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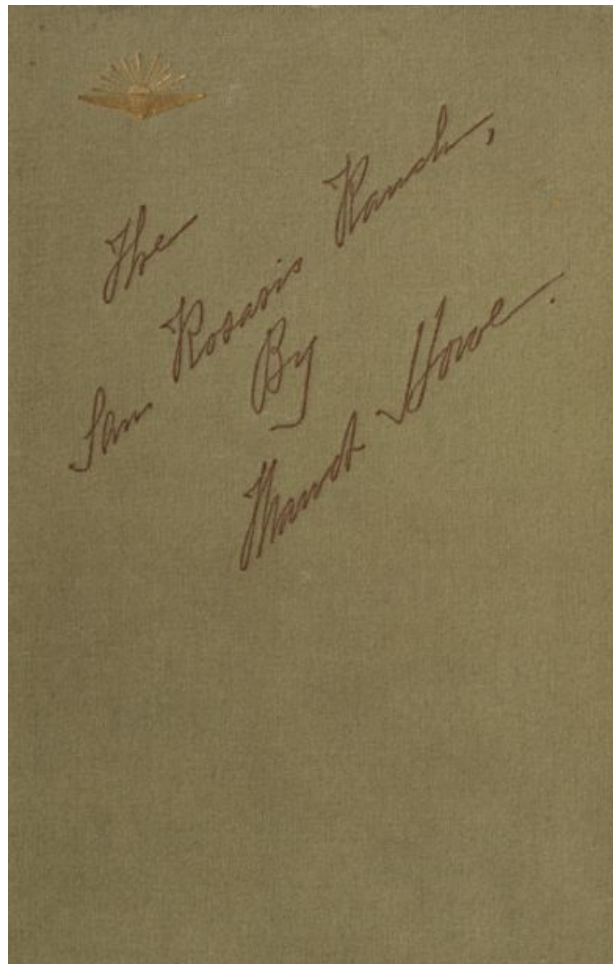
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Cover

THE
SAN ROSARIO RANCH

BY
MAUD HOWE

BOSTON
ROBERTS BROTHERS
1884

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TO
My Beloved Sister,
LAURA E. RICHARDS.

SAN ROSARIO RANCH.

CHAPTER I.

"Welcome her, all things youthful and sweet,
Scatter the blossoms under her feet!"

The house was a large square building, simple and hospitable in appearance. A wide veranda ran about the four sides, heavily draped by climbing roses and clematis. There were indisputable evidences that visitors were expected. Old Tip, the dog, knew it as well as everybody else about the house. He had been routed out from his favorite spot on the sunny side of the piazza, by Ah Lam, who had given him a shower-bath of water and soap-suds, because he did not move away to make room for the scrubbing-brush which the white-clad Celestial plied vigorously. From earliest morning the inhabitants of the simple house had been busied in making it ready. The very kittens which played about the steps of the piazza had licked an extra gloss upon their shining coats in honor of the expected guest. Only Tip, the old hunting-dog, the spoiled child of the household, showed no interest in what was going on, and with a cynical growl trotted off to the woods behind the house, where he might sleep safe from all fear of interruption.

From the wide doorway, which stood hospitably open, stepped a lady. At the first sight of Barbara Deering, strangers were always strongly impressed with the indisputable fact that she was above and before all else a lady. A second look,—and people were sure to take one,—and it appeared that she was a young lady and a beautiful one. She was tall, above the height of ordinary women, and her carriage was remarkably erect and commanding. She walked with a quick, light step to the edge of the piazza, and raising one hand to shade her eyes from the rays of the setting sun, stood looking out across the wide garden. Her figure was like that of a Greek Diana, muscular and graceful, indicating great strength and endurance. The limbs were rounded but not languidly, as one saw by the arm, from which the sleeve had slipped back: it was white,

firm, and hard. Her hands were large and shapely, the tips of the fingers red, and the texture of the skin showed that they were used to other work than that of the broidery-frame. Her head, with its crown of pretty, curling flaxen hair, was habitually held rather high, and her face wore an expression in which a certain natural hauteur and imperiousness seemed at war with a gentleness which was more the result of education than a natural trait. The forehead was wide and unlined, the eyes brown and clear, the nose straight, and the mouth small and rosy. The soft, white woollen gown, with its breast-knot of red roses, suited the young woman perfectly; and as she stood in the sunset light, a spray of climbing rose hanging overhead from the roof of the piazza, she made an unconscious picture of grace and loveliness.

At the sound of a wagon on the driveway a warm flush mantled her cheek and throat, and stepping to the door of the house she called out in a sweet, high voice, "Mamma, mamma! they are coming!"

A moment later and a large open vehicle came into sight, drawn by two swift mules, which were urged forward by the driver, a young man in whose face the traits of the girl on the piazza were reproduced, but somewhat roughly. On the seat behind the driver was seen a female figure closely enveloped in heavy travelling wraps, her features concealed by a thick veil. As the mules stopped before the entrance, the young woman on the piazza came forward with both hands outstretched, saying cordially but half shyly,--

"Dear Millicent, welcome to San Rosario! Are you very, very tired? Let me help you out."

So saying, Barbara Deering almost lifted the new arrival from the wagon, and with her strong arm supported her to a chair.

"Thank you so much!" said the new-comer, speaking with a slightly foreign accent, and lifting her veil; "and you are Barbara? I know you from your picture, only you are much prettier."

"Poor child, you must be terribly tired; you shall come and speak to mamma, and then you must go directly to your room and lie down. Hal, you will go down for Millicent's luggage?"

The young man nodded an assent, touched up his steeds, and the wagon disappeared down the red dusty road. The two young girls entered the house, Barbara leading the stranger to a large room on the upper story. In a low chair sat a small woman, with a face which must have once been beautiful, and which now shone with an expression of simple sincerity and kindness. She held out her hand to Millicent, kissed her on both cheeks, and warmly bade her welcome to San Rosario. Millicent Almsford acknowledged the greeting with a courteous grace, and immediately after accepted Barbara's offer to show her to her room.

When the door was shut upon her, and she was for the first time in many days alone, she seated herself at the window, and leaning her head upon her hand, remained wrapped in thought. She had travelled from the coast of the Adriatic Sea to the shores of the Pacific Ocean, with no companion save her maid and her own painful thoughts. And now the long journeying was at an end, and she found herself in the far West, in California, amidst her kindred, all strangers to her save by tradition and some slight correspondence. She looked about the strange room. It was exquisitely neat and fresh, with its clean whitewashed walls and new blue Kidderminster carpet, its black-walnut "bedroom set," and comfortable lounge, which had been newly covered in her honor. On the bureau were blue and white mats and cushions, a toilet-set which Barbara's busy fingers had stolen time to make.

She marked all these little details, not one of which escaped her eyes, even to the embroidered towel-rack with her initials, and the worked motto, "Welcome home." Again she looked out from the window over a wide pleasant orchard, filled with heavily fruited peach and plum trees; over a garden gay with bright-hued flowers, and beyond to the everlasting hills which close about the happy valley wherein stands the house of the San Rosario Ranch. Numbers of oxen and cows were straying over the hills, with here and there groups of sheep cropping the sun-dried grass of the hills.

The landscape was a perfect symphony in brown. The round shiny hills were golden in color; the warm-hued earth in the ploughed fields and the meadows, whose crop of grass had long since been mowed, was of a deeper tint. The house stood in an oasis of green. A great hedge of rose-trees blushing with red blossoms marked the boundary of the flower-garden, irrigated with great care through the long summer months. The sun, low-hanging over the hilltops, suddenly dropped from sight; and as the room grew dim, Millicent shivered slightly, and turning from the window threw herself on the couch and lay there quite still, too tired even to weep out the pain and homesickness in her heart. A tap on the door was followed by the entrance of one of her trunks, brought in by two strong Chinamen, at whose coppery faces Millicent stared curiously. Six large boxes were placed in a row and unstrapped by the younger Chinaman, who, when he had

completed his task, approached the stranger and said in a sympathetic voice, "Me solly you sick; Ah Lam bring tea-cup?" The white Celestial smiled benignantly and vanished, quickly reappearing with the promised cup of tea, which proved most grateful to the girl's tired nerves. The creature's sympathy and attention brought tears to her eyes; and when Barbara came in a few minutes later, to help her in unpacking, she found the traces of these tears on Millicent's cheeks.

"Do not try to dress for tea, dear; you are too tired. Where shall I find your dressing-case? You must let me take the place of your maid, now that she has left you so cruelly."

So talking pleasantly, Barbara unpacked the guest's dressing-bag, looked admiringly at the silver-topped bottles with "M. A." engraven upon them, the ivory brushes, and all the dainty *et ceteras* which were necessities to the foreign girl, with the long white hands and finger-nails which shone like pale pink conch-pearls.

"Thank you, if you would help me a little to-night, I shall quickly learn to do for myself. If you will look in that largest trunk, you may give me whatever gown lies at the top."

Barbara unfolded as she was bid a sea-green cashmere dress, in which the stranger quickly clad her slender figure. Manifold strings of tiny seed-pearls she wound about her white throat and wrists, performing all the details of her dressing with a careful precision which seemed part of her nature. The pink nails received an extra polish, though the tea-bell had twice summoned the inmates of the house to the evening repast. With a peculiarly graceful motion, like the undulation of a swift but quiet stream, she moved about the room and finally down the stairway to the dining-room below.

"Millicent, will you sit here, on my right? Hal shall have the pleasure of occupying the place beside you."

The speaker was the lady whose gentle, firm hand swayed the small realm of the San Rosario Ranch during the long absence of its master, Mr. Ralph Almsford.

Mr. Almsford had been a widower for the past ten years. On the death of his beloved wife, her mother Mrs. Deering had continued at his earnest request to make his house her home. Her two younger children, Barbara and Henry Deering, remembered no other home, and it seemed but natural to them that they should continue to live with their brother-in-law. The family life was a particularly happy one, and the tie between Ralph Almsford and the Deerings was closer than that which exists between many blood relations.

The advent of the young heiress Millicent Almsford, the half-sister of Ralph, was an event of great importance in the household, and had been eagerly anticipated by Mrs. Deering and her daughter for several weeks. Henry Deering--or as he was always called Hal--displayed an absolute indifference concerning the "strange girl" who was coming to make her home among them for a year. What Ralph Almsford felt about his guest no one of the household could divine. He was a quiet, reticent man, entirely absorbed in his business, which of late had often taken him from home for months at a time. He had written to his half-sister, urging her to visit the ranch; and his letter, the first one of the kind she had ever received, had so moved the girl that she had telegraphed her departure, and forthwith started on her long journey.

Her brother met her in San Francisco, where they passed one day together--a business engagement calling him away on the morrow, as he hoped for a few days only.

Millicent took the place assigned her by Mrs. Deering, and supper was enlivened by conversation about the journey she had just achieved, which she described as the most terrible ordeal that it was possible for a human being to undergo. The guest was entirely at her ease, though her position might have been to many people an embarrassing one. Arriving alone in a household of near connections, who were as yet absolute strangers to her, and with whom it had been decided that the next year of her life should be passed, most girls in her place would have experienced some sensation of awkwardness; but Millicent was entirely mistress of the situation. She spoke principally to Hal Deering, a jolly-looking fellow of twenty-five, who puzzled her with the bits of dialect, perfectly unintelligible to her, which he introduced into his conversation.

After supper Mrs. Deering led the way into the drawing-room, saying to her guest--

"Will you join us at prayers in the library, Millicent? Or would you prefer waiting here for us?"

"I see that you already know that I am an unorthodox person, Mrs. Deering. Frankly, I would prefer not coming, if you will allow me. Being an agnostic, I should hardly be in sympathy with your service. If you will kindly excuse me, I will await you here."

Millicent's refusal to join the family at their devotions was accompanied with a smile so exquisite and winning that the offence was forgiven, although forgiveness had not been asked.

Hal, the great six-foot giant, more than forgave the graceful girl her ungraciousness, and would have a thousand times preferred remaining with her to joining his mother and sister.

On being left to herself, Millicent moved to the piano which stood open near the window, and seating herself let her white fingers stray gently over the keys. Strange hands were Millicent's, of a whiteness that made her pale cheek look brown by comparison. The fingers were long and taper, at the tip of each a drop as of water ready to fall from the pink digits. The wrists were round and very slender. On the fifth finger of the left hand she wore a strange, small old ring of an Etruscan pattern, which had been stripped from the fleshless hand of a princess, whose sanctuary had been rifled by some nineteenth-century robber of graves. The setting enclosed a small green intaglio exquisitely carved, representing a Psyche with new-found wings.

She had a strange, white luminous face whose beauty shone from within and lit the dark gray eyes with a rare and tender loveliness. The large mouth was more exquisitely refined than the mere rosebud tininess of Barbara Deering's. The teeth were very white and perfect, and the veil of soft, golden bronze hair, in which she could have clothed herself like Mary in the desert, was deftly massed into a great dusky knot at the nape of her white neck. Her arms and bosom, veiled by half transparent draperies, were white as marble from Carrara, and as finely yet generously chiselled as those of a goddess of Phidias. She was very tall, though her grace of movement concealed her height; her small feet in their velvet sandals were not disproportionate to her size. Her features were beautiful, and her hair and eyes the delight of every artist who looked upon her. And yet that which made her so remarkable among women had nothing to do with delicate contours or harmonious tints. Her body seemed like a screen through which shone a flame, at times white and gentle, again rosy and passionate. She was like the twin opals which clasped her girdle, and was as sensitive as they to every passing influence.

As the words of the ritual, grown to be meaningless to him by their frequent repetition, fell upon the ears of Henry Deering he heeded them not, and failed to make the proper responses: other sounds had struck his ear, and soft, solemn strains of music made an under prayer to the evening service. To these strange chords his heart made answer, and his thoughts were raised by them far higher than was usual at that hour, when it was their wont to run riot over the business in hand for the next day.

As the family re-entered the drawing-room, Millicent remained seated at the piano, now striking louder chords, and finally ending the long rhapsody with a brilliant waltz of Chopin.

"Thank you, dear," said Barbara, as Millicent left the piano; "I am so glad that you are musical. I find very little sympathy for my music in the family; we will have great pleasure in practising together. I have some very good four-hand music."

Soon after, the newly arrived guest bade good-night to the family, and went to her room accompanied by Barbara.

"She is a little like Ralph," said Mrs. Deering, "only infinitely handsomer. How did she please you, my son?"

"Is she handsome? I hardly noticed. It was her voice that struck me; it has the sound of laughing waters. And can't she play, though! I never heard such music in my life."

"I am very glad for Barbara's sake that she is musical," answered his mother.

"Yes; I hope that Barbara and Miss Almsford *will* get on together. But I have my doubts," said Hal, dubiously pulling his straw-colored mustache.

This is San Rosario to-day. Shall we go back a hundred years? It has a history worth a word or two. To one who is familiar with the beautiful country which lies about the old Mission of San Rosario, it is not a little strange that the place has as yet no prominence either in history or literature. Santa Barbara and the Mission Dolores have been celebrated in prose and verse. San Miguel and San Fernando Rey are not forgotten; while San Rafael and San Francisco, now grown to be important cities, will be remembered as long as Plymouth or Manhattan.

The venerable President of the missions of Upper California, Father Junipero Serra, founded the San Rosario Mission in 1784, the last year of his life. It is possible that the judgment of the enthusiastic priest was already failing when he chose this site, for the Mission was never prosperous, and was abandoned early in the present century. While standing among the ruins of the old church, it is not difficult to see in fancy a picturesque scene enacted on the spot a century ago, on the morning of the consecration of the Mission.

The little band of priests and soldiers have come to the end of their journey; the pleasant valley set in sheltering green hills has been chosen for the site of the new Mission. The tall thin figure of Father Junipero first strikes the eye. In spite of his great age, and the mortal disease

with which he is afflicted, it is his hand that tugs lustily at the rope which swings the great bronze bell, hung in the arms of a gigantic redwood. It is he who shouts aloud the summons, "Hear, hear! all ye Gentiles! come to the holy Church!" Close to the President stand two priests,-- one, a middle-aged man with a head which indicates great power and a dogged persistence; the other, a delicate looking youth with the face of an enthusiast, beautiful and dreamy. The handful of soldiers who serve the Fathers as an escort are making fast the slight church tent which they have just set up. From the neighboring thicket the cries of the startled birds mingle with the earnest tones of Father Junipero and the deep notes of the bronze bell. Hardly less timorous than the wood creatures are the Indians, who peer cautiously from behind the great trees at the strange spectacle before them. They are invited to draw near, and the bolder ones come close to the black-robed figures, and stare curiously at the simple ceremonials with which the ground is consecrated to the service of the heavenly kingdom.

Through the indefatigable energy of the President and the two priests, the few buildings of the Mission were completed within a year. The adobe church was unusually large and well built, as one can see to-day. The tower, the base of which is strongly fortified, is still standing, though the roof of the church has long since fallen to the earthen floor. Little trace now remains of the less important buildings, for the Mission was abandoned thirty years after its establishment, and the property passed into the hands of its present owner, Mr. Ralph Almsford, some fifteen years before the opening of our story.

A century has elapsed since that day when the Fathers planted the cross amidst the stately aisles of madrone trees; the Mission is now almost forgotten, but the San Rosario Ranch is well known for its famous breed of cattle, and for its fine dairy, which supplies the San Francisco market with choice butter and cream.

The two priests--he of the hard-favored countenance, and he of the gentle eyes--lie side by side at the foot of the crumbling altar. The Indians who were reclaimed by them from barbarism have gone to their happy hunting-grounds, and the brilliant future prophesied by Father Junipero is proven to be a dream and nothing more.

CHAPTER II.

"Look to yourselves, ye polished gentlemen!
No city airs or arts pass current here.
Your rank is all reversed: let men of cloth
Bow to the stalwart churls in overalls."

Millicent Almsford awoke early on the morning after her arrival. "What is the matter?" she asked.

No one answering her question, she put another.

"Why do we not go on, what are we stopping for?" this still in a semi-somnolent voice. On opening her eyes and finding that she was not in the berth of the palace car, where she had for a week past always found herself, she laughed outright and then gave a deep sigh.

Her long journey, from the Palazzo Fortunio in Venice to the San Rosario Ranch in California, was at an end; and here she was, to use her own phrase, "planted in the wilderness for a year to come."

"Heavens! how can I bear it?" she cried, tossing restlessly to the other side of her wide bed; "it is all so new, so raw, so crude, so terrible,--just like this cotton sheet, which has chafed my chin so badly that I would rather have slept without one."

Soon a loud bell broke the silence of the morning. Millicent did not heed it, but looked about the room to find a means of summoning assistance. Happily she found the bell quite near her, and, after twice ringing, a tap at her door was heard. In answer to her "Come in," Ah Lam opened the door cautiously.

"Missie call Ah Lam?"

"I want my breakfast now," said Millicent, somewhat dismayed at the attendant she had summoned.

Soon Barbara came, carrying the breakfast tray in her strong arms.

"I am so sorry you don't feel well this morning, Millicent. What can I do for you?"

"But I feel perfectly well. Do I look so badly?"

"No, dear; but we were afraid, not seeing you--"

"Dear Barbara, you must excuse my strange foreign habits. You know I have been only a week in your country. I did not realize that you all came downstairs to breakfast. What time is it?"

"After seven."

"And you have been up since--?"

"Since six o'clock only. Hal is the early riser. Half-past four sees him overlooking the milking."

Millicent shuddered; she had indeed come to a strange land.

"I will try to learn the customs of your country," she said rather piteously, taking up her cup of coffee.

"Only learn those that please you, dear. As for our early breakfast, which I see shocks you, think no more about it. I will gladly bring it up to you every day."

"I shall unpack some of my boxes this morning, Barbara; and later we will try some of your duets, if you like."

The unpacking of her Penates gave Millicent a certain satisfaction, which was, however, tempered by the sad recollections they brought to her mind, of her own apartment with its three pretty rooms in the corner of the great Palazzo Fortunio.

Millicent Almsford was the daughter of an American gentleman who had lived in Venice since before the birth of his daughter. Here the greater portion of her life had been spent, with the interruption only of one long visit made to a relative in England.

A month previous to the opening of our story her father, widowed at her birth, had married for the third time, his wife being a young and uninteresting Italian woman of the middle class. The marriage, to which Millicent was strongly opposed, had led her to accept the invitation of her half-brother to make him an extended visit in his California home.

From the great cases she lifted, with the help of Ah Lam, the household treasures which she had been unwilling to leave behind, in the home which knew her as its mistress no longer. A motley collection of articles had the great trunks enclosed: pictures, books, a large Eastern carpet, a parchment missal of the fifteenth century with beautiful illuminations, a guitar, a little majolica shrine with a figure of San Antonio very much the worse for the journey, a set of delicately wrought silken window and bed hangings of pale sea color, a pair of heavy silver candelabra, with a ponderous packet of wax tapers, and innumerable other knick-knacks.

With the willing and ingenious assistance of Ah Lam, this *roba*, to borrow the untranslatable Italian phrase, was disposed about the large room. The neat Nottingham lace curtains, at which Millicent had looked askance, were now hidden beneath the blue-green draperies, embroidered by the hands of the mother whose face she had never seen. The pictures were hung upon the walls, and a deep-hued Egyptian scarf disguised the pasteboard motto, with its friendly welcome. A book-case was improvised by the Chinaman from some old boxes, and covered by Millicent, who unhesitatingly cut to pieces a heavy woollen gown whose color struck her as appropriate to that end. Beside the bed she hung the little shrine of San Antonio, with much grief that the long journey had damaged his saintly toes and fingers. On a table were ranged the candlesticks and the missal, and an old copy of Dante with a mouse-gnawed cover, and Lear's "Nonsense Book,"--this last because it was an old friend from childhood, which she, being a creature of habit, had forgotten to discard.

The complete metamorphosis of the apartment was a work of several days; and only when it was entirely accomplished were Mrs. Deering and her daughter admitted to see the change. Poor Barbara! All the pains and trouble she had taken, all the careful stitches she had set, were unavailing. The new carpet she had bought with her own pocket money was entirely covered by old rugs, some of which were very faded and worn; none of them were as bright and clean as the Kidderminster.

The warm knitted afghan had disappeared from the bed, which was covered by a white quilt embroidered in strange floral designs. The very toilet set had been replaced, and the pretty painted candles had been banished.

"I have made it a little like Venice," cried Millicent excitedly, "only the walls in my bedroom there are hung in silk and all painted in water-color, and the rooms are so high,--you remember the green room in the Palazzo Fortunio, Mrs. Deering, with the nymphs, the sea gods, and the green hobgoblins painted all over it?"

"Yes, indeed, Millicent. What a change you have wrought in the spare bedroom. Ralph would hardly recognize it. I see now what was contained in the boxes which so aroused Hal's curiosity. I

am afraid you have made your room too attractive, dear, and that we shall find difficulty in coaxing you out of it into our more prosaic apartments."

"Oh, I always live the greater part of my life between my own four walls: I am not a sociable person, I am afraid. At least so Barbara thinks."

Barbara said nothing; she was hurt and disappointed. The room, with its strange furnishing, was unnatural to her. She felt, as she looked at Millicent with this new setting which suited her so perfectly, that neither in the room nor in the life of Millicent Almsford was there a place for her. She had eagerly anticipated the advent of this unknown girl, sisterless like herself, who should grow to be so much to her, and in whom she should find the sympathetic friend of whom she had greatly felt the need; and now that she had come, Barbara was bitterly disappointed. Millicent was gracious, winning, full of attractive qualities, intellectually sympathetic to a degree which she had never before known. And yet the tall daughter of the Ranch was cruelly disturbed.

"I can be nothing to her; she is complete without me," she had said to her mother; and herein lay the reason for all her disappointment. Living among people to whom her beauty, her talent, and her warmth of heart had been the most poetic features of their lives, Barbara Deering had grown to value men and women according to the amount of good or pleasure she could impart to them. Her life had been one wherein the tears and sighs had been stifled, or hidden in the darkness of her chamber; the laughter and smiles, the bright cheery face, the helping hand always meeting those about her. Children loved her, and old people blessed her for her sympathy and kindness. To her mother and brother she was sun, moon, and stars; and to them every hour of her life was consecrated. Naturally endowed with certain tastes which would have somewhat interfered with the quiet plan of life laid out for her, she had systematically neglected these gifts, sacrificing herself to an imaginary duty which was always before her eyes. She had avoided such pursuits as might have led her aside from the common life of the family; and happiness for her was found in the happiness she could afford to others. Enjoyment to her, unless her dear ones were included in it, was something like a sin; and the pleasure she took in her music gave her pangs of conscience.

One morning, about a week after her arrival, Millicent was awakened by the sharp sound of a horse's hoofs clattering down the stony road which led to the orchard from the hill behind the house. She sprang up, and throwing wide the shutters, looked out to see whence the sound came. It was still very early. The sun had not yet clambered over the tops of the high hills; but the sky was bright, and the shadows lay like a misty garment over the happy valley, locked in its circle of hills. The great bull Jupiter, the terror of the Ranch, stood near the house, sniffing the cool morning air, and giving thunderous snorts of pleasure. The bars had been left down, and he had gained access to the green orchard, forbidden ground to him. The hedge of roses was hung with a wondrous garlanding of dewdrops, and the dark-red lilies were just awakening to the draught which the night winds had distilled in their chalices. From every blade of grass and leaf of clover sparkled a diamond. The fair valley had arrayed itself in jewels and fragrance for another day of light and love.

The sound of the horse's hoofs grew nearer; and as Millicent looked expectantly along the bridle-path that descends from the mountain, there came into sight, parting the wet boughs of the fruit trees, a horseman mounted on a gray mustang. The rider was a strong man, who sat his steed with the air of one to the manner born. He was dressed in corduroy breeches, high top-boots, and flannel shirt. He had no hat. In his belt shone a long hunting knife, and over his shoulder was slung a rifle. Before him on the saddle lay a stag whose heavy antlers hardly cleared the ground.

The first rays of the sun, just peeping over the hill-tops, touched his thick brown hair, giving it a glint of bronze, shone on the wide white forehead, flashed into the eyes, and showed her for an instant a stern profile, exceedingly beautiful. Then she lost his face as he turned the corner of the piazza. Here he dismounted, and lifting the deer from the horse laid it on the grass. Perhaps the beauty of the dead creature struck a chord of remorse in the breast of the hunter, for he gave a sigh and turned it so that a gaping wound in the neck was not visible. Then drawing a pencil and a bit of paper from his pocket, he wrote something, and fastening the billet to the horns of the deer, he mounted his horse, and giving him the rein returned slowly by the same road. As he drew near again Millicent saw that the mustache which hid the upper lip was golden-brown, that the throat was white and shapely, that the mouth smiled not untenderly, while the eyes smiled not at all. These details were noted with an artist's love of beauty: and as she watched him out of sight, she wondered with all a woman's curiosity who he might be.

Since Millicent's arrival there had been many visitors at the Ranch. All the friends of the

Deering family who were within calling distance had either come to make the acquaintance of Miss Almsford, or had signified their intention of shortly doing so.

Calling distance in California may be said to extend not over fifty miles. The neighbor who lives half a hundred miles from you will make a call, or in other words will come to pass the day. Calling terms cease beyond these limits, and visits of not less than twenty-four hours are exchanged.

In none of the people whom she had met had Millicent felt or manifested the least interest. She had received them graciously, but with a cordiality of manner only. Not one man or woman among the circle of friends who were on familiar terms at the Ranch awoke in her a desire for further acquaintance. But this one who had called at six o'clock in the morning, and had left his visiting card pinned to the antlers of a stag, piqued the curiosity of the indifferent young lady. Wrapping herself in a soft gray woollen dressing-gown, she ran downstairs in the liveliest manner.

It was a splendid animal, fine as the buck described by Browning in "Donald." Alas, the slender legs would carry his noble body and stately head no further; the branching horns would never again clash against the antlers of a rival. Millicent touched the beautiful dead creature tenderly between the horns, and tried to close the dim eyes. At that moment she heard a step upon the piazza, and Hal Deering joined her.

"Why, Miss Almsford, what does this mean? You to be up and dressed"--he hesitated, "well, yes, you are dressed, and very becomingly too; I like that loose gown--at six in the morning! sighing over the fine piece of venison, and performing the last kind offices of friendship too. Don't believe you would do as much for me."

The young man looked at the deer approvingly, and perceiving the note, took it from the antler and deliberately read it aloud:--

HONORED MISTRESS DEERING,--I lay myself at your feet, and with myself a pretty bit of game I have just killed, thinking that the fair Venetian might fancy a venison steak for her breakfast. I kiss your hand, dear my lady, and am your most unworthy but loyal servitor,
JOHN GRAHAM.

"Of course, knew it was Graham, queer creature. Wonder why he did not stop and take breakfast with us. He is an unaccountable fellow."

"What did you call him?"

"Graham; his full name is John Douglass Graham. Just like a hero's in a novel. But Graham never does anything very heroic, I fancy."

"Shall you cut off his skin?"

"Whose? Graham's?"

"How foolish, Mr. Deering. I mean the deer's fur."

"Oh no, certainly not; in America we always serve game with the hide or feathers. In fact, we usually do not remove the wool from our mutton; but knowing that you were accustomed to seeing it dressed after the super-civilized fashion of the Venetians, I have--"

"Mr. Deering, that is stupid. I want his skin and horns; please arrange them for me."

"Yes, Princess; your most humble servant will obey your mandate."

He seized the creature by its slender legs, hoisted it deftly to his shoulders, and disappeared through the side door. Millicent picked up the bit of a note, smoothed it, and laid it at Mrs. Deering's plate on the breakfast table.

Millicent asked Barbara later on in the day who and what John Graham might be. She was told that the man with the bronze hair and strange eyes was a near neighbor, and that she would without doubt soon make his acquaintance.

With this answer Millicent was fain to be content. She thought about him all that day and dreamed of him that night; the next morning his face was not so distinctly in her mind, but her thoughts were constantly busy with weaving romances in which John Graham played a conspicuous part. The girl was indeed a creature "of the stuff which dreams are made of;" the web of her daily life, no matter how common-place its actual experience might be, was rich with her own vivid imaginings, like the gold thread that a weaver twists through a sad-colored fabric.

"Mr. Deering, take me to the dairy. I have not yet seen it," said Millicent one afternoon, as they all sat together on the wide piazza, after the early dinner. The young man rose slowly, his great length unfolding itself as he left his chair; and for answer put down his pipe and reached up

for Millicent's hat, which he had hung on a peg high above her reach. The two young people passed down the gravel walk between the broad flower beds fragrant with the wonderful roses which grow only upon the shores of the Pacific. A geranium tree twelve feet high, with its great scarlet bunches, and the vine of Maréchal roses which climbed up the piazza and tapped with its heavy blossoms at her casement, aroused Millicent's enthusiasm.

The dairy, Hal told her, was fully thirty years old. But her own palace had frowned grim and black upon the Grand Canal before the passengers on the good ship "Mayflower" had landed in Plymouth. The dairy was a plain, neat frame-building painted white, looking out upon a great farm-yard. Here the pretty cows all stood crowded together, waiting their turn to offer up their evening tribute. Two black-browed Mexicans were milking, and a tall Yankee was overseeing the straining of the milk. He stood by a large trough and received the brimming buckets from the milkers, pouring their contents through a strainer into the great receptacle. In the midst of the herd lay Jupiter, the splendid bull, lazily chewing his cud and switching away the sand flies with his thick black tail.

In a cool inner room were long shelves ranged about the brick walls, whereon stood a shining array of pans filled with milk in different stages. Millicent was one of those people who are always stimulated with a desire to accomplish whatever other people are engaged in doing. She now announced her intention of learning to milk. This suggestion was promptly vetoed by Hal, who, to divert her attention, called to one of the men to bring him the skimming utensils. He placed a large stone jar beneath the shelf, and taking one of the milk pans which was covered with a rich coating of yellow cream, proceeded to skim it. His only tool was a little wooden wand, resembling a sculptor's modelling stick. With this he separated the yellow disk of cream from the sides of the pan, tipping it slightly so that the whole mass of cream slipped off unbroken, leaving the pale-blue skimmed milk in the vessel. Millicent was delighted with the operation which Hal accomplished with such skill, and after many unsuccessful attempts finally performed the feat in a manner very creditable to a beginner.

"If you will find your way back to the house, Princess, I will help the men to finish the milking," said young Deering, when Millicent had announced her intention of returning.

She nodded her assent, and walking a few steps stopped and leaned over the gate of the farm-yard. Presently Deering came out from the dairy, having donned his rough overalls and jersey, and, placing himself on a three-legged stool, proceeded to milk a tall white cow. Millicent looked at him musingly for a few minutes, and then took her way down the path which led to the house. It was but a short distance, and lay within sight of both farm and dwelling-house, and yet she was somewhat astonished at the young man's allowing her to return alone. To see him milking, too, at work with the common laborers, had greatly perplexed her. She cast a glance over her shoulder to reassure herself that it was really Hal's hatless head which was bending forward, almost touching the side of the white cow. "And yet he is a gentleman," she said aloud; and, remembering the white hands of her papa and the gentlemen whom she had known in the Old World, was reminded of the truth, which when it is spoken seems a truism, and yet which is often lost sight of, that the proof of gentleness lies neither in the skin of the body, nor its raiment.

Neither goodly clothes nor skin
Show the gentleman within.

CHAPTER III.

"And to watch you sink by the fireside now
Back again, as you mutely sit
Musing by fire-light, that great brow
And the spirit-small hand propping it."

John Douglass Graham, by birth American, by descent Scottish, by profession painter, sat looking out from his tower window. It was too dark to paint, and not yet late enough for him to light his

study lamp and begin his evening work; so he sat idle, a rare thing for him. Before his window there stretched a fair landscape; and a man, a painter above other men, might well be forgiven an hour's idleness in such a place. The sun's last rays made the little copse look more golden and dreamy than did the stronger morning light. The still pool with its warm reflection of sky and trees, the mysterious dark wood beyond, all shadowy and full of dreams, made a picture which his hand never wearied of reproducing. On his easel stood a canvas which bore a reflection of the scene on which he was looking, painted in a strong, masterly manner, but not yet completed. "Ah, Heavens! no wonder that men love to paint in cities, with nothing of nature's beauty before them to shame their work. If I dwelt face to face with a brick wall and saw no motion save that of horse-cars and over-laden dray horses I might be more satisfied with what I accomplish. This picture might then seem beautiful to me. It is a different thing to look into the face of the great model and then at one's work. Only the strongest of us can do that, only our Duprés and Rousseaus. Shall I ever feel that I can even dimly picture this one view? Can I ever send my testimony of beauty to the world? Can I say the one word of truth which was given me to speak?"

Graham spoke to the four walls to which most of his conversation was addressed. The only sympathy he ever received in his bursts of enthusiasm or despair was from a portrait which hung where the first rays of light fell upon it in the morning. It was the portrait of a woman neither young nor beautiful with the beauty of youth. A tender, sad face, with those heavy lines at the mouth and nose which tell of grief and long weeping. The gray hair was smoothly brushed from the forehead, and the whole mien and costume showed that dignity of age so rarely seen in these days when grandmothers dress in rainbow-hued garments fit for their grandchildren, curl and frizzle their locks after the mode worn by the reigning beauty of the time, and in every possible way simulate a youth whose charm they have not, thus losing the real grace which belongs to their age. Before his mother's portrait the artist always kept fresh flowers, and to that dear and noble face his eyes were turned in a mute appeal for sympathy many times during the long solitary day.

The fires in the western sky burned low and finally faded out before Graham rose from his seat near the window and touched his lamp into flame. The searching light of the large astral revealed clearly the interior of the apartment in which the artist lived and worked. It was a square, high room, not very large, with a miscellaneous furnishing. One corner, half hidden by a large canvas, was devoted to his narrow wooden bed and dressing-table. Near a large casement stood his easel with palette and brushes. On the walls hung a pair of foils and masks and some boxing gloves. These, and a pair of Indian clubs in the corner, proved that the occupant of the tower was not careless of developing the splendid muscles with which he was endowed. Near the doorway hung a string of curious Japanese *netshukés*,--masks, monkeys, bears, men, women, and fruit, carefully carved in wood or ivory by the greatest artificers the world knows to-day. The walls were covered with pictures and sketches; the large table littered with books and tubes of paint. A group of deer antlers served as clothes-pegs, and the floor was strewn with the skins of these and many other animals. A quaint apartment, in which no attempts at the picturesque had been made, which the careless grouping together of many objects had nevertheless attained.

John Graham had reclaimed the old tower from utter desolation two years before, when he took up his residence in the ruins of the Spanish Mission. The adobe building had fallen to decay, a thick cloak of ivy and flowering vines mercifully hiding from the light of day the desolate ruin of what had been the religious centre of the country of San Rosario. The church walls had fallen to the ground; but the reredos and deserted altar stood swept by the winds of heaven, and decked with climbing roses and clinging ferns. The tower, which had been built very substantially, and with a view to defence in case of danger, still stood stanch, gray and weather-beaten. A flight of steep wooden stairs leading from what had been the vestibule of the church gave access to the room.

The tower stood within the limits of the San Rosario Ranch, the property of Mr. Ralph Almsford, which included twenty square miles of wooded country and arable land.

When Graham had asked permission to establish himself in the old tower, Mr. Almsford had readily granted the request, thinking, however, that he would weary of the solitary life in a few weeks. Two years had now passed, and the artist still inhabited his little eyrie, whose possession he disputed with the night owls which had been wont to sit blinking in the tower through the long hours of daylight. The place was five miles distant from the Deering house, and Graham's only neighbor was an old wood-cutter who lived in a cabin hard by, and who went by the name of French John. He prepared the artist's meals and took charge of his room. French John was a strange, silent old creature, whose life had been a varied one. He had served in the French army

first as a soldier, then as an officer's servant. His reminiscences, when he could be induced to tell them, were full of interest. He had been in Paris in '48; his hands had helped to tear up the pavement to make the blockades and barriers. He had served in Algiers, whence he had come to America, and gone as a private to the war of the Southern Rebellion. He had finally drifted out to the San Rosario Ranch, where he would in all probability pass the remainder of his days. For some reason he had received no pension from either of the governments for the support of which he had shed his blood. In his old age this stranded bit of humanity was forced to support himself by the hard labor of a wood-cutter. His little cabin was built behind the altar, where the Lady Chapel had once stood, sheltered from the winds by the high screen of the reredos.

It was to the humble dwelling of French John that Graham proceeded after having made a toilet with unusual care. The door of the little log hut was ajar; and as he approached, the interior was entirely visible, revealed by the uncertain light of the wood-fire. The old man was stooping over the blaze with a saucepan in his hand, the contents of which he was vigorously stirring. Three cats of preternaturally grave aspect sat nearby, intently watching the culinary preparations. A mangy old hunting dog lay snoring in the corner, gray and scarred as his master. A battered fowling-piece and a greasy game-bag were flung on the wooden bench which served as table and chair to the occupant of the humble dwelling. The young man paused a moment on the threshold and sighed. The unkempt little cot with its lonely owner only differed in degree from his own tower, from himself. He had not even the companionship of the dumb beasts. When he should grow as old and battered as the wrinkled wood-cutter, would he be dependent for sympathy on a purring cat, or an old dog? Presently he spoke, but it was in a loud, cheery voice which in nowise indicated the sombre thought which had just suggested itself to his mind.

"Good-evening, John. What luck did you have to-day?"

"Four quail and two rabbits," replied the old man laconically, without returning the greeting of his visitor.

"And what have you in that old iron pot of yours? Something very good, I warrant."

"Stewed quail with bacon."

"Well, you must eat it yourself, for I do not want any supper to-night; I am going up to the house to pass the evening. Here is a package of tobacco for you. I shall be ready at the usual time for my breakfast."

The old man nodded his thanks for the present; and Graham left the hut, and proceeded to the spot where his horse was tethered. He saddled and mounted the mustang, and rode swiftly down the narrow path. Old John watched from his doorway the movements of the young man, and when he had disappeared, sat down to his solitary meal. The brief glimpses of Graham and his many kindly acts were the only human influences which touched the life of poor old French John. His dealings with Hal Deering were rare; once in a month the young man visited his cot, overlooked the work he had been engaged upon, and paid him his wages. For the occasional gifts of tobacco and wine, the chance newspaper from Paris, which were the only events of importance in the dull routine of his life, he was indebted to Graham. He gave no expression to his gratitude, and would have been sorely puzzled to do so. But the artist was none the less aware of it; and some portion of the packages which occasionally came to the tower from San Francisco never failed to find their way to the hut of the wood-cutter.

As Graham rode up the gravel path which led to the house, he caught a glimpse of a tall, slender figure swaying out from the gloom of the piazza. A white, bare arm was stretched upward to pluck a bunch of roses from a vine twisted about the porch. Thus much he saw and nothing more, as he fastened his horse and mounted to the piazza, which had suddenly become tenantless. The house door stood hospitably open, and the young man entered the hall and passed into the library. The soft candle-light showed him the room and its one occupant, the woman whom he had seen dimly amid the climbing roses an instant before. Evidently she had not known that the hoof-beats on the road were bringing a guest; for she was kneeling upon the hearth, her graceful shoulders bent, her strong white arms steadily working a pair of bellows. The total depravity of inanimate things is never more clearly seen than in the case of a wood-fire that refuses to burn. The girl, after several unavailing efforts to rouse a flame from the smouldering mass of embers, deliberately took the fire to pieces and rebuilt it after another fashion, putting a handful of pine cones atop of the logs, and setting them alight with a roll of paper. At last she succeeded in starting the blaze, and, stretching her graceful length upon the deerskin rug, she rested her elbows on the low bench before the fender, and lay quite silent, her face supported by her hands, her dark eyes looking into the fire.

John Graham, who had watched from the doorway every movement of the unconscious young

woman with the pleasure of an artist in all things which are graceful and beautiful, still stood silent, giving no sign of his presence. The warm, pleasant interior, with its comfortable easy chairs and sofas, its open piano, near which stood a work-basket, its shelves of books and vases of flowers, bore all the infallible indications which mark the inmost shrine of domestic life. This was a room where the members of the household lived. Here was a home, the centre of affection and hospitality. The shadow of the lonely old man and his desolate dwelling rose for a moment before his eyes, and at that thought he stepped forward as if irresistibly drawn toward the cheerful hearth and the graceful woman whose eyes were lighted by the dancing flames. There was a tender look about his mouth, usually so stern in expression, as he came forward into the firelight with an expectant countenance, as if he were about to meet an old friend. Hearing the footsteps, the girl without turning her head said,--

"Well, Barbara, here you see me, making myself comfortable on Graham's deerskin. It has just come home; is it not a beauty?"

Receiving no answer, Miss Millicent Almsford turned her face so that her eyes fell upon John Graham standing near her, with a smile on his lips, a flush on his cheek. Was it the sudden leaping of the fire from the heart of the great apple log, John Graham asked himself, or was it the shining of a flame from within that lighted Millicent's face with a strange radiance at the instant when her eyes met his own? For an instant, a space of time too short to be counted by seconds, for something less than one quickened heartbeat, they looked at each other, these two, the woman with his name still on her lips, the man drawn toward the warm fireside by an uncontrollable desire to take his place in the picture, to remain no longer an outsider, a looker-on. One instant, and then habit, ceremony, the second nature of both, asserted itself, and each shrank back from that too intimate glance; the girl rising slowly to her feet, the man making a ceremonious bow.

"I beg your pardon for disturbing you, Miss Almsford; but I found the door open, and I am allowed the privilege of making myself at home at San Rosario. As there is no one here to introduce me, will you allow me to name myself as your most humble servitor, John Graham? I am vain enough to hope that my name is not quite unknown to you. Hal has perhaps spoken of me."

"Indeed, yes, they have all mentioned you frequently. Mrs. Deering and Barbara have not yet returned from the station. When you came in I thought they had returned. I think the train must be late; they drove down to meet a friend. Will you not be seated, Mr. Graham?"

Millicent had by this time quite recovered her equanimity, somewhat shaken by the sudden appearance of the man who had lived so persistently in her thoughts for the past fortnight. She seated herself near the fire, motioning Graham to a chair on the other side.

"I suppose that this fire quite shocks you? Mr. Deering cannot bear to sit in the same room with it; but I have suffered so much from the change of climate that I am allowed to have this little blaze every evening. Do you see this pretty rug? It only came home to-day. Mr. Deering had it dressed for me. It is from the deer which you brought here one morning,--a beautiful, soft piece of fur."

"Yes, it is well arranged too. Did I understand you, Miss Almsford, to say that Miss Deering had gone to meet some visitors?"

"Yes, but you need not mind,"--her quick ear had caught the shade of annoyance in his voice,--"it is only poor Ferrara."

"Poor Ferrara? Ah, I see you have already guessed his secret."

"Who could help it when it was so very evident? Do you think Barbara will ever say yes?"

"I cannot tell. I sometimes hope so, but she is over-fastidious."

"Fastidious? Is that the term to use? Surely you would not have her marry him unless she loved him? To a woman like Barbara such a fate would be intolerable."

"I do not quite agree with you. You know that self-sacrifice is Miss Deering's greatest idea of happiness."

"I cannot comprehend it; truly I think I do not understand Barbara, though I do appreciate her and admire her. They have been expecting a visit from you for some time. Mr. Deering said he should ride over to your tower and look you up to-morrow."

"I have been very much occupied of late, or I should have paid my respects to you before this time. If you have heard anything about me, you must have heard that I am an undependable person, and never do the things which people expect of me. Besides, I am a hard-working creature, and not of the butterfly genus of man like our good Ferrara. Tell me a little how this new country strikes you. What a change it must be, this sudden transplantation from Venice to California!"

"I have suffered terribly. Ah! Mr. Graham, you who have known my Venice can feel for me. None of them here can understand it. I feel like a plant which has been torn suddenly from a garden beautiful with flowers and sunshine, gentle showers and happy birds, and placed with its roots all torn and bleeding on a barren mountain-side, with no flowers near it, only sturdy, useful herbs, which neither shrivel in the terrible sun, nor wither in the keen mountain winds. But *I* fade and die. There is no room for me in this great New World, where all are so busy and have so much work to do. The few beauties which they have, their blue skies and grand hills, they neither understand nor love. They have no time to look back into the glorious past with its memories; they know not how to seize the present with its actualities; they live and toil ever for the future, which they will not live to see. I have nought in common with them. I belong to the land of my birth, where the present is beautiful with the splendors of the past. What are my books, my studies, to these people? Nothing. They tolerate my eccentricity; they listen patronizingly to the tales of what has been; but they bemoan my wasted time, and would fain teach me to throw away my embroidery needle and learn to use their horrible sewing-machines. My music is my saving grace, but they approve of it more than they enjoy it."

