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KENNEDY SQUARE

By F. Hopkinson Smith

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Author's Preface

“Kennedy Square, in the late fifties, was a place of birds and trees and flowers; of rude stone benches, sagging arbors smothered in vines, and cool dirt paths bordered by sweet-smelling box. Giant magnolias filled the air with their fragrance, and climbing roses played hide-and-seek among the railings of the rotting fence. Along the shaded walks laughing boys and girls romped all day, with hoop and ball, attended by old black mammies in white aprons and gayly colored bandannas; while in the more secluded corners, sheltered by protecting shrubs, happy lovers sat and talked, tired wayfarers rested with hats off, and staid old gentlemen read by the hour, their noses in their books.

“Outside of all this color, perfume, and old-time charm; outside the grass-line and the rickety wooden fence that framed them in, ran an uneven pavement splashed with cool shadows and stained with green mould. Here, in summer, the watermelon man stopped his cart; and there, in winter, upon its broken bricks, old Moses unhooked his bucket of oysters and ceased for a moment his droning call.

“On the shady side of the square, and half hidden in ivy, was a Noah's Ark church, topped by a quaint belfry holding a bell that had not rung for years, and faced by a clock-dial all weather-stains and cracks, around which travelled a single rusty hand. In its shadow to the right lay the home of the archdeacon, a stately mansion with Corinthian columns reaching to the roof and surrounded by a spacious garden filled with damask roses and bushes of sweet syringa. To the left crouched a row of dingy houses built of brick, their iron balconies hung in flowering vines, the windows glistening with panes of wavy glass purpled by age.

“On the sunny side of the square, opposite the church, were more houses, high and low: one all garden, filled with broken-nosed statues hiding behind still more magnolias; and another all veranda and honeysuckle, big rocking-chairs and swinging hammocks; and still others with porticos curtained by white jasmine or Virginia creeper.”—From “The Fortunes of Oliver Horn.”

KENNEDY SQUARE

CHAPTER I

On the precise day on which this story opens—some sixty or more years ago, to be exact—a bullet-headed, merry-eyed, mahogany-colored young darky stood on the top step of an old-fashioned, high-stoop house, craning his head up and down and across Kennedy Square in the effort to get the first glimpse of his master, St. George Wilmot Temple, attorney and counsellor-at-law, who was expected home from a ducking trip down the bay.

Whether it was the need of this very diet, or whether St. George had felt a sudden longing for the out-of-doors, is a matter of doubt, but certain it is that some weeks before the very best shot in the county had betaken himself to the Eastern Shore of Maryland, accompanied by his guns, his four dogs, and two or three choice men of fashion—young bloods of the time—men with whom we shall become better acquainted as these chronicles go on—there to search for the toothsome and elusive canvas-back for which his State was famous.

That the darky was without a hat and in his shirt-sleeves, and it winter—the middle of January, really—the only warm thing about him being the green baize apron tied about his waist, his customary livery when attending to his morning duties—did not trouble him in the least. Marse George might come any minute, and he wanted to be the first to welcome him.

For the past few weeks Todd had had the house to himself. Coal-black Aunt Jemima, with her knotted pig-tails, capacious bosom, and unconfined waist, forty years his senior and ten shades darker in color, it is true, looked after the pots and pans, to say nothing of a particular spit on which her master's joints and game were roasted; but the upper part of the house, which covered the drawing-room, dining-room, bedroom, and dressing-room in the rear, as well as the outside of the dwelling, including even the green-painted front door and the slant of white marble steps that dropped to the brick sidewalk, were the especial property of the chocolate-colored darky.

To these duties was added the exclusive care of the master himself—a care which gave the boy the keenest delight, and which embraced every service from the drawing off of St. George Wilmot Temple's boots to the shortening of that gentleman's slightly gray hair; the supervision of his linen, clothes, and table, with such side issues as the custody of his well-stocked cellar, to say nothing of the compounding of various combinations, sweet, sour, and strong, the betrayal of whose secrets would have cost the darky his place.

“Place” is the word, for Todd was not St. George's slave, but the property of a well-born, if slightly impoverished, gentleman who lived on the Eastern Shore, and whose chief source of income was the hiring out to his friends and acquaintances of just such likely young darkies as Todd—a custom common to the impecunious of those days.

As Mr. Temple, however, did not come under either one of the above-mentioned classes—the “slightly impoverished gentleman” never having laid eyes on him in his life—the negotiations had to be conducted with a certain formality. Todd had therefore, on his arrival, unpinned from the inside of his jacket a portentous document signed with his owner's name and sealed with a red wafer, which after such felicitous phrases as —“I have the distinguished honor,” etc.—gave the boy's age (21), weight (140 pounds), and height (5 feet 10 inches)—all valuable data for identification in case the chattel conceived a notion of moving further north (an unnecessary precaution in Todd's case). To this was added the further information that the boy had been raised under his master's heels, that he therefore knew his pedigree, and that his sole and only reason for sparing him from his own immediate service was his own poverty and the fact that while under St. George's care the boy could learn how “to wait on quality.”

As to the house itself—the “Temple Mansion,” as it was called—that was as much a part of Kennedy Square as the giant magnolias gracing the park, or the Noah's Ark church, with its quaint belfry and cracked bell, which faced its shady walks. Nobody, of course, remembered how long it had been built—that is, nobody then alive—I mean the very date. Such authorities as Major Clayton were positive that the bricks had been brought from Holland; while Richard Horn, the rising young scientist, was sure that all the iron and brass work outside were the product of Sheffield; but in what year they had all been put together had always been a disputed question.

That, however, which was certain and beyond doubt, was that St. George's father, old General Dorsey Temple, had purchased the property near the close of the preceding century; that he had, with his characteristic vehemence, pushed up the roof, thrust in two dormer windows, and smashed out the rear wall, thus enlarging the dining-room and giving increased space for a glass-covered porch ending in a broad flight of wooden steps descending to a rose-garden surrounded by a high brick wall; that thus encouraged he had widened the fireplaces, wainscoted the hall, built a new mahogany spider-web staircase leading to his library on the second floor, and had otherwise disported himself after the manner of a man who, having suddenly fallen heir to a big pot of money, had ever after continued oblivious to the fact that the more holes he punched in its bottom the less water would spill over its top. The alterations complete, balls, routs, and dinners followed to such distinguished people as Count Rochambeau, the Marquis de Castellux, Marquis de Lafayette, and other high dignitaries, coming-of-age parties for the young bloods—quite English in his tastes was the old gentleman—not to mention many other extravagances which were still discussed by the gossips of the day.

With the general's death—it had occurred some twenty years before—the expected had happened. Not only was the pot nearly empty, but the various drains which it had sustained had so undermined the family rent-roll that an equally disastrous effect had been produced on the mansion itself (one of the few pieces of property, by the way, that the father had left to his only son and heir unencumbered, with the exception of a suit in chancery from which nobody ever expected a penny), the only dry spots in St. George's finances being the few ground rents remaining from his grandmother's legacy and the little he could pick up at the law.

It is not to be wondered at, therefore, that certain changes and deteriorations had taken place inside and out of the historic building—changes which never in the slightest degree affected the even-tempered St. George, who had retained his own private apartments regardless of the rest of the house—but changes which, in all justice to the irascible old spendthrift, would have lifted that gentleman out of his grave could he have realized their effect and extent. What a shock, for instance, would the most punctilious man of his time have

received when he found his front basement rented for a law office, to say nothing of a disreputable tin sign nailed to a shutter—where in the olden time he and his cronies had toasted their shins before blazing logs, the toddies kept hot on the hearth! And what a row would he have raised had he known that the rose-garden was entirely neglected and given over to the dogs and their kennels; the library in the second story stripped of its books and turned into a guest-chamber, and the books themselves consigned to the basement; the oak-panelled dining-room transformed into a bedchamber for St. George, and the white-and-gold drawing-room fronting the street reduced to a mere living-room where his son and heir made merry with his friends! And then the shrinkages all about! When a room could be dispensed with, it was locked up. When a shingle broke loose, it stayed loose; and so did the bricks capping the chimneys, and the leaky rain-spouts that spattered the dingy bricks, as well as the cracks and crannies that marred the ceilings and walls.

And yet so great was Todd's care over the outside fittings of the house—details which were necessarily in evidence, and which determined at a glance the quality of the folks inside—that these several crumblings, shake-downs, and shrinkages were seldom noticed by the passer-by. The old adage that a well-brushed hat, a clean collar, polished shoes, and immaculate gloves—all terminal details—make the well-dressed man, no matter how shabby or how ill-fitting his intermediate apparel, applied, according to Todd's standards, to houses as well as Brummels. He it was who soused the windows of purple glass, polished the brass knobs, rubbed bright the brass knocker and brass balls at the top and bottom of the delightful iron railings, to say nothing of the white marble steps, which he attacked with a slab of sandstone and cake of fuller's-earth, bringing them to so high a state of perfection that one wanted to apologize for stepping on them. Thus it was that the weather-beaten rainspouts, stained bricks, sagging roof, and blistered window-sashes were no longer in evidence. Indeed, their very shabbiness so enhanced the brilliancy of Todd's handiwork that the most casual passers-by were convinced at a glance that gentlefolk lived within.

On this particular morning, then, Todd had spent most of the time since daylight—it was now eight o'clock—in the effort to descry his master making his way along the street, either afoot or by some conveyance, his eyes dancing, his ears alert as a rabbit's, his restless feet marking the limit of his eagerness. In his impatience he had practised every step known to darkydom in single and double shuffle; had patted juba on one and both knees, keeping time with his heels to the rhythm; had slid down and climbed up the railings a dozen times, his eyes on the turn in the street, and had otherwise conducted himself as would any other boy, black or white, who was at his wits' end to know what to do with the next second of his time.

Aunt Jemima had listened to the racket until she had lost all patience, and at last threw up the basement window:

“Go in an' shet dat do'—'fo' I come up dar an' smack ye—'nough ter make a body deef ter hear ye,” she called, her black shining face dividing the curtains. “How you know he's a-comin'?”

Todd leaned over the railing and peered down: “Mister Harry Rutter done tol' me—said dey all 's a-comin'—de jedge an' Doctor Teackle an' Marse George an' de hull kit an' bilin'. Dey's been gone mos' two weeks now,—dey's a-comin' I tell ye—be yere any minute.”

“I b'liebe dat when I sees it. Fool nigger like you b'liebe anything. You better go inside 'fo' you catch yo' dea'f. I gin ye fair warnin' right now dat I ain't gwineter nuss ye,—d'ye yere?—standin' out dar like a tarr-pin wid yo' haid out. Go in I tell ye!” and she shut the window with a bang and made her way to the kitchen.

Todd kept up his double shuffle with everything going—hands, feet, and knees—thrashed his arms about his chest and back to keep up the circulation and with a final grimace in the direction of the old cook maintained his watch.

“I spec's it's de fog dat's kep' 'em,” he muttered anxiously, his feet still in action. “Dat bay boat's mos' allus late,—can't tell when she'll git in. Only las' week—Golly!—dar he is—DAT'S HIM!”

A mud-bespattered gig was swinging around the corner into the Square, and with a swerve in its course was heading to where Todd stood.

The boy sprang down the steps:

“Yere he is, Aunt Jemima!” he shouted, as if the old cook could have heard him through three brick walls.

The gig came to a stand-still and began to unload: first the dogs, who had been stowed under their master's feet since they left the steamboat wharf, and who with a clear bound to the sidewalk began scouring in mad circles, one after another, up and down Todd's immaculate steps, the four in full cry until the entire neighborhood was aroused, the late sleepers turning over with the remark—“Temple's at home,” and the early risers sticking their heads out of the windows to count the ducks as they were passed out. Next the master: One shapely leg encased in an English-made ducking boot, then its mate, until the whole of his handsome, well-knit, perfectly healthy and perfectly delightful body was clear of the cramped conveyance.

“Hello, Todd!” he burst out, his face aglow with his drive from the boat-landing—“glad to see you! Here, take hold of these guns—-easy now, they won't hurt you; one at a time, you lunkhead! And now pull those ducks from under the seat. How's Aunt Jemima?—Oh, is that you aunty?” She had come on the run as soon as she heard the dogs. “Everything all right, aunty—howdy—” and he shook her hand heartily.

The old woman had made a feint to pull her sleeves down over her plump black arms and then, begrudging the delay, had grasped his outstretched hand, her face in a broad grin.

“Yes, sah, dat's me. Clar' to goodness, Marse George, I's glad ter git ye home. Lawd-a-massy, see dem ducks! Purty fat, ain't dey, sah? My!—dat pair's jes' a-bustin'! G'long you fool nigger an' let me hab 'em! G'way f'om dere I tell ye!”

“No,—you pick them up, Todd—they're too heavy for you, aunty. You go back to your kitchen and hurry up breakfast—waffles, remember,—and some corn pone and a scallop shell or two—I'm as hungry as a bear.”

The whole party were mounting the steps now, St. George carrying the guns, Todd loaded down with the game—ten brace of canvas-backs and redheads strung together by their bills—the driver of the gig following with the master's big ducking overcoat and smaller traps—the four dogs crowding up trying to nose past for a dash into the wide hall as soon as Todd opened the door.

“Anybody been here lately, Todd?” his master asked, stopping for a moment to get a better grip of his

heaviest duck gun.

“Ain't nobody been yere partic'ler 'cept Mister Harry Rutter. Dey alls knowed you was away. Been yere mos' ev'ry day—come ag'in yisterday.”

“Mr. Rutter been here!—Well, what did he want?”

“Dunno, sah,—didn't say. Seemed consid'ble shook up when he foun' you warn't to home. I done tol' him you might be back to-day an' den ag'in you mightn't—'pended on de way de ducks was flyin'. Spec' he'll be roun' ag'in purty soon—seemed ter hab sumpin' on his min'. I'll tu'n de knob, sah. Yere—git down, you imp o' darkness,—you Floe!—you Dandy! Drat dem dogs!—Yere, YERE!” but all four dogs were inside now, making a sweepstakes of the living-room, the rugs and cushions flying in every direction.

Although Todd had spent most of the minutes since daylight peering up and down the Square, eager for the first sight of the man whom he loved with an idolatry only to be found in the negro for a white man whom he respects, and who is kind to him, he had not neglected any of his other duties. There was a roaring wood fire behind brass andirons and fender. There was a breakfast table set for two—St. George's invariable custom. “Somebody might drop in, you know, Todd.” There was a big easy-chair moved up within warming distance of the cheery blaze; there were pipes and tobacco within reach of the master's hand; there was the weekly newspaper folded neatly on the mantel, and a tray holding an old-fashioned squat decanter and the necessary glasses—in fact, all the comforts possible and necessary for a man who having at twenty-five given up all hope of wedded life, found himself at fifty becoming accustomed to its loss.

St. George seized the nearest dog by the collar, cuffed him into obedience as an example to the others, ordered the four to the hearth rug, ran his eye along the mantel to see what letters had arrived in his absence, and disappeared into his bedroom. From thence he emerged half an hour later attired in the costume of the day—a jaunty brown velveteen jacket, loose red scarf, speckled white waistcoat—single-breasted and of his own pattern and cut—dove-gray trousers, and white gaiters. No town clothes for St. George as long as his measure was in London and his friends were good enough to bring him a trunk full every year or two. “Well-cut garments may not make a gentleman,” he would often say to the youngsters about him, “but slip-shod clothes can spoil one.”

He had drawn up to the table now, Todd in white jacket hovering about him, bringing relays of waffles, hot coffee, and more particularly the first of a series of great scallop-shells filled with oysters which he had placed on the well-brushed hearth to keep hot while his master was dressing.

Fifty he was by the almanac, and by the old family Bible as well, and yet he did not look it. Six feet and an inch; straight, ruddy-checked, broad-shouldered, well-rounded, but with his waist measure still under control; slightly gray at the temples, with clean-shaven face, laughing eyes, white teeth, and finely moulded nose, brow, and chin, he was everything his friends claimed—the perfect embodiment of all that was best in his class and station, and of all that his blood had bequeathed him.

And fine old fellows they were if we can believe the historians of the seventeenth century: “Wearing the falchion and the rapier, the cloth coat lined with plush and embroidered belt, the gold hat-band and the feathers, silk stockings and garters, besides signet rings and other jewels; wainscoting the walls of their principal rooms in black oak and loading their sideboards with a deal of rich and massive silver plate upon which was carved the arms of their ancestors;—drinking, too, strong punch and sack from 'silver sack-cups'—(sack being their favorite)—and feasting upon oysters and the most delicious of all the ducks of the world.”

And in none of their other distinguishing qualities was their descendant lacking. In the very lift of his head and brace of his shoulders; in the grace and ease with which he crossed the room, one could see at a glance something of the dash and often the repose of the cavalier from whom he had sprung. And the sympathy, kindness, and courtesy of the man that showed in every glance of his eye and every movement of his body—despite his occasional explosive temper—a sympathy that drifted in to an ungovernable impulse to divide everything he owned into two parts, and his own half into two once more if the other fellow needed it; a kindness that made every man his friend, and a courtesy which, even in a time when men lifted their hats to men, as well as to women, had gained for him, the town over, the soubriquet of “Gentleman George”; while to every young girl and youth under twenty he was just “dear Uncle George”—the one man in all Kennedy Square who held their secrets.

But to our breakfast once more. All four dogs were on their feet now, their tails wagging expectantly, their noses at each of his knees, where they were regaled at regular intervals with choice bits from his plate, the snapping of their solemn jaws expressing their thanks. A second scallop-shell was next lifted from the hearth with the tongs, and deposited sizzling hot on a plate beside the master, the aroma of the oysters filling the room. These having disappeared, as had the former one, together with the waffles and coffee, and the master's appetite being now on the wane, general conversation became possible.

“Did Mr. Rutter look ill, Todd?” he continued, picking up the thread of the talk where he had left it. “He wasn't very well when I left.”

“No, sah,—neber see him look better. Been up a li'l' late I reckon,—Marse Harry mos' gen'ally is a li'l' mite late, sah—” Todd chuckled. “But dat ain't nuthin' to dese gemmans. But he sho' do wanter see ye. Maybe he stayed all night at Mister Seymour's. If he did an' he yered de rumpus dese rapscallions kicked up—yes—dat's you I'm talkin' to”—and he looked toward the dogs—“he'll be roun' yere 'fo' ye gits fru yo' bre'kfus'. Dey do say as how Marse Harry's mighty sweet in dat quarter. Mister Langdon Willits's snoopin' roun' too, but Miss Kate ain't got no use fer him. He ain't quality dey say.”

His master let him run on; Aunt Jemima was Todd's only outlet during his master's absence, and as this was sometimes clogged by an uplifted broom, he made the best use he could of the opportunities when he and his master were alone. When “comp'ny” were present he was as close-mouthed as a clam and as noiseless as a crab.

“Who told you all this gossip, Todd?” exclaimed St. George with a smile, laying down his knife and fork.

“Ain't nary one tol' me—ain't no use bein' tol'. All ye got to do is to keep yo' eyes open. Be a weddin' dar 'fo' spring. Look out, sah—dat shell's still a-sizzlin'. Mo' coffee, sah? Wait till I gits some hot waffles—won't take a

minute!” and he was out of the room and downstairs before his master could answer.

Hardly had he slammed the kitchen door behind him when the clatter and stamp of a horse's hoofs were heard Outside, followed by an impatient rat-a-tat-tat on the knocker.

The boy dropped his dishes: “Fo' Gawd, dat's Mister Harry!” he cried as he started on a run for the door. “Don't nobody bang de do' down like dat but him.”

A slender, thoroughly graceful young fellow of twenty-one or two, booted and spurred, his dark eyes flashing, his face tingling with the sting of the early morning air, dashed past the obsequious darky and burst into Temple's presence with the rush of a north-west breeze. He had ridden ten miles since he vaulted into the saddle, had never drawn rein uphill or down, and neither he nor the thoroughbred pawing the mud outside had turned a hair.

“Hello, Uncle George!” Temple, as has been said, was Uncle George to every girl and youth in Kennedy Square.

“Why, Harry!” He had sprung from his seat, napkin in hand and had him by both shoulders, looking into his eyes as if he wanted to hug him, and would the first thing he knew. “Where are you from—Moorlands? What a rollicking chap you are, and you look so well and handsome, you dog! And now tell me of your dear mother and your father. But first down with you—here—right opposite—always your place, my dear Harry. Todd, another shell of oysters and more waffles and coffee—everything, Todd, and blazing hot: two shells, Todd—the sight of you, Harry, makes me ravenous again, and I could have eaten my boots, when I got home an hour ago, I was so hungry. But the mare”—here he moved to the window—“is she all right? Spitfire, I suppose—you'd kill anything else, you rascal! But you haven't tied her!”

“No—never tie her—break her heart if I did. Todd, hang up this coat and hat in the hall before you go.”

“That's what you said of that horse you bought of Hampson—ran away, didn't he?” persisted his host, his eyes on the mare, which had now become quiet.

“Yes, and broke his leg. But Spitfire's all right—she'll stand. Where will I sit—here? And now what kind of a time did you have, and who were with you?”

“Clayton, Doctor Teackle, and the judge.”

“And how many ducks did you get?” and he dropped into his chair.

“Twenty-one,” answered St. George, dry-washing his white shapely hands, as he took his seat—a habit of his when greatly pleased.

“All canvas-backs?”

“No—five redheads and a mallard.”

“Where did you put up?” echoed Harry, loosening his riding-jacket to give his knife and fork freer play.

“I spent a week at Tom Coston's and a week at Craddock. Another lump of sugar, Todd.”

The boy laughed gently: “Lazy Tom's?”

“Lazy Tom's—and the best-hearted fellow in the world. They're going to make him a judge, they say and—”

“—What of—peach brandy? No cream in mine, Todd.”

“No—you scurrilous dog—of the Common Court,” retorted St. George, looking at him over the top of his cup. “Very good lawyer is Tom—got horse sense and can speak the truth—make a very good judge.”

Again Harry laughed—rather a forced laugh this time, as if he were trying to make himself agreeable but with so anxious a ring through it that Todd busied himself about the table before going below for fresh supplies, making excuse of collecting the used dishes. If there were to be any revelations concerning the situation at the Seymour house, he did not intend to miss any part of them.

“Better put Mrs. Coston on the bench and set Tom to rocking the cradle,” said the young man, reaching for the plate of corn pone. “She's a thoroughbred if ever I saw one, and does credit to her blood. But go on—tell me about the birds. Are they flying high?—and the duck blinds; have they fixed them up? They were all going to pot when I was there last.”

“Birds out of range, most of them—hard work getting what I did. As to the blinds, they are still half full of water—got soaking wet trying to use one. I shot most of mine from the boat just as the day broke,” and then followed a full account of what the party had bagged, with details of every day's adventures. This done, St. George pushed back his chair and faced the young man.

“And now you take the witness-stand, sir—look me in the eyes, put your hand on your fob-pocket and tell me the truth. Todd says you have been here every day for a week looking as if you had lost your last fip-penny-bit and wild to see me. What has happened?”

“Todd has a vivid imagination.” He turned in his seat, stretched out his hand, and catching one of the dogs by the nose rubbed his head vigorously.

“Go on—all of it—no dodging the king's counsellor. What's the matter?”

The young man glanced furtively at Todd, grabbed another dog, rubbed their two ears together in play, and in a lowered voice, through which a tinge of sadness was only too apparent, murmured:

“Miss Kate—we've had a falling out.”

St. George lowered his head suddenly and gave a low whistle:—“Falling out?—what about?”

Again young Rutter glanced at Todd, whose back was turned, but whose ears were stretched to splitting point. His host nodded understandingly.

“There, Todd—that will do; now go down and get your breakfast. No more waffles, tell Aunt Jemima. Bring the pipes over here and throw on another log... that's right.” A great sputtering of sparks followed—a spider-legged, mahogany table was wheeled into place, and the dejected darky left the room for the regions below.

“So you two have had a quarrel! Oh, Harry!—when will you learn to think twice before you speak? Whose fault was it?” sighed St. George, filling the bowl of his pipe with his slender fingers, slowly tucking in each shred and grain.

“Mine.”

“What did you say?” (Puff-puff.)

“Nothing—I couldn't. She came in and saw it all.” The boy had his elbows on the table now, his cheeks sunk in his hands.

St. George looked up: “Drunk, were you?”

“Yes.”

“Where?”

“At Mrs. Cheston's ball last week.”

“Have you seen her since?”

“No—she won't let me come near her. Mr. Seymour passed me yesterday and hardly spoke to me.”

St. George canted his chair and zigzagged it toward the blazing hearth; then he said thoughtfully, without looking at the young man:

“Well, this is a pretty kettle of fish! Have you told your father?”

“No—he wouldn't understand.”

“And I know you didn't tell your mother.” This came with the tone of positive conviction.

“No—and don't you. Mother is daft on the subject. If she had her way, father would never put a drop of wine on the table. She says it is ruining the county—but that's mother's way.”

St. George stooped over, fondled one of the dogs for a moment—two had followed Todd out of the room—settled back in his chair again, and still looking into the fire, said slowly:

“Bad business—bad business, Harry! Kate is as proud as Lucifer and dislikes nothing on earth so much as being made conspicuous. Tell me exactly what happened.”

“Well, there isn't anything to tell,” replied the young fellow, raising his head and leaning back in his chair, his face the picture of despair. “We were all in the library and the place was boiling-hot, and they had two big bowls, one full of eggnog and the other full of apple-toddy: and the next thing I knew I was out in the hall and met Kate on the stairs. She gave a little smothered scream, and moaned—'Oh, Harry!—and you promised me!'—and then she put her hands to her face, as if to shut me out of her sight. That sobered me somewhat, and after I got out on the porch into the night air and had pulled myself together, I tried to find her and apologize, but she had gone home, although the ball wasn't half over.

“Then this was not the first time?” He was still at the hot coals, both hands outfanned, to screen his face from the blaze.

“No—I'm sorry to say it wasn't. I told her I would never fail her again, and she forgave me, but I don't know what she'll do now. She never forgives anybody who breaks his word—she's very queer about it. That's what I came to see you about. I haven't slept much nights, thinking it over, and so I had the mare saddled, as soon as it got light, hoping you would be home. Todd thought you might be—he saw Dr. Teackle's Joe, who said you were all coming to-day.”

Again there was a long pause, during which Temple continued to study the coals through his open fingers, the young man sitting hunched up in his chair, his handsome head dropped between his shoulders, his glossy chestnut hair, a-frouze with his morning ride, fringing his collar behind.

“Harry,” said St. George, knocking the ashes slowly from his pipe on the edge of the fender, and turning his face for the first time toward him,—“didn't I hear something before I went away about a ball at your father's—or a dance—or something, when your engagement was to be announced?”

The boy nodded.

“And was it not to be something out of the ordinary?” he continued, looking at the boy from under his eyelids—“Teackle certainly told me so—said that your mother had already begun to get the house in order—”

Again Harry nodded—as if he had been listening to an indictment, every word of which he knew was true.

St. George roused himself and faced his guest: “And yet you took this time, Harry, to—”

The boy threw up both hands in protest:

“Don't!—DON'T! Uncle George! It's the ball that makes it all the worse. That's why I've got no time to lose; that's why I've haunted this place waiting for you to get back. Mother will be heart-broken if she finds out and I don't know what father would do.”

St. George laid his empty pipe on the table and straightened his body in the chair until his broad shoulders filled the back. Then his brow darkened; his indignation was getting the better of him.

“I don't know what has come over you young fellows, Harry!” he at last broke out, his eyes searching the boy's. “You don't seem to know how to live. You've got to pull a shoat out of a trough to keep it from overeating itself, but you shouldn't be obliged to pull a gentleman away from his glass. Good wine is good food and should be treated as such. My cellar is stocked with old Madeira—some port—some fine sherries—so is your father's. Have you ever seen him abuse them?—have you ever seen Mr. Horn or Mr. Kennedy, or any of our gentlemen around here, abuse them? It's scandalous, Harry! damnable! I love you, my son—love you in a way you know nothing of, but you've got to stop this sort of thing right off. And so have these young roysterers you associate with. It's getting worse every day. I don't wonder your dear mother feels about it as she does. But she's always been that way, and she's always been right about it, too, although I didn't use to think so.” This last came with a lowered voice and a deep, indrawn sigh, and for the moment checked the flow of his wrath.

Harry hung his head still lower, but he did not attempt to defend himself.

“Who else were making vulgarians of themselves at Mrs. Cheston's?” St. George continued in a calmer tone, stretching his shapely legs until the soles of his shoes touched the fender.

“Mark Gilbert, Tom Murdoch, Langdon Willits, and—”

“Willits, eh?—Well, I should expect it of Willits. He wasn't born a gentleman—that is, his grandfather wasn't

a gentleman—married his overseer's daughter, if I remember right:—but you come of the best blood in the State,—egad!—none better! You have something to maintain—some standard to keep up. A Rutter should never be found guilty of anything that would degrade his name. You seem to forget that—you—damn me, Harry!—when I think of it all—and of Kate—my sweet, lovely Kate,—and how you have made her suffer—for she loves you—no question of that—I feel like wringing your neck! What the devil do you mean, Sir?" He was up on his feet now, pacing the room, the dogs following his every movement with their brown agate eyes, their soft, silky ears straightening and falling.

So far the young fellow had not moved nor had he offered a word in defence. He knew his Uncle George—better let him blow it all out, then the two could come together. At last he said in a contrite tone—his hands upraised:

"Don't scold me, Uncle George. I've scolded myself enough—just say something to help me. I can't give Kate up—I'd sooner die. I've always made a fool of myself—maybe I'll quit doing it after this. Tell me how I can straighten this out. She won't see me—maybe her father won't. He and my father—so Tom Warfield told me yesterday—had a talk at the club. What they said I don't know, but Mr. Seymour was pretty mad—that is, for him—so Tom thought from the way he spoke."

"And he ought to be mad—raging mad! He's only got one daughter, and she the proudest and loveliest thing on earth, and that one he intends to give to you"—Harry looked up in surprise—"Yes—he told me so. And here you are breaking her heart before he has announced it to the world. It's worse than damnable, Harry—it's a CRIME!"

For some minutes he continued his walk, stopping to look out of the window, his eyes on the mare who, with head up and restless eyes, was on the watch for her master's return; then he picked up his pipe from the table, threw himself into his chair again, and broke into one of his ringing laughs.

"I reckon it's because you're twenty, Harry, I forgot that. Hot blood—hot temper,—madcap dare-devil that you are—not a grain of common-sense. But what can you expect?—I was just like you at your age. Come, now, what shall we do first?"

The young fellow rose and a smile of intense relief crept over his face. He had had many such overhaulings from his uncle, and always with this ending. Whenever St. George let out one of those big, spontaneous, bubbling laughs straight from his heart, the trouble, no matter how serious, was over. What some men gained by anger and invective St. George gained by good humor, ranging from the faint smile of toleration to the roar of merriment. One reason why he had so few enemies—none, practically—was that he could invariably disarm an adversary with a laugh. It was a fine old blade that he wielded; only a few times in his life had he been called upon to use any other—when some under-dog was maltreated, or his own good name or that of a friend was traduced, or some wrong had to be righted—then his face would become as hot steel and there would belch out a flame of denunciation that would scorch and blind in its intensity. None of these fiercer moods did the boy know;—what he knew was his uncle's merry side—his sympathetic, loving side,—and so, following up his advantage, he strode across the room, settled down on the arm of his uncle's chair, and put his arm about his shoulders.

"Won't you go and see her, please?" he pleaded, patting his back, affectionately.

"What good will that do? Hand me a match, Harry."

"Everything—that's what I came for."

"Not with Kate! She isn't a child—she's a woman," he echoed back between the puffs, his indignation again on the rise. "And she is different from the girls about here," he added, tossing the burned match in the fire. "When she once makes up her mind it stays made up."

"Don't let her make it up! Go and see her and tell her how I love her and how miserable I am. Tell her I'll never break another promise to her as long as I live. Nobody ever holds out against you. Please, Uncle George! I'll never come to you for anything else in the world if you'll help me this time. And I won't drink another drop of anything you don't want me to drink—I don't care what father or anybody else says. Oh, you've GOT to go to her!—I can't stand it any longer! Every time I think of Kate hidden away over there where I can't get at her, it drives me wild. I wouldn't ask you to go if I could go myself and talk it out with her—but she won't let me near her—I've tried, and tried; and Ben says she isn't at home, and knows he lies when he says it! You will go, won't you?"

The smoke from his uncle's pipe was coming freer now—most of it escaping up the throat of the chimney with a gentle swoop.

"When do you want me to go?" He had already surrendered. When had he ever held out when a love affair was to be patched up?

"Now, right away."

"No,—I'll go to-night,—she will be at home then," he said at last, as if he had just made up his mind, the pipe having helped—"and do you come in about nine and—let me know when you are there, or—better still, wait in the hall until I come for you."

"But couldn't I steal in while you are talking?"

"No—you do just as I tell you. Not a sound out of you, remember, until I call you."

"But how am I to know? She might go out the other door and—"

"You'll know when I come for you."

"And you think it will be all right, don't you?" he pleaded. "You'll tell her what an awful time I've had, won't you, Uncle George?"

"Yes, every word of it."

"And that I haven't slept a wink since—"

"Yes—and that you are going to drown yourself and blow your head off and swallow poison. Now off with you and let me think how I am to begin straightening out this idiotic mess. Nine o'clock, remember, and in the hall until I come for you."

“Yes—nine o'clock! Oh!—you good Uncle George! I'll never forget you for it,” and with a grasp of St. George's hand and another outpouring of gratitude, the young fellow swung wide the door, clattered down the steps, threw his leg over Spitfire, and dashed up the street.

CHAPTER II

If Kate's ancestors had wasted any part of their substance in too lavish a hospitality, after the manner of the spendthrift whose extravagances were recounted in the preceding chapter, there was nothing to indicate it in the home of their descendants. No loose shutters, crumbling chimneys, or blistered woodwork defaced the Seymour mansion:—the touch of the restorer was too apparent. No sooner did a shutter sag or a hinge give way than away it went to the carpenter or the blacksmith; no sooner did a banister wabble, or a table crack, or an andiron lose a leg, than up came somebody with a kit, or a bag, or a box of tools, and they were as good as new before you could wink your eye. Indeed, so great was the desire to keep things up that it was only necessary (so a wag said) to scratch a match on old Seymour's front door to have its panels repainted the next morning.

And then its seclusion:—while its neighbors—the Temple mansion among them—had been placed boldly out to the full building line where they could see and be seen, the Seymours, with that spirit of aloofness which had marked the family for generations, had set their dwelling back ten paces, thrown up a hedge of sweet-smelling box to screen the inmates from the gaze of passers-by, planted three or four big trees as protection for the upper windows, and, to insure still greater privacy, had put up a swinging wooden gate, kept shut by a ball and chain, its clang announcing the entrance of each and every visitor.

And this same spirit was manifest the moment you stepped into the wide hall, glanced at the old family portraits marching steadily, one after another, up the side of the spacious stairs (revarnished every other year)—entered the great drawing-room hung with yellow satin and decorated with quaint mirrors, and took a scat in one of the all-embracing arm-chairs, there to await the arrival of either the master of the house or his charming daughter.

If it were the master to whom you wished to pay your respects, one glance at the Honorable Howard Douglass Seymour would have convinced you that he was precisely the kind of man who should have had charge of so well-ordered a home: so well brushed was he—so clean-shaven—so immaculately upholstered—the two points of his collar pinching his cheeks at the same precise angle; his faultless black stock fitting to perfection, the lapels of his high-rolled coat matching exactly. And then the correct parting of the thin gray hair and the two little gray brush-tails of lovelocks that were combed in front of his ears, there to become a part of the two little dabs of gray whiskers that stretched from his temples to his bleached cheekbones. Yes—a most carefully preserved, prim, and well-ordered person was Kate's father.

As to the great man's career, apart from his service in the legislature, which won him his title, there was no other act of his life which marked him apart from his fellows. Suffice it to say that he was born a gentleman without a penny to his name; that he married Kate's mother when she was twenty and he forty (and here is another story, and a sad one)—she the belle of her time—and sole heir to the estate of her grandfather, Captain Hugh Barkeley, the rich ship-owner—and that the alliance had made him a gentleman of unlimited leisure, she, at her death, having left all her property to her daughter Kate, with the Honorable Prim as custodian.

And this trust, to his credit be it said—for Seymour was of Scotch descent, a point in his favor with old Captain Barkeley, who was Scotch on his mother's side, and, therefore, somewhat canny—was most religiously kept, he living within his ample means—or Kate's, which was the same thing—discharging the duties of father, citizen, and friend, with the regularity of a clock—so many hours with his daughter, so many hours at his club, so many hours at his office; the intermediate minutes being given over to resting, dressing, breakfasting, dining, sleeping, and no doubt praying; the precise moment that marked the beginning and ending of each task having been fixed years in advance by this most exemplary, highly respectable, and utterly colorless old gentleman of sixty.

That this dry shell of a man could be the father of our spontaneous lovely Kate was one of the things that none of the younger people around Kennedy Square could understand—but then few of them had known her beautiful mother with her proud step and flashing eyes.

But it is not the punctilious, methodical Prim whom St. George wishes to see to-night; nor does he go through any of the formalities customary to the house. There is no waiting until old Ben, the family butler in snuff-colored coat and silver buttons, shuffles upstairs or into the library, or wherever the inmates were to be found, there to announce “Massa George Temple.” Nor did he send in his card, or wait until his knock was answered. He simply swung back the gate until the old chain and ball, shocked at his familiarity, rattled itself into a rage, strode past the neatly trimmed, fragrant box, pushed open the door—no front door was ever locked in the daytime in Kennedy Square, and few at night—and halting at the bottom step, called up the silent stairs in a voice that was a joyous greeting in itself:

“Kate, you darling! come down as quick as your dear little feet will carry you! It's Uncle George, do you hear?—or shall I come up and bring you down in my arms, you bunch of roses? It won't be the first time.” The first time was when she was a year old.

“Oh!—is that you, Uncle George? Yes,—just as soon as I do up my back hair.” The voice came from the top of the stairs—a lark's voice singing down from high up. “Father's out and—”

“Yes—I know he's out; I met him on his way to the club. Hurry now—I've got the best news in the world for you.”

“Yes—in a minute.”

He knew her minutes, and how long they could be, and in his impatience roamed about the wide hall examining the old English engravings and colored prints decorating the panels until he heard her step overhead and looking up watched her cross the upper hall, her well-poised, aristocratic head high in air, her full, well-rounded, blossoming body imaged in the loose embroidered scarf wound about her sloping shoulders. Soon he caught the wealth of her blue-black hair in whose folds her negro mammy had pinned a rose that matched the brilliancy of her cheeks, two stray curls wandering over her neck; her broad forehead, with clearly marked eyebrows, arching black lashes shading lustrous, slumbering eyes; and as she drew nearer, her warm red lips, exquisite teeth, and delicate chin, and last, the little feet that played hide and seek beneath her quilted petticoat: a tall, dark, full-blooded, handsome girl of eighteen with an air of command and distinction tempered by a certain sweet dignity and delicious coquetry—a woman to be loved even when she ruled and to be reverenced even when she trifled.

