reflection in a snow-storm is weary work. I reasoned, I believe logically, and at last came to this decision: I would follow the road. If, as I suspected, it was but a cart-track, it would probably soon lead to a habitation of some kind. Anyway I had better try a bit further. I took hold of the wearied horse, and with snow under my feet, snow-flakes whirling round me, and a wind blowing right into my teeth, struggled on.

It was a journey! I think I must have been three-quarters of an hour going about a quarter of a mile. I was just beginning to despair, when I saw a welcome gleam of light. I steered toward it, fondly hoping that my troubles were at an end. I found the light stole through the ill-fitting window-shutters of what seemed, so far as I could make out in the darkness, to be a small farmhouse. Tying to a gate the knotted reins by which I had been leading the horse, I staggered up to the door and knocked loudly. Upon my honor, until I leaned against that door-post I had no idea how tired I was—until that moment I never suspected that the finding of speedy shelter meant absolutely saving my life. Covered from head to foot with snow, my hat crushed in, I must have been a pitiable object.

No answer came to my first summons. It was only after a second and more imperative application of my heel that the door deigned to give way a few inches. Through the aperture a woman's voice asked who was there?

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"Let me in," I said. "I have missed my way to Midcombe. My horse has fallen. You must give me shelter for the night. Open the door and let me in."

"Shelter! You can't get shelter here, mister," said a man's gruff voice. "This ain't an inn, so you'd best be off and go elsewhere."

"But I must come in," I said, astonished at such inhospitality; "I can't go a step further. Open the door at once!"

"You be hanged," said the man. "'Tis my house, not yours."

"But, you fool, I mean to pay you well for your trouble. Don't you know it means death wandering about on such a night as this? Let me in."

"You won't come in here," was the brutal and boorish reply. The door closed.

That I was enraged at such incivility may be easily imagined; but if I said I was thoroughly frightened I believe no one would be surprised. As getting into that house meant simply life or death to me, into that house I determined to get, by door or window, by fair means or by foul. So, as the door closed, I hurled myself against it with all the might I could muster. Although I ride much heavier now than I did then, all my weight at that time was bone and muscle. The violence of my attack tore from the lintel the staple which held the chain; the door went back with a bang, and I fell forward into the house, fully resolved to stay there whether welcome or unwelcome.

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II.

THE door through which I had burst like a battering ram opened straight into a sort of kitchen, so although I entered in a most undignified way, in fact on my hands and knees, I was well-established in the centre of the room before the man and woman emerged from behind the door, where my successful assault had thrown them. I stood up and faced them. They were a couple of ordinary, respectably-attired country people. The man, a sturdy, strong-built, bull-necked rascal, stood scowling at me, and, I concluded, making up his mind as to what course to pursue.

"My good people," I said, "you are behaving in the most unheard-of manner. Can't you understand that I mean to pay you well for any trouble I give you? But whether you like it or not, here I stay to-night. To turn me out would be sheer murder."

So saying I pulled off my overcoat, and began shaking the snow out of my whiskers.

I dare say my determined attitude, my respectable, as well as my muscular appearance, impressed my unwilling hosts. Anyway, they gave in without more ado. Whilst the woman shut the door, through which the snow-flakes were whirling, the man said sullenly:

"Well, you'll have to spend the night on a chair. We've no beds here for strangers. 'Specially those as ain't wanted."

"Very well, my friend. Having settled the matter you may as well make yourself pleasant. Go out and put my horse under cover, and give him a feed of some sort—make a mash if you can."

After giving the woman a quick glance as of warning, my scowling host lit a horn lantern, and went on the errand I suggested. I gladly sank into a chair, and warmed myself before a cheerful fire. The prospect of spending the night amid such discomfort was not alluring, but I had, at least, a roof over my head.

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As a rule, the more churlish the nature, the more avaricious it is found to be. My promise of liberal remuneration was, after all, not without its effect upon the strange couple whose refusal to afford me refuge had so nearly endangered my life. They condescended to get me some tea and rough food. After I had disposed of all that, the man produced a bottle of gin. We filled our glasses, and then, with the aid of my pipe, I settled down to make the best of a night spent in a hard wooden chair.