Millicent spoke rapidly and with shining eyes. She had at last found a soul which, if not kindred to her own, was at least capable of an intelligent sympathy.

"It is not strange that you should feel as you do; and, believe me, I can sympathize with you; and yet, do not be hurt if I tell you that this very transplanting is the thing which you needed. Do you know how the finest peaches are produced? To borrow another simile from nature, it is by taking a slip from an old tree and grafting it to the sturdy trunk of a young fruit tree, that the most perfect fruit is obtained. Be not afraid; the wound will heal; and the strong, vigorous sap of the young tree will make the blossom, which now droops, bloom as a rare fruit."

"I do not want it. I do not belong here. I have no part, no sympathy with it," she said rebelliously. "I hate it, this land, where you all strive for money, not for art, and where fame is measured out with ingots for weights."

"When I was in Venice," said Graham, "there was with me a fellow artist, a student like myself. We took our first trip through the Grand Canal together. I remember his first criticism. Shall I tell it to you? It was this: 'How terrible to see cabbage leaves floating on the Grand Canal!' It was the feature which first struck him. For years after he lived in the wonderful city, loving it better, painting it more truly, day by day. He has long since forgotten the cabbage leaves which at first annoyed his nice English taste. Believe me, you will find, above and beneath the things which now jar and shock your nerves, much that is grand in this country which you will one day be proud to call your own."

"Never, never!" she cried impetuously.

At this moment voices sounded in the hall, and several persons entered the library. These were Barbara and her mother, Hal Deering, and a short gentleman with a very large round head, on which the coarse black hair, closely cropped, stood straight in air, like the hobbled mane of a Mexican pony. His piercing black eyes were set too close to the well-shaped aquiline nose; and the black mustache curled fiercely from the upper lip, revealing a good mouth set with strong white teeth. His forehead was deeply seared with lines which betokened frequent frowns, but the wrinkles about the mouth looked as if it might be in the habit of laughing constantly. A good olive complexion made the face not ill-looking, while the small, well-modelled hands and feet redeemed the rather unwieldy little body from absolute ugliness. On seeing Graham, the new-comer frowned fiercely and twisted his mustache upward in an irritated manner. When the artist stepped forward so that the light from the lamp fell on his face, the irate expression died from the countenance of the little gentleman; and, with a fat, good-natured laugh, he shook him warmly by the hand, turning his mustachios downward so that they resembled drooping commas. This act altered the expression of his countenance to an extraordinary degree, half its ferocity having disappeared with the tight upward twist of the mustache.

By some coincidence or providence this had been a red-letter day in the lives of several in the party. The morning mail had brought young Deering the welcome news that his favorite pair of oxen had taken a prize at a cattle-show the day before. The gentle mother had received a letter by the same mail from her wandering son-in-law, Ralph Almsford, full of affection and promising a speedy return to the Ranch. Ferrara was greatly elated by Barbara's having driven down to the station to meet him; and Millicent seemed, for the first time since her arrival at the Ranch, to be thoroughly alive and awake. Her pale cheek was softly flushed, the color shining through the luminous skin like the fire of an opal seen beneath its milky veil. Her eyes, usually deep and earnest, but without great animation, were lit by a flame which was not reflected from the

firelight. Barbara was happy because those about her were so. Her musical little laugh was not mechanical to-night; she was really in good spirits and in no need of feigning them. Graham's rather frozen existence seemed to be melted by the genial company; and the evening passed by with that lightning rapidity unknown in social gatherings, no matter how magnificently they be appointed, where the spirit of cordiality and good-fellowship is lacking. Music was not wanting to complete the jollity. Ferrara sang some delightful Spanish songs with more animation than voice; and, to the astonishment of the company, Millicent, who until that moment had not sung a note, at Graham's request seated herself at the piano, and sang, with a voice of rare beauty and power, ballads tender and war-songs gay, old Italian music of masters long forgotten.

"Sweet Mistress Deering, will you not give us some music?" asked Graham, as Millicent left the piano.

"After such singing as Millicent's and Mr. Ferrara's, my little thread of a voice could hardly be heard, Graham."

"Play for us then, my lady. Miss Barbara, are you not in the mood for a dance?"

"Of course she is," said Hal, "and so is Ferrara. Come, Princess, I will give you your first lesson in the American waltz."

The young men rolled back the huge rugs, leaving the hard-wood floor exposed. Mrs. Deering placed herself at the piano and struck up a little old-fashioned waltz which she had learned in her youth, and Millicent was whirled off her feet by her energetic partner. Not till she had danced twice with Deering and Ferrara, did Graham claim her hand for a waltz; and not till Mrs. Deering struck the last chords of the music did he loose her waist from his circling arm. Then a stroll on the piazza was proposed, and it was not till the last stroke of twelve warned them that the new day had begun that the party broke up. Barbara and Millicent stood together watching for Hal, who had gone to fetch Graham's horse, when the artist joined them on the piazza and bade them good-night. Millicent, with her foreign breeding, never had conformed to the American habit of hand-shaking, but when Graham wished her good-night she instinctively and unconsciously gave him her hand. He held it possibly a half second longer than was necessary, and then sprang on his horse. As he rode down the dark path, he turned in his saddle and took a last look at the house. Barbara had gone indoors; one figure alone stood beneath the rose-vine with bare white arms, the figure he had seen on his arrival earlier in the evening.

"Good-night to you," he cried. The deep, musical tones were answered by a farewell greeting from the girl who stood there alone in the night watching his retreating form.

CHAPTER IV.

"Then, in the boyhood of the year,
Sir Launcelot and Queen Guinevere
Rode through the coverts of the deer
With blissful treble ringing clear;
She seemed a part of joyous Spring."

Though the greater part of his time was spent in the old tower, John Graham was well known in San Francisco. His studio, at the top of a tall apartment-house in one of the unfrequented thoroughfares of the city, was familiar to most of its aspirants to artistic fame. In this large bare room, with its strong north light, there assembled every morning a dozen young men who were busily engaged in cast drawing and model painting. To the instruction of these youths two days of the week were devoted by the artist, whose only recompense was in the gratitude of his scholars. One morning not long after his meeting with Miss Almsford, John Graham might have been seen carefully examining his pupils' work, giving a word of advice here, a criticism there, and a hearty encouragement to all. On his return from Paris he had opened his studio to all those who were desirous of studying art. The first year he had had but three students; at the end of the second year the number had quadrupled. On the morning in question Graham had arrived with a new model,--a rough-looking fellow whom he had met in the street, and induced to accompany him to the studio. On a platform at the end of the room stood the stalwart model; while the artist, standing beside him, gave an off-hand lecture on anatomy, the students sketched the man or took

notes of what their master was saying. It was not Graham's habit to do any work at the studio; but this morning, after he had finished his discourse, he placed himself at a vacant easel, and with a strong, bold hand made a free drawing of the superbly modelled figure. As he worked he forgot his class, his lecture, everything but the canvas before him and the subject he was studying. As the sketch grew beneath his hand the scholars one by one forsook their work, and stood watching him silently. The perfect confidence with which he worked--never hesitating, never altering what was already done--was fascinating to the younger men; and even the sculptor, Arthur Northcote, who inhabited the adjoining studio, stopped on his way upstairs and joined the group behind his chair. When the model declared himself unable longer to maintain the pose in which he had been placed, Graham threw down his brush with a sigh, saying--

"Well, Horton, you may go now if you must, but do not fail to come to-morrow. I have your name correctly,--Daniel Horton? Where do you live?"

The stranger declined to give his address, and promised to come the next day at the appointed hour. After he had left the room the artist had something to say about expression, characterizing the face of the model as one indicative of brutal cunning and impudent daring.

As Graham quitted the studio the young sculptor joined him, and they walked together toward the station. Northcote was a slender, delicately built man some years Graham's junior. His face was instinct with the poetry of art, but was lacking in force. By the side of Graham's strong, resolute countenance his delicate features appeared weak and effeminate. The younger man took his friend's arm, as if relying on him for physical as well as moral support, and said as they walked along--

"Graham, where did you pick up that model this morning?"

"I found him lounging about the station. Why do you ask?"

"He has such a bad face. You should be more careful about the men you engage to pose for you."

"And why, Arthur?"

"Because you lead such an unprotected life in that terrible old ruin."

"What a fanciful creature you are, Northcote. As if there was anything to be gained in molesting a beggarly artist in an inaccessible fortress. You have never seen my tower, or you would not think that it would be an attractive spot to thieves."

"Did you not hear," continued Northcote, "of that case of abduction in Cathgate County last week? A man was carried off by a pair of brigands, and kept for a week until a large sum of money was paid for his ransom."

"What manner of man was he?"

"The president of the county bank."

"Well, my dear Arthur, when I become a bank president, or even a railroad treasurer, I will take better care of my worthless self. At present I am not a promising prize to the most sanguine kidnapper. I can fancy your feelings on receiving a notice that, unless five thousand dollars be left in the hollow of a blasted pine-tree on the high-road at San Rosario, a slice of my right ear would be forwarded by way of a reminder! When are you coming out to pass the night with me?"

"When I have sold my Diana, or when Patrick Shallop gives me an order for a life-size statue of himself."

"Come with me to-day. It will do you good to pass an afternoon in the woods."

"Do not ask me. I will take nothing more from you, Graham,--I cannot,--not even a piece of bread, until--"

"Well, if you are so obstinate, farewell to you. I must hurry or I shall miss my train."

The two men shook hands the sculptor turning into a dingy restaurant, the artist walking rapidly in the direction of the railroad station. Arthur Northcote made a light repast,--for he was poorer than usual that day,--and soon returned to his studio, whose rental was defrayed by his friend's slender purse.

Graham caught his train, and reached San Rosario at about three o'clock. He found his horse at the station, and rode toward the house. At a distant point he caught a glimpse of two figures on the piazza, which he recognized as those of Miss Almsford and Hal Deering, who were talking together, quite unconscious of his approach.

"So you like Graham?" Henry Deering was the speaker.

"Of course I like him. I told you I should, from the moment you described his queer tower and his solitary life to me. I always like people who have something to characterize them and set them apart from the mere dead-level rank and file of mediocrity," answered Millicent.

"But may not a hermit like Graham be mediocre like everybody else?"

"No, the fact of his living alone does not make him interesting; but he would not live alone if he were like everybody else. Ordinary people all herd together."

"You must find all of us very ordinary people, I should think, after the people you have lived among,--romantic Italians and that sort?"

"But Italians are by no means all interesting. The great charm about them is that they are usually a happy people, and that it does not take so much to make them contented as it does you more complex Americans."

"*You* Americans? How soon are you going to call yourself an American? But you do not answer my question. How can you manage to get on as well as you do with commonplace people like ourselves?"

"*You* are not commonplace. A man who knows how to milk cows and digs potatoes, who rubs down his own horse and feeds his stock, and can withal dance like a city beau, and keep a table full of people laughing from the soup to the coffee, cannot be called commonplace."

"Thank you, Princess, most heartily for the compliment. I see you will not be pinned down by my rather personal question. Let me pay you with some of your own coin. I think it quite remarkable that you have so quickly fitted into the life here, and have accepted so quietly things which must be very strange to you. The difference of the way of living, the surroundings, the very strangeness of being waited on by these Chinamen, must be very uncomfortable, I fear?"

"Do not suggest a word against Ah Lam; he is the most delightful servant I have ever seen. Our Italian domestics are like great children, who have to be humored and managed with the extreme of tact and care. Ah Lam is like nothing but one of the automata described by Bulwer in 'The Coming Race,' which stand motionless against the wall until roused to action by the vrill wand, when they promptly perform the duty in hand. Ah Lam is only mechanical as far as regularity goes, for he has feelings and deep sentiments beneath his calm exterior. Do you know that he brings me fresh roses every morning, and that when he returned from San Francisco yesterday he brought me a present?"

"They all do that; they are the most generous creatures in the world. What did Lam bring you?"

"The prettiest little China silk handkerchief, which he presented with these words: 'I solly got no more, I *so* poor.' Was it not touching?"

"How do your lessons get on?"

"Very well. Lam learns ten or twelve new words every day. I give him the English word for an article, and he gives me the Chinese; and the following day we catechise each other; but I have never remembered a Chinese name, and Lam has never forgotten an English one. Then I set him copies, which he writes out beautifully with his queer little camel's-hair brush dipped in India-ink. I fear the sentiments will not greatly benefit him, but I try to explain them to him."

"Give me an example of your copy-book maxims; I am sure they are something new, quite unlike those I was brought up on."

"I take my verses all from Mr. Lear's 'Nonsense Book;' they will help him geographically, if not otherwise."

"You have given him the 'Old Man of Moldavia'?"

"Assuredly."

"Truly, Princess, you are the most inexplicable person I have ever seen. I find you in the morning with a volume of Spinoza in your hand, trying to explain his particular dogma of philosophy to poor Barbara; and in the afternoon you are talking about this absurd child's book as if it were something serious. You snubbed that poor professor last night, because he presumed to give an opinion concerning Dante, never having read him in the original; and to-day I heard you ask my mother if Washington was in the State of New York. You are remarkably erudite and positively ignorant at the same time."

"*Eh bene, cosa volete?* I--"

"Now what is the use of talking Italian to me? You know I can't understand a word of it, and--"

A third voice interrupted Deering. It was that of a man who had joined the pair unnoticed by either of them, the sound of his footsteps being muffled by the deep grass.

"If Miss Almsford knew how pretty her manner of speaking English was, she would never have resort to the weaker language of her birthplace to express her thoughts."

"What, Graham, with a gallant speech upon his lips! Wonder of wonders! Princess, he has the sharpest tongue and the keenest wit I have ever known. Beware of him! When did you come?"

"Just now; I rode over to see if Miss Almsford was in the mood for a ride, and to offer my services as cavalier, knowing that your afternoons, my dear Deering, are too much occupied for

you to play esquire to this fair dame."

"It is the thing of all others I should enjoy," said Millicent; "I will be ready in ten minutes."

Deering strolled off, rather disconsolately, in the direction of the dairy, Graham accompanying him as far as the stable, where he proceeded to put Barbara's saddle on the back of a sturdy cob, which from his immovable character had been named Sphinx.

The artist had visited the house several times since his first meeting with Millicent, and had promised to be her guide to the high hill-top, whence a view of the Sierra Nevadas was to be obtained. Up the narrow bridle path toiled the two horses, Graham's leading the way. The road was a difficult one, underbrush and rolling stones making it dangerous for any horse which was not sure-footed. Old Sphinx set his feet firmly on the solid ground, avoiding all pit-falls in a wary fashion. The air was sweet with the spicy breath of the madrone tree, whose dark red bark and brilliant glossy leaves gleamed out here and there through the darker foliage of the great redwoods. The young man turned his head over his shoulder, letting his mustang find out the path, and talked to his companion, who was not yet at home in the saddle. One of the new delights which the western country held for Millicent was that of riding. Most of her life had been spent in Venice; and she had had little opportunity for indulging in that most exhilarating exercise. Graham assured her that she would soon make a good rider, as she quickly learned to assume the graceful but uncomfortable position compelled by the side-saddle. She was without fear, having that sort of bravery which is found in some children, and which comes from an ignorance of danger.

From a point in the road whence a view of the happy valley was to be obtained, Graham reined in his horse. The wide, pleasant valley lay below them, the house, its central point of interest, standing surrounded by the orchard and garden. A brook wound like a silver ribbon through the wide fields and wooded groves, under rustic bridges, here and there breaking into foam over a mass of stone, or a sudden shelving of the land.

When they again started Graham dismounted, and, passing his arm through the bridle of his horse, took Sphinx by the rein and led him over the rough bit of country. Whether from an exaggerated idea of courtesy, or because the head covering was irksome, Graham doffed his hat and walked bareheaded, the little shafts of sunshine touching his dark hair with points of light. The tall girl noted the sun and shadow which made this and all else lovely on this fair afternoon. As the ascent became steeper, the trees were less dense and the path grew wider. Graham still walked beside her horse, though there was no longer need for him to do so. As they emerged upon a broad plateau Millicent drew her breath and touched Graham lightly with her whip, laying her finger on her lip and pointing to a little hillside spring, which ran dancing from the rich dark earth. Close to the spring stood a magnificent buck and a graceful doe. The stag had bent his head and was drinking from the basin which the water had worn for itself, and which was surrounded by a ring of green turf, jewelled with star blue and pale rose blossoms. Of this tender herbage, so different from the dried grass of the hillside and meadow, the dainty doe was nibbling little morsels. For a moment neither of the animals perceived the approach of the riders, and stood quite still in their unconscious beauty. Graham's hand instinctively sought the revolver in his pocket. As he was taking aim Millicent's velvet fingers closed about the steel barrel, and she cried aloud, "You could not be so cruel!"

At the sound of her voice the stag threw up his great head with a mighty shiver, tossing the crystal water drops from his nose. Before the last word was spoken the slender, dappled doe had flashed across the path and was out of sight, her mate with outstretched head following close upon her track. For an instant the flowing lines of the swift motion were seen on the sky background, and then the trembling leaves of the thicket into which they had penetrated were all that told of their flight.

"You are more tender-hearted than Miss Barbara."

"No, but I could not bear that those two glorious creatures should be put out of the warm sunlight which they love so well."

"Miss Barbara is an excellent shot; she could have killed the stag from this point."

"And yet Barbara is really much better-hearted than I, and feels other people's troubles as if they were her own. Everything is in habit and education; she has looked upon deer in the light of venison, as I have always considered oxen in the light of future beef. And yet, though Barbara is so kind and good, I do not find her *simpatica*--how shall I say?"

"You might say sympathetic or congenial, Miss Almsford, if you could content yourself with the English language."

"But it is not the same thing,--sympathetic and *simpatica*; indeed it is an untranslatable word."

I cannot always express my thoughts in English."

"Would you allow me to suggest that it may not be entirely the fault of the language, which did not fail to express the thoughts of Chaucer and Shakespeare, that you find it difficult to make yourself understood?"

"Do I speak it so badly then? You are not complimentary."

"It is not that you speak it badly, but that your vocabulary is limited, and that your mind far outruns its limits. I fancy you have never read or thought much in a serious vein in the simplest and the strongest of tongues."

"No, I have read very little English, but I challenge your last statement. I do not find English the greatest language. It is coarse by the side of French; it is prosaic compared to Italian. Think of the fine distinctions, the delicate shades of meaning, of the Gallic tongue. Your English can only express the extremes."

"And yet to-day it is more a lender than a borrower of words. You cannot take up a German or a French newspaper without finding an Anglicism in every column."

"What does that prove? Merely that the Anglo-Saxon race is more restless than all others. They are the Goths of the nineteenth century, and invade every corner of Europe, Asia, and Africa, carrying with them their barbarous language. I have heard it intermingled with Arabic in the Syrian desert. It is small wonder they feel the need of travel; there is little enough to interest them at home."

"And yet I, who have lived half my life in Europe, elect to pass the remainder of it in this country of my own free choice. How do you account for that?"

"I cannot account for it save as an aberration of the brain. It is strange, too, for you Americans are not a patriotic people."

"You think not?"

"It does not strike me so."

"You are mistaken, Miss Almsford; but your mistake is a natural one. These ideas, believe me, are not worthy of you, and have been derived by you from some perverted mind. Your own is too clear to have formed such opinions. They have been engrafted or inherited. How should you really have any idea but the most chimerical one, of America or Americans? You have passed your life among a race of people most unlike them, and you have been taught to ignore the country and the race to which you belong. You consider the matter of your birth as a misfortune, and you have learned to look down on your country, from below. I have had some experience of life in the various American colonies in Europe, and I think it a great misfortune to be one of those expatriated Americans. They are people without a country. They feel no responsibility toward any larger society than their own small household circle. Unless he is called by the exigencies of his profession to Europe, the American European is very apt to deteriorate greatly. He is in antagonism with the country which he has abandoned, and his foothold in foreign society is too much on tolerance to be fortunate in its effects on his character."

By this time the strong horses had reached the summit of the foot-hill, and stood breathing heavily. The riders dropped their conversation, which was drawing near to a discussion, and Millicent looked with wide eyes out over the grand scene. Far off stretched the line of the Sierras, the mountain barrier which severs the land of gold from the surrounding country. The sky was faintly flushed with a forewarning of the sunset, and a soft breeze rustled the tree tops, and blew into their faces.

"Are you rewarded for the long ascent, maiden from afar?"

"Yes," answered Millicent softly.

As they made the steep descent together Graham talked, in his strong, sweet voice, of his life in the old tower, of his work, of the pictures he had painted, and those which he dreamed of making some day. The self-dependent and contained young man was much attracted by the girl with the strange ideas and exquisite manners. On the night when they had first met, he had been drawn towards her by an attraction which seemed irresistible. It was not her beauty nor her intelligence which so much affected him, as a nameless charm like the warmth of a bright fire on a cool day, which seemed to wrap him about with a sense of comfort. When he left her this glow was still about him, but as hours passed it seemed to fade away and leave him strangely cold. He felt for the first time how desolate was his life; and he remembered her in his lonely tower as a traveller in the African desert recalls the green oasis where his last draught of water has been drained. Yet sometimes, when they talked together, came a strange antagonism between them like an impalpable mist, chilling the warmth which at meeting always kindled in her eyes and in his own bosom. That the discordance came from himself he often felt, and yet he was helpless in

the face of it. The conversation of that afternoon was a type of their interviews, which were often marred by discussions not far removed from disputes. Whose fault was it? Wherein lay the incompatibility? Did it arise from either of their characters, or from the circumstances and surroundings in which they met? He asked himself the question a score of times and left it always unanswered. Graham had not been without experience of women. In his early youth he had had the misfortune to fall deeply in love with a frivolous and heartless girl. His nature was of a complex character, passionate to an unusual degree, yet guided by an intelligence stronger than passion. He had been deceived and outraged in every feeling by the heartless coquette, whose worst characteristic was her entire incapacity for affection. After breaking her faith with him, she had tried to win him back again, and had sued for the love which she had so lightly won and refused. But though he still loved her with the full force of his being, he had repulsed the woman whom he could no longer respect. Then came the long death-agony of deceived love, leaving its unmistakable traces on heart and brain and body. It was graven on the white brow; it was painted in the deep eyes, with their unfathomable look of doubt; it strengthened the fibres of the strong brain with the greater power which great suffering brings to intelligence of a high order; and alas! saddest of all, it chilled the hot heart-blood and left it cooler and more sluggish in its flow. Sorrowful was the man for the sorrow in the world, but pity for the grief of those about him was not so strong in him as it had been before. The bitterness which follows the spoiling of the rose-sweetness of love was happily modified by the broad humanitarian character of the man. It failed to make him bitter towards the world for its treatment of himself. He accepted manfully the knockdown blow which fate had dealt him; and if he mourned it was in secret,--he burdened no other soul with his misery. But as it was a woman who had darkened his life and drawn the veil of grief about his young soul, the whole rage of grief and bitterness which wore his heart went out toward her sex. As he had loved all women for her sweet sake, so now did he distrust them all because she had proved false. Evil to him appeared abstractly as a feminine element in the world; and the great qualities of nobility, abnegation, and heroism in his eyes were masculine attributes only. Too chivalrous by nature to think of himself as in opposition to the gentler sex, his position was in point of fact antagonistic to them. He was courteous in their company, but he always avoided it. In deed, as in word, he treated them with reverence, speaking no lightlier of them behind their backs than to their faces. The bitterness never broke the barriers of his vexed heart in noxious word or jest, but it lay there always embittering his life. He had finally ceased to remember his crushed hopes and spoiled youth; and then had succeeded a long time wherein he seemed to feel not at all. There was left him always his pious devotion to his mother, touching in its pathetic constancy, as to the one creature given him to love. For the gentle Mrs. Deering, whose face recalled that of his only living parent, he felt a real sentiment of friendship. Barbara, with her sweet, wholesome nature, he esteemed more highly than other young women; but since his intimacy with the family he had always emphasized his regard for the son and mother of the house; and Barbara had felt the difference in his voice when he addressed her. It grew colder, and his manner became formal, if by chance they were thrown together alone.

The charm by which Millicent swayed him, he said to himself, was not love. He looked back into the black and stormy past, and compared his feelings for this girl with those which had once torn his breast. She charmed him, but he surely did not love her. He felt a sense of cold discomfort on leaving her, but it was very different from the passionate grief which he once had suffered. This was what he thought when he contemplated the subject at all, which was not very often. For the most part he let himself drift down the pleasant summer tide. Skies were blue and roses sweet. If Millicent made the sky seem bluer, if the roses took on a more perfect hue when she wore them in her bosom, it was because she was like the skies and roses, tender and full of warmth and color. Did not the buds blush into flowers for all the world as well as for him? Did not the white clouds dip and dance across the sky for other men's pleasure as well as his own? Was not the whole small world of the San Rosario Ranch made more blithe and happily alive by the advent of Millicent Almsford, the maiden from afar? Barbara had been stimulated by the new atmosphere to do more thinking, and had found less time for fancy-work and more leisure for reading. Mrs. Deering, gentlest of women, found a companionship in the stranger which she had at first thought impossible; and Hal, poor Hal, was vainly fighting against the witching spell which was fast making him the slave of the girl, who he had prophesied was too cold to interest him.

Had Graham known the change which his companionship had wrought upon Millicent, he would have felt that if there was no danger for him in those swift fleeting hours passed together, there might be for her. The boredom which she had experienced at first was now dissipated, and

every phase of the novel life at the Ranch had a charm for her.

The loud summons of the supper-bell struck the ears of the young people as they drew near the house; and the family stood waiting on the piazza as they reined in their horses before the door.

"Are you tired, Millicent?" was the anxious question of Mrs. Deering.

"Did you get a clear view of the mountains?" asked Barbara.

"How did Sphinx go?" said Hal.

"I cannot answer you all at once," cried Millicent, breathless from the rapid gallop which had brought them to the house; "but it was perfectly delightful. Sphinx behaved beautifully, and Mr. Graham almost as well. The view is wonderful, and I think the country of California very fine. There is a compliment for you all; do not pretend I never say anything nice about it."

"My dear, we have an invitation to go down to San Real to visit the Shallops. Mamma thinks we had better start to-morrow. Mr. Graham, here is a note for you which came enclosed in my letter. I fancy it carries the same invitation to you. It will be so nice at the seashore. You will like it, Millicent, won't you?"

"I like it here," Millicent answered, as she walked slowly up the steps; "but if you all want to go, I am willing. Who are the Shallops? Where is San Real?"

Graham had torn open his letter, which he quickly perused. Millicent looked inquiringly at him, and he answered her unspoken query:

"Yes, Mrs. Shallop asks me to join your party for a week at her pleasant house. Very kind of her, I am sure; but I never do that sort of thing. I--"

"Now, Graham," interrupted Mrs. Deering, "say nothing about it till I have talked it over with you. I have a particular reason for advising you to go. We will telegraph the answer in the morning, and can make up our minds in the course of the evening."

"I am yours to command in this and all things, Madame," said Graham, offering his arm to his hostess; "and there stands Ah Lam ready to weep because the muffins are growing cold; and I am famously hungry after our ride."

Tea being ended, Mrs. Deering and Graham paced the gravel path around the house for half an hour. It was evident to the group on the piazza that a discussion was going on between them. They spoke in low, earnest voices, whose tones did not escape Millicent's sensitive hearing, though she failed to catch the import of the words.

"For my sake," she finally heard Mrs. Deering say in a pleading voice.

"Dear my lady, is it just to put it on that ground?"

"But if you will hear to it on no other," she argued.

"Think what it is you ask of me. To leave my tower and my man Friday for a luxurious household with plethoric master and servants; to stagnate for a week among those ridiculous people who fill San Real in the summer; and all this not because it will do me or any one else any good, but to the end that I may begin the portraits I have already refused to paint. You know that I am not suited to that sort of hack work. How can I make a picture of that over-fed Shallop or his pinched, good little wife?"

"But our work cannot all be that which is best suited to us--"

"It should be--"

"Remember, Graham, that in three weeks the payment for the studio is due--"

"Ah, kindest one! you never forget me; bless you for your sweetness and thoughtfulness. Yes, I will go and do my best to make Shallop look like something other than an ex-blacksmith, but it is indeed bitter."

"You will find that there will be compensations," said Mrs. Deering, her eyes resting on the pretty group on the piazza: Barbara sitting at Millicent's feet, and Hal reaching up to pluck a spray of honeysuckles for her hair.

CHAPTER V.

Where have we lived and loved before this, sweet?
My will ere now hath led thy wayward feet;
I knew thy beauties--limbs, lips, brows, and hair--
Before these eyes beheld and found thee fair.

Mrs. Deering's arguments carried the day, and Graham decided to accompany the young ladies to San Real. Ferrara was to be of the party. It was a bright morning which saw the departure of the three travellers from the Ranch. Hal drove them to the station in a very disconsolate frame of mind. During Ralph Almsford's long absences, it was impossible for him to leave the Ranch, in which his interests were all vested; and it seemed rather hard that Graham should enjoy the pleasure which he had been obliged to decline. Henry Deering was a susceptible young man, and he was already enthralled by the soft voice and deep eyes of the girl on whom he had bestowed the title of Princess. His friendship for John Graham was one of the strongest feelings he had ever known. He admired him more than any person he knew. He respected the sterling character of the man, on whose honor he would have staked his life; and yet it was hard that Graham should devote himself to the Princess, for he said to himself there could be no chance for him against such a rival.

The country through which the railroad from San Rosario to San Real passes is most picturesque. Round the high hills winds the yellow line of the track, making horseshoe loops, so that the engine, Millicent said, sometimes turned round and looked the passengers in the face. Long, high bridges carry the shining steel threads of travel over deep canyons, with fierce rocky sides and stony bottoms. The scenery is very wild and beautiful, and the moderate pace at which the shaky little engine tugged along the rickety cars gave the travellers every opportunity for seeing and admiring the view.

A great mountain, lying among the low foothills, remained in view through the greater part of the route; it was conical and sharp-pointed, like the typical mountain of the atlas. A great fire had lately raged for days among the spreading trees and thick undergrowth; and now that the smoke had cleared away, the path which the flame had taken was distinctly visible from certain points. A great cross lay stamped on the mountain-side, for all men to see. The baptism of fire had left the symbol which was sanctified eighteen hundred years ago. Graham attracted Millicent's attention to this, which, she said, would have been considered a miracle in Italy.

"Are they not happy, those dear simple-minded Italians? A large portion of them do really believe in miracles to this day." Millicent was the speaker.

"Yes, far happier than those of us who have lost all belief in anything beyond our own bodies, and the facts which that body's senses reveal to us."

"And you believe--"

"Ask me not, maiden, what I believe. I can only hope. But this I know, that there is need to you and to me, to all of us of this generation, to whom the old fallacious dogmas of dead creeds are meaningless, of faith. This is not the age of belief. The things which have been considered necessary draperies to religion are stripped off; but because truth is naked, it is none the less truth. Faith in that part of ourselves which is not of earth, we must hold fast to, when all else is rent from our feeble natures."

"You should be a preacher. I think that you have got the right end of the truth, perhaps--"

Barbara, who had sat a silent listener to this conversation between the two young people, now spoke for the first time.

"I know little of the modern scientific theories, which Mr. Graham thinks have stripped religion of much that used to belong to it; but to me the denial of a Creator is the most illogical and ignorant act of which the human mind is capable. Look at that house we are just passing. If I should tell you that it never was built, that no architect or workman ever planned and executed its design, you would say that my talk was too idle to require contradiction. And yet you will tell me that the pleasant earth on which the house stands, the very trees which furnished its wood, the metals and stone which are wrought into it, exist, and yet knew no Maker."

"Barbara, do not let us talk any more about it; it is impossible for you and me to speak understandingly to each other on these subjects. Mr. Graham stands midway between your conventional faith and my unbelief; he can understand us both. Now let us talk about love and roses."

"*Apropos* of love and roses, here comes Ferrara, laden with both of those fragile commodities, which he will straightway lay at Miss Barbara's feet. If you like, Miss Almsford, we will make the next stage of our journey on the engine. I spoke to the engineer, at the last station, of your desire to see the mechanism of his locomotive. You will find the man quite clean and intelligent."

Ferrara joined the party at this moment, having come up to meet the train at this station. He carried a handful of great yellow roses, which he presented to Barbara with a low bow. The girl

looked beseechingly at Millicent, who laughed rather heartlessly, and, escorted by Graham, proceeded to the engine. She was pleasantly received by its presiding genius, a hatchet-faced, sharp-voiced Yankee, who made a place for her on his little cushioned seat at one side of the locomotive. As soon as she was comfortably ensconced here, Graham sitting at her feet, the engineer rang the bell and allowed Millicent to pull the lever, which set the panting creature of iron and wood a-screaming. With a guttural shriek the engine pulled itself together and started off down the track at a good speed. Once in motion, the breeze, blowing through the windows, cooled the intense heat. Millicent looked straight down the narrowing steel rails with that keen sense of pleasure which every novel experience gave her. Presently she asked the small Yankee to explain the use of the steam gauge and of the various appliances crowded into the small space where she sat. The fireman, a hideous giant, black and grimy, occasionally opened a door and fed the furious fire with great lumps of coal. When it was well filled he varied his occupation by watering the wooden parts of the engine with a long rubber hose, lest they should ignite from the great heat. On a little shelf above her seat Millicent espied a book, toward which she instinctively stretched her hand. Books always acted on Millicent like magnets. The volume proved to be a Life of Napoleon Bonaparte, lately published in a cheap edition. She asked the sharp-faced engineer if he found the matter interesting, and was somewhat astonished by his astute remarks on the work and the personage of whom it treated. She looked at Graham in some astonishment, but he seemed in no-wise surprised at the phenomenon of a working-man in a blue blouse who could intelligently read and understand the seriously written biography of the great conqueror. The steam gauge rose higher and higher, while the engine tore along at a quicker speed in order to please the delicate visitor, who was now allowed to move the lever, and to pull the bell when they passed the signals requiring them to do so. The engineer was an interesting person, Millicent thought; he told her many humorous stories of his experiences, and some tragical ones. His wife had on one occasion accompanied him on a trip, sitting on the very place where Millicent now reposed. An accident had occurred, a broken rail throwing the cars down a high embankment, while the weight of the engine had saved them both from the terrible fate of many of the passengers. From that day his wife had refused ever to travel in any part of the train save in the small cabin where her husband sat. In a collision, Millicent learned, the dread fate of the engineer could only be avoided by desertion of his post; and the speaker bore witness to the steadfast bravery of more than one of his mates who had preferred death to such an act. As he talked he kept his eyes fixed on the two shining rails stretching before them. Sometimes, when interested in his own story, or their remarks, the engineer would look for a moment into Millicent's face; and she, with a terrified consciousness that her eyes were the only ones which could see any obstruction before the train thundering along at a great speed, would strain her vision to the utmost down the narrowing line of track. What an awful responsibility lay upon the shoulders of this cheerful little man, with his twinkling gimlet blue eyes, and how lightly he seemed to carry his burden. She grew quite white and silent at the thought; and when her hand, guided by the engineer, brought the panting locomotive to a standstill at the next station, she gladly stepped down upon the narrow platform, steadied by Graham's arm. They parted from the engineer with many expressions of pleasure for the ride they had enjoyed, and joined Barbara and Ferrara in the car.

San Real is one of the pleasantest sea-side towns to be found on the coast of California. It has become quite lately a fashionable summer resort, and boasts two large hotels, a colony of boarding-houses, and half a dozen private residences. All of these are of modest dimensions, with the single exception of the pretentious mansion of Mr. Patrick Shallop, which stands at the distance of a mile from the little village composed of one long street of shops and saloons.

At the station the party found a handsome carriage awaiting them, drawn by two prancing gray horses and decorated with sprawling coats-of-arms. The groom and driver were dressed according to the latest English fashion, and the tidy cart for the luggage was driven by a liveried menial. Millicent noted these details with surprise as she sank back on the satin cushions of the landau, and Graham laughingly commented upon her evident astonishment at the smart equipage.

"It appears, O fair Venetian, that you are surprised at this grandeur. Did not Miss Barbara prepare you for it?"

"No," answered the young woman quietly; she did not like to be laughed at. As the carriage rolled along the village street, Millicent gave a little cry of joy: "I smell the sea!" she cried.

Soon after they emerged from the shadow of the houses and struck the road which led to the brow of the cliffs. There, for the first time since she had left New York, Millicent looked out over

the salt waves. The cool sea breeze twisted the curls which clustered about her forehead into tighter rings, and fanned a color into her marble cheek. She kissed her hand toward the great gray ocean as if gladly greeting the Pacific. Below the cliffs stretched the white beach, with its rows of bathing-houses, and booths hung with gay-colored wares. They had but time to glance at the view when the carriage turned from the road and entered a long avenue bordered with good-sized trees. Marble statues gleamed through the dark green of the luxuriant gardens, and odorous flowers made the air heavy with sweetness. Before the door of an enormous house the horses were drawn up, and Barbara and Millicent, followed by Graham and Ferrara, entered the wide hall. The exterior of the house was far from attractive. The material used was exclusively wood, which in California is almost universally employed in private dwellings. The fear of earthquakes always lurks in the mind of the Californian, and houses of brick or stone are very rare. The model adopted by the architect was a novel one, and seemed a combination of the Ionic, Corinthian, and Queen Anne styles. Stucco and lath represented decorations and columns which would have been appropriate in marble or granite. The massive style and the flimsy material gave an incongruous appearance to the great building. The wide terrace which surrounded the house, with its bright parterres of flowers, and the pleasant piazza, with roof and pillars like a Norman cloister, were, however, wonderfully attractive. Beyond the close-clipped emerald lawn was seen the ocean, whose white curling waves danced merrily in the unbroken sunshine.

The guests found Mrs. Shallop awaiting them in a long dim drawing-room. She was a skimpy pattern of feminality, with a pitiful, pinched face, great sad-looking eyes, colorless, sandy hair, and a thin, angular body. Though it was early in the afternoon, the elegance of her dress would have been suitable to a ball room. The heavy folds of rich blue brocade stood out from the poor little figure whose emaciated lines its rich fabric refused to indicate. She advanced toward her guests with something of an effort, as if the burden of dress which was laid upon her were greater than she could bear. Her welcome was, however, very cordial; and her bony little hands, with their weight of jewels, clasped Barbara's strong fingers affectionately.

"I am real glad you have all come, Miss Deering. I was awful fidgety about the train's being late. Miss Almsford, I am real pleased to see you. Mister Graham, happy to see you, sir. I hope your health is better, Mister Ferrara?"

Each of the guests acknowledged the kindly greeting, and some general conversation ensued. Millicent looked about the great drawing-room, noting the various beautiful articles of furniture, the Venetian glasses, the pictures and rich embroideries, the thousand-and-one bits of *bric-à-brac* which decorated the walls and cabinets of the lofty apartment. It was in truth a rarely beautiful room, the prevailing color a deep, soft crimson, the wood-work all painted white and delicately carved. Below the ceiling ran a frieze, the work of John Graham. The subject treated was the history of Cupid and Psyche. The scenes were divided into panels by twining sprays of rose-vines charmingly treated. The first represented the meeting of the two lovers, their marriage being the next in order. In the third compartment the doubting Psyche looks for the first time on the radiant beauty of the sleeping God. Next the artist had portrayed the forsaken, love-lorn bride sitting alone, crushed with grief, repenting the fatal curiosity which prompted her to peer too closely into the nature of love,—that greatest of boons, which should be accepted joyously and with thanksgiving, and to which doubt means death. The hard services required by Cytherea from the desolate Psyche were exquisitely rendered; and the final scene of the reunion of the two lovers was the masterpiece of the whole work. Psyche, radiant with new-found love and joy, her face touched with a more than mortal beauty by the grief she has endured, stands looking reverently into the face of the strongest of gods. Her rainbow wings can lift her now, to soar beside her lover, even to Olympus.

Millicent admired the beautiful frieze, which the hostess confessed troubled her sorely because of the scanty raiment which she said seemed to have been the fashion of the time it represented.

"Mister Graham," she explained, had induced her to keep it in the place for which it had been designed. Mrs. Shallop added that the artist had refused to follow her suggestion of adding clothing to the half nude bodies; and had, moreover, extracted a promise from her husband that he would never allow any other painter to be intrusted with thus supplementing the airy rainbow draperies of the figures.

Miss Almsford was much astonished at the very beautiful interior of the great Shallop house, and soon learned that its furnishing and decoration had been intrusted to Graham, who was gifted with that rarest and most valuable of aesthetic qualities, a perfect and original taste.

"It is the only house Mr. Graham has ever arranged, and he says he will never do another. He was in Europe while it was being built, and mamma persuaded the Shallops to give him *carte blanche* to buy all the beautiful things he could lay hands upon," Barbara explained.

The guests were shown to their rooms by the hostess, and Millicent gave an exclamation of delight on entering the apartment allotted to her. It was indeed a unique room. The walls were panelled in ebony to a third of their height, a bright light pattern in flowers running to the ceiling, and relieving what might otherwise have been sombre. The glossy black wood was carved into a wide, high fireplace, where two brass andirons, curiously wrought with twisted dragons, supported a fire whose bright blaze was most welcome to Millicent. She found the season very cold compared to the still, hot Italian summers. Below the mantel the fire shone out in welcome, but above the ebony shelf, set in the wall, was a picture which seemed fuller of light and color than the leaping flames. A Venetian scene with a terrace whereon sat men and maidens in the warm glow of the sunset, looking out over a stretch of many-toned water, in which were mirrored sky and clouds, trees, draperies, and graceful human figures. A black gondola, partly shown in the foreground, might have held the painter while he sketched the brilliant scene.

"It is my Venice!" cried Millicent, "it is my home!" Her eyes were full of tears. She caught Barbara by the arm and rapidly described to her the point from which the picture had been painted.

"Mr. Graham will be very much pleased that you recognized the spot."

"Is it *his* picture? Yes, I ought to have known it."

"Why, are you clairvoyant?"

"Yes, Barbara, sometimes."

Millicent seemed somewhat disconcerted at what she had said; and, without noticing anything more in the pretty room, ascended the dainty little ebon staircase with its fanciful rail, and, pushing back a panel which slid into the wall, entered her bedroom. Later, when both of the girls had exchanged their travelling dresses, Barbara knocked at Millicent's boudoir.

"*Entraté,*" was the response, in obedience to which she opened the door, and found Millicent lying on the low, crescent-shaped sofa, her fair head resting on a pile of cushions. Her graceful figure was clad in a gown soft amber in color, her only ornaments wonderful strings of amber beads falling over the white neck, which the fashion of the frock disclosed, and encircling the smooth bare arms, with their delicate tracery of blue veins like the lines in purest marble. Her hands were hidden, clasped behind her head, and the expression of her face was almost vacant in its look of absorbing reverie. Beside her on the floor lay a small parchment book, ivory-clasped,--"The Sonnets of Petrarch." Her eyes were fixed on the panel over the mantel shelf, but they saw more than the artist had pictured with brush and color: a waking day dream of her home as she had last seen it, and ah! how much sweeter an imagining of how she might next see it,--with what surroundings, with what companionship! O blessed dream-castles of women, in which all the cares and privations of life are forgotten; in which there is never a weariness or a pain; where lonely watching is succeeded by joyous reunion; where those who have lived and know too surely that they must die without that greatest happiness which life can hold, drink the cup of joy innocently, purely, fearing no bitter after-taste, finding no foul dregs!

At Barbara's entrance Millicent slowly drew herself back from dreamland into the actual present. Her eyes, which had been staring widely with a blank look, now seemed to change color with returning consciousness. It was a long journey, and she gave a deep sigh when it was accomplished, and she realized that plump, pretty Barbara, with her best frock and ribbons, stood by her side looking curiously in her face.

"I was reading, and I fancy I had fallen asleep, Bab, what can I do for you?"

"Mrs. Shallop suggested our all having tea here, if you liked. They do not dine till eight to-night. Mr. Shallop has been detained in San Francisco."

"Very well, dear, just as you say. You did not mean to send for the gentlemen?"

"Oh, yes, this room is always used for a tea room, unless you object, of course. If you prefer to 'sport your oak,' you have a perfect right to do so, and we will go downstairs."

"No, no, let us have it here by all means, if it is the custom."

Barbara rang the bell, which was answered by a ponderous butler with a condescending manner, white neckcloth, bandy legs, and an apoplectic countenance. The individual had been imported by the Shallops along with the footman and driver, his two younger brothers, who, in common with all the other members of the household, from Mr. Shallop down to the boots, stood in awe of him. To this worthy Barbara somewhat timidly gave orders that tea should be brought, and the gentlemen warned that it awaited them.

"Very good, miss," answered the functionary in the driest possible tone, his features curled into an expression of scorn toward the whole human race. His bow was so terrific in its icy grandeur that Barbara shivered as he left the room.

"I hate that man, and he knows it. He always spoils my appetite by glaring at me all through dinner; and I think he takes an evil delight in handing all the most impossible dishes to me first, which I have to refuse, because I don't dare to attack them."

The man shortly after returned and laid a low round table in the bow-window for tea. Barbara placed herself behind the old-fashioned silver urn and busied herself with tea-making, while Millicent drew up the blinds and let the sunset into the room. Soon Graham came in, begging for a cup of tea, a sure bait to him, he said, especially when Miss Deering poured out the delicious beverage. This last speech he made with an exaggeratedly deep bow, which grotesqued the compliment and made the girl's cheek redden. Shortly after, Ferrara joined the party, and a pleasant tea-drinking ensued, though the last comer refused to be tempted by the pretty cups of smoking Souchong.

"Neither will I reproach my luncheon, nor insult the excellent dinner which I am sure Mrs. Shallop will give us, by the uncivilized fashion of drinking tea at this hour."

"Miss Almsford thinks we are too civilized here, Ferrara. She almost fainted when she learned that I was the possessor of a dress-coat. She hoped to find us in eternal suits of corduroy and flannel, with top-boots and bowie knives."

"You have exactly described the costume in which I first saw you, Mr. Graham; so you surely should not blame me for believing that, in wearing it, you followed the prevailing fashion of your country."

"That alters the case; but are you not mistaken? I remember having taken particular care to don a black coat on that evening--do you remember?--when I surprised you by the fire."

"But I had seen you before that, though you had never seen me."

"When, fair lady? May I hope that our first encounter was in your white dreams?"

The girl shook her head and laughed.

"Was it perhaps in another existence? Did we dance together, you and I, in the old happy days when Pan reigned? Now I think of it, were you not the wood-nymph who vanished from me into the arms of a great tree? Did you not tread one measure with me in the merry wood-dance, and then leave me desolate with a tryst appointed but never kept?"

"Did you not soon find another partner?"

"I waited long alone."

"And if I could not come sooner?"