She had reached the floor now, and the two arm in arm, he patting her hand, she laughing beside him, had entered the small library followed by the old butler bringing another big candelabra newly lighted.

“It's so good of you to come,” she cried, her face alight with the joy of seeing him—“and you look so happy and well—your trip down the bay has done you a world of good. Ben says the ducks you sent father are the best we have had this winter. Now tell me, dear Uncle George”—she had him in one of the deep arm-chairs by this time, with a cushion behind his shoulders—“I am dying to hear all about it.”

“Don't you 'dear Uncle George' me until you've heard what I've got to say.”

“But you said you had the best news in the world for me,” she laughed, looking at him from under her lashes.

“So I have.”

“What is it?”

“Harry.”

The girl's face clouded and her lips quivered. Then she sat bolt upright.

“I won't hear a word about him. He's broken his promise to me and I will never trust him again. If I thought you'd come to talk about Harry, I wouldn't have come down.”

St. George lay back in his chair, shrugged his shoulders, stole a look at her from beneath his bushy eyebrows, and said with an assumed dignity, a smile playing about his lips:

“All right, off goes his head—exit the scoundrel. Much as I could do to keep him out of Jones Falls this morning, but of course now it's all over we can let Spitfire break his neck. That's the way a gentleman should die of love—and not be fished out of a dirty stream with his clothes all bespattered with mud.”

“But he won't die for love. He doesn't know what love means or he wouldn't behave as he does. Do you know what really happened, Uncle George?” Her brown eyes were flashing, her cheeks aflame with her indignation.

“Oh, I know exactly what happened. Harry told me with the tears running down his cheeks. It was dreadful—INEXCUSABLE—BARBAROUS! I've been that way myself—tumbled half-way down these same stairs before you were born and had to be put to bed, which accounts for the miserable scapegrace I am to-day.” His face was in a broad smile, but his voice never wavered.

Kate looked at him and put out her hand. “You never did—I won't believe a word of it.”

“Ask your father, my dear. He helped carry me upstairs, and Ben pulled off my boots. Oh, it was most disgraceful! I'm just beginning to live it down,” and he reached over and patted the girl's cheek, his hearty laugh ringing through the room.

Kate was smiling now—her Uncle George was always irresistible when he was like this.

“But Harry isn't you,” she pouted.

“ISN'T ME!—why I was ten times worse! He's only twenty-one and I was twenty-five. He's got four years the better of me in which to reform.”

“He'll NEVER be like you—you never broke a promise in your life. He gave me his word of honor he would never get—yes—I'm just going to say it—drunk—again: yes—that's the very word—DRUNK! I don't care—I won't have it! I won't have anything to do with anybody who breaks his promise, and who can't keep sober. My father was never so in his life, and Harry shall never come near me again if he—”

“Hold on!—HOLD ON! Oh, what an unforgiving minx! You Seymours are all like tinder boxes—your mother was just like you and so was—”

“Well, not father,” she bridled, with a toss of her head.

St. George smiled queerly—Prim was one of his jokes. “Your father, my dear Kate, has the milk of human kindness in his veins, not red fighting blood. That makes a whole lot of difference. Now listen to me:—you love Harry—”

“No! I DESPISE him! I told him so!” She had risen from her seat and had moved to the mantel, where she stood looking into the fire, her back toward him.

“Don't you interrupt me, you blessed girl—just you listen to Uncle George for a minute. You DO love Harry—you can't help it—nobody can. If you had seen him this morning you would have thrown your arms around him in a minute—I came near doing it myself. Of course he's wild, reckless, and hot-headed like all the Rutters and does no end of foolish things, but you wouldn't love him if he was different. He's just like Spitfire—never keeps still a minute—restless, pawing the ground, or all four feet in the air—then away she goes! You can't reason with her—you don't wish to; you get impatient when she chafes at the bit because you are determined she shall keep still, but if you wanted her to go like the wind and she couldn't, you'd be more dissatisfied than ever. The pawing and chafing is of no matter; it is her temperament that counts. So it is with Harry. He wouldn't be the lovable, dashing, high-spirited young fellow he is if he didn't kick over the traces once in a while and break everything to pieces—his promises among them. And it isn't his fault—it's the Spanish and Dutch blood in his veins—the blood of that old hidalgo and his Dutch ancestor, De Ruyter—that crops out once in a while. Harry would be a pirate and sweep the Spanish main if he had lived in those days,

instead of being a gentleman who values nothing in life so much as the woman he loves.”

He had been speaking to her back all this time, the girl never moving, the outlines of her graceful body in silhouette against the blaze.

“Then why doesn't he prove it?” she sighed. She liked old hidalgos and had no aversion to pirates if they were manly and brave about their work.

“He does—and he lives up to his standard except in this one failing for which I am truly sorry. Abominable I grant you—but there are many things which are worse.”

“I can't think of anything worse,” she echoed with a deep sigh, walking slowly toward him and regaining her chair, all her anger gone, only the pain in her heart left. “I don't want Harry to be like the others, and he can't live their lives if he's going to be my husband. I want him to be different,—to be big and fine and strong,—like the men who have made the world better for their having lived in it—that old De Ruyter, for instance, that his father is always bragging about—not a weak, foolish boy whom everybody can turn around their fingers. Some of my girl friends don't mind what the young men do, or how often they break their word to them so that they are sure of their love. I do, and I won't have it, and I have told Harry so over and over again. It's such a cowardly thing—not to be man enough to stand up and say 'No—I won't drink with you!' That's why I say I can't think of his doing anything worse.”

St. George fixed his eyes upon her. He had thought he knew the girl's heart, but this was a revelation to him. Perhaps her sorrow, like that of her mother, was making a well-rounded woman of her.

“Oh, I can think of a dozen things worse,” he rejoined with some positiveness. “Harry might lie; Harry might be a coward; Harry might stand by and hear a friend defamed; Harry might be discourteous to a woman, or allow another man to be—a thing he'd rather die than permit. None of these things could he be or do. I'd shut my door in his face if he did any one of them, and so should you. And then he is so penitent when he has done anything wrong. 'It was my fault—I would rather hang myself than lose Kate. I haven't slept a wink, Uncle George.' And he was so handsome when he came in this morning—his big black eyes flashing, his cheeks like two roses—so straight and strong, and so graceful and wholesome and lovable. I wouldn't care, if I were you, if he did slip once in a while—not any more than I would if Spitfire stumbled. And then again”—here he moved his chair close to her own so he could get his hand on hers the easier—“if Spitfire does stumble, there is the bridle to pull her up, but for this she might break her neck. That's where you come in, Kate. Harry's in your hands—has been since the hour he loved you. Don't let him go headlong to the devil—and he will if you turn him loose without a bridle.”

“I can't do him any good—he won't mind anything I say. And what dependence can I place on him after this?” her voice sank to a tone of helpless tenderness. “It isn't his being drunk altogether; he will outgrow that, perhaps, as you say you did, and be man enough to say no next time; but it's because he broke his promise to me. That he will never outgrow! Oh, it's wicked!—wicked for him to treat me so. I have never done anything he didn't want me to do! and he has no right to—Oh, Uncle George, it's—”

St. George leaned nearer and covered her limp fingers with his own tender grasp.

“Try him once more, Kate. Let me send him to you. It will be all over in a minute and you will be so happy—both of you! Nothing like making up—it really pays for the pain of a quarrel.”

The outside door shut gently and there was a slight movement in the hall behind them, but neither of them noticed it. Kate sat with her head up, her mind at work, her eyes watching the firelight. It was her future she was looking into. She had positive, fixed ideas of what her station in life as a married woman should be;—not what her own or Harry's birth and position could bring her. With that will-o'-the-wisp she had no sympathy. Her grandfather in his early days had been a plain, seafaring man even if his ancestry did go back to the time of James I, and her mother had been a lady, and that too without the admixture of a single drop of the blood of any Kennedy Square aristocrat. That Harry was well born and well bred was as it should be, but there was something more;—the man himself. That was why she hesitated. Yes—it WOULD “all be over in a minute,” just as Uncle George said, but when would the next break come? And then again there was her mother's life with all the misery that a broken promise had caused her. Uncle George was not the only young gallant who had been put to bed in her grandfather's house. Her mother had loved too—just as much as she loved Harry—loved with her whole soul—until grandpa Barkeley put his foot down.

St. George waited in silence as he read her mind. Breaches between most of the boys and girls were easily patched up—a hearty cry, an outstretched hand—“I am so sorry,” and they were in each other's arms. Not so with Kate. Her reason, as well as her heart, had to be satisfied. This was one of the things that made her different from all the other girls about her, and this too was what had given her first place in the affections and respect of all who knew her. Her heart he saw was uppermost to-night, but reason still lurked in the background.

“What do you think made him do it again?” she murmured at last in a voice barely audible, her fingers tightening in his palm. “He knows how I suffer and he knows too WHY I suffer. Oh, Uncle George!—won't you please talk to him! I love him so, and I can't marry him if he's like this. I can't!—*I* CAN'T!”

A restrained smile played over St. George's face. The tide was setting his way.

“It won't do a bit of good,” he said calmly, smothering his joy. “I've talked to him until I'm tired, and the longer I talk the more wild he is to see you. Now it's your turn and there's no time to lose. I'll have him here in five minutes,” and he glanced at the clock. She raised her hand in alarm:

“I don't want him yet. You must see him first—you must—”

“No, I won't see him first, and I'm not going to wait a minute. Talk to him yourself; put your arms around him and tell him everything you have told me—now—to-night. I'm going for him,” and he sprang to his feet.

“No!—you must not! You SHALL not!” she cried, clutching nervously at his arm, but he was out of the room before she could stop him.

In the silent hall, hat in hand, his whole body tense with expectancy, stood Harry. He had killed time by walking up and down the long strip of carpet between the front door and the staircase, measuring his nervous steps to the length of the pattern, his mind distracted by his fears for the outcome—his heart thumping away

at his throat, a dull fright gripping him when he thought of losing her altogether.

St. George's quick step, followed by his firm clutch of the inside knob, awoke him to consciousness. He sprang forward to catch his first word.

“Can I go in?” he stammered.

St. George grabbed him by the shoulder, wheeled him around, and faced him.

“Yes, you reprobate, and when you get in go down on your knees and beg her pardon, and if I ever catch you causing her another heartache I'll break your damned neck!—do you hear?”

With the shutting of the swinging gate the wily old diplomat regained his normal good-humored poise, his face beaming, his whole body tingling at his success. He knew what was going on behind the closed curtains, and just how contrite and humble the boy would be, and how Kate would scold and draw herself up—proud duchess that she was—and how Harry would swear by the nine gods, and an extra one if need be—and then there would come a long, long silence, broken by meaningless, half-spoken words—and then another silence—so deep and absorbing that a full choir of angels might have started an anthem above their heads and neither of them would have heard a word or note.

And so he kept on his way, picking his steps between the moist places in the path to avoid soiling his freshly varnished boots; tightening the lower button of his snug-fitting plum-colored coat as a bracing to his waist-line; throwing open the collar of his overcoat the wider to give his shoulders the more room—very happy—very well satisfied with himself, with the world, and with everybody who lived in it.

CHAPTER III

Moorlands was ablaze!

From the great entrance gate flanked by moss-stained brick posts capped with stone balls, along the avenue of oaks to the wide portico leading to the great hall and spacious rooms, there flared one continuous burst of light. On either side of the oak-bordered driveway, between the tree-trunks, crackled torches of pine knots, the glow of their curling flames bringing into high relief the black faces of innumerable field-hands from the Rutter and neighboring plantations, lined up on either side of the gravel road—teeth and eyeballs flashing white against the blackness of the night. Under the porches hung festoons of lanterns of every conceivable form and color, while inside the wide baronial hall, and in the great drawing-room with the apartments beyond, the light of countless candles, clustered together in silver candelabras, shed a soft glow over the groups of waiting guests.

To-night Colonel Talbot Rutter of Moorlands, direct descendant of the house of De Ruyter, with an ancestry dating back to the Spanish Invasion, was to bid official welcome to a daughter of the house of Seymour, equally distinguished by flood and field in the service of its king. These two—God be thanked—loved each other, and now that the young heir to Moorlands was to bring home his affianced bride, soon to become his wedded wife, no honor could be too great, no expense too lavish, no welcome too joyful.

Moreover, that this young princess of the blood might be accorded all the honors due her birth, lineage, and rank, the colonel's own coach-and-four, with two postilions and old Matthew on the box—twenty years in the service—his whip tied with forget-me-nots, the horses' ears streaming with white ribbons—each flank as smooth as satin and each panel bright as a mirror—had been trundled off to Kennedy Square, there to receive the fairest of all her daughters, together with such other members of her royal suite—including His Supreme Excellency the Honorable Prim—not forgetting, of course, Kate's old black mammy, Henny, who was as much a part of the fair lady's belongings when she went afield as her ostrich-plume fan, her white gloves, or the wee slippers that covered her enchanting feet.

Every detail of harness, wheel, and brake—even the horn itself—had passed under the colonel's personal supervision; Matthew on the box straight as a hitching-post and bursting with pride, reins gathered, whip balanced, the leaders steady and the wheel horses in line. Then the word had been given, and away they had swept round the circle and so on down the long driveway to the outer gate and Kennedy Square. Ten miles an hour were the colonel's orders and ten miles an hour must Matthew make, including the loading and unloading of his fair passenger and her companions, or there would be the devil to pay on his return.

And the inside of the house offered no less a welcome. Drawn up in the wide hall, under the direct command of old Alec, the head butler, were the house servants;—mulatto maids in caps, snuff-colored second butlers in livery, jet-black mammies in new bandannas and white aprons—all in a flutter of excitement, and each one determined to get the first glimpse of Marse Harry's young lady, no matter at what risk.

Alec himself was a joy to look upon—eyeballs and teeth gleaming, his face one wide, encircling smile. Marse Harry was the apple of his eye, and had been ever since the day of his birth. He had carried him on his back when a boy; had taught him to fish and hunt and to ride to hounds; had nursed him when he fell ill at the University in his college days, and would gladly have laid down his life for him had any such necessity arisen. To-night, in honor of the occasion, he was rigged out in a new bottle-green coat with shiny brass buttons, white waistcoat, white gloves three sizes too big for him, and a huge white cravat flaring out almost to the tips of his ears. Nothing was too good for Alec—so his mistress thought—and for the best of reasons. Not only was he the ideal servant of the old school, but he was the pivot on which the whole establishment moved. If a particular brand or vintage was needed, or a key was missing, or did a hair trunk, or a pair of spurs, or last week's Miscellany, go astray—or even were his mistress's spectacles mislaid—Alec could put his hand upon each and every item in so short a space of time that the loser was convinced the old man had hidden them on purpose, to enjoy their refinding. Moorlands without old Alec would hive been a wheel without a hub.

As a distinct feature of all these preparations—and this was the best part of the programme—Harry was to meet Kate at the outer gate supported by half a dozen of his young friends and hers—Dr. Teackle, Mark

Gilbert, Langdon Willits, and one or two others—while Mrs. Rutter, Mrs. Cheston, Mrs. Richard Horn, and a bevy of younger women and girls were to welcome her with open arms the moment her dainty feet cleared the coach's step. This was the way princesses of the blood had been welcomed from time immemorial to palaces and castles high, and this was the way their beloved Kate was to make entry into the home of her lord.

Soon the flash of the coach lamps was seen outside the far gate. Then there came the wind of a horn—a rollicking, rolling, gladsome sound, and in the wink of an eyelid every one was out on the portico straining their eyes, listening eagerly. A joyous shout now went up from the negroes lining the fences; from the groups about the steps and along the driveway.

“Here she comes!”

The leaders with a swing pranced into view as they cleared the gate posts. There came a moment's halt at the end of the driveway; a postilion vaulted down, threw wide the coach door and a young man sprang in. It was Harry!... Snap!! Crack!! Toot—toot!!—and they were off again, heading straight for the waiting group. Another prolonged, winding note—louder—nearer—one of triumph this time!—a galloping, circling dash toward the porch crowded with guests—the reining in of panting leaders—the sudden gathering up of the wheel horses, back on their haunches—the coach door flung wide and out stepped Kate—Harry's hand in hers, her old mammy behind, her father last of all.

“Oh, such a lovely drive! and it was so kind of you, dear colonel, to send for me! Oh, it was splendid! And Matthew galloped most all the way.” She had come as a royal princess, but she was still our Kate. “And you are all out here to meet me!” Here she kissed Harry's mother—“and you too, Uncle George—and Sue—Oh, how fine you all look!”—and with a curtsy and a joyous laugh and a hand-clasp here and there, she bent her head and stepped into the wide hall under the blaze of the clustered candles.

It was then that they caught their breaths, for no such vision of beauty had ever before stood in the wide hall of Moorlands, her eyes shining like two stars above the rosy hue of her cheek; her skin like a shell, her throat and neck a lily in color and curves. And her poise; her gladsomeness; her joy at being alive and at finding everybody else alive; the way she moved and laughed and bent her pretty head; the ripples of gay laughter and the low-pitched tone of the warm greetings that fell from her lips!

No wonder Harry was bursting with pride; no wonder Langdon Willits heaved a deep sigh when he caught the glance that Kate flashed at Harry and went out on the porch to get a breath of fresh air; no wonder St. George's heart throbbed as he watched them both and thought how near all this happiness had come to being wrecked; no wonder the servants tumbled over each other in their eagerness to get a view of her face and gown, and no wonder, too, that the proud, old colonel who ruled his house with a rod of iron, determined for the first time in his life to lay down the sceptre and give Kate and Harry full sway to do whatever popped into their two silly heads.

And our young Lochinvar was fully her match in bearing, dress, and manners,—every inch a prince and every inch a Rutter,—and with such grace of movement as he stepped beside her, that even punctilious, outspoken old Mrs. Cheston—who had forgiven him his escapade, and who was always laughing at what she called the pump-handle shakes of some of the underdone aristocrats about her, had to whisper to the nearest guest—“Watch Harry, my dear, if you would see how a thoroughbred manages his legs and arms when he wishes to do honor to a woman. Admirable!—charming! No young man of my time ever did better.” And Mrs. Cheston knew, for she had hobnobbed with kings and queens, her husband having represented his government at the Court of St. James—which fact, however, never prevented her from calling a spade a spade; nor was she ever very particular as to what the spade unearthed.

Yes—a very gallant and handsome young man was our prince as he handed Kate up the stairs on her way to the dressing-room, and looked it in his pearl-gray coat with buttons of silver, fluffy white silk scarf, high dog-eared collar, ivory-white waistcoat, and tight-fitting trousers of nankeen yellow, held close to the pumps with invisible straps. And a very gallant and handsome young fellow he felt himself to be on this night of his triumph, and so thought Kate—in fact she had fallen in love with him over again—and so too did every one of the young girls who crowded about them, as well as the dominating, erect aristocrat of a father, and the anxious gentle mother, who worshipped the ground on which he walked.

Kate had noted every expression that crossed his face, absorbing him in one comprehensive glance as he stood in the full blaze of the candles, her gaze lingering on his mouth and laughing eyes and the soft sheen of his brown hair, its curved-in ends brushing the high velvet collar of his coat—and so on down his shapely body to his shapely feet. Never had she seen him so adorable—and he was all her own, and for life!

As for our dear St. George Temple, who had never taken his eyes off them, he thought they were the goodliest pair the stars ever shone upon, and this his happiest night. There would be no more stumbling after this. Kate had the bridle well in hand now; all she needed was a clear road, and that was ahead of both horse and rider.

“Makes your blood jump in your veins, just to look at them, doesn't it, Talbot?” cried St. George to Harry's father when Kate disappeared—laying his hand as he spoke on the shoulder of the man with whom he had grown up from a boy. “Is there anything so good as the love of a good woman?—the wise old prophet places her beyond the price of rubies.”

“Only one thing, St. George—the love of a good man—one like yourself, you dear old fellow. And why the devil you haven't found that out years ago is more than I can understand. Here you are my age, and you might have had a Kate and Harry of your own by this time, and yet you live a stupid old—”

“No, I won't hear you talk so, colonel!” cried a bride of a year. “Uncle George is never stupid, and he couldn't be old. What would all these young girls do—what would I have done” (another love affair with St. George as healer and mender!)—“what would anybody have done without him? Come, Miss Lavinia—do you hear the colonel abusing Uncle George because he isn't married? Speak up for him—it's wicked of you, colonel, to talk so.”

Miss Lavinia Clendenning, who was one of St. George's very own, in spite of her forty-odd years, threw back her head until the feathers in her slightly gray hair shook defiantly:

“No—I won't say a word for him, Sue. I've given him up forever. He's a disgrace to everybody who knows him.”

“Oh, you renegade!” exclaimed St. George in mock alarm.

“Yes,—a positive disgrace! He'll never marry anybody, Sue, until he marries me. I've begged him on my knees until I'm tired, to name the day, and he won't! Just like all you shiftless Marylanders, sir—never know when to make up your minds.”

“But you threw me over, Lavinia, and broke my heart,” laughed Temple with a low bow, his palms flattened against his waistcoat in assumed humility.

“When?”

“Oh, twenty years ago.”

“Oh, my goodness gracious! Of course I threw you over then;—you were just a baby in arms and I was old enough to be your mother—but now it's different. I'm dying to get married and nobody wants me. If you were a Virginian instead of a doubting Marylander, you would have asked me a hundred times and kept on asking until I gave in. Now it's too late. I always intended to give in, but you were so stupid you couldn't or wouldn't understand.”

“It's never too late to mend, Lavinia,” he prayed with hands extended.

“It's too late to mend you, St. George! You are cracked all over, and as for me—I'm ready to fall to pieces any minute. I'm all tied up now with corset laces and stays and goodness knows what else. No—I'm done with you.”

While this merry badinage was going on, the young people crowding the closer so as not to lose a word, or making room for the constant stream of fresh arrivals on their way toward the dressing-rooms above, their eyes now and then searching the top of the stairs in the hope of getting the first glimpse of Kate, our heroine was receiving the final touches from her old black mammy. It took many minutes. The curl must be adjusted, the full skirts pulled out or shaken loose, the rare jewels arranged before she was dismissed with—“Dah, honey chile, now go-long. Ain't nary one on 'em ain't pizen hongry for ye—any mos' on 'em 'll drown derselves 'fo' mawnin' becos dey can't git ye.”

She is ready now, Harry beside her, her lace scarf embroidered with pink rosebuds floating from her lovely shoulders, her satin skirt held firmly in both hands that she might step the freer, her dainty silk stockings with the ribbons crossed about her ankles showing below its edge.

But it was the colonel who took possession of her when she reached the floor of the great hall, and not her father nor her lover.

“No, Harry—stand aside, sir. Out with you! Kate goes in with me! Seymour, please give your arm to Mrs. Rutter.” And with the manner of a courtier leading a princess into the presence of her sovereign, the Lord of Moorlands swept our Lady of Kennedy Square into the brilliant drawing-room crowded with guests.

It was a great ball and it was a great ballroom—in spaciousness, color, and appointments. No one had ever dreamed of its possibilities before, although everybody knew it was the largest in the county. The gentle hostess, with old Alec as head of the pulling-out-and-moving-off department, had wrought the change. All the chairs, tables, sofas, and screens, little and big, had either been spirited away or pushed back against the wall for tired dancers. Over the wide floor was stretched a linen crash; from the ceiling and bracketed against the white walls, relieved here and there by long silken curtains of gold-yellow, blazed clusters of candles, looking for all the world like so many bursting sky-rockets, while at one end, behind a mass of flowering plants, sat a quartette of musicians, led by an old darky with a cotton-batting head, who had come all the way from Philadelphia a-purpose.

Nor had the inner man been forgotten: bowls of hot apple toddy steamed away in the dining-room; bowls of eggnog frothed away in the library; ladlings of punch, and the contents of several old cut-glass decanters, flanked by companies of pipe-stem glasses, were being served in the dressing-rooms; while relays of hot terrapin, canvas-back duck, sizzling hot; olio, cold joints; together with every conceivable treatment and condition of oysters—in scallop shells, on silver platters and in wooden plates—raw, roasted, fried, broiled, baked, and stewed—everything in fact that could carry out the colonel's watchword, “Eat, drink, and be merry,” were within the beck and call of each and every guest.

And there were to be no interludes of hunger and thirst if the host could help it. No dull pauses nor recesses, but one continued round, lasting until midnight, at which hour the final banquet in the dining-room was to be served, and the great surprise of the evening reached—the formal announcement of Harry and Kate's engagement, followed by the opening of the celebrated bottle of the Jefferson 1800 Monticello Madeira, recorked at our young hero's birth.

And it goes without saying that there were no interludes. The fun began at once, a long line of merry talk and laughter following the wake of the procession, led by the host and Kate, the colonel signalling at last to the cotton-batting with the goggle spectacles, who at once struck up a polka and away they all went, Harry and Kate in the lead, the whole room in a whirl.

This over and the dancers out of breath, Goggles announced a quadrille—the colonel and St. George helping to form the sets. Then followed the schottische, then another polka until everybody was tired out, and then with one accord the young couples rushed from the hot room, hazy with the dust of lint from the linen crash, and stampeded for the cool wide stairs that led from the great hall. For while in summer the shadows on some vine-covered porch swallowed the lovers, in winter the stairs were generally the trysting-place—and the top step the one most sought—because there was nobody behind to see. This was the roost for which Kate and Harry scampered, and there they intended to sit until the music struck up again.

“Oh, Kate, you precious darling, how lovely you look!” burst out Harry for the hundredth time when she had nestled down beside him—“and what a wonderful gown! I never saw that one before, did I?”

“No—you never have,” she panted, her breath gone from her dance and the dash for the staircase. “It's my dear mother's dress, and her scarf too. I had very little done to it—only the skirt made wider. Isn't it soft and rich? Grandpa used to bring these satins from China.”

“And the pearls—are they the ones you told me about?” He was adjusting them to her throat as he spoke—somehow he could not keep his hands from her.

“Yes—mother's jewels. Father got them out of his strong-box for me this morning. He wanted me to wear them to-night. He says I can have them all now. She must have been very beautiful, Harry—and just think, dear—she was only a few years older than I am when she died. Sometimes when I wear her things and get to thinking about her, and remember how young and beautiful she was and how unhappy her life, it seems as if I must be unhappy myself—somehow as if it were not right to have all this happiness when she had none.” There was a note of infinite pathos in her voice—a note one always heard when she spoke of her mother. Had Harry looked deeper into her eyes he might have found the edges of two tears trembling on their lids.

“She never was as beautiful as you, my darling—nobody ever was—nobody ever could be!” he cried, ignoring all allusion to her mother. Nothing else counted with the young fellow to-night—all he knew and cared for was that Kate was his very own, and that all the world would soon know it.

“That's because you love me, Harry. You have only to look at her portrait in father's room to see how exquisite she was. I can never be like her—never so gracious, so patient, no matter how hard I try.”

He put his fingers on her lips: “I won't have you say it. I won't let anybody say it. I could hardly speak when I saw you in the full light of the hall. It was so dark in the coach I didn't know how you looked, and I didn't care; I was so glad to get hold of you. But when your cloak slipped from your shoulders and you—Oh!—you darling Kate!” His eye caught the round of her throat and the taper of her lovely arm—“I am going to kiss you right here—I will—I don't care who—”

She threw up her hands with a little laugh. She liked him the better for daring, although she was afraid to yield.

“No—NO—Harry! They will see us—don't—you mustn't!”

“Mustn't what! I tell you, Kate, I am going to kiss you—I don't care what you say or who sees me. It's been a year since I kissed you in the coach—forty years—now, you precious Kate, what difference does it make? I will, I tell you—no—don't turn your head away.”

She was struggling feebly, her elbow across her face as a shield, meaning all the time to raise her lips to his, when her eyes fell on the figure of a young man making his way toward them. Instantly her back straightened.

“There's Langdon Willits at the bottom of the stairs talking to Mark Gilbert,” she whispered in dismay. “See—he is coming up. I wonder what he wants.”

Harry gathered himself together and his face clouded. “I wish he was at the bottom of the sea. I don't like Willits—I never did. Neither does Uncle George. Besides, he's in love with you, and he always has been.”

“What nonsense, Harry,” she answered, opening her fan and waving it slowly. She knew her lover was right—knew more indeed than her lover could ever know: she had used all the arts of which she was mistress to keep Willits from proposing.

“But he IS in love with you,” Harry insisted stiffly. “Won't he be fighting mad, though, when he hears father announce our engagement at supper?” Then some tone in her voice recalled that night on the sofa when she still held out against his pleading, and with it came the thought that while she could be persuaded she could never be driven. Instantly his voice changed to its most coaxing tones: “You won't dance with him, will you, Kate darling? I can't bear to see you in anybody else's arms but my own.”

Her hand grasped his wrist with a certain meaning in the pressure.

“Now don't be a goose, Harry. I must be polite to everybody, especially to-night—and you wouldn't have me otherwise.”

“Yes, but not to him.”

“But what difference does it make? You are too sensible not to understand, and I am too happy, anyway, to want to be rude to anybody. And then you should never be jealous of Langdon Willits.”

“Well, then, not a round dance, please, Kate.” He dare not oppose her further. “I couldn't stand a round dance. I won't have his arm touch you, my darling.” And he bent his cheek close to hers.

She looked at him from under her shadowed lids as she had looked at St. George when she greeted him at the foot of the stairs; a gleam of coquetry, of allurement, of joy shining through her glances like delicate antennae searching to feel where her power lay. Should she venture, as her Uncle George had suggested, to take the reins in her own hands and guide this restive, mettlesome thoroughbred, or should she surrender to him? Then a certain mischievous coquetry possessed her. With a light, bubbling laugh she drew her cheek away.

“Yes, any kind of a dance that he or anybody else wants that I can give him,” she burst out with a coquettish twist of her head, her eyes brimming with fun.

“But I'm on your card for every single dance,” he demanded, his eyes again flashing. “Look at it—I filled it up myself,” and he held up his own bit of paste-board so she could read the list. “I tell you I won't have his arm around you!”

“Well, then, he sha'n't touch even the tips of my fingers, you dreadful Mr. Bluebeard.” She had surrendered now. He was never so compelling as when determined to have his own way. Again her whole manner changed; she was once more the sweetheart: “Don't let us bother about cards, my darling, or dances, or anything. Let us talk of how lovely it is to be together again. Don't you think so, Harry?” and she snuggled the closer to his arm, her soft cheek against his coat.

Before Harry could answer, young Willits, who had been edging his way up the stairs two steps at a time, avoiding the skirts of the girls, reaching over the knees of the men as he clung to the hand-rail, stood on the step below them.

“It's my next dance, Miss Kate, isn't it?” he asked eagerly, scanning her face—wondering why she looked so happy.

“What is it to be, Mr. Willits?” she rejoined in perfunctory tones, glancing at her own blank card hanging to

her wrist: he was the last man in the world she wanted to see at this moment.

“The schottische, I think—yes, the schottische,” he replied nervously, noticing her lack of warmth and not understanding the cause.

“Oh, I'm all out of breath—if you don't mind,” she continued evasively; “we'll wait for the next one.” She dared not invite him to sit down, knowing it would make Harry furious—and then again she couldn't stand one discordant note to-night—she was too blissfully happy.

“But the next one is mine,” exclaimed Harry suddenly, examining his own dancing-card. He had not shifted his position a hair's breadth, nor did he intend to—although he had been outwardly polite to the intruder.

“Yes—they'd all be yours, Harry, if you had your way,” this in a thin, dry tone—“but you mustn't forget that Miss Kate's free, white, and twenty-one, and can do as she pleases.”

Harry's lips straightened. He did not like Willits's manner and he was somewhat shocked at his expression; it seemed to smack more of the cabin than of the boudoir—especially the boudoir of a princess like his precious Kate. He noticed, too, that the young man's face was flushed and his utterance unusually rapid, and he knew what had caused it.

“They will be just what Miss Seymour wants them to be, Willits.” The words came in hard, gritting tones through half-closed lips, and the tightening of his throat muscles. This phase of the Rutter blood was dangerous.

Kate was startled. Harry must not lose his self-control. There must be no misunderstandings on this the happiest night of her life.

“Yes,” she said sweetly, with a gracious bend of her head—“but I do want to dance with Mr. Willits, only I don't know which one to give him.”

“Then give me the Virginia reel, Miss Kate, the one that comes just before supper, and we can go all in together—you too, Harry,” Willits insisted eagerly. “See, Miss Kate—your card is still empty,” and he turned toward her the face of the one hanging to her wrist.

“No, never the reel, Kate, that is mine!” burst out Harry determinedly, as a final dismissal to Willits. He lowered his voice, and in a beseeching tone said—“Father's set his heart on our dancing the reel together—please don't give him the reel!”

Kate, intent on restoring harmony, arched her neck coyly, and said in her most bewitching tones—the notes of a robin after a shower: “Well, I can't tell yet, Mr. Willits, but you shall have one or the other; just leave it to me—either the reel or the schottische. We will talk it over when I come down.”

“Then it's the reel, Miss Kate, is it not?” he cried, ignoring Harry completely, backing away as he retraced his steps, a look of triumph on his face.

She shook her head at him, but she did not answer. She wanted to get rid of him as quickly as possible. Willits had spoiled everything. She was so happy before he came, and Harry was so adorable. She wished now she had not drawn away her cheek when he tried to kiss her.

“Don't be angry, Harry, dear,” she pleaded coaxingly, determined to get her lover back once more. “He didn't mean anything—he only wanted to be polite.”

“He didn't want to be polite,” the angry lover retorted. “He meant to force himself in between us; that is what he meant, and he's always at it, every chance he gets. He tried it at Mrs. Cheston's the other night until I put a stop to it, but there's one thing certain—he'll stop it when our engagement is announced after supper or I'll know the reason why.”

Kate caught her breath. A new disturbing thought entered her mind. It was at Mrs. Cheston's that both Willits and Harry had misbehaved themselves, and it was Harry's part in the sequel which she had forgiven. The least said about that night the better.

“But he is your guest, Harry,” she urged at last, still determined to divert his thoughts from Willits and the loss of the dance—“OUR guest,” she went on—“so is everybody else here to-night, and we must do what everybody wants us to, not be selfish about it. Now, my darling—you couldn't be impolite to anybody—don't you know you couldn't? Mrs. Cheston calls you 'My Lord Chesterfield'—I heard her say so to-night.”

“Yes, I know, Kate”—he softened—“that's what father said about my being polite to him—but all the same I didn't want Willits invited, and it's only because father insisted that he's here. Of course, I'm going to be just as polite to him as I can, but even father would feel differently about him if he had heard what he said to you a minute ago.”

“What did he say?” She knew, but she loved to hear him defend her. This, too, was a way out—in a minute he would be her old Harry again.

“I won't even repeat it,” he answered doggedly.

“You mean about my being twenty-one? That was rather ungallant, wasn't it?”

Again that long look from under her eyelids—he would have succumbed at once could he have seen it.

“No, the other part of it. That's not the way to speak to a lady. That's what I dislike him for. He never was born a gentleman. He isn't a gentleman and never can be a gentleman.”

Kate drew herself up—the unreasonableness of the objection jarred upon her. He had touched one of her tender spots—pride of birth was something she detested.

“Don't talk nonsense, Harry,” she replied in a slightly impatient voice. Moods changed with our Kate as unexpectedly as April showers. “What difference should it make to you or anybody else whether Langdon Willits's grandmother was a countess or a country girl, so she was honest and a lady?” Her head went up with a toss as she spoke, for this was one of Kate's pet theories.

“But he's not of my class, Kate, and he shouldn't be here. I told father so.”

“Then make him one,” she answered stoutly, “if only for to-night, by being extra polite and courteous to him and never letting him feel that he is outside of what you call 'your class.' I like Mr. Willits, and have always liked him. He is invariably polite to me, and he can be very kind and sympathetic at times. Listen! they are

calling us, and there goes the music—come along, darling—it's a schottische and we'll dance it together."

Harry sprang up, slipped his arm around Kate's waist, lifted her to her feet, held her close, and kissed her squarely on the mouth.

"There, you darling! and another one—two—three! Oh, you precious! What do I care about Willits or any other red-headed lower county man that ever lived? He can have fifty grandmothers if he pleases and I won't say a word—kiss me—kiss me again. Quick now or we'll lose the dance," and, utterly oblivious as to whether any one had seen them or not, the two raced down the wide stairs.

CHAPTER IV

While all this gayety was going on in the ballroom another and equally joyous gathering was besieging the serving tables in the colonel's private den—a room leading out of the larger supper room, where he kept his guns and shooting togs, and which had been pressed into service for this one night.

These thirsty gentlemen were of all ages and tastes, from the young men just entering society to the few wrinkled bald-pates whose legs had given out and who, therefore, preferred the colonel's Madeira and terrapin to the lighter pleasures of the dance.

In and out of the groups, his ruddy, handsome face radiant with the joy that welled up in his heart, moved St. George Temple. Never had he been in finer form or feather—never had he looked so well—(not all the clothes that Poole of London cut came to Moorlands). Something of the same glow filtered through him that he had felt on the night when the two lovers had settled their difficulties, and he had swung back through the park at peace with all the world.

All this could be seen in the way he threw back his head, smiling right and left; the way he moved his hands—using them as some men do words or their eyebrows—now uplifting them in surprise at the first glimpse of some unexpected face, his long delicate fingers outspread in exclamations of delight; now closing them tight when he had those of the new arrival in his grasp—now curving them, palms up, as he lifted to his lips the fingers of a grande dame. "Keep your eyes on St. George," whispered Mrs. Cheston, who never missed a point in friend or foe and whose fun at a festivity often lay in commenting on her neighbors, praise or blame being impartially mixed as her fancy was touched. "And by all means watch his hands, my dear. They are like the baton of an orchestra leader and tell the whole story. Only men whose blood and lineage have earned them freedom from toil, or men whose brains throb clear to their finger-tips, have such hands. Yes! St. George is very happy to-night, and I know why. He has something on his mind that he means to tell us later on."

Mrs. Cheston was right: she generally was—St. George did have something on his mind—something very particular on his mind—a little speech really which was a dead secret to everybody except prying Mrs. Cheston—one which was to precede the uncorking of that wonderful old Madeira, and the final announcement of the engagement—a little speech in which he meant to refer to their two dear mothers when they were girls, recalling traits and episodes forgotten by most, but which from their very loveliness had always lingered in his heart and memory.