I had come across strange people in my travels, but I have no hesitation in saying that my host was the sullenest, sulkiest, most boorish specimen of human nature I had as yet met with. In spite of his recent ill-treatment of me I was quite ready to establish matters on a friendly footing, and made several attempts to draw him into conversation. The brute would only answer in monosyllables, or often not answer at all. So I gave up talking as a bad job, and sat in silence, smoking and looking into the fire, thinking a good deal, it may be, of some one I should have met that morning at Lilymere had the wretched snow but kept off.

The long clock—that cumbrous eight-day machine which inevitably occupies one corner of every cottager's kitchen—struck nine. The woman rose and left us. I concluded she was going to bed. If so, I envied her. Her husband showed no sign of retiring. He still sat over the fire, opposite me. By this time I was dreadfully tired: every bone in my body ached. The hard chair which an hour or two ago, seemed all I could desire, now scarcely came up to my ideas of the comfort I was justly entitled to claim. My sulky companion had been drinking silently but steadily. Perhaps the liquor he had poured into himself might have rendered his frame of mind more pleasant and amenable to reason.

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"My good fellow," I said, "your chairs are excellent ones of the kind, but deucedly uncomfortable. I am horribly tired. If the resources of your establishment can't furnish a bed for me to sleep in, couldn't you find a mattress or something to lay down before the fire?"

"You've got all you'll get to-night," he answered, knocking the ashes out his pipe.

"Oh, but I say!"

"So do I say. I say this: If you don't like it you can leave it. We didn't ask you to come."

"You infernal beast," I muttered—and meant it too—I declare had I not been so utterly worn out, I would have had that bullet-headed ruffian up for a few rounds on his own kitchen floor, and tried to knock him into a more amiable frame of mind.

"Never mind," I said; "but, remember, civility costs nothing, and often gets rewarded. However, if you wish to retire to your own couch don't let your native politeness stand in your way. Pray don't hesitate on my account. Leave plenty of fuel, and I shall manage until morning."

"Where you stay, I stay," he answered. Then he filled his pipe, and once more relapsed into stony silence.

I bothered about him no more. I dozed off for a few minutes—woke—dozed off again for some hours. I was in an uncomfortable sort of half sleep, crammed full of curious dreams—dreams from which I started, wondering where I was and how I got there. I even began to grow nervous. All sorts of horrible travellers' tales ran through my head. It was in just such places as this that unsuspecting voyagers were stated to have been murdered and robbed, by just such unmitigated ruffians as my host—I can tell you that altogether I spent a most pleasant night.

To make matters worse and more dismal the storm still raged outside. The wind moaned through the trees, but it had again changed, and I knew from the sound on the window-panes that heavy rain had succeeded snow. As the big drops of water found their way down the large old-fashioned chimney, the fire hissed and spluttered like a spiteful vixen. Everything combined to deprive me of what dog's sleep I could by sheer persistency snatch.

I think I tried every position which an ordinary man, not an acrobat, is capable of adopting with the assistance of a common wooden chair. I even lay down on the hard flags. I actually tried the table. I propped up the upper half of my body against the corner walls of the room; but found no rest. At last I gave up all idea of sleeping, and fully aroused myself. I comforted myself by saying that my misery was only temporary—that the longest night must come to an end.

My companion had by now succumbed to fatigue, or to the combined effects of fatigue and gin-and-water. His head was hanging sideways, and he slept in a most uncomfortable attitude. I chuckled as I looked at him, feeling quite sure that if such a clod was capable of dreaming at all, his dreams must be worse even than mine. I filled another pipe, poked the smoldering logs into a blaze, and sat almost nose and knees over the fire, finding some amusement in speculating upon the condition of the churl before me, and thanking the Lord I was not like unto this man. Suddenly an idea flashed across me.