"Well, you have come at last to keep the tryst. Will you finish that dance which was begun so many eons ago?"

"Ay me! and can we now dance the same measure, you and I? Would not our feet tread inharmonious steps?"

"Which of us can say? Shall we try?"

"If you say my word was given, I know not how to break it."

The room had grown dim, and Barbara and Ferrara in the recess of the window were speaking together, while Millicent sat gazing dreamily into the glowing heart of the low-burning fire, conscious that Graham was looking intently on her face. She dared not lift her eyes to his, and veiled them with the downcast lids. Not what she might read daunted her, but what might be revealed to the man who sat leaning forward in the quaintly-carven oak chair.

"It is understood then that you admit my claim to your hand,--for one dance at least? You acknowledge the promise made so many dim years back? You have come across wide, tossing seas and over broad, sun-parched fields to keep the tryst you made with me, a smile upon your face, a shadow in your eyes?"

For answer the girl bowed her head.

"Nay, I must hear it from your very own lips. Is it for this that you have come?"

"Yes." The word came soft as twilight shadows, sweet as Nature's harmony. A long pause preceded the low-breathed monosyllable, the word which fond women love best to speak and which listening lovers thrill, half cold, half hot, at hearing. And when it was spoken and heard came a second silence, even longer than the first; and yet what they had said was begun in badinage, and was finished without serious thought by either man or woman. Dangerous words! dangerous silence! happy time, how oft remembered in later days!

"Did I hear you asking Miss Almsford for a dance, Graham? What ball are you contemplating? I have heard of none unless you mean to invite us all to your tower for a frolic. Be sure you do not

leave me out; I have long wished to visit your hermitage."

"If the ladies would so highly honor a lonely dweller in the woods as to allow him the felicity of being their host, be sure, my dear Ferrara, that you shall escort them to my humble abode."

"Really, are you in earnest? I have always wished to see your tower. When shall we come?"

"That is for you to say, Miss Deering. Any day which will suit your convenience will be agreeable to me."

"We will settle it after we return to the Ranch."

Soon after this Mrs. Shallop joined the group, and they all went out and walked on the wide terrace till dinner was served. Here Millicent met Mr. Shallop for the first time. He was a heavy-featured Irishman, with light-blue eyes, overhanging brows, and thick, coarse brown hair. His badly modelled nose had a decided upward tendency, and the broad mouth disclosed sharp, long teeth, like those of an inferior animal. When he smiled he showed the whole set, which gave him a rather ferocious aspect. His face was clean shaven, save for a fringe of whisker stretching from the lobe of the ear to the lower jaw. With a pipe and a shillelah he would have been an excellent specimen of a patron of Donnybrook Fair. On this occasion he wore irreproachable evening dress. His linen was finer than Graham's, and the cut of his collar and pattern of his studs were of a later fashion than those worn by Ferrara. A valet's care had smoothed the rough hair and cared for the ugly hands. One of his peculiarities was to address all ladies as "Marm." His conversation was not unintelligent, and betrayed a keen, sharp mind, which clearly understood those things which came in close contact with it, but whose mental vision was bounded by the physical one. Those things which he had learned by experience he knew absolutely, and he never questioned or theorized on subjects which did not directly touch himself or his own interests. California had been to him a place which held a gold mine, nothing more or less. His history, which he made no effort to conceal, was not an uncommon one. He had come out in '49, among the fevered crowd of gold-seekers drawn from every country, from every station in life, by the loadstone which had been discovered on the banks, of the American River, by James Marshall. He had come to San Francisco in those early days when law and order were not, save when the conscience of the public, stronger and purer in its united power than in the individuals which compose it, was awakened, and hastened to punish a crime by a rude and swift justice. Shallop had built a cabin in which he lived, and in which he sold, when he was networking in the gulches, any articles of food which he was able to procure. When there were no potatoes or bread, he closed the door of his shanty and started off with pick and washing-pan for the gulches. When these staple edibles were to be had, he made a brisk trade in catering to the half-starved miners. It had been said that though Shallop's bread was heavy, it cost nearly its weight in gold. In those days he had wooed and married the widow of a brother miner, one of the few women whose sad lot brought them to the land of disorder and bloodshed. A few weeks only elapsed, before the widowed woman gladly changed her state for the protection of the strong arm of Patrick Shallop, to whom she became deeply attached, with a pathetic love resembling that of a dog for a kind master. The bread grew lighter then, and sometimes the potatoes fed pitiful pale youths who brought no store of gold-dust to pay for them. Patrick Shallop, living in the most magnificent dwelling in the whole length and breadth of California, was sometimes moved to tell of the little cabin where he had brought home his bride on a wet night, borrowing an umbrella to place over the bed to keep the rain from wetting her to the skin. There had been times when things had gone badly with the inmates of the little cabin, and days had passed when the mother's ears were torn with the cries of children hungry for bread. It was at this time that Barbara's father had known the Shallops. Mr. Deering was a delicately bred, handsome young man, who had come with the eager crowd of men all pushing ruthlessly forward to the golden goal, sometimes trampling to death the weaker brothers who fell by the wayside. Sick of a fever, faint and dying, he was plundered of his hard-earned store of gold-dust, and would have been murdered by his robber but for the interposition of Shallop, who stood by to see fair play, and carried the sick man home to his shanty, where the tender nursing of the busy wife saved his life a second time. Adversity makes strange companionships between men; and the friendship between the saloon-keeper and the delicately nurtured youth with the blood of a Puritan ancestry in his veins, was one which lasted through both their lives. By some mining exploits which would hardly bear the light of day, but which were, alas! not more uncommon at that time than at the present day, the Irishman had made a colossal fortune which placed him among the richest men in the world. There could be little sympathy between the two men whom the chances of that wild time had thrown together for the moment, but a cordiality was always felt; and after Mr. Deering's death frequent visits were exchanged between the dwellers of the San Rosario Ranch and the inmates of the most

celebrated house on the borders of the Pacific Ocean.

The dinner was a long one, served with all the tedious formalities which the fierce butler chose to inflict. It was not until the servants had withdrawn that the host and hostess, who stood in mortal dread of their chief functionary, their oracle on all matters of etiquette, seemed to feel themselves at home at their own table. The removal of this restraint, and the excellent wine, served to make the last quarter of an hour spent over the dessert the pleasantest part of the repast. Millicent, sitting at the right hand of her host, at last succeeded in making him tell some anecdotes of his early Californian experiences, to which she listened with breathless interest. Her feelings were undergoing a radical change; and if the country which she at first detested had not yet become dear to her, she certainly felt the greatest interest and curiosity to learn more of it. In the old dreamy life of Venice, her days had been spent in golden visions of a vanished grandeur. She was now awaking to the stirring reality of the present, and felt dimly that to be an heir to the glories of the past was but a part of living,—an inheritance which affects us less than the actual doing and striving of our own times.

The party sat together in the library, with its comfortable chairs and rows of undisturbed books sleeping between their gilded covers, until late in the evening. The conversation was general, and the quick mind of the stranger guest learned from it much that roused her attention. "If I only had four ears instead of two!" she cried at last, after a vain endeavor to follow at the same time a discussion between Ferrara and Mr. Shallop on the best method of vine culture, and a conversation between Graham and Mrs. Shallop on the subject of the public schools. Soon after this, the ladies left the room; and Millicent, her pulses all a-tremble with the various new experiences of the day, was slow in falling asleep. That night her lips forgot to give their wonted homesick sigh for Italy, for Venice.

CHAPTER VI.

"Did young people take their pleasure when the sea was warm in May?
When they made up fresh adventures for the morrow do you say?"

The week's visit at the Shallops' slipped quickly away, each pleasant day passing too hastily into to-morrow, Millicent thought. The ordering of each day had something of a routine, beginning invariably with a gallop on horseback. The way sometimes led across wet, hard beaches where the horses' hoofs crushed, with a crisp sound, the tiny sea-shells left by the receding waves. The tall roan which Millicent rode was a young thoroughbred, with slender legs, a proud, arching neck, and unclipped mane and tail. Mrs. Shallop had given the fine animal to her guest; and Millicent, who had a magnetic influence over all animals, easily controlled the horse by word or touch. The young people usually paired off; Millicent riding beside Graham, Barbara and Ferrara following, while Mr. Shallop brought up the rear on a sturdy cob whose character and strength were well calculated to bear up the portly magnate. Sometimes they rode through the odorous woods, where the air was heavy with spices, and melodious with sweet bird-notes foreign to Millicent's ears. The tall and stately redwoods standing straight and unbending in their close serried ranks, seemed to her a noble symbol of the life of an upright man, who looks fearlessly into the wide heavens, raised far above the briars which grow about his lesser brethren.

On their return from their ride, glowing with the splendid exercise, breakfast was served; sometimes in the pretty morning room, oftener in a sheltered part of the wide veranda, from whence they might look out upon the shadowy woods stretching behind the house. After this meal, Mr. Shallop and Ferrara took the train for San Francisco; and the hostess and Graham disappeared into the temporary studio which had been arranged for the artist. The two girls were left to amuse themselves. Millicent, who had brought her usual store of books, did not open one of them, but moused about in the library, finding many works quite new to her and full of interest. If her knowledge of Italian and French literature was remarkable, her ignorance of the English classics was stupendous. Shakspeare alone was familiar to her among the great ones. The long rows of finely bound books were mostly uncut and showed little evidence of having been read, a copy of a lady's fashion book, and a volume treating of the manners of polite society, forming notable exceptions to this rule. At mid-day a beach-wagon conveyed the young girls to

the shining sea-sands, and they indulged in the luxury of a bath. In the afternoon they took long drives, or played lawn tennis with friends from the hotel in the town. The evenings were sometimes spent on the long, cool veranda, oftener on Mr. Shallop's stanch yacht, the "Golden Hind." She was a fine vessel several tons heavier than her illustrious namesake, in which Sir Francis Drake sailed along the coast of California more than three centuries ago, and took possession of the land as "New Albion," in the name of good Queen Bess.

Pleasant days, full of incident and enjoyment, filled with new impressions to Millicent, and freighted with sunlight and merriment to all the party. No thought of the weather lent the anxious uncertainty to plans which so often to us in the East takes half the enjoyment from anticipation. From May to November in this favored land the blue of the sky is unclouded, save by gossamer white drifts of vapor, massed into soft shapes and mystic outlines. The sky smiles from spring to laughing summer, and the land lies steeped in sunshine through the late autumn.

The wide white beach, with its row of bathing-houses and little tents, was very attractive to Millicent. She sometimes sat in the warm sand for hours, chatting with Barbara or making friends with the bare-legged children, the tireless architects in sand. Finally, donning their bathing-suits, they ran, hand in hand, over the dry sands, across the wet space which the last wave had darkened, through the white fringe of the sea, into the cool green billows.

The last day of their visit had come, and the morrow would see them on their way back to San Rosario. Millicent and Barbara had prolonged their sea dip beyond their usual wont. Never before had the water seemed so bracing and delicious. As there were twenty or thirty bathers to keep her company, Millicent lingered among the breakers, while Barbara regained the shore. She swam leisurely about, displacing the clear water with her white arms and pretty, small feet. She suddenly became aware that a swimmer was gaining on her from behind, and her stroke instinctively quickened. Millicent swam as only the women of Venice can swim; and the race between her and her unseen pursuer bade fair to be hotly contested. With head high lifted from the waves which circled caressingly about the smooth round throat, knotting the tendril curls at the nape of the neck, the girl kept steadily on her course without turning her head to see who might be so audacious as to follow her. Strong as were her strokes, she slowly lost ground; and finally the water about her rippled with the strokes of the man who was gaining. Soon he had caught up with her, and side by side they swam for a space. Then the victor spoke in a voice well known to her, and the girl answered him with a laugh which rang out fresh and crisp as the sound of the wavelets. Then she turned her head and looked full at him as he moved by her side, strong and graceful as a young merman.

"So, my nymph, you are at home in Father Neptune's arms as well as in the embrace of the great tree. Which is your native element, earth, air, or water?"

"I am amphibious."

"And which of your three elemental homes do you like the best?"

"When I am dancing, the air; when I am walking, dear Mother Earth; and when I swim, the sea."

"When I paint you, it will be as I see you now, triumphing over the waves as our great mother, Aphrodite, triumphed over them before you."

"That compliment would go to my head were it not mixed with so much water."

Then they both laughed, because the sky was sapphire clear, and the sea beryl green; because the golden sun warmed them with its kind rays; because each was fair and good to look upon; because, when they were together, winds blew more softly, and sky and sea took on a more tender hue where they melted at the horizon into one ineffable kiss. A pair of white-winged gulls swept above them, shrieking their love-notes hoarsely, while the white-armed girl and the strong-limbed man breasted the waves together, side by side. Though lapped by the cool water, Graham felt the warm influence which folded about him like a cloak in Millicent's presence. When she grew tired the girl turned upon her side and floated; while Graham swam about her in little circles, first moving like a shark on one side, with long, far-reaching strokes, then swimming upon his back, and finally beneath the waves, looking always at her face seen dimly through the dark-green water.

After a space Millicent looked about to find herself alone, far from the shore with its group of bathers. At first she fancied that her companion must be swimming below the water as he had done before; but, as the slow-passing seconds went by, she realized that some ill must have befallen him. Stretching her arms above her head, she dived straight and swift through the clear water towards the pebbled bottom of the ocean shining through the pellucid waters. In that dim under-current she touched him, stiff and cold, rising toward the surface, but through no effort of

his own helpless limbs. In that terrified heart-beat of time she saw his face set and white, with horror-stricken eyes widely strained apart. Into them she looked, her own firing with hope and courage, and giving a mute promise of rescue. She seized his rigid arm with her strong, small hands, and they rose together to the surface. The man was as if paralyzed; and the girl for an instant tried to support him, but, feeling such a strain would soon out-wear her half-spent strength, she cried,--

"Put your hand on my shoulder--so, and I will swim below you." Her voice was hoarse and shrill as that of the screaming sea-gulls. He could not speak, but looked toward the shore as if he would have her save herself and abandon him to his fate.

"No, no!" she cried, "I *will* save you;" and, placing his hands on her shoulders, struck out bravely toward the shore. To reach it seemed at first an easy thing, but the struggle proved a terrible one, cruelly unequal, between the girl's small strength, with the burden now added to her own weight, and the waves grown hungry for human prey. Their babbling music now was changed to Millicent's ears, and they clamored greedily for her life, for that other life which she was striving to snatch from their cruel embrace. Again and again the man would loosen his hold. She could not save him: why should she die too, she was so young, so fair! This he tried to tell her in gasping accents, but she only gripped his hand more firmly and placed it as before. They should both live or die. Fate, which had been so cruel to her, had cast their lots together for that day at least; and death seemed sweeter by his side than life without him. Her brave spirit fainted not, though her labored strokes grew slower and feebler. Then she gave one great cry for help to those who were so near them, and yet so unconscious of their danger. She heard their voices plainly,--the mothers talking to romping children, whose ringing laughter mocked her agony. Was it their death knell, this sound of sweet child-voices that drowned her frenzied cry, and filled the ears of the strong men and women, keeping out the fainting accents which pleaded for his life and her own? Once again, and this time with a thrilling vibration of despair, the woman's voice rang out across the waves. It was freighted with her last hope; it was the latest sound her gasping lungs could utter. Could love and hope of life outshriek the murmur of the waves, the shrill note of the sea-mews, the noisy prattle of the infants? The man, long since despairing, groaned: it seemed murder to him that his helpless weight should drag down the fair, brave young creature to her grave; his death agony was made more bitter by the thought. The girl's determination never wavered, and her little strength was not wasted in a longer struggle; she managed to keep his face above the waves, but now only held her own, and had ceased to make the slightest progress. She could now no longer see the bathers. Had her cry been heard? O waves! be merciful and still your clamor! White-winged partners, cry no more your mocking love notes! Sweet mothers, list no longer to your children's laughter, for there is other sound which must reach your fond ears and chill your warm hearts with horror! For a moment there grew a great silence as of listening, and then over the water came answering cries of women agonized with sympathy, came the hearty voices of strong men saying, "Keep up, keep up! for help is coming, it is close beside you." Ah, God! it is in time, for the two white faces, lying so close in the green waters, have but just vanished from sight; they still shine through the waves but a little space beneath the surface. Strong helping arms raise the nerveless bodies from the waves that murmur sullenly, bear them safely to the shore with its shining white sands, and, last, gently loose the maiden's white hands, clinging still, though all unconsciously, to the man whose life she has saved. Weeping women gather about them, lying there so still and fair upon the white beach; frightened children look curiously at the half-drowned figures of the man and the woman. Still are they man and woman, and not yet fallen to that terrible neuter of death, wherein age and sex are not, where serf and queen are equals.

CHAPTER VII.

"A flame! Her clear soul's essence slips,
To steep for aye with mine, from her fast-whitening lips!"

Several days passed before these two who, hand in hand, had looked death in the face, and felt his chill breath freezing up the current of their lives, again saw one another. Graham, after

twenty-four hours, was able to be about, looking pale and ill. The congestive chill which had overcome him was the result of his having plunged into the sea while very much over-heated. The water at San Real, and indeed all along the Pacific coast, is very much colder than at the Eastern watering places of a corresponding latitude, where the genial influence of the Gulf Stream is felt. His vigorous constitution quickly threw off the effects of the terrible experience; but three long days and nights wore themselves out before Millicent's light step sounded on the stairs. Mrs. Shallop and Barbara were sitting alone at the luncheon table, when the latter caught the sound of the well-known footfall; she hastily left the room, and running up the stairs passed her arm about the feeble girl, supporting her into the room.

"Why did you not tell me that you were coming? Do you think it prudent, dear?"

"Yes, I wanted to come, and the doctor said I should do whatever I fancied," she answered a little fretfully; then she smiled, with that flashing of the eyes that always won her pardon for any little sin. It was a strange coincidence, Barbara thought, that Millicent should have come downstairs for the first time on the morning when Graham had gone to San Francisco. It was his first absence since the beginning of their visit. Why should she avoid meeting the man whose life she had saved at the risk of her own? Graham had every day begged to see her, but Millicent had not felt equal to the interview. Barbara was genuinely puzzled; but then Barbara was often puzzled by Millicent. During the days just past her gentle care and nursing had brought her much nearer to Millicent than she had been before. In those long mornings when Barbara, in a full, deep voice, read to her from her favorite books, Millicent had time to think more about her new friend; and the more she thought about her the better she liked the sweet, sound, womanly nature, with its domestic instincts, and maternal care of all creatures sick or sorry. One morning, as the invalid lay upon her couch, while Barbara's gentle hands plaited her long hair in thick strands, she said, somewhat abruptly,--

"Barbara, why have you not married?"

"What an odd question!"

"If you knew what a charming wife you would make, you would think the question a most natural one. I suppose you have been in love?"

"I suppose so," jestingly.

"Bah! talk seriously for a moment with me. Why do you not marry Ferrara? The poor fellow is perfectly pathetic in his devotion to you. You know, Barbara, that matrimony would suit you delightfully; there is nothing so becoming to a woman of your type as the background of a home of her own. There you would shine like Jessica's candle in this naughty world."

"I have never thought about it in the way of a background."

"Of course you never did; but, Barbara, do you think you could fall in love again?"

"Who knows?"

"Then I know that you have never been in love at all, *ma belle*--oh, I forgot, and have broken my vow to speak English pure and simple. Well, never mind, now we will talk about my broth, for I am very hungry. I feel like little Rosalba in the 'Rose and the Ring,' when she went about crying, 'Dutess Tountess, my royal highness vely hungy.'"

Long confidences had followed this conversation; and Millicent listened to Barbara's account of a childish romance with that deep interest which women all feel in the heart experiences of their sisters. Such sympathy is born in the feminine breast before the power of loving awakes there, and dies not when experience has brought nothing to it but grief and bitterness. The veriest chit of a girl of ten will read a love-story if she be allowed, while her brothers are inventing ingenious instruments for the torture of cats and nurses. The deafest grandam will listen with keen interest to her favorite grand-daughter's confession of love, and will be careful not to chill young hopes with her own sad memories. All those who have loved truly, with that love which outlasts grief, death, and human passion, which smiles at the cruelest neglect, which, like the love of the Most High, passeth all understanding, have sympathy and kindly interest for those who are in love. That "all the world loves a lover," is the truest of all sayings.

As soon as they were alone, Millicent told Barbara that she was anxious to return to the Ranch the following day. Since her first meeting with John Graham, her life had danced away through bright hours passed in his company, in remembering past interviews, in looking forward to future meetings. In the long days when she lay weak and helpless, slowly recovering from the terrible drain on forces, nervous and muscular, she had thought long and deeply; and now that she was well, she did not wish to meet Graham, and avoided his presence. She realized, as she had not done before, that she deeply and irrevocably loved this man, whose name six months ago had been unknown to her. Whether this understanding of what was in her own heart came upon

her in one broad flash of quickened intelligence, when she lay half swallowed up by the jaws of death, still clasping him with feeble hands, or if, in the quiet hours of introspection which followed that awful moment, she gradually learned the truth, it would be hard to say, but that she now knew it, was indubitable. The fact that the man she loved should be indebted to her for his life was a distasteful one. Not through gratitude did she wish to attract him; the very thought of it was galling to her. She loved him, and longed, with the deepest power in her soul, to arouse in his breast that answering passion, which, like a deep bass chord, mingles with the sweet treble song of woman's love, their harmony making the one perfect note to which the keystone of the universe trembles sympathetically. Sweet as was the thought that her strength had sufficed for them both, she mourned the chance which had made her hand the rescuing one. Love that springs from gratitude or from pity is earth-born and earth-bound; she would have none of it; it was as if she had a claim upon him for that gift, which if not freely given is valueless. So, with a shyness new to her, she avoided meeting Graham; and the night of his return she sought her room again and did not appear until the following morning. If Graham did not know all, he was ready enough to understand that she avoided his thanks.

Mrs. Shallop passed the last evening of her guests' visit sitting with Miss Almsford, answering her many eager questions of the strange, wild days when law and order were not in the broad golden land. It seemed almost incredible to Millicent, and yet she felt it to be true, that the wife of the mining king regretted the past days of poverty and simplicity. The hard-earned crust, shared with a husband whose every thought was known to her, had tasted sweeter than the luxuries of a table at which she often sat alone, or with a partner absorbed in thoughts and enterprises in which she had no part. Her children had then been entirely hers; now they were far distant,—the boy at an English college, the girl in a French conventual school, whence they would both return grown too clever and proud to care for her simple-hearted companionship. What mattered it that she had toiled day and night to buy them food and clothing, had worn out her poor body and dulled her simple mind with anxious overstrain and grinding labor? Would they thank her for it now? When, a year before, she had visited these adored children, she had felt the distance between them and herself. If her son had not been ashamed of his poor mother, it was only because his heart was not quite weaned from hers. The girl was gentle and kind; but the pitying care with which she brought her conversation to the level of her mother's understanding was all too obvious to the sensitive woman, whose nervous strength had been shattered in the hard fight which she had made all those years ago, to keep the breath of life in their little bodies. Half her life had been passed at the wash-tub, half in the drawing-room; the transition had been too sudden for a person of her temperament. The soapsuds, which used to flash the splintered rays of light from her hands, were more appropriate to them than the diamonds with which they now glittered. Poor woman, the extremes of fortune were both known to her.

Though their visit had been a delightful one, Millicent was anxious to return to the Ranch; she longed for the quiet, refined atmosphere of the place, with its simple comforts, doubly attractive after this experience of the luxurious but inappropriate house of Mr. Patrick Shallop. There is a certain fitness in things; and the ex-miner, living in the palace of the railroad king, was less at home than England's monarch could have been in the cowherd's hovel. Millicent felt the social *malaise* which arises from the incongruity of persons with their surroundings. Graham, interested in his portrait, which was coming on famously, was not easily affected by a personal atmosphere to which he was indifferent; while Barbara and Ferrara, used to a similar condition of things, accepted it without question.

The morning of the last day of their visit dawned bright and clear; and Millicent, standing on the terrace, thought the wide view had never seemed so beautiful before. She was taking farewell of that sea which had so nearly swallowed her young life with all its hopes and fears. The waves murmured with a gentle sound, as if quite oblivious of their late rapacity. She went out into the thick pine woods behind the house, and stood for the last time among the great redwoods, which to her were so wonderful, and which everybody else accepted as a matter of course. A well-known footstep behind her on the dry leaves caused the slight pink tinge which the morning breeze had brought to her cheek to fade suddenly; the blood seemed rushing from every vein back to its source, and her heart stopped its pulsations for a moment. She did not turn her head, but stood quite silent, waiting for Graham's first word. When he was at her side, she felt her hand suddenly caught in a warm pressure which sent the blood rushing through the arteries again, tingling painfully in every fibre of her body, and loosening the cold silence of the heart, which beat out a quick answer to the words of greeting. They were but few and very earnest, the words

of a brave man glad to be beholden to so fair a woman for his life. Was it gratitude that made his voice tremble, that lighted his grave eyes with a smile?

She answered him sweetly and seriously, with a steady voice and calm eyes, though the rose-flush flooded and ebbed from her cheek and brow. The man did not trouble himself to analyze the feelings which gave rise to the fleeting blushes; he was too full of his own enthusiasm to notice how it affected its object. He spoke as he felt and thought of the woman standing there so full of life and beauty,--only in the light of his relation to her. He knew how he felt towards her, and told her so with admiring frankness; of her feelings towards himself he never stopped to think. His was an egotistic nature, as are those of all strong men whose personality stamps the age in which they live. Weaker men and women receive the imprint of their time; only the few strong ones leave their images impressed when the soft clay of the present is transmitted into the unmalleable granite of the past.

They walked together for a time, Graham full of anxious inquiry for her health, and Millicent happy in his anxiety. When the artist learned of the proposed departure, he strongly opposed it, urging a longer stay. When he found that the young ladies had decided to leave San Real, he announced his intention of accompanying them. Mrs. Shallop shortly afterward joined the pair and handed Millicent a newspaper, at which the girl looked quite indifferently until her eyes caught her own name in large letters at the head of a column. She quickly read the article, which proved to be a highly sensational account of the rescue of Graham.

A FIGHT WITH DEATH!--Heroism of a Young Girl!--John Graham rescued from Drowning by Beautiful Millicent Almsford!--The Personal Appearance of the Heroine!--Early History of the Lucky Man!

These headings preceded the two-column article at which Graham laughed contemptuously, and which drew hot tears from Millicent's eyes. She had never before seen her own name in print, and the freedom with which the Anglo-Saxon press deals with the affairs of ladies who have no claim on the public interest was unknown to her. She only felt that her name was being spoken by people who never had heard of her; that the most sacred and awful hour of her life was revealed to the world; and that the event of which she had hardly spoken, and of which she barely dared to think, was now familiar to thousands of indifferent readers. The news had in fact been telegraphed to one of the large New York papers, and in the course of a week filtered down through the smaller organs of that city to the suburban press, and was read and forgotten by the careless public throughout the length and breadth of this enlightened land. To Mrs. Shallop and Barbara, accustomed to the vagaries of American journalism, the state of mind into which Millicent was thrown by the article in the San Francisco "Roarer," was entirely surprising. It was without doubt annoying, but they had both become so accustomed to seeing their own names and those of their friends in the columns of the daily journals, that Millicent's horror and indignation seemed disproportionate to the cause. This utter disrespect of the privacy of life which is the right of all men and women leading peaceable lives, breaking no law of the civil or social statutes, is the crying sin of modern journalism. When they are charged with this, the journals very tritely retort that "social news" pays better than any other class of matter; that its insertion is more often prized and sought after by the individuals mentioned than resented by them; that much of the personal news is actually furnished by the individuals whom it most concerns; and that they but supply the demand of their readers. It would be well for them to remember that to pander to the public taste is not the highest object open to journalism; to elevate that taste were a task more deserving of commendation, and less unworthy of good printer's ink and paper.

The next mail brought two letters for Millicent; one from a well-known photographer asking her for an early sitting, and begging that he might have the sole privilege of photographing her. The other communication was a civil letter from the editor of a weekly journal, asking for a slight autobiographical sketch from the hand of the heroine of San Real. In the course of the morning a reporter from the California "Bugle," a rival sheet, arrived and requested an interview with Miss Almsford and Mr. Graham, from which to compile an article on "The Rescuer and the Rescued." Millicent's eyes flashed angrily when the import of the small printed visiting-card bearing the name of this nineteenth-century inquisitor was explained to her. She was heard to murmur, beneath her breath, some Italian words highly inimical to the smart young person who was taking the opportunity to examine Mrs. Shallop's drawing-room with an eye to future "notes." She was astonished when Graham quietly lighted a cigarette, and asking that the gentleman might be shown into the smoking-room, joined him there.

"Why does he not beat him?" she cried. "If I were a man I should thrust him from the house."

"And be held up to the public as a brutal assassin?" laughed Barbara. "No, no, my dear, let Mr. Graham alone; he knows best how to manage the visitor. It never does to insult those gentlemen; they are dangerous enemies, and have the public's ear into which to pour all their grievances. Our friend will draw the fire on himself, I fancy, in order to spare you. News the news-fiend must have; he will make it himself if it be not provided for him. Poor thing! he must live, after all, as well as you or I. It is not his fault that he is obliged to interview people; it must be a very disagreeable profession."

Thus kindly and with wide sympathy did Barbara Deering judge all men and women; ay, and reporters too, together with babies, Chinamen, and other unfortunate works of God. Graham returned in a quarter of an hour, having appeased his visitor with the aid of a good cigar and a champagne cocktail, compounded by the careful hand of the solemn-faced butler.

Millicent was still flushed and excited, all Barbara's arguments having failed to soothe her nerves. Graham, with one sentence, banished the angry dint from her white forehead and brought a smile back to her face. The hour of the last good-bys had arrived; and the guests took leave of their kind hostess, with promises to repeat their visit before long. Little Mrs. Shallop really cried at parting with Millicent, to whom she had become greatly attached. She sighed as the carriage disappeared from view, bearing its freight of young people with their vivid lives and strong interests. When she went back to her great lonely drawing-room, with its splendid furnishings, she realized what a fitting frame it had made for the two pretty young guests, and how unsuitable it was to her simple tastes. The house was dreary without their joyous voices and quick footsteps.

Just after sundown the travellers reached the San Rosario station, where Hal was awaiting them in the great red-painted wagon. The two sturdy mules were supplemented by old Sphinx harnessed before them, making what is known as a spiked team.

"Hail! the conquering Heroine comes! sound the trumpets, beat the drums!" cried the irrepressible young rancher. "How is our most heroic Princess, and will she deign to enter the triumphal car which her humble slave has prepared for her?"

They all laughed; but, through all the lively nonsense which he reeled off to them on the way to the house, Millicent felt that he had been really moved by what had occurred. The grip which he gave her hand spoke a volume of approval; and the loud clap on the shoulder with which he greeted Graham expressed more than a dozen sentences of rhetorical eloquence could have done. The antics of the unicorn team were extremely diverting; and these, with the absurdities which Hal perpetrated at every step of the road, brought the quartette to the house door "in a state of merriment bordering on idiocy," as he expressed it. Mrs. Deering, with her sweet motherly greeting, made their return seem a home-coming to Millicent and Graham, as well as to Barbara, the tall daughter of the house. Her hospitality was so genuinely of the heart that the recipient of it was made to feel that it was simply his due, and that his presence was as great a favor to the hostess as her kindness was to him.

Graham was warmly urged to stay over night, but he resisted the temptation of remaining. Neither Millicent's voice nor Millicent's eyes had supplemented the invitation.

As they paced the path together, her hand lying on his arm, Graham told Mrs. Deering, in a low voice, of all that had happened since their departure,—of the pleasant days with their excursions; of the new impressions made on Millicent by all that she saw; of the friends whom he had met, remembering all the kind messages which had been sent to the gentle *châtelaine* of San Rosario; of Barbara's sweetness and Mrs. Shallop's hospitality; of the progress he had made on the portrait of his hostess; of the thousand-and-one little items of news so welcome to people leading a life of quiet isolation. Then in graver tones he spoke of his great peril and Millicent's bravery, of the strange thoughts which had crossed his mind in that last moment of consciousness, how her face as well as his mother's had been revealed to him as in a vision. All this was listened to with that perfect sympathy that is always ready to receive confidences, and which forbears to claim them when they are not spontaneously given. Blessed among women are these rare ones to whom motherless sons can confide every hope and disappointment, sure of a quick sympathy, and in whom the mighty instinct of maternity is not satisfied in ministering to their own flesh and blood, but springs forth to succor all who are suffering for the gentle mother love.

It was late when these two said good-night, and Graham went to find the others to take farewell. Barbara and Hal were singing duets. They had neither of them seen Millicent, and fancied that she must have gone to her room. With a sense of cold disappointment and injury the

young man left the house. As he passed by the corner of the piazza he fancied he saw a figure standing close in the shadow of an angle. He stopped; the figure remained motionless; through the heavy drapery of the vines he could not tell whether it was a person or merely a shadow.

"Who is it?" he asked in a low voice. No answer came, but through the stillness of the night he thought he heard the sound of a quick-drawn breath. Putting the honeysuckle aside he stepped on the piazza, and found that his eyes had not deceived him. Millicent stood beneath the rose vines. When she saw that she was discovered she spoke with a light laugh:

"I did not want you to see me, for I have been unsociable this evening, and hoped you would all think I had gone to bed."

"Is it not damp for you to be sitting out-of-doors?" he asked, with a voice grown deep and tender.

"Oh, no! I am quite used to it. What a wonderful night! I think I never saw the stars so brilliant."

The girl seated herself on the edge of the piazza, Graham placing a cushion under her feet and taking his place at her side. It was a perfectly still evening, the only sound being the far-away tinkle of a sheep bell. There was a moment of dangerous silence, which Millicent broke a little nervously, speaking of Italy, of Mrs. Shallop and their late visit, of Hal's irresistible wit, of any one of the subjects which danced through her brain. She was afraid to be silent, and feared yet longed for what might be said if she left too long a pause. The spell which kept Graham at her side when he should have been half way to his lonely tower, began to assert itself over the woman, always the last to yield. The man had long since abandoned himself to that mysterious state of being in which every nerve of brain and every pulse of heart yearns for sympathy and reaches out toward its counterpart. At last she was silent, the last commonplace dying half spoken on her trembling lips. Silence now in all the land; only the sound of heart-beats which each felt must reach the other's ears. Stars more tender than those of heaven shone close to Graham through the blue-black night; a breath sweeter than the wind stirring the honeysuckle touched his cheek. At length that silence, more musical than sweetest harmony, was broken by a low, deep voice.

"May I kiss you?" said the voice.

What was the faint sound which the night wind wafted to his ear? Was it the whirring of the humming birds whose nest hung close by? Was it the far-off silver ripple of the brooklet, or the cadence of the distant sheep-bell? Was it that sweeter sound than note of mating bird, of falling water, or of faint bell-chime,--was it a loving woman's "Yes"?

CHAPTER VIII.

*"Oui, les premiers baisers, oui, les premiers serments
Que deux êtres mortels échangèrent sur terre
Ce fut au pied d' un arbre effeuillé par les vents,
Sur un roc en poussière."*

When he awoke the next morning, John Graham gave a deep sigh. His dreams had been so sweet that no reality could equal their happiness. As he sat on the edge of his narrow bed disentangling what was real from what was dream-born in his thoughts, his eye fell upon the knot of roses which he had taken from Millicent's hair the night before, and had clasped to his lips as he fell asleep. They were faded now, but they still gave out a strong perfume. His cheek had been wounded by a thorn, but he kissed the wilted posies, for all that, placed the little bouquet tenderly in an exquisite Venetian vase, and then bounded down the stairway of his tower and across the narrow space which led to a clear deep pool where a crystal stream fell in a white cataract to a rocky basin. The foam-bubbles danced joyously in the clear dark waters, and the plashing of the fall had a sound of a sweet deep voice which had grown very dear to him. A mossy bank, shaded by two drooping trees, sloped to the edge of this natural bath, refreshing enough to have tempted Diana from the chase. As Graham plunged into the cool waters he shouted out a verse of a song he had learned long ago. Attracted by the sound of his voice, French John laid down his axe beside the young tree he was about to fell, and came down to the pool where

Graham was vigorously tossing about the bright water. The old wood-cutter looked at the young man as if the sight did him good. He responded to the uproarious greeting which the artist shouted to him, by his usual silent nod of the head. Had words been worth their weight in diamond dust, the old soldier could not have been more chary of wasting them, but the look in his faded blue eyes was gentle and full of admiration. He had had a son of whom he had lost all trace since its infancy. If the boy had lived he would have been about Graham's age, and it was the man's fancy that he would have resembled his patron. He imagined he could trace in the splendidly modelled arms and legs and the strong, perfectly proportioned torso of the bather the shape into which the baby contours he remembered so well must have developed. Graham had by this time gained the green turf and stood shaking the water out of his thick hair, drawing quick panting breaths, meanwhile, and springing about to warm himself, with the grace and strength of a leopard. The old Frenchman gave a deep sigh as he looked at him.

"Yes; Hector certainly must resemble this young man," he murmured, as he wetted his hard hands, and, grasping the handle of his axe, smote heavily at the stem of a young pine-tree. Graham rapidly made his toilet in the open air. The plunge in the clear cold water had rather stimulated than expended the electric, nervous force which ran through his veins, quickening the life-blood in its flow. He felt ten years younger since yesterday morning. His thirty years and the gravity they had brought to him had shrunk to twenty. As he looked up at his tower he sang aloud a snatch of an old song which had been often on his lips in those happy, careless days in the *Rue d' Enfer*,--words which he had painted over the tiny grate in the cramped apartment under the leads, where he had suffered from heat all summer, and shivered all winter:

Dans un grenier qu' on est bien
A vingt ans, à vingt ans!

He would have liked to dance. Had his years in truth been but twenty, he would have yielded to the temptation. He would gladly have thrown his arms about the old Frenchman, for lack of another confidant, and have told him the cause of his happiness. But, after all, this reflex of youth could not entirely melt the reserve of manhood from him; he wore his thirty years lightly indeed, but could not shake them off.

"Give me your axe, John; I know something of your woodman's craft; let me show you how easily I can fell this young tree."

He took the tool from the woodcutter, and, whirling the sharp edge in the air, laid it at the root of the tree with a ringing blow.

"It appears in truth that monsieur 'ave 'andled an axe before."

"Surely, John. I once spent a summer with some friends of mine, who lived in a forest in Brittany; they were *sabotiers*."

"Monsieur is jesting?"

"Not in the least. I not only can fell a tree,--clumsily enough, be it confessed,--but if I had the tools I could shape you a pair of *sabots*, as good ones as you could buy for ten sous at Quimper; that is your town, I think?"

He talked in short, jerky sentences between the strokes, while the white splinters flew about him like a hail-storm. After a few moments the knack which he seemed at first to have forgotten came back to him. The smell of the bruised bark was aromatic; the death-sigh of the young branches was musical as they trembled for the last time together, reaching out to touch their sister trees in solemn leave-taking. Their sigh was now drowned in the groan of the swaying tree.

"Take care, monsieur, take care; it is about to fall," cried the Frenchman.

His warning was a timely one. Graham, so long unused to the exercise of the craft, had not noticed how deeply he had cut into the stem. The straight tree seemed to hesitate, tossing its branches helplessly heavenward, and then with a creaking sound crashed through the surrounding underbrush, and with a dull thud measured its slender length upon the earth. For a moment its branches shook convulsively, and then all was quiet. It seemed as if all nature paused at the fall of so fair a thing: the birds were silent in the thicket; the babble of the water-fall grew faint; and the wood creatures stirred not in their burrows. A mighty breeze crept through the forest, rustling the surrounding trees, wailing through the open gap as if in requiem, and a light cloud floated over the face of the sun, throwing its shadowy pall on the spot.

"That was well done, monsieur."

And, at the sound of the man's voice, the cloud floated by and the sun shone out once more,

the wood birds took up their song again, the squirrel in the hollow of the white oak went on cracking her nut, and the brief mourning was over.

That man must feel himself indeed beloved, who fancies that the world will pause as long beside his grave as does the forest at the fall of one of its children.

Not until the branches had been lopped off and the long stem cut into lengths, did Graham cease his labor. The exercise did him good, and gave him an appetite for the breakfast which old John served him in the open air. He declared that the coffee was better than could be had at the *Café de Paris*; and assured John that neither Paris nor Vienna could produce such bread as that which the old man had baked in some mysterious manner in an oven of his own construction, made of flat stone sunk in the ground. Graham remembered that he had somewhere in the tower a bottle of rare old wine, which he sent John to fetch.

"Bring my glass and your tin cup, John."

He needed sympathy, he who had lived for years without asking man or woman to share his joys or sorrows; he felt a new need in himself for human companionship; and the silent old fellow who did his bidding was the only soul to whom he could look for it. The ice which had encased his heart was broken; and instead of sternly demanding from his fellow-men honor, truth, and sincerity, he embraced the whole world in a warm, unquestioning love and sympathy. Yesterday he was a man who labored for his kind; to-day he was content to love them. Yesterday he was a reformer; to-day he was a philanthropist. The henchman returning with the wine, Graham filled the crystal goblet and the humble cup to the brim, and together these two denizens of the balmy forest drank to the new day which had dawned on the young man's life. After the long, black night which for months obscures the face of nature in the far northern land, the first rising of the sun touches the hearts of men with a deeper, more profound joy than the dwellers in a temperate zone can well understand. So was the light of this new love more glorious a thousand-fold to the man in whose life there had so long been darkness, than if it had arisen in a heart unacquainted with grief. In the first flush of happiness, his whole nature rebelled against the joyless life he had been leading; his work lost its attraction for him, and he could not have painted a stroke that day if his whole future reputation had depended upon it. The new impulse had swung him far out of his accustomed orbit; that there might be a rebound, he never for an instant fancied.

He spent an hour in ransacking his tower to find the most beautiful thing he possessed to carry to Millicent. He wanted to go to her with something in his hand that might in some measure express the tide of generous feeling that flooded his whole nature. He still had a score of those treasures, souvenirs of his European residence, of which the greater part had found their way to the shelves and cabinets of his friends' houses. He spread them out before him on his one table, ruthlessly pushing aside paints, brushes, books, and drawing chinks, in a hubbub of disorder. With an intense interest he looked them all through. He had almost decided upon a rare Etruscan coin which he had seen roll from the palm of an exhumed skeleton, when his eye was caught by a tiny Tanagrine figure. The exquisite modelling of this clay toy, instinct with the beauty which pervaded every detail of Greek life, made it a more appropriate gift. The miniature woman was as truly proportioned as the Milo herself, and as surely constructed according to that greatest law of art that the world has yet seen evolved, the Greek, wherein are welded together the real and the ideal. A third article now struck his fancy as more appropriate than either of these for his first gift to Millicent. It was a crown of olive leaves of the purest gold, which might have bound Helen's brow. It had lain amidst the dust of eons which covers Troy with its pall; and now, in the nineteenth century, it was to serve as the gift of a Californian lover to his mistress. Surely, never before had the precious leaves encircled so fair a head as that which they were now destined to adorn.

Among the many sins which had been laid at Graham's door by friend or foe, the vice of foppery was missing. That minute attention to every detail of dress, which is found as often in man as in woman, had no place in his busy life. He was, however, always neatly dressed; and the prosaic fashions of our time were modified as much as possible in his wardrobe, especially while he inhabited the forest. On this occasion, instead of one absent look in his small mirror, merely to ascertain if his hair were properly parted and his cravat neatly tied, a full hour was given to the process of dressing. Every suit of clothes, and each possible combination of the garments which his wardrobe afforded, were carefully considered. When at last the decision was made, the vest needed a button, which the artist laboriously attached to the garment. Taking a coarse linen thread strong enough for a halter, he made the button fast, taking several turns of the thread about its eye, as if he were belaying a rope. His cravat occupied him fully a quarter of an hour. He must have brushed his hair at least half a dozen times. He caught sight of his anxious face in

the mirror, just as he was settling his cravat for the last time, and burst into a peal of laughter at his own dandyism. At the foot of the tower his sturdy mustang Tasso stood ready saddled. French John had given an extra polish to the sleek gray coat, bright enough to reflect the silver-studded Mexican bridle. A pair of red cockades, set at the ears of the beast, were made from flowers yielded by the small garden patch behind the woodcutter's cabin, where he raised flowers and vegetables for his patron and himself. The tall cock gave a condescending crow of approval as Graham mounted his horse; while the three cats sunning themselves near by hunched their backs at him, as if to express their disapproval of his idleness. It was still early in the afternoon, and it was not his wont to sally forth until the shadows were long. Where could he be going? they asked one of the other, purring inquisitively together like a group of women-folk over a cup of afternoon tea. Of all his brute friends, Tasso alone knew whither his master was going; he snorted scornfully at cats and cock, and, shaking his head playfully, sped over the bridle path with flying feet, as if conscious of the eyes that were watching for him, the ears that were strained to catch the first faint echo of his hoofs as they flashed over the stony orchard road.

Those sweet eyes had not closed since they had last looked into Graham's; that white form had known no rest since it had slipped from his arms. The night, which had brought to him such peaceful dreams, was fraught with bitter memories to Millicent. She had paced her room through the long hours. No longer a half-yielding, shrinking maiden, but a woman, full of tears, before whom some great sorrow, long stifled, had risen up again. Was her nature then two-fold? While she was with other people, Millicent seemed a strong, self-reliant woman, pure and cold, with quick intellectual sympathies, and strong opinions and convictions. When in the society of the man she loved, his influence unfolded the closed petals of her heart as the sun kisses back the white leaves of the daisy, and uncovers its great golden centre to the eyes of all men. A new warmth shone from her eyes, and softened her silver voice. An unwonted shyness made her shrinking and timid under his gaze. A new life was born within her, so much stronger and more intense than any that she had ever known, that her past existence paled before it as the luminous circle of a night-lamp fades before the strong rays of morning. But when she was alone....

Whatever her sombre thoughts had been, they were banished before she next met her lover. When she learned that he had come, she longed to fly from him out into the dim reaches of the forest, where he had told her half in jest that they had lived and loved before man's time began; when nymphs and dryads danced together in the shade of the oak-trees; when Pan reigned, and the earth was young. If she could have seen him in her own sanctum, where the light was softened by the dull green hanging of the wall, where the air was warm from the ever-flaming fire, and sweet with the spices burning in a great sea-shell, she would not have greatly cared; but the stereotyped drawing-room, with its blank white walls, was no place for their greeting. She went down the stairway and stood a moment before Graham; then, as he advanced towards her as if about to speak, she glided swiftly from the room across the hall and out into the sunlight.