Before this important event took place, however, there were some matters which he intended to look after himself, one of them being the bowl of punch and its contiguous beverages in the colonel's den. This seemed to be the storm centre to-night, and here he determined, even at the risk of offending his host, to set up danger-signals at the first puff of wind. The old fellows, if they chose, might empty innumerable ladles full of apple toddy or compounds of Santa Cruz rum and pineapples into their own persons, but not the younger bloods! His beloved Kate had suffered enough because of these roysterers. There should be one ball around Kennedy Square in which everybody would behave themselves, and he did not intend to mince his words when the time came. He had discussed the matter with the colonel when the ball opened, but little encouragement came from that quarter.

"So far as these young sprigs are concerned, St. George," Rutter had flashed back, "they must look out for themselves. I can't curtail my hospitality to suit their babyships. As for Harry, you're only wasting your time. He is made of different stuff—it's not in his blood and couldn't be. Whatever else he may become he will never be a sot. Let him have his fling: once a Rutter, always a Rutter," and then, with a ring in his voice, "when my son ceases to be a gentleman, St. George, I will show him the door, but drink will never do it."

Dr. Teackle had also been on the alert. He was a young physician just coming into practice, many of the younger set being his patients, and he often acted as a curb when they broke loose. He, with St. George's whispered caution in his ears, had also tried to frame a word of protest to the colonel, suggesting in the mildest way that that particular bowl of apple toddy be not replenished—but the Lord of the Manor had silenced him with a withering glance before he had completed his sentence. In this dilemma he had again sought out St. George.

"Look out for Willits, Uncle George. He'll be staggering in among the ladies if he gets another crack at that toddy. It's an infernal shame to bring these relays of punch in here. I tried to warn the colonel, but he came near eating me up. Willits has had very little experience in this sort of thing and is mixing his eggnog with everything within his reach. That will split his head wide open in the morning."

"Go and find him, Teackle, and bring him to me," cried St. George; "I'll stay here until you get him. Tell him I want to see him—and Alec"—this to the old butler who was skimming past, his hands laden with dishes—"don't you bring another drop of punch into this room until you see me."

"But de colonel say dat—"

"—I don't care what the colonel says; if he wants to know why, tell him I ordered it. I'm not going to have this night spoiled by any tomfoolery of Talbot's, I don't care what he says. You hear me, Alec? Not a drop.

Take out those half-empty bowls and don't you serve another thimbleful of anything until I say so." Here he turned to the young doctor, who seemed rather surprised at St. George's dictatorial air—one rarely seen in him. "Yes—brutal, I know, Teackle, and perhaps a little ill-mannered, this interfering with another man's hospitality, but if you knew how Kate has suffered over this same stupidity you would say I was right. Talbot never thinks—never cares. Because he's got a head as steady as a town clock and can put away a bottle of port without winking an eyelid, he believes anybody else can do the same. I tell you this sort of thing has got to stop or sooner or later these young bloods will break the hearts of half the girls in town.... Careful! here comes Willits—not another word.... Oh, Mr. Willits, here you are! I was just going to send for you. I want to talk to you about that mare of yours—is she still for sale?" His nonchalance was delightful.

"No, Mr. Temple; I had thought of keeping her, sir," the young man rejoined blandly, greatly flattered at having been specially singled out by the distinguished Mr. Temple. "But if you are thinking of buying my mare, I should be most delighted to consider it. If you will permit me—I will call upon you in the morning." This last came with elaborate effusiveness. "But you haven't a drop of anything to drink, Mr. Temple, nor you either, doctor! Egad! What am I thinking of! Come, won't you join me? The colonel's mixtures are—"

"Better wait, Mr. Willits," interrupted St. George calmly and with the air of one conversant with the resources of the house. "Alec has just taken out a half-emptied bowl of toddy." He had seen at a glance that Teackle's diagnosis of the young man's condition was correct.

"Then let us have a swig at the colonel's port—it's the best in the county."

"No, hold on till the punch comes. You young fellows don't know how to take care of your stomachs. You ought to stick to your tipple as you do to your sweetheart—you should only have one."

"—At a time," laughed Teackle.

"No, one ALL the time, you dog! When I was your age, Mr. Willits, if I drank Madeira I continued to drink Madeira, not to mix it up with everything on the table."

"By Jove, you're right, Mr. Temple! I'm sticking to one girl—Miss Kate's my girl to-night. I'm going to dance the Virginia reel with her."

St. George eyed him steadily. He saw that the liquor had already reached his head or he would not have spoken of Kate as he did. "Your choice is most admirable, Mr. Willits," he said suavely, "but let Harry have Miss Kate to-night," adding, as he laid his hand confidingly on the young man's shoulder—"they were made to step that dance together."

"But she said she would dance it with me!" he flung back—he did not mean to be defrauded.

"Really?" It was wonderful how soft St. George's voice could be. Teackle could not have handled a refractory patient the better.

"Well, that is," rejoined Willits, modified by Temple's tone—"she is to let me know—that was the bargain."

Still another soft cadence crept into St. George's voice: "Well, even if she did say she would let you know, do be a little generous. Miss Seymour is always so obliging; but she ought really to dance the reel with Harry to-night." He used Kate's full name, but Willits's head was buzzing too loudly for him to notice the delicately suggested rebuke.

"Well, I don't see that, and I'm not going to see it, either. Harry's always coming in between us; he tried to get Miss Kate away from me a little while ago, but he didn't succeed."

"Noblesse oblige, my dear Mr. Willits," rejoined St. George in a more positive tone. "He is host, you know, and the ball is given to Miss Seymour, and Harry can do nothing else but be attentive." He felt like strangling the cub, but it was neither the time nor place—nothing should disturb Kate's triumph if he could help it. One way was to keep Willits sober, and this he intended to do whether the young man liked it or not—if he talked to him all night.

"But it is my dance," Willits broke out. "You ask him if it isn't my dance—he heard what Miss Kate said. Here comes Harry now."

Like a breath of west wind our young prince blew in, his face radiant, his eyes sparkling. He had entirely forgotten the incident on the stairs in the rapture of Kate's kisses, and Willits was once more one of the many guests he was ready to serve and be courteous to.

"Ah, gentlemen—I hope you have everything you want!" he cried with a joyous wave of his hand. "Where will I get an ice for Kate, Uncle George? We are just about beginning the Virginia reel and she is so warm. Oh, we have had such a lovely waltz! Why are you fellows not dancing? Send them in, Uncle George." He was brimming over with happiness.

Willits moved closer: "What did you say? The Virginia reel? Has it begun?" His head was too muddled for quick thinking.

"Not yet, Willits, but it will right away—everybody is on the floor now," returned Harry, his eyes in search of something to hold Kate's refreshment.

"Then it is my dance, Harry. I thought the reel was to be just before supper or I would have hunted Miss Kate up."

"So it is," laughed Harry, catching up an empty plate from the serving table and moving to where the ices were spread. "You ought to know, for you told her yourself. It is about to begin. They were taking their partners when I left."

"Then that's MY reel," Willits insisted. "You heard what Miss Kate said, Harry—that's what I told you too, Mr. Temple," and he turned to St. George for confirmation.

"Oh, but you are mistaken, Langdon," continued Harry, bending over the dish. "She said she would decide later on whether to give you the reel or a schottische—and she has. Miss Kate dances this reel with me." There was a flash in his eye as he spoke, but he was still the host.

"And I suppose you will want the one after supper too," snapped Willits. He had edged closer and was now speaking to Harry's bent back.

“Why, certainly, if Miss Kate is willing and wishes it,” rejoined Harry simply, still too intent on having the ice reach his sweetheart at the earliest possible moment to notice either Willits's condition or his tone of voice.

Willits sprang forward just as Harry regained his erect position. “No you won't, sir!” he cried angrily. “I've got some rights here and I'm going to protect them. I'll ask Miss Kate myself and find out whether I am to be made a fool of like this,” and before St. George could prevent started for the door.

Harry dropped the plate on the table and blocked the enraged man's exit with his outstretched arm. He was awake now—wide awake—and to the cause.

“You'll do nothing of the kind, Langdon—not in your present state. Pull yourself together, man! Miss Seymour is not accustomed to be spoken of in that way and you know it. Now don't be foolish—stay here with Uncle George and the doctor until you cool down. There are the best of reasons why I should dance the reel with Miss Kate, but I can't explain them now.”

“Neither am I, Mr. Harry Rutter, accustomed to be spoken to in that way by you or anybody else. I don't care a rap for your explanations. Get out of my way, or you'll be sorry,” and he sprang one side and flung himself out of the room before Harry could realize the full meaning of his words.

St. George saw the flash in the boy's eyes, and stretching out his hand laid it on Harry's arm.

“Steady, my boy! Let him go—Kate will take care of him.”

“No! I'll take care of him!—and now!” He was out of the room and the door shut behind him before Temple could frame a reply.

St. George shot an anxious, inquiring look at Teackle, who nodded his head in assent, and the two hurried from the room and across the expanse of white crash, Willits striding ahead, Harry at his heels, St. George and the doctor following close behind.

Kate stood near the far door, her radiant eyes fixed on Harry's approaching figure—the others she did not see. Willits reached her first:

“Miss Kate, isn't this my dance?” he burst out—“didn't you promise me?”

Kate started and for a moment her face flushed. If she had forgotten any promise she had made it certainly was not intentional. Then her mind acted. There must be no bad blood here—certainly not between Harry and Willits.

“No, not quite that, Mr. Willits,” she answered in her sweetest voice, a certain roguish coquetry in its tones. “I said I'd think it over, and you never came near me, and so Harry and I are—”

“But you DID promise me.” His voice could be heard all over the room—even the colonel, who was talking to a group of ladies, raised his head to listen, his companions thinking the commotion was due to the proper arranging of the dance.

Harry's eyes flashed; angry blood was mounting to his cheeks. He was amazed at Willits's outburst.

“You mean to contradict Miss Kate! Are you crazy, Willits?”

“No, I am entirely sane,” he retorted, an ugly ring in his voice.

Everybody had ceased talking now. Good-natured disputes over the young girls were not uncommon among the young men, but this one seemed to have an ominous sound. Colonel Rutter evidently thought so, for he had now risen from his seat and was crossing the room to where Harry and the group stood.

“Well, you neither act nor talk as if you were sane,” rejoined Harry in cold, incisive tones, inching his way nearer Kate, as if to be the better prepared to defend her.

Willits's lip curled. “I am not beholden to you, sir, for my conduct, although I can be later on for my words. Let me see your dancing-card, Miss Kate,” and he caught it from her unresisting hand. “There—what did I tell you!” This came with a flare of indignation. “It was a blank when I saw it last and you've filled it in, sir, of your own accord!” Here he faced Harry. “That's your handwriting—I'll leave it to you, Mr. Temple, if it isn't his handwriting.”

Harry flushed scarlet and his eyes blazed as he stepped toward the speaker. Kate shrank back in alarm—she had read Harry's face and knew what was behind it.

“Take that back, Langdon—quick! You are my guest, but you mustn't say things like that here. I put my name on the card because Miss Kate asked me to. Take it back, sir—NOW!—and then make an humble apology to Miss Seymour.

“I'll take back nothing! I've been cheated out of a dance. Here—take her—and take this with her!” and he tore Kate's card in half and threw the pieces in his host's face.

With the spring of a cat, Harry lunged forward and raised his arm as if to strike Willits in the face: Willits drew himself up to his full height and confronted him: Kate shrivelled within herself, all the color gone from her cheeks. Whether to call out for help or withdraw quietly, was what puzzled her. Both would concentrate the attention of the whole room on the dispute.

St. George, who was boiling with indignation and disgust, but still cool and himself, pushed his way into the middle of the group.

“Not a word, Harry,” he whispered in low, frigid tones. “This can be settled in another way.” Then in his kindest voice, so loud that all could hear—“Teackle, will you and Mr. Willits please meet me in the colonel's den—that, perhaps, is the best place after all to straighten out these tangles. I'll join you there as soon as I have Miss Kate safely settled.” He bent over her: “Kate, dear, perhaps you had better sit alongside of Mrs. Rutter until I can get these young fellows cooled off”—and in a still lower key—“you behaved admirably, my girl—admirably. I'm proud of you. Mr. Willits has had too much to drink—that is what is the matter with him, but it will be all over in a minute—and, Harry, my boy, suppose you help me look up Teackle,” and he laid his hand with an authoritative pressure on the boy's arm.

The colonel had by this time reached the group and stood trying to catch the cue. He had heard the closing sentence of St. George's instructions, but he had missed the provocation, although he had seen Harry's

uplifted fist.

“What's the matter, St. George?” he inquired nervously.

“Just a little misunderstanding, Talbot, as to who was to dance with our precious Kate,” St. George answered with a laugh, as he gripped Harry's arm the tighter. “She is such a darling that it is as much as I can do to keep these young Romeos from running each other through the body, they are so madly in love with her. I am thinking of making off with her myself as the only way to keep the peace. Yes, you dear girl, I'll come back. Hold the music up for a little while, Talbot, until I can straighten them all out,” and with his arm still tight through Harry's, the two walked the length of the room and closed the far door behind them.

Kate looked after them and her heart sank all the lower. She knew the feeling between the two men, and she knew Harry's hot, ungovernable temper—the temper of the Rutters. Patient as he often was, and tender-hearted as he could be, there flashed into his eyes now and then something that frightened her—something that recalled an incident in the history of his house. He had learned from his gentle mother to forgive affronts to himself; she had seen him do it many times, overlooking what another man would have resented, but an affront to herself or any other woman was a different matter: that he would never forgive. She knew, too, that he had just cause to be offended, for in all her life no one had ever been so rude to her. That she herself was partly to blame only intensified her anxiety. Willits loved her, for he had told her so, not once, but several times, although she had answered him only with laughter. She should have been honest and not played the coquette: and yet, although the fault was partly her own, never had she been more astonished than at his outburst. In all her acquaintance with him he had never lost his temper. Harry, of course, would lay it to Willits's lack of breeding—to the taint in his blood. But she knew better—it was the insanity produced by drink, combined with his jealousy of Harry, which had caused the gross outrage. If she had only told Willits herself of her betrothal and not waited to surprise him before the assembled guests, it would have been fairer and spared every one this scene.

All these thoughts coursed through her mind as with head still proudly erect she crossed the room on the colonel's arm, to a seat beside her future mother-in-law, who had noticed nothing, and to whom not a syllable of the affair would have been mentioned, all such matters being invariably concealed from the dear lady.

Old Mrs. Cheston, however, was more alert; not only had she caught the anger in Harry's eyes, but she had followed the flight of the torn card as its pieces fell to the floor. She had once been present at a reception given by a prime minister when a similar fracas had occurred. Then it was a lady's glove and not a dancing-card which was thrown in a rival's face, and it was a rapier that flashed and not a clenched fist.

“What was the matter over there, Talbot?” she demanded, speaking from behind her fan when the colonel came within hearing.

“Nothing! Some little disagreement about who should lead the Virginia reel with Kate. I have stopped the music until they fix it up.”

“Don't talk nonsense, Talbot Rutter, not to me. There was bad blood over there—you better look after them. There'll be trouble if you don't.”

The colonel tucked the edge of a rebellious ruffle inside his embroidered waistcoat and with a quiet laugh said: “St. George is attending to them.”

“St. George is as big a fool as you are about such things. Go, I tell you, and see what they are doing in there with the door shut.”

“But, my dear Mrs. Cheston,” echoed her host with a deprecating wave of his hand—“my Harry would no more attack a man under his own roof than you would cut off your right hand. He's not born that way—none of us are.”

“You talk like a perfect idiot, Talbot!” she retorted angrily. “You seem to have forgotten everything you knew. These young fellows here are so many tinder boxes. There will be trouble I tell you—go out there and find out what is going on,” she reiterated, her voice increasing in intensity. “They've had time enough to fix up a dozen Virginia reels—and besides, Kate is waiting, and they know it. Look! there's some one coming out—it's that young Teackle. Call him over here and find out!”

The doctor, who had halted at the door, was now scrutinizing the faces of the guests as if in search of some one. Then he moved swiftly to the far side of the room, touched Mark Gilbert, Harry's most intimate friend, on the shoulder, and the two left the floor.

Kate sat silent, a fixed smile on her face that ill concealed her anxiety. She had heard every word of the talk between Mrs. Cheston and the colonel, but she did not share the old lady's alarm as to any actual conflict. She would trust Uncle George to avoid that. But what kept Harry? Why leave her thus abruptly and send no word back? In her dilemma she leaned forward and touched the colonel's arm.

“You don't think anything is the matter, dear colonel, do you?”

“With whom, Kate?”

“Between Harry and Mr. Willits. Harry might resent it—he was very angry.” Her lips were quivering, her eyes strained. She could hide her anxiety from her immediate companions, but the colonel was Harry's father.

The colonel turned quickly: “Resent it here! under his own roof, and the man his guest? That is one thing, my dear, a Rutter never violates, no matter what the provocation. I have made a special exception in Mr. Willits's favor to-night and Harry knows it. It was at your dear father's request that I invited the young fellow. And then again, I hear the most delightful things about his own father, who though a plain man is of great service to his county—one of Mr. Clay's warmest adherents. All this, you see, makes it all the more incumbent that both my son and myself should treat him with the utmost consideration, and, as I have said, Harry understands this perfectly. You don't know my boy; I would disown him, Kate, if he laid a hand on Mr. Willits—and so should you.”

CHAPTER V

When Dr. Teackle shut the door of the ballroom upon himself and Mark Gilbert the two did not tarry long in the colonel's den, which was still occupied by half a dozen of the older men, who were being beguiled by a relay of hot terrapin that Alec had just served. On the contrary, they continued on past the serving tables, past old Cobden Dorsey, who was steeped to the eyes in Santa Cruz rum punch; past John Purviance, and Gatchell and Murdoch, smacking their lips over the colonel's Madeira, dived through a door leading first to a dark passage, mounted to a short flight of steps leading to another dark passage, and so on through a second door until they reached a small room level with the ground. This was the colonel's business office, where he conducted the affairs of the estate—a room remote from the great house and never entered except on the colonel's special invitation and only then when business of importance necessitated its use.

That business of the very highest importance—not in any way connected with the colonel, though of the very gravest moment—was being enacted here to-night, could be seen the instant Teackle, with Gilbert at his heels, threw open the door. St. George and Harry were in one corner—Harry backed against the wall. The boy was pale, but perfectly calm and silent. On his face was the look of a man who had a duty to perform and who intended to go through with it come what might. On the opposite side of the room stood Willits with two young men, his most intimate friends. They had followed him out of the ballroom to learn the cause of his sudden outburst, and so far had only heard Willits's side of the affair. He was now perfectly sober and seemed to feel his position, but he showed no fear. On the desk lay a mahogany case containing the colonel's duelling pistols. Harry had taken them from his father's closet as he passed through the colonel's den.

St. George turned to the young doctor. His face was calm and thoughtful, and he seemed to realize fully the gravity of the situation.

“It's no use, Teackle,” St. George said with an expressive lift of his fingers. “I have done everything a man could, but there is only one way out of it. I have tried my best to save Kate from every unhappiness to-night, but this is something much more important than woman's tears, and that is her lover's honor.”

“You mean to tell me, Uncle George, that you can't stop this!” Teackle whispered with some heat, his eyes strained, his lips twitching. Here he faced Harry. “You sha'n't go on with this affair, I tell you, Harry. What will Kate say? Do you think she wants you murdered for a foolish thing like this!—and that's about what will happen.”

The boy made no reply, except to shake his head. He knew what Kate would say—knew what she would do, and knew what she would command him to do, could she have heard Willits's continued insults in this very room but a moment before while St. George was trying to make him apologize to his host and so end the disgraceful incident.

“Then I'll go and bring in the colonel and see what he can do!” burst out Teackle, starting for the door. “It's an outrage that—”

“You'll stay here, Teackle,” commanded St. George—“right where you stand! This is no place for a father. Harry is of age.”

“But what an ending to a night like this!”

“I know it—horrible!—frightful!—but I would rather see the boy lying dead at my feet than not defend the woman he loves.” This came in a decisive tone, as if he had long since made up his mind to this phase of the situation.

“But Langdon is Harry's guest,” Teackle pleaded, dropping his voice still lower to escape being heard by the group at the opposite end of the room—“and he is still under his roof. It is never done—it is against the code. Besides”—and his voice became a whisper—“Harry never levelled a pistol at a man in his life, and this is not Langdon's first meeting. We can fix it in the morning. I tell you we must fix it.”

Harry, who had been listening quietly, reached across the table, picked up the case of pistols, handed it to Gilbert, whom he had chosen as his second, and in a calm, clear, staccato tone—each word a bullet rammed home—said:

“No—Teackle, there will be no delay until to-morrow. Mr. Willits has forfeited every claim to being my guest and I will fight him here and now. I could never look Kate in the face, nor would she ever speak to me again, if I took any other course. You forget that he virtually told Kate she lied,” and he gazed steadily at Willits as if waiting for the effect of his shot.

St. George's eyes kindled. There was the ring of a man in the boy's words. He had seen the same look on the elder Rutter's face in a similar situation twenty years before. As a last resort he walked toward where Willits stood conferring with his second.

“I ask you once more, Mr. Willits”—he spoke in his most courteous tones (Willits's pluck had greatly raised him in his estimation)—“to apologize like a man and a gentleman. There is no question in my mind that you have insulted your host in his own house and been discourteous to the woman he expects to marry, and that the amende honorable should come from you. I am twice your age and have had many experiences of this kind, and I would neither ask you to do a dishonorable thing nor would I permit you to do it if I could prevent it. Make a square, manly apology to Harry.”

Willits gazed at him with a certain ill-concealed contempt on his face. He was at the time loosening the white silk scarf about his throat in preparation for the expected encounter. He evidently did not believe a word of that part of the statement which referred to Harry's engagement. If Kate had been engaged to Harry she would have told him so.

“You are only wasting your time, Mr. Temple,” he answered with an impatient lift of his chin as he stripped his coat from his broad shoulders. “You have just said there is only one way to settle this—I am ready—so are my friends. You will please meet me outside—there is plenty of firelight under the trees, and the sooner we get through this the better. The apology should not come from me, and will not. Come, gentlemen,” and he stepped out into the now drizzling night, the glare of the torches falling on his determined face and white shirt as he strode down the path followed by his seconds.

Seven gentlemen hurriedly gathered together, one a doctor and another in full possession of a mahogany case containing two duelling pistols with their accompanying ammunition, G. D. gun caps, powder-horn, swabs and rammers, and it past eleven o'clock at night, would have excited but little interest to the average darky—especially one unaccustomed to the portents and outcomes of such proceedings.

Not so Alec, who had absorbed the situation at a glance. He had accompanied his master on two such occasions—one at Bladensburg and the other on a neighboring estate, when the same suggestive tokens had been visible, except that those fights took place at daybreak, and after every requirement of the code had been complied with, instead of under the flare of smoking pine torches and within a step of the contestant's front door. He had, besides, a most intimate knowledge of the contents of the mahogany case, it being part of his duty to see that these defenders of the honor of all the Rutters—and they had been in frequent use—were kept constantly oiled and cleaned. He had even cast some bullets the month before under the colonel's direction. That he was present to-night was entirely due to the fact that having made a short cut to the kitchen door in order to hurry some dishes, he had by the merest chance, and at the precise psychological moment, run bump up against the warlike party just before they had reached the duelling ground. This was a well-lighted path but a stone's throw from the porch, and sufficiently hidden by shrubbery to be out of sight of the ballroom windows.

The next moment the old man was in full cry to the house. He had heard the beginning of the trouble while he was carrying out St. George's orders regarding the two half-emptied bowls of punch and understood exactly what was going to happen, and why.

“Got de colonel's pistols!” he choked as he sped along the gravel walk toward the front door the quicker to reach the ballroom—“and Marse Harry nothin' but a baby! Gor-a-Mighty! Gor-a-Mighty!” Had they all been grown-ups he might not have minded—but his “Marse Harry,” the child he brought up, his idol—his chum!—“Fo' Gawd, dey sha'n't kill 'im—dey sha'n't!—DEY SHA'N'T!!”

He had reached the porch now, swung back the door, and with a sudden spring—it was wonderful how quick he moved—had dashed into the ballroom, now a maze of whirling figures—a polka having struck up to keep everybody occupied until the reel was finally made up.

“Marse Talbot!—Marse Talbot!” All domestic training was cast aside, not a moment could be lost—“All on ye!—dey's murder outside—somebody go git de colonel!—Oh, Gawd!—somebody git 'im quick!”

Few heard him and nobody paid any attention to his entreaties; nor could anybody, when they did listen, understand what he wanted—the men swearing under their breath, the girls indignant that he had blocked their way. Mrs. Rutter, who had seen his in-rush, sat aghast. Had Alec, too, given way, she wondered—old Alec who had had full charge of the wine cellar for years! But the old man pressed on, still shouting, his voice almost gone, his eyes bursting from his head.

“Dey's gwineter murder Marse Harry—I seen 'em! Oh!—whar's de colonel! Won't somebody please—Oh, my Gawd!—dis is awful! Don't I tell ye dey's gwineter kill Marse Harry!”

Mrs. Cheston, sitting beside Kate, was the only one who seemed to understand.

“Alec!” she called in her imperious voice—“Alec!—come to me at once! What is the matter?”

The old butler shambled forward and stood trembling, the tears streaming down his cheeks.

“Yes, mum—I'm yere! Oh, can't ye git de colonel—ain't nobody else'll do—”

“Is it a duel?”

“Yes, mum! I jes' done see 'em! Dey's gwineter kill my Marse Harry!”

Kate sprang up. “Where are they?” she cried, shivering with fear. The old man's face had told the story.

“Out by de greenhouse—dey was measurin' off de groun'—dey's got de colonel's pistols—you kin see 'em from de winder!”

In an instant she had parted the heavy silk curtains and lifted the sash. She would have thrown herself from it if Mrs. Cheston had not held her, although it was but a few feet from the ground.

“Harry!” she shrieked—an agonizing shriek that reverberated through the ballroom, bringing everybody and everything to a stand-still. The dancers looked at each other in astonishment. What had happened? Who had fainted?

The colonel now passed through the room. He had been looking after the proper handling of the famous Madeira, and had just heard that Alec wanted him, and was uncertain as to the cause of the disturbance. A woman's scream had reached his ears, but he did not know it was Kate's or he would have quickened his steps.

Again Kate's voice pierced the room:

“Harry! HARRY!”—this time in helpless agony. She had peered into the darkness made denser by the light rain, and had caught a glimpse of a man standing erect without his coat, the light of the torches bringing his figure into high relief—whose she could not tell, the bushes were so thick.

The colonel brushed everybody aside and pulled Kate, half fainting, into the room. Then he faced Mrs. Cheston.

“What has happened?” he asked sharply. “What is going on outside?”

“Just what I told you. Those fools are out there trying to murder each other!”

Two shots in rapid succession rang clear on the night air.

The colonel stood perfectly still. No need to tell him now what had happened, and worse yet, no need to tell him what WOULD happen if he showed the slightest agitation. He was a cool man, accustomed to critical situations, and one who never lost his head in an emergency. Only a few years before he had stopped a runaway hunter, with a girl clinging to a stirrup, by springing straight at the horse's head and bringing them both to the ground unhurt. It only required the same instantaneous concentration of all his forces, he said to himself, as he gazed into old Alec's terror-stricken face framed by the open window. Once let the truth be known and the house would be in a panic—women fainting, men rushing out, taking sides with the

combatants, with perhaps other duels to follow—Mrs. Rutter frantic, the ball suddenly broken up, and this, too, near midnight, with most of his guests ten miles and more from home.

Murmurs of alarm were already reaching his ears: What was it?—who had fainted?—did the scream come from inside or outside the room?—what was the firing about?

He turned to allay Kate's anxiety, but she had cleared the open window at a bound and was already speeding toward where she had seen the light on the man's shirt. For an instant he peered after her into the darkness, and then, his mind made up, closed the sash with a quick movement, flung together the silk curtains and raised his hand to command attention.

“Keep on with the dance, my friends; I'll go and find out what has happened—but it's nothing that need worry anybody—only a little burnt powder. Alec, go and tell Mr. Grant, the overseer, to keep better order outside. In the meantime let everybody get ready for the Virginia reel; supper will be served in a few minutes. Will you young gentlemen please choose your partners, and will some one of you kindly ask the music to start up?”

Slowly, and quite as if he had been called to the front door to welcome some belated guest, he walked the length of the room preceded by Alec, who, agonized at his master's measured delay, had forged ahead to open the door. This closed and they out of sight, the two hurried down the path.

Willits lay flat on the ground, one arm stretched above his head. He had measured his full length, the weight of his shoulder breaking some flower-pots as he fell. Over his right eye gaped an ugly wound from which oozed a stream of blood that stained his cheek and throat. Dr. Teackle, on one knee, was searching the patient's heart, while Kate, her pretty frock soiled with mud, her hair dishevelled, sat crouched in the dirt rubbing his hands—sobbing bitterly—crying out whenever Harry, who was kneeling beside her, tried to soothe her:—“No!—No!—My heart's broken—don't speak to me—go away!”

The colonel, towering above them, looked the scene over, then he confronted Harry, who had straightened to his feet on seeing his father.

“A pretty piece of work—and on a night like this! A damnable piece of work, I should say, sir!... Has he killed him, Teackle?”

The young doctor shook his head ominously.

“I cannot tell yet—his heart is still beating.”

St. George now joined the group. He and Gilbert and the other seconds had, in order to maintain secrecy, been rounding up the few negroes who had seen the encounter, or who had been attracted to the spot by the firing.

“Harry had my full consent, Talbot—there was really nothing else to do. Only an ounce of cold lead will do in some cases, and this was one of them.” He was grave and deliberate in manner, but there was an infinite sadness in his voice.

“He did—did he?” retorted the colonel bitterly. “YOUR full consent! YOURS! and I in the next room!” Here he beckoned to one of the negroes who, with staring eyeballs, stood gazing from one to the other. “Come closer, Eph—not a whisper, remember, or I'll cut the hide off your back in strips. Tell the others what I say—if a word of this gets into the big house or around the cabins I'll know who to punish. Now two or three of you go into the greenhouse, pick up one of those wide planks, and lift this gentleman onto it so we can carry him. Take him into my office, doctor, and lay him on my lounge. He'd better die there than here. Come, Kate—do you go with me. Not a syllable of this, remember, Kate, to Mrs. Rutter, or anybody else. As for you, sir”—and he looked Harry squarely in the face—“you will hear from me later on.”

With the same calm determination, he entered the ballroom, walked to the group forming the reel, and, with a set smile on this face indicating how idle had been everybody's fears, said loud enough to be heard by every one about him:

“Only one of the men, my dear young people, who has been hurt in the too careless use of some firearms. As to dear Kate—she has been so upset—she happened unfortunately to see the affair from the window—that she has gone to her room and so you must excuse her for a little while. Now everybody keep on with the dance.”

With his wife he was even more at ease. “The same old root of all evil, my dear,” he said with a dry laugh—“too much peach brandy, and this time down the wrong throats—and so in their joy they must celebrate by firing off pistols and wasting my good ammunition,” an explanation which completely satisfied the dear lady—peach brandy being capable of producing any calamity, great or small.

But this would not do for Mrs. Cheston. She was a woman who could be trusted and who never, on any occasion, lost her nerve. He saw from the way she lifted her eyebrows in inquiry, instead of framing her question in words, that she fully realized the gravity of the situation. The colonel looked at her significantly, made excuse to step in front of her, his back to the room, and with his forefinger tapping his forehead, whispered:

“Willits.”

The old lady paled, but she did not change her expression.

“And Harry?” she murmured in return.

The colonel kept his eyes upon her, but he made no answer. A hard, cold look settled on his face—one she knew—one his negroes feared when he grew angry.

Again she repeated Harry's name, this time in alarm:

“Quick!—tell me—not killed?”

“No—I wish to God he were!”

CHAPTER VI

The wounded man lay on a lounge in the office room, which was dimly lighted by the dying glow of the outside torches and an oil lamp hurriedly brought in. No one was present except St. George, Harry, the doctor, and a negro woman who had brought in some pillows and hot water. All that could be done for him had been done; he was unconscious and his life hung by a thread. Harry, now that the mysterious thing called his “honor” had been satisfied, was helping Teackle wash the wound prior to an attempt to probe for the ball.

The boy was crying quietly—the tears streaming unbidden down his cheeks—it was his first experience at this sort of thing. He had been brought up to know that some day it might come and that he must then face it, but he had never before realized the horror of what might follow. And yet he had not reached the stage of regret; he was sorry for the wounded man and for his suffering, but he was not sorry for his own share in causing it. He had only done his duty, and but for a stroke of good luck he and Willits might have exchanged places. Uncle George had expressed his feelings exactly when he said that only a bit of cold lead could settle some insults, and what insult could have been greater than the one for which he had shot Willits? What was a gentleman to do? Go around meeting his antagonist every day?—the two ignoring each other? Or was he to turn stable boy, and pound him with his fists?—or, more ridiculous still, have him bound over to keep the peace, or bring an action for—Bah!—for what?—Yes—for what? Willits hadn't struck him, or wounded him, or robbed him. It had been his life or Willits's. No—there was no other way—couldn't be any other way. Willits knew it when he tore up Kate's card—knew what would follow. There was no deception—nothing underhand. And he had got precisely what he deserved, sorry as he felt for his sufferings.

Then Kate's face rose before him—haunted him. Why hadn't she seen it this way? Why had she refused to look at him—refused to answer him—driven him away from her side, in fact?—he who had risked his life to save her from insult! Why wouldn't she allow him to even touch her hand? Why did she treat Willits—drunken vulgarian as he was—differently from the way she had treated him? She had broken off her engagement with him because he was drunk at Mrs. Cheston's ball, where nobody had been hurt but himself, and here she was sympathizing with another drunken man who had not only outraged all sense of decency toward her, but had jeopardized the life of her affianced husband who defended her against his insults; none of which would have happened had the man been sober. All this staggered him.

More astounding still was her indifference. She had not even asked if he had escaped unhurt, but had concentrated all her interest upon the man who had insulted her. As to his own father's wrath—that he had expected. It was his way to break out, and this he knew would continue until he realized the enormity of the insult to Kate and heard how he and St. George had tried to ward off the catastrophe. Then he would not only change his opinion, but would commend him for his courage.

Outside the sick-room such guests as could be trusted were gathered together in the colonel's den, where they talked in whispers. All agreed that the ladies and the older men must be sent home as soon as possible, and in complete ignorance of what had occurred. If Willits lived—of which there was little hope—his home would be at the colonel's until he fully recovered, the colonel having declared that neither expense nor care would be spared to hasten his recovery. If he died, the body would be sent to his father's house later on.

With this object in view the dance was adroitly shortened, the supper hurried through, and within an hour after midnight the last carriage and carryall of those kept in ignorance of the duel had departed, the only change in the programme being the non-opening of the rare old bottle of Madeira and the announcement of Harry's and Kate's engagement—an omission which provoked little comment, as it had been known to but few.

Kate remained. She had tottered upstairs holding on to the hand-rail and had thrown herself on a bed in the room leading out of the dressing-room, where she lay in her mud-stained dress, the silken petticoat torn and bedraggled in her leap from the window. She was weeping bitterly, her old black mammy sitting beside her trying to comfort her as best she could.

With the departure of the last guest—Mr. Seymour among them; the colonel doing the honors; standing bare-headed on the porch, his face all smiles as he bade them good-by—the head of the house of Rutter turned quickly on his heel, passed down the corridor, made his way along the long narrow hall, and entered his office, where the wounded man lay. Harry, the negro woman, and Dr. Teackle alone were with him.

“Is there any change?” he asked in a perfectly even voice. Every vestige of the set smile of the host had left his face. Harry he did not even notice.

“Not much—he is still alive,” replied the doctor.

“Have you found the ball?”

“No—I have not looked for it—I will presently.”

The colonel moved out a chair and sat down beside the dying man, his eyes fixed on the lifeless face. Some wave of feeling must have swept through him, for after a half-stifled sigh, he said in a low voice, as if to himself:

“This will be a fine story to tell his father, won't it?—and here too—under my roof. My God!—was there ever anything more disgraceful!” He paused for a moment, his eyes still on the sufferer, and then went on—this time to the doctor—“His living so long gives me some hope—am I right, Teackle?”

The doctor nodded, but he made no audible reply. He had bent closer to the man's chest and was at the moment listening intently to the labored breathing, which seemed to have increased.

Harry edged nearer to the patient, his eyes seeking for some move of life. All his anger had faded. Willits, his face ablaze with drink and rage, his eyes flashing, his strident voice ringing out—even Kate's shocked, dazed face, no longer filled his mind. It was the suffering man—trembling on the verge of eternity, shot to death by his own ball—that appealed to him. And then the suddenness of it all—less than an hour had passed since this tall, robust young fellow stood before him on the stairs, hanging upon every word that fell from Kate's lips—and here he lay weltering in his own blood.

Suddenly his father's hopeful word to the doctor sounded in his ears. Suppose, after all, Willits SHOULD

get well! Then Kate would understand and forgive him! As this thought developed in his mind his spirits rose. He scanned the sufferer the more intently, straining his neck, persuading himself that a slight twitching had crossed the dying man's face. Almost instantaneously the doctor rose to his feet.

“Quick, Harry!—hand me that brandy! It's just as I hoped—the ball has ploughed outside the skull—the brain is untouched. It was the shock that stunned him. Leave the room everybody—you too, colonel—he'll come to in a minute and must not be excited.”

Harry sprang from his chair, a great surge of thankfulness rising in his heart, caught up the decanter, filled a glass and pressed it to the sufferer's lips. The colonel sat silent and unmoved. He had seen too many wounded men revive and then die to be unduly excited. That Willets still breathed was the only feature of his case that gave him any hope.

Harry shot an inquiring glance at his father, and receiving only a cold stare in return, hurried from the room, his steps growing lighter as he ran. Kate must hear the good news and with the least possible delay. He would not send a message—he would go himself; then he could explain and relieve her mind. She would listen to his pleading. It was natural she should have been shocked. He himself had been moved to sympathy by the sufferer's condition—how much more dreadful, then, must have been the sight of the wounded man lying there among the flower-pots to a woman nurtured so carefully and one so sensitive in spirit! But it was all over—Willits would live—there would be a reconciliation—everything would be forgiven and everything forgotten.

All these thoughts crowded close in his mind as he rushed up the stairs two steps at a time to where his sweetheart lay moaning out her heart. He tapped lightly and her old black mammy opened the door on a crack.

“It's Marse Harry, mistis,” she called back over her shoulder—“shall I let him come in?”