I had seen this fellow before. But when or where I could not remember. His features, as I looked at them with keener interest, seemed to grow more and more familiar to me. Where could I have met him? Somewhere or other, but where? I racked my brain to associate him with some scene, some event. Although he was but an ordinary countryman, such as one sees scores of in a day's ride, only differing from his kind on account of his unpleasant face, I felt sure we were old acquaintances. When he awoke for a moment and changed his strained attitude, my feeling grew stronger and stronger. Yet puzzle and puzzle as I would I could not call to mind a former encounter; so at last I began to think the supposed recognition was pure fancy on my part.

Having smoked out several pipes, I thought that a cigar would be a slight break to the monotony of the night's proceedings. So I drew out my case and looked at its contents. Among the weeds was one of a lighter color than the others. As I took it out I said to myself, "Why, old Brand gave me that one when I was last at his house." Curiously enough that cigar was the missing link in the chain of my memory. As I held it in my hand I knew at once why my host's ugly face seemed familiar to me.

About a fortnight before, being in town, I had spent the evening with the doctor. He was not alone, and I was introduced to a tall pale young man named Carriston. He was a pleasant, polite young fellow, although not much in my line. At first I judged him to be a would-be poet of the fashionable miserable school; but finding that he and Brand talked so much about art I eventually decided that he was one of the doctor's many artist friends. Art is a hobby he hacks about on grandly. (Mem. Brand's own attempt at pictures are simply atrocious!)

Just before I left, Carriston, the doctor's back being turned, asked me to step into another room. There he showed me the portrait of a man. It seemed very cleverly drawn, and I presumed he wanted me to criticise it.

"I am a precious bad judge," I said.

"I am not asking you to pass an opinion," said Carriston. "I want to beg a favor of you. I am almost ashamed to beg it on so short an acquaintance."

He seemed modest, and not in want of money, so I encouraged him to proceed.

"I heard you say you were going into the country," he resumed. "I want to ask you if by any chance you should meet the original of that drawing to telegraph at once to Dr. Brand."

"Whereabouts does he live?"

"I have no idea. If chance throws him in your way please do as I ask."

"Certainly I will," I said, seeing the young man made the request in solemn earnest.

He thanked me, and then gave me a small photograph of the picture. This photograph he begged me to keep in my pocket-book, so that I might refer to it in case I met the man he wanted. I put it there, went my way, and, am sorry to say, forget all about it. Had it not been for the strange cigar in my case bringing back Carriston's unusual request to my mind, the probabilities are that I should not have thought again of the matter. Now, by a remarkable coincidence, I was spending the night with the very man, who, so far as my memory served me, must have sat for the portrait shown me at Brand's house.

"I wonder what I did with the photo," I said. I turned out my letter-case. There it was, right enough! Shading it with one hand, I carefully compared it with the sleeper.

Not a doubt about it! So far as a photograph taken from a picture can go, it was the man

himself. The same ragged beard, the same coarse features, the same surly look. Young Carriston was evidently a wonderful hand at knocking off a likeness. Moreover, in case I had felt any doubt in the matter, a printed note at the bottom of the photograph said that one joint was missing from a right-hand finger. Sure enough, my friend lacked that small portion of his misbegotten frame.

This discovery threw me in an ecstasy of delight. I laughed so loudly that I almost awoke the ruffian. I guessed I was going to take a glorious revenge for all the discomforts I had suffered. No one, I felt sure, could be looking for such a fellow as this to do any good to him. I was quite happy in the thought, and for the remainder of the night gloated over the idea of putting a spoke in the wheel of one who had been within an ace of causing my death. I resolved, the moment I got back to civilization, to send the desired intelligence to Brand, and hope for the best.

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III.

THE end of that wretched night came at last. When the welcome morning broke I found that a great change had taken place out-of-doors. The fierce snow-storm had been the farewell of the frost. The heavy rain that followed had filled the roads with slushy and rapidly-thawing snow. I managed to extort some of a breakfast from my host, then, having recompensed him according to my promise, not his deserts, started, as soon as I could, on the bare back of my unfortunate steed, for Midcombe, which place, after my night's experience, seemed gifted with merits not its own.