Barbara, standing near by, scattering corn to a flock of tame doves which fluttered about her, laughed as the light figure flitted by, with bare head, and delicate silken draperies fit only to rustle over soft carpets. Barbara laughed pleasantly, cheerily calling over her shoulder to her mother, who sat indoors,--

"Look at Millicent racing with her own shadow."

"'T is a substantial shadow, Bab, but otherwise the simile 's good," said Hal, as he passed by on his way to the dairy.

And Barbara looked again, and looking sighed. Another figure had sped by her, down the orchard road towards the wood,--the figure of a man, pursuing the flying girl, with kindled face and fleet steps. She threw her last handful of grain to the circling doves, went into the stiff drawing-room, mechanically set straight the disordered chairs and drew down a shade where the light fell too hotly upon a breadth of carpet. She paused before a mirror and looked at her own pretty face clouded by a pain she would not explain. More than one lover had sued for her hand, earnestly and tenderly, but she had listened to no suit. No man had ever pursued her with fleet steps and sparkling eyes, no man had ever brought that expression of half-shamed happiness to her face which had made Millicent look just now like a child racing with her own shadow.

In the forest Graham found her standing breathless beneath an oak-tree, whose branches had caught her gown and forced her to stay her flight.

"Again under that terrible oak; but I shall not lose you this time. Say that you will not vanish in his jealous arms."

"He opens them to me no longer; he offers me no refuge now."

"And I stand waiting for you, and hold out my hand for yours. Not for a dance now do I ask it,

but for a happy walk which shall end only with our lives. Will you put your hand in mine?"

For answer a little warm palm creeps into his broad fingers; and the oak-tree sighs a blessing on the betrothal of which he is the only witness.

CHAPTER IX.

"And in the forest delicate clerks, unbrowned,
Sleep on the fragrant brush as on down-beds.
Up with the dawn, they fancied the light air
That circled freshly in their forest dress
Made them to boys again."

The life of John Graham had been one wherein the sorrowful days far outnumbered the joyous ones. His youth had been saddened by the reverses and griefs which had pursued his parents with a relentless persistence. His home life had not been a happy one. In the large family of brothers and sisters there had been a meeting and clashing of strong, positive characters and opposing wills. An intense family pride was the one bond which united them. This sentiment, almost amounting to a passion, made the members cling closely to one another when there was little of sympathy to make a sweeter bond. Graham's parents had moved to California, from the Eastern town where they were both born, while he was still an infant. The first sixteen years of his life had been spent on the Pacific coast. At this age he was sent eastward to pursue his studies. The youth had already determined on devoting himself to art. The years passed at the famous New England college were very busy ones. The painful economies by which his beloved mother defrayed his college expenses were well known to the young man, and he held himself responsible to that dear and honored parent for every hour of his time. His active mind eagerly grasped such fruits of knowledge as were offered by that garden of learning, and his career in the university fully repaid the sacrifices which it had entailed. During all this time he never for an instant relinquished his fixed determination to become a painter. In the leisure hours when his companions were amusing themselves according to their several tastes, Graham was always found at his easel. Some wiseacre once suggested to the young man that Greek and Latin were expensive acquirements, likely to prove useless to a painter.

"And if I were to be a shoemaker, I should make better shoes for having studied the classics," was his reply to this admonition.

He had not been among the popular men of his class, being very poor in leisure time, the currency which buys that most expensive commodity, popularity. He made few friends and no enemies. His strong, earnest nature commanded the respect of his fellows; and his studious example endeared him to a few of the most serious among them. At the age of twenty Graham went to Europe, where he passed the next eight years of his life in study and hard work. The sketches which he sent home brought him money enough to live on in that quarter of Paris where the young art students congregate. Poor enough the living had sometimes been; hunger and cold were well known to the youth by actual experience. When he lived at the rate of five francs a day he thought himself rich, and gave suppers in his studio, *au cinquième, Rue d'Enfer*. Times there had been, while he was at work upon his great *Salon* picture of St. Paul, when a loaf of bread and five sous' worth of the rough red wine of the people, had sufficed for his day's provender. Those days of earnest work among the gay companions, whose lives much resembled his own, were, perhaps, the happiest time in the life of the young artist. Success had not been wanting to crown his efforts. The picture on which he toiled for weary days and months received "honorable mention" from the judges of the *Salon*; and to the passing fame which this success brought him, he owed his introduction to the woman who had so spoiled the happiness of his youth. She was his compatriot, the daughter of a rich Parisian American, who desired to make the acquaintance of the artist hero of the hour. The young woman was beautiful, heartless, and slightly emotional. While in the society of the handsome, spiritual painter, she yielded to the charm his strong spirit exercised over her; and it was not long before their names were linked together by the small world which knew them both. But Graham's happiness was short-lived; and a few months served to show him the cold, shallow nature of the woman who had aroused his first passion. After he

had been jilted and disillusioned, he turned his back upon the city where he had learned and suffered so much, and became a wanderer on the face of Europe. One year found him painting the beauties of Southern Spain; the next saw him sketching the wonderful scenery which lies about Stockholm.

About two years before the opening of our story he had returned to San Francisco, with a portfolio of sketches, a few hundred dollars, and a prodigious store of canvases, paints, and brushes. He was welcomed by the many friends who had followed his career with interest, and soon received more orders for portraits than he could well fill. His taste led him to prefer another branch of painting; and it was for the purpose of studying the very beautiful scenery in the neighborhood of San Rosario that he had established himself in the tower of the old Spanish Mission. He was also partly induced to take this step, because he found that home life, always irksome to him, had become, after his long emancipation from domestic rules and regulations, wellnigh intolerable.

Graham's character was a peculiar one, full of contradictory traits; it might be compared to a mass of white quartz, through which ran deep veins of the purest gold. In some respects it was a hard nature, with certain tender qualities; and nowhere was there to be found an ounce of base metal; a pitiless nature, which knew not how to forgive either its own faults or those of his fellow-men. If his judgments of others were harsh, his self-despair was sometimes fanatical. His ideal of manhood was as pure and noble as was that of the perfect King Arthur; that he failed a hundred times a day in living up to it, had not the effect of lowering that ideal one hair's-breadth. His highest duty was towards his own soul and its struggle to reach the perfection he held it to be capable of attaining. With the mind of an ascetic, he was endowed with a warm, sensuous temperament, having a passionate delight in beauty, light, and color, and capable of living through the senses with the keen enjoyment of a Sybarite. A strain of music, a beautiful flower, or a fair child moved him to a degree of pleasure that to any nature save an artistic one was incomprehensible. Filled with pity at the sight of distress, he would unhesitatingly give his last dollar to a needy rascal; but if appealed to for sympathy by the same sinner, the scorching contempt by which he would blast the shameful deeds for which, to him, there was no palliation, would leave the wrong-doer a sadder if not a wiser man. Because he expected so much of men, their short-comings outraged him. To a man of this character it was easier, if not better, to avoid the paths of his fellows; and his life had often been that of a hermit, even when he dwelt in the busiest cities of the world. Not willing that one shadow from the burden of his life should fall upon the paths of those who cared for him, his voice and face were always cheery when in their company. He wanted not the sympathy of man or woman, and endured what griefs were given him to bear in silence and alone. That divine mandate, "Bear ye one another's burdens," was meaningless to him; for he had ever borne his burden unsupported and unhelped. The struggle between the two sides of his nature, the ascetic and the poetic, seemed sometimes like to rend soul and body apart; at other times both contending forces seemed asleep, and the current of his life flowed peacefully on. There were periods when the tender golden veins seemed to overlap and hide the flinty quartz; then he felt alive, with thrilling pulses and lips breaking into song; then he painted rapidly, painlessly, achieving quick successes, sometimes making brilliant failures. At other periods hyper-criticism of himself seemed to weight his brush and dim his vision, to take the color from the warm earth and tender sky; then the life-blood pulsed slowly through his veins, and he forgot to sing.

Into the existence of this self-centred being, with its extremes of cold and warmth, few personal influences had crept; and now, for the first time in many years, he felt his life to have become entangled, for good or ill, with that of another human creature. Since his first meeting with Millicent, on that memorable night when he had found her the central figure of a picture of warmth and comfort, his frozen existence had been thawed and made happy by the subtle influence which she wielded over him. Without reasoning with himself, he had yielded to the pleasurable charm, only amazed, and perhaps a little glad, to find that there was a woman who could rob him of his well-earned sleep, and dance through his dreams at night with a wilful persistence. If he had been obliged to characterize the influence which the girl held over him, he would probably have said that she made his life vivid, and reminded him that his nature was human and not mechanical. Day by day her presence became more necessary to him; and his work was slighted, or hastily performed, in order that he might be free the sooner to reach her side. Without retrospection or introspection he had lived through the pleasant days at San Real, when Millicent's heroic behavior had made him feel doubly grateful to her: he now owed her his life, as well as the new pleasure in that life. When the happy visit had come to an end, and he had

parted with her after the return to the Ranch, it had seemed as if he could not leave her as a friend only. That one swift, silent embrace had broken the peaceful contract of friendship; and he had sealed the tumultuous untried bond of love upon her lips.

Since that white night with its unspoken protestation, Time seemed to have taken unto himself new, strong wings, on which he bore the lovers through the bright weeks of the spring-tide of love all too swiftly. Few words of explanation had been necessary; each understood the other, except when that chill, impalpable something seemed to come between them like a cloud, as it had done in the first days of their acquaintance. The one note which was never absolutely in tune in their love harmony, at these times made a discord, and disagreements which grieved them both sprang up between them; but these were rare, and the pale face of the artist was less shadowy than in other days; while Millicent seemed transformed from a statue to a living being, with a heart tender and full of love towards all her kind. But her cheek grew less round than it had been in the days before this new life was poured into her veins, and long, sleepless vigils told upon her strength. She was happy with a joy of which she had never before dreamed, and yet weary nights of weeping traced dark circles about her eyes. What struggle could it be that left her pale and broken, and drew pitiful sighs from her white lips when she found herself between the four walls of her own room? One word from Graham, the sound of his horse's hoofs as he drew near the house, would banish the pained look, call back the color to the lips and cheek, and give the old brightness to her deep eyes; but when he was gone, the painful thoughts winged swiftly back to torture her.

To the sweet, open-hearted Barbara, Millicent's state of mind was incomprehensible. The cool, indifferent, somewhat scornful girl had been transformed into an excitable, impulsive creature, always in one of the extremes of spirits, by turns gay with a gayety contagious, irresistible, committing every sort of extravagance; and again serious with a tragic sadness, more pathetic than the wildest weeping. Mrs. Deering, with that sublime unconsciousness which sympathetic women know how to assume at will, saw nothing.

The happy summer weeks slipped all too rapidly away, and the last days of August were come. It was at this time that a long-planned excursion took place, and the family of the San Rosario Ranch went to pass the day with some friends who were camping out at a distance of fifteen miles from the house. Ever since her arrival in California, Millicent had heard of Maurice Galbraith, a friend of the family, whom a combination of circumstances had prevented her from meeting. It was to his camp that they were wending their way when Graham joined them on horseback, as they drove down the shaded road which passes through the great grove of redwoods, and leads to the dusty highway. Millicent was driving in the light phaeton with young Deering; Barbara and her mother following in the large wagon driven by Pedro, one of the Mexican helpers. Crouching on the floor of the wagon behind the seats sat Ah Lam, with his spotless linen and shining coppery countenance. He could not sit beside the "Greaser," or Mexican, and this lowly place was allotted him. His round, placid face, with its clear brown skin and oblique eyes, was not an unpleasing one. His hands and arms were finely modelled, and his sturdy figure was of a much more solid type than is usual with his race. From his position it was possible for him to hold a parasol over Mrs. Deering, which he did without varying the angle of the rather heavy umbrella one degree during the whole long journey. He had been taught that hardest of lessons for the Chinaman,—that obedience and respect to the ladies of the family are even more necessary than submission to the master. On his arrival at the Ranch he had coolly and placidly ignored all orders given him by the female members of the household as unworthy of notice. When he finally had learned the lesson that "Melican woman boss too," he had never failed in respect to the ladies.

The drive was a beautiful one. The road led through deep valleys, still wet with the night dew; sometimes it curled around the side of a mountain which barred its progress, and again it plunged down to the level of a swift stream. There was a certain spot where Millicent, who was familiar with the first five miles of the route, always stopped for a few moments. Sphinx had grown accustomed to bring his sleepy gait to a standstill just at the brink of the bridge which spanned the rushing forest river, grown boisterous at this place. All about the spot stood the great hills, some green with the never-fading redwoods and madrone trees, others, stripped by the woodman's craft, naked and unsightly. Behind them stretched the hot, red high-road, with its group of humble cabins. In front of one of these a group of strange, wolfish-looking children had called a greeting to Pedro, the driver, who was of their kin. The narrow, weather-beaten bridge, with its shaky wooden piers, joined the highway over which they had come, to a forest road which hung over the stream and skirted the mountain's base. The gray ruin of what had once been a

mill stood on the farther bank, with rusty, idle wheels and empty grain-bins. There was a small islet in the stream, between which and the near bank was a clear pool which reflected with perfect distinctness the trees and rocks, the very ferns and marsh flowers of the overhanging bank. Here the party paused for a few moments, enjoying the familiar beauty of the scene.

"You will paint this place one day for me, will you not? I care very much for it." Millicent was the speaker; and the artist close at her side laughed and answered,--

"Your will, of course, is my law, lady; but when you can teach the bird on yonder twig a new song, you can perhaps choose a spot where a painter shall see a picture. Much that is beautiful in nature cannot be portrayed in art."

For a moment longer they paused on the bank, little thinking how that scene would be graven on their memories in after days; and then Hal brandished his whip, and Sphinx started off at a brisk trot, the strong mules following at the top of their speed, while Graham led the way on his fleet mustang. It was not far from high noon when the party arrived at the place of destination, recognized by a flag floating above the low underbrush at the foot of a hill. In reply to Hal's lusty hallooing, a young man emerged from the other side of the hill, and waving his hat in greeting, hurried to help Mrs. Deering descend from the wagon.

"How late you are, good people!" he cried in a pleasant voice. "The fellows thought you were going to disappoint us; but I had too much faith in your word, Mrs. Deering, to doubt you. Miss Deering, you were too quick for me; your agility is only excelled by your grace. Well, Graham, glad to see you; for once you are better than your word."

The young men shook hands with that punctilious politeness which gentlemen who do not quite like each other are apt to show in the presence of mutual lady friends. Deering presented their host to Miss Almsford, and at that moment the other two woodmen made their appearance,--Michael O'Neil, a jolly-looking young Irishman, and Dick Hartley, a dark-browed Englishman. The three men were intimates at the Ranch, and Millicent already knew O'Neil and Hartley; the latter was an old friend and travelling-companion of Graham. Leaving Deering and O'Neil to take care of the horses, Galbraith led the way to the camp, a sheltered spot on the south side of the protecting hill. Three small sleeping-tents here stood close together. Galbraith's was the central one; it was wonderfully luxurious, Millicent thought, with its comfortable rug and little iron bedstead, two chairs, and a writing-table. A small looking-glass had been brought from town "on purpose for the visit of the ladies," Hartley assured them; at which statement there was a general laugh at the young Englishman's expense, his personal vanity being well known. But it was of the greenwood drawing-room that the ladies expressed the highest approval. A square space of ground had been cleared of the dense undergrowth, its smooth surface being thickly carpeted by soft piles of fresh, sweet ferns. Close-growing shrubs and bushes served as walls, while the thick branches of the great trees made a roof close enough to keep out the heat of the sun. The flowers of the manzanita and the buckeye perfumed the air of this sylvan boudoir, wherein were ranged comfortable stools and camp-chairs. A wide hammock fitted with a red blanket swung between two straight tree stems. Here they sat for a while, resting from the long drive; and here it was that Millicent had time to observe more particularly the appearance of Mr. Maurice Galbraith, of whom she had heard so much. Galbraith was not, strictly speaking, a handsome man, though he had a good deal of beauty. He was tall and slender, with a finely shaped head, well set upon the shoulders. His bright, intelligent face was too thin for beauty; while the fine, brilliant eyes, with their heavy lashes, were hollow from over-work. His delicate chin and mouth were exquisitely modelled; while the nose seemed a trifle over-large through the extreme thinness of the face. The features in repose were almost stern in their look of concentrated thought; but when he laughed it was with the sudden merriment of a child, the mouth parting over the small white teeth, and the large, dark, hollow eyes flashing cheerily. Barely over thirty, he might have passed for some years older, an unflagging attention to his arduous profession having told somewhat upon his strength. Among the lawyers on the Pacific coast, Galbraith was considered a rising man, his late appointment to a district attorneyship proving the confidence which he enjoyed. Millicent thought him decidedly the most attractive of their hosts; but her quick intuition had already told her that Graham felt little cordiality towards him, and she spoke chiefly to Hartley, the rather insignificant "beauty man" of the camp. From him she learned that for several years the trio of friends had passed the summer months in camping out at some spot not far distant from the railroad, which carried them every morning to San Francisco, and which brought them back as early in the afternoon as might be. Their one henchman (of course a Chinaman) was left in charge of the camp during the day, and performed the household work necessary to so primitive a *ménage*. Not far distant from the camp, the stream whose course they had followed spread out

into a wide, deep pool, affording an opportunity for a refreshing plunge, with which the three friends were wont to begin the proceedings of the day. A breakfast eaten at the tent door was followed by a walk to the station, half a mile distant, when they bade good-by to their sylvan home. Four o'clock, or at latest five, saw them on their way from the city; and an hour or two of angling in the cool stream, wherein swam delicious trout, or a tramp through the woods with a gun, brought them to the dinner hour. Just at this point in Hartley's chronicle of their daily life, Ah Lam, who had been brought to assist the one servant of the camp in his preparations, announced that dinner was served. Millicent never learned how the evenings were passed in camp, for there was a general move towards the dining-room, another triumph of sylvan architecture. A few paces distant from the green parlor, but hidden from it by the thick intervening bushes, was a great fig-tree with wide-spreading branches laden with delicious purple fruit. At the foot of the tree stood a table laid with plates, knives and forks, and other appurtenances of civilized life. Millicent gave a little cry of delight at the prettily decorated board, which was wreathed with a garland of green leaves and covered with bright flowers. Barbara, who had been reading Dumas with that intense delight to which the first acquaintance with French romance gives rise, said that the banquet surpassed the one spread by Joseph Bassano for the Dauphine of France in the old Chateau. Millicent found herself at the table between Graham and the good-natured Irishman, O'Neil. Her lover seemed to her handsomer to-day among this band of his contemporaries than ever before; and she looked at him with her whole soul in her eyes, forgetting all in the world beside or beyond him. O'Neil, who was the wit of the camp, told funny stories at which every one laughed; but when Graham spoke, the men all listened, like soldiers waiting the words of their superior. Before they had come to the table, the artist had twined a girdle for Millicent's slender waist of some feathery green creeper, a spray of which she had wreathed about her head. When the red wine was poured, Graham spilled from his glass, as if by accident, a few drops upon the earth, then, touching his goblet to hers, he said in an undertone,--

"We will drink the old toast, my nymph, to Pan, *evoë, evoë!*"

Galbraith devoted himself to Barbara; and after dinner, when all justice had been done to the woodland fare, and the great warm figs had been eaten with the sunshine in them, the party broke up into groups. Graham, who had brought his colors, made a sketch of the view from the hilltops, Millicent sitting silently beside him, handing him the brushes as he required them, then squeezing the little tubes of paint with a childish delight. Barbara and Galbraith made their way to the pool, where Miss Deering angled successfully, landing four good-sized trout within the hour. Hal Deering and O'Neil employed the time in firing at an ace of hearts pinned to a tree; while Hartley and Mrs. Deering sat in the green parlor, where the thoughtful, motherly woman put a very necessary patch on one of Galbraith's coats, in which her quick glance had descried a rent, as it hung on a peg in his tent.

As the afternoon shadows lengthened, and his sketch drew near its completion, Graham found time occasionally to speak to his companion sitting so quietly and contentedly at his side. The absolute ignoring of self possible to this intelligent girl, with her strong mind and latent talents, was incomprehensible to him. She was perfectly happy to forget her individual existence in a sympathetic interest in his work. He felt sure that should it please him she would give up her music, her studies, every other interest in life and be content to sit always as now, watching his work, giving a word of intelligent criticism when asked to do so, stifling every thought which should cloud the mirror of her mind in which he might see himself ever reflected. To the sensitive man, who had passed most of his life in solitude, this absolute, unreasoning devotion had something intensely painful about it. If he had known how to frame his thought he would have begged her to care less for him. He felt himself an ingrate, so poor a return could he make for this wealth of love poured out at his feet. Her presence was a pleasure to him; he loved to watch her graceful motions as she walked, and the beautiful poses which she all unconsciously took in sitting, standing, or moving. Her appreciation of his work, her understanding of himself, were truer than ever man or woman had shown before; and yet he sometimes was annoyed by the irksome feeling that what he had to give her was but a bankrupt's portion of love. Times there were when this feeling did not intrude itself upon him; and the day which was now drawing to its close was one of those precious ones wherein had been no slightest misunderstanding betwixt them. When Hal came to tell them that it was time to return, Graham put up his work with a sigh that it must be so soon finished, and the two lovers lingered for a moment, taking a last look over the little camp.

After bidding their hosts farewell the guests turned their horses toward home, the larger

wagon with Mrs. Deering and Barbara leading the way. Sphinx, whose best days were over, was tired; and Millicent soon lost sight of the swift mule team. Graham rode a little in advance of the carriage, leaving the place at Millicent's side to Mr. Galbraith, who had volunteered to accompany them for a part of the journey. She found him a most attractive person, and was much interested in his conversation. He told her anecdotes of the primitive justice which prevailed in certain remote districts of the State, and gave some personal reminiscences of his earliest cases, in which he had been called upon to defend or accuse criminals of the most desperate class. Galbraith talked with that sort of brilliancy which requires sympathetic attention from his hearers, and for the first three miles of the road he was able to win this from Miss Almsford. When, however, the girl's eyes wandered from his intelligent face to the man on horseback half a dozen rods in advance, and she mentally compared the strong, elastic figure of the distant horseman to the man at her side, Galbraith found that it was time to return to the camp and "leave them to their own fate." Millicent's parting words were doubly gracious to the young lawyer, from the fact that she thought his departure would bring her lover to her. In this hope she was however disappointed, for Graham was in one of those moods when silence was more attractive to him than Hal's amusing companionship. He would have liked to have Millicent all to himself on that pleasant homeward ride; but Millicent with the inevitable addition of Deering could not win him to her side. Suddenly the two in the carriage saw Graham's horse give a wild rear and plunge, after which he shied at some unseen object by the roadside with a force which would have unseated any ordinary horseman. The animal now stood for an instant trembling in every limb, and then seemed to fling himself and his rider in a perfect agony of terror down the high-road, his four feet beating out the startling measure of a break-neck gallop to Millicent's horrified ears. From the cloud of dust, and through the cadence of the mustang's hoofs, these words were shouted back to them,--

"Look out for rattlesnakes!"

They had by this time reached the spot where Graham's horse had taken fright; and old Sphinx shivered violently, tossing his head and snorting loudly. In a few moments, it seemed to Millicent an eternity, Graham rejoined them, having regained control over his fiery horse.

"Deering, stand by Sphinx's head and hold my horse, will you?"

As he spoke John Graham dismounted, pulled his high boots over his knees, and seizing the heavy whip from the carriage, advanced cautiously to the edge of the road, while Hal soothed the startled horses. Millicent, left alone in the wagon, gave a low cry of terror. Graham was at her side in an instant.

"Dear one, you must help me with your courage; do not be afraid, there is really no danger," he murmured. She was silent, and tried to smile an answer.

Graham now walked slowly along the road, looking intently into the grass which lined the highway. Suddenly the dread sound of the rattle was heard, awful alike to man and beast. Sphinx started again, but was soon quieted, while Tasso reared and gave a shriek of terror. Graham, raising his heavy whip, brought the thong with a tremendous force across the snake's body. The creature reared itself with blazing eyes and sprang towards its pursuer, who dealt it another blow; and before it could coil itself for a second spring, Graham ran forward, and with his iron boot-heel crushed the reptile's head into the dust. He soon despatched the writhing creature, and was stooping to cut the rattles from its lifeless body, when a warning cry from Millicent told him that the battle was not over. The mate of the dead snake was close beside him, ready to spring upon his stooping body. He straightened himself, and ran backwards, firing his revolver as he went. The shot missed the snake, whose rattle rang out a very death-knell. It leaped savagely towards him. Graham had dropped his whip, most efficient of weapons with which to meet these dangerous animals, and hastily tearing off his coat he threw it over the snake. He sprang upon the garment and stamped in every direction; finally pinning the creature low down in the body, the bristled head, with its awful tongue, reared itself from beneath the folds of the coat, wounded but furious to avenge its mate. The horrible hiss chilled Millicent's blood. She saw the forked tongue dart out and strike Graham's leg. Mercifully it struck below the knee, the fang failing to penetrate the thick leather of the boot. The creature wreathed another coil of its length from beneath the iron heel, and again made ready to strike. Graham cocked his revolver, and while the angry red throat, with its death-dealing jaws, yawned before him, he poured a volley of hot lead into the writhing body. One, two, three shots Millicent counted; and then after a pause Graham's voice rang out brisk and clear: "All right, my girl, if there are no more of the beasts." The still quivering bodies of the snakes lay in the dust of the road, and Graham, recovering his whip, carefully examined the locality from which they had emerged, to see if by chance a nest of eggs

or young ones was to be found. His search was unsuccessful; and after securing the second rattle, which was a long one, proving how powerful the reptile had been, he measured the bodies of the dead snakes, and rejoined Millicent. She held out her hand to him; and Deering, who had had as much as he could do in controlling the two horses, congratulated him on his success, and was about to resume his seat in the carriage. Millicent had been perfectly quiet and composed during the time of danger; her firm hand and voice had controlled the frightened horse; her watchfulness had warned Graham of the approach of his second enemy. But now the snakes were both dead, her lover was safe, and there was no further need of her strength or composure. As Hal approached the carriage, she dropped the reins, buried her face in her hands, and burst into an uncontrollable fit of weeping. Hal, who had lifted one foot to the step of the vehicle, dropped it to the ground, and retreated a few paces with a frightened countenance. He would not have been afraid to encounter a nest of rattlesnakes, but a weeping girl completely unnerved him. He retreated behind the wagon, and, after a hurried conversation with Graham, without more ado, mounted that gentleman's horse and rode off as fast as the animal would carry him; while Graham quietly stepped into the vehicle, and touching Millicent lightly on the shoulder, said, "Millicent, it is I."

The passionate weeping grew more quiet; the sobs became less violent; a slight tremor ran through her frame at the touch; at the words the tears rolled back to their source; and presently a pale face was lifted from the supporting hands, and the mouth quivered into a smile. And so they rode home together, hand in hand, through the deepening shadows; and one more day of the sweet summer-tide of love had passed, and each was richer for that day, how often recalled by both of them when the shadows of life had deepened into night.

CHAPTER X.

"Thereon comes what awakening! One grave sheet
Of cold implacable white about me drawn"--

John Graham was one of those men in whose nature there seems no trace of feminality. Man and woman supplement each other, each bringing certain qualities to the completion of humanity; and yet it is rare to find a man whose character is not modified by some mother trait. Graham's qualities and his faults were equally masculine; he was more strongly attracted by women through this intense virility than are men who, having some trace of the feminine in their nature, understand and sympathize more perfectly with the opposite sex. The attraction was one against which he rebelled, deeming it to belong to the weaker side of his nature; and he had so ordered his life that it might not fall within the influence of maid or matron. This antagonism to woman made itself felt in his work; his successful pictures were of men, their high exploits and successes. A noble painting of Saint Paul, which now hung over the altar of a Roman Catholic church in San Francisco, had won him his first reputation in Paris; he could understand and sympathize with that great man as if he had known him. It was only the highest type of man that attracted him,--the lovers of men, and not their conquerors. He had never tried to paint Alexander, but had labored long and lovingly over a picture of Socrates. The female subjects which he had treated were not less powerful than these, but the force which they showed was scornful and untender. A marvellous painting of Circe hung in his studio; it was one of his most masterly works, and yet, though critics had praised and connoisseurs had approved it, the picture was still unsold. With black brows bound by red-gold serpents, the enchantress lay upon a luxurious couch; her beautiful body was but half veiled, the arms and bosom immodestly displayed; about her jewelled feet fawned the creatures whose brute natures had conspired with the enchantress to smother whatever was human in their beings; self-despair and scorn for their abasement deformed her regular features to that moral ugliness never so hideous as when seen in a youthful and beautiful face. A terrible picture, full of wrath, but untempered by mercy. His Cressida, purchased by a great European Academy, was another wonderful picture; a picture which made men smile a little bitterly, and had brought an angry flush to the cheek of more than one sensitive woman.

Over a man of this nature woman holds a more important influence than with any other class;

it may be a good influence or it may be a harmful one, but it is the most potent one which touches his life. Had John Graham loved happily at twenty-five, instead of most miserably, he would have been a very different man at thirty from the hermit artist of San Rosario. It would have been better for him if he could have learned the lesson which all wise men learn if they live long enough,—that women are neither angels who stand immeasurably above men, nor inferior beings whose place is at their feet, but human like themselves, full of good and faulty instincts, and, with all their imperfections, the God-given helpmates of man. So justly should they be judged; and if a little mercy be claimed for them, generosity should not deny it, so few are their chances in life compared with those of their brothers. A woman has but one possibility of happiness in this world. The stakes are high on which she risks her whole fortune, which she may lose by one unredeemable throw.

If Graham could have known all this, as, being what he was, he could not, he would have gained that one element which his genius lacked to make it superlative. Man and child he was by turns, but never for an instant had he been able to look at life from the standpoint of a woman. He had once loved the whole gentler sex with that chivalrous spirit which made him unfit to live in the nineteenth century. No discourteous or cruel word toward any woman had he to reproach himself with; he had looked upon them as creatures so far removed from his sphere, that his mind must be cleared of every base thought before it might dwell upon them; they were mysterious angels which it was his happiness to worship. Then came a change, and the love which had turned to grief darkened his soul. As his heart had been filled with a love so great that it embraced all the sisters of his idol, his contempt went out towards them, as his love had done before. His revenge had been terrible: he had struck at womankind; he had pictured it in its debasement for all the world to see.

The few women for whom he cared were elderly people, whose life-battles had been fought and won; who sat enthroned in the calm of that peaceful period when youth is no longer regretted nor old age feared. Such women he could paint without bitterness; and his portrait of his mother was a masterpiece of exquisite sentiment. No woman that he had ever met disliked John Graham; if he was distant and cold, he was honest and courteous, and a gentleman in the deepest sense of the word. He was too chivalrous to revenge himself on any individual; his grief was too great to stoop to anything so mean. More than one woman would gladly have loved him, but he avoided them as if they had been poison-nurtured.

Men, as a rule, respected and feared Graham; a few of his heart-friends would have given their lives for him with a smile. To those who understood and loved him, there was something more than human about the man,—a quality to which the highest part of their nature did homage. Fools laughed at him for his quixotism; the critics had worn themselves out in shrieking abuse of his work which affected him in nowise. He cared little for men's praise or blame; he would have died to help them to a new truth. He was of the stuff which made martyrs in the old time, crusaders in the dark ages, and artists in the Renaissance. His pictures were beautiful as works of art, but they were great because they embodied living truths. At twenty his friends said that he had great talent; at thirty his enemies ceased to deny his force; at forty, if he lived so long, the world would crown him with its laurel as a man of genius. If haply that bitterness which lay like a blight on all his work, on all his life, might be made sweet! What a chance was here for the woman whose love was now breaking over his frozen life with warmth, fragrance, and beauty! How grand an opportunity to sweeten by truth and faith all that had grown bitter from untruth and faithlessness! If she could only have known him as he was, have understood him and his past, before she had loved him, what could not Millicent have accomplished! Alas! poor child, she knew nothing of all this. Her own past was black with a grief and wrong greater than that which he had borne. She, too, was waking, and for the first time, from a trance of soul and sleep of heart; she was all engrossed in her own growth and development. She was like a little dungeon-born plant, which has at last climbed through the iron bars, and under the light and warmth of the glorious day runs riotous and unthinking across the wall, up, down, on every side, content to live and grow in the sun and air. But the taint of the old wrong and the lie it had entailed, were not yet left behind. He had taken her for a pure white lily; and how could she tell him that there had been a time when she lived in darkness and despair before her life flowered into its one perfect white blossom under the warmth of his love?

Life is very pleasant at the San Rosario Ranch with its bordering of peaceful hills. Here all are happy, be they of high or low degree; from the gentle-voiced *châtelaine* to the stranger within her gates, the potent charm extends. The fair daughter and tall son have lived peaceful, uneventful lives; and though their young eyes may sometimes turn a little wearily toward the

mountain barrier, beyond which lies the great busy world, known more to them by hearsay than by actual experience, they are happy, far happier than are most of the men and women in the crowded thoroughfare of the world's cities. The Ranch does not lie in the belt of gold, nor in the silver girdle which crosses the Pacific coast. The rude mining towns are far distant from this portion of the dairy lands of California. The trains which leave the station in this neighborhood are laden indeed with a golden freight; but no armed men are found necessary to guard the boxes filled with their rolls of fragrant yellow. The product of the dairy lands is of a smaller, surer value than that for which men toil and drudge in the gulches or mines. Far away to the southward, where the orange groves are white and golden with their double burden of blossom and fruit, is a climate milder than that of San Rosario; and there Hal had set his heart upon one day establishing himself. In that vine country the air is heavy with the spicy odor of the grape, and the harvest is blood-red with its life-juices; and yet to Millicent the fairest garden in this world's garden lay between the circled hills of San Rosario.

Millicent, having learned the earliest stage of butter-making under Hal's direction, wished to be initiated into the mysteries which follow the skimming of the cream. Hal gave one of his boisterous guffaws of laughter when she one morning gravely informed him that she was going to help in that day's churning. She had donned the prettiest chintz morning gown imaginable, with the sleeves rolled up to the elbow, and a fresh white apron. Her skirt was kilted up half way to the knee, showing a scarlet petticoat, which in turn exposed the pretty, small feet, and possibly two inches more of the round ankle than is usually shown by ladies of her degree. Tying one of the great picturesque hats which they had brought home from San Real, under her chin, the energetic young woman started for the dairy. Hal, giving a knowing wink to his mother and sister standing near by, as if to say that the joke was too good to be spoiled, followed her, with Tip, the cross old dog, following him in turn.

"Millicent, did you ever do any churning?"

"No, but I can learn."

"Without doubt; but tell me, did you ever see any one else churn?"

"Oh, yes; very often."

"Who, if one may ask?"

"You will not know any better if I tell you. It was old Nina, at home."

"Ah, old Nina; and what sort of a machine did she use?"

"She did not use a machine at all; she used a churn, like anybody else."

"What did it look like?"

"I am sure I have forgotten; it was probably an old-fashioned one, but it made quite as good butter as *yours* does;" this in a slightly irritated voice. She objected to being catechised, and had, moreover, a dim sense that Deering was bent on quizzing her. She ran along the footpath in advance in order to avoid further questioning, and reached the dairy a few minutes before him. Finding the main door shut, she hurried round to the side, when, just as she turned the corner, her rapid progress was suddenly brought to an end. She had met an obstacle; she had, moreover, fallen into the arms of the obstacle, which proved to be a tall man with a kindly voice, for he called out merrily, "Hello, my girl, where are you going so fast?" steadying her at the same moment with his arm, as the sudden shock almost precipitated her from the path.

Millicent drew back disconcerted and breathless, and looked up into the face of the man whom she had so unexpectedly encountered. When she saw that it was a face familiar to her, she blushed and stammered a little as she replied to his astonished greeting. Mutual apologies and explanations followed; and Hal, coming up at that moment, laughed at her discomfiture till the tears rolled down his face.

"You always laugh at other people's misfortunes," cried Millicent, trying to be angry; but it was impossible to be angry with Hal. The irrepressible young rancher carried the day; and Maurice Galbraith assured Millicent that it was his awkwardness which had aroused Deering's merriment.

"We are very glad to see you, Galbraith, but we are too busy to stop and talk to you just now. You will find mother and Bab at the house. I have a new hand here who is going to take charge of the churning in future, and I am just showing her about a little. Do you catch on?"

"Slang again! Five cents more towards the amusement fund."

"Oh, we shall not want any more amusement fund if you are going to turn worker, Princess." As he spoke they entered the cool dairy. It was tenantless. At one end of the room stood a large wooden vessel, half as big as the Trojan horse, and from its hollow sides came a dull, splashing sound.

"Why, you said they would be at work already," said Millicent, in a disappointed voice; "where are they all?"

"Oh, it only takes one man to attend to this part of the butter-making, and there he is at his post."

Outside the open doorway, as wide as the entrance to a barn, sat Pedro, lazily smoking his pipe, and occasionally flicking with his whip the strong mule who was slowly revolving round the small space to which he was tethered.

"Well," said Millicent impatiently, "what does that mean?"

"Only this, my Princess, that you must turn the crank that this animal is agitating, with your own small hands, if you persist in your resolution to help with the churning."

Millicent's face fell; and Galbraith hastened to explain to her that the quantity of cream handled at one churning made it necessary, in a place where human labor is so dear, to employ horsepower. Nobody likes to be laughed at, though Millicent tried hard to smile at her own blunder; when Hal, suddenly calling out; "By your leave, Princess," without a word of warning caught up the young lady in his arms, and placed her on the back of the patient mule, remarking, as he accomplished the feat, "No one can say now that you have not helped with the churning."

It would be difficult to say whether Millicent or the mule felt the greater surprise; they were both taken unawares; but the quadruped was the first to recover himself, and resumed his weary task of plodding round in the monotonous circle. Millicent, clinging closely to the creature, cried loudly to be relieved from her uncomfortable position; but Hal, fearing her wrath, had disappeared into the interior of the dairy, leaving to Galbraith the pleasure of assisting the young woman in dismounting. Pedro, who had been an amused spectator of the scene, now announced that the churning was completed, and that they should soon see the washing of the butter, if it pleased them to wait. The big golden fragments were collected from the sea of buttermilk, and finally massed together on a wide table. There it was worked by Pedro, who tossed the fragrant mass from side to side, pressing out the remaining deposits of the milk with a heavy wooden wand. He moulded the butter into fantastic forms, prettiest of which was a huge bell-shaped flower like a giant trumpet blossom. It struck Millicent that here was a delightful material for modelling; and taking up a piece of butter and one of the dairy tools, she forthwith produced a bas-relief portrait of Galbraith, which would have done credit to the sculptress of the sleeping Iolanthe.

"There are two classes of hands, those which are skilful and those which are clumsy; of all other divisions of humanity this is the most important. You, Miss Almsford, are so happy as to belong to the skilful half, or rather quarter, of humanity,--for men are all clumsy. I see that you can do all things artistic as well as useful with your fingers."

"I am afraid I have never tried to do much that was useful," said the girl half ruefully. "Barbara, now, can do all sorts of things. But I am tired of comparing myself with her; I always suffer by the process;" this with a rather vicious little stroke at the butter-model, which she was now finishing into a medallion, with a pattern of scroll-work for a border.

"Let me judge between yourself and Miss Barbara. I know that she can touch the ivory keys with grace, and can also make wonderful peach preserves. On the other hand, you model in butter and--and--well, what else can those small hands accomplish of art or industry?"

"They can draw a little as well as model; they can trim bonnets, yes, really quite well; they are not unfamiliar with the key-boards of piano and organ; and, best of all,--I had really forgotten to enumerate this accomplishment,--they can move tables and chairs; they can draw pain from your head; they can put you into a trance,--they are, in fact, magnetic hands."

"It seems, then, that you are a Spiritualist."

"Far from it; by what power I do the few things which form the *repertoire* of my manifestations, as the mediums call them, I do not know any more than you."

"Will you give me a *séance*?"

"Indeed; no."

"And because--"

"Because it tires me, and I am rather afraid of my own power. Some one once compared me to a child who had got hold of an electric battery which he did not understand, and with which he unwittingly produced inexplicable phenomena, not devoid of danger to himself."

"You are really in earnest then, and believe in these manifestations?"

"Perfectly so; and I am rather cowardly about exploring them to their source, as I have seen so many strong minds unhinged by study of this subject. I certainly object to the vulgar theory, that the spirits of those who have gone before us have nothing better to do than to tip tables and

dip their hands in pails of paraffine which accommodating mediums prepare for them."

"You do not believe in mediums, then?"

"I believe no manifestation to be genuine which comes from a professional medium. That they often have real power, I do not doubt; but so soon as it is a question of earning their living, they must inevitably fall back upon fraud. But we are growing quite serious about this subject which I never like to talk of for fear of being misunderstood."

"But I am really interested in what you say--"

"Never mind; here is your portrait, which is not flattered, I frankly confess; but is it a little like you?"

"If I know my face at all, it is wonderfully good. Would that you had deigned to model it in a less perishable material!"

"Oh, no! this is infinitely better, it is so much more appropriate--"

"Thanks for the compliment; but why, if I may ask, should you consider butter to be particularly suitable to me?"

"Not to you personally, but to humanity. Is it not stupid to carve bronze fac-similes of that which is as perishable as the grass?"

"But had it not been for this stupidity, how should we know the features of Cæsar?"

"And would it greatly matter?"

"I think so; but a young lady who so cruelly assures me that butter is the only material in which my humble features deserve to be reproduced--"

Millicent interrupted the speaker by her pleasant laugh, with its sound of falling waters, and thanking Pedro for what he had shown her, led the way from the dairy. She refused to speak further on the subject during the day-time, but as they sat together on the piazza in the twilight, Galbraith referred to it again; and, after much persuasion, Millicent seated herself at a table, round which the company grouped themselves, placing their hands lightly on its surface. Barbara, who was seated next to Millicent, their hands touching one another, seemed strangely affected, after they had been sitting for some time in silence. She manifested unmistakable signs of sleepiness, and finally, with a long sigh, her eyes closed and her head fell upon Millicent's shoulder. With a little frightened cry, Millicent quickly lifted her, and making several passes over her head called Hal to come and support his sister. In a moment Barbara recovered herself, and showed no more symptoms of sleep. She laughed heartily, and said that a peculiar sensation in her elbows had preceded her momentary unconsciousness. Galbraith applauded the little episode, which he assured Millicent was very well acted by both participants. The girl turned her eyes, deep and burning, full upon him, half in anger, and said,--

"Very well, Mr. Galbraith, we will see if you can act a part as well as Barbara. Lay your hand in mine--so."

The young man smiled, and did as he was bid, with a courteous bow, as if deprecating the power in which he did not believe; and for a space of time they stood looking each other full in the face. Then Millicent's slight form seemed to vibrate, and from her eyes a light flashed into the man's dark orbs, her cheek flushed, and from every nerve in her body an electric flash seemed to emanate, concentrating into a broad current at the shoulder, and slipping through the round white arm to the very finger-tips. Galbraith's face paled as hers flushed; a stinging sensation half painful, half agreeable, made him wince; and when in a few moments Millicent withdrew her hand, he remained standing motionless, white to the lips, with dim, dreaming eyes, and slow-beating heart.

"Speak," said the magnetizer, "tell me what is in your mind?"

"There is nothing," answered the man, in a low, monotonous voice.

"Now speak, and tell me what you see."

"I see a man on horseback; the horse is running away. Now he gallops, and the rider loses control of him; they disappear in a cloud of dust, and I see nothing. Now they return; the horse is going quietly, and the rider looks towards a carriage in which sits a lady; it is Millicent. He enters the carriage; she is weeping, and he touches--" he paused.

Millicent's cheek had grown crimson. She said in a low tone,--

"Why do you not continue?"

"Because you will not let me."

At this moment a light step sounded on the piazza. Millicent turned her head and saw Graham approaching her. She stepped quickly towards him, forgetting Galbraith, the company, everything and everybody, save that her lover had come to her. As she turned from him, Galbraith reeled suddenly, and would have fallen had not Hal steadied him to a seat.

"I fear I am interrupting you," said the artist, in a cool voice, betraying some annoyance.

"Indeed, no," cried the girl, "we were only trying the stupid old game of willing people; I have succeeded in magnetizing Mr. Galbraith here."

By this time the young lawyer had recovered himself, though he looked strangely pale and agitated. He was somewhat overcome by what had gone before, and was not a little troubled by the power which the tall, straight girl had exercised over him. He rebelled against it, and yet the sensation of giving up his volition, and living for the time only by her will and her thought had not been unmixed with a keen pleasure. If no one had witnessed the affair, above all, if Graham had not seen it, he would not have greatly cared; but though he had no recollection of what he had seen and described in Millicent's mind, that evening's experience deepened the vague antipathy he had always felt towards the artist, into a positive dislike.

Later, as they walked together alone, Graham asked Millicent if she would magnetize him, to which she replied in the negative.

"Do you think that you could succeed?"

"I cannot tell; but if I could, I should not be willing to do so."

"And yet you threw a spell over that fellow Galbraith?"

"Dear, there is a difference; cannot you see?"

"No; upon my soul I can't."

"I do not want to command even your thought for an instant; you must think of me to please yourself, not because I will it."

"What a strange girl you are, Millicent! Do you really love me so very much?"

"I love you better than my own soul."

"A dangerous thing, child; do not ever say that to me again."

"Why?"

"It shocks me; I cannot tell you why."

For answer, she gave him a rose from her breast with a childish gesture, as if asking forgiveness. There was an awkwardness, born of an unwonted shyness, in the movement which was more attractive to the artist than the most graceful attitude he had ever seen her assume. He caught the hand with the rose and crushed them both in his two strong palms, as if to hurt her. She smiled, though her wrist reddened from the sudden pressure. It is more sweet to bear pain from those we love, than to receive kindness from a hand which is not dear.

As Graham was taking his leave, he asked Millicent for two books which she had promised to lend him. Barbara had joined them, and offered to fetch them for him.

"Thank you, Barbara, but I know just where they are."

"Is it not the Petrarch and your manuscript translation of Dante that Mr. Graham wants?"

"Yes."

"You left them on your table. I saw them when I went up to shut the blinds. You had better let me go, you are so tired."

"Yes, let Miss Deering get them for you; you are quite worn out with your magnetizing." He wanted to say one last good-night to her.

His lightest wish was her law; she nodded gratefully to Barbara, who disappeared, while Graham told her once more how lovely she was that night. When Miss Deering came back, Graham had already mounted his horse and Millicent was feeding the animal with sugar.

"You are sure you have the right books, Barbara?"

"Quite sure; I know them perfectly."

"Many thanks to you both, and good-night."