“No!—no!—I don't want to see him; I don't want to see anybody—my heart is broken!” came the reply in half-stifled sobs.

Harry, held at bay, rested his forehead against the edge of the door so his voice could reach her the better.

“But Willits isn't going to die, Kate dear. I have just left him; it's only a scalp wound. Dr. Teackle says he's all right. The shock stunned him into unconsciousness.”

“Oh, I don't care what Dr. Teackle says! It's you, Harry!—You! You never once thought of me—Oh, why did you do it?”

“I did think of you, Kate! I never thought of anything else—I am not thinking of anything else now.”

“Oh, to think you tried to murder him! You, Harry—whom I loved so!” she sobbed.

“It was for you, Kate! You heard what he said—you saw it all. It was for you—for nobody else—for you, my darling! Let me come in—let me hold you close to me and tell you.”

“No!—NO—NO! My heart is broken! Come to me, mammy!”

The door shut gently and left him on the outside, dazed at the outcry, his heart throbbing with tenderness and an intense, almost ungovernable impulse to force his way into the room, take her in his arms, and comfort her.

The closed door brought him to his senses. To-morrow, after all, would be better, he confessed to himself humbly. Nothing more could be done to-night. Yes—to-morrow he would tell her all. He turned to descend the stairs and ran almost into Alec's arms. The old man was trembling with excitement and seemed hardly able to control himself. He had come in search of him, and had waited patiently at Kate's door for the outcome of the interview, every word of which he had overheard.

“Marse Talbot done sont me fer ye, Marse Harry,” he said in a low voice; “he wants ye in his li'l' room. Don't ye take no notice what de young mistis says; she ain't griebin' fer dat man. Dat Willits blood ain't no 'count, nohow; dey's po' white trash, dey is—eve'ybody knows dat. Let Miss Kate cry herse'f out; dat's de on'y help now. Mammy Henny'll look arter her till de mawnin'”—to none of which did Harry make answer.

When they reached the bottom step leading to the long hall the old man stopped and laid his hand on his young master's shoulder. His voice was barely audible and two tears stood in his eyes.

“Don't you take no notice ob what happens to-night, son,” he whispered. “'Member ye kin count on ol' Alec. Ain't neber gwineter be nothin' come 'twixt me an' you, son. I ain't neber gwineter git tired lovin' ye—you won't fergit dat, will ye?”

“No, Alec, but Mr. Willits will recover. Dr. Teackle has just said so.”

“Oh, dat ain't it, son—it's you, Marse Harry. Don't let 'em down ye—stand up an' fight 'em back.”

Harry patted the old servant tenderly on the arm to calm his fears. His words had made but little impression on him. If he had heard them at all he certainly did not grasp their import. What he was wanted for he could not surmise—nor did he much care. Now that Kate had refused to see him he almost wished that Willits's bullet had found its target.

“Where did you say my father was, Alec?” he asked in a listless voice.

“In his li'l' room, son; dey's all in dar, Marse George Temple, Mister Gilbert—dem two gemmans who stood up wid Mister Willits—dey's all dar. Don't mind what dey say, honey—jes' you fall back on ol' Alec. I dassent go in; maybe I'll be yere in de pantry so ye kin git hold o' me. I'se mos' crazy, Marse Harry—let me git hold oh yo' hand once mo', son. Oh, my Gawd!—dey sha'n't do nothin' to ye!”

The boy took the old man's hand in his, patted it gently and resumed his walk. The least said the better when Alec felt like this. It was Kate's voice that pierced his ears—Kate's sobs that wrenched his heart: “You never thought of me!” Nothing else counted.

Harry turned the handle of the door and stepped boldly in, his head erect, his eyes searching the room. It was filled with gentlemen, some sitting, some standing; not only those who had taken part in the duel, but three or four others who were in possession of the secret that lay heavy on everybody's mind.

He looked about him: most of the candles had burned low in the socket; some had gone out. The few that

still flickered cast a dim, ghostly light. The remains of the night's revel lay on the larger table and the serving tables:—a half empty silver dish of terrapin, caked over with cold grease; portion of a ham with the bone showing; empty and partly filled glasses and china cups from which the toddies and eggnog had been drunk. The smell of rum and lemons intermingled with the smoke of snuffed-out candle wicks greeted his nostrils—a smell he remembered for years and always with a shudder.

There had evidently been a heated discussion, for his father was walking up and down the room, his face flushed, his black eyes blazing with suppressed anger, his plum-colored coat unbuttoned as if to give him more breathing space, his silk scarf slightly awry. St. George Temple must have been the cause of his wrath, for the latter's voice was reverberating through the room as Harry stepped in.

“I tell you, Talbot, you shall not—you DARE not!” St. George was exclaiming, his voice rising in the intensity of his indignation. His face was set, his eyes blazing; all his muscles taut. He stood like an avenging knight guarding some pathway. Harry looked on in amazement—he had never seen his uncle like this before.

The colonel wheeled about suddenly and raised his clenched hand. He seemed to be nervously unstrung and for a moment to have lost his self-control.

“Stop, St. George!” he thundered. “Stop instantly! Not another word, do you hear me? Don't strain a friendship that has lasted from boyhood or I may forget myself as you have done. No man can tell me what I shall or shall not do when my honor is at stake. Never before has a Rutter disgraced himself and his blood. I am done with him, I tell you!”

“But the man will get well!” hissed St. George, striding forward and confronting him. “Teackle has just said so—you heard him; we all heard him!”

“That makes no difference; that does not relieve my son.”

Rutter had now become aware of Harry's presence. So had the others, who turned their heads in the boy's direction, but no one spoke. They had not the lifelong friendship that made St. George immune, and few of them would have dared to disagree with Talbot Rutter in anything.

“And now, sir”—here the colonel made a step towards where Harry stood, the words falling as drops of water fall on a bared head—“I have sent for you to tell you just what I have told these gentlemen. I have informed them openly because I do not wish either my sense of honor or my motives to be misunderstood. Your performances to-night have been so dastardly and so ill-bred as to make it impossible for me ever to live under the same roof with you again.” Harry started and his lips parted as if to speak, but he made no sound. “You have disgraced your blood and violated every law of hospitality. Mr. Willits should have been as safe here as you would have been under his father's roof. If he misbehaved himself you could have ordered his carriage and settled the affair next day, as any gentleman of your standing would have done. I have sent for a conveyance to take you wherever you may wish to go.” Then, turning to St. George, “I must ask you, Temple, to fill my place and see that these gentlemen get their proper carriages, as I must join Mrs. Rutter, who has sent for me. Good-night,” and he strode from the room.

Harry stared blankly into the faces of the men about him: first at St. George and then at the others—one after another—as if trying to read what was passing in their minds. No one spoke or moved. His father's intentions had evidently been discussed before the boy's arrival and the final denunciation had, therefore, been received with less of the deadening effect than it had produced on himself. Nor was it a surprise to old Alec, who despite his fears had followed Harry noiselessly into the room, and who had also overheard the colonel's previous outbreak as to his intended disposition of his young master.

St. George, who during the outburst had stood leaning against the mantel, his eyes riveted on Harry, broke the silence.

“That, gentlemen,” he exclaimed, straightening to his feet, one hand held high above his head, “is the most idiotic and unjust utterance that ever fell from Talbot Rutter's lips! and one he will regret to his dying day. This boy you all know—most of you have known him from childhood, and you know him, as I do, to be the embodiment of all that is brave and truthful. He is just of age—without knowledge of the world, his engagement to Kate Seymour, as some of you are aware, was to be made known to-night. Willits was drunk or he would not have acted as he did. I saw it coming and tried to stop him. That he was drunk was Rutter's own fault, with his damned notions of drowning everybody in drink every minute of the day and night. I saw the whole affair and heard the insult, and it was wholly unprovoked. Harry did just what was right, and if he hadn't I'd either have made Willits apologize or I would have shot him myself the moment the affair could have been arranged, no matter where we were. I know perfectly well”—here he swept his eyes around—“that there is not a man in this room who does not feel as I do about Rutter's treatment of this boy, and so I shall not comment further upon it.” He dropped his clenched hand and turned to Harry, his voice still clear and distinct but with a note of tenderness through it. “And now, that pronunciamentos are in order, my boy, here is one which has less of the Bombastes Furioso in it than the one you have just listened to—but it's a damned sight more humane and a damned sight more fatherly, and it is this:—hereafter you belong to me—you are my son, my comrade, and, if I ever have a dollar to give to any one, my heir. And now one thing more, and I don't want any one of you gentlemen within sound of my voice ever to forget it: When hereafter any one of you reckon with Harry you will please remember that you reckon with me.”

He turned suddenly. “Excuse me one moment, gentlemen, and I will then see that you get your several carriages. Alec!—where's Alec?”

The old darky stepped out of the shadow. “I'm yere, sah.”

“Alec, go and tell Matthew to bring my gig to the front porch—and be sure you see that your young master's heavy driving-coat is put inside. Mr. Harry spends the night with me.”

CHAPTER VII

The secrecy enjoined upon everybody conversant with the happenings at Moorlands did not last many hours. At the club, across dinner tables, at tea, on the street, and in the libraries of Kennedy Square, each detail was gone over, each motive discussed. None of the facts were exaggerated, nor was the gravity of the situation lightly dismissed. Duels were not so common as to blunt the sensibilities. On the contrary, they had begun to be generally deplored and condemned, a fact largely due to the bitterness resulting from a famous encounter which had taken place a year or so before between young Mr. Cocheran, the son of a rich landowner, and Mr. May—the circumstances being somewhat similar, the misunderstanding having arisen at a ball in Washington over a reigning belle, during which Mr. May had thrown his card in Cocheran's face. In this instance all the requirements of the code were complied with. The duel was fought in an open space behind Nelson's Hotel, near the Capitol, Mr. Cocheran arriving at half-past five in the morning in a magnificent coach drawn by four white horses, his antagonist reaching the grounds in an ordinary conveyance, the seconds and the two surgeons on horseback. Both fired simultaneously, with the result that May escaped unhurt, while Cocheran was shot through the head and instantly killed.

Public opinion, indeed, around Kennedy Square, was, if the truth be told, undergoing many and serious changes. For not only the duel but some other of the traditional customs dear to the old regime were falling into disrepute—especially the open sideboards, synonymous with the lavish hospitality of the best houses. While most of the older heads, brought up on the finer and rarer wines, knew to a glass the limit of their endurance, the younger bloods were constantly losing control of themselves, a fact which was causing the greatest anxiety among the mothers of Kennedy Square.

This growing antipathy had been hastened and solidified by another tragedy quite as widely discussed as the Cocheran and May duel—more so, in fact, since this particular victim of too many toddies had been the heir of one of the oldest residents about Kennedy Square—a brilliant young surgeon, self-exiled because of his habits, who had been thrown from his horse on the Indian frontier—an Iowa town, really—shattering his leg and making its amputation necessary. There being but one other man in the rough camp who had ever seen a knife used—and he but a student—the wounded surgeon had directed the amputation himself, even to the tying of the arteries and the bandages and splints. Only then did he collapse. The hero—and he was a hero to every one who knew of his coolness and pluck, in spite of his recognized weakness—had returned to his father's house on Kennedy Square on crutches, there to consult some specialists, the leg still troubling him. As the cripple's bedroom was at the top of the first flight of stairs, the steps of which—it being summer—were covered with China matting, he was obliged to drag himself up its incline whenever he was in want of something he must fetch himself. One of these necessities was a certain squat bottle like those which had graced the old sideboards. Half a dozen times a day would he adjust his crutches, their steel points preventing his slipping, and mount the stairs to his room, one step at a time.

Some months after, when the matting was taken up, the mother took her youngest boy—he was then fifteen—to the steps:

“Do you see the dents of your brother's crutches?—count them. Every one was a nail in his coffin.” They were—for the invalid died that winter.

These marked changes in public opinion, imperceptible as they had been at first, were gradually paving the way, it may be said, for the dawn of that new order of things which only the wiser and more farsighted men—men like Richard Horn—were able to discern. While many of the old regime were willing to admit that the patriarchal life, with the negro as the worker and the master as the spender, had seen its best days, but few of them, at the period of these chronicles, realized that the genius of Morse, Hoe, and McCormick, and a dozen others, whose inventions were just beginning to be criticised, and often condemned, were really the chief factors in the making of a new and greater democracy: that the cog, the drill, the grate-bar, and the flying shuttle would ere long supplant the hoe and the scythe; and that when the full flood of this new era was reached their old-time standards of family pride, reckless hospitality, and even their old-fashioned courtesy would well-nigh be swept into space. The storm raised over this and the preceding duel had they but known it, was but a notch in the tide-gauge of this flood.

“I understand, St. George, that you could have stopped that disgraceful affair the other night if you had raised your hand,” Judge Pancoast had blurted out in an angry tone at the club the week following. “I did raise it, judge,” replied St. George, calmly drawing off his gloves.

“They don't say so—they say you stood by and encouraged it.”

“Quite true,” he answered in his dryest voice. “When I raised my hand it was to drop my handkerchief. They fired as it fell.”

“And a barbarous and altogether foolish piece of business, Temple. There is no justification for that sort of thing, and if Rutter wasn't a feudal king up in his own county there would be trouble over it. It's God's mercy the poor fellow wasn't killed. Fine beginning, isn't it, for a happy married life?”

“Better not have any wife at all, judge, than wed a woman whose good name you are afraid to defend with your life. There are some of us who can stand anything but that, and Harry is built along the same lines. A fine, noble, young fellow—did just right and has my entire confidence and my love. Think it over, judge,” and he strolled into the card-room, picked up the morning paper, and buried his face in its columns, his teeth set, his face aflame with suppressed disgust at the kind of blood running in the judge's veins.

The colonel's treatment of his son also came in for heated discussion. Mrs. Cheston was particularly outspoken. Such quixotic action on the ground of safeguarding the rights of a young drunkard like Willits, who didn't know when he had had enough, might very well do for a self-appointed autocrat like Rutter, she maintained, but some equally respectable people would have him know that they disagreed with him.

“Just like Talbot Rutter,” she exclaimed in her outspoken, decided way—“no sense of proportion. High-tempered, obstinate as a mule, and a hundred years—yes, five hundred years behind his time. And he—could have stopped it all too if he had listened to me. Did you ever hear anything so stupid as his turning Harry—

the sweetest boy who ever lived—out of doors, and in a pouring rain, for doing what he would have done himself! Oh, this is too ridiculous—too farcical. Why, you can't conceive of the absurdity of it all—nobody can! Gilbert was there and told me every word of it. You would have thought he was a grand duke or a pasha punishing a slave—and the funniest thing about it is that he believes he is a pasha. Oh—I have no patience with such contemptible family pride, and that's what is at the bottom of it."

Some of the back county aristocrats, on the other hand—men who lived by themselves, who took their cue from Alexander Hamilton, Lee, and Webb, and believed in the code as the only means of arbitrating a difficulty of any kind between gentlemen—stoutly defended the Lord of Moorlands.

"Rutter did perfectly right to chuck the young whelp out of doors. Outrageous, sir—never is done—nothing less than murder. Ought to be prosecuted for challenging a man under his own roof—and at night too. No toss-up for position, no seconds except a parcel of boys. Vulgar, sir—infernally vulgar, sir. I haven't the honor of Colonel Rutter's acquaintance—but if I had I'd tell him so—served the brat right—damn him!"

Richard Horn was equally emphatic, but in a far different way. Indeed he could hardly restrain himself when discussing it.

"I can think of nothing my young boy Oliver would or could do when he grows up," he exclaimed fiercely—his eyes flashing, "which would shut him out of his home and his dear mother's care. The duel is a relic of barbarism and should be no longer tolerated; it is mob law, really, and indefensible, with two persons defying the statutes instead of a thousand. But Rutter is the last man in the world to take the stand he has, and I sincerely regret his action. There are many bitter days ahead of him."

Nor were the present conditions, aspirations, and future welfare of the two combatants, and of the lovely girl over whom they had quarrelled, neglected by the gossipers. No day passed without an extended discussion of their affairs. Bearers of fresh news were eagerly welcomed both to toddy and tea tables.

Old Morris Murdoch, who knew Willits's father intimately, being a strong Clay man himself, arrived at one of these functions with the astounding information that Willits had called on Miss Seymour, wearing his hat in her presence to conceal his much-beplastered head. That he had then and there not only made her a most humble apology for his ill-tempered outbreak, which he explained was due entirely to a combination of egg-and-brandy, with a dash of apple-toddy thrown in, but had declared upon his honor as a gentleman that he would never again touch the flowing bowl. Whereupon—(and this excited still greater astonishment)—the delighted young lady had not only expressed her sympathy for his misfortunes, but had blamed herself for what had occurred!

Tom Tilghman, a famous cross-country rider, who had ridden in post haste from his country seat near Moorlands to tell the tale—as could be seen from his boots, which were still covered with mud—boldly asserted of his own knowledge that the wounded man, instead of seeking his native shore, as was generally believed, would betake himself to the Red Sulphur Springs (where Kate always spent the summer)—accompanied by three saddle horses, two servants, some extra bandages, and his devoted sister, there to regain what was left of his health and strength. At which Judge Pancoast had retorted—and with some heat—that Willits might take a dozen saddle horses and an equal number of sisters, and a bale of bandages if he were so minded, to the Springs, or any other place, but he would save time and money if he stayed at home and looked after his addled head, as no woman of Miss Seymour's blood and breeding could possibly marry a man whose family escutcheon needed polishing as badly as did his manners. That the fact—the plain, bold fact—and here the judge's voice rose to a high pitch—was that Willits was boiling drunk until Harry's challenge sobered him, and that Kate hated drunkenness as much as did Harry's mother and the other women who had started out to revolutionize society.

What that young lady herself thought of it all not even the best-posted gossip in the club dared to venture an opinion. Moreover, such was the respect and reverence in which she was held, and so great was the sympathy felt for her situation, that she was seldom referred to in connection with Harry or the affair except with a sigh, followed by a "Too bad, isn't it?—enough to break your heart," and such like expressions.

What the Honorable Prim thought of it all was apparent the next day at the club when he sputtered out with:

"Here's a nice mess for a man of my position to find himself in! Do you know that I am now pointed out as the prospective father-in-law of a young jackanapes who goes about with a glass of grog in one hand and a pistol in the other. I am not accustomed to having my name bandied about and I won't have it—I live a life of great simplicity, minding my own business, and I want everybody else to mind theirs. The whole affair is most contemptible and ridiculous and smacks of the tin-armor age. Willits should have been led quietly out of the room and put to bed and young Rutter should have been reprimanded publicly by his father. Disgraceful on a night like that when my daughter's name was on everybody's lips."

After which outburst he had shut himself up in his house, where, so he told one of his intimates, he intended to remain until he left for the Red Sulphur Springs, which he would do several weeks earlier than was his custom—a piece of news which not only confirmed Tom Tilghman's gossip, but lifted several eyebrows in astonishment and set one or two loose tongues to wagging.

Out at Moorlands, the point of view varied as the aftermath of the tragedy developed, the colonel alone pursuing his daily life without comment, although deep down in his heart a very maelstrom was boiling and seething.

Mrs. Rutter, as fate would have it, on hearing that Kate was too ill to go back to town, had gone the next morning to her bedside, where she learned for the first time not only of the duel—which greatly shocked her, leaving her at first perfectly limp and helpless—but of Harry's expulsion from his father's house—(Alec owned the private wire)—a piece of news which at first terrified and then keyed her up as tight as an overstrung violin. Like many another Southern woman, she might shrink from a cut on a child's finger and only regain her mental poise by a liberal application of smelling salts, but once touch that boy of hers—the child she had nourished and lived for—and all the rage of the she-wolf fighting for her cub was aroused. What took place behind the closed doors of her bedroom when she faced the colonel and flamed out, no one but themselves knew. That the colonel was dumfounded—never having seen her in any such state of mind—goes without

saying. That he was proud of her and liked her the better for it, is also true—nothing delighted him so much as courage;—but nothing of all this, impressive as it was, either weakened or altered his resolve.

Nor did he change front to his friends and acquaintances: his honorable name, he maintained, had been trailed in the mud; his boasted hospitality betrayed; his house turned into a common shamble. That his own son was the culprit made the pain and mortification the greater, but it did not lessen his responsibility to his blood. Had not Foscari, to save his honor, in the days of the great republic, condemned his own son Jacopo to exile and death? Had not Virginius slain his daughter? Should he not protect his own honor as well? Furthermore, was not the young man's father a gentleman of standing—a prominent man in the State—a friend not only of his own friend, Henry Clay, but of the governor as well? He, of course, would not have Harry marry into the family had there been a marriageable daughter, but that was no reason why Mr. Willits's only son should not be treated with every consideration. He, Talbot Rutter, was alone responsible for the honor of his house. When your right hand offends you cut it off. His right hand HAD offended him, and he HAD cut it off. Away, then, with the spinning of fine phrases!

And so he let the hornets buzz—and they did swarm and buzz and sting. As long as his wrath lasted he was proof against their assaults—in fact their attacks only confirmed him in his position. It was when all this ceased, for few continued to remonstrate with him after they had heard his final: “I decline to discuss it with you, madame,” or the more significant: “How dare you, sir, refer to my private affairs without my permission?”—it was, I say, when all this ceased, and when neither his wife, who after her first savage outbreak had purposely held her peace, nor any of the servants—not even old Alec, who went about with streaming eyes and a great lump in his throat—dared renew their entreaties for Marse Harry's return, that he began to reflect on his course.

Soon the great silences overawed him—periods of loneliness when he sat confronting his soul, his conscience on the bench as judge; his affections a special attorney:—silences of the night, in which he would listen for the strong, quick, manly footstep and the closing of the door in the corridor beyond:—silences of the dawn, when no clatter of hoofs followed by a cheery call rang out for some one to take Spitfire:—silences of the breakfast table, when he drank his coffee alone, Alec tip-toeing about like a lost spirit. Sometimes his heart would triumph and he begin to think out ways and means by which the past could be effaced. Then again the flag of his pride would be raised aloft so that he and all the people could see, and the old hard look would once more settle in his face, the lips straighten and the thin fingers tighten. No—NO! No assassins for him—no vulgar brawlers—and it was at best a vulgar brawl—and this too within the confines of Moorlands, where, for five generations, only gentlemen had been bred!

And yet, product as he was of a regime that worshipped no ideals but its own; hide-bound by the traditions of his ancestry; holding in secret disdain men and women who could not boast of equal wealth and lineage; dictatorial, uncontradictable; stickler for obsolete forms and ceremonies—there still lay deep under the crust of his pride the heart of a father, and, by his standards, the soul of a gentleman.

What this renegade son of his thought of it all; this disturber of his father's sleeping and waking hours, was far easier to discover. Dazed as Harry had been at the parental verdict and heart-broken as he still was over the dire results, he could not, though he tried, see what else he could have done. His father, he argued to himself, had shot and killed a man when he was but little older than himself, and for an offence much less grave than Willits's insult to Kate: he had frequently boasted of it, showing him the big brass button that had deflected the bullet and saved his life. So had his Uncle George, five years before—not a dead man that time, but a lame one—who was still limping around the club and very good friends the two, so far as he knew. Why then blame HIM? As for the law of hospitality being violated, that was but one of the idiosyncrasies of his father, who was daft on hospitality. How could Willits be his guest when he was his enemy? St. George had begged the wounded man to apologize; if he had done so he would have extended his hand and taken him to Kate, who, upon a second apology, would have extended her hand, and the incident would have been closed. It was Willits's stubbornness and bad breeding, then, that had caused the catastrophe—not his own bullet.

Besides no real harm had been done—that is, nothing very serious. Willits had gained strength rapidly—so much so that he had sat up the third day. Moreover, he had the next morning been carried to one of the downstairs bedrooms, where, he understood, Kate had sent her black mammy for news of him, and where, later on, he had been visited by both Mrs. Rutter and Kate—a most extraordinary condescension on the young girl's part, and one for which Willits should be profoundly grateful all the days of his life.

Nor had Willits's people made any complaint; nor, so far as he could ascertain, had any one connected with either the town or county government started an investigation. It was outside the precincts of Kennedy Square, and, therefore, the town prosecuting attorney (who had heard every detail at the Chesapeake from St. George) had not been called upon to act, and it was well known that no minion of the law in and about Moorlands would ever dare face the Lord of the Manor in any official capacity.

Why, then, had he been so severely punished?

CHAPTER VIII

While all this talk filled the air it is worthy of comment that after his denunciation of Pancoast's views at the club, St. George never again discussed the duel and its outcome. His mind was filled with more important things:—one in particular—a burning desire to bring the lovers together, no matter at what cost nor how great the barriers. He had not, despite his silence, altered a hair-line of the opinion he had held on the night he ordered the gig, fastened Harry's heavy coat around the young man's shoulders, and started back with him through the rain to his house on Kennedy Square; nor did he intend to. This, summed up, meant that the colonel was a tyrant, Willits a vulgarian, and Harry a hot-headed young knight, who, having been forced into a position where he could neither breathe nor move, had gallantly fought his way out.

The one problem that gave him serious trouble was the selection of the precise moment when he should make a strategic move on Kate's heart; lesser problems were his manner of approaching her and the excuses he would offer for Harry's behavior. These not only kept him awake at night, but pursued him like an avenging spirit when he sought the quiet paths of the old square, the dogs at his heels. The greatest of all barriers, he felt assured, would be Kate herself. He had seen enough of her in that last interview, when his tender pleading had restored the harmonies between herself and Harry, to know that she was no longer the child whose sweetness he loved, or the girl whose beauty he was proud of—but the woman whose judgment he must satisfy. Nor could he see that any immediate change in her mental attitude was likely to occur. Some time had now passed since Harry's arrival at his house, and every day the boy had begged for admission at Kate's door, only to be denied by Ben, the old butler. His mother, who had visited her exiled son almost daily, had then called on her, bearing two important pieces of news—one being that after hours of pleading Harry had consented to return to Moorlands and beg his father's pardon, provided that irate gentleman should send for him, and the other the recounting of a message of condolence and sympathy which Willits had sent Harry from his sick-bed, in which he admitted that he had been greatly to blame. (An admission which fairly bubbled out of him when he learned that Harry had assisted Teackle in dressing his wound.)

And yet with all this pressure the young girl had held her own. To every one outside the Rutter clan she had insisted that she was sorry for Harry, but that she could never marry a man whose temper she could not trust. She never put this into words in answering the well-meant inquiries of such girl friends as Nellie Murdoch, Sue Dorsey, and the others; then her eyes would only fill with tears as she begged them not to question her further. Nor had she said as much to her father, who on one occasion had asked her the plump question—“Do you still intend to marry that hot-head?”—to which she had returned the equally positive answer—“No, I never shall!” She reserved her full meaning for St. George when he should again entreat her—as she knew he would at the first opportunity—to forget the past and begin the old life once more.

At the end of the second week St. George had made up his mind as to his course; and at the end of the third the old diplomat, who had dared defeat before, boldly mounted the Seymour steps. He would appeal to Harry's love for her, and all would be well. He had done so before, picturing the misery the boy was suffering, and he would try it again. If he could only reach her heart through the armor of her reserve she would yield.

She answered his cheery call up the stairway in person, greeting him silently, but with arms extended, leading him to a seat beside her, where she buried her face in her hands and burst into tears.

“Harry has tried to see you every day, Kate,” he began, patting her shoulders lovingly in the effort to calm her. “I found him under your window the other night; he walks the streets by the hour, then he comes home exhausted, throws himself on his bed, and lies awake till daylight.”

The girl raised her head and looked at him for a moment. She knew what he had come for—she knew, too, how sorry he felt for her—for Harry—for everybody who had suffered because of this horror.

“Uncle George,” she answered, choking back her tears, speaking slowly, weighing each word—“you've known me from a little girl—ever since my dear mother died. You have been a big brother to me many, many times and I love you for it. If I were determined to do anything that would hurt me, and you found it out in time, you would come and tell me so, wouldn't you?”

St. George nodded his head in answer, but he did not interrupt. Her heart was being slowly unrolled before him, and he would wait until it was all bare.

“Now,” she continued, “the case is reversed, and you want me to do something which I know will hurt me.”

“But you love him, Kate?”

“Yes—that is the worst part of it all,” she answered with a stifled sob—“yes, I love him.” She lifted herself higher on the cushions and put her beautiful arms above her head, her eyes looking into space as if she was trying to solve the problem of what her present resolve would mean to both herself and Harry.

St. George began again: “And you remember how—”

She turned impatiently and dropped one hand until it rested on his own. He thought he had never seen her look so lovely and never so unhappy. Then she said in pleading tones—her eyes blinded by half-restrained tears:

“Don't ask me to REMEMBER, dear Uncle George—help me to forget! You can do no kinder thing for both of us.”

“But think of your whole future happiness, Kate—think how important it is to you—to Harry—to everybody—that you should not shut him out of your life.”

“I have thought! God knows I have thought until sometimes I think I shall go mad. He first breaks his promise about drinking and I forgive him; then he yields to a sudden impulse and behaves like a mad-man and you ask me to forgive him again. He never once thinks of me, nor of my humiliation!” Her lips were quivering, but her voice rang clear.

“He thinks of nothing else BUT you,” he pleaded. “Let your heart work—don't throw him into the street as his father has done. He loves you so.”

“*I*—throw HIM in the street! He has thrown ME—mortified me before everybody—behaved like a—No,—I can't—I won't discuss it!”

“May I—”

“No—not another word. I love you too much to let this come between us. Let us talk of something else—anything—ANYTHING.”

The whole chart of her heart had been unrolled. Her head and not her heart was dominant. He felt, moreover, that no argument of his would be of any use. Time might work out the solution, but this he could not hasten. Nor, if the truth be told, did he blame her. It was, from the girl's point of view, most unfortunate, of course, that the two calamities of Harry's drunkenness and the duel had come so close together. Perhaps—and for the first time in his life he weakened before her tears—perhaps if he had thrown the case of pistols out of the window, sent one man to his father and the other back to Kennedy Square, it might all have been

different—but then again, could this have been done, and if it had been, would not all have to be done over again the next day? At last he asked hopelessly:

“Have you no message for Harry?”

“None,” she answered resolutely.

“And you will not see him?”

“No—we can never heal wounds by keeping them open.” This came calmly, and as if she had made up her mind, and in so determined a tone that he saw it meant an end to the interview.

He rose from his seat and without another word turned toward the door. She gained her feet slowly, as if the very movement caused her pain; put her arms around his neck, kissed him on the cheek, followed him to the door, waved her hand to him as she watched him pick his way across the square, and threw herself on her lounge in an agony of tears.

That night St. George and Harry sat by the smouldering wood fire; the early spring days were warm and joyous, but the nights were still cool. The boy sat hunched up in his chair, his face drawn into lines from the anxiety of the past week; his mind absorbed in the story that St. George had brought from the Seymour house. As in all ardent temperaments, these differences with Kate, which had started as a spark, had now developed into a conflagration which was burning out his heart. His love for Kate was not a part of his life—it was ALL of his life. He was ready now for any sacrifice, no matter how humiliating. He would go down on his knees to his father if she wished it. He would beg Willits's pardon—he would abase himself in any way St. George should suggest. He had done what he thought was right, and he would do it over again under like circumstances, but he would grovel at Kate's feet and kiss the ground she stepped on if she required it of him.

St. George, who had sat quiet, examining closely the backs of his finely modelled hands as if to find some solution of the difficulty written in their delicate articulated curves, heard his outburst in silence. Now and then he would call to Todd, who was never out of reach of his voice—no matter what the hour—to replenish the fire or snuff the candles, but he answered only in nods and monosyllables to Harry. One suggestion only of the heart-broken lover seemed to promise any result, and that was his making it up with his father as his mother had suggested. This wall being broken down, and Willits no longer an invalid, perhaps Kate would see matters in a different and more favorable light.

“But suppose father doesn't send for me, Uncle George, what will I do then?”

“Well, he is your father, Harry.”

“And you think then I had better go home and have it out with him?”

St. George hesitated. He himself would have seen Rutter in Hades before he would have apologized to him. In fact his anger choked him so every time he thought of the brutal and disgraceful scene he had witnessed when the boy had been ordered from his home, that he could hardly get his breath. But then Kate was not his sweetheart, much as he loved her.

“I don't know, Harry. I am not his son,” he answered in an undecided way. Then something the boy's mother had said rose in his mind: “Didn't your mother say that your father's loneliness without you was having its effect?—and wasn't her advice to wait until he should send for you?”

“Yes—that was about it.”

“Well, your mother would know best. Put that question to her next time she comes in—I'm not competent to answer it. And now let us go to bed—you are tired out, and so am I.”

CHAPTER IX

Mysterious things are happening in Kennedy Square. Only the very wisest men know what it is all about—black Moses for one, who tramps the brick walks and makes short cuts through the dirt paths, carrying his tin buckets and shouting: “Po' ole Moses—po' ole fellah! O-Y-S-T-E-R-S! O-Y-STERS!” And Bobbins, the gardener, who raked up last year's autumn leaves and either burned them in piles or spread them on the flower-beds as winter blankets. And, of course, Mockburn, the night watchman: nothing ever happens in and around Kennedy Square that Mockburn doesn't know of. Many a time has he helped various unsteady gentlemen up the steps of their houses and stowed them carefully and noiselessly away inside, only to begin his rounds again, stopping at every corner to drone out his “All's we-l-l!” a welcome cry, no doubt, to the stowaways, but a totally unnecessary piece of information to the inhabitants, nothing worse than a tippler's tumble having happened in the forty years of the old watchman's service.

I, of course, am in the secret of the mysterious happenings and have been for more years than I care to admit, but then I go ten better than Mockburn. And so would you be in the secret had you watched the process as closely as I have done.

It is always the same!

First the crocuses peep out—dozens of crocuses. Then a spread of tulips makes a crazy-quilt of a flowerbed; next the baby buds, their delicate green toes tickled by the south wind, break into laughter. Then the stately magnolias step free of their pods, their satin leaves falling from their alabaster shoulders—grandes dames these magnolias! And then there is no stopping it: everything is let loose; blossoms of peach, cherry, and pear; flowers of syringa—bloom of jasmine, honeysuckle, and Virginia creeper; bridal wreath in flowers of white and wistaria in festoons of purple.

Then come the roses—millions of roses; on single stalks; in clusters, in mobs; rushing over summer-houses, scaling fences, swarming up trellises—a riotous, unruly, irresistible, and altogether lovable lot these roses when they break loose!

And the birds! What a time they are having—thrush, bobolinks, blackbirds, nightingales, woodpeckers, little pee-wees, all fluttering, skimming, chirping; bursting their tiny throats for the very joy of living. And they are all welcome—and it wouldn't make any difference to them if they hadn't been; they would have risked it anyway, so tempting are the shady paths and tangled arbors and wide-spreading elms and butternuts of Kennedy Square.

Soon the skies get over weeping for the lost winter and dry their eyes, and the big, warm, happy sun sails over the tree-tops or drops to sleep, tired out, behind the old Seymour house, and the girls come out in their white dresses and silk sashes and the gallants in their nankeens and pumps and the old life of out-of-doors begins once more.

And these are not the only changes that the coming of spring has wrought. What has been going on deep down in the tender, expectant hearts of root and bulb, eager for expression, had been at work in Harry's own temperament. The sunshine of St. George's companionship has already had its effect; the boy is thawing out; his shrinking shyness, born of his recent trouble, is disappearing like a morning frost. He is again seen at the club, going first under St. George's lee and then on his own personal footing.

The Chesapeake, so St. George had urged upon him, was the centre of news—the headquarters, really, of the town, where not only the current happenings and gossip of Kennedy Square were discussed, but that of the country at large. While the bald-heads, of course, would be canvassing the news from Mexico, which was just beginning to have an ugly look, or having it out, hammer and tongs, over the defeat of Henry Clay, to which some rabid politicians had never become reconciled, the younger gentry—men of Harry's own tastes—would be deploring the poor showing the ducks were making, owing to the up-river freshets which had spoiled the wild celery; or recounting the doings at Mrs. Cheston's last ball; or the terrapin supper at Mr. Kennedy's, the famous writer; or perhaps bemoaning the calamity which had befallen some fellow member who had just found seven bottles out of ten of his most precious port corked and worthless. But whatever the topics, or whoever took sides in their discussion, none of it, so St. George argued, could fail to interest a young fellow just entering upon the wider life of a man of the world, and one, of all others, who needed constant companionship. Then again, by showing himself frequently within its walls, Harry would become better known and better liked.

That he was ineligible for membership, being years too young, and that his continued presence, even as a guest, was against the rules, did not count in his case, or if it did count, no member, in view of what the lad had suffered, was willing to raise the question. Indeed, St. George, in first introducing him, had referred to “my friend, Mr. Rutter,” as an “out of town guest,” laughing as he did so, everybody laughing in return, and so it had gone at that.

At first Harry had dreaded meeting his father's and his uncle's friends, most of whom, he fancied, might be disposed to judge him too harshly. But St. George had shut his ears to every objection, insisting that the club was a place where a man could be as independent as he pleased, and that as his guest he would be entitled to every consideration.

The boy need not have been worried. Almost every member, young and old, showed by his manner or some little act of attention that their sympathies were with the exile. While a few strait-laced old Quakers maintained that it was criminal to blaze away at your fellow-man with the firm intention of blowing the top of his head off, and that Harry should have been hung had Willits died, there were others more discerning—and they were largely in the majority—who stood up for the lad however much they deplored the cause of his banishment. Harry, they argued, had in his brief career been an unbroken colt, and more or less dissipated, but he at least had not shown the white feather. Boy as he was, he had faced his antagonist with the coolness of a duellist of a score of encounters, letting Willits fire straight at him without so much as the wink of an eyelid; and, when it was all over, had been man enough to nurse his victim back to consciousness. Moreover—and this counted much in his favor—he had refused to quarrel with his irate father, or even answer him. “Behaved himself like a thoroughbred, as he is,” Dorsey Sullivan, a famous duellist, had remarked in recounting the occurrence to a non-witness. “And I must say, sir, that Talbot served him a scurvy trick, and I don't care who hears me say it.” Furthermore—and this made a great impression—that rather than humiliate himself, the boy had abandoned the comforts of his palatial home at Moorlands and was at the moment occupying a small, second-story back room (all, it is true, Gentleman George could give him), where he was to be found any hour of the day or night that his uncle needed him in attendance upon that prince of good fellows.

One other thing that counted in his favor, and this was conclusive with the Quakers—and the club held not a few—was that no drop of liquor of any kind had passed the boy's lips since the eventful night when St. George prepared the way for their first reconciliation.

Summed up, then, whatever Harry had been in the past, the verdict at the present speaking was that he was a brave, tender-hearted, truthful fellow who, in the face of every temptation, had kept his word. Moreover, it was never forgotten that he was Colonel Talbot Rutter's only son and heir, so that no matter what the boy did, or how angry the old autocrat might be, it could only be a question of time before his father must send for him and everything at Moorlands go on as before.