I was surprised upon leaving the house to find it was of larger dimensions than, from the little I saw of it during the night, I had imagined. It was altogether a better class of residence than I had supposed. My surly friend accompanied me until he had placed me on the main road, where I could make no possible mistake. He was kind enough to promise to assist any one I might send out in getting the dog-cart once more under way. Then, with a hearty wish on my part that I might never again meet with his like, we parted.

I found my way to Midcombe without much trouble. I took off my things, had a wash, and, like a sensible man for once, went to bed. But I did not forget to send a boy straight off to the nearest telegraph station. My message to Brand was a brief one. It simply said: "Tell your friend I have found his man." This duty done, I dismissed all speculation as to the result from my mind, and settled down to make up arrears of sleep.

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I was surprised at the reply received that same evening from Brand: "We shall be with you as soon as we can get down to-morrow. Meet us at station." From this it was clear that my friend was wanted particularly—all the better! I turned to the time-table and found that, owing to changes and delays, they could not get to C—, the nearest station to Midcombe, until three o'clock in the afternoon. I inquired about the crippled dog-cart. It had been brought in; so I left strict instructions that a shaft of some sort was to be rigged in time for me to drive over the next day and meet the doctor and his friend.

They came as promised. It was a comfort to see friends of any description, so I gave them a hearty welcome. Carriston took hold of both my hands, and shook them so warmly that I began to feel I had discovered a long-lost father of his in my friend. I had almost forgotten the young fellow's appearance, or he looked a very different man to-day from the one I had seen when last we met. Then he was a wan, pensive, romantic, poetical-looking sort of fellow; now he seemed full of energy, vitality, and grit. Poor old Brand looked as serious as an undertaker engaged in burying his own mother.

Carriston began to question me, but Brand stopped him. "You promised I should make inquiries first," he said. Then he turned to me.

"Look here, Richard,"—when he calls me Richard I know he is fearfully in earnest—"I believe you have brought us down on a fool's errand; but let us go to some place where we can talk together for a few minutes."

I lead them across the road to the Railway Inn. We entered a room, and, having for the sake of appearances ordered a little light refreshment, told the waiter to shut the door from the outside. Brand settled down with the air of a cross-examining counsel. I expected to see him pull out a New Testament and put me on my oath.

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"Now, Richard," he said, "before we go further I want to know your reasons for thinking this man, about whom you telegraphed, is Carriston's man, as you call him."

"Reasons! Why of course he is the man. Carriston gave me his photograph. The likeness is indisputable—leaving the finger-joint out of the question."

Here Carriston looked at my cross-examiner triumphantly. The meaning of that look I have never to this hour understood. But I laughed because I knew old Brand had for once made a mistake, and was going to be called to account for it. Carriston was about to speak, but the doctor waved him aside.

"Now, Richard, think very carefully. You speak of the missing finger-joint. We doctors know how many people persuade themselves into all sorts of thing. Tell me, did you notice the likeness before you saw the mutilated finger, or did the fact of the finger's being mutilated bring the likeness to your mind?"

"Bless the man!" I said; "one would think I had no eyes. I tell you there is no doubt about this man being the original of the photo."

"Never mind; answer my question."

"Well, then, I am ashamed to confess it, but I put the photo in my pocket, and forgot all about it until I had recognized the man, and pulled out the likeness to make sure. I didn't even know there was a printed description at the foot, nor that any member was wanting. Confound it, Brand! I'm not such a duffer as you think."

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Brand did not retaliate. He turned to his friend and said gravely, "To me the matter is inexplicable. Take your own course, as I promised you should." Then he sat down, looking deliciously crest-fallen, and wearing the discontented expression always natural to him when worsted in argument.

It was now Carriston's turn. He plied me with many questions. In fact, I gave him the whole history of my adventure. "What kind of house is it?" he asked.

"Better than a cottage—scarcely a farm-house. A place, I should think, with a few miserable acres of bad land belonging to it. One of those wretched little holdings which are simply curses to the country."

He made lots of other inquiries, the purport of which I could not then divine. He seemed greatly impressed when I told him that the man had never for a moment left me alone. He shot a second glance of triumph at Brand, who still kept silent, and looked as if all the wind had been taken out of his sails.