Millicent was in a wakeful mood that night. She went to the piano and played for an hour or two, as she only played when alone. Her hands drifted dreamily over the key-board, drawing out fantastic melodies,--themes which were composed and forgotten within the hour. In an obscure corner of the room stood a head of Beethoven. Her eyes were fixed on the face of the master while she played, and as the notes grew strong and sweet she smiled; when the harmony changed to a tender minor strain, the smile faded from her face. The music expressed the thoughts which drifted through her mind. At first she played the quick movement of a march, through which rang out the measured beat of a horse's hoofs; then the strain changed to a pensive nocturne suggestive of the forest at night. A tender slumber-song followed, in which her voice took up the melody, chanting loving words in the language of Tuscany. The light, delicate thread of harmony now broadened into a full consonance of sound, the chords following each other tumultuously, as if in translating one supreme moment of leave-taking. As she was striking the closing strains of this emotional improvisation, her powerful voice trembling with a passionate *addio*, the sweet

symphony of sounds was interrupted by a crashing discord. She sprang from the piano startled and trembling, to find that a heavy vase of flowers had fallen on the key-board from the shelf above the piano. The metal jar was uninjured, but about her feet were scattered the petals of a bunch of white roses which Graham had plucked for her that night. So rudely was her rhapsody interrupted! She closed the piano, and, after restlessly wandering through the silent house, went to her own room, where she sat looking out of her window at the moon-lit hills. She could not sleep, she was full of unrest.

The gray morning light was filtering into Barbara Deering's room when she was awakened by a light touch on the shoulder. Millicent stood before her, gray as the twilight; she held in her hand a small parchment book.

"Barbara, what books did you give Mr. Graham?"

"The Petrarch and your Dante. What is the matter, Millicent? Have n't you been in bed?"

"No, I could not sleep. Here is the little Dante; where did you find the book you mistook for it?"

Barbara sat up and rubbed her eyes confusedly.

"Why, it was not where I had last seen it. I found it somewhere, in your jewel-box, I think. I am so sorry I made a mistake; 't was just like the Dante. Does it matter much?"

"I only wanted to know, Barbara; go to sleep again."

She spoke in a low, constrained voice, and glided quietly from the room. Barbara, only half awake, gave a sigh, and settling her flaxen head among the pillows, again fell asleep and dreamed that she had stabbed Millicent with a knife, and that Graham was trying to stanch the wound with the leaves of a little parchment book.

When Graham arrived at his lonely tower, after making his horse comfortable for the night, he looked into French John's cabin to see whether all was well with the old fellow. The door was fast, and looking through the small window, the young man saw the wood-cutter lying on his hard couch, his gun beside him, his dog curled up at his feet. The creature growled at the sound of Graham's footsteps, but catching sight of a familiar face through the window, he gave a comfortable yawp, wagged his tail, and relapsed into slumber. The artist never slept without paying this last visit to his humble friend. He stumbled up the steep tower stairs, and after fumbling with the clumsy lock, the door swung open and admitted him to his one room. After groping about in the dark for a moment he struck a light, and out of the embers on the hearth blew a little flame. He looked about the small room and laughed; this was a home, indeed, to which to bring a bride! It sufficed for him; and he asked for nothing more commodious or luxurious than this old tower in the corner of the ruined church, with its grand north light and easy chair, its open fire and pallet-bed.

If he married,--when he married, he corrected himself, for he surely intended to marry Millicent,--there would have to be great changes in his life. He would be obliged to abandon his old tower, and live in a smug new house somewhere, with fuss and worry about servants, who would not please him half so well as did the old wood-cutter John. His work, ah, how that would suffer!--no more of the pleasant conscientious labor, the slow painting and study of that one supreme moment of the day when the golden copse was made tender by the light of the setting sun. He must hie him to the city and pass his life in painting fat, over-fed matrons in lace and diamonds, or expressionless minxes with costumes indicative of youth and ignorance. He would, perhaps, relapse into a mere mechanical portrait-painter, with as much imagination as a photographer; and his pictures would be ordered as theirs are, with the simple difference that the artist produces but one copy, while the photographer, with equal trouble, makes a dozen or ten dozen, or a single picture. He sighed aloud, and for consolation lit his pipe. He caught sight of the flower which had bloomed on a fair bosom and was now fastened to his coat, somewhat crushed but still fragrant. He carefully unpinned the rose and placed it in a small vase of water, and then proceeded to examine the books which Millicent had given him. Graham liked old books, and was delighted with the yellowed parchment copy of Petrarch. An inscription on the cover showed that it had once belonged to a monastery. On the fly-leaf was a slight sketch of a young monk's head seen in profile. It was a beautiful, clear-cut face, with delicate outlines and an earnest expression; beneath it was written, "Fra Antonio, Aetat 22."

"So this was brother Antonio, and he lived and died probably in the peaceful quiet of a Roman monastery. I wonder if he painted too, or whether he wrote hymns to all the pretty female saints in the calendar. Brother Antonio must have lived and died without a helpmeet. I fancy he did none the worse work for that."

The thought struck him as ungrateful, and, as if to make amends for it, he took up the other

little volume. It was a thin book bound in white vellum, with Millicent's name in illuminated text upon its cover. The covers of this small tome were closed with a gold clasp, which he finally succeeded in opening. It proved to be a diary in manuscript; he recognized the clear, delicate handwriting of the girl he loved. Yes, he loved her tenderly; why else should he press the senseless pages close to his lips, kissing the fair paper over which her fairer hand had passed? He drew his lamp nearer to him and prepared to read the record. It was written in Italian, and the first page bore a date five years back. He was somewhat puzzled, but supposed he had misunderstood what she had told him of the book. She could have been but a child then; she was now only just past her majority. How pretty she must have been at sixteen, before she had grown to the perfect womanhood which now became her so well! He fancied her in all the shyness and awkwardness of young maidenhood, with childhood reluctantly slipping from her, and girlhood anxiously leading her forward. Again he kissed the book, but reverently this time, and with a deep sigh as if it had been a holy one. If he could have known her then, before he had grown to feel so old, before she had learned that she was fair and young, how much easier it would have been for both of them. As he sat with unseeing eyes fixed on the faintly traced characters, beholding in fancy the little Millicent of half-grown figure and cool, loveless eyes stooping over the book, putting her white, childish thoughts into these words, it seemed to him that he heard a faint sound,—a sound that was deeper than the wind stirring the tops of the redwoods; a sound that made him shiver and turn the bright flame of the lamp a little higher. It was like a noise heard dimly in a dream, an echo of a woman's sob ringing faint and muffled through a space of years, was it, or of distance? It had grown quite cold; and he heaped an armful of brushwood on the dying fire, which soon shot up the little chimney with a cheery roar, and threw its bright light to the farthest corner of the room, touching the picture on the easel, bringing out the ugly little *netshukés* from their shadowy corner, and shining on the polished steel of the gun standing near the maulstick and fishing-rod.

It must have been the wind, that faint sound which had seemed to find an echo in the beating of his heart. He drew aside the heavy window-curtains. Outside in the cool moonlight he saw the arms of the great trees swaying to and fro; below these the desolate ruins of the old church; all was quiet and deserted. There was the dismantled altar,—it was surely a trick of the moonlight and the trees, that shadowy semblance of a woman kneeling out there in the night, with wild hair, and arms cast about the broken cross, overturned this half century? Yes, it was a shadow surely; for a cloud passed before the silver face of the half-moon, and when it had floated by, the shadow of a female figure had vanished. He dropped the curtain and turned with a sigh of relief from the mysterious half-light, with its revelations of deserted chapels and uncared-for altars, its shattered cross and phantom penitent. Inside his small domicile was warmth and light; and to drive away the cold, nervous feeling which had crept about him like an invisible network, he again took up the little parchment journal. Again he seated himself, and turned the first leaf. As he read he smiled, and occasionally turned over the sheets to see how many more pages remained to be perused. Presently the smile faded from his face; and the flames on the hearth burnt low and finally died, choked by the gray ashes. And still Graham turned the pages of the little journal with cold fingers. The lamp grew dim, and the moon paled and sank beneath the horizon; the chill morning twilight crept betwixt the hangings, and showed him sitting cold and motionless to the slow-coming dawn. The last page of the journal had been turned long since; but he still held the book open, his eyes fixed on the final words.

CHAPTER XI.

"Dearer than woman's love
Is yonder sunset fading in the sky!"

After that night's vigil, Graham took his gun, and packing a blanket and a few camping utensils in his saddle-bag, mounted his horse and rode away toward a hunting-lodge some twenty miles distant, where he sometimes passed the night. His way led through the woods, where the bracing air, the light footsteps of the invisible animals, the fluttering of the birds in the trees, served to turn his mind from the painful thoughts of the past night. He had a part in this woodland life, and

owned a kinship to the four-footed and feathered creatures who made the forest their home. His spirit was lifted to that close and intimate communion with Nature which is only possible to man when unfettered by human companionship. The cool, spicy air was sweeter than the kiss of maiden; the leafage of the restless trees more tender than that of the gold-bronze hair he had so often praised. It seemed to him that the only real thing in all the fair sunny earth was himself; that the people whom he had known were but pictures seen in a dream. He lived, and breathed the scent of the pine-trees; he lived, and heard the cry of the blue-jays in their branches; he lived, and his eyes were filled with the glorious beauty of his world,--all his, with nothing to come between him and the fragrant Mother Earth. All that day he rode and walked through the tangled paths and trackless thickets, holding communion with sky and earth, content to live without retrospection or anticipation. Just before sunset he shot a brace of quail for his supper; and when dark shadows had crept through the wooded places he built a fire on the hearth of the little cabin where he proposed spending the night. It was a rude lodge, a trifle less comfortable than French John's house, with wooden bunks around the walls, and trunks of trees roughly fashioned into seats. Under a certain board in the floor, known to him, was a hiding-place wherein were stored half a dozen tallow candles, with a bottle to serve as candle-stick, a pack of cards, an iron pot and spoon, a rusty jack-knife with a corkscrew, and, last of all, a flask of brandy, which it was a matter of honor always to leave half full. The shed had been built by himself and Henry Deering, and was occasionally used by them and their friends when on hunting expeditions. As there were no means of securely fastening so slight a building, there was neither lock nor bar to door or window. Over the fireplace was tacked a notice written in Deering's bold hand, which read as follows:--

"Gentlemen are requested to put out the fire and latch the door before leaving this shanty. Water to be found three rods beyond this spot to the north."

Graham found the candles, which he finally succeeded in lighting; and after making a meal of hard-tack and roasted quail, he filled his pipe and sat down on one of the bunks, tired out by his long day's ride. The painful thoughts which he had banished during the hours of daylight now took possession of him; and the brow, which had been calm all day, showed the three deep dints which trouble more than time had furrowed upon its noble expanse. He was alone again!--no more friendly sounds and sights to divert his mind and fill his eyes with beauty. Only his sad thoughts and the one great problem which was set before him to solve. His changeful, melancholy eyes were fixed vacantly on the floor. They saw nothing but the shadowy vision of the night,--the figure of a woman amidst the broken altars of the old Mission church. The words which he had read in the little journal came thronging back to him in riotous haste,--those pitiful words of passionate grief traced by the slender white fingers, which so lately had lingered tremblingly in his own strong brown hands. Could he forgive her? Poor child, poor child! What was he, that he had a right to withhold his forgiveness for an instant? Let their lives be laid side by side, with every act and every thought bared to his view, and how did his life's record compare with hers?

Ah, if she had but told him the story, and not left it to accident to reveal the secret! She had deceived him! And the angry blood surged from his heart to his brow and settled there dully red. The stern lines of his face grew harder than the mask of a stone statue, and the expression of the chiselled mouth was terribly relentless. He would never see her again, never, never! What he had felt for her was not that highest passion which melts heart and soul and body in one pure flame; for, without a perfect faith, such love is not. So he reasoned, pity and anger sweeping across his soul; and then, forgetting both in a great pain, he cried, stretching out his arms, "Millicent, Millicent, come to me!" At last the wearied muscles and tired brain and heart slowly, half-consciously yielded to a warm, close-folding influence which straightened out the lines on the brow, loosened the tight-drawn muscles, stole the fire from the deep eyes and the anger from the curved mouth. The grand head, with its thousand schemes and theories, fell back upon the couch; the skilful hand, with its nervous, delicate fingers, relaxed; a long, shivering sigh shook the body; and, with the fire-light shining upon his stern beauty, Graham slept. The fire burned low upon the hearth and finally flickered out, leaving a bed of glowing ashes. The quiet of the night was broken by the long shrill wail of the coyote, but Graham stirred not. A light footstep sounded near the cabin, and a scratching noise might have been heard as the head of a great bear was raised to the level of the window. The sleeper's breath never quickened; and Bruin, after a long look and a vain attempt to push the door open, gave a growl and trotted off through the underbrush toward his own cosey cave under the rocky hillside near by. A young owlet, flying aimlessly through the night, flapped itself through an opening in the roof intended to let out the smoke; and finding it

difficult to escape by the place where it had entered, settled itself comfortably near the sleeper, standing on one foot, and meditatively regarding the strange creature on the bed. To all these noises Graham was deaf; but when the clatter of a horse's hoofs broke the silence, that strange half-consciousness which gives warning of an unaccustomed sound called his slumbering senses to awaken. In a moment he was perfectly conscious, and, after feeling for his pistol, lay quietly down again upon the hard couch. The rider might not pause at the shanty, and as he was in no mood for company, he would give no sign of his presence there until it was necessary. The hope was a vain one; he heard the rider call to his horse with an oath to stop. After a slight pause, the door, which he had secured with a wooden bar, was roughly shaken. The new-comer, finding the portal fast, now showed himself at the little window and peered into the room. Seeing a recumbent figure, he cried out,--

"Who the --- is in this shanty?"

"John Graham; and who is outside?"

After a pause the voice answered,--

"A man as wants a night's rest bad, and has got as good a right to it as anybody."

"Put up your shooting-irons, Horton, and I will open the door."

First striking a match and lighting his candle, Graham unfastened the bar, and the light door swung wide. The figure out in the darkness peered doubtfully into the room.

"Don't be afraid; I am alone," said the artist coolly, seating himself upon his bunk, and proceeding to fill his pipe. The man came cautiously into the cabin, looking about him once more to make sure that Graham had spoken the truth. He was a rough-looking fellow, with a sinister expression of countenance, in great part owing to the deep scar which seamed his face from temple to chin.

The stranger seemed a good deal disconcerted at finding the artist ensconced in the lodge.

"Did n't expect to find anybody--least of all you--in this shanty."

"I do not often occupy it; though I built it myself."

"Is that so? You ain't got a mouthful of bread as yer'd let a man have as has fasted since sunrise?"

Graham's answer was to hand him a couple of rounds of hard-tack, which he quickly devoured; and to pass his flask, filled with the rough, strong wine from the vineyards of Los Angeles. The fellow poured half its contents down his throat at one draught, wiping his mouth upon the sleeve of his rough jacket. Then, with a nod of acknowledgment, he handed back the flask with a regretful sigh, and seating himself on the floor by the fireplace, warmed his feet in the still hot ashes.

"You never came for those last sittings, Horton; my picture is not finished yet."

"You see, I got another job more to my taste than posturin'."

"Are you working in the neighborhood?"

"No; I am on my way to the Swindawl mines. Do you live in these yer parts?"

"Yes. You know the old church? I live in the tower."

"Rum place, that; passed it to-day."

"If you want to earn a little money to pay your travelling expenses, I should like to finish that picture."

The man did not answer, but stretched his great limbs and yawned.

"It's blasted cold for the season."

Graham nodded assent, blowing a great cloud of tobacco-smoke from his lips, and composing in his mind, meanwhile, a picture in which this wild-looking fellow, with his rough hair and coarse, strong outlines, formed the central figure. He was of a low type of humanity, with a narrow forehead and large, heavy features; his face was tanned where the skin was visible, the heavy beard growing high up on the cheeks, leaving little uncovered surface. His clothes were somewhat dilapidated, but his wide sombrero hat and high boots were strong and whole. His figure was superbly developed, and Herculean in type. As he sat crouching on the floor, hugging his knees, his back braced against the wall behind him, he nodded wearily, and, after various abortive attempts at conversation, finally fell into a sound sleep, his head resting against the wall behind him. Graham took a charred brand from the hearth, and with this rough tool drew, on a smooth board in the side of the cabin, a sketch of the man before him. As he looked narrowly at his model, he perceived that his face was disfigured by some recent scratches from which the blood was still unwashed. They were got while riding through a thorny thicket, the artist fancied, and thought no more about them, touching in the details of the desolate background. The man's expression was hardly human in his sleep, the fierce animal face was so stupid and brutish. It is

wonderful how character is expressed in a sleeping countenance. The studied or unconscious control which we hold over our features when awake is overthrown in slumber, and the real nature is seen with no polite restraint or deceitful mask. A beautiful woman is beautiful no longer while sleeping, if she have a bad heart. It is a terrible thing to look upon one who is dear to us in sleep. Even when the countenance shadows forth holy dreams, it is awful to watch its still composure, so like death, and to feel that impassable distance between the unfettered soul and our own earth-bound spirit,—that distance which, but for the briefest spaces, is never bridged over in our whole lives, though they flow quietly side by side through peaceful days and happy nights.

Though the man had closed his eyes in the knowledge that it was entirely safe for him to sleep in Graham's presence, his slumber was not an easy one. He started often and groaned more than once; while his hand nervously made the movement of striking with a weapon at some unseen foe. The artist watched him for some minutes.

"I should like to have another day's work on that rascal's torso," he said at last; "I suppose if I paid him enough he would come to the tower."

As he spoke he tore a leaf from his notebook, and writing a few lines upon it placed it in the fellow's nerveless hands, lest he should steal away before morning. Then he threw himself back and slept again long and heavily. When he awoke it was broad daylight in the cabin of which he found himself the sole occupant. At first he wondered if he had dreamed that his lodging had been shared by a rough companion; but no, there was the sketch upon the wall of the sleeping figure crouching by the fireplace. Besides, his visitor had left a trace of his presence. Near the spot where he had sat lay a handkerchief. The artist carelessly picked up the square of white linen, somewhat surprised to find that it was of the finest quality. A red stain on one corner induced him to examine it more carefully. It was neatly stitched with an odd pattern which was not unfamiliar to him, and in one corner was an embroidered monogram of an intricate form. The letters were cunningly twisted together, and it took him several minutes to distinguish them. Two L's, an I, a T, an E, an N, and a C, all enclosed in a large M. Nobody in the world could have so many initials, not even a Spanish grandee. It must be a name, probably one beginning with M, as that was the most prominent letter in the *chiffre*. He studied it for an instant, and suddenly cried aloud that name which had become so dear to him,—"Millicent!"

What could it mean? Millicent's handkerchief in the possession of that ruffianly fellow, the dark crimson stain of blood marring its whiteness? What could have befallen her? He dared not even think of what this portended; and thrusting it into his breast, he ran to the door and looked all about him. Silence everywhere; no movement in the copse before the door; no trace of his late visitor save the broken branch of a buckeye near which his horse had been tethered.

Graham was a brave man, with nerves at once sensitive and strong; but the picture which rose before his eyes unmanned him for the moment completely. He leaned against the door-post quaking with terror, too much confused to know what next to do. He could not think; he only saw that villainous face before him in its heavy sleep, that clinching of the hand, that motion as of stabbing with a knife. In the breast of what victim had that weapon been buried? At the recollection of what crime had he groaned aloud?

The neighing of his horse in the thicket near by roused him from the benumbing horror which had bound him like a trance. He mounted the fiery animal, and struck him fiercely with his spur. The mustang darted forward at a breakneck speed, and with flying hoofs carried his rider over the steep trail which led from the cabin to the house of the San Rosario Ranch. It was a rude road, sometimes merely indicated by signs on the trees, at other places worn by the feet of cattle; it led through dry river-courses and down precipitous planes, through tangled brakes and over desolate, blackened spaces where fire had passed and blasted the trees, leaving them dead and gray, with naked branches and bare roots. No vegetation was here; only black, dry soil. It was a dangerous journey, none too safe at any time; but neither rider nor steed hesitated at sharp turns or steep descents; and the pace slackened not, though the horse foamed at the mouth and the man's face and hands were cut to bleeding by the low-hanging branches of the thorn-tree. Twenty-five miles, at the lowest rating, lay between the cabin and the house. How well Graham knew the way! How often he had passed over it with Hal and O'Neil!—a jolly trio of sportsmen. The very day before he had loitered along the same route, taking the whole day to accomplish the distance, walking sometimes with his horse following him, and never travelling at a greater speed than an easy trot. How different his thoughts had been then, when he had fancied that he had found a closer companionship than that of a loving woman's heart. Now he saw not the trees nor the wood creatures,—only that one villainous face, with its freshly bleeding wounds, with its old

scar red and ugly.

Five miles accomplished: here is the great oak-tree which the lightning had struck half a century ago; but twenty miles now lie before him. Another landmark is passed,--the iron spring, with its red mouth framed in green ferns, where he had once journeyed to bring *her* a flask of the strengthening water. On and on they fly, startling the birds in the thickets and the foxes in their coverts, racing with the lazy breeze which puffs slowly along and is soon left behind by the horse's speed. At the spring on the hillside, where Millicent's hand had checked his shooting of the deer, the rider draws rein and springs to the ground; while the gasping horse stands for a brief breathing-space, drawing long, painful breaths. Graham cools his heated brow in the rocky basin, and gives his horse a mouthful of the refreshing water. Then they start away again towards the house where so many happy hours of his life have been spent; where he first saw Millicent! It is a terrible ride, and one that the man never will forget to his dying day. The anguish of doubt and fear, the awful pace at which he rides, which makes every mile he accomplishes seem like to be the last, will never be forgotten by him in the quiet after-years. Now but ten miles separate him from the vine-clad house; quickly are they accomplished; and in a space of time too short to be credited by those towards whom he rides, he reaches the high hill which looks down upon the valley. The familiar look of the surroundings surprises him. A blue feather of smoke curls about the red chimney; the trees in the orchard, the cattle browsing on the hills, look just as he has seen them a thousand times before; nothing betokens any unusual state of affairs within the quiet house. The brave horse gathers himself together for a last gallop; and the stones of the hillside fly from his hoofs as man and beast thunder down the rocky path which loses itself in the wide farm-road at the edge of the orchard. From this point he commands a view of Millicent's window. He gives a low groan as he looks up for some sign of life,--the heavy blinds are tightly closed.

CHAPTER XII.

"Most sacrilegious murder hath broke ope
The Lord's anointed temple, and stole thence
The life o' the building."

The breakfast table at the San Rosario Ranch was usually a merry one; but on the morning after what Hal had called Millicent's "magnetic exhibition," the usual good spirits were missing. Millicent took her accustomed place at Deering's side; and Galbraith marked the extraordinary change which she had suffered since she had bade him good-night the evening before. Her face had blanched to a whiteness which made the ebon lines of eyebrows and lashes seem unnatural. Her mouth was pale and contracted, and her expression of horrified anticipation reminded him of the look in the eyes of a deer at bay. What could have come to the girl? he asked himself in dismay; with a strange consciousness that whatever should befall her of good or evil from that time forth would have to him an interest beyond all else in the world. She ate her breakfast mechanically, and answered all that was said in which she could be supposed to have an interest. She laughed once, too, at one of Hal's jokes; but the sound was rough and strained. Mrs. Deering and Barbara, occupied with some household complication, merely noticed that Millicent seemed tired; and Hal put her odd look and manner down to the score of her being in love, which in his eyes accounted for every freak or unexplained symptom of hers.

It had been proposed that the day should be spent out-of-doors, at a place which Millicent had long wished to visit,--the little island in the river, below the deserted mill. Galbraith had remained to be of the party; and his two friends had promised to ride over from the camp and join them at the appointed place. Just before they started, old John arrived with a note to Mrs. Deering from Graham, who wrote that he should not be able to be of the party. Hal and Millicent drove together, as they had done on that day when Graham, in accordance with California etiquette, had stopped to kill the rattlesnakes. Old Sphinx was doing his best to keep up with the mule team, when Millicent's sensitive ears detected the sound of horses' hoofs behind them. Presently, through the thick cloud of dust, she descried two horsemen riding at full gallop towards them. The sunlight and the veil of dust made it impossible to see what manner of men they were until Millicent observed that each carried over his shoulder a long object, which

glittered in the sunlight.

"Have you brought your pistols?" she asked.

"Yes, Princess, but they are in the wagon. I expected till the last moment that Graham would turn up to take you, and that I should drive the team. Why do you ask? There is no danger of our being molested."

"Look at those men. Are not those gun barrels I see on their shoulders?"

"Yes; but they are probably peaceful hunters."

The young man spoke in a perfectly careless tone, to reassure his companion; but Millicent noticed that he occasionally looked behind him as the riders gained on them. Finally, as the men drew near, Millicent saw the rider nearest her shift the gun from his shoulder and rest it across the saddle-bow, as if preparing to take aim. Hal, who had seen the action, instantly called to Millicent to catch the reins, and held up both his hands. By this time the men were close upon them, and the one who had shifted his weapon called out in a rough voice,--

"All right, boss; we know you ain't got no money, and we don't want your life to-day." His companion laughed aloud, and striking spurs to their horses, they galloped down the high-road. Hal laughed as heartily as the supposed highwayman, saying,--

"Well, that's a greaser's idea of a joke, I suppose. Adventure number one has befallen us with few bad consequences. I don't think you were half as frightened as you were the other day by the snakes."

"No, I fancy I was not. I should not much mind being killed to-day." This with a little, bitter laugh.

"And why? Let us wait till after luncheon. Barbara has put up a capital venison pasty,--a real English one, out of the Queen's own receipt book."

"Well, we will wait for the pie, to please you."

The drive was accomplished with the usual desultory chit-chat, Hal doing rather more than his share of the joking. As they passed the little hovel, the wild children ran out, as they had upon the day when they had visited the camp in the woods; and soon the gray bridge and the little island were reached. The baskets were unpacked and the luncheon spread upon the grass by the time the guests arrived. Among them were O'Neil, Hartley, Ferrara, and Mrs. Shallop, who had come over by the train; with a party of people from the village, in whom Millicent had never taken much interest. Galbraith never left Millicent's side; sparing her the necessity of talking by keeping up an incessant stream of conversation which she heard vaguely, and of which she understood not one word. In after days the import of all the young man said came back to her; and she remembered the quaint Indian legends, the reminiscences of life on the two edges of the continent, with which Maurice Galbraith kept the others of the party from her side. She realized what he was doing, and knew that he only, in all the company, understood and sympathized with her half-dazed mood; and for his efforts he received more than one little smile, sadder than tears.

This is one of the stories which the lawyer told her:--

"In the old days, when Father Junipero and his small band of priests and soldiers came into the wilderness of California, with the cross uplifted in one hand, the sword grasped in the other, there lived on this island where we now sit, a beautiful Indian maiden. Her name was a very long one, and its meaning in our language is the Smile of the Morning. She lived with the old chief, her father, in a wigwam, where also lived her sisters and brothers and various of her cousins and distant relatives. The old chief had many daughters, but the Smile of the Morning was his favorite child; and she it was who cooked his food for him, when he did not eat it raw, and brought him his bow and arrows when he started on a hunting party. The sisters of the favorite daughter all found mates among the sons of the tribe, but she lived alone with only the wild bird in the madrone tree for her lover. Her sisters, each of whom carried a pappoose upon her back, laughed at the Smile of the Morning, and said that she would die without a husband; but the girl did not mind them. She was taller, by a head, than any woman of the tribe; she could charm the wild birds, and draw the feathers from their tails to make head-dresses for the old chief and ornaments for herself; she could dance war-dances like one of the braves, only with more grace; and when she told the stories which the fishes in the river whispered to her, the old chieftain nodded his head wisely and patted the girl on the shoulder. She should find a husband in good time; but he must be as much taller and stronger than the other men of the tribe, as she was fairer and wiser than her sisters.

"When the missionary priests came, with their white faces and strange garments fashioned neither from the skin of any animal nor from the feathers of any bird, and made friendly overtures to the old chief, the Smile of the Morning fell upon her face in terror. The Indians

would have worshipped the men with the white faces and strange tongue; but to prove to them that they too were men and adored a God, the priests held their services and kneeled to the Great Spirit whom they revered. When the new-comers had learned the language of the Indians, and had built themselves a house and a greater house to their God, the daughter of the chief grew to be no longer afraid of the black-robed figures. She eagerly learned the simple lessons which they set for the people; and it was because of the wonderful learning that they gave her that she studied so industriously, and not, like her brothers and sisters, to gain the daily rations of corn. When the early bell called the Indians to the church of the San Rosario Mission, the Smile of the Morning was the first to answer the summons; and when the other Indians were squabbling over their breakfast of maize, she lingered in the sanctuary, trying to fathom the strange rites which were so much holier than those of her people, looking into the painted faces in the pictures over the rude altar, and feeling curiously behind them to ascertain whether the backs also were painted.

"The soldiers who upheld the authority of the priests were encouraged by large bounties and grants of land to marry the converted squaws; and in the course of time several such unions were solemnized at the Mission. Among the stern old pioneer priests was one young man dear to the Father Junipero, whose pupil he had been, and who had followed the famous man on his great mission of converting the heathen Indians. His name was Fra Antonio. His voice was soft and low, and his eyes open and sad, with shadows in them, which the Indian maiden had never seen in other eyes,--shadows like those cast by the white clouds floating before the sun's face on hot summer afternoons. Fra Antonio was very kind to the tall beauty of the tribe, and with a never-failing patience strove to make the doctrines of his religion clear to her simple understanding. Strange were the means by which the fathers learned to expound their religion to the savages. To express the great hope of the resurrection, they put a number of insects in a vessel of water, leaving them there till they were apparently quite dead. Then the creatures were placed in a bank of hot ashes, which warmed their frozen, half-dead bodies back to life. When the gauzy wings were spread, carrying the insects up into the sunshine again, the fathers marked the words ejaculated by the Indians, and by that term they called the resurrection.

"New and beautiful were the thoughts which now possessed the mind of the Indian girl. She learned that to forgive was nobler than to avenge,--strangest of all doctrines taught by the priests to the red men. She learned that the stars, pale and fiery, were great worlds like the one in which she lived, and not the hearts of the brave chiefs placed in the heavens after death as she had always been taught. Only the simplest of the great truths which lie like jewels in the tawdry setting of the Mother Church, did Fra Antonio instil into her childish mind, which with an unquestioning faith accepted all the young priest taught. Few among the tribe--perhaps, indeed, no one of the Indians beside the Smile of the Morning--understood or believed the new doctrines taught by the priests. These were satisfied that the rites of baptism and of extreme unction were administered, and that the daily services were attended, quite conscious that their most potent weapon of conversion was the ration of *atole*, or prepared corn, which they served out to the lazy braves. As soon as he became a member of the church, every redskin was cared for, and a gentle slavery was the result, in which the priests exacted a certain amount of labor from the Indian, in turn feeding him and caring for his wants. The art of weaving was taught, together with civilized agriculture; and the fruit of the vines was fermented into strong, rough wine, this being reserved for the service of the altar and the table of the priests. In the eyes of the zealous missionaries the Indian was the rightful owner of the soil; and there was no thought of disputing his claim to it. It was that he might better and more wisely enjoy the fruits of his own land, and in the next life enter the happier home prepared for all true followers of the Church of Rome, that the Father Junipero and his band of soldiers and priests lived and died in the wilderness of California. How their treatment of the original inhabitants of the soil differed from that adopted by the enlightened race which now claims the country, you have seen enough, or at any rate heard enough, of our Indian policy to appreciate. Instead of improving the land for its owners, as did the brave missionary priests, we have wrested it from them, driving the children of those who for centuries have owned the Pacific coast away from the choicest spots to rocky, desolate lands which have again been taken from them by the greedy gold-hunters. But all this has happened since the time when the Smile-of the Morning lived upon this pretty island, and decked her glossy hair with a coronet of blue-jays' feathers, that she might be fair in the eyes of one whom she loved. But a year had passed since the arrival of Fra Antonio, when the old chieftain noticed that his daughter's step had grown heavy and slow; that her great eyes danced no more; that her countenance no longer merited the name of the morning's smile. He was a wise old man for an

Indian; and after thinking the matter over for a week, during which time he smoked an unusual number of pipes of tobacco, he came to the conclusion that the girl had been bewitched by one of the strange priests. Calling her to him, he questioned her as to the cause of her altered behavior; and from her downcast face and embarrassed replies he quickly surmised her secret. The Smile of the Morning loved the fair young priest, and it was for his sake that her tears flowed. The old chief at first scoffed at her infatuation, and bade her take up with one of her dusky suitors. But the girl was obstinate; and finally yielding to her whim, the old chief himself offered his daughter's hand to Fra Antonio. The young priest, in holy horror, took counsel with his superiors; and it was explained to the chieftain that though the white soldiers were free to mate with the maidens of the tribe, the priests were vowed to celibacy. If the pious young priest had unwittingly mingled an unwise fervor in his exhortations to the Indian girl, he bitterly regretted his fault. As day by day he saw her elastic figure grow more feeble, and marked her hollow cheeks and her sad eyes fixed reproachfully on him whilst he served the mass or taught the new converts, a tenderness for her, which her savage health and perfections had failed to arouse, awoke in his breast. When he saw the young braves, each with his dusky partner, and the sisters of the Smile of the Morning with their children in their arms, he sometimes cursed the priestly habit which proclaimed him a thing apart from all other of God's creatures, doomed to live unmated and alone. Long vigils and heavy penances failed to ease the grief in his heart, or to set at rest its yearning toward the child who had been redeemed from barbarism, through his teaching, to live a Christian life and die in the hope of his faith.

"At last the battle between the spirit and the heart grew too terrible for him to bear; he was not strong enough; and he begged the fathers to send him to another Mission far to the northward. When the Smile of the Morning learned that Fra Antonio was to leave the Mission on the morrow, she decked herself in all her jewels, hung her long shell necklaces about her throat, wound her bead bracelets about her arms, and placed her coronet of blue-jays' feathers upon her brow. She was not to be found that night when the old chief lay down to rest; and when the sun rose on the day which should see Fra Antonio far on his long journey, her sisters found the maiden lying in the cool waters of the river which washes this island, with the little rosary the priest had given her locked in her cold fingers, and the smile upon her face that had been missing for so many weeks. They called the fathers to come and look upon her; and Fra Antonio prayed long beside her, with streaming eyes and broken voice. The kiss which his sad lips laid reverently on her brow was felt perhaps, for all those who stood near heard the sigh which came rustling through the trees near by. As she had wilfully taken her own life, the poor girl could not be buried with the ceremonies of the church to which she had been admitted; so she was interred by her people near the spot where they had found her, on this little island where we now sit. When the good fathers sat together of an evening and discussed questions spiritual and temporal touching the welfare of their little flock, Fra Antonio was often missing from their midst. Sometimes the faint sound was heard of the church bell softly struck by a tender hand, and the priests crossed themselves silently, knowing for whose soul it was that Fra Antonio solemnized the mass for the dead."

A silence followed Galbraith's story, which was broken by Millicent, who said,--

"I have a sketch in an old Italian book of a beautiful young monk, Fra Antonio by name. Could it be the same, I wonder?"

"Who knows? Some of the priests were Italians. Would the dates agree?"

"The portrait was dated some time in the latter part of the last century."

"It could not have been far from that time that the Smile of the Morning met her sad fate."

"Sad,--do you call her fate sad?" queried Millicent.

"Who could think it otherwise?"

"I surely do. Was it sad to die for the man she loved?"

"It would have been happier if she could have lived for him."

"Happiness! Who spoke of happiness? Why talk about a thing so mythical? I think her lot was an enviable one. To her simple mind the thought that suicide is sinful could never have occurred. She might not follow the man she loved; she believed that the soul now prisoned in her breast might always be near him; so she opened the cage and let the bird fly."

"You speak as seriously as if you had known the Smile of the Morning and sympathized with her."

"It is the privilege of those who have greatly suffered, that the grief of others can be felt and understood by them." Millicent spoke absently, dreamily, checking her speech at the pained expression which her words brought to Galbraith's face.

Later in the afternoon the party left the island and wandered about the old bridge. Some of them climbed the high hill; others struck into the woods. By some chance Millicent found herself left alone near the mill with no one of the party near her save Ah Lam. Calling the faithful creature to her side, she made him prepare her a comfortable seat, and leaning back against the wall, she entered into a desultory conversation with her pupil. Ah Lam often told her stories in his broken English, descriptive of the power and character of the most august personages of the Chinese mythology. To-day he found an inattentive listener in his kind friend and teacher; but he had been bidden to speak, and so he talked on patiently, describing rites of death and feasts of marriages, recalling the great river *fête* which he had witnessed shortly before sailing from his native city. As the Chinaman paused after this last tale, Millicent heard a step approaching the door of the old mill. She looked up carelessly, expecting to see one of the gentlemen. The man who stood before her was a stranger. His face was somewhat flushed, and he looked as if he had travelled some distance.

"Second time, my lady, I've see'd yer purty face to-day."

Millicent bowed her head and turned away, looking anxiously toward the wood, where she had seen Hal disappear a few moments before.

"Sha'n't let yer off ser aisy this time. I've took a fancy to see the color of yer eyes."

The look of angry indignation with which the gray orbs were turned upon the man was enough to have abashed any sensitive person, but to this class the stranger did not belong. He was a rough-looking fellow of large stature, with a heavy animal face, crossed by a deep scar running from the chin to the forehead on the right side. In his belt he wore a pair of pistols, at which the Chinaman looked uneasily.

"Say, do yer belong in these parts?"

"Yes," answered the girl in a low voice.

"Well, I am leavin' 'em for good; we're not likely to meet again. I 'm a gentleman, and I don't want to trouble you for them rings o' yourn, but a kiss won't cost you nothin'."

Suiting the action to the word, the man threw an arm about the girl's slender waist, and quick as a thought began to drag her toward the spot where a couple of horses were tethered. With a sudden wrench, she shook herself free from his rude clasp, and sped down the path calling for help. Help was nearer to her than she had thought, and a humble friend sprang to her aid. As the insolent creature started in pursuit of the swift-footed girl, Ah Lam adroitly tripped him up, bringing him to the ground with a heavy fall. The man was somewhat bruised by his tumble, a sharp stone having struck his arm. He arose with difficulty, pouring out a volley of oaths the like of which had never before desecrated Millicent's ears. The Chinaman, knowing full well the danger which his temerity had brought upon him, ran quickly after his young mistress. The path brought them to the border of the stream, and their flight was stopped by this obstacle. By this time, the man, blind with rage, had caught up with the two fugitives; he seemed in doubt which of them to molest first. Millicent stood with flashing eyes and curling lip, her head thrown back, her arms folded across her breast, looking at him with an expression of scorn that seemed to awe him for a moment. He drew back, as if afraid to touch so beautiful and wrathful a creature, and in his rage clutched the Chinaman by the throat. In the scuffle which ensued, Ah Lam's hat was thrown off, and the long cue coiled about his head fell down. Quick as thought, the ruffian seized the braid, and drawing a sharp knife from his boot, cut it from the head of the Chinaman. With a shriek which had the despair of a double death, the Chinaman turned and implanted his finger-nails in the face of his adversary, inflicting ten long scratches on the cheeks. The crushed worm will turn at last; and the poor soul, damned for eternity by the cutting of his hair, had turned upon the ruffian. Quick as the fast-drawn breath of the terrified girl, the villain lifted his long knife and, with a horrible oath, plunged it into the side of the Chinaman. The shrieks of the victim, the horror-stricken screams of the girl, the sight of the blood, seemed to madden the wretch; for he tore the quivering knife from the wound and stabbed him again and again. At last the rage for blood seemed satiated; he threw the mutilated body, still breathing, to ebb out its life on the soil, and turned with bloody hands and seared eyes toward Millicent, who had sunk upon her knees, lifting the head of the dying Chinaman to her young breast.

The closed lids fluttered open, the dimmed eyes looked gratefully for the last time into the face of the girl who had been kinder to him than any other creature in this strange land where he had worked so faithfully, where he had been so cruelly oppressed in life, and so foully murdered; hope of Heaven being closed to him before his miserable breath had been taken. The horror of his crime must have overcome the ruffian for a moment, for he paused and silently watched the death-agonies of his victim. To that moment's feeling of horror or remorse, what might not

Millicent owe? For soon, to her it seemed an eternity, the men, whose answering shouts she had not heard, appeared close at hand. The murderer saw them none too quickly for his safety, and springing upon his horse, which stood near by, clapped spurs to the flank and rode off at a hand gallop in the opposite direction.

Galbraith rushed to Millicent's side and lifted the dying creature from her breast. They placed him gently upon the bank, and Hal put his flask to his lips; but it was too late. With one last struggle Ah Lam yielded up his miserable life; and Millicent's cry of pity sounded his death-knell. Then she lifted her hands to Heaven and prayed for the soul of the poor creature who had so bravely defended her. An hour ago she had smiled at Fra Antonio's masses for the repose of the Smile of the Morning. In moments like these the strong instincts of men and women overcome the reasons and doctrines of education; Millicent prayed, believing that she should be heard.

When it became evident to the little group which had silently assembled about the spot, that poor Ah Lam was beyond human help, Maurice Galbraith and Henry Deering lifted the lifeless body and laid it in the great wagon. Millicent followed and drew over the dead face the white cloak which she had worn all that day. Pedro, climbing to his seat, touched the mules into motion; and the wagon, which had carried so merry a freight to the gray bridge that morning, returned at sunset over the same path with its ghastly burden,--a very funeral car.

Maurice Galbraith gently placed Millicent beside Barbara and her mother in the smaller carriage, which was driven back to the Ranch under the escort of Ferrara, O'Neil, and Hartley. Then the young lawyer, with Henry Deering to bear him company, started in pursuit of the murderer. He had sworn a silent oath, as he stood by the dying man, and learned that his life had been given to protect Millicent, that Ah Lam should be avenged. If there were law and justice in the broad land of California, the murderer should suffer the extreme penalty for wilful and wicked shedding of innocent blood. In pursuit rode the two young men, with stern faces; and it was well for the fugitive that he had a long start of them, for they rode as men do when time must be gained at all costs. Along the narrow bridle-path, over which the murderer had passed, they took their way, and were soon lost to the view of the three women sitting close together in troubled silence. Barbara's strong hands held the reins and plied the whip, while streams of tears coursed down her cheeks. Mrs. Deering patted her daughter's shoulder; but it was on Millicent her attention was most firmly fixed. The girl had not moved since Galbraith had placed her in the carriage. Her eyes were strained wide open, and the expression in their depths was one which the gentle woman never forgot,--a look as of an endless despair and horror. Back to the happy valley they drove silently, no joyous young voices carolling out ballads of love, songs of battle, as was their wont; in silence and grief they passed over the familiar road through the gap between the guardian hills, back to the quiet house, to herald the advent of the humble dead to those who had been his fellow-servants.

No one told Millicent that standing near the spot where the ruffian's horse had been tethered was a second steed. A strong mustang saddled and bridled was found there. A heavy leading-rein passed through the bit, and a stout rope lying over the saddle, gave a sinister significance to the fact. For whom had that horse been brought?

CHAPTER XIII.

"Abroad it rushed,
My frolic soul, for it had sight
Of something half-way, which was known
As mine at once, yet not mine own."

It was early in the morning for Millicent, usually a late sleeper, to be in the garden among the flowers. There Graham found her, white as the gown she wore, standing with her arms filled with dark-red roses,--standing with the sunlight touching her pretty hair, and shining in her cool gray eyes. He stared at her, as at one risen from the dead; he touched her hand before he spoke to her, to make sure that it was really she, alive, with softly heaving breast and warm, clinging fingers. Alive, and not as he had pictured her a thousand times during that terrible ride,--cold and

dead, with the stain which had dyed her kerchief, on brow and bosom. For a long time they stood silently looking into each other's faces; and then the man laid her hand gently on his arm, and together they passed down the orchard road, across a space of sunburnt meadow, to a spot they both knew,--Millicent's boudoir, hanging over the narrow stream, walled by six tall redwoods grown from the seeds of some giant predecessor, carpeted with thick green moss, furnished with two rough seats. Here they rested silently for a time,--Graham drawing long breaths of the morning air to relax his tired lungs; Millicent resting her wearied heart with looking at him, all her soul shining through her eyes. Graham first broke the silence with questions of all that had happened since they had parted. She told him of her danger, and of the murder of the Chinaman, in a low voice, full of awe. It had been her first knowledge of death; and the chill reality, the only certain thing which men look forward to, had first been known by her now that she was a woman grown, and could fully understand its dreadful significance. Hitherto, death had been a phrase only; a thing which must come to all creatures, as a matter of course. That she should sometime die she knew, but only by tradition; it had meant nothing to her. Now she understood it all, and the terrible knowledge had chilled her life-blood. Could she ever again think of anything but that dead face? One stronger than the King of Terrors was driving it from her thoughts: love was swiftly painting out the grim picture from her memory.

Step by step they went over the ground of their mutual experiences since the time when they had parted: the picnic, and its tragic ending; the night which Graham had passed in the cabin with Ah Lam's murderer,--for there could be no doubt it was he who had dropped Millicent's handkerchief in the hut. Of the little journal Graham spoke sadly, gently, without anger, as if it were a thing which concerned neither of them. Then Millicent brokenly told the story which the written words had simply indicated. She told it with a sense of thankfulness that the weight of the secret rested no longer on her heart alone; that its pain was shared, and that at last her lover understood and saw her absolutely as she was. No reservation did she make, but bared to him the inmost chambers of her heart, sure of no misunderstanding, and upheld by a sympathy she had never before known. Then her confidence was returned, and Graham spoke to her of many things of which he had never spoken before; of the hopes and aspirations which had sometimes made his life glorious; of the quicksands and hidden rocks which had often made his way dangerous.

A wonderful confession,--solemn as those first confessions made by men and women who at maturity join the Roman Catholic Church, and unflinchingly reveal to the confessor every temptation to which they have yielded in the course of their lives. To no mumbling, inattentive priest, with store of penances and absolutions in his pocket, was the confession made; in no stifling confessional, with throng of penitents outside, grudging every moment of delay. Each spoke to a tender human heart, that filled out the broken sentences, and echoed the deep sighs. The roof of their temple swayed in the light breeze, and the wild birds chanted the hymn of praise which consecrated it.

As Millicent at last sat silent, not knowing whether her lover still spoke to her in words, or if that finer language of the spirit made his thoughts clear to her, came at once a strange consciousness that she was no longer a creature of this earth, with material senses and shape. The last words which she had spoken she remembered as one dimly recalls what has happened in another life. They were these:--

"Are you sorry for me?"