It was on one of these glorious never-to-be-forgotten spring days, then, a week or more after St. George had given up the fight with Kate—a day which Harry remembered all the rest of his life—that he and his uncle left the house to spend the afternoon, as was now their custom, at the Chesapeake. The two had passed the early hours of the day at the Relay House fishing for gudgeons, the dogs scampering the hills, and having changed their clothes for something cooler, had entered the park by the gate opposite the Temple Mansion, as being nearest to the club; a path Harry loved, for he and Kate had often stepped it together—and then again, it was the shortest cut to her house.

As the beauty and quiet of the place with its mottling of light and shade took possession of him he slackened his pace, lagging a little behind his uncle, and began to look about him, drinking in the loveliness of the season. The very air breathed tenderness, peace, and comfort. Certainly his father's heart must be softening toward him; surely his bitterness could not last. No word, it is true, had yet come to him from

Moorlands, though only the week before his mother had been in to see him, bringing him news of his father and what her son's absence had meant to every one, old Alec especially. She had not, she said, revived the subject of the boy's apology; she had thought it better to wait for the proper opportunity, which might come any day, but certain it was that his father was most unhappy, for he would shut himself up hours at a time in his library, locking the door and refusing to open it, no matter who knocked, except to old John Gorsuch, his man of business. She had also heard him tossing on his bed at night, or walking about his room muttering to himself.

Did these things, he wondered on this bright spring morning, mean a final reconciliation, or was he, after all, to be doomed to further disappointment? Days had passed since his mother had assured him of this change in his father, and still no word had come from him. Had he at last altered his mind, or, worse still, had his old obstinacy again taken possession of him, hardening his heart so that he would never relent? And so, with his mind as checkered as the shadow-flecked path on which they stepped, he pursued his way beneath the wide-spreading trees.

When the two had crossed the street St. George's eye rested upon a group on the sidewalk of the club. The summer weather generally emptied the coffee-room of most of its habitues, sending many of them to the easy-chairs on the sprinkled pavement, one or two tipped back against the trees, or to the balconies and front steps. With his arm in Harry's he passed from one coterie to another in the hope that he might catch some word which would be interesting enough to induce him to fill one of the chairs, even for a brief half-hour, but nothing reached his ears except politics and crops, and he cared for neither. Harding—the pessimist of the club—a man who always had a grievance (and this time with reason, for the money stringency was becoming more acute every day), tried to beguile him into a seat beside him, but he shook his head. He knew all about Harding, and wanted none of his kind of talk—certainly not to-day.

“Think of it!” he had heard the growler say to Judge Pancoast as he was about to pass his chair—“the Patapsco won't give me a cent to move my crops, and I hear all the others are in the same fix. You can't get a dollar on a house and lot except at a frightful rate of interest. I tell you everything is going to ruin. How the devil do you get on without money, Temple?” He was spread out in his seat, his legs apart, his fat face turned up, his small fox eyes fixed on St. George.

“I don't get on,” remarked St. George with a dry smile. He was still standing. “Why do you ask?” Money rarely troubled St. George; such small sums as he possessed were hived in this same Patapsco Bank, but the cashier had never refused to honor one of his checks as long as he had any money in their vaults, and he didn't think they would begin now. “Queer question for you to ask, Harding” (and a trifle underbred, he thought, one's private affairs not being generally discussed at a club). “Why does it interest you?”

“Well, you always say you despise money and yet you seem happy and contented, well dressed, well groomed”—here he wheeled St. George around to look at his back—“yes, got on one of your London coats—Hello, Harry!—glad to see you,” and he held out his hand to the boy. “But really, St. George, aren't you a little worried over the financial outlook? John Gorsuch says we are going to have trouble, and John knows.”

“No”—drawled St. George—“I'm not worried.”

“And you don't think we're going to have another smash-up?” puffed Harding.

“No,” said St. George, edging his way toward the steps of the club as he spoke. He was now entirely through with Harding; his financial forebodings were as distasteful to him as his comments on his clothes and bank account.

“But you'll have a julep, won't you? I've just sent John for them. Don't go—sit down. Here, John, take Mr. Temple's order for—”

“No, Harding, thank you.” The crushed ice in the glass was no cooler nor crisper than St. George's tone. “Harry and I have been broiling in the sun all the morning and we are going to go where it is cool.”

“But it's cool here,” Harding called after him, struggling to his feet in the effort to detain him. There was really no one in the club he liked better than St. George.

“No—we'll try it inside,” and with a courteous wave of his hand and a feeling of relief in his heart, he and Harry kept on their way.

He turned to mount the steps when the sudden pushing back of all the chairs on the sidewalk attracted his attention. Two ladies were picking their way across the street in the direction of the club. These, on closer inspection, proved to be Miss Lavinia Clendenning and her niece, Sue Dorsey, who had been descried in the offing a few minutes before by the gallants on the curbstone, and who at first had been supposed to be heading for Mrs. Pancoast's front steps some distance away, until the pair, turning sharply, had borne down upon the outside chairs with all sails set—(Miss Clendenning's skirts were of the widest)—a shift of canvas which sent every man to his feet with a spring.

Before St. George could reach the group, which he did in advance of Harry, who held back—both ladies being intimate friends of Kate's—old Captain Warfield, the first man to gain his feet—very round and fat was the captain and very red in the face (1812 Port)—was saying with his most courteous bow:

“But, my dear Miss Lavinia, you have not as yet told us to what we are indebted for this mark of your graciousness; and Sue, my dear, you grow more like your dear mother every day. Why are you two angels abroad at this hour, and what can we do for you?”

“To the simple fact, my dear captain,” retorted the irresistible spinster, spreading her skirts the wider, both arms akimbo—her thin fingers acting as clothespins, “that Sue is to take her dancing lesson next door, and as I can't fly in the second-story window, having mislaid my wings, I must use my feet and disturb everybody. No, gentlemen—don't move—I can pass.”

The captain made so profound a salaam in reply that his hat grazed the bricks of the sidewalk.

“Let me hunt for them, Miss Lavinia. I know where they are!” he exclaimed, with his hand on his heart.

“Where?” she asked roguishly, twisting her head on one side with the movement of a listening bird.

“In heaven, my lady, where they are waiting your arrival,” he answered, with another profound sweep of his

hand and dip of his back, his bald head glistening in the sunlight as he stooped before her.

“Then you will never get near them,” she returned with an equally low curtsy and a laugh that nearly shook her side curls loose.

St. George was about to step the closer to take a hand in the badinage—he and the little old maid were forever crossing swords—when her eyes fell upon him. Instantly her expression changed. She was one of the women who had blamed him for not stopping the duel, and had been on the lookout for him for days to air her views in person.

“So you are still in town, are you?” she remarked frigidly in lowered tones. “I thought you had taken that young firebrand down to the Eastern Shore to cool off.”

St. George frowned meaningly in the effort to apprise her ladyship that Harry was within hearing distance, but Miss Lavinia either did not, or would not, understand.

“Two young boobies, that's what they are, breaking their hearts over each other,” she rattled on, gathering the ends of her cape the closer. “Both of them ought to be spanked and put to bed. Get them into each other's arms just as quick as you can. As for Talbot Rutter, he's the biggest fool of the three, or was until Annie Rutter got hold of him. Now I hear he is willing to let Harry come back, as if that would do any good. It's Kate who must be looked after; that Scotch blood in her veins makes her as pig-headed as her father. No—I don't want your arm, sir—get out of my way.”

If the courtiers heard—and half of them did—they neither by word or expression conveyed that fact to Harry or St. George. It was not intended for their ears, and, therefore, was not their property. With still more profound salutations from everybody, the three bareheaded men escorted them to the next stoop, the fourth going ahead to see that the door was properly opened, and so the ladies passed on, up and inside the house. This over, the group resumed its normal condition on the sidewalk, the men regaining their seats and relighting their cigars (no gentleman ever held one in evidence when ladies were present)—fresh orders being given to the servants for the several interrupted mixtures with which the coterie were wont to regale themselves.

Harry, who had stood with shoulders braced against a great tree on the sidewalk, had heard every word of the old maid's outburst, and an unrestrained burst of joy had surged up in his heart. His father was coming round! Yes—the tide was turning—it would not be long before Kate would be in his arms!

CHAPTER X

St. George held no such sanguine view, although he made no comment. In fact the outbreak had rather depressed him. He knew something of Talbot's stubbornness and did not hope for much in that direction, nor, if the truth be told, did he hope much in Kate's. Time alone could heal her wounds, and time in the case of a young girl, mistress of herself, beautiful, independent, and rich, might contain many surprises.

It was with a certain sense of relief, therefore, that he again sought the inside of the club. Its restful quiet would at least take his mind from the one subject which seemed to pursue him and which Miss Clendenning's positive and, as he thought, inconsiderate remarks had so suddenly revived.

Before he had reached the top step his face broke out into a broad smile. Instantly his spirits rose. Standing in the open front door, with outstretched hand, was the man of all others he would rather have seen—Richard Horn, the inventor.

“Ah, St. George, but I'm glad to see you!”, cried Richard. “I have been looking for you all the afternoon and only just a moment ago got sight of you on the sidewalk. I should certainly have stepped over to your house and looked you up if you hadn't come. I've got the most extraordinary thing to read to you that you have ever listened to in the whole course of your life. How well you look, and what a fine color you have, and you too, Harry. You are in luck, my boy. I'd like to stay a month with Temple myself.”

“Make it a year, Richard,” cried St. George, resting his hand affectionately on the inventor's shoulder. “There isn't a chair in my house that isn't happier when you sit in it. What have you discovered?—some new whirligig?”

“No, a poem. Eighteen to twenty stanzas of glorious melody imprisoned in type.”

“One of your own?” laughed St. George—one of his merry vibrating laughs that made everybody happier about him. The sight of Richard had swept all the cobwebs out of his brain.

“No, you trifler!—one of Edgar Allan Poe's. None of your scoffing, sir! You may go home in tears before I am through with you. This way, both of you.”

The three had entered the coffee-room now, Richard's arm through St. George's, Harry following close. The inventor drew out the chairs one after another, and when they were all three seated took a missive from his pocket and spread it out on his knee, St. George and Harry keeping their eyes on his every movement.

“Here's a letter, St. George”—Richard's voice now fell to a serious key—“which I have just received from your friend and mine, Mr. N. P. Willis. In it he sends me this most wonderful poem cut from his paper—the Mirror—and published, I discover to my astonishment, some months back. I am going to read it to you if you will permit me. It certainly is a most remarkable production. The wonder to me is that I haven't seen it before. It is by that Mr. Poe you met at my house some years ago—you remember him?—a rather sad-looking man with big head and deep eyes?” Temple nodded in answer, and Harry's eyes glistened: Poe was one of his university's gods. “Just let me read to you what Willis says”—here he glanced down the letter sheet: “'Nothing, I assure you, my dear Horn, has made so great a stir in literary circles as this “Raven” of Poe's. I am sending it to you knowing that you are interested in the man. If I do not mistake I first met Poe one night at your house.' And a very extraordinary night it was, St. George,” said Richard, lifting his eyes from the

sheet. “Poe, if you remember, read one of his stories for us, and both Latrobe and Kennedy were so charmed that they talked of nothing else for days.”

St. George remembered so clearly that he could still recall the tones of Poe's voice, and the peculiar lambent light that flashed from out the poet's dark eyes—the light of a black opal. He settled himself back in his chair to enjoy the treat the better. This was the kind of talk he wanted to-day, and Richard Horn, of all others, was the man to conduct it.

The inventor's earnestness and the absorbed look on St. George's and Harry's faces, and the fact that Horn was about to read aloud, had attracted the attention of several near-by members, who were already straining their ears, for no one had Richard's gift for reading.

In low, clear tones, his voice rising in intensity as the weird pathos of the several stanzas gripped his heart, he unfolded the marvellous drama until the very room seemed filled with the spirit of both the man and the demon. Every stanza in his clear enunciation seemed a separate string of sombre pearls, each syllable aglow with its own inherent beauty. When he ceased it was as if the soul of some great 'cello had stopped vibrating, leaving only the memory of its melody. For a few seconds no one moved nor spoke. No one had ever heard Richard in finer voice nor had they ever listened to more perfect rhythmic beauty. So great was the effect on the audience that one old habitue, in speaking of it afterward, insisted that Richard must have seen the bird roosting over the door, so realistic was his rendering.

Harry had listened with bated breath, absorbing every tone and inflection of Richard's voice. He and Poe had been members of the same university, and the poet had always been one of his idols—the man of all others he wanted most to know. Poe's former room opening into the corridor had invariably attracted him. He had frequently looked about its bare walls wondering how so great an inspiration could have started from such meagre surroundings. He had, too, with the romantic imagination of a boy, pictured to himself the kind of man he was, his looks, voice, and manner, and though he had never seen the poet in the flesh, somehow the tones of Richard's voice recalled to him the very picture he had conjured up in his mind in his boyhood days.

St. George had also listened intently, but the impression was quite different from the one made on the younger man. Temple thought only of Poe's despondency, of his striving for a better and happier life; of his poverty—more than once had he gone down into his own pockets to relieve the poor fellow's urgent necessities, and he was still ready to do it again—a readiness in which he was almost alone, for many of the writer's earlier friends had of late avoided meeting him whenever he passed through Kennedy Square. Even Kennedy, his life-long friend, had begun to look upon him as a hopeless case.

This antipathy was also to be found in the club. Even with the memory of Richard's voice in their ears one of the listeners had shrugged his shoulders, remarking with a bitter laugh that musical as was the poem, especially as rendered by Richard, it was, after all, like most of Poe's other manuscripts, found in a bottle, or more likely “a bottle found in a manuscript,” as that crazy lunatic couldn't write anything worth reading unless he was half drunk. At which St. George had blazed out:

“Hush, Bowdoin! You ought to be willing to be blind drunk half your time if you could write one stanza of it! Please let me have it, Richard,” and he took the sheet from his friend's hand, that he and Harry might read it at their leisure when they reached home.

Harry's blood had also boiled at the rude thrust. While under the spell of Richard's voice a cord in his own soul had vibrated as does a glass globe when it responds in perfect harmony to a note from a violin. He too had a Lenore whose loss had wellnigh broken his heart. This in itself was an indissoluble bond between them. Besides, he could understand the poet as Alec and his mother and his Uncle George understood himself. He had begun now to love the man in his heart.

With his mind filled with these thoughts, his hunger for Kate aroused tenfold by the pathos and weird beauty of what he had just heard, he left the group of men who were still discussing the man and his verses, and joined his uncle outside on the top step of the club's high stoop, from which could be seen the full length of the sun-flecked street on which the clubhouse stood, as well as the park in all its spring loveliness.

Unconsciously his eyes wandered across the path where Kate's house stood. He could see the tall chimneys and the slope of the quaint roof, and but that the foliage hid the lower part, could have seen Kate's own windows. She was still at home, he had heard, although she was expected to leave for the Red Sulphur any day.

Suddenly, from away up the street, past the corner of the park, there reached his ears a low winding note, which grew louder as it turned the corner, followed by the rattle of wheels and the clatter of horses' feet. He leaned forward and craned his head in the direction of the sound, his heart in his throat, the blood mounting to his cheeks. If that was not his father's horn it was wonderfully like it. At the same moment a coach-and-four swept in sight, driven by a man in a whitey-brown coat and stiff furry hat, with two grooms behind and a coachman next to him on the box. It was heading straight for the club.

Every man was on his feet.

“By Jove!—it's Rutter. Bowdoin!—Clayton!—here comes the colonel!”

Again the horn gave out a long withering, wiry note ringing through the leaves and along the brick pavement, and the next instant the leaders were gathered up, the wheel-horses hauled taut, the hub of the front wheel of the coach halting within an inch of the horse-block of the club.

“Bravo, Rutter! Best whip in the county! Not a man in England could have done it better. Let me help you down!”

The colonel shook his head good-humoredly, rose in his seat, shifted a bunch of violets to his inner lapel, slipped off his driving-coat, threw it across the rail, dropped his whip in the socket, handed his heavy gloves to his groom, and slid gracefully to the sidewalk. There he shook hands cordially with the men nearest him, excused himself for a moment until he had inspected his off leader's forefoot—she had picked up a stone on the way in from Moorlands—patted the nigh wheel-horse, stamped his own feet lustily as if to be sure he was all there, and, with a lordly bow to those about him, slowly mounted the steps of the club.

Harry had already risen to his feet and stood trembling, one hand clutching the iron railing that guarded the marble steps. A great throb of joy welled up in his throat. His mother was right—the loneliness had overpowered his father; he still loved him, and Miss Clendenning's prediction was coming true! Not only was he willing to forgive him, but he had come himself to take him home. He could hardly wait until his father reached his side, so eager was he to open his arms and hands and his lips in apology—and Kate!—what joy would be hers!

St. George had also gained his feet. What had brought the colonel into town, he said to himself, and in such state—and at this hour of the day, too? Could it be that Harry was the cause?

“How were the roads, Talbot?” he called out in his customary cheery tones. He would start fair, anyway.

The colonel, who, head down, had been mounting the marble steps one at a time, inspecting each slab as he climbed, after the manner of men thoroughly satisfied with themselves, and who at the same time are conscious of the effect of their presence on those about them, raised his head and gazed in astonishment at the speaker. Then his body straightened up and he came to a stand-still. He looked first into St. George's face, then into Harry's, with a cold, rigid stare; his lips shut tight, his head thrown back, his whole frame stiff as an iron bar—and without a word of recognition of any kind, passed through the open door and into the wide hall. He had cut both of them dead.

Harry gave a half-smothered cry of anguish and turned to follow his father into the club.

St. George, purple with rage, laid his hand on the boy's arm, so tight that the fingers sank into the flesh: there were steel clamps inside these delicate palms when occasion required.

“Keep still,” he hissed—“not a word, no outburst. Stay here until I come for you. Stop, Rutter: stand where you are!” The two were abreast of each other now. “You dare treat your son in that way? Horn—Murdoch—Warfield—all of you come out here! What I've got to say to Talbot Rutter I want you to hear, and I intend that not only you but every decent man and woman in Kennedy Square shall hear!”

The colonel's lips quivered and his face paled, but he did not flinch, nor did his eyes drop.

“You are not a father, Talbot—you are a brute! There is not a dog in your kennels that would not treat his litter better than you have treated Harry! You turned him out in the night without a penny to his name; you break his mother's heart; you refuse to hear a word he has to say, and then you have the audacity to pass him on the steps of this club where he is my guest—my guest, remember—look him squarely in the face and ignore him. That, gentlemen, is what Talbot Rutter did one minute ago. You have disgraced your blood and your name and you have laid up for your old age untold misery and suffering. Never, as long as I live, will I speak to you again, nor shall Harry, whom you have humiliated! Hereafter *I* am his father! Do you hear?”

During the whole outburst the colonel had not moved a muscle of his face nor had he shifted his body a quarter of an inch. He stood with his back to the door through which could be seen the amazed faces of his fellow-members—one hand tight shut behind his back, the other loose by his side, his eyes fixed on his antagonist. Then slowly, one word at a time, as if he had purposely measured the intervals of speech, he said, in a voice hardly heard beyond the door, so low was it:

“Are—you—through—St. George?”

“Yes, by God!—I am, and forever!”

“Then, gentlemen”—and he waved his hand courteously to the astounded listeners—“may I ask you all to join me? John, bring the juleps!”

CHAPTER XI

All the way back to his house St. George's wrath kept him silent. He had rarely been so stirred. He was not a brawler—his whole life had been one of peace; his whole ambition to be the healer of differences, and yet there were some things he could not stand. One of these was cruelty to a human being, and Rutter's public disowning of Harry was cruelty of the most contemptible kind. But one explanation of such an outrage was possible—the man's intolerable egoism, added to his insufferable conceit. Only once did Temple address Harry, walking silently by his side under the magnolias, and then only to remark, more to himself than to his companion—“It's his damned, dirty pride, Harry—that's what it is!”

Harry also held his peace. He had no theories regarding his father's conduct: only facts confronted him, one being that he had purposely humiliated him before the men who had known him from a boy, and with whom his future life must be cast. The end had come now. He was adrift without a home. Even Kate was lost. This last attack of his father's would widen the breach between them, for she would never overlook this last stigma when she heard of it, as she certainly must. Nobody would then be left on his side except his dear mother, the old house servants, and St. George, and of these St. George alone could be of any service to him.

It had all been so horrible too, and so undeserved—worse than anything he had ever dreamed of; infinitely worse than the night he had been driven from Moorlands. Never in all his life had he shown his father anything but obedience and respect; furthermore, he had loved and admired him; loved his dash and vigor; his superb physique for a man of his years—some fifty odd—loved too his sportsmanlike qualities—not a man in the county was his equal in the saddle, and not a man in his own or any other county could handle the ribbons so well. If his father had not agreed with him as to when and where he should teach a vulgarian manners, that had been a question about which gentlemen might differ, but to have treated him with contempt, to insult him in public, leaving him no chance to defend himself—force him, really, into a position which made it impossible for him to strike back—was altogether a different thing, and for that he would never, never forgive him.

Then a strange thing happened in the boy's mind. It may have been the shifting of a grain of gray matter

never called into use before; or it may have been due to some stranded red corpuscle which, dislodged by the pressure he had lately been called upon to endure, had rushed headlong through his veins scouring out everything in its way until it reached his thinking apparatus. Whatever the cause, certain it was that the change in the boy's view of life was as instantaneous as it was radical.

And this was quite possible when his blood is considered. There had been, it is true, dominating tyrants way back in his ancestry, as well as spend-thrifts, drunkards, roysterers, and gamesters, but so far as the records showed there had never been a coward. That old fellow De Ruyter, whose portrait hung at Moorlands and who might have been his father, so great was the resemblance, had, so to speak, held a shovel in one hand and a sword in the other in the days when he helped drown out his own and his neighbors' estates to keep the haughty don from gobbling up his country. One had but to look into Harry's face to be convinced that he too would have followed in his footsteps had he lived in that ancestor's time.

It was when the boy, smarting under his father's insult, was passing under the blossoms of a wide-spreading magnolia, trying to get a glimpse of Kate's face, if by any chance she should be at her window, that this grain of gray matter, or lively red corpuscle—or whatever it might have been—forced itself through. The breaking away was slow—little by little—as an underground tunnel seeks an opening—but the light increased with every thought-stroke, its blinding intensity becoming so fierce at last that he came to a halt, his eyes on the ground, his whole body tense, his mind in a whirl.

Suddenly his brain acted.

To sit down and snivel would do no good; to curse his father would be useless and wicked; to force himself on Kate sheer madness. But—BUT—BUT—he was twenty-two!—in perfect health and not ashamed to look any man in the face. St. George loved him—so did his precious mother, and Alec, and a host of others. Should he continue to sit in ashes, swaddled in sackcloth—or should he meet the situation like a man? Then as his mental vision became accustomed to the glare, two things stood out clear in his mind—to win Kate back, no matter at what cost—and to compel his father's respect.

His mother was the first to hear the music of this new note of resolve, and she had not long to wait. She had come to town with the colonel—indeed it was at her request that he had ordered the coach instead of coming in on horseback, as was his custom—and was at the moment quietly resting on St. George's big sofa.

“It is all over, mother,” Harry cried in a voice so firm and determined that his mother knew at once something unusual had happened—“and you might as well make up your mind to it—I have. Father walked into the club five minutes ago, looked me square in the face, and cut me dead; and he insulted Uncle George too, who gave him the greatest dressing down you ever heard in your life.” He had learned another side of his uncle's character—one he should never cease to be grateful for—his outspoken defence of him before his equals.

Mrs. Rutter half rose from her seat in blank astonishment. She was a frail little woman with pale-blue eyes and a figure like a curl of smoke.

“Your—father—did not—speak—to—you!” she exclaimed excitedly. “You say—your father—But how dare he!”

“But he did!” replied Harry in a voice that showed the incident still rankled in his mind—“and right in the club, before everybody.”

“And the other gentlemen saw it?” She stood erect, her delicate body tightening up. There was a strain of some old-time warrior in her blood that would brook no insult to her son.

“Yes, half a dozen gentlemen saw it. He did it purposely—so they COULD see. I'll never forgive him for it as long as I live. He had no business to treat me so!” His voice choked as he spoke, but there was no note of surrender or of fear.

She looked at him in a helpless sort of way. “But you didn't answer back, did you, my son?” This came in a tone as if she feared to hear the details, knowing the boy's temperament, and his father's.

“I didn't say a word; Uncle George wouldn't let me. I'm glad now he stopped me, for I was pretty mad, and I might have said something I would have been sorry for.” The mother gave a sigh of relief, but she did not interrupt, nor did she relax the tautness of her body. “You ought to have heard Uncle George, though!” Harry rushed on. “He told him there was not a dog at Moorlands who would not have treated his puppy better than he had me—and another thing he told him—and that was that after to-day I was HIS son forever!”

St. George had been standing at the front window with his back to them, looking out upon the blossoms. At this last outburst he turned, and said over his shoulder:

“Yes—that's true, Annie—that's what I said and what I mean. There is no use wasting any more time over Talbot, and I don't intend to.”

“But Mr. Rutter will get over his temper.” (She never called him by any other name.)

“Then he will have to come here and say so. I shall never step foot in his house until he does, nor will Harry. As to his forgiving Harry—the boot is on the other leg; it is Talbot, not the boy he outraged, who must straighten out to-day's work. There was not a man who heard him who was not ashamed of him. Oh!—I have no patience with this sort of thing! The only son he's got—his only child! Abominable—unforgivable! And it will haunt him to his dying day! Poor as I am, alone in the world and without a member of my family above ground, I would not change places with him. No—Annie—I know how you feel, and God knows I have felt for you all these years, but I tell you the end has come! It's finished—over—I told him so to his face, and I mean it!”

The slight body sank back into her chair and her eyes filled with tears. Harry knelt beside her and put his arms about her. This mother, frail as she was, had always been his refuge and comfort: now he must do the comforting! (Keep moving, old red corpuscle, there is a lot of work ahead of you!)

“Don't worry, you dear little mother,” he said tenderly. “I don't know how it's coming out, but it will come out somehow. Let father go: Kate is the only thing that counts now. I don't blame her for anything she has done, and I don't blame myself either. All I know is that everything has gone wrong. But, wrong or right, I'm going to stay here just as long as Uncle George will let me. He's been more of a father to me than my own.

It's you I can't get along without, you precious little mother," and he patted her pale cheeks. "Won't you come in every day—and bring Alec too?" then, as if he had not yet asked her consent—"You don't mind my being here, do you?"

She drew his head close to her lips and kissed his cheek. "No, my son, I don't mind—I'm glad. Every night of my life I thank my Maker that you are here." She raised her eyes to St. George, who stood looking down upon them both, and in a voice barely audible, an unbidden sob choking her utterance, faltered—"It's only one more proof of your goodness, St. George."

He raised his hand in protest and a faint smile crossed his face. "Don't talk that way. Annie."

"I will—it's true. It is a proof of your goodness. I have never deserved it. I don't now—but you never fail me." Her voice was clearer now—her cheeks, too, had regained some of their color. Harry listened wonderingly, his arm still around her.

"I couldn't do anything else, Annie—nobody could under the circumstances." His voice had dropped almost to a whisper.

"But it was for me you did it, St. George. I would rather think of it that way; it makes it easier. Say you did it for me."

St. George stooped down, raised her thin white hand to his lips, kissed it reverently, and without a word of any kind walked to the door of his bedroom and shut it behind him.

Mrs. Rutter's hand dropped to her lap and a smile of intense relief passed over her face. She neither looked after St. George, nor did she offer any explanation to Harry; she merely bent forward and continued her caresses, stroking the boy's glossy hair, patting the white temples with her delicate fingers, smoothing the small, well-set ears and the full brown throat, kissing his forehead, her eyes reading his face, wondering if she had spoken too freely and yet regretting nothing: what she had said had come straight from her heart and she was not ashamed of it.

The boy lay still, his head against her breast. That his mother had been stirred even in a greater degree over what St. George had said to her than she had been by his father's treatment of him was evident in the trembling movement of the soft hands caressing his hair and in the way her breath came and went. Under her soothing touch his thoughts went back to the events of the morning:—his uncle's defiant tones as he denounced his father; his soft answer to his mother; her pleading words in reply, and then the reverent kiss.

Suddenly, clear as the tones of a far-off convent bell sifting down from some cloud-swept crag, there stole into his mind a memory of his childhood—a legend of long ago, vague and intangible—one he could not put into words—one Alec had once hinted at. He held his breath trying to gather up the loose ends—to make a connected whole; to fit the parts together. Then, as one blows out a candle, leaving total darkness, he banished it all from his mind.

"Mother dear!—mother dear!" he cried tenderly, and wound his arms the closer about her neck.

She gathered him up as she had done in the old days when he was a child at her breast; all the intervening years seemed blotted out. He was her baby boy once more—her constant companion and unending comfort: the one and only thing in her whole life that understood her.

Soon the warmth and strength of the full man began to reach her heart. She drew him still closer, this strong son who loved her, and in the embrace there grew a new and strange tenderness—one born of confidence. It was this arm which must defend her now; this head and heart which must guide her. She was no longer adrift.

The two had not moved when St. George re-entered the room some moments later. Harry's head still lay on her breast, the thin, transparent hands tight about his neck.

CHAPTER XII

The colonel's treatment of Harry at the club had cleared the air of any doubt that either the boy or St. George might have had concerning Rutter's frame of mind. Henceforth the boy and the man would conduct their lives as if the Lord of Moorlands did not exist.

So the boy unpacked the things which Alec had brought in, and with his mother's assistance—who came in once a week—hung up his hunting-clothes in the closet, racked up his guns and fishing-rods over the mantel, and suspended his favorite saddle by a stirrup on a hook in the hall. Then the two had set out his books and miniatures; one of his mother, which he kissed tenderly, with the remark that it wasn't half as pretty as the original, and then propped up in the place of honor in the middle of his desk, and another of his father, which he placed on an adjoining table—as well as his few belongings and knickknacks. And so the outcast settled down determined not only to adapt himself to the comforts—or want of them—to be found under St. George's roof, but to do it cheerfully, gratefully, and like a man and a gentleman.

To none of all this did his father offer a single objection. "Make a clean sweep of Mr. Harry Rutter's things," he had said to Alec, "so that I may be relieved from the annoyance of a second delivery."

Alec had repeated the order to Harry word for word, adding: "Don't you sass back, Marse Harry—let him blow hisse'f out—he don't mean nothin'. He's dat mad he's crazy—gits dat way sometimes—den purty soon he's fit to bust hisse'f wide open a-cryin'! I see him do dat once when you warn't mo'n so high, and de doctor said you was daid fo' sho'."

Harry made no reply, but it did not ruffle his temper. His duty was no longer to be found at Moorlands; his Uncle George claimed him. All his hours would now be devoted to showing him how grateful he was for his protection and guidance. Time enough for his father, and time enough for Kate, for that matter, should the clouds ever lift—as lift they would—but his Uncle George first, last, and all the time.

And St. George appreciated it to the full. Never had he been so happy. Even the men at the club saw the change, and declared he looked ten years younger—fifteen really, when Harry was with him, which was almost always the case—for out of consideration for St. George and the peculiar circumstances surrounding the boy's condition, his birth and station, and the pride they took in his pluck, the committee had at last stretched the rule and had sent Mr. Henry Gilmor Rutter of Moorlands—with special reference to "Moorlands," a perennial invitation entitling him to the club's privileges—a card which never expired because it was systematically renewed.

And it was not only at the club that the two men were inseparable. In their morning walks, the four dogs in full cry; at the races; in the hunts, when some one loaned both Harry and his uncle a mount—at night, when Todd passed silently out, leaving all the bottled comforts behind him—followed by—"Ah, Harry!—and you won't join me? That's right, my son—and I won't ask you," the two passed almost every hour of the day and night together. It was host one minute and father the next.

And this life, if the truth be told, did not greatly vary from the one the boy had always led, except that there was more of town and less of country in it than he had heretofore been accustomed to. The freedom from all care—for the colonel had trained Harry to neither business nor profession—was the same, and so was the right to employ his time as he pleased. At Moorlands he was busy over his horses and dogs, his sporting outfits, riding to hounds, cock-fights—common in those days—and, of course, assisting his father and mother in dispensing the hospitality of the house. In Kennedy Square St. George was his chief occupation, and of the two he liked the last the best. What he had hungered for all his life was sympathy and companionship, and this his father had never given him; nor had he known what it was since his college days. Advice, money, horses, clothes, guns—anything and everything which might, could, or would redound to the glory of the Rutters had been his for the asking, but the touch of a warm hand, the thrill in the voice when he had done something to please and had waited for an acknowledgment—that had never come his way. Nothing of this kind was needed between men, his father would say to Harry's mother—and his son was a man now. Had their child been a daughter, it would have been quite another thing, but a son was to be handled differently—especially an only son who was sole heir to one's entire estate.

And yet it must not be thought that the outcast spent his time in sheer idleness. St. George would often find him tucked away in one of his big chairs devouring some book he had culled from the old general's library in the basement—a room adjoining the one occupied by a firm of young lawyers—Pawson & Pawson (only one brother was alive)—with an entrance on the side street, it being of "no use to me" St. George had said—"and the rent will come in handy." Tales of the sea especially delighted the young fellow—the old admiral's blood being again in evidence—and so might have been the mother's fine imagination. It was Defoe and Mungo Park and Cooke who enchained the boy's attention, as well as many of the chronicles of the later navigators. But of the current literature of the day—Longfellow, Margaret Fuller, Hawthorne, and Emerson—no one appealed to him as did the man Poe. He and St. George had passed many an hour discussing him. Somehow the bond of sympathy between himself and the poet had become the stronger. Both had wept bitter tears over the calamities that had followed an unrequited love.

It was during one of these talks—and the poet was often under discussion—that St. George had suddenly risen from his chair, lighted a candle, and had betaken himself to the basement—a place he seldom visited—from which he brought back a thin, crudely bound, and badly printed, dust-covered volume bearing the title "Tamerlane:—by a Bostonian." This, with a smile he handed to Harry. Some friend had given him the little book when it was first published and he had forgotten it was in the house until he noted Harry's interest in the author. Then again, he wanted to see whether it was the boy's literary taste, never much in evidence, or his romantic conception of the much-talked-of poet, which had prompted his intense interest in the man.

"Read these poems, Harry, and tell me who wrote them," said St. George, dusting the book with a thrash of his handkerchief and tossing it to the young fellow.

The boy caught it, skimmed through the thin volume, lingered over one or two pages, absorbing each line, and replied in a decided and delighted voice: "The same man who wrote 'The Raven,' of course—there can't be any doubt of it. I can hear Mr. Horn's voice in every line. Why didn't you let me have it before?"

"Are you sure?" asked St. George, watching him closely.

"Am I sure?—of course I am! Listen to this:

"'We grew in age—and—love—together, Roaming the forest and the wild—'

"That's Kate and me, Uncle George," and he smiled sadly. "And then this line:

"'I saw no heaven but in her eyes.'

"And then these lines in 'The Raven'—wait—I will read them." He had the sheet of paper in his pocket which Richard Horn had read from at the club, and knew the poem now by heart:

"'Tell this soul with sorrow laden, if, within the distant Aidenn, It shall clasp a sainted maiden whom the angels call Lenore'—

"That's me again. I wish I could read it like Mr. Horn. What a voice—so deep—so musical—like a great organ, or, rather, like one of the big strings on his violin."

"And what a mind, too, Harry," rejoined St. George. "Richard is a long way ahead of his time. His head is full of things that few around here understand. They hear him play the violin or read, and some go away calling him a genius, but when he talks to them about the way the railroads are opening up, and the new telegraph this man Morse is at work on, and what is going to come of it—or hear him discuss the development of the country along scientific lines, they shrug their shoulders and tap their foreheads. You want to talk to him every chance you get. That is one reason I am glad they let you permanently into the club, for he is too busy in his work-shop at home to speak to anybody. Nobody will do you so much good—and he likes you, Harry. He said to me only the other night when I was dining with him—the night you were at Mrs. Cheston's—that he felt sorry for you; that it was not your fault, or the fault of your father—but that you both had been caught in the ebb-tide of a period."

Harry laughed: "What did he mean by that?"

“I'll be hanged if I know. You made so good a guess on the Tamerlane, that it's just occurred to me to try you on this,” and St. George laughed heartily. (St. George was adrift on the ebb-tide himself did he but know it.)

Harry thought earnestly for a moment, pondering upon what the inventor could have had in his mind. It couldn't have been politics that Mr. Horn meant; nor failure of the crops; nor the way the slaves were treated. None of these things affected him. Indeed none of them did he know anything of. Nor was he an expert on duelling. It must have been Kate. Yes—of course—it was Kate and her treatment of him. The “tide” was what had swept them apart.

“Oh, I know,” he cried in an animated tone. “He meant Kate. Tell me—what did he say about her?” He had searched his books for some parallel from which to draw a conclusion, but none of them had given him any relief. May be Mr. Horn had solved the problem.

“He said she was the first of the flood, though he was mighty sorry for you both; and he said, too, that, as she was the first to strike out for the shore, Kennedy Square ought to build a triumphal arch for her,” and St. George looked quizzically at Harry.

“Well, do you think there is any common sense in that?” blurted out the boy, twisting himself in his chair so he could get a better look at his uncle's face.

“No—it doesn't sound like it, but it may be profound wisdom all the same, if you can only see it from Richard's point of view. Try it. There's a heap of brains under his cranium.”

Harry fell to tapping the arm of his chair. Queer reasoning this of Mr. Horn's, he said to himself. He had always thought that he and his father were on the tip-top of any kind of tide, flood or ebb—and as for Kate, she was the white gull that skimmed its crest!

Again Harry dropped into deep thought, shifting his legs now and then in his restless, impatient way. If there was any comfort to be gotten out of this new doctrine he wanted to probe it to the bottom.

“And what does he say of Mr. Poe? Does he think he's a drunken lunatic, like some of the men at the club?”

“No, he thinks he is one of the greatest literary geniuses the country has yet produced. He has said so for years—ever since he began to write. Willis first became acquainted with Mr. Poe through a letter Richard gave him, and now that the papers are full of him, and everybody is talking about him, these backbiters like Bowdoin want to get into line and say they always thought so. But Richard has never wavered. Of course Poe loses his balance and topples backward once in a while—but he's getting over it. That is his mistake and it is unfortunate, but it isn't a crime. I can forgive him anything he does so he keeps to his ideals. If he had had a better bringing up and knew the difference between good rain-water Madeira and bad pump water and worse whiskey he would keep as straight as a church deacon. Too bad he doesn't.”