"How far is the place?" asked Carriston. "Could you drive me there after dark?"

At this question the doctor returned to life. "What do you mean to do?" he asked his friend. "Let us have no nonsense. Even now I feel sure that Fenton is misled by some chance resemblance—"

"Deuce a bit, old chap," I said.

"Well, whether or not, we needn't do foolish things. We must go and swear information, and get a search-warrant, and the assistance of the police. The truth is, Richard," he continued, turning to me, "we have reason to believe, or I should say Carriston persists in fancying, that a friend of his has for some time been kept in durance by the man whom you say you recognized."

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"Likely enough," I said. "He looked villain enough for anything up to murder."

"Anyway," said Brand, "we must do everything according to law."

"Law! I want no law," answered Carriston. "I have found her, as I knew I should find her. I shall simply fetch her, and at once. You can come with me or stay here, as you like, doctor; but I am afraid I must trouble your friend to drive me somewhere near the place he speaks of."

Foreseeing an adventure and great fun—moreover, not unmoved by thoughts of revenge—I placed myself entirely at Carriston's disposal. He expressed his gratitude, and suggested that we should start at once. In a few minutes we were ready, and mounted the dog-cart. Brand, after grumbling loudly at the whole proceeding, finished up by following us, and installing himself in the back seat. Carriston placed a parcel he carried inside the cart, and away we went.

It was now nearly dark, and raining cats and dogs. I had my lamps lighted, so we got along without much difficulty. The roads were deep with mud; but by this time the snow had been pretty nearly washed away from everywhere. I don't make a mistake in a road twice, so in due course we reached the scene of my upset. Here I drew up.

"The house lies about five hundred yards up the lane," I told Carriston; "we had better get out here."

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"What about the horse?" asked Brand.

"No chance of any one passing this way on such a night as this; so let us put out the lamps and tie him up somewhere."

We did so; then struggled on afoot until we saw the gleam of light which had been so welcomed by me two nights before.

It was just about as dark as pitch; but guided by the light, we went on until we stood in front of the house, where a turf bank and a dry hedge hid us from sight, although on such a night we had little fear of our presence being discovered.

"What do you mean to do now?" asked Brand in a discontented whisper. "You can't break into the house."

Carriston said nothing for a minute; then I felt him place his hand on my shoulder.

"Are there any horses; any cows about the place?" he asked.

I told him I thought that my surly friend rejoiced in the possession of a horse and a cow.

"Very well. Then we must wait. He'll come out to see to them before he goes to bed," said Carriston, as decidedly as a general giving orders just before a battle.

I could not see how Brand expressed his feelings upon hearing this order from our commander—I know I shrugged my shoulders, and if I said nothing, I thought a deal. The present situation was all very well for a strongly-interested party like Carriston, but he could scarcely expect others to relish the prospect of waiting, it might be for hours, under that comfortless hedge. We were all wet to the skin, and although I was extremely anxious to see the end of the expedition, and find poetical justice meted out to my late host, Carriston's Fabian tactics lacked the

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excitement I longed for. Brand, in spite of his disapproval of the whole course of action, was better off than I was. As a doctor, he must have felt sure that, provided he could survive the exposure, he would secure two fresh patients. However, we made no protest, but waited for events to develop themselves.

IV.

MORE than half an hour went by. I was growing numbed and tired, and beginning to think that we were making asses of ourselves, when I heard the rattle of a chain, and felt Carriston give my arm a warning touch. No doubt my late host had made sure that his new door-fastenings were equal to a stronger test than that to which I had subjected the former ones; so we were wise in not attempting to carry his castle by force.

The door opened, and closed again. I saw the feeble glimmer of a lantern moving toward the out-house in which my horse had been stabled. I heard a slight rustling in the hedge, and, stretching out my arm, found that Carriston had left my side. In the absence of any command from him I did not follow, but resumed the old occupation—waiting.