There had been no answer in words or in looks; for the power of sight had been left behind with the outer case, now shaken off for the first time since life upon the earth had begun. She was a thing apart no longer; her existence had become merged in that of a stronger soul, to which she was an all-important part. Folded in this spirit-embrace time was not, nor past nor future; nothing but the perfect ecstasy of a union which eternity should consecrate. Floating on a celestial ether, the double soul mounted ever higher and higher. Was it toward eternal bliss that it was wafted? Was the long waiting at an end?

Again she saw the sunlight; again she heard the ripple of the water; again she felt the earthly tenement closing about the divine spirit. Before her, framed in the green leaves, was a face dear indeed, the face of her lover. With solemn eyes they looked at each other; and a broken voice whispered to her,--

"Dear, what is it?"

She answered softly,--

"I have never been so near to you before."

Then a flood of feeling swept over her, and she would have knelt to him, her other self; but he

was already at her feet, moved by that same instinct to do homage to the human form which held his counter soul, and on her white feet he laid a reverent embrace.

Strengthened and uplifted by that mystic union whose memory should never leave her, whose bonds should ever bind her, was Millicent. In every existence comes one supreme, all-important moment, which thenceforth is the landmark by which life is measured; the climacteric point to which the past merely served to lead, the future availing only to enshrine its memory. To some men and women the significance of that moment is known only when it has long passed; to Millicent, the knowledge that her whole after life should be controlled by that hour was not wanting. And her lover,--would he be faithful to that unspoken vow? The thought never crossed her mind; she was irrevocably bound to him; priest and rite could but make a poor, earthy contract between what was mortal in them both; the spiritual union was not for this world, and might not be broken by either.

CHAPTER XIV.

"Dust and ashes, dead and done with, Venice spent what Venice earned.
The soul, doubtless, is immortal--where a soul can be discerned."

It was a pitiful story which the little journal had made known to John Graham,--the story of a woman grievously wronged, cruelly deceived.

Millicent Almsford's life had not been a happy one. Her childhood had been lonely, and she had none of those early recollections which are so comforting in after years to people more fortunately bred. Her father was an invalid and a bookworm, and looked upon his only daughter as a creature to be fed, clothed, educated, and kept quiet. Her feeding he intrusted to her faithful nurse, who had promised her dying mother never to leave the child till she should be grown to womanhood. Her wardrobe was ordered by a relative who lived in Paris, and who twice a year overlooked the making and packing of her clothes, from her first baby wrappings to the ball dress in which she was presented at the court of St. James. Her education he left very much to chance and her own taste, simply locking up the *livres defendus* of his library, and telling her English governess to order any necessary volumes from Mudie's. The young woman in whose charge Millicent was placed, was more eager to learn Italian than to teach English; to explore the literature of Dante than to familiarize her pupil with the British authors. When Millicent was sixteen years old, the feeble protection of this governess was taken from her; the woman returning to England to keep a long protracted marriage engagement with her own cousin. The same year old Nina died; and then it was that the lonely girl fell under the influence which was to darken her destiny and turn aside the natural current of her life. Millicent Almsford, at that age, was a very peculiar and interesting study. Her mind had eagerly grasped much more material than it could master. Her vivid imagination and great talent for music were, with a love of beauty, the most strongly developed traits in her nature, whose intellectual growth was destined to be slow and late; whose spiritual existence had not yet begun. An exquisite native refinement and a perfect taste were among her most interesting qualities. Singularly attractive and strangely incomplete, she had formed few relations; and her friendship with Edward Holworthy, the man whose influence so marred her life, was the first strong feeling which she had known. He was her opposite in character, and knew life only through people, while she had lived purely in ideas. Her complex nature, unfathomable to herself, was to him a novel and engrossing study, and it was through him that she learned to understand one side of it. The man found a great heart which had never loved; a strong power for working good or evil; a bold mind, that feared not to grapple with the deepest problems of life; and a possibility of absolute devotion to a resolution once formed, which is rarely found among young women. He became her mental guide, and directed her readings; with a certain clever intuition bringing her under the influence of minds as sophisticated and frivolous as his own. Sympathetic to an extreme degree, her nature quickly took from his the color of an exaggerated cynicism, which was sometimes strongly shaken by the inner spirit which still slept under the untouched heart. Platonics, where the man is of the world wise, and the woman foolish with the innocence of childhood, are dangerous things, as he knew full well, and she did not. In pointing out the forces which mould the lives of men and women, what

theme is so often upon the lips of two life students of opposite sexes as that of love? To the girl it seemed a strange, rather interesting force, whose power it would not be unpleasant to test; and when one day her mentor confessed to her that she had bound him irrevocably by those bonds which he had taught her were but ropes of sand, she smiled half sadly, but in her heart laughed with childish merriment. She now should see the actual workings of that strange hallucination; she should learn something of what love was. She was as unfeeling as a young lioness, and learned the lesson of making him turn pale and red by turns, as quickly as she had learned the knack of touching the chords of her mandolin. She looked upon her quondam friend in the light of an invalid, suffering from a dangerous but non-contagious malady. And so things went on; the man gaining every day a firmer hold over the girl, intoxicated by the new power in herself and a growing consciousness of her beauty and charms. During the long mornings at the Palazzo Fortunio, the two friends read and talked together, while the Italian governess, understanding no word of their intercourse, sat sewing patiently beside them. In the cool afternoons, when they were rowed by the strong-armed gondolier, Girolomo, out into the glory of the sunset, the same stolid companion always accompanied them. One day, Mr. Almsford, selfish old epicurean, perceived for the first time that his daughter had grown to a tall and fair womanhood. His attention had, perhaps, been first called to the fact by the increasing size of the half-yearly coffer which found its way from Fashion's capital to the Fortunio Palace, and by the proportionate lengthening of the account which accompanied it. Yes, Millicent was certainly grown to be a young lady. They were beginning to send her little, demure bonnets, and close-fitting, simple woollen dresses, made with more of an idea of displaying her graceful figure than heretofore. The girl was heiress to her mother's fortune; and it behooved him to see about finding a suitable husband for her. Whom should he consult in this matter, but their most intimate friend; the man who seemed at once his contemporary and hers; the handsome, clever fellow-countryman, who had been on the most intimate footing in his house for the last ten years? Edward Holworthy had started unaccountably when, in the midst of one of the solemn pauses of their game of chess, Mr. Almsford had propounded the unexpected question to him:--

"How shall I find Millicent a husband?"

The elder gentleman, for the first time in many months, checkmated his adversary in two moves, and won the game in an unprecedentedly short space of time.

Holworthy's advice was given after a week's deliberation. It was in favor of sending Miss Almsford to her father's sister, who lived in London, in order that she might be presented at court and introduced to English society. Mr. Almsford thought over the advice, which appeared to him wise. He consulted Millicent, who eagerly accepted the chance to see something of the world; and finally, after six months' exchange of letters upon the subject, the girl was taken to London by her father, and comfortably established, with her aunt, in a pretty Kensington villa, for which her poorly circumstanced relative gladly forsook a small house in an unfashionable quarter of the town. Having married a younger son of a great house, with no portion but debts on his part and beauty on hers, Millicent's aunt, with the matchless tact of our countrywomen, had secured herself a prominent and agreeable position in London society. In mere worldly advantages the young girl could have had no better chaperone than the pretty young woman, still occupied with bets, beaux, and bon-bons. She took her niece to all the best houses; and soon Millicent's extreme beauty, and the widely noised, somewhat exaggerated accounts of her worldly goods, brought her scores of invitations and admirers on her own account.

Six months after her departure, Millicent Almsford returned to the Palazzo Fortunio, where the report of her great social success had preceded her and tickled the ears of her parent, proud of the child for whose sake he had never sacrificed a whim of his own. Edward Holworthy, who had accompanied the father and daughter to London, and remained there during the period of the latter's stay, did not return to Venice, but sailed for Australia, from whence he never returned either to his native or to his adopted country. The change which her half year's absence had wrought in Millicent, her father attributed to her social experience. She had left him half a child, with a thousand absurd, whimsical ways, which had amused him, and endeared her to him more than any other trait in her character. Few things diverted him; and he counted every laugh which Millicent provoked from him as a positive good, which he set down to her credit in their joint account. Her stay in London had given Millicent a certain poise and manner which suited her marvellously well; but all the sparkle and freshness seemed to have left her. She was like a fresh, white lily which has been broken and wilted by a violent storm of wind and rain. For months she never smiled. Her life seemed to have come to a standstill; she suffered dumbly, hopelessly, with sad, deep eyes, made more beautiful by the trouble in them. A sceptic and a materialist, she

found nothing in this world worth suffering for, and smiled incredulously when the old curé, her Latin teacher, tried to help her from the slough of earthly despair by promises of a glorious future, for whose attainment the life-battle should be bravely fought. She was conscious of no ethereal essence which should outlive the graceful body, whose beauty she sometimes cursed. Did it not reduce her to the level of all hunted creatures? Was she not a thing to be pursued by men, like a tall deer or a fleet, timid hare?

"Something had come to the Signorina," said Girolomo, the gondolier; "and the Signor Holworthy, where was he?" And he shook his head gravely, the wise old creature, guessing, as did no other soul, that Edward Holworthy was in some way connected with Millicent's changed face and listless demeanor.

Something had come to her; but she never confided to priest or friend the trouble which robbed her young face of its childish curves, which killed the youth in her, and made her a woman in grief, while she was still a child in years. Only one confidant had she,--the little journal; the gold-clasped tome which all those years after had fallen into John Graham's hands. The story of the first passion she had ever roused, read by the only man she had ever loved.

It was the pitiful story of a grievous wrong which had darkened more than one life. The miserable consequences of a wicked act are infinite; its influence spreads wider and wider every day, like the broadening rings which circle on the surface of a still pool disturbed by a stone which a careless hand has tossed. The black deed may be hidden from the sight of men, but its baleful effects are felt afar off in the lives of those who have known nought of its perpetration. Let not the sinner comfort himself in that his soul alone is damned for his crime. It darkens innocent lives with its evil; and in sinning against himself he sins against mankind.

In the strange country whither Millicent had gone, Holworthy was the only link which bound her to her home, the one being who understood and cared for her. The dominion which he had always held over her was now strengthened into a powerful magnetic force. The little journal told how that influence had been exerted in compelling her to a secret marriage against her own will and judgment. She had been tricked into an elopement,--it might better be called an abduction,--and all unwillingly became his wife. Then all too soon, ere a week had passed, came the terrible discovery that the marriage was no marriage. For then came to her the mother of the man whom she was striving to love with wifely duty, an old woman, bowed with grief and years. She had come very far, across half a continent, to break to the girl whose name she had heard linked with that of her only son, the news that he was not free to marry, that she must give him up. When the tall girl with the childish, flower face fell stricken to the earth like a broken lily, at the feet of the older woman, she had made no cry; in the hours that followed, she said no word. When the man who had wrecked her life came and knelt beside her, prayed her to be patient and her wrongs should be righted, spoke of his remorse, told her of his terrible mad wife from whom the law would set him free, and make him really hers, prayed, besought, and worshipped at her feet, she answered him with one terrible word only. She rose and stood before him white and cruel in her agony, relentless as Fate.

"Go!" was the one syllable which her frozen lips uttered; and with a gesture of command, majestic and beautiful, she had banished him from her presence. The secret was kept, even from the old woman, grown more sorrowful at the sight of the girl's dumb agony and of her son's grief, which she could not soothe. The secret was kept; and that very night Millicent's face, pale and clouded, shone out amidst a group of fair women who sat languidly chatting through the music of *Faust* at the opera. He kept her secret, poor wretch, and shielded her as best he might, forcing her to speak to him and see him before others, that no sudden breaking of their relations might be remarked. Save in the world, she never saw him again. That one word of command was the last syllable which he ever heard her speak to him directly. Not without a struggle did he give her up, but she was implacable. She yielded to him, and played her part in the little comedy which the world thought it understood. The beautiful Miss Almsford had found Holworthy a pleasant admirer, but her delicate American beauty and her solid American fortune would certainly win her a higher place in the world than that of the wife of Mr. Edward Holworthy, her countryman and old friend.

Youth and health are great physicians; and as the years passed, Millicent recovered something of her old spring and elasticity. She was infinitely more interesting, if something colder and harder, than she had been in the old days. Her unquenchable vigor of temperament came to her help, and gave her a keen pleasure in her studies and in the work and thought of the people about her. Always self-reliant, she grew to live entirely without support from man or woman. She was a friend to many people, but was herself friendless. The Palazzo Fortunio, under

her reign, grew to be the centre of a charming social circle. Musicians and painters were made welcome by the young hostess. At once an artist and a patron of the arts, she stood in a peculiar relation to the men who frequented her *salon*. If she had been without fortune she would have made music her profession. As it was, she studied it as faithfully as if self-support had been her aim; and she claimed that sympathy from her artistic friends which a mere connoisseur, be he ever so enthusiastic, can never arouse. To her small world she was all-important. Her sympathy helped many a timid *debutante*, and her counsel cheered the black days of more than one disheartened artist. Always gracious and kind, she had drawn about her a group of people, to all of whom she was a sort of exalted fellow-worker, who knew but the poetry of art, and helped them to forget its prose. Her heart was quite empty, but her mind was keenly interested and fully occupied by the men and women among whom she lived. Happiness she had forgotten to look for, but in enjoyment her days were not wanting. It was a terrible blow to her when this pleasant, quiet life was suddenly broken up by her father's marriage. To her imperious nature the presence of the inferior woman whom Mr. Almsford had brought home to the Palazzo was intolerable. Where could she go? For the first time in her life she felt the power which her fortune gave her. She could establish herself wherever she liked. Her father's sister proposed a repetition of their joint establishment in London, but at the very mention of her returning to England Millicent's face blanched. She would never again set foot in that country. It was while she was in a state of doubt concerning her future movements that her half-brother wrote her a long and affectionate letter, urging her to come and dwell for a time among his people, to visit her mother's country before she decided the important question of where she should establish herself for life. The idea seemed a just one to her; and acting on a tender impulse roused by the loving words of her unknown brother, she had telegraphed her departure, and forthwith started on her long journey accompanied by her capable French maid. The Abigail discharged her trust faithfully, as far as San Francisco, from which city she turned her face on the very day of her arrival, unwilling to remain longer in what she called "*le plus triste pays du monde*." If the truth could have been known, Millicent would have signed away ten years of her life to have gone back with the woman to the Old World, the only home she had ever known.

Graham had not been mistaken when he predicted to Millicent that she would grow more in sympathy with the race from which she drew her inheritance of character and temperament than at first seemed possible. Nature is stronger than habit, well called second nature; and as the surface roughness became familiar to her, she began to feel the strong life and vigor of the young Western land quickening her pulses and stimulating her whole being. The poverty of intellectual intercourse was more than compensated by the tremendous power of work, the electrical force which accomplishes so rapidly in this new land what in other countries has been the slow growth of centuries.

An answering glow of enthusiasm flushed her with hope, with a keener, fuller, more intense life than she had ever known before. She had clung at first to her traditions, and fought against the tide which seemed to be sweeping this people on and on and ever on. But nature was too strong for habit; her upright, fearless mind acknowledged kinship with these hard-working men and women, to whom pleasure is not save in toil, whose whole life is one long unconscious sacrifice to their country. On the eastern margins of our land the austere simplicity and purity have become infested with plague-spots brought--ay, imported with care and expense--from the Old World, and fostered like exotics on the clean soil. But from the great Western prairie comes a fresh, strong breeze which sweetens all the foulness of the Atlantic cities, and makes the breath of Columbia still pure and fragrant.

With this new sentiment for her new-found country came the first passionate love to the heart of the beautiful and unhappy young woman. She had breathed the spicy air of the Californian forests, bracing and sweet, and her cheek had grown fuller and fairer in the perfect climate. Her empty, hollow heart was filled by a great love and strength, all-sustaining and soothing.

When Graham had first seen her lying in the fire-light, with cool, deep eyes, before the light of love had dawned in her flower face, she had seemed to him like a perfect white rose. Then the rose flushed palely, as the love-light trembled to a flame; and he brought her flowers of the color of the sea-shells, and she wore them in her hair. Last of all, he laid at her feet deep-red damask rosebuds; and these she placed on her white breast, where they bloomed and died in a single night. He had painted her by the waves, as he had once seen her on that strange day when death had seemed so near and life so beautiful. He had painted her standing at the sea edge with pallid roses in her little hands, her graceful head set about with the same soft-hued flowers, and a single crimson rose lying lightly over her heart. He had hung the sketch against the wall where

the sunlight fell upon it early in the morning; and Millicent had bade him remember, while he slept or waked, that she was near him.

CHAPTER XV.

"It cannot be that love so deep as mine
Could fail to stay you like ethereal wine."

When he first understood the full import of the dreadful story, John Graham had been dazed with grief. He had sought distraction from his torturing thoughts in action, and had spent that first day in wandering through the forest. When he lay down to sleep that night in the lodge, his heart was burdened with the double weight of Millicent's secret and Millicent's deceit. He said to himself that they had put an insuperable bar between her and himself. He could have pardoned the disgrace which had befallen her, and was not her fault, but he could never forgive her deceit toward him. The finding of her kerchief the next morning, and the terrible apprehension which the blood-stain had aroused in him, swept away the anger and sorrow from his heart, leaving nothing there but an agonizing fear. This had been, in turn, banished by the joy of finding her alive and unharmed, waiting for him amidst the roses. The great fear had softened the anger in his heart; the sudden happiness exalted his soul from the hell of anguish in which it had dwelt, into a perfect and pure peace. Pride, anger, and resentment were swept away, and love swayed him with its mastery. He knew her now, faulty as she was; and his higher nature forgave her, because of her great love, because of her great wrong. But in his stormy breast the tide of feeling flowed and ebbed; pride had reigned there so long that love could not all at once claim undisputed sway. He could not learn in an instant that pride is born of hell, while love is breathed from heaven. In that strange moment when their two beings had seemed etherealized, he had forgiven her all; but in the days that followed, pride, doubt, and prejudice came forward one by one to do combat with victorious love. It might be that they would conquer in the struggle; it might even be that pride, being selfish, should make him doubt and finally even forget love, which is unselfish. But he had pardoned her, and loved her with all her sins; he had acknowledged that bond of spirit which made them one; he had knelt before her and kissed her feet in a passionless embrace full of reverence. No matter what griefs should fall upon her, no matter what deed or word of his might put them apart in this world, she should carry through her life, and beyond it, the knowledge that what was highest in him had leapt to meet her love, and acknowledged that they belonged each to other for eternity.

John Graham awoke one morning to find himself possessed of a picture. He had seen it between waking and sleeping, in the early hours of the night, and it had haunted his dreams till sunrise. He heard the wondrous carolling of the birds just before dawn, with a joy greater than was his wont, for it heralded the day which should bring light for his work. French John, coming in with his breakfast, for the first time in his life entered and left the tower without word or look of greeting from the artist, who, with bent brow and serious face, was sketching in the first lines of his picture with a bit of white chalk. The half-finished portrait of Mrs. Patrick Shallop looked at him with one reproachful eye from the easel; but Graham paid no heed to the neglected portrait; he was deeply engrossed in pursuing his thought and preserving it in a tangible shape. It is a rare thing, in this age of the worship of the golden calf, for the artist even to be absorbed in the love of his profession. Of old, it seems that the sages and the sculptors wrought and thought for the sake of art and learning, the spur of ambition being all that was necessary to urge them forward. To-day the goal toward which such men strive is a golden one, and the worship of money is more in vogue than the pursuit of glory.

When artists sell their souls, brains, and talents to dealers, engaging to deliver so many works of art in so many months, on such and such a class of subjects, bargaining by the wholesale for the work which they shall produce during the coming twelve-month, what wonder that the cry of the connoisseur is, Too much technique, too little sentiment! "What is sentiment?" one would ask such a babler; is it a thing to be measured off by the yard, or sold in canvases to suit traders, who feel the pulse of the public, and if it is feverish give more stimulant, or if it is fainting prescribe an anodyne? To such prostitution do these men strive to degrade the arts, but

in vain. Apollo's voice is still stronger than the chink of doubloons; and there are those whose ears are ever strained to catch his mystic music. The art trade, the literary trade, may flourish luxuriantly, growing like weeds, with a rank prodigality; but the flowers of art and literature, for all that, stand serenely strong in the garden of our fair young world, growing day by day in beauty and strength. Their blossoming may be rare in this day and generation, but the plants are sound and full of a mighty sap.

Though John Graham was a man of the world, there was no taint of worldliness about him; he knew the world, because he had lived somewhat in it, but more, perhaps, because he had studied the lives of the world's people. The painting of a picture was to him of more importance than its sale; the conception of a work more than its accomplishment. His enthusiasm was apt to wane as his picture neared completion. The great glow with which the idea came to him kept him warm and interested through all the stages of the crystallization of his thought; but when the work was finished he ceased to prize it, and either threw himself into a new composition, or patiently labored at uninteresting mechanical work until he was again inspired. It was with difficulty that he could be induced to sell his pictures; he would sometimes keep them before him for years, waiting to alter some detail or to remedy some defect. His friends, knowing his reluctance to part with them, were wont to wait till they knew the artist to be in absolute need of funds, and then quietly to walk away with the coveted picture, forcing him to accept its price. A few people only in California understood or cared for his landscapes, or the rare works of imagination which he produced; and it was through his portraits that he was chiefly known. He felt in himself an unfitness for this line of work; and had it not been for the sake of his beloved mother, partially dependent on him, it is not likely that he would ever have followed it. The reason was not far to seek why. Graham did not succeed in that important branch of art: the individual had little interest for him; men and women absorbed him less than nature. Every tree and brooklet, dead forest leaf or purpled thunder-cloud, held for him a lesson. Men and women seen from a distance were more likely to interest him than those with whom he was thrown in close contact. When their lives and actions were viewed in an impersonal perspective, he understood them better, and often theorized about them. His thoughts were oftener occupied with people of whom he knew little than with his friends and intimates. To seek truth first and beauty second, was his creed; but his life was not always guided by that high rule; and the jack-o'-lantern beauty sometimes tempted him from the pursuit of truth, leading him on long rambles over smiling meads and into flower-hedged swamp lands. There would he lie undone, angry and smarting from the thorns through which beauty had led him; and then, turning his back upon her, would trudge earnestly along the road which leads truthward. Millicent had once whispered to him that he mistook two loving sisters for dread rivals, and that truth and beauty, when truly seen, are found together; whereat Graham had looked full into her eyes, long and steadily, and kissing her hand, with a sigh, had spoken of other things.

Lying beside him on the floor, as he worked upon his newly imagined picture, was a painting nearly finished, on which he had been working the previous day. A wooden panel, on which was represented the ever-new subject, fairest of themes to artist and poet,—two lovers, standing together in the rosy dawn of love, ere the scorching sun of passion has deepened their cool morning into a fervid midday. The man's figure was strong and graceful, his attitude one of protection; the girl's rounded and delicate body swayed toward her lover, whose arm enfolded her. His face was turned away, the eyes looking far, as if into the future; while her delicate features were turned toward him, her glance trustfully fastened on his face. The color of the warm woodland background was mellow and rich, bringing out the deeper tones of the figures. The resemblance of the girl to Millicent Almsford could hardly have been unintentional, one who knew her well would have said; and yet Graham was only half-conscious that the face and figure recalled her chief traits. He had thought of her as he worked; and beneath his brush her bronze hair and luminous face had been shadowed out more distinctly every day. A rare picture, full of beauty and sentiment; but thrown aside to-day for the new inspiration which had seized upon the artist. The subject to be treated was the entrance of the Poet to the abode of the Muses. He sketched the Poet, mounted on his winged horse, just crossing the narrow, defile which led to the sacred spot. With knit brows and earnest face, Graham worked at the sketch all day; only leaving his tower when the daylight failed him. As he wandered through the dim forest aisles, he thought of Millicent for the first time, remembering that he had agreed to ride with her in the afternoon at three o'clock; it was now past six. Without the slightest feeling of remorse at his failure to keep the engagement, he determined to ride over to the house and see her. Millicent received him rather coolly, having spent the afternoon crying with worry and disappointment at his non-

appearance; and he, only half noticing her mood, failed to understand it. He was dimly aware that her society was not as agreeable as usual, and consequently he devoted himself to Mrs. Deering during the evening. At first Miss Almsford kept aloof from the conversation; but later, when her lover began to talk brilliantly, she drew near to where he sat and listened to his words with downcast eyes. Graham was in wonderful vein that night; his every gesture spoke of a strong under-current of excitement. His eyes shone, and his deep voice had a thrill of enthusiasm which stirred the pulses of the calm-browed girl, sitting near by with softly folded hands and parted, breathless lips. But it was neither for Millicent, nor because of Millicent, that the young man talked so brilliantly. A more stimulating influence than hers had touched him, and he was beyond the reach of her sympathy; exalted by the wings of his genius to that clear, cool, lonely communion with the immortals which only such as he experience. Dismayed, and yet full of reverence for this new phase of his nature, Millicent was filled with a great pain. She was left behind; she could follow but not accompany the flight of his fancy; and a sense of lonely desolation chilled the hot heart-blood with a depression the like of which she had never before known. The ethereal quality of her being recognized and did honor to his bold up-winging; but the personal, selfish side rebelled at the neglect to which she was subjected. The struggle in her breast was at that time unintelligible to herself; in after days, when the baser nature had been overcome, she realized it all, and knew that the long death-struggle of self began that night when Graham's eyes looked beyond her for inspiration, up to the blue-starred empyrean over both their heads.

More from habit than because he needed her society, her lover asked her to step for a moment upon the piazza before he left. As they stood side by side, he absently took her firm, small hand in his and kissed the pink fingers one by one, as if she had been a child. All at once he perceived that she was weeping, her slender form shaken by a storm of sobs.

"Millicent, my child, what is it? Are you ill?" he asked, tenderly stroking her hair.

"No, only unhappy. Graham, why did you not come for me to-day? I waited for you all the afternoon."

"Did I not tell you, dear, that I was very busy? I have begun a new picture. I quite forgot my engagement with you,—I am very sorry," he answered, puzzled at her emotion.

"Then it is your picture that is my rival. I hate it, I hate it! I never want to see it!"

"Millicent, what do you mean?"

Her only answer was to lay her aching head upon his breast, to twine her arms about him, and to sob out incoherent words of love and grief, all of which puzzled and wearied him. He soothed her tenderly; and when they parted there was a smile upon her lips, though her breast still trembled with the slow after-waves of a grief which shook her whole being. Graham, unnerved by the tempest which he had all unwittingly aroused, reached his tower in an excited and irritable frame of mind. The first thing that met his eyes was the picture of the lovers lying at the foot of the easel. He picked it up, placed it on the table before him, and long and critically surveyed his work.

"I painted better than I knew," he sighed. "Yes, thus it is that we stand toward each other, man and woman, and ever shall stand,—the man looking out beyond, above, the woman, and she finding her utmost limit of self-projection in him. Alas and alas!" He placed the painting with its face toward the wall, and with a moody brow turned to his new sketch.

"Bah, I can do nothing, see nothing in that picture; I have been too rudely summoned back to earth, to the little griefs of humanity, by a woman's tears. I was never meant for it, I cannot bear it." So ran his thoughts impatiently. He had been living in the passionless perfection of art, and had been suddenly recalled by a little creature, full of small human feelings, to this narrow world. Nettled and unstrung, he threw himself upon his hard bed, to dream of Millicent,—a happy dream, in which she knelt before him, acknowledging her fault, pleading his forgiveness; a dream of sweet reconciliation, wherein was memory of that hour among the redwoods, of that mystic soul-embrace but once known to him his whole life through. He awoke refreshed and strengthened, with a love-song on his lips tender as that of the mourning dove. Sundown showed him again at his easel after a long day's work; but that evening Millicent listened in vain for the patter of Tasso's hoofs among the softly rustling autumn leaves.

In the week which followed Graham did not venture to see Millicent again, fearing her disturbing influence on his work. He sent her every day by his faithful henchman some little memento. One morning it was a quick sketch of the sunset of the previous night. Another day it was a bunch of pretty brown quails, the result of an hour's shooting. Once she found hung upon her window-ledge a garland of dewy red roses; and easily guessed what strong, light figure had

swung itself up the piazza post, and over the trellis-work, to lay this offering before her curtained window.

Henry Deering, passing by the piazza on the night the lovers had parted, heard the sound of weeping. In the days that followed, he noticed Millicent's reddened eyes and restless mood. He felt sure that some misunderstanding had arisen between them; and as the days passed, and Graham failed to appear, he began to believe that the breach was a serious one. In the old days he had loved Graham as a brother; but in the last months his affection had grown cold, and held a weak place in his heart, from whence jealousy was fast banishing it. Now that he believed his old friend to have grieved the woman they both loved, a feeling of antipathy and an undefined distrust possessed him.

After the long day's work it was his custom to sit for an hour or so upon the piazza beneath Millicent's window, watching the beam of light which shone through her closed blinds until it was extinguished. One night, as he sat alone, the drowsy humming of the insects soothed him into a light sleep. When he awoke with a start, the moon, which had not before been visible, was high in the heavens. As he was about to go in-doors he heard a footstep on the path outside the house. He remained motionless in his chair, resolved to see who was abroad so late. The footsteps were uncertain and stealthy. The person first approached the house, and then retreated to the turf, where the steps were hardly audible. Deering stepped lightly to the edge of the piazza and peered through the honeysuckle screen. At a distance of twenty feet from him stood a man looking up at the house, at Millicent's window. His face was hidden by a muffler and a broad hat pulled low over the brows. Deering drew his revolver and cocked it. The click of the lock evidently reached the intruder's ears, for he turned and fled toward the orchard. Deering sprang from the piazza, and shouting, "Who are you? Stop, or I 'll fire!" ran down the path. The fugitive neither answered nor slackened his pace. Deering fired, aiming low down; but the ball whistled by the man and buried itself in the heart of a peach-tree. In the close shrubbery which surrounded the orchard Deering missed his man; and three minutes later he heard the swift tramp of a pair of horses on the path which led to the high-road. He ran to the stable. Nothing there but the mules and old Sphinx; his own fleet mare and Millicent's thorough-bred were grazing in the pasture. He slipped a bridle over the old mustang's head, and sprang on his back without waiting for a saddle. By the time he reached the highway the riders were out of sight, and the echo of the distant hoof-beats reached his ears. Pursuit was useless; they were well mounted; and Sphinx had gone dead lame the day before. The young man listened to the faint sound of the hoofs until it died in the silent night. Then he dismounted and examined the road. There were the traces of two horses. As he looked closely at the impressions left on the thick dust, he saw that only one of the horses had carried a rider; the other had been led.

When he returned to the house he found the family aroused. Barbara met him on the piazza, asking anxiously what had happened. The report of the revolver had awakened her.

"It was a bear, Barbara," said her brother. "It is a shame to have roused you all, and for nothing, too. I thought I had a sure shot, and that we should have bear-steak for dinner to-morrow."

"A bear, Hal? How strange! Why, this is the first time one ever came so near the house, is n't it?"

"No; Ralph killed two long ago, before you can remember. Go to bed now, and get the house quiet, for heaven's sake!"

The young man kept his own counsel, and the next morning made a careful examination of the grounds near the house. On the farther side of the orchard there were traces of a pair of horses having been tethered.

Two more days went by, and still Graham did not come. Millicent was distressed and puzzled at his long absence; and finally, after thoughtful deliberation, she decided to write to him, telling him how grieved she was at her own unreasonable behavior.

Graham found a letter early one morning folded in an embroidered kerchief, and laid before the door of his tower. That heavy unpainted barrier could have told a tale like that of Tennyson's talking oak, had it been given the power of speech. Trembling lips had pressed timid kisses upon its weather-beaten panels. Strange old door of the tower, roughly fashioned by the Mission priests a century ago, what secrets have you not shut in; what hopes have you not seen pass out between your time-rusted lintels!

It was the first letter Millicent had ever written him; he had but once before seen her handwriting. The girlish, weak hand which had traced the words in the little journal was greatly altered. It was now a graceful, flowing chirography, full of that individuality which stamped

everything appertaining to her. Graham studied the superscription carefully before he broke the golden seal, with its device of Psyche with new-found wings. It ran as follows:--

BELOVED,--Forgive me! forgive me if you will, for I cannot forgive myself. I was wrong to grudge you the time passed with your work. It was weak and selfish of me; but now that I know my fault, be not afraid. Believe that I am strong enough to overcome it. For the red roses at my window I thank you; and for the fair picture and the graceful couplet, for all the tender thoughts which prompted you to send me these tokens, bless you a hundred times. But oh! my lover, come to me; and let me read in your strange eyes, that are now bright and cold as ocean deeps, and again burning with Promethean fire, that I am forgiven. Not rose nor picture, not poem nor sweet garland, can tell me as can they that you love me.

MILLICENT.

Graham read the letter through twice, and folded it away, with a sigh. "Do I love her? Does she love me?" he queried; and all that day the doubt tormented him. While he worked, while he took his afternoon ramble through the woods, while he sat at his solitary supper, it rankled in his mind. He could not solve it; could she? It were best at least to ask her. It was only right that she should know of his doubts of her and of himself. He found her flushed with pleasure at the sight of him. She had anticipated his coming, and was dressed in soft colors which he approved, and fair with a hundred little efforts of coquetry to please him. Her bronze hair seemed to the man but a mesh to snare him. He turned his eyes impatiently from the pretty, bare arms, and the cool, snowy shoulders shining through transparent draperies. His judgment should not be turned aside by her loveliness. He greeted her coolly, barely touching her outstretched hand; and then stood looking gloomily into the distance, not knowing what to say, uncertain of the truth, doubting her. The woman, quick to see his trouble, spoke to him tenderly, with a low, soothing voice, thanking him for coming to her, telling him how long the time had seemed since they had met.

"And tell me all about your new picture."

"I cannot, Millicent; your letter spoiled my day's work. I have done nothing since I read it."

"Dear, what can you mean?"

"This, Millicent,--that my work must always be first to me. I had thought that you would help me in it, but it is not so." After a pause, "Millicent, I think we have made a mistake, you and I. We cannot help each other, and therefore we hinder one another. You dazzle me with your beauty, and send me back to my work unfitted for it; while I only make you unhappy, and fear I can never do anything else."

"Graham, you kill me." She looked indeed as if a blow had been planted in her breast, as she reeled, all white and trembling, to a seat. Her words seemed to deepen the nervous agitation which possessed him, for he said impatiently,--

"What can I do? It is not my fault that you have neither the best love to give me, nor the power to arouse it in me. I tell you, child, that we have been mistaken, and that it is time for this thing to end."

"No, no, Graham; you are angry, you know not what you say. In mercy speak no more." She had sunk upon her knees, her clasped hands stretched toward him in an agony of fear.

"Do not kneel to me, but listen; for I am right. If things had been different, it might have been; but as they are, we have been mad to think of it. There is no help for it, my girl; we must kiss and part. You never loved me as you should, Millicent, because you could not. A woman can love but once, and that is the first time."

"It is not true. You, who are a man, say it. What woman ever said it? It is a lie, a lie! You shall not say it, you must not think it. You would make us creatures without souls indeed. Are they right, then, the Easterns? If when we women are sold, or stolen, or entrapped, we must love, and only then, you deny us other life than that of the earth. Of what man would you hold this doctrine to be true? It is utterly false! it is wicked! it is unworthy of you!" She moaned where she had fallen on the ground, and tried to speak again; but the man continued with a pitiless stream of words, sincere, earnest, spoken for her good as well as his own.

"We have been loitering together for a time, child, on life's way, and have chased the golden butterfly of pleasure which men oft mistake for love. Before we are too deeply entangled in the briers, we must turn from the chase, we must forget each other. We can be of no good, one to the other; and I will be no more harm to you than I have been."

He could not see her face now; it was hidden on her arm as she crouched where his words had thrown her. The pathos of the attitude touched him; he gently lifted one of the tightly

clined hands, and loosened the fingers which so fiercely bit the delicate palm. He was in a strange mood, when heart and soul seemed absent from him, and only the clear, strong brain prompted his words. Her passionate grief hardened rather than softened the look in his eyes. This girl, who had been as wax in his fingers,--glad when he smiled, weeping when he sighed, swayed invariably by the mood which possessed him,--now denied by piteous word and gesture the words which he was speaking. Her hand, unlocked by him, would have clasped his stronger palm; but at the caress he dropped her arm and turned his eyes from her.

"I cannot give you up," she murmured; "you must not leave me so. Oh, my love, you wrong me, you wrong yourself! I love you, Graham, with all my soul; I love you as I never thought to love before! Cruel--cruel! It is not with lips and eyes that I have loved you, for you could lose that, and yet miss nothing from your life. Turn not from me, if you would not leave that which is best worth having by the roadside, and press on to find that goal towards which your ambition spurs you, empty and void without me at your side! It is your worse nature which doubts mine. Graham, Graham! what matters it if hand and eyes have been another's? My soul is only yours, wakened first when your strong spirit called it from the sleep begun before it was vested in this body, ere it was divided from your own."

The last words, faintly whispered, hardly reached his ears. To-day their import could not have been felt by him. In other times he understood, and sufferingly admitted the truth of those incoherent words, which died on the air as soon as they were breathed, and yet whose memory abode with him his life through. He had come to Millicent not knowing what he should say, and the words seemed to have spoken themselves. He was sorry, as is the surgeon for the pain which he inflicts; but, like the physician, he felt that mercy lay in mercilessness. As she lay weeping at his feet, a strong tide of emotion swept over him, leaving him pale and trembling. He lifted her with eager hands, and on shoulder, brow, and pallid mouth he pressed cruel, parting kisses, which carried no balm to her broken heart, and brought no ease to his fevered spirit. Then he broke from her with a mighty effort, passion and pride wasting him with a terrible warring, and fleeing through the night left her there cold and nerveless, like a broken lily amidst the dews and damps.

In the days which followed, Barbara watched with tender solicitude Millicent's changed face and nerveless step. Only through her sympathetic perceptions did she know of the girl's trouble; of what nature it was she surmised, not incorrectly. Lovers' quarrels are usually looked upon with a tolerant amusement by intimate friends and relatives; and when they are of short duration, it is usually considered advisable to ignore them altogether. But as weeks passed, and Barbara learned that Graham was in San Francisco, she redoubled her little attentions, and shielded Millicent as best she could from her mother's anxious questions.

Angry and rebellious was Millicent in these days, with that terrible under-feeling of anguish which must outlive anger and rebellion; that fainting of the soul, when all that has supported it seems to have sunk away, and it is left absolutely without power to resist an all-devouring despair. Her happiness had been so short-lived; her misery was so terrible, so unending! Her young life, which had been balked of its natural joyousness and youth, had suddenly been illumined with the pure and perfect light of the love which passeth all understanding, and now she was in darkness blacker than she had ever known. The anguish of that great love was not wanting, and she suffered with a new sense of her capacity for pain. In her dumb grief she knew that the agony was not undeserved; this was the bitterest drop in the cup of tears. She had not told him her sad secret; she had deceived him! She had meant to tell him of the blot upon her name, before their lives had become irrevocably joined; but she had put off the dreaded moment until it was too late: he knew all now, and not by her confession. Would she ever have had the courage to tell him? She almost doubted herself. Was she deceitful by nature? she asked herself a hundred times, questioning her deep eyes in the mirror's depth. No, she knew that her frank, sincere character had been warped and distorted by the evil influence of the man whose name she would have cursed, had not the grave closed over him, burying his sins and her reproaches in the cold earth. Poor child, poor women all, the weaker creatures in this remorseless world! When they are bruised and broken by the force of their masters, is it strange, is it unpardonable, that the weapon of the weak tempts them? Who forged that weapon for them, who forced them to use it? If there were no unjust oppression among men, no brutal abuse of a superior force, would women be driven to deceit, that refuge of the weak?

In this sophistry she wrapped herself, but was not satisfied. She had been tried and found wanting. This it was that had lost to her the lover for whom she had faced death. He might not know it; he had never said it; but she recognized what had driven him from her side,--the fault

was hers. Was it unpardonable? Could he never forgive her? Must their lives be separated, now that spirit had kissed soul? Must the long waiting last until time should be ended for them both, and Eternity begun?

Of all cruel gifts, is not that which lingered in Pandora's box the one through which men suffer most fiercely? O Hope! if thou hadst escaped along with the rest of the heathen god's blessings, how many tortured souls would now be at rest in a fixed and accepted grief which struggles not, neither rebels at the decrees of destiny! Unquenchable art thou, robbing sad mortals of all repose; even in death shall they not find rest; thou troublest the dying with thy visions of a future! With resolute hands sorrowing women seize upon thee, and would stifle thee in their breasts; but though thou dost sometimes simulate death, when the watchful hands loosen their hold thou springest up stronger and more cruel than before, and tormentest the sufferer with thy struggles!

"If it would only die--if it would only die!" moaned Millicent, as she paced her room, her hands crossed heavily upon her breast, as if to stifle some tangible spark with their weight. A thousand times she submitted to the rest of a despair which was all too quickly routed by the fever of a hope which could not die.

CHAPTER XVI.

"If we should part and pass to separate ways
With stifled sigh, averted head,
Within a land where centuries are as days
Our love shall live though flesh and wrong lie dead."

And her lover, where was he? In the heart of the city, working in a garret on his great picture, for the sake of which he had forsaken the woman he loved. Intolerant of opposition was Graham; and when once an idea had been accepted by him, it was next to an impossibility for him to give it up. He had become convinced that his love for Millicent would make him faithless to his work; that the love of woman was not compatible with the highest devotion to art. Her fond dependence on him would drain his strength. Without his work he could neither be satisfied nor satisfy her. The closer she clung to him the more did he recoil from her. In the strength of his genius, he laughed at the idea that a loving companionship was necessary to him; and yet hours came, at the end of a long day's work, in the quiet watches of the night when the city slept about him, in which all his theories were overset, in a terrible longing for the girl whose sad eyes haunted him. To see her and to touch her; to hear her low, deep voice; to forget all the grievous striving of his life, in the restful warmth of hers! He thought of her always as he had first seen her, lying before the fire, her slender figure robed in white, her head supported in the hands which he had so often caressed. Waiting for him, she seemed to have been then. Waiting for him, he loved to fancy her always. These tender thoughts drifted through his mind in the soft twilight, or before the dawn. In the fervid daylight he only remembered her as she had been on that last evening, rebellious and close-clinging, desperate, beautiful, and full of unrest.

The city tired him with its everlasting sounds of traffic. The tread of dray horses and the rumbling of carts sounded in his ears from earliest dawn till late night. There was no peace here amongst his fellow-men. He longed for the solitude of his tower, for his forest neighbors, for the sound of the woods, the wide arch of blue sky, seen now through one narrow slit between the opposing houses.

One morning he determined to take a day of rest; and, after making a light breakfast at a coffee-house near by, he started for the San Rosario Ranch, with a lighter heart than he had carried in his bosom for many days. It was a bright morning; the air was crisped with a prediction of winter weather, genial enough in this region at its worst. As he passed through the familiar country he traced some likeness to Millicent Almsford in every object on which his eyes lighted. Now it was the golden-brown of her hair seen in the shiny coat of a sleek filly frolicking in a pasture; now it was her graceful movements traced in the trembling branches of a straight young sapling; again, her gray eyes smiled in his face from under the brows of a fair child playing by the roadside. The harsh voice of the wheels thundering over the steel rails seemed to be repeating

her name; and his heart kept time with the refrain, beating out the syllables rhythmically,--Millicent, Millicent, Millicent! He was weary of reasoning with himself. For six days in the week his work was all-sufficing, and he needed no other companionship; but on the seventh day he longed for rest; he needed beauty, he needed love. He knew that it was weak in him to waver in his resolution not to see Millicent again; he knew that it was a wrong to her, and that he would bitterly regret it in after days. And yet he yielded to that exquisite golden haze which seemed to have dropped about him, flooding his life with a passionate delight, an ecstasy of expectation.

He alighted at the station, and stood watching the receding train with strained eyes. He wished now that he had not come. He walked up and down the narrow platform, flushed and unnerved with the tumult in his breast. On his right lay the dusty carriage-road which led to the house; on his left a narrow bridle-path pierced the woods, over which he must pass to reach his tower. Which should it be,--a day passed with the creatures of the forest, under the blue sky and murmuring trees; or an hour of the soft delight which Millicent's voice, Millicent's eyes, Millicent's lightest finger-touch, wrapped about him? He realized now how he had cheated himself. He had said that it was the wood-birds whose voices wooed him from the city! He knew now that beneath that longing for the free air of his forest home lay the deeper desire which had tempted him to leave his picture half finished, his palette half set.

Which road should he take? Not more unstable was the blue ring of smoke which the breeze carried from his lips, tossing it hither and thither in a cloudy wreath upon the white air, than was this man between the opposing influences which divided his nature. At last he tossed his cigarette upon the platform, carefully quenching its spark with his foot, and with a light, fleet step ran down the wide carriage-road which led to the house--which would bring him to Millicent. He had known all along, with that inner consciousness which decides with lightning rapidity a question which the intellect debates long and seriously, that his feet would follow that pleasant, open road rather than the dark wood-trail; and yet the train had sped twenty miles further on its journey before he turned his face toward the happy valley. So clumsy is reason compared to instinct; so tedious are the modes of thought to the working of the feelings; so useless is the grave gate of wisdom to check the tumultuous torrent of feeling.

He found the wide piazza deserted, the front door fast closed, the blinds of the library and dining-room tightly drawn. The hospitable house was silent and deserted. His imperative summons was finally answered by a domestic, the successor of poor Ah Lam, who in his ridiculous vernacular informed the visitor that "Alley folk go waly." Which, being translated into English, signified that no one was at home.