“Well,” Harry answered at last, rising from his chair and brushing the ashes of his pipe from his clothes—“I don't know anything about Mr. Horn's tides, but he's right about Mr. Poe—that is, I hope he is. We've both, got a 'Lost Lenore,'” and his voice quivered. All Harry's roads ended at Kate's door.

And so with these and other talks, heart-burnings, outings, sports, and long tramps in the country, the dogs scampering ahead, the summer days slipped by.

CHAPTER XIII

Such were the soft, balmy conditions in and around the Temple Mansion—conditions bringing only peace and comfort—(heart-aches were kept in check)—when one August morning there came so decided a change of weather that everybody began at once to get in out of the wet. The storm had been brewing for some days up Moorlands way, where all Harry's storms started, but up to the present moment there had been no indications in and about Kennedy Square of its near approach, or even of its existence.

It was quite early in the day when the big drops began to patter down on Todd's highly polished knocker. Breakfast had been served and the mail but half opened—containing among other missives a letter from Poe acknowledging one from St. George, in which he wrote that he might soon be in Kennedy Square on his way to Richmond—a piece of news which greatly delighted Harry—and another from Tom Coston, inviting them both to Wesley for the fall shooting, with a postscript to the effect that Willits was “still at the Red Sulphur with the Seymours”—(a piece of news which greatly depressed him)—when Todd answered a thunderous rat-a-tat and immediately thereafter recrossed the hall and opened the dining-room door just wide enough to thrust in first his scared face—then his head—shoulder—arm—and last his hand, on the palm of which lay a small, greasy card bearing the inscription:

John Gadgem, Agent.

The darky, evidently, was not in a normal condition, for after a moment's nervous hesitation, his eyes over his shoulder as if fearing he was being followed, he squeezed in the rest of his body, closed the door softly behind him, and said in a hoarse whisper to the room at large:

“Dat's de same man been here three times yisterday. He asked fust fer Marse Harry, an' when I done tol' him he warn't home—you was 'sleep upstairs, Marse Harry, but I warn't gwineter 'sturb ye—he say he come back dis mawnin'.”

“Well, but what does he want?” asked Harry, dropping a lump of sugar in his cup. He had been accumstomed to be annoyed by agents of all kinds who wanted to sell him one thing or another—and so he never allowed any one to get at him unless his business was stated beforehand. He had learned this from his father.

“I dun'no, sah.”

“What does he look like, Todd?” cried St. George, breaking the seal of another letter.

“Wall, he ain't no gemman—he's jus' a pusson I reckon. I done tol' him you warn't out o' bed yit, but he said he'd wait. I got him shet outside, but I can't fool him no mo'. What'll I do now?”

“Well, what do you think he wants, then?” Harry burst out impatiently.

“Well,” said Todd—“ef I was to tell ye God's truf', I reckon he wants money. He says he's been to de big house—way out to de colonel's, and dey th'owed him out—and now he's gwineter sit down yere till somebody listens to him. It won't do to fool wid him, Marse Harry—I see dat de fus' time he come. He's a he-one—and he's got horns on him for sho'. What'll I do?”

Both Harry and St. George roared.

“Why bring him in, of course—a 'pusson' with horns on him will be worth seeing.”

A shabby, wizened-faced man; bent-in-the-back, gimlet-eyed, wearing a musty brown coat, soiled black stock, unspeakable linen, and skin-tight trousers held to his rusty shoes by wide straps—showing not only the knuckles of his knees but the streaked thinness of his upper shanks—(Cruikshank could have drawn him to the life)—sidled into the room, mopping his head with a red cotton handkerchief which he took from his hat.

“My name is GADgem, gentleman—Mr. John GADgem of GADgem & Combes.

“I am looking for Mr. Harry Rutter, whom I am informed—I would not say POSitively—but I am inFORMED is stopping with you, Mr. Temple. You forget me, Mr. Temple, but I do not forget you, sir. That little foreclosure matter of Bucks vs. Temple—you remember when—”

“Sit down,” said St. George curtly, laying down his knife and fork. “Todd, hand Mr. Gadgem a chair.”

The gimlet-eyed man—and it was very active—waved his hand deprecatingly.

“No, I don't think that is necessary. I can stand. I preFER to stand. I am acCUStomed to stand—I have been standing outside this gentleman's father's door now, off and on, for some weeks, and—”

“Will you tell me what you want?” interrupted Harry, curtly. References to Moorlands invariably roused his ire.

“I am coming to that, sir, slowly, but surely. Now that I have found somebody that will listen to me—that is, if you are Mr. Harry Rutter—” The deferential air with which he said this was admirable.

“Oh, yes—I'm the man,” answered Harry in a resigned voice.

“Yes, sir—so I supposed. And now I look at you, sir”—here the gimlet was in full twist—“I would make an affidavit to that effect before any notary.” He began loosening his coat with his skinny fingers, fumbling in his inside pocket, thrusting deep his hand, as if searching for an elusive insect in the vicinity of his arm-pit, his talk continuing: “Yes, sir, before any notary, you are so exactly like your father. Not that I've seen your father, sir, VERY MANY TIMES”—the elusive had evidently escaped, for his hand went deeper. “I've only seen him once—ONCE—and it was enough. It was not a pleasant visit, sir—in fact, it was a most UNpleasant visit. I came very near having cause for action—for assault, really. A very polite colored man was all that prevented it, and—Ah—here it is!” He had the minute pest now. “Permit me to separate the list from the exhibits.”

At this Gadgem's hand, clutching a bundle of papers, came out with a jerk—so much of a jerk that St. George, who was about to end the comedy by ordering the man from the room, stopped short in his protest, his curiosity getting the better of him to know what the fellow had found.

“There, sir.” Here he drew a long slip from the package, held it between his thumb and forefinger, and was about to continue, when St. George burst out with:

“Look here, Gadgem—if you have any business with Mr. Rutter you will please state it at once. We have hardly finished breakfast.”

“I beg, sir, that you will not lose your temper. It is unBUSinesslike to lose one's temper. Gadgem & Combes, sir, NEVER lose their temper. They are men of peace, sir—ALways men of peace. Mr. Combes sometimes resorts to extreme measures, but NEVER Mr. Gadgem. *I* am Mr. Gadgem, sir,” and he tapped his soiled shirt-front with his soiled finger-nail. “PEACE is my watchword, that is why this matter has been placed in my hands. Permit me, sir, to ask you to cast your eye over this.”

Harry, who was getting interested, scanned the long slip and handed it to St. George, who studied it for a moment and returned it to Harry.

“You will note, I beg of you, sir, the first item.” There was a tone of triumph now in Gadgem's voice. “One saddle horse sixteen hands high, bought of Hampson & Co. on the”—then he craned his neck so as to see the list over Harry's shoulder—“yes—on the SECOND of LAST September. Rather overdue, is it not, sir, if I may be permitted to remark?” This came with a lift of the eyebrows, as if Harry's oversight had been too naughty for words.

“But what the devil have I got to do with this?” The boy was thoroughly angry now. The lift of Gadgem's eyebrows did it.

“You rode the horse, sir.” This came with a certain air of “Oh! I have you now.”

“Yes, and he broke his leg and had to be shot,” burst out Harry in a tone that showed how worthless had been the bargain.

“EXactly, sir. So your father told me, sir. You don't remember having PAID Mr. Hampson for him beFORE he broke his leg, do you, sir?” He had him pinned fast now—all he had to do was to watch his victim's struggles.

“Me? No, of course not!” Harry exploded.

“EXactly so, sir—so your father told me. FORcibly, sir—and as if he was quite sure of it.”

Again he looked over Harry's shoulder, following the list with his skinny finger. At the same time he lowered his voice—became even humble. “Ah, there it is—the English racing saddle and the pair of blankets, and the—might I ask you, sir, whether you have among your papers any receipt for—?”

“But I don't pay these bills—I never pay any bills.” Harry's tone had now reached a higher pitch.

“EXactly so, sir—just what your father said, sir, and with such vehemence that I moved toward the door.”

Out went the finger again, the insinuating voice keeping up. “And then the five hundred dollars from Mr. Slater—you see, sir, we had all these accounts placed in our hands with the expectation that your father would liquidate at one fell swoop—these were Mr. Combes's very words, sir: 'ONE FELL SWOOP.'” This came with an inward rake of his hand, his fingers grasping an imaginary sickle, Harry's accumulated debts being so many weeds in his way.

“And didn't he? He always has,” demanded the culprit.

“EXactly so, sir—exactly what your father said.”

“Exactly what?”

“That he had heretofore always paid them.”

“Well, then, take them to him!” roared Harry, breaking loose again. “I haven't got anything to do with them, and won't.”

“Your father's PREcise words, sir,” purred Gadgem. “And by the time he had uttered them, sir, I was out of the room. It was here, sir, that the very polite colored man, Alec by name, so I am informed, and of whom I made mention a few moments ago, became of inVALuable assistance—of very GREAT assistance, sir.”

“You mean to tell me that you have seen my father—handed him these bills, and that he has refused to pay them?” Harry roared on.

“I DO, sir.” Gadgem had straightened his withered body now and was boring into Harry's eyes with all his might.

“Will you tell me just what he said?” The boy was still roaring, but the indignant tone was missing.

“He said—you will not be offended, sir—you mean, of course, sir, that you would like me to state exACTly what your father said, proceeding as if I was under oath.” It is indescribable how soft and mellifluous his voice had now become.

Harry nodded.

“He said, sir, that he'd be DAMNED if he'd pay another cent for a hot-headed fool who had disgraced his family. He said, sir, that you were of AGE—and were of age when you contracted these bills. He said, sir, that he had already sent you these accounts two days after he had ordered you from his house. And FInally, sir—I say, finally, sir, because it appeared to me at the time to be conclusive—he said, sir, that he would set the dogs on me if I ever crossed his lot again. HENCE, sir, my appearing three times at your door yesterday. HENCE, sir, my breaking in upon you at this unseemly hour in the morning. I am particular myself, sir, about having my morning meal disturbed; cold coffee is never agreeable, gentlemen—but in this case you must admit that my intrusion is pardonable.”

The boy understood now.

“Come to think of it I have a bundle of papers upstairs tied with a red string which came with my boxes from Moorlands. I threw them in the drawer without opening them.” This last remark was addressed to St. George, who had listened at first with a broad smile on his face, which had deepened to one of intense seriousness as the interview continued, and which had now changed to one of ill-concealed rage.

“Mr. Gadgem,” gritted St. George between his teeth—he had risen from the table during the colloquy and was standing with his back to the mantel, the blood up to the roots of his hair.

“Yes, sir.”

“Lay the packages of bills with the memoranda on my desk, and I will look them over during the day.”

“But, Mr. Temple,” and his lip curled contemptuously—he had had that same trick played on him by dozens of men.

“Not another word, Mr. Gadgem. I said—I—would look—them—over—during—the—day. You've had some dealings with me and know exactly what kind of a man I am. When I want you I will send for you. If I don't send for you, come here to-morrow morning at ten o'clock and Mr. Rutter will give you his answer. Todd, show Mr. Gadgem out.”

“But, Mr. Temple—you forGET that my duty is to—”

“I forget nothing. Todd, show Mr. Gadgem out.”

With the closing of the door behind the agent, St. George turned to Harry. His eyes were snapping fire and his big frame tense with anger. This phase of the affair had not occurred to him—nothing in which money formed an important part ever did occur to him.

“A cowardly piece of business, Harry, and on a par with everything he has done since you left his house. Talbot must be crazy to act as he does. He can't break you down in any other way, so he insults you before his friends and now throws these in your face”—and he pointed to the package of bills where Gadgem had laid it—“a most extraordinary proceeding. Please hand me that list. Thank you.... Now this third item ... this five hundred dollars—did you get that money?”

“Yes—and another hundred the next day, which isn't down,” rejoined the young man, running his eye over the list.

“Borrowed it?”

“Yes, of course—for Gilbert. He got into a card scrape at the tavern and I helped him out. I told my father all about it and he said I had done just right; that I must always help a friend out in a case like that, and that he'd pay it. All he objected to was my borrowing it of a tradesman instead of my coming to him.” It was an age of borrowing and a bootmaker was often better than a banker.

“Well—but why didn't you go to him?” He wanted to get at all the facts.

“There wasn't time. Gilbert had to have the money in an hour, and it was the only place where I could get it.”

“Of course there wasn't time—never is when the stakes are running like that.” St. George folded up the memorandum. He knew something of Talbot's iron will, but he never supposed that he would lose his sense of

what was right and wrong in exercising it. Again he opened the list—rather hurriedly this time, as if some new phase had struck him—studied it for a moment, and then asked with an increased interest in his tones:

"Did Gilbert give you back the money you loaned him?"

"Yes—certainly; about a month afterward." Here at least was an asset.

St. George's face lighted up. "And what did you do with it?"

"Took it to my father and he told me to use it; that he would settle with Mr. Slater when he paid his account;—when, too, he would thank him for helping me out."

"And when he didn't pay it back and these buzzards learned you had quit your father's house they employed Gadgem to pick your bones."

"Yes—it seems so; but, Uncle George, it's due them!" exclaimed Harry—"they ought to have their money. I would never have taken a dollar—or bought a thing if I had not supposed my father would pay for them." There was no question as to the boy's sense of justice—every intonation showed it.

"Of course it's due—due by you, too—not your father; that's the worst of it. And if he refuses to assume it—and he has—it is still to be paid—every cent of it. The question is how the devil is it to be paid—and paid quickly. I can't have you pointed out as a spendthrift and a dodger. No, this has got to be settled at once."

He threw himself into a chair, his mind absorbed in the effort to find some way out of the difficulty. The state of his own bank account precluded all relief in that direction. To borrow a dollar from the Patapsco on any note of hand he could offer was out of the question, the money stringency having become still more acute. Yet help must be had, and at once. Again he unfolded the slip and ran his eyes over the items, his mind in deep thought, then he added in an anxious tone:

"Are you aware, Harry, that this list amounts to several thousand dollars?"

"Yes—I saw it did. I had no idea it was so much. I never thought anything about it in fact. My father always paid—paid for anything I wanted." Neither did the young fellow ever concern himself about the supply of water in the old well at Moorlands. His experience had been altogether with the bucket and the gourd: all he had had to do was to dip in.

Again St. George ruminated. It had been many years since he had been so disturbed about any matter involving money.

"And have you any money left, Harry?"

"Not much. What I have is in my drawer upstairs."

"Then I'll lend you the money." This came with a certain spontaneity—quite as if he had said to a companion who had lost his umbrella—"Take mine!"

"But have you got it, Uncle George?" asked Harry in an anxious tone.

"No—not that I know of," he replied simply, but with no weakening of his determination to see the boy through, no matter at what cost.

"Well—then—how will you lend it?" laughed Harry. Money crises had not formed part of his troubles.

"Egad, my boy, I don't know!—but somehow."

He rang the bell and Todd put in his head. "Todd, go around outside,—see if young Mr. Pawson is in his office below us, present my compliments and say that it will give me great pleasure to call upon him regarding a matter of business."

"Yes, sah—"

"—And, Todd—say also that if agreeable to him, I will be there in ten minutes."

Punctually at ten o'clock on the following morning the shrivelled body and anxious face of the agent was ushered by Todd into St. George's presence—Dandy close behind sniffing at his thin knees, convinced that he was a suspicious person. This hour had been fixed by Temple in case he was not sent for earlier, and as no messenger had so far reached the bill collector he was naturally in doubt as to the nature of his reception. He had the same hat in his hand and the same handkerchief—a weekly, or probably a monthly comfort—its dingy red color defrauding the laundry.

"I have waited, sir," Gadgem began in an unctuous tone, his eyes on the dog, who had now resumed his place on the hearth rug—"waited IMpatiently, relying upon the word and honor of—"

"There—that will do, Gadgem," laughed St. George good-naturedly. Somehow he seemed more than usually happy this morning—bubbling over, indeed, ever since Todd had brought him a message from the young lawyer in the basement but half an hour before. "Keep that sort of talk for those who like it. No, Todd, you needn't bring Mr. Gadgem a chair, for he won't be here long enough to enjoy it. Now listen," and he took the memorandum from his pocket. "These bills are correct. Mr. Rutter has had the money and the goods. Take this list which I have signed to my attorney in the office underneath and be prepared to give a receipt in full for each account at twelve o'clock to-morrow. I have arranged to have them paid in full. Good-morning."

Gadgem stared. He did not believe a word about finding the money downstairs. He was accustomed to being put off that way and had already formulated his next tactical move. In fact he was about to name it with some positiveness, recounting the sort of papers which would follow and the celerity of their serving, when he suddenly became aware that St. George's eyes were fixed upon him and instantly stopped breathing.

"I said good-morning, Mr. Gadgem," repeated St. George sententiously. There was no mistaking his meaning.

"I heard you, sir," hesitated the collector—"*I* heard you diSTINCTly, but in cases of this kind there is—"

St. George swung back the door and stood waiting. No man living or dead had ever doubted the word of St. George Wilmot Temple, not even by a tone of the voice, and Gadgem's was certainly suggestive of a well-defined and most offensive doubt. Todd moved up closer; Dandy rose to his feet, thinking he might be of use. The little man looked from one to the other. He might add an action for assault and battery to the claim, but that would delay its collection.

“Then at TWELVE o'clock, to-morrow, Mr. Temple,” he purred blandly.

“At twelve o'clock!” repeated St. George coldly, wondering which end of the intruder he would grapple when he threw him through the front door and down the front steps.

“I will be here on the stroke of the clock, sir—on the STROKE,” and Gadgem slunk out.

For some minutes St. George continued to walk up and down the room, stooping once in a while to caress the setter; dry-washing his hands; tapping his well-cut waistcoat with his shapely fingers, his thumbs in the arm-holes; halting now and then to stretch himself to the full height of his body. He had outwitted the colonel—taught him a lesson—let him see that he was not the only “hound in the pack,” and, best of all, he had saved the boy from annoyance and possibly from disgrace.

He was still striding up and down the room, when Harry, who had overslept himself as usual, came down to breakfast. Had some friend of his uncle found a gold mine in the back yard—or, better still, had Todd just discovered a forgotten row of old “Brahmin Madeira” in some dark corner of his cellar—St. George could not have been more buoyant.

“Glad you didn't get up any earlier, you good-for-nothing sleepy-head!” he cried in welcoming, joyous tones. “You have just missed that ill-smelling buzzard.”

“What buzzard?” asked Harry, glancing over the letters on the mantel in the forlorn hope of finding one from Kate.

“Why, Gadgem—and that is the last you will ever see of him.”

“Why?—has father paid him?” he asked in a listless way, squeezing Dandy's nose thrust affectionately into his hand—his mind still on Kate. Now that Willits was with her, as every one said, she would never write him again. He was a fool to expect it, he thought, and he sighed heavily.

“Of course he hasn't paid him—but I have. That is, a friend of mine has—or will.”

“You have!” cried Harry with a start. He was interested now—not for himself, but for St. George: no penny of his uncle's should ever go to pay his debts. “Where did the money come from?”

“Never you mind where the money came from. You found it for Gilbert—did he ask you where you got it? Why should you ask me?”

“Well, I won't; but you are mighty good to me, Uncle George, and I am very grateful to you.” The relief was not overwhelming, for the burden of the debt had not been heavy. It was only the sting of his father's refusal that had hurt. He had always believed that the financial tangle would be straightened out somehow.

“No!—damn it!—you are not grateful. You sha'n't be grateful!” cried St. George with a boyish laugh, seating himself that he might fill his pipe the better from a saucer of tobacco on the table. “If you were grateful it would spoil it all. What you can do, however, is to thank your lucky stars that that greasy red pocket-handkerchief will never be aired in your presence again. And there's another thing you can be thankful for now that you are in a thankful mood, and that is that Mr. Poe will be at Guy's to-morrow, and wants to see me.” He had finished filling the pipe bowl, and had struck a match.

The boy's eyes danced. Gadgem, his father, his debts, everything—was forgotten.

“Oh, I'm so glad! How do you know?”

“Here's a letter from him.” (Puff-puff.)

“And can I see him?”

“Of course you can see him! We will have him to dinner, my boy! Here comes Todd with your coffee. Take my seat so I can talk to you while I smoke.”

CHAPTER XIV

Although St. George dispensed his hospitality without form or pretence, never referring to his intended functions except in a casual way, the news of so unusual a dinner to so notorious a man as Edgar Allan Poe could not long be kept quiet.

While a few habitues occupying the arm-chairs on the sidewalk of the club were disappointed at not being invited,—although they knew that ten guests had always been St. George's limit,—others expressed their disapproval of the entire performance with more than a shrug of the shoulders. Captain Warfleld was most outspoken. “Temple,” he said, “like his father, is a law unto himself, and always entertains the queerest kind of people; and if he wants to do honor to a man of that stamp, why that, of course, is his business, not mine.” At which old Tom Purviance had blurted out—“And a shiftless vagabond too, Warfield, if what I hear is true. Fine subject for St. George to waste his Madeira on!” Purviance had never read a dozen lines of anybody's poetry in his life, and looked upon all literary men as no better than play actors.

It was then that Richard Horn, his eyes flashing, had retorted:

“If I did not know how kind-hearted you were, Purviance, and how thoughtless you can sometimes be in your criticisms, I might ask you to apologize to both Mr. Poe and myself. Would it surprise you to know that there is no more truth in what you say than there is in the reports of that gentleman's habitual drunkenness? It was but a year ago that I met him at his cousin's house and I shall never forget him. Would it also surprise you to learn that he has the appearance of a man of very great distinction?—that he was faultlessly attired in a full suit of black and had the finest pair of eyes in his head I have ever looked into? Mr. Poe is not of your world, or of mine—he is above it. There is too much of this sort of ill-considered judgment abroad in the land. No—my dear Purviance—I don't want to be rude and I am sure you will not think I am personal. I am only trying to be just to one of the master spirits of our time so that I won't be humiliated when his real worth becomes a household word.”

The women took a different view.

“I can't understand what Mr. Temple is thinking of,” said the wife of the archdeacon to Mrs. Cheston. “This Mr. Poe is something dreadful—never sober, I hear. Mr. Temple is invariably polite to everybody, but when he goes out of his way to do honor to a man like this he only makes it harder for those of us who are trying to help our sons and brothers—” to which Mrs. Cheston had replied with a twinkle in her mouse eyes and a toss of her gray head:—“So was Byron, my dear woman—a very dreadful and most disreputable person, but I can't spare him from my Library, nor should you.”

None of these criticisms would have affected St. George had he heard them, and we may be sure no one dared tell him. He was too busy, in fact—and so was Harry, helping him for that matter—setting his house in order for the coming function.

That the table itself might be made the more worthy of the great man, orders were given that the big silver loving-cup—the one presented to his father by no less a person than the Marquis de Castellux himself—should be brought out to be filled later on with Cloth of Gold roses so placed that their rich color and fragrance would reach both the eyes and the nostrils of his guests, while the rest of the family silver, brightened to a mirror finish by Todd, was either sent down to Aunt Jemima to be ready for the special dishes for which the house was famous, or disposed on the side-board and serving-table for instant use when required. Easy-chairs were next brought from upstairs—tobacco and pipes, with wax candles, were arranged on teak-wood trays, and an extra dozen or so of bubble-blown glasses banked on a convenient shelf. The banquet room too, for it was late summer, was kept as cool as the season permitted, the green shutters being closed, thus barring out the heat of early September—and the same precaution was taken in the dressing-room, which was to serve as a receptacle for hats and canes.

And Todd as usual was his able assistant. All the darky's training came into play when his master was giving a dinner: what Madeira to decant, and what to leave in its jacket of dust, with its waistcoat of a label unlaundered for half a century; the temperature of the claret; the exact angle at which the Burgundy must be tilted and when it was to be opened—and how—especially the “how”—the disturbing of a single grain of sediment being a capital offence; the final brandies, particularly that old Peach Brandy hidden in Tom Coston's father's cellar during the war of 1812, and sent to that gentleman as an especial “mark of my appreciation to my dear friend and kinsman, St. George Wilmot Temple,” etc., etc.—all this Todd knew to his finger ends.

For with St. George to dine meant something more than the mere satisfying of one's hunger. To dine meant to get your elbows next to your dearest friend—half a dozen or more of your dearest friends, if possible—to look into their faces, hear them talk, regale them with the best your purse afforded, and last and best of all to open for them your rarest wines—wines bred in the open, amid tender, clustering leaves; wines mellowed by a thousand sunbeams; nurtured, cared for, and put tenderly to sleep, only to awake years thereafter to warm the hearts and cheer the souls of those who honored them with their respect and never degraded them with their debauchery.

As for the dishes themselves—here St. George with Jemima's help was pastmaster: dishes sizzling hot; dishes warm, and dishes stone cold. And their several arrivals and departures, accompanied by their several staffs: the soup as an advance guard—of gumbo or clams—or both if you chose; then a sheepshead caught off Cobb's Island the day before, just arrived by the day boat, with potatoes that would melt in your mouth—in gray jackets these; then soft-shell crabs—big, crisp fellows, with fixed bayonets of legs, and orderlies of cucumber—the first served on a huge silver platter with the coat-of-arms of the Temples cut in the centre of the rim and the last on an old English cut-glass dish. Then the woodcock and green peas—and green corn—their teeth in a broad grin; then an olio of pineapple, and a wonderful Cheshire cheese, just arrived in a late invoice—and marvellous crackers—and coffee—and fruit (cantaloupes and peaches that would make your mouth water), then nuts, and last a few crusts of dry bread! And here everything came to a halt and all the troops were sent back to the barracks—(Aunt Jemima will do for the barracks).

With this there was to follow a change of base—a most important change. Everything eatable and drinkable and all the glasses and dishes were to be lifted from the table—one half at a time—the cloth rolled back and whisked away and the polished mahogany laid bare; the silver coasters posted in advantageous positions, and in was to rattle the light artillery:—Black Warrior of 1810—Port of 1815—a Royal Brown Sherry that nobody knew anything about, and had no desire to, so fragrant was it. Last of all the notched finger-bowls in which to cool the delicate, pipe-stem glasses; and then, and only then, did the real dinner begin.

All this Todd had done dozens and dozens of times before, and all this (with Malachi's assistance—Richard Horn consenting—for there was nothing too good for the great poet) would Todd do again on this eventful night.

As to the guests, this particular feast being given to the most distinguished literary genius the country had yet produced,—certainly the most talked of—those who were bidden were, of course, selected with more than usual care: Mr. John P. Kennedy, the widely known author and statesman, and Mr. John H. B. Latrobe, equally noteworthy as counsellor, mathematician, and patron of the fine arts, both of whom had been Poe's friends for years, and who had first recognized his genius; Richard Horn, who never lost an opportunity to praise him, together with Judge Pancoast, Major Clayton, the richest aristocrat about Kennedy Square and whose cellar was famous the county over—and last, the Honorable Prim. Not because old Seymour possessed any especial fitness one way or the other for a dinner of this kind, but because his presence would afford an underground communication by which Kate could learn how fine and splendid Harry was—(sly old diplomat St. George!)—and how well he had appeared at a table about which were seated the best Kennedy Square could produce.

“I'll put you right opposite Mr. Poe, Harry—so you can study him at your leisure,” St. George had said when discussing the placing of the guests, “and be sure you look at his hands, they are just like a girl's, they are so soft and white. And his eyes—you will never forget them. And there is an air about him too—an air of—well, a sort of haughty distraction—something I can't quite explain—as if he had a contempt for small things—things that you and I, and your father and all of us about here, believe in. Blood or no blood, he's a gentleman, even

if he does come of very plain people;—and they were players I hear. It seems natural, when you think it over, that Latrobe and Kennedy and Horn should be men of genius, because their blood entitles them to it, but how a man raised as Mr. Poe has been should—well—all I can say is that he upsets all our theories."

"But I think you are wrong, Uncle George, about his birth. I've been looking him up and his grandfather was a general in the Revolution."

"Well, I'm glad of it—and I hope he was a very good general, and very much of a gentleman—but there is no question of his descendant being a wonder. But that is neither here nor there—you'll be right opposite and can study him in your own way."

Mr. Kennedy arrived first. Although his family name is the same as that which dignifies the scene of these chronicles, none of his ancestors, so far as I know, were responsible for its title. Nor did his own domicile front on its confines. In fact, at this period of his varied and distinguished life, he was seldom seen in Kennedy Square, his duties at Washington occupying all his time, and it was by the merest chance that he could be present.

"Ah, St. George!" he exclaimed, as he handed his hat to Todd and grasped his host's hand. "So very good of you to let me come. How cool and delicious it is in here—and the superb roses—Ah yes!—the old Castellux cup. I remember it perfectly; your father once gave me a sip from its rim when I was a young fellow. And now tell me—how is our genius? What a master-stroke is his last—the whole country is ringing with it. How did you get hold of him?"

"Very easily. He wrote me he was passing through on his way to Richmond, and you naturally popped into my head as the proper man to sit next him," replied St. George in his hearty manner.

"And you were on top of him, I suppose, before he got out of bed. Safer, sometimes," and he smiled significantly.

"Yes, found him at Guy's. Sit here, Kennedy, where the air is cooler."

"And quite himself?" continued the author, settling himself in a chair that St. George had just drawn out for him.

"Perhaps a little thinner, and a little worn. It was only when I told him you were coming, that I got a smile out of him. He never forgets you and he never should."

Again Todd answered the knocker and Major Clayton, Richard Horn, and Mr. Latrobe joined the group. The major, who was rather stout, apologized for his light seersucker coat, due, as he explained, to the heat, although his other garments were above criticism. Richard, however, looked as if he had just stepped out of an old portrait in his dull-blue coat and white silk scarf, St. George's eyes lighting up as he took in the combination—nothing pleased St. George so much as a well-dressed man, and Richard never disappointed him, while Latrobe, both in his dress and dignified bearing, easily held first place as the most distinguished looking man in the room.

The Honorable Prim now stalked in and shook hands gravely and with much dignity, especially with Mr. Kennedy, whose career as a statesman he had always greatly admired. St. George often said, in speaking of this manner of the Scotchman's, that Prim's precise pomposity was entirely due to the fact that he had swallowed himself and couldn't digest the meal; that if he would once in a while let out a big, hearty laugh it might split his skin wide enough for him to get a natural breath.

St. George kept his eyes on Harry when the boy stepped forward and shook Prim by the hand, but he had no need for anxiety. The face of the young prince lighted up and his manner was as gracious as if nothing had ever occurred to mar the harmony between the Seymour clan and himself.

Everybody had seated themselves now—Malachi having passed around a course of palm-leaf fans—Clayton, Latrobe, and Horn at one open window overlooking the tired trees—it was in the dog days—Seymour and the judge at the other, while St. George took a position so that he could catch the first glimpse of the famous poet as he crossed the Square—(it was still light), the dinner hour having arrived and Todd already getting nervous.

Once more the talk dwelt on the guest of honor—Mr. Kennedy, who, of all men of his time, could best appreciate Poe's genius, and who, with Mr. Latrobe, had kept it alive, telling for the hundredth time the old story of his first meeting with the poet, turning now and then to Latrobe for confirmation.

"Oh, some ten or more years ago, wasn't it, Latrobe? We happened to be on the committee for awarding a prize story, and Poe had sent in his 'Manuscript in a Bottle' among others. It would have broken your hearts, gentlemen, to have seen him. His black coat was buttoned up close to his chin—seedy, badly worn—he himself shabby and down at the heels, but erect and extremely courteous—a most pitiable object. My servant wasn't going to let him in at first, he looked so much the vagrant."

"And you know, of course, Kennedy, that he had no shirt on under that coat, don't you?" rejoined Latrobe, rising from his seat as he spoke and joining St. George at the window.

"Do you think so?" echoed Mr. Kennedy.

"I am positive of it. He came to see me next day and wanted me to let him know whether he had been successful. He said if the committee only knew how much the prize would mean to him they would stretch a point in his favor. I am quite sure I told you about it at the time, St. George," and he laid his hand on his host's shoulder.

"There was no need of stretching it, Latrobe," remarked Richard Horn in his low, incisive voice, his eyes on Kennedy's face, although he was speaking to the counsellor. "You and Kennedy did the world a great service at the right moment. Many a man of brains—one with something new to say—has gone to the wall and left his fellow men that much poorer because no one helped him into the Pool of Healing at the right moment." (Dear Richard!—he was already beginning to understand something of this in his own experience.)

Todd's entrance interrupted the talk for a moment. His face was screwed up into knots, both eyes lost in the deepest crease. "Fo' Gawd, Marse George," he whispered in his master's ear—"dem woodcock'll be sp'iled if dat gemman don't come!"

St. George shook his head: “We will wait a few minutes more, Todd. Tell Aunt Jemima what I say.”

Clayton, who despite the thinness of his seersucker coat, had kept his palm-leaf fan busy since he had taken his seat, and who had waited until his host's ear was again free, now broke in cheerily:

“Same old story of course, St. George. Another genius gone astray. Bad business, this bee of literature, once it gets to buzzing.” Then with a quizzical glance at the author: “Kennedy is a lamentable example of what it has done for him. He started out as a soldier, dropped into law, and now is trying to break into Congress again—and all the time writes—writes—writes. It has spoiled everything he has tried to do in life—and it will spoil everything he touches from this on—and now comes along this man Poe, who—”

“—No, he doesn't come along,” chimed in Pancoast, who so far had kept silence, his palm-leaf fan having done all the talking. “I wish he would.”

“You are right, judge,” chuckled Clayton, “and that is just my point. Here I say, comes along this man Poe and spoils my dinner. Something, I tell you, has got to be done or I shall collapse. By the way, Kennedy—didn't you send Poe a suit of clothes once in which to come to your house?”

The distinguished statesman, who had been smiling at the major's good-natured badinage, made no reply: that was a matter between the poet and himself.

“And didn't he keep everybody waiting?” persisted Clayton, “until your man found him and brought him back in your own outfit—only the shirt was four sizes too big for his bean-pole of a body. Am I right?” he laughed.

“He has often dined with me, Clayton,” replied Kennedy in his most courteous and kindly tone, ignoring the question as well as all allusion to his charity—“and never in all my experience have I ever met a more dazzling conversationalist. Start him on one of his weird tales and let him see that you are interested and in sympathy with him, and you will never forget it. He gave us parts of an unfinished story one night at my house, so tremendous in its power that every one was frozen stiff in his seat.”

Again Clayton cut in, this time to St. George. He was getting horribly hungry, as were the others. It was now twenty minutes past the dinner hour and there were still no signs of Poe, nor had any word come from him. “For mercy's sake, St. George, try the suit-of-clothes method—any suit of clothes—here—he can have mine! I'll be twice as comfortable without them.”

“He couldn't get into them,” returned St. George with a smile—“nor could he into mine, although he is half our weight; and as for our hats—they wouldn't get further down on his head than the top of his crown.”

“But I insist on the experiment,” bubbled Clayton good-naturedly. “Here we are, hungry as wolves and everything being burned up. Try the suit-of-clothes trick—Kennedy did it—and it won't take your Todd ten minutes to go to Guy's and bring him back inside of them.”

“Those days are over for Poe,” Kennedy remarked with a slight frown. The major's continued allusions to a brother writer's poverty, though pure badinage, had begun to jar on the author.

For the second time Todd's face was thrust in at the door. It now looked like a martyr's being slowly roasted at the stake.

“Yes, Todd—serve dinner!” called St. George in a tone that showed how great was his disappointment. “We won't wait any longer, gentlemen. Geniuses must be allowed some leeway. Something has detained our guest.”

“He's got an idea in his head and has stopped in somewhere to write it down,” continued Clayton in his habitual good-natured tone: it was the overdone woodcock—(he had heard Todd's warning)—that still filled his mind.

“I could forgive him for that,” exclaimed the judge—“some of his best work, I hear, has been done on the spur of the moment—and you should forgive him too, Clayton—unbeliever and iconoclast as you are—and you WOULD forgive him if you knew as much about new poetry as you do about old port.”

Clayton's stout body shook with laughter. “My dear Pancoast,” he cried, “you do not know what you are talking about. No man living or dead should be forgiven who keeps a woodcock on the spit five minutes over time. Forgive him! Why, my dear sir, your poet ought to be drawn and quartered, and what is left of him boiled in oil. Where shall I sit, St. George?”

“Alongside of Latrobe. Kennedy, I shall put you next to Poe's vacant chair—he knows and loves you best. Seymour, will you and Richard take your places alongside of Pancoast, and Harry, will you please sit opposite Mr. Kennedy?”

And so the dinner began.

CHAPTER XV

Whether it was St. George's cheery announcement: “Well, gentlemen, I am sorry, but we still have each other, and so we will remember our guest in our hearts even if we cannot have his charming person,” or whether it was that the absence of Poe made little difference when a dinner with St. George was in question—certain it is that before many moments the delinquent poet was for the most part forgotten.

As the several dishes passed in review, Malachi in charge of the small arms—plates, knives, and forks—and Todd following with the heavier guns—silver platters and the like—the talk branched out to more diversified topics: the new omnibuses which had been allowed to run in the town; the serious financial situation, few people having recovered from the effects of the last great panic; the expected reception to Mr. Polk; the new Historical Society, of which every one present was a member except St. George and Harry; the successful experiments which the New York painter, a Mr. Morse, was making in what he was pleased to call Magnetic

Telegraphy, and the absurdity of his claim that his invention would soon come into general use—every one commenting unfavorably except Richard Horn:—all these shuttlecocks being tossed into mid-air for each battledore to crack, and all these, with infinite tact the better to hide his own and his companions' disappointment over the loss of his honored guest—did St. George keep on the move.

With the shifting of the cloth and the placing of the coasters—the nuts, crusts of bread, and finger-bowls being within easy reach—most of this desultory talk ceased. Something more delicate, more human, more captivating than sport, finance, or politics; more satisfying than all the poets who ever lived, filled everybody's mind. Certain Rip Van Winkles of bottles with tattered garments, dust-begrimed faces, and cobwebs in their hair were lifted tenderly from the side-board and awakened to consciousness (some of them hadn't opened their mouths for twenty years, except to have them immediately stopped with a new cork), and placed in the expectant coasters, Todd handling each one with the reverence of a priest serving in a temple. Crusty, pot-bellied old fellows, who hadn't uttered a civil word to anybody since they had been shut up in their youth, now laughed themselves wide open. A squat, lean-necked, jolly little jug without legs—labelled in ink—“Crab-apple, 1807,” spread himself over as much of the mahogany as he could cover, and admired his fat shape upside down in its polish. Diamond-cut decanters—regular swells these—with silver chains and medals on their chests—went swaggering round, boasting of their ancestors; saying “Your good health” every time any one invited them to have a drop—or lose one—while a modest little demijohn—or rather a semi-demi-little-john—all in his wicker-basket clothes, with a card sewed on his jacket—like a lost boy (Peggy Coston of Wesley did the sewing) bearing its name and address—“Old Peach, 1796, Wesley, Eastern Shore,” was placed on St. George's right within reach of his hand. “It reminds me of the dear woman herself, gentleman, in her homely outside and her warm, loving heart underneath, and I wouldn't change any part of it for the world.”