In a few minutes the light of the lantern reappeared; the bearer stood on the threshold of the house, while I wondered what Carriston was doing. Just as the door was opened for the boor's readmittance, a dark figure sprung upon him! I heard a fierce oath and cry of surprise; then the lantern flew out of the man's hand, and he and his assailant tumbled struggling through the narrow door-way.

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"Hurrah! the door is won, anyway!" I shouted, as, followed closely by the doctor, I jumped over the hedge and rushed to the scene of the fray.

Although Carriston's well-conceived attack was so vigorous and unexpected that the man went down under it; although our leader utilized the advantage he had gained in a proper and laudable manner, by bumping that thick bullet-head as violently as he could against the flags on which it lay; I doubt if, after all, he could have done his work alone. The countryman was a muscular brute and Carriston but a stripling. However, our arrival speedily settled the question.

"Bind him!" panted Carriston; "there is a cord in my pocket." He appeared to have come quite prepared for contingencies. Whilst Carriston still embraced his prostrate foe, and Brand, to facilitate matters, knelt on his shoulders, sat on his head, or did something else useful, I drew out from the first pocket I tried a nice length of half-inch line, and had the immense satisfaction of trussing up my scowling friend in a most workmanlike manner. He must have felt those turns on his wrists for days afterward. Yet when we were at last at liberty to rise and leave him lying helpless on his kitchen-floor, I considered I exercised great self-denial in not bestowing a few kicks upon him, as he swore at us in the broadest vernacular in a way which, under the circumstances, was no doubt a great comfort to him.

We scarcely noticed the man's wife while we rendered her husband helpless. As we entered she attempted to fly out, but Brand, with a promptitude which I am glad to record, intercepted her, closed the door, turned and pocketed the key. After that the woman sat on the floor and rocked herself to and fro.

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For some moments, while recovering his breath, Carriston stood, and positively glared at his prostrate foe. At last he found words.

"Where is she? Where is the key, you hound?" he thundered out, stooping over the fellow, and shaking him with a violence which did my heart good. As he received no answers save the unrecordable expressions above mentioned, we unbuttoned the wretch's pockets, and searched those greasy receptacles. Among the usual litter we did certainly find a key. Carriston snatched at it, and shouting "Madeline! Madeline! I come!" rushed out of the room like a maniac, leaving Brand and me to keep guard over our prisoners.

I filled a pipe, lit it, and then came back to my fallen foe.

"I say, old chap!" I said, stirring him gently with the toe of my boot, "this will be a lesson to you. Remember, I told you that civility costs nothing. If you had given me Christian bed accommodation instead of making me wear out my poor bones on that infernal chair, you could have jogged along in your rascality quite comfortably, so far as I am concerned."

He was very ungrateful—so much so that my desire to kick him was intensified. I should not like to swear I did not to a slight degree yield to the temptation.

"Push a handkerchief in his mouth," cried Brand, suddenly. "A lady is coming."

With right good-will I did as the doctor suggested.

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Just then Carriston returned. I don't want to raise home tempests, yet I must say he was accompanied by the most beautiful creature my eyes have ever lighted upon. True, she was pale as a lily—looked thin and delicate, and her face bore traces of anxiety and suffering, but for all that she was beautiful—too beautiful for this world, I thought, as I looked at her. She was clinging in a half-frightened, half-confiding way to Carriston, and he—happy fellow!—regardless of our presence, was showering down kisses on her sweet pale face. Confound it! I grow quite romantic as I recall the sight of those lovers.

A most curious young man, that Carriston! He came to us, the lovely girl on his arm, without showing a trace of his recent excitement.

"Let us go now," he said, as calmly as if he had been taking a quiet evening drive. Then he

turned to me.

“Do you think, Mr. Fenton, you could without much trouble get the dog-cart up to the house?”

I said I would try to do so.

“But what about these people?” asked Brand.

Carriston gave them a contemptuous glance. “Leave them alone,” he said. “They are but the tools of another—him I cannot touch. Let us go.”

“Yes, yes. But why not verify your suspicions while you can?”

Just like Brand! He’s always wanting to verify everything.