Graham felt as if a flood of cold water had been dashed into his face. He shivered, as he turned from the door and descended the steps; and yet before he had walked two miles in the familiar road which led to his tower, he gave a profound sigh of relief. It was better so! The exercise had cooled his fevered blood; the crisp forest air had brought reason back to his passion-tossed breast. It was better that he had not seen her. Something of the fatalist was there about this strong-brained rationalist. He half fancied that it was not chance alone which had decreed that Millicent should be absent from the Ranch that day. But he sang no more as he had done on his way to the house; and his serious face lost that smile of hope which had lighted the eyes and touched the mouth into an unaccustomed softness. If he was silent, the wild birds were melodious, and he walked between choirs of invisible songsters; while the whirring of a partridge, the fleet step of a wild fox in the thicket, gave him the assurance that he was not alone in the mysterious wood. At last the distance was accomplished; and at high noon, when the shadows had all shrunk back into the tall trees before the ardent heat of the sun, he reached the ruin of the old church. He leaned against the fragment of a pillar which stood at the foot of the staircase, and looked up at the square gray tower with its close-clinging pall of moss and yellow lichens. From a rift in the wall burst a blaze of color,--a clump of wallflowers stretching its flame of blossoms upward toward his window. He noticed that the casement was open; and as he looked he saw the fluttering of a bit of drapery over the edge of the sill. It must have been the curtain, of course; but the sight of it gave him a strange sensation, not unlike one that he had experienced before on that spot, when he had been tricked by the moonlight into fancying that there was a woman straying in the aisles of the old church. He remembered that night and what it had revealed to him; and at the black thought the sky seemed to have darkened over his head. He had stood dreaming at the tower foot for fifteen minutes, and in that time the sky had become overcast, a cold wind had sprung up and now blew into his face, carrying a host of big drops with it. The rain had come at last! After the long spring and summer unmarred by clouded skies or rude gusts, the first rain had come. With a rough tenderness it dashed itself against the parched

land and shook the tall trees till they murmured a delighted welcome. The dusty ferns growing low down about the knees of the great trees caught the happy news, and uncurled their tender fernlings that they might feel the welcome touch of the rain-drops, as they filtered through the greedy leaves and raced down the straight stems to reach the myriads of thirsty mouths yearning for their balm. The rain had come; and the languid stream, which had pined and shrunk to a pitiful thread of water, leaped joyously down its rocky bed. It would grow strong and young and beautiful again; its banks would bloom with flowers; its course would no longer run painfully over heated stones, between seared brown edges,--the rain had come!

On the narrow stairway Graham paused, near the top. Something shining lay on the step before him. The object proved to be a small silver arrow, tipped with a feather of brilliants. He picked up the jewelled toy, which he had once before held in his hand,--one evening when he had withdrawn it from the soft tresses which it caught together behind a small white ear. His hand trembled as he remembered the soft rushing of silken curls over his arm, the fragrance which had floated about him, the look of loving reproach which had punished his audacity. Wondering how the arrow had found its way to the threshold of his tower, Graham tried to open the heavy door with his key. To his surprise it refused to yield; the bolt was drawn on the inside. Some one was in his tower. Thinking that the Frenchman, in whose care his room had been left, might be at work, he lifted the heavy brass dolphin which served for a knocker, and rapped loudly. There was no answer. The rain by this time was falling in torrents. He was entirely without shelter; and he knocked a second time, calling out to know who was inside the room. He heard a light step approach the door, and a hand was laid upon the lock. The old wood-cutter could never have walked with that musical footstep; the soft rustle of garments could not have been made by him. Graham's heart leaped from its quiet beating into a very tumult of pulsations, as the bolt was gradually drawn and the heavy door swung slowly open. On the threshold of his lonely tower stood Millicent, with downcast eyes and pale face. For a moment he was silent, looking at her, doubting his own vision; fearing to move lest she should vanish from before his eager eyes as she did in his dreams. Could this beautiful, colorless creature, with marble cheeks and fallen lids, with sombre garments and nerveless, pallid hands crossed upon the breast, be Millicent Almsford? He stepped nearer with outstretched hands to touch her, to feel that it was in verity the woman who had lain weeping at his feet that night among the roses. He would have folded her to his breast, but the white lids flashed open, the sad, tear-worn eyes looked into his own with an expression which made him draw back; and the girl, without a word, passed out of the doorway and stood unprotected in the driving storm.

Before her mute grief, his passionate longing was turned to a great and holy pity. He stood beside her and said gently,--

"Millicent, you will not leave me without a word? You must not go out into the storm; I will leave you here alone, if you wish, until the rain is over. Do not be so cruel as to doubt me, dear one."

He stopped, for his words had made her tremble. She feared him no longer, and with a little sigh laid her hand in his and suffered him to lead her into the room. The artist placed his visitor in a great chair, and busied himself in making a fire on his cold hearth.

"Now this is more cheerful, fair lady, is it not?" he cried, in a pleasant voice. "And pray tell me what brought you to my lonely dwelling."

"I had always wanted to see your tower, Graham; and this morning they all went to San Francisco for the day, and I thought I would ride over and look at it from the outside. I found old John airing the room, and accepted his invitation to rest here for half an hour before riding home. He came up just now to tell me that it was going to rain, but as he thought it would be only a shower he had put my horse under shelter. This is how I came here; and now tell me what brought you so unexpectedly from town."

"I cannot tell, white one. Your will, perhaps."

"Nay, friend, that has never swayed thee one hair's-breadth from thine appointed course."

He shook his head sadly, and looked out of the window. She did not know--it was better for her perhaps that she never should know--how great an influence she had wielded over his life. She did not know that for her, faith and youth had bloomed in his heart when he had thought them dead. Her untruth was killing them, and their death-agony had shaken and worn him cruelly. She thought him hard and relentless. It might be easier for her to dull the pain in her heart, with this consciousness of injury received. He would never tell her of the irreparable wrong she had done him. If he was not forgiving he was magnanimous. No word of reproach should pass his lips.

Outside the rain was pouring down, but less steadily; the patter of the drops sounded more and more lightly on the window-panes. The shower would not long continue. Graham took note of the clearing sky, and sighed heavily. With all her faults he loved her; the tower would be lonelier than ever when she had flitted from it like a sprite of the rain-storm. The great trees outside lifted up their branches with a mighty wailing, echoing his sigh; and Millicent, as if conscious that love was pleading against pride in that strong heart which had never learned the lesson of forgiveness, turned her white, appealing face towards him. The man's being had been swept that day with fiery impulses from the first moment of consciousness. Passionate love, pity, scorn, and anger had in turn written their impress on his mobile face. He came close to her side, and taking both her hands in his, knelt at her side:

"O Millicent, Millicent! could he not have spared you? We could have loved each other so truly! Poor child, poor child! What fiend was he to have betrayed you! But now it can never be, never, never, never!" The words rang out drearily, the death-knell of all that had made life beautiful to them both. The pale girl sat motionless, speechless, her eyes dark with horror, her hands nerveless in his passionate grasp. Tears fell upon those white fingers which he had so often kissed,--cruel tears wrung from the bruised heart of the man she loved; tears that she had no power to check, tears that had their source in her own sin. In that hour of agony, if remorse may in aught atone for error, Millicent must have been forgiven of the angels. The proud man knew how to suffer, but he could not forgive. He arose and dashed the tears from his eyes; they had cost him mortal pain.

The rain was over, the gray sky had cleared; and Millicent, like a gray shadow, slipped from the tower, leaving her lover alone, with the mocking sunlight shining on his dark, tear-stained face.

CHAPTER XVII.

"Our bread was such as captives' tears
Have moistened many a thousand years,
Since man first pent his brother men
Like brutes within an iron den."

It was a long chase that brought Hal Deering and Maurice Galbraith face to face with the ruffian, whom Hal readily identified. They found him with a group of new-found friends in the chief liquor saloon of a small, rather disreputable town, fifty miles from the Ranch. When the two young men entered the place, the man they were looking for asked them to join in the "all-round drink" he was about to "stand treat for," which invitation was promptly declined by Hal Deering. After a whispered word, Galbraith had left the shop; and Hal, seating himself at a table, awaited the return of his friend, quietly enduring the insulting remarks which the offended Horton heaped upon him. The loafers in the shop had a kindly feeling toward the man who had treated them, and did not discourage him in his attempts to force the new-comer into a quarrel. But Hal was imperturbable, and answered neither with look nor word. Stimulated by the whiskey he had imbibed, and the admiring attention of his friends, the rowdy finally called out in a brutal voice,--

"If you think yerself too good to drink with this yere crowd, p'raps yer would n't mind amusing 'em by showing 'em the last style of dancing down in 'Frisco. 'T would raley please us to see you step out."

As he spoke he drew his pistol from his belt and pointed it at Deering. The more sober ones of the party here interfered; and the burly saloon-keeper stepped forward with the remark, that he "did n't mean to 'low anything but fair play in his shanty; and that if the gen'l'm'n had a difference between them they must settle it outside."

The man whom Deering was after seated himself astride a hogshead of beer and cocked his pistol, advising the "boss" to keep out of the affair if he valued his "sweet life."

"Now, then, young man, if yer don't cut a caper before I count three, I shall be obliged to see how much of your right boot-heel I can carry away with this bullet, without endangering them handsome feet o' yours."

Hal, only afraid of losing his man, answered coolly,--

"You can shoot if you want to. I am a stranger in this place, and I prefer to do my dancing at home."

The proprietor again interposed, and laying his hand on the bully's shoulder, ordered him to put up his shooting-irons. Horton threw him off, and things were beginning to look rather serious; when Deering saw Galbraith crossing the street with two men, one of whom he recognized as the county sheriff.

"Gentlemen," he said, "I have come a long distance to find this man; I am anxious to have his company as far as the San Bernardino prison, where he will find comfortable board provided for him. If you are law-abiding citizens, you will not interfere with the arrest of Daniel Horton on an indictment of murder."

As he finished speaking, the three men entered, and the sheriff laid his hand on Horton's shoulder. Murder is an ugly word, and a silence followed Hal's speech. The crowd instinctively drew back from the man who had been charged with the foul crime; and a silence ensued, which was broken by the sheriff, a high-voiced little man, who said in a loud tone,--

"I arrest you, Dan Horton, for the murder of Ah Lam, committed at Carey's Bridge, on the afternoon of Wednesday last."

A revulsion of feeling was manifest in the faces of the crowd. The horror for a person who has committed the unattonable crime of murder had been felt; but when it transpired that the victim was a Chinaman, the case appeared to be very much altered. The man, quick to see the favorable change in public sentiment, cried,--

"Wall, boys, you see I am 'spected of having done the business for one of these Chinese vermin. What sort of a town 's this as will see a man 'rested for that?"

Daniel Horton's experience of life in the rough mining towns, where the last five years of his life had been spent, gave him the hope that the men in the saloon would help him to escape from arrest. But though sympathy for him was evinced by the group of idlers, there was no attempt at resisting the officers; and the sheriff, assisted by Galbraith and Deering, finally succeeded in placing the hand-cuffs on his wrists. When he saw that there was no help for him, he submitted to be led from the saloon, giving one parting look of scorn at the friends whom he had won by a glass of liquor and lost on the appearance of an officer.

"Of all the derved mean skunks as I ever met, this town numbers the most," he muttered, as the screen door swung to behind him.

The examination of the prisoner was to be held in the court-room of the county prison of San Bernardino. Millicent was summoned to be present. Escorted by Deering and Galbraith, she arrived before the entrance of the gloomy building, one bright October morning. It was a day when life seemed a pleasant thing, if only because there were sunlight and color in the odorous woods and pleasant highways. Just as they reached the doorway, a line of people filed out from the narrow portal. They were the discharged prisoners, some of whom had been in confinement for twenty-four hours only, while others had not breathed the free air for many weary months. A girl not older than Millicent passed them with a slow, inelastic step and downcast eyes. Her slender figure was poorly but decently clad in a gown of rusty black, her hair neatly arranged, her hands and face clean and of a remarkable pallor. She alone among the little group seemed loath to leave the prison, where at least she had been among those who could not look down on her. At the threshold she paused and shuddered, as if the wide street, with its row of young shade-trees and neat sidewalk, were more forbidding than the narrow prison-yard, with its spiked rails and dismal barred windows. Those who were behind became impatient at her delay; and she was pushed not ungently into the street by the man next to her in the sad procession. As she found herself alone outside the dreary stone building, she gave a low groan, clasping her poor thin hands together over her breast. Millicent, moved by the pathetic gesture, spoke to her gently, asking if she could in any way help her; but the girl shook her head as if annoyed by the question, and walked quickly down the street, taking the first turn which led her out of sight of the prison. All those who followed were men, most of whom wore a conscious expression, as if they were more embarrassed at being seen leaving the prison than mortified at having merited the punishment which they had undergone. As the last of the queue filed out, Galbraith entered the doorway, Millicent following him, and Deering bringing up the rear. In the wide stone hall which they entered were groups of men talking together or leaning idly against the rails. A heavy grated door swung open with a rusty, grinding sound, and two men appeared, arm-in-arm. The taller of the two was a handsome young fellow, with blond, curling hair, blue eyes, and fresh rosy cheeks. His expression was almost infantine in its beauty; and this, with his jaunty air, contrasted strangely with his companion's ugly, stooping figure and downcast, shamed face. The latter was a

misshapen creature, with a humped back and a large, ugly head furnished with coarse hair and beard. As the grate clanged behind the couple, the handsome young fellow laughed cheerily, stretched his limbs, and drew a long breath of relief.

"Ta-ta, bully, hope I won't see you soon again," he said, nodding impudently to the door-keeper. The smaller man was lame, as well as deformed; and the under-warden, who had joined Galbraith, asked him kindly how his leg was doing.

"Better, sir, thank you," croaked the unfortunate in a harsh voice; "it came hard on me not havin' George here to help me; but it's all right now. Good-morning to you, sir."

"Tell me about those men," said Millicent to an official whom Galbraith had introduced to her.

"They are brothers, George and Pete Marcy. Which of them do you think paid a twenty-dollar fine to get his brother out of prison just now? Likely you 'll think it was the good-looking chap; but 't was Pete the dwarf. He 's the tinker and general useful man of the town, is Pete; and George is one of the biggest rascals in the State of California. But he covers his tracks well; and though we know a good many things about him, we can prove nothing more against him than an occasional assault and battery."

"And did the poor little creature pay the fine out of his earnings?"

"Bless you, yes; and pays for his clothes,--nice ones, you remarked, mebbe? Pete gives that rascal every dollar he earns; and the only thing George does toward supporting himself, is to rob an occasional hen-roost when he wants to give a supper party."

The outer door now closed with a grave sound; it had let out its day's quota of men and women who had legally expiated their crimes; it had taken in its one breath of sun and air. From a narrow window Millicent saw the Marcy brothers walking down the street, George with head erect and swaggering gait, Pete shambling awkwardly along at his side, vainly trying to keep pace with his handsome brother's long strides.

The warden now led the way to the court-room. The keeper of the gate, a stern-looking man, with iron-gray hair and iron-rusted clothes, stopped Millicent as she was about to pass through the grated door, saying,--

"Put up your veil, please." Three inches of transparent red tulle masked her face from the brow to the mouth. So slight a covering was it that the superior officer had not noticed it; but nothing escaped the lynx-eyed jailer, who added curtly, "Must keep it up all through the prison. No woman is allowed to enter or leave this place veiled."

Millicent looked a little puzzled as she unfastened the bit of lace; and the grim guardian added, in a voice which was something softer than the grating of his key in the lock,--

"You need n't be ashamed to put up your veil, with *such* a face as yours."

Millicent smiled an acknowledgment of the compliment, and passed through the gate, holding fast to the slip of yellow paper and the red ticket which had been given to her, and which were necessary to secure an exit from that precinct which is so easily entered and so difficult to leave.

"You have captivated that grim old fellow with one glance, Miss Almsford. How do you do it?" queried Galbraith.

"What do you mean? I don't," answered Millicent rather inconsistently.

They had by this time reached the prison-yard; and Millicent, with a shiver, looked up at the high, smooth stone walls, with their cruel topping of iron spikes. In a certain angle she stopped a moment, attracted by a little fern which had found place for its slender roots in a cranny of the masonry. She suddenly started, and with a horrified expression ran back a few paces, grown pale to the lips. The warden, who had looked at her with an odd expression, said,--

"You were standing, just now, miss, on the spot where the gallows is always erected."

"I knew it," said the girl, in a shaking voice. "I saw it."

Maurice Galbraith quietly drew her arm under his own, and said gently, but authoritatively,--

"Come, my child, do not be nervous; you have a great deal to go through with to-day."

He fixed his deep, serious eyes on her face for a moment; and the girl, sensitive to his quiet influence, quickly recovered herself.

They passed up a narrow, dark stone stair-case, and along a corridor running outside the cells. Most of the heavy wooden doors were open, the outer grating of iron revealing the interior of the cells. In one of these a young mulatto, the Figaro of the village, stood leaning against the bars talking to a respectable-looking man of his own color, who proved to be the pastor of a Methodist church. The young man was a handsome fellow, carefully and neatly dressed. He seemed somewhat excited, and talked in a loud voice, which he lowered at the approach of the party. Galbraith inquired what crime he had been charged with, and learned from the officer that he had wounded his brother mortally in a quarrel; "They both was waitin' on the same gal," the

attendant added in explanation. A man lying at full-length upon the floor sprang to his feet as they passed his door, and walked furiously up and down the narrow room, shaking his head from side to side, reminding Millicent of a caged panther she had once seen. Each dreary, cramped apartment imprisoned some unfortunate, either suffering the penalty for, or awaiting the judgment of, his crimes. Millicent felt the chill air of the prison damp and fetid upon her cheek, and yet she did not hurry down the corridor, but walked slowly, apparently looking neither to the right nor left, but with one quick, sidelong glance, taking in the details of each of the cells and the faces of the malefactors, impressions which never faded from her memory. Some of the men laughed impudently as the little group passed their cells; and one fellow of wild aspect buried his face in his hands, with a sudden movement, as if ashamed of being seen behind the disgraceful bars. A pair of youthful criminals were engaged in playing *moro*, the great Italian gambling game. One of the youths was a native of Italy; and he had evidently taught his companion in confinement the simple but exciting game. No cards or dice, checkers or other paraphernalia, are needed; the game is played with the fingers only. Those of the left hand keep the account of the game. With the right hand a quick movement is made by both players simultaneously, showing a certain number of fingers; while at the same moment each calls out his guess of the number which his antagonist holds up,—"due"—"cinque"—"tutti." The familiar words fell upon Millicent's ears, and she stopped outside the door, her cheeks dyed with a flush of pleasure, her eyes sparkling at the sound of her native language. She did not remember that she was in a prison; she thought of nothing but the fact that here was a compatriot; she spoke to him in a low voice a few words of greeting. The fellow stared at her at first; and then, seeing that hers was a friendly face, left his seat on the corner of the narrow bed, came close to the grate and poured out a torrent of words in the patois of the Venetians. When he learned that the signorina was not only of his country, but from his city, the poor fellow, whose crime had been nothing more than participation in a street-fight, was moved to tears. Millicent forgot her companions and the strange place of meeting, and listened with sympathizing attention to the story of the man with the dull red-gold hair and white, delicate features, whose face recalled more than one friend in the far-off city of her home. His profession was that of a cobbler, his name Giovanni Brogli. He had drifted out to this strange country through a love of wandering, and had been drawn into a street-brawl by some chance acquaintances, who had robbed him of all that remained of his small fortune; and when he would have fought his betrayers, they turned him over to the police. True or false, the story was a pitiful one. The creature could speak next to no English; and Millicent's tender heart was troubled by the recital of his griefs. She had no money with her, and before either of her companions was aware of her intention, she had untwined a gold serpent of exquisite workmanship from her throat and held it through the bars to the man inside the cell. He looked at her with wondering eyes, and taking the white fingers in his own rough, blackened hand, kissed them reverently, murmuring a blessing which brought tears to her eyes.

"I say, Princess, you must n't do that sort of thing;" said Hal, thoroughly scandalized, pulling her by the sleeve. "Come on! you can't stand talking to these rascals and giving them your jewelry,—it is n't sensible."

She answered impatiently, and then saying a word of farewell to the prisoner, she submitted to be led away from the grate by Galbraith, followed by a fervent parting blessing from Giovanni of the reddish locks.

"I wish you wouldn't be so absurdly soft-hearted. What did you want to give that beggar your lovely necklace for?" said Hal.

"I had no money with me," half penitently.

"Well, I could have let you have some. But it's against the rule. I should n't wonder if you got into trouble for doing such a thing," continued the young man, who was genuinely shocked at Millicent's behavior.

"There was no harm done, was there, Mr. Galbraith? I won't be scolded. It was my serpent; I will do what I choose with my own things, and will not be dictated to by you." Millicent was angry at Deering's very natural interference; and Galbraith, anxious to spare her all annoyance, gave Hal a warning kick, and hurried her towards their destination, lest she should feel moved to part with any more of her personal property for the benefit of the prisoners.

They now entered a small apartment; and Millicent learned that before the opening of the trial, she was called upon to identify the murderer of Ah Lam. The question was asked,—

"Could you identify, on oath, the man you saw at Carey's Bridge? You were under great excitement at the time; you could hardly be expected to remember anything beyond the fact of the killing."

"I am positive I can identify him."

"On oath; are you sure?"

"Perfectly so."

"How could you surely recognize a man you have seen but once, under very painful circumstances, six weeks ago?"

"I remember his face distinctly; I should know his voice among a thousand."

"Be careful; what you say may be put to the test. What you state in the court you must be able to prove."

"I am ready to prove it."

When the moment came for the identification of the prisoner, Millicent's eyes were bandaged; and twelve men filed into the room, among whom she was told was the man arrested for the crime. As she had made the assertion that his voice alone would betray the murderer to her, she was asked to listen to a sentence repeated in turn by each of these men. Three of them had said the stipulated words, and the fourth was about to speak, when those who were nearest to Millicent noticed that she shuddered violently.

"Let the next man speak."

The fellow looked at Millicent askance, and then repeated the sentence in a low, unnatural voice. He had said but three words when she interrupted him.

"The person who is now speaking is the man who assaulted me at Carey's Bridge."

The judge, who had taken a keen interest in all Millicent had said, now motioned to the men to change places. The bandage being removed, she glanced at the row of men and said,--

"He now stands at the end of the row nearest the window."

Her expression, as she turned her eyes and looked in the face of Daniel Horton, was cold and set as that of one of the younger Fates. Aversion and horror were therein painted. As she spoke she pointed at the guilty wretch, who moved uneasily under her gaze, and dropped his bold eyes before the light in her gray orbs, as if their fire scorched him.

The preliminaries accomplished, all the participants adjourned to the court-room, which was a bare apartment, very grimy, and sadly in need of paint and soapsuds. At one end was a slightly raised table, behind which the judge seated himself. He was a singular-looking man, and wore his hair long, in greasy ringlets falling as far as the coat-collar. His stout person was adorned with a large amount of rather flashy jewelry, and a pink cravat was supplemented by a bunch of fuchsias worn in the button-hole. The space in front of the bench was railed in by an iron balustrade painted green. At the long tables sat groups of men busily engaged in writing or in conversation. A policeman standing near the judge's desk, when the clamor in the court-room became unusually loud, pounded on the floor with his club, whereat the voices grew lower for a brief space, and then the hubbub began again. Somebody seemed to be addressing the court, though Millicent thought that no one paid much attention to him. The entrance of the prosecuting council in the case of manslaughter soon to be called, with two of the chief witnesses, made some stir; and Millicent was conscious, as she took her place, that the eyes of all present were fixed upon her. She looked wonderingly about the dismal apartment, with its dirty wooden settles and bare floor, at the judge on the bench, and at the crowd of poorly dressed people in the seats behind her. Galbraith now entered the little pen, and, seating himself at the table, proceeded to look through some papers which his clerk handed to him, while the man who was haranguing the court continued his discourse, in which nobody seemed to take any interest. Millicent had never been in court before. Her only experience of the abodes of justice had been the long afternoons passed in the court-rooms of the Doge's palace, studying the frescoes and beautiful carvings of those famous apartments. She had always invested the precincts of justice with a vague majesty and splendor. A judge, in her imagination, was a stately man clothed in crimson and ermine, with grave, reverend features, majestic in mien, deliberate in speech. When Hal pointed out Judge Croley, as one of the most distinguished of American jurists, she was greatly astonished.

"Will he try the case in that dress?"

"Oh, yes; I heard Croley condemn a man to death in very much the same costume as that which he wears to-day. The cravat was a little brighter pink, I think; and I remember he wore carnations in his button-hole. He said in a pleasant, nonchalant voice, very much the tone he would use in ordering his farmer to kill a pair of chickens, 'You are condemned to be taken to the San Bernardino prison, there to be hanged by the neck until you are dead, on the third day of May at twelve o'clock; and may God have mercy upon your soul!'"

Millicent shuddered as she heard the case called, and faltered for the first time in her desire to see justice done to the murderer of Ah Lam. It is such a terrible responsibility, the taking of

life; can man's law make it guiltless? The great question which all of modern thought has not yet solved, troubled the mind of the young woman, who could accept no judgment or creed on faith; she painfully and laboriously solved the problems of life by the force of her own reasoning.

"There is Pierson, the counsel for the defence," whispered Hal, as a little man strutted up the aisle between the benches full of people, and entered the green-railed enclosure. He was perhaps the most grotesque-looking person Millicent had ever seen. His height could not have been above five feet; and this, with his small hands and feet, gave him an exceedingly effeminate appearance. His small round head was like a ball, on the surface of which little globular eyes and a beak-like nose had been very casually placed. These features did not seem at all a necessary part of the head, which resembled that of a parrot. Before he spoke he put his head on one side, in a bird-like fashion; and he occasionally shook himself, very much as a canary does when anything has ruffled its composure. Millicent had learned from Galbraith that this man was the most prominent criminal lawyer in California. As she looked at his high, narrow forehead and mean, pinched smile she thought that among all the malefactors in San Bernardino prison she had seen no face as bad as that of Pierson, the great criminal lawyer. The prisoner was now brought into the court. After stating his name, age, residence, and occupation, he was asked the question,--

"Are you guilty or not guilty of the wilful murder of Ah Lam at Carey's Bridge, on the afternoon of Wednesday, October 16?"

The noisy court-room had grown perfectly still; and the prisoner's low-spoken answer was heard in the farthest corner with perfect distinctness,--

"Not guilty."

The counsel for the defence now stated that the prisoner acknowledged having been at Carey's Bridge on the day of the murder. He had there seen and spoken to Miss Almsford, but had fled at the approach of some gentlemen of the party. He admitted that he had assaulted Miss Almsford, but pleaded that he had no intention of injuring her.

"What were you doing at the mill?"

"I come there to meet a man as I had 'gaged to."

"What man was it?"

The prisoner declined to answer this question, and finally declared that he did not know the man's name.

"For what purpose did you meet this man?"

"To do a job as we was hired for."

"And what were you hired to do?"

"To carry off the young lady."

At this astonishing statement a moment's silence fell upon the court-room, which was broken by Pierson's sharp voice: he asked his client to name the person who had engaged him to kidnap the young girl.

With clasped hands and startled eyes, Millicent looked into the face of the ruffian, waiting to hear the name of the man who had plotted against her. John Graham, in the excitement of the moment, stood up in his place to get a better view of Horton; while Maurice Galbraith sat with an unmoved countenance, keenly watching the features of the prisoner at the bar. The question was twice put to him,--"Who was the man?" but he did not speak. A third time he was asked. Finally, he looked at his lawyer, who nodded slightly; and then, with a defiant glance toward the artist, at whom he pointed an unsteady finger, he said,--

"The man as hired me to do the job stands in this yer court-room. He calls himself John Graham."

A moment of silence followed this astounding statement, succeeded by an incredulous murmur which ran from mouth to mouth. From the confused sounds rang out a deep, clear voice uttering these words:--

"It is a shameful lie!" Millicent it was who had spoken, rising to her feet and stretching out her arms toward Graham with a gesture of womanly protection, as if to shield him from the ruffian's slanderous breath.

Silence was at last enforced, and the examination of Horton proceeded. He repeated his statement that he had not killed the Chinaman, and that the abduction of Millicent had been attempted at the instigation of John Graham. The artist, after the first moment of surprise, said nothing, but remained perfectly silent, his eyes fixed intently on Daniel Horton's face. The story told by the prisoner was one which bore some semblance of truth. He had met his confederate on the morning of the picnic as had been previously arranged, and had attempted to carry off Miss Almsford; but hearing the voices of the gentlemen had fled. He had undertaken the affair some

time beforehand, and had twice visited Graham's studio, where the artist had made a painting of him in order to explain his presence there. A scrap of paper, soiled and tumbled, was produced, on which were traced these words in Graham's handwriting: "Come to the place I told you of, to-morrow at one; you shall be well paid." One o'clock had been the hour of the picnic; and this note, it was affirmed, had been sent to Horton on the previous day as per agreement. On being further examined, the fellow showed a dogged persistence in his story; and Maurice Galbraith's adroit cross-questioning failed to make him contradict his original statement in any particular. The day waned as the storm of words raged; and at dusk the trial was adjourned until the following day. As the crowd filed out of the court-room, Millicent found Graham at her side. He was pale, and his dark eyes flashed angrily. He was about to speak to her; and she turned toward him with smiling lips and eyes, when Henry Deering stepped between them, and, bowing coolly to the artist, drew her arm through his own, and, before she was well aware of his intention, led her from the room. The eyes of a dozen curious outsiders were fixed upon her, and she submitted to be placed in the wagon, which Hal drove off at a sharp pace. The artist remained in the court-room, where he was presently joined by Maurice Galbraith, who in a formal voice asked him to accompany him to his apartment, in order that they might discuss the new and unexpected feature in the case. The two men walked together down the street, both too much excited to trust themselves to speak. As soon as they found themselves alone in Galbraith's chamber at the inn, Graham cried excitedly,--

"Galbraith, no one can for a moment believe that infamous lie,--you can make the fellow eat his words to-morrow?"

The lawyer folded his arms across his breast, and looked into his companion's face with a searching gaze, before he answered slowly and ironically,--

"Am I to understand, Mr. Graham, that you deny all collusion in the attempt to carry off Miss Almsford?"

"Great God! of course I do. Can you for a moment doubt me? *I to carry off Millicent?* Are you mad to ask me such a question? Why, don't you know, man, how much I have cared for that girl?"

"It is not difficult for the most indifferent observer to detect your admiration for Miss Almsford."

"Well?"

"Well, what does that prove? It is a point against you that you are supposed to be in love with the young lady, and gives color to Horton's accusation."

Graham sank into a seat, and the lawyer continued,--

"Your great intimacy at the Ranch and your marked attentions to Miss Almsford were apparently unaccountably discontinued by your removal to San Francisco. This feature is against you. You must have seen that in the eyes of Henry Deering, Horton's statement needed strong disproving."

"And you, Galbraith, can you for an instant suspect me of so base, so vile an action? Is it possible that a man can be so misjudged?"

"All I have to say, Mr. Graham, is that it is my hope to prove you innocent of the crime in which Horton has implicated you. As the friend and counsel of Miss Almsford, I prefer to believe that she was menaced by a vulgar ruffian and not by a man who might have aspired to the honor and privilege of guarding her from every harm. If you will excuse me, I will see you in the course of the evening."

With these words the lawyer left the apartment, his nervous face suffused by a deep flush. John Graham stared after him for a moment, and then passed down the corridor and out into the quiet night, to seek counsel from the stars in this strange hour of doubt.

CHAPTER XVIII.

"... the passions of her mind,
As winds from all the compass shift and blow,
Made war upon each other for an hour."

"Millicent! Millicent! are you awake?"

It was the evening of the first day of the trial; and Miss Almsford, sitting in her chamber warming her pretty feet before the fire, recognized the voice and answered,--

"Yes, Bab, come in."

It was very late, past twelve o'clock; but Barbara brought news of a visitor, who would keep them both from their sleep an hour longer. Mr. Galbraith was downstairs and must speak with her. Miss Almsford gave a little tired sigh, and, folding her white wrapper about her shoulders, caught the thick tangle of hair together with a silver arrow, and, without glancing at the mirror, left the room and joined the young lawyer in the library.

"I am so sorry to disturb you, Miss Almsford; I know you must be tired, but I could not get here sooner. Miss Barbara, do not be offended, but I must ask you to let me see Miss Almsford alone for a few minutes; would you mind waiting in the next room?"

When they were alone, the young man seemed at a loss how to open the interview which he had sought. Millicent, tired by the events of the exciting day, did not seem inclined to help him. After a long and rather awkward pause, she turned wearily to her visitor and said,--

"It is about the trial, of course?"

Galbraith bowed an assent.

"About the statement made by that man--" She shuddered, as if unable to pronounce his name. The young man silently assented again.

"Well, there is nothing to be said by me beyond what I have already said: it is an infamous lie! It is so apparent a fabrication that I should hardly have thought it necessary for you to give yourself the trouble to come so far, merely to hear me repeat what I asserted this afternoon."

"It is your honest opinion, then, that Mr. Graham has been slandered?"

"My *honest* opinion, Mr. Galbraith? I do not know how to give any other. Are you come to make me angry? You had better not, for we Italians are more easily roused to anger than soothed. I am so tired, too; can you not spare me?"

Her voice dropped from the deep, indignant tone, to a pleading note like that of a tired child. Maurice Galbraith, leaning quietly against the mantel-shelf, with downcast eyes and calm face, seemed strangely moved by the words of the woman who stood before him, so white and so beautiful. He turned toward her; and when he next spoke, a tenderness had crept all unawares into his face, which shone with a light whose meaning she could not fail to understand. His very voice seemed a caress addressed to her ear, so low and gentle was it.

"My child, you do not understand me. *I* to make you angry, to add one annoyance to your life, which is so sad? Ah! you little know how gladly--" He stopped suddenly, warned, by the rising flush on her cheek, that he was saying other words than those which he had come to speak,--"you little know how gladly I would have spared you the question which it was necessary for me to ask. I am now answered."

"But you do not believe me? I see that--"

"I would believe you if all the angels in heaven should deny your truth."

She looked at him curiously; she was infinitely touched by his emotion. He cared for her; he loved her with a passion which she could understand. He would gladly--oh, how gladly!--have folded her life about with a protecting care, keeping the very winds of heaven from her face if they should blow too roughly; have taken her in his strong arms, stood between her and all the world, given her all and been content with the giving, asking for nought but the right to protect her. That she did not love him he knew; that she cared for another he more than imagined; and yet he would have been content to try and win her regard by a life's devotion.

Of all this he spoke not one word, as he stood looking into her face with burning, tender eyes. He did not speak, and yet he knew that he was understood. The woman gave a little weary sigh; it was in vain! To her there was but one man in all the world. He said no word, but stepped toward her with outstretched, pleading hands, with tender love and pity, asking nothing, giving all without questioning, without doubt. She, who had befriended so many, and was yet without a friend, who had been tempest-tossed and shipwrecked before her life-journey had fairly begun, knew what it was that lay in Maurice Galbraith's outstretched hands,--the love of a life, a haven of peace and quiet. He was about to speak, to let the love which was troubling his heart pour itself out in a flood of words at the portal of her ear; but with a movement she checked him. The repellent gesture of her hand, her averted head and downcast eyes, answered him. He understood her as well, better perhaps than if he had spoken and she had answered. It left him another chance, too; later, when he had shown her how faithfully he could wait, he might speak the words which she now refused to hear. So both were glad that they had spoken only with their eyes. She had been spared the pain of putting into words that which it would have been hard for

him to hear; and he was glad that she had not spoken the cold truth which he read in her face. When she spoke again, it was to ignore that silent prayer and its denial. She took up the thread of the conversation where they had dropped it:--

"I am glad that you are convinced of this truth; and I trust that you will bring the others, Henry Deering most of all, to feel as you do."

The tender look of love died out from Maurice Galbraith's face. He turned gloomily away from the fair woman whose beauty was not for him.

"I cannot tell, I do not know; what man can judge another? I said that I believed you; did I imply that I trusted him?"

Of all cruel griefs endured by Millicent Almsford, this was the most bitter,--that her lover, through her fault, should be misjudged; that in the eyes of others he should suffer. She realized now in what a light he had appeared to Galbraith, to Hal and Barbara, to all the small circle who had seen their friendship flower into love, and that flower tossed to the earth before it had ripened to its fruition. His sudden disappearance, her own too obvious grief, to what could they attribute it but to his faithlessness? And now that this base slander had been cast upon him, they believed it. He was compromised, dishonored in their eyes; and the fault was hers. As the full significance of all this struck her, she groaned aloud, clasping her hands together over her grieved heart as if in mortal agony. How could she right him in their eyes? How could she dissipate the cloud which darkened his stainless honor?

There was but one way,--to tell them all the sad truth. Her honor against his! How could she hesitate, loving him as she did? And yet there was a moment of awful suspense. Her proud spirit, which had borne unaided and alone the burden which would have crushed a feebler soul, revolted at the thought of a new humiliation. A man's honor is writ on a strong shield that can be easily cleansed. It may receive many a hard blow, and show many a dint, and yet be as good as those carried by his mates. It can be burnished bright again, and held up for all men to see, its very scars proving through what battles it has been worn, and adding, rather than detracting, from its present lustre. If all else be lost, let him but give his life to expiate his sin, and the blot is washed out from the shield. But with a woman it is not so. Her honor must be maintained by a shield of crystal, on which the faintest breath of slander leaves its foul impress; which one blow dealt by a man's hand shatters irrevocably. This is man's code of honor; and as man's voice is strongest in the world, it is the world's code of honor. Only the greatest men set it aside as unjust; only the strongest refuse to recognize it.

All this Millicent knew. It was not wonderful that she hesitated, that she was silent, or answered the searching questions put to her by the young lawyer slowly and evasively. She was putting off the moment in which she must decide between his honor and her own. She remembered the indignant look Deering had cast upon Graham in the court-room, the cool manner in which Barbara had spoken of him, Mrs. Deering's grieved silence respecting the man who had been so valued a friend to her, and, worst of all, Galbraith's openly expressed doubt of his innocence. A woman of a smaller nature who had endured Millicent's cruel experience might, too, have doubted Graham; but she had fathomed his nature more truly in a few months than had his lifelong friends. She knew that in it there was no room for one ignoble thought. His faults she recognized more clearly than if she had loved him less. She knew him to be selfish, with the selfishness of genius; hard of heart, with the indifference to human pain common to those men who are capable of enduring the most terrible suffering; intolerant of those who differed from him, with the steadfast knowledge that his thoughts and opinions had been moulded from no contact with other minds, but attained with pain and weariness of spirit, built up from his inner consciousness, the result of thought and experience, not of the study of other men's minds and actions.

As Galbraith continued to question her, she answered clearly all that he said, while her mind, with a dual consciousness, carried on its separate train of thought. She realized that if Maurice Galbraith were not himself convinced of Graham's innocence, his efforts to disprove Horton's accusation would be half-hearted, perfunctory, and without the moral weight of honest conviction. If he were to learn the true reason of the breach between Graham and herself, he must know it immediately,--that very night. That her confession would clear the man she loved from every suspicion she never doubted, and yet--she did not speak. It was so hard to tell the story of her broken life; she was not strong enough. To any other it would have been easier to bare her secret than to this man who revered her, who had told her, with look and deed and tender thought, that he loved her.

Barbara, weary of waiting till the long conversation should come to an end, had taken her

place at the piano in the adjoining room; and after playing for some time she struck the chords of a song full of tender associations to Millicent. A wild, passionate melody of Rubinstein, full of love and hope and youth. Millicent had sung it on that night when Graham had found her waiting for him in the firelight, with his name upon her lips, though they were still strangers. She had sung it then with an intensity which had brought the grave artist close to her side, full of enthusiasm for the song, of admiration for the singer. She remembered how he had thanked her silently with a look, while the others, whose presence she had forgotten, had been full of warm praises. A mist of tears rose to her eyes and gathered itself into crystal drops of pain. Moved by the flood of memories which rushed about her with the tumultuous waves of sound, she rose, her pride swept away, her love triumphant; and, with a brow peaceful with its victory, she spoke. She told them all her sad story; while Barbara, summoned to her side, wept softly at the piteous tale, and Galbraith, strong man that he was, trembled with emotion at the words of passionate grief. Without reserve was the revelation made; the tragedy of her young life, her meeting with Graham, her love for him, and the deceit to which it led,--all were told. No word of anger had she for the false friend and dead lover, and no thought of condemnation of Graham's action. He was right; he could not have acted otherwise; he had been frank and true and honest with her; and she had deceived him! He had left the San Rosario Ranch to spare her the pain of seeing him, and because it was best for them both that he should go. The bar between them was of her forging; the breach was inevitable; it was her fault, all her fault. His thoughts of her had been white as the snow,--"and cold as ice," muttered Galbraith, to whom this panegyric of his rival was anything but gratifying. At last she was silent; all her story was finished. She had spoken standing, her expressive gestures and changeful face having done more than half the telling. She had begun quietly and with downcast eyes and pale cheek; now neck and brow were suffused. She was pleading the cause of the man she loved with all the eloquence of youth and beauty. She now stood silent, looking eagerly from Barbara's tear-stained face to Galbraith's pale, set countenance, to read there the acquittal of the man they had suspected of baseness and cruelty to her.

Barbara put her arm about the tall girl, and caressed her tenderly, holding the glorious head, with its tangled crown of hair, close to her womanly heart, weeping tears gentle as summer dew. Maurice Galbraith reverently lifted to his lips one long tress which flowed over her shoulder; and then, leading Millicent from the apartment, he turned to Barbara.

"You understood it all?"

"Yes."

"I ask you to think of that thing which is most sacred to you in all the world. By that holy thought, swear to me that no word of what has been said here to-night shall ever pass your lips; that you will not dare to think of it even, when you are not alone, lest your face betray you."

He held out his hand to her; and with wide eyes and trembling voice, Barbara gave the promise he asked, laying her cold palm in his hot grasp. To guard the secret of the woman they both loved, this loyal man and honest woman bound themselves by a most solemn oath. To each, the other was nothing but an ally in this cause. Their own personalities were lost in the strong affection for Millicent; they would love her and protect her always. As they stood thus, Millicent, passing up the stairway, saw them through the open door. She saw and understood their compact. She saw, as they did not, into the future; and from her heart rose an unselfish prayer, that the secret of her great misery might be the first link in a chain that should bind these two together for life.

Millicent Almsford had pleaded that night for the man she loved; she had cleared him in the eyes of two persons whose opinions would sway those of all who knew anything of his relation to her. She had done more: she had made for herself a friend of a discouraged lover, a champion who would fight her battles to the death; and she had bound a gentle, loving woman's heart to her own by an indissoluble tie. She had striven only to exonerate John Graham; and she had made Maurice Galbraith glad that he loved her, though hopelessly and passionately; she had filled Barbara Deering with the deepest sentiment which woman can hold for sister woman,--a compassionate love.

Though wearied by his long ride and the exciting events of the day, Maurice Galbraith slept little that night, and the morning found him pale and restless. He had a hard day's work before him, and perhaps the most trying part of it was the first duty he had set himself to perform. He felt that he owed John Graham an apology for the suspicion which he had entertained against him, and which in that moment of excitement he had made no effort to conceal. Had not the young lawyer been deeply in love with Millicent, and consequently extremely jealous of Graham,

it is hardly possible that he could for an instant have believed the preposterous charge made against the artist. But as Love is blind, and Jealousy is deaf to reason, it is not strange that, unprepared as he was for Horton's accusation, he should have believed that it might have some truth. Millicent's revelation, and the calmer reflection which had followed the interview with her, proved to him how greatly his judgment had been at fault. Fervently as he disliked Graham, he had always respected him; and to his generous mind, the injustice he had done his rival was abhorrent. He found the artist at the inn, where they had parted the previous night. Graham received the lawyer with a cold formality: the latter did not fail to observe the nervous clinching of the artist's hands as he entered the room. The fierce natural instinct of redressing an insult by a personal chastisement moved the refined man. Poet-artist as he was, he would rather, a thousand times, have grappled with Galbraith in a fierce struggle, than have been forced to receive and accept his apology. Maurice Galbraith, had he yielded to the impulse which shook his determination, would have spoken words which might have justified such an action on Graham's part. The men looked angrily at each other for a moment. Maurice Galbraith's words of apology would not utter themselves, and seemed like to choke him. He saw that clinching of the hand, and his brow reddened as he stepped forward as if to strike the man who had so easily won, and who so lightly valued, the love of Millicent Almsford.

In a land where a lower code of ethics and of honor exists, the insult each burned to cast upon the other would have been uttered; and the result would have been a so-called "affair of honor," in which both men would have run the risk of bringing blood-guiltiness upon their souls, and the stigma of murder upon their honorable names. The struggle in Galbraith's breast was short, and human intelligence triumphed over brute instinct. His few words of apology were spoken with cold courtesy, and accepted with quiet dignity. The men did not shake hands; each understood the position too clearly for that. They could never be friends; but, as they were honorable gentlemen, all enmity was at end between them, for rivalry does not necessarily entail hatred. Then they spoke of the trial, and their conversation lasted until the hour of the opening of the court.

Millicent, escorted by Henry Deering, arrived at the court just as Graham and Galbraith entered the room together. She saw Graham whisper something to the lawyer, who bowed courteously in answer. The significance of the action was not lost upon her,—her revelation had not been made in vain. She now heard her name called in a loud, harsh voice. She started violently, but did not stir from her seat.

"Come," said Hal, "you must go up to that little platform and answer all the questions they ask you."

She walked quietly to the place indicated, took the customary oath "to speak the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth," and answered the preliminary questions in a low voice.

"What is your name?"

"Millicent Almsford."

"Where were you born?"

"In Venice."

"What state?"

"In Italy."

"How old are you?"

"One and twenty."

"You were present at the killing of Ah Lam, at Carey's Bridge?"

"I was."

"Tell the court all that you saw on that occasion." Galbraith was the speaker. He knew that Millicent's natural eloquence would give the story with more force if she were allowed to tell it in her own way without the usual questioning.

She began speaking in a low voice, her eyes fixed on the ground before her. As the memory of that dreadful day came back to her, she seemed to see it all again,—the peaceful woodland scene, the quiet river, the forest road, and at her side her humble friend and pupil. The walls of the court-room faded from before her, and judge and jury, lawyer and audience, were forgotten; she looked at Graham only, and spoke to him alone; his grave eyes met hers, and the sympathy in them made the task of telling her story an easy one. Aiding her recital with expressive gestures, she told of the appearance of Daniel Horton on the peaceful scene; she repeated his insolent words, unconsciously imitating the man's manner and voice; she described the affront offered to herself with burning cheeks and flashing eyes; her voice grew tremulous and low when she spoke of the dead servant's efforts to save her from the insolent ruffian; when with a deep, horrified

voice she told of the murder and death of Ah Lam, it was as if she were describing a scene still enacting itself before her eyes. A strong impression was made by the girl's words on all her hearers. The noisy court-room had grown perfectly still; the very recorders held their pens useless in their hands; and the eyes of the judge with the pink cravat were riveted on her face. As she ceased speaking, a sympathetic tremor ran through the crowd assembled in the court-room, and a low murmur was heard.

Maurice Galbraith, usually the most quiet and reserved of men, was evidently undergoing an unusual excitement, those who knew him thought; and Pierson, the counsel for the defendant, seemed rather disconcerted by the strong impression made by the witness.