“What Madeira is this, St. George?” It was the judge who was speaking—he had not yet raised the thin glass to his lips; the old wine-taster was too absorbed in its rich amber color and in the delicate aroma, which was now reaching his nostrils. Indeed a new—several new fragrances, were by this time permeating the room.

“It is the same, judge, that I always give you.”

“Not your father's Black Warrior?”

“Yes, the 1810. Don't you recognize it? Not corked, is it?”

“Corked, my dear man! It's a posy of roses. But I thought that was all gone.”

“No, there are a few bottles still in my cellar—some—How many are there, Todd, of the Black Warrior?”

“Dat's de las' 'cept two, Marse George.”

“Dying in a good cause, judge—I'll send them to you to-morrow.”

“You'll do nothing of the kind, you spendthrift. Give them to Kennedy or Clayton.”

“No, give them to nobody!” laughed Kennedy. “Keep them where they are and don't let anybody draw either cork until you invite me to dinner again.”

“Only two bottles left,” cried Latrobe in consternation! “Well, what the devil are we going to do when they are gone?—what's anybody going to do?” The “we” was the key to the situation. The good Madeira of Kennedy Square was for those who honored it, and in that sense—and that sense only—was common property.

“Don't be frightened, Latrobe,” laughed St. George—“I've got a lot of the Blackburn Reserve of 1812 left. Todd, serve that last bottle I brought up this morning—I put it in that low decanter next to—Ah, Malachi—you are nearest. Pass that to Mr. Latrobe, Malachi—Yes, that's the one. Now tell me how you like it. It is a little pricked, I think, and may be slightly bruised in the handling. I spent half an hour picking out the cork this morning—but there is no question of its value.”

“Yes,” rejoined Latrobe, moistening his lips with the topaz-colored liquid—“it is a little bruised. I wouldn't have served it—better lay it aside for a month or two in the decanter. Are all your corks down to that, St. George?”

“All the 1810 and '12—dry as powder some of them. I've got one over on the sideboard that I'm afraid to tackle”—here he turned to Clayton: “Major, you are the only man I know who can pick out a cork properly. Yes, Todd—the bottle at the end, next to that Burgundy—carefully now. Don't shake it, and—”

“Well—but why don't YOU draw the cork yourself, St. George?” interrupted the major, his eyes on Todd, who was searching for the rarity among the others flanking the sideboard.

“I dare not—that is, I'm afraid to try. You are the man for a cork like that—and Todd!—hand Major Clayton the corkscrew and one of those silver nutpicks.”

The Honorable Prim bent closer. “What is it, St. George, some old Port?” he asked in a perfunctory way. Rare old wines never interested him. “They are an affectation,” he used to say.

“No, Seymour—it's really a bottle of the Peter Remsen 1817 Madeira.”

The bottle was passed, every eye watching it with the greatest interest.

“No, never mind the corkscrew, Todd,—I'll pick it out,” remarked the major, examining the hazardous cork with the care of a watchmaker handling a broken-down chronometer. “You're right, St. George—it's too far gone. Don't watch me, Seymour, or I'll get nervous. You'll hoodoo it—you Scotchmen are the devil when it comes to anything fit to drink,” and he winked at Prim.

“How much is there left of it, St. George?” asked Latrobe, watching the major manipulate the nutpick.

“Not a drop outside that bottle.”

“Let us pray—for the cork,” sighed Latrobe. “Easy—E-A-SY, major—think of your responsibility, man!”

It was out now, the major dusting the opening with one end of his napkin—his face wreathed in smiles when his nostrils caught the first whiff of its aroma.

“By Jupiter!—gentlemen!—When I'm being snuffed out I'll at least go like a gentleman if I have a drop of this on my lips. It's a bunch of roses—a veritable nosegay. Heavens!—what a bouquet! Some fresh glasses,

Todd.”

Malachi and Todd both stepped forward for the honor of serving it, but the major waved them aside, and rising to his feet began the round of the table, filling each slender pipe-stem glass to the brim.

Then the talk, which had long since drifted away from general topics, turned to the color and sparkle of some of the more famous wines absorbed these many years by their distinguished votaries. This was followed by the proper filtration and racking both of Ports and Madeiras, and whether milk or egg were best for the purpose—Kennedy recounting his experience of different vintages both here and abroad, the others joining in, and all with the same intense interest that a group of scientists or collectors would have evinced in discussing some new discovery in chemistry or physics, or the coming to light of some rare volume long since out of print—everybody, indeed, taking a hand in the discussion except Latrobe, whose mouth was occupied in the slow sipping of his favorite Madeira—tilting a few drops now and then on the end of his tongue, his eyes devoutly closed that he might the better relish its flavor and aroma.

It was all an object lesson to Harry, who had never been to a dinner of older men—not even at his father's—and though at first he smiled at what seemed to him a great fuss over nothing, he finally began to take a broader view. Wine, then, was like food or music, or poetry—or good-fellowship—something to be enjoyed in its place—and never out of it. For all that, he had allowed no drop of anything to fall into his own glass—a determination which Todd understood perfectly, but which he as studiously chose to ignore—going through all the motions of filling the glass so as not to cause Marse Harry any embarrassment. Even the “1817” was turned down by the young man with a parrying gesture which caught the alert eyes of the major.

“You are right, my boy,” the bon vivant said sententiously. “It is a wine for old men. But look after your stomach, you dog—or you may wake up some fine morning and not be able to know good Madeira from bad. You young bloods, with your vile concoctions of toddies, punches, and other satanic brews, are fast going to the devil—your palates, I am speaking of. If you ever saw the inside of a distillery you would never drink another drop of whiskey. There's poison in every thimbleful. There's sunshine in this, sir!” and he held the glass to his eyes until the light of the candles flashed through it.

“But I've never seen the inside or outside of a distillery in my life,” answered Harry with a laugh, a reply which did not in the least quench the major's enthusiasms, who went on dilating, wine-glass in hand, on the vulgarity of drinking STANDING UP—the habitual custom of whiskey tipplers—in contrast with the refinement of sipping wines SITTING DOWN—one being a vice and the other a virtue.

Richard, too, had been noticing Harry. He had overheard, as the dinner progressed, a remark the boy had made to the guest next him, regarding the peculiar rhythm of Poe's verse—Harry repeating the closing lines of the poem with such keen appreciation of their meaning that Richard at once joined in the talk, commending him for his insight and discrimination. He had always supposed that Rutter's son, like all the younger bloods of his time, had abandoned his books when he left college and had affected horses and dogs instead. The discovery ended in his scrutinizing Harry's face the closer, reading between the lines—his father here, his mother there—until a quick knitting of the brows, and a flash from out the deep-brown eyes, upset all his preconceived opinions; he had expected grit and courage in the boy—there couldn't help being that when one thought of his father—but where did the lad get his imagination? Richard wondered—that which millions could not purchase. “A most engaging young man in spite of his madcap life,” he said to himself—“I don't wonder St. George loves him.”

When the bell in the old church struck the hour of ten, Harry again turned to Richard and said with a sigh of disappointment:

“I'm afraid it's too late to expect him—don't you think so?”

“Yes, I fear so,” rejoined Richard, who all through the dinner had never ceased to bend his ear to every sound, hoping for the rumble of wheels or the quick step of a man in the hall. “Something extraordinary must have happened to him, or he may have been called suddenly to Richmond and taken the steamboat.” Then leaning toward his host he called across the table: “Might I make a suggestion, St. George?”

St. George paused in his talk with Mr. Kennedy and Latrobe and raised his head:

“Well, Richard?”

“I was just saying to young Rutter here, that perhaps Mr. Poe has been called suddenly to Richmond and has sent you a note which has not reached you.”

“Or he might be ill,” suggested Harry in his anxiety to leave no loophole through which the poet could escape.

“Or he might be ill,” repeated Richard—“quite true. Now would you mind if I sent Malachi to Guy's to find out?”

“No, Richard—but I'll send Todd. We can get along, I expect, with Malachi until he gets back. Todd!”

“Yes, sah.”

“You go to Guy's and ask Mr. Lampson if Mr. Poe is still in the hotel. If he is not there ask for any letter addressed to me and then come back. If he is in, go up to his room and present my compliments, and say we are waiting dinner for him.”

Todd's face lengthened, but he missed no word of his master's instructions. Apart from these his mind was occupied with the number of minutes it would take him to run all the way to Guy's Hotel, mount the steps, deliver his message, and race back again. Malachi, who was nearly twice his age, and who had had twice his experience, might be all right until he reached that old Burgundy, but “dere warn't nobody could handle dem corks but Todd; Malachi'd bust 'em sho' and spile 'em 'fo' he could git back.”

“'Spose dere ain't no gemman and no letter, den what?” he asked as a last resort.

“Then come straight home.”

“Yes, sah,” and he backed regretfully from the room and closed the door behind him.

St. George turned to Horn again: “Very good idea, Richard—wonder I hadn't thought of it before. I should probably had I not expected him every minute. And he was so glad to come. He told me he had never

forgotten the dinner at Kennedy's some years ago, and when he heard you would be here as well, his whole face lighted up. I was also greatly struck with the improvement in his appearance, he seemed more a man of the world than when I first knew him—carried himself better and was more carefully dressed. This morning when I went in he—”

The door opened silently, and Todd, trembling all over, laid his hand on his master's shoulder, cutting short his dissertation.

“Marse George, please sah, can I speak to you a minute?” The boy looked as if he had just seen a ghost.

“Speak to me! Why haven't you taken my message, Todd?”

“Yes, sah—dat is—can't ye step in de hall a minute, Marse George—now—right away?”

“The hall!—what for?—is there anything the matter?”

St. George pushed back his chair and followed Todd from the room: something had gone wrong—something demanding instant attention or Todd wouldn't be scared out of his wits. Those nearest him, who had overheard Todd's whispered words, halted in their talk in the hope of getting some clew to the situation; others, further away, kept on, unconscious that anything unusual had taken place.

Several minutes passed.

Again the door swung wide, and a man deathly pale, erect, faultlessly dressed in a full suit of black, the coat buttoned close to his chin, his cavernous eyes burning like coals of fire, entered on St. George's arm and advanced toward the group.

Every guest was on his feet in an instant.

“We have him at last!” cried St. George in his cheeriest voice. “A little late, but doubly welcome. Mr. Poe, gentlemen.”

Kennedy was the first to extend his hand, Horn crowding close, the others waiting their turn.

Poe straightened his body, focussed his eyes on Kennedy, shook his extended hand gravely, but without the slightest sign of recognition, and repeated the same cold greeting to each guest in the room. He spoke no word—did not open his lips—only the mechanical movement of his outstretched hand—a movement so formal that it stifled all exclamations of praise on the part of the guests, or even of welcome. It was as if he had grasped the hands of strangers beside an open grave.

Then the cold, horrible truth flashed upon them:

Edgar Allan Poe was dead drunk!

The silence that followed was appalling—an expectant silence like that which precedes the explosion of a bomb. Kennedy, who had known him the longest and best, and who knew that if his mind could once be set working he would recover his tongue and wits, having seen him before in a similar crisis, stepped nearer and laid both hands on Poe's shoulders. Get Poe to talking and he would be himself again; let him once be seated, and ten chances to one he would fall asleep at the table.

“No, don't sit down, Mr. Poe—not yet. Give us that great story of yours—the one you told at my house that night—we have never forgotten it. Gentlemen, all take your seats—I promise you one of the great treats of your lives.”

Poe stood for an instant undecided, the light of the candles illumining his black hair, pallid face, and haggard features; fixed his eyes on Todd and Malachi, as if trying to account for their presence, and stood wavering, his deep, restless eyes gleaming like slumbering coals flashing points of hot light.

Again Mr. Kennedy's voice rang out:

“Any one of your stories, Mr. Poe—we leave it to you.”

Everybody was seated now, with eyes fixed on the poet. Harry, overcome and still dazed, pressed close to Richard, who, bending forward, had put his elbow on the table, his chin in his hand. Clayton wheeled up a big chair and placed it back some little distance so that he could get a better view of the man. Seymour, Latrobe, and the others canted their seats to face the speaker squarely. All felt that Kennedy's tact had saved the situation and restored the equilibrium. It was the poet now who stood before them—the man of genius—the man whose name was known the country through. That he was drunk was only part of the performance. Booth had been drunk when he chased a super from the stage; Webster made his best speeches when he was half-seas-over—was making them at that very moment. It was so with many other men of genius the world over. If they could hear one of Poe's poems—or, better still, one of his short stories, like “The Black Cat” or the “Murders in the Rue Morgue”—it would be like hearing Emerson read one of his Essays or Longfellow recite his “Hyperion.” This in itself would atone for everything. Kennedy was right—it would be one of the rare treats of their lives.

Poe grasped the back of the chair reserved for him, stood swaying for an instant, passed one hand nervously across his forehead, brushed back a stray lock that had fallen over his eyebrow, loosened the top button of his frock coat, revealing a fresh white scarf tied about his neck, closed his eyes, and in a voice deep, sonorous, choked with tears one moment, ringing clear the next—word by word—slowly—with infinite tenderness and infinite dignity and with the solemnity of a condemned man awaiting death—repeated the Lord's Prayer to the end.

Kennedy sat as if paralyzed. Richard Horn, who had lifted up his hands in horror as the opening sentence reached his ears, lowered his head upon his chest as he would in church. There was no blasphemy in this! It was the wail of a lost soul pleading for mercy!

Harry, cowering in his chair, gazed at Poe in amazement. Then a throb of such sympathy as he had never felt before shook him to his depths. Could that transfigured man praying there, the undried tears still on his lids, be the same who had entered on his uncle's arm but a few moments before?

Poe lifted his head, opened his eyes, walked in a tired, hopeless way toward the mantel and sank into an easy-chair. There he sat with bowed head, his face in his hands.

One by one the men rose to their feet and, with a nod or silent pressure of St. George's palm, moved toward

the door. When they spoke to each other it was in whispers: to Todd, who brought their hats and canes; to Harry, whom, unconsciously, they substituted for host; shaking his hand, muttering some word of sympathy for St. George. No—they would find their way, better not disturb his uncle, etc. They would see him in the morning, etc., and thus the group passed out in a body and left the house.

Temple himself was profoundly moved. The utter helplessness of the man; his abject and complete surrender to the demon which possessed him—all this appalled him. He had seen many drunken men in his time—roysterers and brawlers, most of them—but never one like Poe. The poet seemed to have lost his identity—nothing of the man of the world was left—in speech, thought, or movement.

When Harry re-entered, his uncle was sitting beside the poet, who had not yet addressed him a word; nor had he again raised his head. Every now and then the sound of an indrawn breath would escape Poe, as if hot tears were choking him.

St. George waved his hand meaningly.

“Tell Todd I'll ring for him when I want him, Harry,” he whispered, “and now do you go to sleep.” Then, pointing to the crouching man, “He must stay in my bed here to-night; I won't leave him. What a pity! O God! what a pity! Poor fellow—how sorry I am for him!”

Harry was even more affected. Terrified and awestruck, he mounted the stairs to his room, locked his chamber door, and threw himself on his bed, his mother's and Kate's pleadings sounding in his ears, his mind filled with the picture of the poet standing erect with closed eyes, the prayer his mother had taught him falling from his lips. This, then, was what his mother and Kate meant—this—the greatest of all calamities—the overthrow of a MAN.

For the hundredth time he turned his wandering search-light into his own heart. The salient features of his own short career passed in review: the fluttering of the torn card as it fell to the floor; the sharp crack of Willits's pistol; the cold, harsh tones of his father's voice when he ordered him from the house; Kate's dear eyes streaming with tears and her uplifted hands—their repellent palms turned toward him as she sobbed—“Go away—my heart is broken!” And then the refrain of the poem which of late had haunted him night and day:

“Disaster following fast and following faster,
Till his song one burden bore,”

and then the full, rich tones of Poe's voice pleading with his Maker:

“Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us.”

Yes:—Disaster had followed fast and faster. But why had it followed him? What had he done to bring all this misery upon himself? How could he have acted differently? Wherein had he broken any law he had been taught to uphold, and if he had broken it why should he not be forgiven? Why, too, had Kate turned away from him? He had promised her never to drink again; he had kept that promise, and, God helping him, he would always keep it, as would any other man who had seen what he had just seen to-night. Perhaps he had trespassed in the duel, and yet he would fight Willits again were the circumstances the same, and in this view Uncle George upheld him. But suppose he had trespassed—suppose he had committed a fault—as his father declared—why should not Kate forgive him? She had forgiven Willits, who was drunk, and yet she would not forgive him, who had not allowed a drop to pass his lips since he had given her his promise. How could she, who could do no wrong, expect to be forgiven herself when she not only shut her door in his face, but left him without a word or a line? How could his father ask forgiveness of his God when he would not forgive his son? Why were these two different from his mother and his Uncle George, and even old Alec—who had nothing but sympathy for him? Perhaps his education and training had been at fault. Perhaps, as Richard Horn had said, his standards of living were old-fashioned and quixotic.

Only when the gray dawn stole in through the small window of his room did the boy fall asleep.

CHAPTER XVI

Not only Kennedy Square, but Moorlands, rang with accounts of the dinner and its consequences. Most of those who were present and who witnessed the distressing spectacle had only words of sympathy for the unfortunate man—his reverent manner, his contrite tones, and abject humiliation disarming their criticism. They felt that some sudden breaking down of the barriers of his will, either physical or mental, had led to the catastrophe. Richard Horn voiced the sentiments of Poe's sympathizers when, in rehearsing the episode the next afternoon at the club, he had said:

“His pitiable condition, gentlemen, was not the result of debauchery. Poe neither spoke nor acted like a drunken man; he spoke and acted like a man whom a devil had overcome. It was pathetic, gentlemen, and it was heart-rending—really the most pitiful sight I ever remember witnessing. His anguish, his struggle, and his surrender I shall never forget; nor will his God—for the prayer came straight from his heart.”

“I don't agree with you, Horn,” interrupted Clayton. “Poe was plumb drunk! It is the infernal corn whiskey he drinks that puts the devil in him. It may be he can't get anything else, but it's a damnable concoction all the same. Kennedy has about given him up—told me so yesterday, and when Kennedy gives a fellow up that's the last of him.”

“Then I'm ashamed of Kennedy,” retorted Horn. “Any man who can write as Poe does should be forgiven, no matter what he does—if he be honest. There's nothing so rare as genius in this world, and even if his flame does burn from a vile-smelling wick it's a flame, remember!—and one that will yet light the ages. If I know anything of the literature of our time Poe will live when these rhymers like Mr. Martin Farquhar Tupper,

whom everybody is talking about, will be forgotten. Poe's possessed of a devil, I tell you, who gets the better of him once in a while—it did the night of St. George's dinner."

"Very charitable in you, Richard," exclaimed Pancoast, another dissenter—"and perhaps it will be just as well for his family, if he has any, to accept your view—but, devil or no devil, you must confess, Horn, that it was pretty hard on St. George. If the man has any sense of refinement—and he must have from the way he writes—the best way out of it is for him to own up like a man and say that Guy's barkeeper filled him too full of raw whiskey, and that he didn't come to until it was too late—that he was very sorry, and wouldn't do it again. That's what I would have done, and that's what you, Richard, or any other gentleman, would have done."

Others, who got their information second hand, followed the example of St. George's guests censuring or excusing the poet in accordance with their previous likes or dislikes. The "what-did-I-tell-yous"—Bowdoin among them—and there were several—broke into roars of laughter when they learned what had happened in the Temple mansion. So did those who had not been invited, and who still felt some resentment at St. George's oversight.

Another group; and these were also to be found at the club—thought only of St. George—old Murdock, voicing their opinions when he said: "Temple laid himself out, so I hear, on that dinner, and some of us know what that means. And a dinner like that, remember, counts with St. George. In the future it will be just as well to draw the line at poets as well as actors."

The Lord of Moorlands had no patience with any of their views. Whether Poe was a drunkard or not did not concern him in the least. What did trouble him was the fact that St. George's cursed independence had made him so far forget himself and his own birth and breeding as to place a chair at his table for a man in every way beneath him. Hospitality of that kind was understandable in men like Kennedy and Latrobe—one the leading literary light of his State, whose civic duties brought him in contact with all classes—the other a distinguished man of letters as well as being a poet, artist, and engineer, who naturally touched the sides of many personalities. So, too, might Richard Horn be excused for stretching the point—he being a scientist whose duty it was to welcome to his home many kinds of people—this man Morse among them, with his farcical telegraph; a man in the public eye who seemed to be more or less talked about in the press, but of whom he himself knew nothing, but why St. George Temple, who in all probability had never read a line of Poe's or anybody else's poetry in his life, should give this sot a dinner, and why such sane gentlemen as Seymour, Clayton, and Pancoast should consider it an honor to touch elbows with him, was as unaccountable as it was incredible.

Furthermore—and this is what rankled deepest in his heart—St. George was subjecting his only son, Harry, to corrupting influences, and at a time, too, when the boy needed the uplifting examples of all that was highest in men and manners.

"And you tell me, Alec," he blazed out on hearing the details, "that the fellow never appeared until the dinner was all over and then came in roaring drunk?"

"Well, sah, I ain't yered nothin' 'bout de roarin', but he suttinly was 'how-come-ye-so'—fer dey couldn't git 'im upstairs 'less dey toted him on dere backs. Marse George Temple gin him his own baid an' sot up mos' ob de night, an' dar he stayed fur fo' days till he come to. Dat's what Todd done tol' me, an' I reckon Todd knows."

The colonel was in his den when this conversation took place. He was generally to be found there since the duel. Often his wife, or Alec, or some of his neighbors would surprise him buried in his easy-chair, an unopened book in his hand, his eyes staring straight ahead as if trying to grasp some problem which repeatedly eluded him. After the episode at the club he became more absorbed than ever. It was that episode, indeed, which had vexed him most. Not that St. George's tongue-lashing worried him—nor did Harry's blank look of amazement linger in his thoughts. St. George, he had to confess to himself as he battled with the questions, was the soul of honor and had not meant to insult him. It was Temple's love for Harry which had incited the quixotic onslaught, for, as he knew, St. George dearly loved the boy, and this in itself wiped all resentment from the autocrat's heart. As to Harry's attitude toward himself, this he continued to reason was only a question of time. That young upstart had not learned his lesson yet—a harsh lesson, it was true, and one not understood by the world at large—but then the world was not responsible for his son's bringing up. When the boy had learned it, and was willing to acknowledge the error of his ways, then, perhaps, he might kill the fatted calf—that is, of course, if the prodigal should return on all fours and with no stilted and untenable ideas about his rights—ideas that St. George, of course, was instilling into him every chance he got.

So far, however, he had had to admit to himself that while he had kept steady watch of the line of hills skirting his mental horizon, up to the present moment no young gentleman in a dilapidated suit of clothes, inverted waist measure, and lean legs had shown himself above the sky line. On the contrary, if all reports were true—and Alec omitted no opportunity to keep him advised of Marse Harry's every movement—the young Lord of Moorlands was having the time of his life, even if his sweetheart had renounced him and his father forced him into exile. Not only had he found a home and many comforts at Temple's—being treated as an honored guest alongside of such men as Kennedy and Latrobe, Pancoast, and the others, but now that St. George had publicly declared him to be his heir, these distinctive marks of his approbation were likely to continue. Nor could he interfere, even if he wished to—which, of course, he did not, and never could so long as he lived.... "Damn him!" etc., etc. And with this the book would drop from his lap and he begin pacing the floor, his eyes on the carpet, his broad shoulders bent in his anxiety to solve the problem which haunted him night and day:—how to get Harry back under his roof and not yield a jot or tittle of his pride or will—or, to be more explicit, now that the mountain would not come to Mahomet, how could Mahomet get over to the mountain?

His friend and nearest neighbor, John Gorsuch, who was also his man of business, opened the way. The financier's clerk had brought him a letter, just in by the afternoon coach, and with a glance at its contents the shrewd old fellow had at once ordered his horse and set out for Moorlands, some two miles distant. Nor did

he draw rein or break gallop until he threw the lines to a servant beside the lower step of the colonel's porch.

“It's the Patapsco again! It will close its doors before the week is out!” he cried, striding into the library, where the colonel, who had just come in from inspecting a distant field on his estate, sat dusting his riding-boots with his handkerchief.

“Going to stop payment! Failed! What the devil do you mean, John?”

“I mean just what I say! Everything has gone to bally-hack in the city. Here's a letter I have just received from Harding—he's on the inside, and knows. He thinks there's some crooked business about it; they have been loaning money on all sorts of brick-bats, he says, and the end has come, or will to-morrow. He wanted to post me in time.”

The colonel tossed his handkerchief on his writing-table: “Who will be hurt?” he asked hurriedly, ignoring the reference to the dishonesty of the directors.

“Oh!—a lot of people. Temple, I know, keeps his account there. He was short of cash a little while ago, for young Pawson, who has his law office in the basement of his house, offered me a mortgage on his Kennedy Square property, but I hadn't the money at the time and didn't take it. If he got it at last—and he paid heavily for it if he did—the way things have been going—and if he put that money in the Patapsco, it will be a bad blow to him. Harry, I hear, is with him—so I thought you ought to know.”

Rutter had given a slight start at the mention of Temple's name among the crippled, and a strange glitter still lingered in his eyes.

“Then I presume my son is dependent on a beggar,” he exclaimed, rising from his seat, stripping off his brown velveteen riding-jacket and hanging it in a closet behind his chair.

“Yes, it looks that way.”

Gorsuch was watching the colonel closely. He had another purpose in making his breakneck ride. He didn't have a dollar in the Patapsco, and he knew the colonel had not; he, like himself, was too shrewd a man to be bitten twice by the same dog; but he had a large interest in Harry and would leave no stone unturned to bring father and son together.

The colonel again threw himself into his chair, stretched out his slender, well-turned legs, crooked one of his russet-leather riding-boots to be sure the spurs were still in place, and said slowly—rather absently, as if the subject did not greatly interest him:

“Patapsco failed and St. George a beggar, eh?—Too bad!—too bad!” Then some disturbing suspicions must have entered his head, for he roused himself, looked at Gorsuch keenly, and asked in a searching tone: “And you came over full tilt, John, to tell me this?”

“I thought you might help. St. George needs all the friends he's got if this is true—and it looks to me as if it was,” answered Gorsuch in a casual way.

Rutter relaxed his gaze and resumed his position. Had his suspicions been correct that Gorsuch's interest in Harry was greater than his interest in the bank's failure, he would have resented it even from John Gorsuch.

Disarmed by the cool, unflinching gaze of his man of business, his mind again took up in review all the incidents connected with St. George and his son, and what part each had played in them.

That Temple—good friend as he had always been—had thwarted him in every attempt to bring about a reconciliation between himself and Harry, had been apparent from the very beginning of the difficulty. Even the affair at the club showed it. This would have ended quite differently—and he had fully intended it should—had not St. George, with his cursed officiousness, interfered with his plans. For what he had really proposed to himself to do, on that spring morning when he had rolled up to the club in his coach, was to mount the steps, ignore his son at first, if he should run up against him—(and he had selected the very hour when he hoped he would run up against him)—and then, when the boy broke down, as he surely must, to forgive him like a gentleman and a Rutter, and this, too, before everybody. Seymour would see it—Kate would hear of it, and the honor of the Rutters remain unblemished. Moreover, this would silence once and for all those gabblers who had undertaken to criticise him for what they called his inhumanity in banishing this only son when he was only trying to bring up that child in the way he should go. Matters seemed to be coming his way. The failure of the Patapsco might be his opportunity. St. George would be at his wits' end; Harry would be forced to choose between the sidewalk and Moorlands, and the old life would go on as before.

All these thoughts coursed through his mind as he leaned back in his chair, his lips tight set, the jaw firm and determined—only the lids quivering as he mastered the tears that crept to their edges. Now and then, in his mental absorption, he would absently cross his legs only to straighten them out again, his state of mind an open book to Gorsuch, who had followed the same line of reasoning and who had brought the news himself that he might the better watch its effect.

“I'm surprised that Temple should select the Patapsco. It has never got over its last smash of four years ago,” Gorsuch at last remarked. He did not intend to let the topic drift away from Harry if he could help it.

“I am not surprised, John. St. George is the best fellow in the world, but he never lets anything work but his heart. When you get at the bottom of it you will find that he's backed up the bank because some poor devil of a teller or clerk, or may be some director, is his friend. That's enough for St. George, and further than that he never goes. He's thrown away two fortunes now—his grandmother's, which was small but sound—and his father's, which if he had attended to it would have kept him comfortable all his life.”

“You had some words at the club, I heard,” interjected Gorsuch.

“No, he had some words, I had a julep,” and the colonel smiled grimly.

“But you are still on good terms, are you not?”

“I am, but he isn't. But that is of no consequence. No man in his senses would ever get angry with St. George, no matter what he might say or do. He hasn't a friend in the world who could be so ill bred. And as to calling him out—you would as soon think of challenging your wife. St. George talks from his heart, never his head. I have loved him for thirty years and know exactly what I am talking about—and yet let me tell you, Gorsuch, that with all his qualities—and he is the finest-bred gentleman I know—he can come closer to being

a natural born fool than any man of his years and position in Kennedy Square. This treatment of my son—whom I am trying to bring up a gentleman—is one proof of it, and this putting all his eggs into one basket—and that a rotten basket—is another."

"Well, then—if that is your feeling about it, colonel, why not go and see him? As I have said, he needs all the friends he's got at a time like this." If he could bring the two men together the boy might come home. Not to be able to wave back to Harry as he dashed past on Spitfire, had been a privation which the whole settlement had felt. "That is, of course," he continued, "if St. George Temple would be willing to receive you. He would be—wouldn't he?"

"I don't know, John—and I don't care. If I should make up my mind to go—remember, I said 'IF'—I'd go whether he liked it or not."

He HAD made up his mind—had made it up at the precise moment the announcement of the bank's failure and St. George's probable ruin had dropped from Gorsuch's lips—but none of this must Gorsuch suspect. He would still be the doge and Virginius; he alone must be the judge of when and how and where he would show leniency. Generations of Rutters were behind him—this boy was in the direct line—connecting the past with the present—and on Colonel Talbot Rutter of Moorlands, and on no other, rested the responsibility of keeping the glorious name unsmirched.

Todd, with one of the dogs at his heels, opened the door for him, smothering a "Gor-a-Mighty!—sumpin's up fo' sho'!" when his hand turned the knob. He had heard the clatter of two horses and their sudden pull-up outside, and looking out, had read the situation at a glance. Old Matthew was holding the reins of both mounts at the moment, for the colonel always rode in state. No tying to hitching-posts or tree-boxes, or picking up of a loose negro to watch his restless steed when he had a stable full of thoroughbreds and quarters packed with grooms.

"Yes, Marse Colonel—yes, sah—Marse George is inside—yes, sah—but Marse Harry's out." He had not asked for Harry, but Todd wanted him to get all the facts in case there was to be another such scene as black John described had taken place at the club on the occasion of the colonel's last visit to the Chesapeake.

"Then I'll go in unannounced, and you need not wait, Todd."

St. George was in his arm-chair by the mantel looking over one of his heavy ducking-guns when the Lord of Moorlands entered. He was the last man in the world he expected to see, but he did not lose his self-control or show in any way his surprise. He was host, and Rutter was his guest; nothing else counted now.

St. George rose to his feet, laid the gun carefully on the table, and with a cold smile on his face—one of extreme courtesy—advanced to greet him.

"Ah, Talbot—it has been some time since I had this pleasure. Let me draw up a chair for you—I'll ring for Todd and—"

"No, St. George. I prefer to talk to you alone."

"Todd is never an interruption."

"He may be to-day. I have something to say to you—and I don't want either to be interrupted or misunderstood. You and I have known each other too many years to keep up this quarrel; I am getting rather sick of it myself."

St. George shrugged his shoulders, placed the gun carefully in the rack by the door, and maintained an attentive attitude. He would either fight or make peace, but he must first learn the conditions. In the meantime he would hold his peace.

Rutter strode past him to the fireplace, opened his riding-jacket, laid his whip on the mantel, and with his hands deep in his breeches pockets faced the room and his host, who had again taken his place by the table.

"The fact is, St. George, I have been greatly disturbed of late by reports which have reached me about my son. He is with you, I presume?"

St. George nodded.

Rutter waited for a verbal reply, and receiving none, forged on: "Very greatly disturbed; so much so that I have made an especial trip from Moorlands to call upon you and ascertain their truth."

Again St. George nodded, the smile—one of extreme civility now—still on his face. Then he added, flicking some stray grains of tobacco from his sleeve with his fingers: "That was very good of you, Talbot—but go on—I'm listening."

The colonel's eyes kindled. Temple's perfect repose—something he had not expected—was beginning to get on his nerves, He cleared his throat impressively and continued, his voice rising in intensity:

"Instead of leading the life of a young man brought up as a gentleman, I hear he is consorting with the lowest class of people here in your house—people who—"

"—Are my guests," interrupted St. George calmly—loosening the buttons of his coat in search of his handkerchief—there being more tobacco on his clothes than he had supposed.

"Yes, you have hit it exactly—your guests—and that is another thing I have come to tell you, for neither I nor your friends can understand how a man of your breeding should want to surround himself with—Is it necessary that you should understand, Talbot?"—same low, incisive but extremely civil voice, almost monotonous in its cadences. The cambric was in full play now.

"Of course it is necessary when it affects my own flesh and blood. You know as well as I do that this sot, Poe, is not a fit companion for a boy raised as my Harry has been—a man picked out of the gutter—his family a lot of play-actors—even worse, I hear. A fellow who staggers into your house dead drunk and doesn't sober up for a week! It's scandalous!"

Again St. George shrugged his shoulders, but one hand was tight shut this time, the steel claws protruding, the handkerchief alone saving their points from pressing into the palms.

"And is that what you came from Moorlands to tell me, Talbot?" remarked St. George casually, adjusting the lapels of his coat.

“Yes!” retorted Rutter—he was fast losing what was left of his self-control—“that and some other things! But we will attend to Harry first. You gave that boy shelter when—”

“Please state it correctly, Talbot. We can get on better if you stick to the facts.” The words came slowly, but the enunciation was as perfect as if each syllable had been parted with a knife. “I didn't give him shelter—I gave him a home—one you denied him. But go on—I prefer to hear you out.”

The colonel's eyes blazed. He had never seen St. George like this: it was Temple's hot outbursts that had made him so easy an adversary in their recent disputes.

“And you will please do the same, St. George,” he demanded in his most top-lofty tone, ignoring his opponent's denial. “You know perfectly well I turned him out of Moorlands because he had disgraced his blood, and yet you—my life-long friend—have had the bad taste to interfere and drag him down still lower, so that now, instead of coming to his senses and asking my pardon, he parades himself at the club and at your dinners, putting on the airs of an injured man.”

St. George drew himself up to his full height.

“Let us change the subject, Talbot, or we will both forget ourselves. If you have anything to say to me that will benefit Harry and settle the difficulty between him and you, I will meet you more than half-way, but I give you fair warning that the apology must come from you. You have—if you will permit me to say it in my own house—behaved more like a brute than a father. I told you so the night you turned him out in the rain for me to take care of, and I told you so again at the club when you tried to make a laughing-stock of him before your friends—and now I tell you so once more! Come!—let us drop the subject—what may I offer you to drink?—you must be rather chilled with your ride in.”

Rutter was about to flare out a denial when his better judgment got the best of him; some other tactics than the ones he had used must be brought into play. So far he had made but little headway against Temple's astounding coolness.

“And I am to understand, then, that you are going to keep him here?” he demanded, ignoring both his host's criticisms and his proffered hospitality.

“I certainly am”—he was abreast of him now, his eyes boring into his—“just as long as he wishes to stay, which I hope will be all his life, or until you have learned to be decent to him. And by decency, I mean companionship, and love, and tenderness—three things which your damned, high-toned notions have always deprived him of!” His voice was still under control, although the emphasis was unmistakable.

Rutter made a step forward, his eyes flashing, his teeth set:

“You have the impertinence, sir, to charge me with——”

“—Yes!—and it's true and you know it's true!”—the glance, steady as a rifle, had not wavered. “No, you needn't work yourself up into a passion—and as for your lordly, dictatorial airs, I am past the age when they affect me—keep them for your servants. By God!—what a farce it all is! Let us talk of something else—I am tired of it!”

The words cut like a whip, but the Lord of Moorlands had come to get his son, not to fight St. George. Their sting, however, had completely changed his plans. Only the club which Gorsuch had put into his hands would count now.

“Yes—a damnable farce!” he thundered, “and one played by a man with beggary staring him straight in the face, and yet to hear you talk one would think you were a Croesus! You mortgaged this house to get ready money, did you not?” He was not sure, but this was no time in which to split words.

St. George turned quickly: “Who told you that?”

“Is it true?”

“Yes! Do you suppose I would let Harry sneak around corners to avoid his creditors?”

The colonel gave an involuntary start, the blood mounting to the roots of his hair, and as suddenly paled:

“You tell me that—you dared to—pay Harry's debts?” he stammered in amazement.

“Dared!” retorted St. George, lifting his chin contemptuously. “Really, Talbot, you amuse me. When you set that dirty hound Gadgem on his trail, what did you expect me to do?—invite the dog to dinner?—or have him sleep in the house until I sold furniture enough to get rid of him?”

The colonel leaned back against the mantel's edge as if for support. All the fight was out of him. Not only was the situation greatly complicated, but he himself was his host's debtor. The seriousness of the whole affair confronted him. For a brief instant he gazed at the floor, his eyes on the hearthrug, “Have you any money left, St. George?” he asked. His voice was subdued enough now. Had he been his solicitor he could not have been more concerned.

“Yes, a few thousand,” returned St. George. He saw that some unexpected shot had hit the colonel, but he did not know he had fired it.

“Left over from the mortgage, I suppose?—less what you paid out for Harry?”

“Yes, left over from the mortgage, less what I paid Gadgem,” he bridled. “If you have brought any more of Harry's bills hand them out. Why the devil you ask, Talbot, is beyond my ken, but I have no objection to your knowing.”

Rutter waved his hand impatiently, with a deprecating gesture; such trifles were no longer important.

“You bank with the Patapsco, do you not?” he asked calmly. “Answer me, please, and don't think I'm trying to pry into your affairs. The matter is much more serious than you seem to think.” The tone was so sympathetic that St. George looked closer into his antagonist's face, trying to read the cause.