In searching for the key we had found some papers on our prisoner. Brand examined them, and handed to Carriston an envelope which contained what looked like bank-notes.

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Carriston glanced at it. “The handwriting is, of course, disguised,” he said, carelessly; “but the postmark shows whence it came. It is as I always told you. You agree with me now?”

“I am afraid I must,” said Brand, humbly. “But we must do something about this man,” he continued.

Hereupon Carriston turned to our prisoner. “Listen, you villain,” he said. “I will let you go scot-free if you breathe no word of this to your employer for the next fortnight. If he learns from you what has happened before that time, I swear you shall go to penal servitude. Which do you choose?”

I pulled out the gag, and it is needless to say which the fellow chose.

Then I went off, and recovered the horse and cart. I relighted the lamps, and with some difficulty got the dog-cart up to the house, Carriston having exactly anticipated the events of the night. The parcel he had brought with him contained a bonnet and a thick, warm cloth cloak. His beautiful friend was equipped with these; then leaving the woman of the house to untie her husband at her leisure and pleasure, away we started; the doctor sitting by me; Carriston and the lady behind.

We just managed to catch the last train from C—. Not feeling sure as to what form inquiries might take to-morrow, I thought it better to go up to town with my friends; so, as we passed through Midcombe, I stopped, paid my bill, and gave instructions for my luggage to be forwarded to me. By six o’clock the next morning we were all in London.

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DR. BRAND IN CONCLUSION.

WHEN I asked Fenton to relate his experiences I did not mean him to do so at such length. But there, as he has written it, and as writing is not a labor of love with him, let it go.

When Madeline Rowan found the bed by the side of which she had thrown herself in an ecstasy of grief untenanted, she knew in a moment that she was the victim of a deep-laid plot. Being ignorant of Carriston’s true position in the world she could conceive no reason for the elaborate scheme which have been devised to lure her so many miles from her home, and make a prisoner of her.

A prisoner she was. Not only was the door locked upon her, but a slip of paper lay on the bed. It bore these words, “No harm is meant you, and in due time you will be released. Ask no questions, make no foolish attempts at escape, and you will be well-treated.”

Upon reading this the girl’s first thought was one of thankfulness. She saw at once that the reported accident to her lover was but an invention. The probabilities were that Carriston was alive, and in his usual health. Now that she felt certain of this, she could bear anything.

From the day on which she entered that room, to that on which we rescued her, Madeline was to all intents and purposes as close a prisoner in that lonely house on the hill-side as she might have been in the deepest dungeon in the world. Threats, entreaties, promises of bribes availed nothing. She was not unkindly treated—that is, suffered no absolute ill-usage. Books, materials for needle-work, and other little aids to while away time were supplied. But the only living creatures she saw were the women of the house who attended to her wants, and, on one or two occasions, the man whom Carriston asserted he had seen in his trance. She had suffered from the close confinement, but had always felt certain that sooner or later her lover would find her, and effect her deliverance. Now that she knew he was alive she could not be unhappy.

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I did not choose to ask her why she had felt so certain on the above points. I wished to add no more puzzles to the one which, to tell the truth, exercised, even annoyed me, more than I care to say. But I did ask her if, during her incarceration, her jailer had ever laid his hand upon her.

She told me that some short time after her arrival a stranger had gained admittance to the house. Whilst he was there the man had entered her room, held her arm, and threatened her with violence if she made any outcry. After hearing this, I did not pursue the subject.

Carriston and Madeline were married at the earliest possible moment, and left England immediately after the ceremony. A week after their departure, by Carriston’s request, I forwarded the envelope found upon our prisoner to Mr. Ralph Carriston. With it I sent a few lines stating where and under what peculiar circumstances we had become possessed of it. I never received any reply to my communication; so, wild and improbable as it seems, I am bound to believe that Charles Carriston’s surmise was right—that Madeline was decoyed away and

concealed, not from any ill-will toward herself, but with a view to the possible baneful effect which her mysterious disappearance might work upon her lover's strange and excitable organization; and I firmly believe that had he not in some inexplicable way been firmly convinced that she was alive and faithful to him, the plot would have been a thorough success, and Charles Carriston would have spent the rest of his days in an asylum.