When Graham came upon the stand and told his story of the night passed in the shooting-lodge, Millicent listened breathlessly. The young painter gave his evidence with a certain picturesqueness, describing the arrival at the cabin of Dan Horton, his demand for food and shelter, his troubled sleep, his wounded face, the peculiar nature of the scratches, and finally, the finding of Millicent's handkerchief after his departure on the following morning. An effort was made to disprove the evidence, and an *alibi* was sworn to by two new-found friends of the prisoner, who claimed to have passed that night in his company. These witnesses, carefully prepared by Pierson, gave their evidence with few blunders; and Dan Horton, closely following every word of the defence, gave a satisfied smile at the new turn which the skilfully devised *alibi* seemed likely to give to affairs.

Pierson's aim was to disprove Horton's identity with the man who had killed Ah Lam and had afterwards seen Graham. He endeavored to show that there were two men engaged in the affair, - Horton, who had spoken to Miss Almsford, and his confederate, who, it was argued, must have committed the crime. When Millicent had told of the wounds inflicted by the Chinaman on the cheeks of his murderer, it was shown that Horton's face bore no trace of these scratches. It was argued, in reply to this, that in a man of Horton's vigorous temperament such wounds might easily be healed in as short time as had elapsed between the murder and the trial. At this point Galbraith had a trump card to play, the existence of which neither prisoner nor counsel had suspected. Neither had it been learned by the omniscient reporter, through whose instrumentality evidence is too often prematurely made public, cases are lost, and offenders are enabled to escape apprehension.

"I would inform your Honor that I have other proof of the identity of the prisoner with the man who passed the night following the murder in the shooting lodge."

A new witness, by name John Du Jardin, by profession a wood-cutter, was called to the stand.

"Have you ever seen the prisoner before?"

"Yes, before wonce," answered the old Frenchman.

"When was that?"

"The night after murder."

"Where did you see him?"

"At the little 'unting 'ouse of M. Graham."

"What were you doing at the lodge?"

Graham looked at his henchman with a perplexed expression, and smiled slightly at the answer.

"I were not in the cabin, I were by the window, lookin'."

"Oh, you were looking in at the window; and what did you see?"

"I see monsieur, 'e sleepin'. I see dat man," pointing to the prisoner; "'e come, and monsieur give 'im to drink and to eat."

"What else did you see?"

"I see *cet homme*, dat man lay 'imself *près* side by the *feu*. Presentlee 'e sleep, monsieur 'e mark 'im; 'e take faggot from fire, 'e make point, 'e draw one picture of 'im."

Here Pierson asked the witness what he was doing outside the lodge in the middle of the night.

"I was watch monsieur."

"That seems very strange. Why did you want to watch him?"

"'E 'as not slept the night; 'e 'as nothing eat the day; I fear 'im *malade*. I follow him."

Galbraith continued his examination, and elicited from the witness the admission that he had remained outside the cabin that night, concealed in the bushes, and had only left it after Horton had taken his departure. He had then started to return, but after he had gone a mile he retraced his steps with the intention of cooking for his master's breakfast a brace of quail he had shot on the way. He found the cabin empty, and on the wall the portrait which he had seen sketched. It

was where it would have been easily effaced, and so he had loosened the board on which the drawing was made, and carried it to his house.

Graham was now recalled and questioned.

"Mr. Graham, you have told the court that you are an artist by profession. Is it your habit to make drawings of persons of a striking appearance?"

"I have the habit of sketching any remarkable-looking people whom I happen to meet."

"On the night in question, were you impressed by anything uncommon in the appearance of the man who slept by the fire in the lodge?"

"I was."

"Did you make any notes of the impression made on you by the man?"

"I did. I sketched him as he crouched in the ashes of the fire."

"What materials did you use?"

"A charred piece of wood, and a smooth board in the side of the cabin."

"Would you recognize your work if you should see it?"

"Undoubtedly."

"By what means?"

"I should recognize it as you would your own handwriting; besides--"

"You have other means of knowing it?"

"My initials will be found in the upper right-hand corner of the sketch."

"Is this the sketch?"

"It is."

There was a craning of necks, and a murmur of recognition from those present who could obtain a glimpse of the strong drawing held up by Maurice Galbraith. Graham's words in answer to the last question were hardly necessary to prove the resemblance. Horton, sitting in his chair, his head thrown back, his hands clasping his knees, had all-unconsciously assumed the pose in which Graham had sketched him. The resemblance was indubitable, and the cheeks bore the bloody testimony of Ah Lam's hands.

This was evidence which there was no breaking down; and Horton, when the sketch was at last turned so that he could see it, gave an oath under his breath, which was not lost upon the jury. The twelve men with whom lay the decision of Horton's guilt or innocence were for the most part tradesmen and mechanics, the only exception being in the person of Mr. Patrick Shallop, the mining king, who by some strange chance had been impanelled on this occasion. The voice of such a man would carry great weight in the decision. The case was evidently going against the prisoner. The evidence of the prosecution was very damaging, and Horton's friends in the crowd were greatly discouraged.

The trial occupied several hours, and ended in the conviction of Daniel Horton. Maurice Galbraith made a speech which has already become famous. He had induced a Californian jury to pronounce a man who had killed a Chinaman guilty of voluntary manslaughter. He had obtained this almost unprecedented verdict, and a full sentence from the court of ten years' imprisonment. The efforts of the defending counsel to turn the main interest in the case from the chief feature, by endeavoring to implicate Graham in the attempted abduction, were useless. Horton's real confederate was found, and the truth of the matter arrived at. Through the newspaper accounts of Millicent, published at the time of her rescue of Graham, these men had learned that she was a rich heiress, and had conceived the bold idea of carrying her off in order to extort a large sum of money for her ransom.

The flimsy tissue of lies which Pierson had woven was quickly unravelled by Galbraith. The fact that the jury had for a time been misled by the false evidence, made their verdict more immediately unanimous than it might otherwise have been; and the cloud which had for a moment overhung John Graham was dispelled as quickly as a noxious vapor is blown away by a brisk westerly wind. He was cleared of every suspicion. Galbraith had surpassed himself in his management of the case, even in the eyes of his warmest friends. Had he not been working for the woman he loved? In exonerating his rival, he had done the only thing that in him lay to win Millicent's gratitude. She had thanked him, and blessed him for his eloquence with tears and smiles. He had gained her friendship; and does not friendship soften into love more often than love crystallizes into friendship?

"Je me dis seulement; à cette heure en ce lieu,
Un jour, je fus aimé, j'aimais, elle était belle.
J'enfouis ce trésor dans mon âme immortelle.
Et je l'emporte à Dieu!"

"A letter for you, Mr. Graham."

"Very well; lay it down."

The burly landlady placed the missive on the small, unpainted pine table which stood near the artist's easel, and with a last glance at the feminine superscription, and the device of the golden Psyche which sealed it, left the room. It was late in the afternoon,--there would be only an hour more of light in which he could paint. Graham did not glance at the letter. If it had been a telegram it would have waited till the tender gray of the sky had been laid on the canvas. At last it grew too dim for him to distinguish the tints on his palette, and, throwing down his brushes, the young man rose and stretched his cramped limbs. He had not moved from his stool for four hours. As he paced up and down his narrow room, the letter caught his eye. He had quite forgotten its existence.

It was from Millicent. He stepped close to the window, and by the waning light perused the words traced by a hand that surely had trembled in the writing. Twice he read it through, as if not understanding its import. Then, with a groan, he cast the letter upon the floor, and sank upon a low seat near by. His head supported by his hands, his elbows upon his knees, he sat, the picture of despair. With a sudden movement he grasped the missive and crushed it between his two hands, as if to avenge upon the senseless paper the pain which it brought to him.

He could not bear it in the cold, dark room; the streets would be full of people who might divert him. He soon found himself in a crowded thoroughfare. It was six o'clock, and the city was full of hurrying men, women, and children returning homeward after the long day's work. The girl from the millinery establishment under his room, whose sweet, childish face he had painted from memory the very day before, was just leaving the shop as he stepped into the street. She was very poorly dressed, with a hat which would have disgraced anybody but a milliner's apprentice. Her dress fitted neatly, however, and she gave her close-cut jacket a tug to make it smooth about the shoulders before she reached the corner. A tall, pale, dyspeptic-looking youth joined her just outside the druggist's. Graham recognized him as the clerk in a dry-goods shop near by. Their greeting he could not but overhear.

"I am late, George--"

"Twenty minutes; I almost gave you up," in a surly tone.

"I am so sorry; don't be angry." The man hesitated a moment; then her pleading voice got the better of his ill-temper, and, taking her by the arm after the fashion of his kind, he led her across the street, and in a moment they were lost to Graham's sight. He next stopped at the cobbler's around the corner to call for a pair of boots which had needed repairing. The narrow stall was brightly lighted, and he saw through the window a little child holding up its face to be kissed. The cobbler's girl had just brought her father his supper. As Graham entered, the man pushed the little figure gently into the street. "Tell mother I 'll not be late," he said; and wiping his blackened hands upon his dirty ticking apron, he greeted the artist civilly, and proceeded to find his boots for him.

"They need re-soling, Mr. Graham, but I did not like to do the job without orders. The patches are all right."

Graham paid the man for his work, and went out. He had thought to find distraction in the street, but what he saw there only made him more desolate. He was alone, while all other men had some loving soul to greet them after their day's toil. The pair of lovers, the cobbler and his child, made him feel his loneliness more acutely, and emphasized painfully the news which the letter had brought to him,--Millicent was gone!

She had passed as suddenly and unexpectedly out of his life as she had entered it. He had not seen her since that day in the court-room. And now she was gone, back to the Old World, to Venice the mysterious, the silent, to the old Palazzo Fortunio, with its lofty halls and marble corridors, back to the old home, which he knew could never be home to her again. All the color seemed to have faded out of his life; she had taken it with her. He suffered deeply, impatiently, angry at himself for suffering, yet powerless to forget the pain which the letter had given him. He picked it up again from the floor when he came back to the lonely studio, and marked that though

the letter was crushed and torn, the device of the golden Psyche was still intact.

On the following day he found some consolation in his picture. He came back to it after his vigil with an uncherished grief, with less enthusiasm than before; but from that hour until he had laid the last stroke of paint on the canvas, his hand faltered not, if his imagination sometimes flagged. He could not serve both love and art. He had chosen his mistress, and would be faithful to his choice. He dared not think, while he painted, of the woman whose influence had so warmed his frozen existence. To do so seemed an infidelity to his Art,--a breach of faith which would not escape its merited punishment. So he resolutely put her from his mind, and labored day and night upon his great picture.

Summer and autumn were past, and the first month of winter was drawing to its close, when Graham finished his picture. He had painted it as he always did his best works, without interruption. From the morning on which he had made the first rough chalk sketch, until the day when he reluctantly drew the fine veil of varnish over his work, he had hardly looked at any other canvas. He was not satisfied with it,--what true artist ever is satisfied with his work?--and yet he was convinced that it was the best he had yet accomplished. He had sometimes realized what he had sacrificed for this picture; and as he touched in the crimson line of sunset, the fancy came to him, that the sky was stained with heart's-blood.

His few brother artists--there was but a handful of them in the city--and his pupils requested him to set a day for them to see the new picture, and Graham had consented. The young sculptor, who had the next room, threw open the door which separated the two studios, and both rooms were in holiday trim. Northcote had been in the country all the previous day, gathering flowers and ferns with which to deck the bare apartment. He placed a jar of roses before the picture with a reverent face; he loved the artist whose light purse had for the last two years kept a roof over his head and life in his body.

Graham was greatly admired by the knot of artists who lived, or starved, in San Francisco. They were the pioneers of art in the new Western land; and their work, if crude and untutored, was not wanting in certain strong qualities. Several of them were men of promise; and they were all wise enough to feel that in Graham's genius lay the brightest hope for a new school of art which should combine the knowledge of the Old World with the fresh vigor and hope of the New. They looked up to him as a leader, and he earnestly wrought and thought for their advancement. It was for this that he had left Europe and his many agreeable associates there, and returned to his own country, that whatever power for good there in him lay should redound to her glory. His fellow artists all revered him, and they would gladly have loved him; but the sensitive man shrank from that familiarity which popularity entails. In their work he was always interested; and in whatever touched the art they all served, he was active and ready to labor endlessly without recompense or recognition. But in their lives and personalities he felt no wish to mix; and so it was that he who labored most for them as an artist was farthest removed from them as a man.

There was but one verdict rendered by the men who stood grouped about the easel. It was a masterly picture, they all said. For an hour or more, one or another of them discussed certain technical points with Graham, who with kindled face listened and talked with his associates, more himself than he had been since the night when he had first dreamed of the picture. The young sculptor was less loud in his praise than were the others; in his eyes the classic subject was a trifle labored and cold. After having praised, the men felt at liberty to criticise; and if Graham had followed one half the advice offered to him, there would have been little suggestion of the original picture left.

Standing in a corner, with its face to the wall, was a panel which, as the little circle was about to break up, Northcote asked Graham's permission to show. The new picture was taken from the easel, and the neglected canvas put in its place. Its surface was dusty, and the young man wiped it with his silk handkerchief. There was a minute's silence, broken by the oldest of the party, a disappointed painter whose life had been one long series of calamities.

"My boy, this is worth a dozen of the other. It is the biggest thing you have done yet."

The younger men all chimed in, echoing the opinion of their senior. Graham looked incredulously from one to the other; there was no doubting their sincerity. Like many another before him, he knew not how to distinguish his successes from his failures. The old artist, who had all his life been on the eve of painting his great picture, underrated the value of the new picture, but he was not mistaken in placing *The Lovers* far above it. Graham looked at it for the first time in many weeks, with that impersonal criticism of his own work which is only possible to an artist when a certain period has elapsed after its creation, and the mind has been occupied with other interests.

It was late that night when the artist returned to his room, after dining with his sculptor friend at a restaurant near by. The moonlight flooded the studio, lighting its farthest corner. It showed him the vases of rose-bloom and the dark-browed Circe on the wall; it showed him the blackened hearth, where the embers still smouldered. And what was that in the fireplace? A charred wooden frame with a heap of ashes lying 'twixt its sides. Graham sprang forward with a cry of apprehension, and lifted the blistered frame. His fear had not been groundless: this bit of wood and that handful of cinders were all that remained of his great new picture! He gave a deep groan and staggered back against the wall. Before him, on the easel, gleaming through the pure silver light, was the picture of The Lovers. Millicent's dreamy face, radiant with hope and love, smiled at him from the arms of the lover who now stood, half crazed with grief, gazing at the ruin before him.

The young sculptor stood beside him, full of a sympathy he knew not how to express. At last he spoke:--

"Graham, look up, and do not grieve for what is past help. I tell you, man, that your greatest picture stands before you. The Lovers has the one quality which your work has heretofore missed. It is human, it is full of natural sentiment. It does not appeal to an aristocracy of thought, but to all men and all women, learned and untaught. I know not what influence swayed you in this picture, but I know that it lifted you to a higher plane than you had before attained. I care not for the loss of your Poet; it told me nothing of you that I did not know before; it was a step backwards to the time when you made that wondrous wicked Circe with her herd of swine. Let it go, and submit to the influence which inspired this picture, for which the world is richer to-day than for a score of such works as the other."

Graham looked at the speaker with doubting eyes. The words seemed to rouse an echo in his soul. They told him that he had served the altar of Art with Moloch sacrifices. Instead of the peaceful offerings of love, he had brought the anguish of two strong hearts to desecrate her temple. A dim perception of the truth entered his mind, and his grief for the lost picture was for a moment forgotten in a doubt which rose before him, never to be dismissed again until it was fully solved. A doubt of self, of his own judgment, of his own inflexible will.

Millicent was gone! The six straight redwoods whispered the news one to another, and shook their tall tops sadly, while the sweet south wind sighed through their branches. Millicent was gone! and the roses that clasped and clung about her lattice died on the night she left them, and the vine bloomed no more, and bore for that season nothing but leaves. Millicent was gone! She had set wide the door of the golden prison where her love-birds had lived and sung so merrily through the long summer. But the little white creatures, prison-born, prison-bred, were too timid to venture out into the roomy forest, and had clung to the only home they had ever known; and so Barbara, gentle, sweet-souled Barbara, took them into her sunny room; and cared for them as Millicent had done. For a day they were silent, and then they sang as merrily as before. There was still sunshine; and crispy groundsel and clear cool water were given them by hands as gentle, if not so fair, as those which had tended them before.

The New Year was at hand, and the *châtelaine* of the San Rosario Ranch had summoned a group of friends to her hospitable home to pass the holiday time. So Barbara was full of household cares, and Hal was busy with shooting and riding expeditions. Ferrara was there, just back from Alaska, with a tribute of rare furs to lay at Barbara's pretty feet. Maurice Galbraith and John Graham were missing, and that other whose absence was still keenly felt. Mr. and Mrs. Shallop, O'Neil, and Hartley were come, with a half dozen other old friends, all bound together by the magnetic influence which radiated from their hostess, in whom all their various interests were concentrated. Each was friend to other for her sake, whom they all loved. In the existence of every one of the group her pure and unselfish nature was a real factor. When faith in human nature, in one's self, is faint and wavering, then is the time when the remembrance of such a spotless life, so pure a heart, steadies the wavering belief in truth, and strengthens us to fight the good fight. By loving help and by high example, Marianne Deering had succored and befriended each of the friends who on that New Year's eve assembled about her dining table. With a face bright with that beauty of the soul which knows not the marring of time, she presided over the gay festivity. Three pretty cousins from San Francisco added their bright faces to the charming scene. The apartment and the board were garlanded with flowers. Banks of heavy ferns panelled the walls, and bunches of white, heavy-scented magnolias were outlined against their dark green. Through the open windows were seen the gay lanterns hung about the veranda, illuminating the festoons of fresh creepers, and giving glimpses of the soft velvet turf outside. The merriment was

at its height as Barbara lifted the loving-cup, filled with a sweet, strong wine, and, calling out the toast, "To absent friends," set her rosy lips to the brim, and drank from the cup in which each of the joyful company was to pledge some distant dear one. It was a custom at the San Rosario Ranch which had become time-honored. The girl smiled gayly as she passed the crystal beaker to Juan Ferrara, who sat upon her right; but her eyes were dark with unshed tears, and the man sighed as he drank, omitting to repeat the toast. What were absent friends to him beside this woman who smiled in his face, but whose tears fell for one who was far from her! Round went the cup from hand to hand, and to every heart came a thrill of joy or sorrow at the thought of the absent one, toward whom it turned in this loving communion. O'Neil, sitting by his hostess, was the last to take the cup. The warm-blooded Irishman was in high spirits. The glances of the dark-eyed "girling" at his side, and the general good-fellowship of the occasion, had brought out in him the irrepressible good-humor of his nation. The ceremony of passing the loving-cup, and the invocation to absent friends, had carried something a little serious with it, which, to the jolly Irishman, was thoroughly antagonistic.

"Dear hostess," said he, placing the cup before him on the table, "I do not like the sentiment of your toast; 't is ungentle. How can I, sitting between two such lovely ladies, find time or power to salute an absent one, howsoever fair? May I give you my toast for the loving-cup? Have I your permission to sing a stave from one of my national songs on the subject?"

He was answered by a general acclamation of assent. Rising to his feet, the blond, burly giant held up the cup with its low ebb of crimson wine, and sang in a clear, strong voice the following couplet:--

"Oh! 't is sweet to think that where'er we rove
 We are sure to find something blissful and dear,
And that, when we 're far from the lips that we love,
 We 've but to make love to the lips that are near.
The heart, like a tendril accustomed to cling,
 Let it grow where it will, cannot flourish alone,
But will lean to the nearest and loveliest thing
 It can twine with itself, and make closely its own.
Then oh! what pleasure where'er we rove
 To be sure to find something still that is dear;
And to know, when far from the lips that we love,
 We have but to make love to the lips that are near."

Amidst the general laughter and applause which followed O'Neil's song, Madame Marianne's gentle word of disapproval was lost. The song had restored the jollity which, for a moment, seemed to have left the party. O'Neil now drained the cup to the last drop, turning the crystal vessel upside down to show that it was empty, and whispered a saucy compliment to the bright-eyed girl beside him. At that moment, when the merriment was at its height, when O'Neil stood with the empty cup in his hand, the door opened, and, as if in answer to the toast, John Graham entered the room. He was greeted by a dozen voices as he made his way to Mrs. Deering's side. Taking her outstretched hand in his own, he dropped upon one knee, and kissed it respectfully.

"Dear my lady, I have come to wish you the happiest New Year, and to join in your loving-cup, in your toast to absent friends--"

"Always welcome, dear Graham," said the lady, laying her hand upon his head for an instant; "there is always a place for you at our table, but alas--"

"You are too late--too late!"

It was Barbara who spoke, interrupting her mother brusquely, her voice full of a reproach inexplicable to all but Graham. He looked at her fixedly for a moment, and then O'Neil clapped him on the back, and held up the empty cup.

"Too late, old fellow, as Miss Barbara says. Never mind," in a lower key, "I have promised Deering to brew an Irish punch, after the ladies withdraw."

The artist stared a moment at the goblet, and shivered as he took the place which had been made for him beside his hostess. Soon the signal was given for the ladies to leave the room; Graham's arrival having precipitated the breaking up of the party. The new-comer did not long remain in the dining-room, but presently followed his hostess into the library, where he found Barbara at the piano. Mrs. Deering signalled him to take a place at her side.

"I fear I took too great a liberty in coming unasked. O'Neil says I stalked into the room like a stage ghost, and cast a gloom over the party."

"You know you are always welcome here. You used to call the Ranch your home."

"Have I still a right to do so? Things seem so changed, my lady."

"You will never find me changed while I can help you. I did not send for you, knowing that you would come if it was best for you."

"And yet I came too late!"

"Graham, there are no such words as too late to those who know how to wait. That phrase is only for the impatient, not for the steadfast. But now tell me of yourself, of your work; it is so long since we have seen you."

"Of myself, no! of my work, yes. I have finished my picture; it has gone to Paris. It will now be judged by other men." He did not tell her of his loss, or that he had sent *The Lovers* in the place of the burned picture.

"May they prove kindly critics."

"No, I do not want that; I do not insist that they shall praise my work; I only question, can they understand it?"

"But that is the least of it all, you have sometimes said."

"Ah! Madonna, I have been wrong. What use is there for me to speak if there be no one to hear? If they do not understand, the fault must lie in me. I must learn to speak the broad language of humanity. I cannot ask men to puzzle themselves with my small vernacular." The man sighed deeply, and his friend noticed that he was paler and thinner than she had last seen him.

"You have been over-working, Graham; you lead an unnatural life when you are in town, now that your people are away. Why not come back to the tower again?"

"I think I will, Madonna."

He had been over-working, and for what? That the picture for which he had sacrificed so much, should be seen one brief hour by a dozen men! He now felt in what a strained condition his nerves had been. The picture was gone, and with it the strong excitement which had kept him alive and alert. The tension was relaxed, and an intense depression had followed, which was in turn losing itself in a new feeling. A lonely longing, a craving for a tender womanly sympathy, for the only human being who had never misunderstood his many moods, who was always in sympathy with him in joy or sorrow. She alone in all the world could have helped him at this time; to her he could have confided all those delicate shades of thought which drifted through his mind, too fragile ever to be prisoned in words. She could have divined those half-formed ideas and crystallized them into steadfast utterances. He was cold, bitterly cold, and suffered for that loving human sympathy as the parched hillsides had but now longed for the refreshing rain which had made the earth green and fair after the long summer drought. He had chosen Art for his mistress, and she had smiled upon him chastely and coolly; and yet he was not content.

Barbara left the piano, and Graham joined her. The over-punctilious courtesy with which he had always treated her was forgotten. He spoke suddenly and sharply:--

"What did you mean by what you said to me,--why am I too late?"

"I meant too late for a draught from the loving-cup."

"You meant more than that."

"If you choose to fancy--"

"I cannot but choose to *know*."

By this time the gay group from the dining-room had flooded the library with their ringing voices, their merry faces. Only these two were pale and out of harmony with the scene. Barbara, with downcast eyes, stood by the piano, tapping her fingers nervously on the polished case.

"I have interrupted your festivity; I have been a very skeleton at the feast; forgive me,--I could not help coming,--forgive me and answer me one question, and I will go and leave you in peace."

"I say, Bab, we are going into the drawing-room to tell ghost stories. O'Neil has a splendid one,--a real Irish family banshee yarn. Come on, you and Graham."

"In a moment, Hal, don't wait for us; we will join you before you are all settled and Mr. O'Neil has begun."

The library was again empty. The voices of the holiday folk reached their ears across the hall.

"Tell me what you have heard from her."

There was no need of speaking her name. Her face looked at them from its place over the mantel-shelf,--a quick, strong sketch made by Graham. From a leafy background white shoulders, and a fair face with deep eyes, were shadowed forth. The firelight, falling restlessly upon the

picture, touched into light now the full red mouth, now the ivory throat.

"I have not heard for some time. She was in Venice again, very ill from the long journey, when she last wrote."

"You have not heard since?"

"No."

"Do you think she is well now, and--and at peace?"

"No."

"What reason have you to doubt her well-being?"

"I cannot tell you."

The man looked at her searchingly, as if he would read her very soul, and then turned away with a word of leave-taking,--"Good-night."

"Stay a moment. I have something to tell you. I do not know why I am forced to speak to you of the last interview she had in this room, but I must do so. Before she left,--on the night when she cried out in the court-room,--you remember?"

Did he remember? Ah, Heaven! only too well he remembered the last words she had ever spoken to him,--valiant words, full of love and protection.

"That night Mr. Galbraith came to see her. It was very late, and they had a long conversation. I could only hear their voices from the next room; and then she called me to her, and told us both all her sad story,--all that had passed between you and her. She took all blame upon herself, and would have made us both acknowledge that you had been right and just in acting as you did."

"And was I not just?"

"Just, perhaps; but how ungenerous! What have you to do with justice? You, who never painted till you painted her; you, who were so cold and unfeeling till her smile made you human for a little time. Then your own selfish egotism froze you again."

"Thank you for what you have told me, and good-by. I shall not see you soon again. You were very good to her; bless you for it! Every one was good to her,--every one but me, it seems."

"You speak as if she were dead."

He did not hear her last words. He was already out of earshot, taking leave of his hostess.

When he was alone with the stars he could think better than in that heated room, with that dear vine-crowned face before his eyes, with Barbara's voice in his ears. He saw how Barbara misjudged him. He knew that most men and women would have held him as she did; and yet he had thought that he was right. He had fought the good fight, and he had conquered. What mattered it if all the world saw in him a monster of selfishness? He had chosen poverty, hard work, and loneliness, when wealth, worldly success, and a painless love might have been his. Sybaris had been open to him; and he had turned his back upon the perfumed island for an attic, a crust, and a mistress who demanded all, and had yielded nothing but hope.

But now things were altered. He felt angry and outraged at the thought that others knew her story, that she was pitied by them because of her great love for him. He longed to protect her, to suffer for her, to make her forget in his love and care the cruel lot which had been hers. He yearned for her sympathy, for her love, for that sense of peace which had come upon him as he sat by her side. The tide of love, which not once in a million years is at the full in two human hearts at once, rushed over him, sweeping away pride, reason, selfishness, ambition,--all, all routed and o'er-set by that warm, delicious flood of emotion. He had fought against love so long, that at last the overthrow of will brought him an ecstasy of delight. He ran like one crazed through the cool, starry night, singing a love-song strange and tender, a song of submission, of hope and passionate love. Through the orchard he passed, startling the birds with his wonderful song. The prisoned love-mates heard it in their little nest, and folded their snowy wings closer together; the white roses heard it, and trembled at the sound; the six tall redwoods listened and whispered gravely together as he came among them and sank upon his knees at their feet, on the very spot where she had sat that day. That day! How could he have forgotten it, and all that it had meant to them both? What mist had risen again between them and hidden its memory from his sight? Before, it had been her want of faith in him, her fault, her only fault. Her atonement for that sin against her own soul, against him, had been bitter indeed. And afterwards what veil had blinded him to the great truth that they loved each other absolutely, that their two beings were each incomplete without the other? His pride! It had been his pride which had kept them so long apart! But now it was over. He would go to her, and tell her all.

"Millicent, Millicent, I love you!" he cried aloud, his eager voice surging from his breast as if to relieve its weight of love. His cry was joyous, bounding, full of life and love and hope. The night wind bore back to his ears a tender, mournful cadence,--"love you."

"Millicent, my love, I am coming; wait for me!"

"Wait for me!" sighed the echo.

And the young moon, pale and shrinking, dropped behind the high tree-tops from his sight; while the redwoods swayed tremulously, shaken by a sudden blast, and the echo again sighed its faint response,--

"Wait for me!"

And the tide on the Pacific was at the flood.

CHAPTER XX.

"Malheureux! cet instant où votre âme engourdie
A secoué les fers qu' elle traîne ici-bas,
Ce fugitif instant fut toute votre vie;
Ne le regrettez pas."

It was a wonderful morning which saw the birth of the new year in Venice,--one of those clear, bright days on which Winter lays aside all his severity and assumes the smiles of the Spring still asleep in the bosom of the stiffened earth. The *piazza* was filled with a motley crowd of holiday folk, and the lagoons swarmed with a fleet of gondolas and *sandalos*.

Before a mighty marble house which stands where one of the smaller thoroughfares sweeps its waters into the Grand Canal, a gondola has paused. A young man, a foreigner evidently, steps from the boat and passes under the fretted archway, with an admiring glance at the beautiful carving. He is pressed for time, but he stops for a moment to glance into the square cortile, with its group of almond-trees and its playing fountain. He is met at the wide doorway by a servant, of whom he asks, in the best Italian he can muster, for the Signorina Almsford. The black-browed menial politely replies that it will be impossible for him to see the signorina; she is not at home to visitors. No further answer can the stranger obtain to his eager inquiries. A gold piece unlocks the tongue of the menial at last, and he informs the young man, in excellent English, that the signorina has been ill ever since her return from America, a month and more ago.

"She has been very ill; Girolomo says that she will die, and the Signor Almsford himself fears the worst. She has not left her room once. To-day being a *festa*, she has fancied to go out with Girolomo in the gondola, and I am to help him carry her downstairs."

As he finished speaking, the man noticed that the visitor had grown very pale, and now stood leaning against a marble pillar as if for support. When he spoke again it was to send his card to Mr. Almsford. On being admitted to an outer reception room he sank upon a chair, his face hidden in his hands. Soon he was bidden to enter. The signorina had learned of his arrival, and it was her pleasure to see him.

The young man passed through a long suite of stately rooms, scarcely noticing the rich furnishing and decorations. Before a curtained doorway he hesitated for a moment, but the servant, pushing aside the heavy portière, left him no choice but to enter. Before him, reclining in a great chair, lay a figure which he had last seen full of health and strength. From a pile of sea-green cushions smiled a face which he had known when it was glorious with the freshness of youth. The color which the red rose of love had brought to her cheek had faded now; she was like a flower no longer, but a great white pearl shimmering through pale waters. She smiled, and held out her hand to her countryman; and Maurice Galbraith, bowing low over the small fingers, strove to hide his face from the great hollow eyes which looked inquiringly into his own.

"I am so glad you have come. I do not even ask what has brought you, it is so good to see some one from home."

It had become "home" to her now, the country which she had so long repudiated. "Home" after a half year's residence; "home," though the language spoken there was to her a foreign one. The meeting is not without its tears, the pleasure not unmixed with pain. Eager questions are asked, and faithfully answered. Millicent's visitor brings her tidings and tender messages from far-off friends. He is rewarded for his pains by a faint smile which glimmers over the pale features, rising in the deep eyes and losing itself in the tender curves of the mouth. Beside the couch stands a delicate bronze table wrought by no less cunning a hand than Benvenuto's. A vase

of flowers and a crystal bell are here placed. The musical note of the bell now summons a domestic, who bows at the order given, softly disappears, and soon re-enters, bearing a salver on which are a plate of fruits and a bluish decanter, with glasses of the dainty Venetian fashion. From the delicately tendrilled flask Millicent pours a clear golden wine whose perfume permeates the apartment. She fills both glasses, and, touching the edge of hers to the rim of his, bids him drink to the health of the dear ones at home. Galbraith stops the musical ring which the contact has drawn from the tumbler by touching the edge with his finger in a mechanical manner. It was one of the superstitions which had waned to a habit with him.

"Why do you drown that sound of good cheer?"

"Because my grandmother told me when I was a little child that if a glass rang itself out to silence, the sound was sure to prove a death-knell."

"Listen, you can still hear mine faintly. It is a wonderful wine, connoisseurs say, this *Lacrymæ Christi* of ours. How different, is it not, from the strong red wine of California that you gave us that day,--do you remember?--when we feasted with you under the fig-tree."

"As different as you were to the rest of us gathered about the board that day."

"And yet I would give all the wine that lies mellowing in the cellars of the palace for one cup of your good Los Angeles vintage."

The wine seemed to spread through her frame like a flame. It brought a flush to the pale cheeks and strength to the fragile body. She arose and walked unsupported across the room to a dusky mirror. She wrapped herself in a garment of silvery fur, and together they left the room fit for the boudoir of a princess. At the doorway Girolomo awaited them. Waving aside the domestic who stood ready to assist him, the strong gondolier lifted the delicate figure and bore it unaided down the marble stairs. He laid her light weight gently among the cushions of the gondola, and assuming his oar with the incomparably graceful movement of his guild, rowed the black-hooded craft down the Grand Canal. To the young American, the awe and mystery of the place are not yet familiar; and as the boat glides between the rows of mighty palaces, he wonders if the strange scene is the fabric of his own dream.

But no; when he looks into the face of the woman lying amid the cushions, he knows that it is all true, and that this shadowy figure is more real to him than all the men and women he has ever known. Presently they emerge into the broader waters of the lagoon, where lie the fisher craft, with their many-colored sails spread to dry in the afternoon breeze. The smooth green water is marked here and there with the black mooring-piles, which throw a shadowy outline on the changeful tide. To the American, bred in a land where Art is in its cradle, and beauty exists in its more austere aspect alone, the glory of the spectacle, the wondrous architecture, the wealth of color, are intoxicating. The western sky glows with the first pale tints of the sunset, against which a score of spires are darkly outlined. The air is musical with soft, distant chimes, and the song of the gondoliers is rhythmic to the motion of their oars. From the shore come cheerful sounds of holiday folk; and now and then a *sandalo* sweeps past them with a freight of joyous pleasure-seekers. In one of these a group of masqueraders are singing a gay love-ballad. Millicent hums the refrain to herself, and answers pleasantly to the noisy greeting with which one of the party hails them. A young girl, with the red-gold hair of her people, turns and looks long into Millicent's face. She wears over her broad shoulders a leopard-skin for warmth; while her head, with its glorious crown of hair, has no other protection than the doubtful one of a garland of roses. As she looks at Millicent, she takes the fragrant wreath from her brow, and, with a graceful salutation, tosses it into the gondola. In a moment the strong strokes of the two rowers carry the *sandalo* out of sight, and Galbraith lays the flowers in Millicent's lap.

"May the saints bless the child! 'T is the tribute of happiness and beauty to grief and pain."

The air has grown chill with the down-dropping of the sun, and Girolomo, unbidden, turns the gondola homeward. As they float past the familiar places, Millicent looks long and steadily at the scenes which are so dear to her. She shivers as the Bridge of Sighs looms dimly forth, and smiles again at the familiar faces of the boatmen on the steps of the *piazzetta*.

"I am so glad that you have seen me in the city of my birth; you can understand me now as you could never have understood me over there. Dear, dreamy Venice, where great vices and greater virtues have flourished more grandly than anywhere else in the world! And now it is all past, her glory and her pain; and knowing this, we make the best of the pleasant things left to us. We steep ourselves in her rich beauty, content with its perfection; we con over her mysterious legends, and forget that other nations are living, striving, working, and making their histories, while we are dreaming and playing our lives away. Your great Saxon virtue, 'Truth,' is meaningless to us; we are content with Beauty."

"And you are happy--contented; you are willing to pass the rest of your life here?"

"Yes, and no. I could never be satisfied to drop back into the old easy life. I have drunk too deeply of the strong, new wine of Los Angeles, to be content with the mellow vintage of the Abruzzi."

"And yet there is fermentation of a strong, new wine here, in your wondrous Italy. All do not dream of the past; there are men and women who foretell a new existence to the land, now that the old shackles of tyranny and superstition are dropping from her cramped limbs."

"Yes; but it is a volcanic soil. Everything is so sudden and so shifting. There will be changes, but it is the making over of an old garment after all. Liberty may sponge and cleanse herself a vesture, but the old stains and spots have eaten deep into the tri-color."

"You will return then; you will not pass your life so far away from us?"

She smiled a little wearily and said, "I think I shall never see America again. But I am, oh, so thankful to have known my home! I, who have lived a Venetian, shall die an American."

"And yet--?"

"And yet I am glad to--do not be shocked, kind friend, if I say that I am glad to die in my own Venice where I was born. I have two selves. One was born and nurtured here under the shadow of the silent palaces; the other sprang up full-grown among the madrone trees of San Rosario. The two have warred and struggled *here*; their battle-ground has been my breast, and the new self conquered the old; but the victory will be short-lived."

Galbraith looked at her intently. She had spoken a little wildly, as if her mind were clouded. She saw his look, and with a sigh smoothed the lines from her brow.

"I am a little mad, you think? Yes, yes. But I am so happy to see you. You understand me, dear friend; and you understand him, a little. You will see him again, though perhaps I never shall. You will tell him--No, do not look so grieved. It is very likely that I shall get well."

He lifted her pale hand and touched it to his lips, as a Catholic might kiss the cross.

"You will be well and strong again, my child. Do not speak so."

"It may be, and yet I do not wish it. Life looks so hard and cold and lonely. I do not wish to live,--and yet I am so afraid to die." She shivered, and Galbraith drew the gray cloak closer about her. "If I could only fall quietly asleep, and wake to find this poor weak body left behind--but you remember that poor creature's death? It was so terrible--I can never forget it."

"You must not think of it. What message was it that you wanted to send home?"

"It was to Graham. I can speak to you about him and to no one else. You must tell him how thankful I am that I left my old home, my old life, and came to his country. Tell him that he has nothing to reproach himself with; that the only thing that has made my life worth living has been my love for him. Tell him to remember me tenderly and without regret; it should be a sweet memory without a shadow of bitterness. Tell him--but what am I saying? You could never repeat it all even if you would. Give him this; it will tell him all; it is a token the trace of which he will find on my hand when we meet again, if souls retain aught of their old vesture in the twilight world."

She seemed wandering again. From her slim finger she slipped the little ring which Galbraith took and kept.

"And Barbara, dear good Barbara. She is white with that spotless purity of a passionless womanhood. Do you know, Mr. Galbraith, that dying people sometimes have a power of seeing into the future? Shall I tell you what face I see beside Barbara's in the bright coming years which I shall never know? It is that of a brave and loyal man,--a man whose love would make such a woman happy and complete. It is the face of the friend who has brought me great peace on this New Year's Day."

The black gondola now floated at rest under the archway of the grim old palace. From beneath the sable hood Girolomo lifted the slender frame. The old fellow's eyes filled with tears at the gentle words which his young mistress whispered to him as he carried her through the marble archway and up the long steep stairs.

"*Tanto ricca, tanto giovine, tanto bella, e bisogna che muore.*" Galbraith understood the words muttered by the old servant as he passed him after having laid his burden at rest in the great chair. He understood, but he would not believe them. It could not be true.

It was late that night when the soft-footed nun who was Millicent's nurse laid her patient on her couch, with a gentle reproof for her wilfulness in being so wakeful.

"But it was not my fault, my sister; I could not sleep earlier. Now I am better and shall rest." She smiled in the quiet face which bent over her under its snow-white coif of linen. The heavy gold-bronze hair was not plaited that night, Millicent was so tired. The sister smoothed it

tenderly over the pillow, her hard fingers thrilling at the touch of so much beauty. Her own close-shaven head had once been covered with thick black curls, one of which slept on the heart of the dead man for the repose of whose soul her prayers were offered at every hour of the day.

"My sister, sit by me. I want to talk with you a little while. I know your story, blessed one. Let me ask you a little of your life in the convent, among the sick. Is it peaceful, is it happy? Do you feel that you are nearer to the spirit of your dead lover than when you were in the world?"

"My child, I may not speak of these things; it would be a sin. Our words we can control, if not our thoughts."

"But, sister, I need your help. You know that I have not your faith, and never could have. But I have loved as you once loved, and I shall never see the face of my lover. What shall I do with my empty life? I am so weak!"

"All the greater need have you for a stronger help than mine, for a haven from the ills of the world. I cannot think you would find that place in our cloister. There must be workers in the world among the living and strong, as well as with the sick and dying. It is in that world that you, my child, with your power, your wealth, your beauty, should find your work. The arms of the Church are wide, and embrace the toilers in the market-place as well as those who watch and pray in the cloister."

"There is only work, then, that will bring peace?"

"Work and prayer, my child. You must not talk of this to-night; you should sleep now. To-morrow you shall tell me more of the needs of your soul."

"Only work! I am so tired, I am so weak, I cannot work alone. If there had been one to help me--" She lifted her white hand, so nerveless now, and let it sink wearily beside her.

"Bring the great candelabrum, and set it at the foot of the bed. Light all the candles. I want to drive out the shadows from the dark corners. Ah! hear them singing below there in the canal."

She sat up among her pillows listening to the chorus chanted by a band of belated merry-makers. It was the love-song that the people in the *sandalo* had sung that afternoon.

"*Dame un pensiero, sogna me, ed io ti sognerò.*" "In dreaming give a thought of me, and I will dream of thee."

"Give me my little golden crown, sister, and then lie down upon your couch and sleep. You do not mind the lights?"

Millicent was fanciful and wilful that night; and the nun, knowing that it was best to humor her, brought her from its velvet case the gold fillet of olive leaves which Graham had laid on the brow of his love in the forest of San Rosario. The girl set it on her head, and called for a mirror.

"I am beautiful still, my sister, though so pale, am I not?"

The nun nodded her head smilingly.

"Now that is all, and I shall sleep. Good-night to you. Say a little prayer for me, sister, and one for a strong, proud man who will be very sad to-night with me so far away from him."

She folded her palms upon her breast, as they fold the hands of the dead. The sister stood beside her, watching uneasily the light slumber into which her patient had fallen. Her pulse was full and even, the breathing regular, and the sleep peaceful as that of a child.

"A strange fancy to light those candles, and to put that wreath about her head. Poor child, she is beautiful, indeed, as the vision of a saint," murmured the sister.

At last the black-robed watcher laid aside her coif, and, lying down upon a couch near the bedside, fell asleep. She could not have told how long she slept, when a sound awoke her. The quiet of the night was broken by a sudden gust of wind blowing through the long apartment with a deep sigh. It trembled among the tresses of the sleeping girl, and stirred and lingered in the strand of hair which overhung the tiny ear. It blew the flame of the candles straight out from the wick, and fanned the embers on the hearthstone to a last up-flaming. It blew over the lips of the sleeper, and bore these softly spoken words to her ear,--

"I come, I come! wait for me!"

The girl turned on her pillow, and smiled in her sleep. All was going well. The nun replenished the dying fire with fuel, and, extinguishing the candles, lay down to sleep again by the light of the night lamp, muttering an Ave Maria.

And the breath of the west wind passed out of the silent sick room, and went roustering through the long suite of stately apartments, where it met no man. It was a strong puff of wind, which had travelled far and sturdily across wild seas and smiling lands. It had raced with man's toy of steam and iron, and laughed in derision at the poor engine and its boasted speed; it had swayed dim forest-trees in a far-off land; it had ruffled a quiet ocean into deep furrows of foam; it had

breathed upon a band of icy mountain giants, and had grown cold at their contact; it had come sighing down the Grand Canal, and had entered the great palace unceremoniously; it had fanned the cheek of a sleeping woman beautiful as the vision of a saint; it had whispered in her ear its message. And now, at the doorway of that great palace, the bold wind ceased its blustering, and died away into the still air of the ante-chamber, getting behind the heavy arras, and imparting a trembling motion to the faded figures of warrior and horse. A dim, gray Presence had entered the palace, before which the merry west wind had grown quiet. The hush of deepest night was on all the sleeping house, and the tide of the Adriatic was at the ebb. Silently the Presence crept toward the sick-room, and, as it crossed the threshold, the spark of the night light flickered and went out, while the nun crossed herself as she slept.

When Maurice Galbraith called at the Palazzo Fortunio early on the morning after he had seen Millicent, to inquire how she had passed the night, he found the porter's room empty. He rang at the door of the apartment, which was opened, after some delay, by a weeping woman. He could not understand what she said to him, and made his way to the boudoir where he had last seen Millicent, without meeting any one. He heard voices in the next room, which he knew to be her sleeping apartment.

"It must have been quite painless," he heard a strange voice say in English. "See! she has not moved; the clothes are quite unruffled. It is doubtful if she woke at all. Sister Theresa says she was in this attitude when she last saw her. If she had even breathed heavily the nun would have heard her, she sleeps so lightly."

A chill fell upon the young man's heart. What could those strange words mean? The door opened at last, and two men entered the room, the younger carefully closing it behind him. He was evidently a physician. The elder man passed him with bowed head and clasped hands. Galbraith touched the younger man on the arm, and asked him what his words had meant. The doctor waited till the father had left the room, and, turning to the stranger, answered him gently and compassionately; told him the little there was to tell beyond the great fact that Death had entered in the night and stolen the breath of the fairest, while she slept.

"If I could but fall quietly asleep!" he remembered her words of yester eve. Her prayer had been answered. The grim visage of Death had been hidden by the tender veil of sleep.

The physician was very patient with the stranger who asked him so often if it were certain, if there could be no mistake regarding the dreadful event. At last, when he was satisfied that there was no hope, he turned to go, stumbling over a chair as he went. The doctor made him take a glass of wine, and bade him rest awhile before going out. Maurice Galbraith was a strong man, and after the first faintness which the news had brought him, he nerved himself to meet the terrible grief, and bear it as a strong man should.

"You are Mr. Galbraith, from California, of whom she spoke last night?"

"Yes."

"Perhaps you could help me in a little matter which Mr. Almsford has asked me to attend to. This telegram came an hour ago. It was directed to her, and is dated California. Do you know the sender, and the meaning of the message?"

Galbraith took the slip of blue paper, and read these words:--

"I am coming to you. I start to-night.

"GRAHAM."

"You know the person?"

"Yes, very well."

"As we have not his address, would you kindly answer the despatch and tell him?"

"Surely."

"It would be a great favor."

"It is the last but one that I can ever do for her now."

He found his way to the telegraph office, he never knew how, and with trembling hand penned this message, which should fly swifter than west wind or shifting water, to John Graham on the far golden shore, where the tide was at the flood, and the earth glad and green in the promise of the new-born year:--

"Millicent died last night."

* * * * *

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