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Both Sir Charles—he succeeded to his title shortly after his marriage—and Lady Carriston are now dead, or I should not have ventured to relate these things concerning them. They had twelve years of happiness. If measured by time the period was but a short one; but I feel sure that in it they enjoyed more true happiness than many others find in the course of a protracted life. In word, thought, and deed they were as one. She died in Rome of fever, and her husband, without so far as I know any particular complaint, simply followed her.

I was always honored with their sincerest friendship, and Sir Charles left me sole trustee and guardian to his three sons; so there are now plenty of lives between Ralph Carriston and his desire. I am pleased to say that the boys, who are as dear to me as my own children, as yet show no evidence of possessing any gifts beyond nature.

I know that my having made this story public will cause two sets of objectors to fall equally foul of me—the matter-of-fact prosaic man who will say that the abduction and subsequent imprisonment of Madeline Rowan was an absurd impossibility, and the scientific man, like myself, who cannot, dare not believe that Charles Carriston, from neither memory nor imagination, could draw a face, and describe peculiarities, by which a certain man could be identified. I am far from saying there may not be a simple natural explanation of the puzzle, but I, for one, have failed to find it, so close this tale as I began it by saying I am a narrator, and nothing more.

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Transcriber's Note

A table of contents has been added.

In the original the pagenumbers started again from the second story, this has been changed for reader convenience.

Obvious errors in punctuation have been corrected. Also the following corrections have been made, on page

55 "anb" changed to "and" (and up towards the dizzy crown)

68 "out" changed to "but" (understood and enjoyed at home, but foreigners, especially)

117 "proproposition" changed to "proposition" (applause of her proposition.)

135 "Cattelton" changed to "Cattleton" (Cattleton sprung to his feet)

150 "come" changed to "came" (Mr. Herbert came to the rescue.)

153 "persuade" changed to "persuade" (you would only persuade my father)

156 "insistance" changed to "insistence" (Miss Herbert's insistence that two or three roses)

157 double "to" removed (one of his many boys to take Jerry's place.)

158 "striken" changed to "stricken" (were stricken with a great wonder.)

160 "despict" changed to "depict" (that face might depict passions stronger than those)
 172 "XIII." changed to "III." (CHAPTER III.)
 172 "neice" changed to "niece" (whilst driving with her niece)
 177 "Ht" changed to "At" (At last he could bear)
 182 "prom-" changed to "promise" (if you will promise to be)
 185 "is" added (it is as well you cannot)
 195 "tarning" changed to "turning" (listlessly turning the leaves of)
 200 "Bettwsy-Coed" changed to "Bettws-y-Coed" (and made Bettws-y-Coed my headquarters.)
 213 "with out" changed to "without" (possessed them without due trial)
 215 "apearance" changed to "appearance" (no less than his appearance.)
 220 "Cowan's" changed to "Rowan's" (inquiries as to Miss Rowan's parentage.)
 223 "augument" changed to "augmented" (embellished and augmented by each one)
 231 "stared" changed to "started" (before he started for France)
 235 "neice" changed to "niece" (had left her niece all of which she died possessed.)
 257 "gibly" changed to "glibly" (If the tale he told so glibly and circumstantially)
 260 "Carrisson" changed to "Carriston" (as Carriston averred)
 263 double "was" removed (of these precious photographs was sent home)
 267 "habi tof" changed to "habit of" (to shake off the bad habit of giving in)
 280 "misbegotton" changed to "misbegotten" (that small portion of his misbegotten frame.)
 282 "Midcomb" changed to "Midcombe" (nearest station to Midcombe, until three o'clock)
 288 "faciliate" changed to "facilitate" (to facilitate matters)
 288 "immence" changed to "immense" (and had the immense satisfaction of)
 293 "rereived" changed to "received" (I never received any reply).

Otherwise the original has been preserved, including inconsistencies in spelling, hyphenation and punctuation.

*** END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK A FORTNIGHT OF FOLLY ***

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