“Always with the Patapsco. I have kept my account there for years,” he rejoined simply. “Why do you want to know?”

“Because it has closed its doors—or will in a few hours. It is bankrupt!”

There was no malice in his tone, nor any note of triumph. That St. George had beggared himself to pay his son's debts had wiped that clear. He was simply announcing a fact that caused him the deepest concern.

St. George's face paled, and for a moment a peculiar choking movement started in his throat.

“Bankrupt!—the Patapsco! How do you know?” He had heard some ugly rumors at the club a few days before, but had dismissed them as part of Harding's croakings.

“John Gorsuch received a letter last night from one of the directors; there is no doubt of its truth. I have suspected its condition for some time, so has Gorsuch. This brought me here. You see now how impossible it is for my son to be any longer a burden on you.”

St. George walked slowly across the room and drawing out a chair settled himself to collect his thoughts the better;—he had remained standing as the better way to terminate the interview should he be compelled to exercise that right. The two announcements had come like successive blows in the face. If the news of the bank's failure was true he was badly, if not hopelessly, crippled—this, however, would wait, as nothing he might do could prevent the catastrophe. The other—Harry's being a burden to him—must be met at once.

He looked up and caught the colonel's eye scrutinizing his face.

“As to Harry's being a burden,” St. George said slowly, his lip curling slightly—“that is my affair. As to his remaining here, all I have to say is that if a boy is old enough to be compelled to pay his debts he is old enough to decide where he will live. You have yourself established that rule and it will be carried out to the letter.”

Rutter's face hardened: “But you haven't got a dollar in the world to spare!”

“That may be, but it doesn't altar the situation; it rather strengthens it.” He rose from his chair: “I think we are about through now, Talbot, and if you will excuse me I'll go down to the bank and see what is the matter. I will ring for Todd to bring your hat and coat.” He did not intend to continue the talk. There had just been uncovered to him a side of Talbot Rutter's nature which had shocked him as much as had the threatened loss of his money. To use his poverty as a club to force him into a position which would be dishonorable was inconceivable in a man as well born as his antagonist, but it was true: he could hardly refrain from telling him so. He had missed, it may be said, seeing another side—his visitor's sympathy for him in his misfortune. That, unfortunately, he did not see: fate often plays such tricks with us all.

The colonel stepped in front of him: his eyes had an ugly look in them—the note of sympathy was gone.

“One moment, St. George! How long you are going to keep up this fool game, I don't know; but my son stays here on one condition, and on one condition only, and you might as well understand it now. From this time on I pay his board. Do you for one instant suppose I am going to let you support him, and you a beggar?”

St. George made a lunge toward the speaker as if to strike him. Had Rutter fired point-blank at him he could not have been more astounded. For an instant he stood looking into his face, then whirled suddenly and swung wide the door.

“May I ask you, Talbot, to leave the room, or shall I? You certainly cannot be in your senses to make me a proposition like that. This thing has got to come to an end, and NOW! I wish you good-morning.”

The colonel lifted his hands in a deprecatory way.

“As you will, St. George.”

And without another word the baffled autocrat strode from the room.

CHAPTER XVII

There was no one at home when Harry returned except Todd, who, having kept his position outside the dining-room door during the heated encounter, had missed nothing of the interview. What had puzzled the darky—astounded him really—was that no pistol-shot had followed his master's denouncement and defiance of the Lord of Moorlands. What had puzzled him still more was hearing these same antagonists ten minutes later passing the time o' day, St. George bowing low and the colonel touching his hat as he passed out and down to where Matthew and his horses were waiting.

It was not surprising, therefore, that Todd's recital to Harry came in a more or less disjointed and disconnected form.

“You say, Todd,” he exclaimed in astonishment, “that my father was here!” Our young hero was convinced that the visit did not concern himself, as he was no longer an object of interest to any one at home except his mother and Alec.

“Dat he was, sah, an' b'ilin' mad. Dey bofe was, on'y Marse George lay low an' de colonel purty nigh rid ober de top ob de fence. Fust Marse George sass him an' den de colonel sass him back. Purty soon Marse George say he gwinter speak his min'—and he call de colonel a brute an' den de colonel riz up an' say Marse George was a beggar and a puttin' on airs when he didn't hab 'nough money to buy hisse'f a 'tater; an' den Marse George r'ared and pitched—Oh I tell ye he ken be mighty sof' and persimmony when he's tame—and he's mos' allers dat way—but when his dander's up, and it suttinly riz to-day, he kin make de fur fly. Dat's de time you wanter git outer de way or you'll git hurted.”

“Who did you say was the beggar?” It was all Greek to Harry.

“Why, Marse George was—he was de one what was gwine hongry. De colonel 'lowed dat de bank was busted an'—”

“What bank?”

“Why de 'Tapsco—whar Marse George keep his money. Ain't you see me comin' from dar mos' ebery day?”

“But it hasn't failed, has it?” He was still wondering what the quarrel was about.

“Wall, I dunno, but I reckon sumpin's de matter, for no sooner did de colonel git on his horse and ride away dan Marse George go git his hat and coat hisse'f and make tracks th'ou' de park by de short cut—and you

know he neber do dat 'cept when he's in a hurry, and den in 'bout a ha'f hour he come back ag'in lookin' like he'd seed de yahoo, only he was mad plump th'ou'; den he hollered for me quick like, and sont me down underneaf yere to Mr. Pawson to know was he in, and he was, and I done tol' him, and he's dar now. He ain't neber done sont me down dar 'cept once sence I been yere, and dat was de day dat Gadgem man come snuffin' roun'. Trouble comin'.”

Harry had now begun to take in the situation. It was evidently a matter of some moment or Pawson would not have been consulted.

“I'll go down myself, Todd,” he said with sudden resolve.

“Better lem'me tell him you're yere, Marse Harry.”

“No, I'll go now,” and he turned on his heel and descended the front steps.

On the street side of the house, level with the bricks, was a door opening into a low-ceiled, shabbily furnished room, where in the old days General Dorsey Temple, as has been said, shared his toddies with his cronies. There he found St. George seated at a long table piled high with law books and papers—the top covered with a green baize cloth embroidered with mice holes and decorated with ink stains. Beside him was a thin, light-haired, young man, with a long, flexible neck and abnormally high forehead, over-doming a shrewd but not unkindly face. The two were poring over a collection of papers.

The young lawyer rose to his feet, a sickly, deferential smile playing along his straight lips. Young aristocrats of Harry's blood and breeding did not often darken Pawson's door, and he was extremely anxious that his guest should in some way be made aware of his appreciation of that fact. St. George did not move, nor did he take any other notice of the boy's appearance than to fasten his eyes upon him for a moment in recognition of his presence.

But Harry could not wait.

“Todd has just told me, Uncle George, that”—he caught the grave expression on Temple's face—“Why!—Uncle George—there isn't anything the matter, is there? It isn't true that the—”

St. George raised his head: “What isn't true, Harry?”

“That the Patapsco Bank is in trouble?”

“No, I don't think so. The bank, so far as I know, is all right; it's the depositors who are in trouble,” and one of his quaint smiles lighted up his face.

“Broken!—failed!” cried Harry, still in doubt as to the extent of the catastrophe, but wishing to be sympathetic and proportionably astounded as any well-bred young man should be when his best friend was unhappy.

“I'm afraid it is, Harry—in fact I know it is—bankrupt in character as well as in balances—a bad-smelling, nasty mess, to tell you the truth. That's not only my own opinion, but the opinion of every man whom I have seen, and there was quite an angry mob when I reached the teller's window this morning. That is your own opinion also, is it not, Mr. Pawson?—your legal summing up, I mean.”

The young attorney stretched out his spare colorless hands; opened wide his long, double-jointed fingers; pressed their ten little cushions together, and see-sawing the bunch in front of his concave waistcoat, answered in his best professional voice:

“As to being bankrupt of funds I should say there was no doubt of that being their condition; as to any criminal intent or practices—that, of course, gentlemen”—and he shrugged his shoulders in a non-committal, non-actionable way—“is not for me to decide.”

“But you think it will be months, and perhaps years, before the depositors get a penny of their money—do you not?” persisted St. George.

Again Pawson performed the sleight-of-hand trick, and again he was non-committal—a second shrug alone expressing his views, the performance ending by his pushing a wooden chair in the direction of Harry, who was still on his feet.

Harry settled himself on its edge and fixed his eyes on his uncle. St. George again became absorbed in the several papers, Pawson once more assisting him, the visitor having now been duly provided for.

This raking of ashes in the hope of finding something of value unscorched was not a pleasant task for the young lawyer. He had, years before, conceived the greatest admiration for his landlord and was never tired of telling his associates of how kind and considerate St. George had always been, and of his patience in the earlier days of his lease, Mr. Temple often refusing the rent until he was quite ready to pay it. He took a certain pride, too, in living under the same roof, so to speak, with one universally known as a gentleman of the old school, whose birth, education, and habits made him the standard among his fellows—a man without pretence or sham, living a simple and wholesome life; with dogs, guns, priceless Madeira and Port, as well as unlimited clothes of various patterns adapted to every conceivable service and function—to say nothing of his being part of the best society that Kennedy Square could afford.

Even to bow to his distinguished landlord as he was descending his front steps was in itself one of his greatest pleasures. That he might not miss it, he would peer from behind his office shutters until the shapely legs of his patron could be seen between the twisted iron railing. Then appearing suddenly and with assumed surprise, he would lift his hat with so great a flourish that his long, thin arms and body were jerked into semaphore angles, his face meanwhile beaming with ill-concealed delight.

Should any one of St. George's personal friends accompany him—men like Kennedy, or General Hardisty, or some well-known man from the Eastern Shore—one of the Dennises, or Joyneses, or Irvings—the pleasure was intensified, the incident being of great professional advantage. “I have just met old General Hardisty,” he would say—“he was at our house,” the knowing ones passing a wink around, and the uninitiated having all the greater respect and, therefore, all the greater confidence in that rising young firm of “Pawson & Pawson, Attorneys and Counsellors at Law—Wills drawn and Estates looked after.”

That this rarest of gentlemen, of all men in the world, should be made the victim of a group of schemers who had really tricked him of almost all that was left of his patrimony, and he a member of his own

profession, was to Pawson one of the great sorrows of his life. That he himself had unwittingly helped in its culmination made it all the keener. Only a few weeks had passed since that eventful day when St. George had sent Todd down to arrange for an interview, an event which was followed almost immediately by that gentleman in person. He remembered his delight at the honor conferred upon him; he recalled how he had spent the whole of that and the next day in the attempt to negotiate the mortgage on the old home at a reasonable rate of interest; he recalled, too, how he could have lowered the rate had St. George allowed him more time. “No, pay it and get rid of them!” St. George had said, the “them” being part of the very accounts over which the two were poring. And his patron had showed the same impatience when it came to placing the money in the bank. Although his own lips were sealed professionally by reason of the interests of another client, he had begged St. George, almost to the verge of interference, not to give it to the Patapsco, until he had been silenced with: “Have them put it to my credit, sir. I have known every member of that bank for years.”

All these things were, of course, unknown to Harry, the ultimate beneficiary. Who had filled the bucket, and how and why, were unimportant facts to him. That it was full, and ready for his use, brought with it the same sense of pleasure he would have felt on a hot day at Moorlands when he had gone to the old well, drawn up the ice-cold water, and, plunging in the sweet-smelling gourd, had drank to his heart's content.

This was what wells were made for; and so were fathers, and big, generous men like his Uncle George, who had dozens of friends ready to cram money into his pocket for him to hand over to whoever wanted it and without a moment's hesitation—just as Slater had handed him the money he needed when Gilbert wanted it in a hurry.

Nor could it be expected that Harry, even with the examination of St. George's accounts with the Patapsco and other institutions going on under his very eyes, understood fully just what a bank failure really meant. Half a dozen banks, he remembered, had gone to smash some few years before, sending his father to town one morning at daylight, where he stayed for a week, but no change, so far as he could recall, had happened because of it at Moorlands. Indeed, his father had bought a new coach for his mother the very next week, out of what he had “saved from the wreck,” so he had told her.

It was not until the hurried overhauling of a mass of papers beneath his uncle's hand, and the subsequent finding of a certain stray sheet by Pawson, that the boy was aroused to a sense of the gravity of the situation. And even then his interest did not become acute until, the missing document identified, St. George had turned to Pawson and, pointing to an item halfway down the column, had said in a lowered tone, as if fearing to be overheard:

“You have the receipts, have you not, for everything on this list?—Slater's account too, and Hampson's?”

“They are in the file beside you, sir.”

“Well, that's a comfort, anyhow.”

“And the balance”—here he examined a small book which lay open beside him—“amounting to”—he paused—“is of course locked up in their vaults?”

Harry had craned his head in instant attention. His quickened ears had caught two familiar names. It was Slater who had loaned him the five hundred dollars which he gave to Gilbert, which his father had commended him for borrowing; and it was Hampson who had sold him the wretched horse that had stumbled and broken his leg and had afterwards to be shot.

“Slater, did you say, Uncle George—and Hampson? Aren't they my old accounts?”

“Quite right, Mr. Rutter—quite right, sir.” St. George tried to stop him with a frown, but Pawson's face was turned towards Harry and he failed to get the signal. “Quite right, and quite lucky; they were both important items in Mr. Gadgem's list, and both checks passed through the bank and were paid before the smash came.”

The tones of Pawson's voice, the twisting together of his bony hands in a sort of satisfied contentment, and the weary look on his uncle's face were the opening of so many windows in the boy's brain. At the same instant one of those creepy chills common to a man when some hitherto undiscovered vista of impending disaster widens out before him, started at the base of Harry's spine, crept up his shoulder-blades, shivered along his arms, and lost itself in his benumbed fingers. This was followed by a lump in his throat that nearly strangled him. He left his chair and touched Pawson on the shoulder.

“Does this mean, Mr. Pawson—this money being locked up in the bank vaults and not coming out for months—and may be never—does it mean that Mr. Temple—well, that Uncle George—won't have enough money to live on?” There was an anxious, vibrant tone in Harry's voice that aroused St. George to a sense of the boy's share in the calamity and the privations he must suffer because of it. Pawson hesitated and was about to belittle the gravity of the situation when St. George stopped him.

“Yes—tell him—tell him everything, I have no secrets from Mr. Rutter. Stop!—I'll tell him. It means, Harry”—and a brave smile played about his lips—“that we will have to live on hog and hominy, may be, or pretty nigh it—certainly for a while—not bad, old fellow, when you get accustomed to it. Aunt Jemima makes very good hominy and—”

He stopped; the brave smile had faded from his face.

“By Jove!—that's something I didn't think of!—What will I do with the dear old woman—It would break her heart—and Todd?”

Here was indeed something on which he had not counted! For him to forego the luxuries that enriched his daily life was easy—he had often in his hunting trips lived for weeks on sweet potato and a handful of cornmeal, and slept on the bare ground with only a blanket over him, but that his servants should be reduced to similar privations suggested possibilities which appalled him. For the first time since the cruel announcement fell from Rutter's lips the real situation, with all that it meant to his own future and those dependent upon him, stared him in the face.

He looked up and caught Harry's anxious eyes scanning his own. His old-time, unruffled spirit came to his assistance.

“No, son!” he cried in his cheeriest voice, springing to his feet—“no, we won't worry. It will all come out

right—we'll buckle down to it together, you and I. Don't take it too much to heart—we'll get on somehow."

But the boy was not reassured; in fact, he had become more anxious than ever. Not only did the chill continue, but the lump in his throat grew larger every minute.

"But, Uncle George—you told me you borrowed the money to pay those bills my father sent me. And will you now have to pay that back as well?" He did not ask of whom he had borrowed it, nor on what security, nor would either Pawson or his uncle have told him, that being a confidential matter.

"Well, that depends, Harry; but we won't have to pay it right away, which is one comfort. And then again, I can go back to the law. I have yet to make my maiden speech before a jury, but I can do it. Think of it!—everybody in tears, the judge mopping his eyes—court-room breathless. Oh, you just wait until your old uncle gets on his feet before a bench and jury. Come along, old fellow—let us go up into the house." Then in a serious tone—his back to Harry—"Pawson, please bring the full accounts with you in the morning, and now let me thank you for your courtesy. You have been extremely civil, sir, and I appreciate it most highly."

When they had reached the front walk and were about to climb the immaculate steps, St. George, still determined to divert the boy's thoughts from his own financial straits, said with a laugh:

"Todd told you, of course, about your father paying me a visit this morning, did he not?"

"Oh, yes!—a most extraordinary account. You must have enjoyed it," replied Harry, trying to fall into his uncle's mood, his heart growing heavier every moment. "What did he want?"

One of St. George's heat-lightning smiles played over his face: "He wanted two things. He first wanted you, and then he wanted a receipt for a month's board—YOUR board, remember! He went away without either."

A new perspective suddenly opened up in Harry's mind; one that had a gleam of sunshine athwart it.

"But, Uncle George!" he burst out—"don't forget that my father owes you all the money you paid for me! That, of course, will eventually come back to you." This came in a tone of great relief, as if the money was already in his hand.

St. George's face hardened: "None of it will come back to me," he rejoined in a positive tone. "He doesn't owe me one single penny and he never will. That money he owes to you. Whatever you may happen to owe me can wait until you are able to pay it. And now while I am talking about it, there is another thing your father owes you, and that is an humble apology, and that he will pay one of these days in tears and agony. You are neither a beggar nor a cringing dog, and you never will be so long as I can help it!" He stopped, rested his hand on the boy's shoulder, and with a quiver in his voice added:

"Your hand, my son. Short commons after this, may be, but we will make the fight together."

When the two passed through the front door and stepped into the dining-room they found it filled with gentlemen—friends who had heard of the crash and who had come either to extend their sympathy or offer their bank accounts. They had heard of the catastrophe at the club and had instantly left their seats and walked across the park in a body.

To one and all St. George gave a warm pressure of the hand and a bright smile. Had he been the master of ceremonies at a state reception he could not have been more self-possessed or more gallant; his troubles were for himself, never for his guests.

"All in a lifetime—but I am not worrying. The Patapsco pulled out once before and it may again. My only regret is that I cannot, at least for a time, have as many of you as I would wish under my mahogany. But don't let us borrow any trouble; certainly not to-day. Todd, get some glasses and bring me that bottle of Madeira—the one there on the sideboard!" Here he took the precious fluid from Todd's hand and holding high the crusted bottle said with a dry smile—one his friends knew when his irony was aroused: "That wine, gentlemen, saw the light at a time when a man locked his money in an iron box to keep outside thieves from stealing it; to-day he locks his money in a bank's vault and locks the thieves in with it. Extraordinary, is it not, how we gentlemen trust each other? Here, Todd, draw the cork!... Slowly.... Now hand me the bottle—yes—Clayton, that's the same wine that you and Kennedy liked so much the night we had Mr. Poe with us. It is really about all there is left of my father's Black Warrior of 1810. I thought it was all gone, but Todd found two more the other day, one of which I sent to Kennedy. This is the other. Kennedy writes me he is keeping his until we can drink it together. Is everybody's glass full? Then my old toast if you will permit me: 'Here's to love and laughter, and every true friend of my true friend my own!'"

Before the groups had dispersed Harry had the facts in his possession—principally from Judge Pancoast, who gave him a full account of the bank's collapse, some papers having been handed up to him on the bench that morning. Summed up, his uncle was practically ruined—and he, Harry, was the cause of it—the innocent cause, perhaps, but the cause all the same: but for his father's cruelty and his own debts St. George would never have mortgaged his home. That an additional sum—his uncle's entire deposit—had been swallowed up in the crash was but part of the same misfortune. Poe's lines were true, then—never so true as now:

"Some unhappy master whom unmerciful disaster Followed fast and followed faster..."

This, then, was ever after to be his place in life—to bring misery wherever he went.

He caught up his hat and walked through the park beside the judge, hoping for some further details of his uncle's present plight and future condition, but the only thing his Honor added to what he already knew was his wonderment over the fact that St. George, having no immediate use for the money except to pay his bills, should have raised so large a sum on a mortgage instead of borrowing it from his friends. It was here that Harry's heart gave a bound:—no one, then, but his uncle, Pawson, and himself knew that he alone was responsible for the catastrophe! That his father should have learned of his share in it did not enter the boy's head.

Todd answered his knock on his return, and in reply to his inquiry informed him that he must not sit up, as "Marse George" had left word that he would be detained until late at a meeting of the creditors of the bank.

And so the unhappy lad, his supper over, sought his bed and, as had occurred more than once before, spent the earlier hours of the night gazing at the ceiling and wondering what would become of him.

CHAPTER XVIII

With the breaking of the dawn Harry's mind was made up. Before the sun was an hour high he had dressed hurriedly, stolen downstairs so as to wake no one, and closing the front door softly behind him had taken the long path through the park in the direction of the wharves. Once there, he made the rounds of the shipping offices from Light Street wharf to the Falls—and by the time St. George had finished dressing—certainly before he was through his coffee—had entered the name of Henry Rutter on two sets of books—one for a position as supercargo and the other, should nothing better be open, as common seaman. All he insisted upon was that the ship should sail at once. As to the destination, that was of no consequence, nor did the length of the voyage make any difference. He remembered that his intimate friend, Gilbert, had some months before gone as supercargo to China, his father wanting him to see something of the world; and if a similar position were open he could, of course, give references as to his character—a question the agent asked him—but, then, Gilbert had a father to help him. Should no such position be available, he would ship before the mast, or serve as cook or cabin-boy, or even scullion—but he would not live another day or hour dependent on his dear Uncle George, who had impoverished himself in his behalf.

He selected the sea instead of going into the army as a common soldier because the sea had always appealed to him. He loved its freedom and its dangers. Then again, he was young and strong—could climb like a cat—sail a boat—swim—Yes!—the sea was the place! He could get far enough away behind its horizons to hide the struggle he must make to accomplish the one purpose of his life—the earning of his debt.

Filled with this idea he began to perfect his plans, determining to take no one into his confidence until the day before the ship was ready to sail. He would then send for his mother and Alec—bring them all down to St. George's house and announce his intention. That was the best and wisest way. As for Kate—who had now been at home some weeks—he would pour out his heart to her in a letter. This was better than an interview, which she would doubtless refuse:—a letter she would be obliged to read and, perhaps, answer. As for his dear Uncle George—it would be like tearing his heart out to leave him, but this wrench had to be met and it was best to do it quickly and have done with it.

When this last thought took possession a sudden faintness crept over him. How could he leave his uncle? What St. George was to him no one but himself knew—father, friend, comrade, adviser—standard of men and morals—all and more was his beloved uncle. No thought of his heart but he had given him, and never once had he been misunderstood. He could put his arm about his uncle's neck as he would about his mother's and not be thought effeminate or childish. And the courtesy and dignity and fairness with which he had been treated; and the respect St. George showed him—and he only a boy: compelling his older men friends to do the same. Never letting him feel that any foolish act of his young life had been criticised, or that any one had ever thought the less of him because of them.

Breakfast over, during which no allusion was made either to what St. George had accomplished at the conference of creditors the night before, or to Harry's early rising—the boy made his way into the park and took the path he loved. It was autumn, and the mild morning air bespoke an Indian summer day. Passing beneath the lusty magnolias, which flaunted here and there their glossy leaves, he paused under one of the big oaks, whose branches, stripped of most of their foliage, still sheltered a small, vine-covered arbor where he and Kate had often sat—indeed, it was within its cool shade that he had first told her of his love. Here he settled himself on a small wooden bench outside the retreat and gave his thoughts full rein—not to repine, nor to revive his troubles, which he meant to put behind him—but to plan out the letter he was to write Kate. This must be clear and convincing and tell the whole story of his heart. That he might empty it the better he had chosen this place made sacred by her presence. Then again, the park was generally deserted at this hour—the hour between the passing of the men of business and the coming of the children and nurses—and he would not be interrupted—certainly not before this arbor—one off by itself and away from passers-by.

He seated himself on the bench, his eyes overlooking the park. All the hours he had passed with Kate beneath the wide-spreading trees rose in his mind; the day they had read aloud to each other, her pretty feet tucked under her so that the dreadful ants couldn't touch her dainty stockings; the morning when she was late and he had waited and fumed stretching minutes into hours in his impatience; that summer night when the two had hidden behind the big oak so that he could kiss her good-night and none of the others see.

With these memories stirring, his letter was forgotten, and his head dropped upon his breast, as if the weight of all he had lost was greater than he could bear. Grasping his walking-stick the tighter he began tracing figures in the gravel, his thoughts following each line. Suddenly his ears caught the sound of a quick step—one he thought strangely familiar.

He raised his eyes.

Kate had passed him and had given no sign of her presence!

He sprang from his seat:

“Kate!—KATE!—Are you going to treat me as my father treated me! Don't, please!—You'll never see me again—but don't cut me like that: I have never done anything but love you!”

The girl came to a halt, but she did not turn her head, nor did she answer.

“Please, Kate—won't you speak to me? It may be the last time I shall ever see you. I am going away from Kennedy Square. I was going to write you a letter; I came out here to think of what I ought to say—”

She raised her head and half turned her trembling body so that she could see his face, her eyes reading his.

“I didn't think you wanted me to speak to you or you would have looked up.”

“I didn't see you until you had passed. Can't we sit down here?—no one will see us.”

She suffered him to take her hand and lead her to the bench. There she sat, her eyes still searching his face—a wondering, eager look, discovering every moment some old remembered spot—an eyebrow, or the line at

the corner of the mouth, or the round of the cheek—each and every one bringing back to her the days that were past and gone never to return.

“You are going away?” she said at last—“why? Aren't you happy with Uncle George? He would miss you, I am sure.” She had let the scarf fall from her shoulders as she spoke, bringing into view the full round of her exquisite throat. He had caught its flash, but he could not trust himself to look the closer.

“Not any more than I shall miss him,” he rejoined sadly; “but he has lost almost everything he had in the bank failure and I cannot have him support me any longer—so I am going to sea.”

Kate started forward and laid her hand on his wrist: “To sea!—in a ship! Where?” The inquiry came with such suddenness and with so keen a note of pain in her voice that Harry's heart gave a bound. It was not St. George's losses then she was thinking of—she was thinking of him! He raised his eyes quickly and studied her face the closer; then his heart sank again. No!—he was wrong—there was only wonder in her gaze; only her usual curiosity to know every detail of what was going on around her.

With a sigh he resumed his bent position, talking to the end of his walking-stick tracing figures in the gravel: “I shall go to Rio, probably,” he continued in the same despondent tone—“or China. That's why I called after you. I sail day after to-morrow—Saturday at the latest—and it may be a good many years before I get back again, and so I didn't want to go, Kate, without telling you that—that—I forgive you for everything you have done to me—and whether you forgive me or not, I have kept my promises to you, and I will always keep them as long as I live.”

“What does dear Uncle George think of it?” She too was addressing the end of the stick; gaining time to make up her mind what to do and say. The old wound, of course, could not be opened, but she might save him and herself from fresh ones.

“He doesn't know I am going; nobody knows but you. I have been a curse to every one who has been kind to me, and I am going now where there will be nobody but strangers about me. To leave Uncle George breaks my heart, but so does it break my heart to leave my precious mother and dear old Alec, who cries all the time and has now taken to his bed, I hear.”

She waited, but her name was not added to the list, nor did he raise his head.

“I deserve it all, I suspect,” he went on, “or it wouldn't be sent to me; but it's over now. If I ever come back it will be when I am satisfied with myself; if I never come back, why then my former hard luck has followed me—that's all. And now may I talk to you, Kate, as I used to do sometimes?” He straightened up, threw down his cane, and turned his shoulders so he could look her squarely in the eyes. “If I say anything that offends you you can get up and walk away and I won't follow you, nor will I add another word. You may never see me again, and if it is not what I ought to say, you can forget it all when I am gone. Kate!”—he paused, and for a moment it was all he could do to control himself. “What I want to tell you first is this—that I haven't had a happy day or hour since that night on the stairs in my father's house. Whether I was right or wrong I don't know; what followed is what I couldn't help, but that part I don't regret, and if any one should behave to you as Willits did I would do it over again. What I do regret is the pain it has caused you. And now here comes this awful sorrow to Uncle George, and I am the cause of that too.”

She turned her face quickly, the color leaving her cheeks as if alarmed. Had he been behaving badly again? But he swept it away with his next sentence.

“You see, my father refused to pay any of the bills I owed and Uncle George paid them for me—and I can't have that go on a day longer—certainly not now.”

Kate's shoulders relaxed. A sigh of relief spent itself; Harry was still an honest gentleman, whatever else he might have done!

“And now comes the worst of it, Kate.” His voice sank almost to a whisper, as if even the birds should not hear this part of his confession: “Yes—the worst of it—that I have had all this to suffer—all this misery to endure—all these insults of my father to bear without you! Always, before, we have talked things out together; then you were shut away and I could only look up at your windows and rack my brain wondering where you were and what you were doing. It's all over now—you love somebody else—but I shall never love anybody else: I can't! I don't want to! You are the last thing I kiss before I close my eyes; I shut them and kiss only the air—but it is your lips I feel; and you are the first thing I open them upon when I wake. It will always be so, Kate—you are my body, my soul, and my life. I shall never have you again, I know, but I shall have your memory, and that is sweeter and more precious to me than all else in the world!”

“Harry!” There was a strange cadence in her voice—not of self-defence—not of recrimination—only of overwhelming pity: “Don't you think that I too have had my troubles? Do you think it was nothing to me to love you as I did and have—” She stopped, drew in her breath as if to bolster up some inward resolution, and then with a brave lift of the head added: “No, I won't go into that—not to-day.”

“Yes—tell me all of it—you can't hurt me more than you have done. But you may be right—no, we won't talk of that part of it. And now, Kate, I won't ask you to stay any longer; I am glad I saw you—it was better than writing.” He leaned forward: “Let me look into your face once more, won't you?—so I can remember the better.... Yes—the same dear eyes—and the hair growing low on the temples, and the beautiful mouth and—No—I sha'n't forget—I never have.” He rose from his seat and held out his hand: “You'll take it, won't you?—just once—Good-by!”

She had not moved, nor had she grasped his hand; her face was still towards him, her whole frame tense, the tears crowding to the lids.

“Sit down, Harry. I can't let you go like this. Tell me something more of where you are going. Why must you go to sea? Can't you support yourself here?—isn't there something you can get to do? I will see my father and find out if—”

“No, you won't.” There was a note almost of defiance in his voice—one she had never heard before. “I am through with accepting favors from any living man. Hereafter I stand in my own shoes, independent of everybody. My father is the only person who has a right to give me help, and as he refuses absolutely to do anything more than pay my board, I must fall back on myself. I didn't see these things in this same way when

Uncle George paid my debts, or even when he took me into his home as his guest, but I do now."

Something gave a little bound in Kate's heart. This manly independence was one of the things she had in the old days hoped was in him. What had come over her former lover, she wondered.

"And another thing, Kate"—she was listening eagerly—she could not believe it was Harry who was speaking—"if you were to tell me this moment that you loved me again and would marry me, and I still be as I am to-day—outlawed by my father and dependent on charity—I would not do it. I can't live on your money, and I have none of my own. Furthermore, I owe dear Uncle George his money in such a way that I can never pay it back except I earn it, and that I can't do here. To borrow it of somebody else to pay him would be more disgraceful still."

Again her heart gave a bound. Her father had followed the opposite course, and she knew for a certainty just what some men thought of him, and she could as easily recall half a dozen younger men who had that very summer been willing to play the same game with herself. Something warm and sympathetic struggled up through her reserve.

"Would you stay, Harry, if I asked you to?" she said in almost a whisper. She had not meant to put the question quite in that way, but somehow it had asked itself.

He looked at her with his soft brown eyes, the long lashes shading their tender brilliancy. He had guessed nothing of the newly awakened throb in her heart; only his situation stared him in the face, and in this she had no controlling interest; nor could she now that she loved somebody else.

"No, Kate, it wouldn't alter anything. It would be putting off the day when it would all have to be done over again; and then it would be still worse because of the hopes it had raised."

"Do you really mean, Harry, that you would not stay if I asked you?" It was not her heart which was speaking, but the pride of the woman who had always had her own way.

"I certainly do," he answered emphatically, his voice ringing clear. "Every day I lose is just so much taken from a decent, independent life."

A sudden revulsion of feeling swept through her. This was the last thing she had expected from Harry. What had come over him that he should deny her anything?—he who had always obeyed her slightest wish. Then a new thought entered her head—why should she humble herself to ask any more questions? With a quick movement she gained her feet and stood toying with her dress, arranging the lace scarf about her throat, tightening the wide strings that held her teacup of a bonnet close to her face. She raised her eyes and stole a glance at him. The lips were still firmly set with the resolve that had tightened them, but his eyes were brimming tears.

As suddenly as her pride had risen did it die out. All the tenderness of her nature welled up. She made one step in his direction. She was about to speak, but he had not moved, nor did his face relax. She saw that nothing could shake his resolve; they were as far apart as if the seas already rolled between them. She held out her hand, and with that same note of infinite pathos which he knew so well when she spoke straight from her heart, said as she laid her fingers in his:

"Good-by, and God bless you, Harry."

"Good-by, Kate," he murmured in barely audible tones. "May I—may I—kiss you on the forehead, as I always used to do when I left you—"

She bent her head: he leaned over and touched the spot with his lips as reverently as a sinner kisses the garment of a saint, then, choking down her tears, all her body unstrung, her mind in a whirl, she turned and passed out of the park.

That same afternoon Kate called her father into her little sitting-room at the top of the stairs and shut the door.

"Harry Rutter is going to sea as a common sailor on one of the ships leaving here in a couple of days. Can you find out which one?—it may be one of your own." He was still perfunctory agent of the line.

"Young Rutter going to sea!"—the nomenclature of "my dear Harry" had ended since the colonel had disinherited him. "Well—that is news! I suspect that will be the best place for him; then if he plays any of his pranks there will be somebody around with a cat-o'-nine-tails to take it out of him. Going to sea, is he?"

Kate looked at him with lowered lids, her lips curling slightly, but she did not defend the culprit. It was only one of what Prim called his "jokes:" he was the last man in the world to wish any such punishment. Moreover, she knew her father much better than the Honorable Prim knew his daughter, and whenever she had a favor to ask was invariably careful not to let his little tea-kettle boil over.

"Only a short time ago, father, you got a berth as supercargo on one of my grandfather's ships for Mark Gilbert. Can't you do it for Harry?"

"But, Kate, that was quite a different thing. Mark's father came to me and asked it as a special favor." His assumed authority at the shipping office rarely extended to the appointing of officers—not when the younger partners objected.

"Well, Harry's father won't come to you, nor will Harry; and it isn't a different thing. It's exactly the same thing so far as you are concerned, and there is a greater reason for Harry, for he is alone in the world and he is not used to hard work of any kind, and it is cruel to make a common sailor of him."

"Why, I thought Temple was fathering him."

"So Uncle George has, and would always look after him, but Harry is too brave and manly to live upon him any longer, now that Uncle George has lost most of his money. Will you see Mr. Pendergast, or shall I go down to the office?"

Prim mused for a moment. "There may not be a vacancy," he ventured, "but I will inquire. The Ranger sails on Friday for the River Plate, and I will have Mr. Pendergast come and see me. Supercargoes are of very little use, my dear, unless they have had some business training, and this young man, of course, has had none at all."

"This young man, indeed!" thought Kate with a sigh, stifling her indignation. "Poor Harry!—no one need

treat him any longer with even common courtesy, now that St. George, his last hold, had been swept away."

"I think on the whole I had better attend to it myself," she added with some impatience. "I don't want anything to go wrong about it."

"No, I'll see him, Kate; just leave it all to me."

He had already decided what to do—or what he would try to do—when he first heard the boy wanted to leave the country. What troubled him was what the managing partner of the line might think of the proposition. As long as Harry remained at home and within reach any number of things might happen—even a return of the old love. With the scapegrace half-way around the world some other man might have a chance—Willits, especially, who had proved himself in every way worthy of his daughter, and who would soon be one of the leading lawyers of the State if he kept on.

With the closing of the door upon her father, Kate threw herself upon her lounge. One by one the salient features of her interview with Harry passed in review: his pleading for some word of comfort; some note of forgiveness with which to cheer the hours of his exile.—"You are the last thing I kiss before I close my eyes." Then his open defiance of her expressed wishes when they conflicted with his own set purpose of going away and staying away until he made up his mind to return. While the first brought with it a certain contented satisfaction—something she had expected and was glad of—the last aroused only indignation and revolt. Her brow tightened, and the determination of the old seadog—her grandfather Barkeley—played over her countenance. She no longer, then, filled Harry's life, controlling all his actions; she no longer inspired his hopes. Rather than marry her he would work as a common sailor. Yes—he had said so, and with his head up and his voice ringing brave and clear. She was proud of him for it—she had never been so proud of him—but why no trace of herself in his resolve; except in his allusion to the duel, when he said he would do it again should any one insult her? It was courteous, of course, for him to feel that way, however much she abhorred the system of settling such disputes. But, then, he would do that for any other woman—would, no doubt, for some woman he had not yet seen. In this he was the son of his father and the same Harry—but in everything else he was a changed man—and never more changed than in his attitude toward her.

With these thoughts racking her brain she rose from the lounge and began pacing the floor, peering out between the curtains of her room, her eyes wandering over the park as if she could still see him between the branches. Then her mind cleared and the true situation developed itself:—for months she had hugged to herself the comforting thought that she had only to stretch out her hand and bring him to her feet. He had now looked her full in the face and proclaimed his freedom. It was as if she had caged a bird and found the door open and the prisoner singing in a tree overhead.

That same night she sat by her wood fire in her chamber, her old black mammy—Mammy Henny—bending close, combing out her marvellous hair. She had been studying the coals, watching the little castles pile and fall; the quick smothering of slowly fading sparks under a blanket of gray ashes, and the wavering, flickering light that died on the curling smoke. She had not spoken for a long time, when the old woman roused her.

"Whar was you dis mawnin', honey chile? Mister Willits done wait mo'n ha'f a hour, den he say he come back an' fetch his sorrel horse wid him dis arternoon an' take ye ridin'. But he ain't come—dat is, Ben done tol' me so."

"No, mammy," she answered wearily—"I sent him word not to—I didn't feel like riding to-day."

CHAPTER XIX

Over two years have passed away since that mournful night when Harry with his hand in St. George's, his voice choking, had declared his determination to leave him the next day and seek his fortunes across the seas.

It was a cruel blow to Temple, coming as it did on the heels of his own disaster, but when the first shock had passed he could but admire the lad for his pluck and love him the better for his independence.

"All right, my son," he had said, concealing as best he could his intense suffering over the loss of his companion. "I'll try and get along. But remember I am here—and the door is always open. I don't blame you—I would do the same thing were I in your place. And now about Kate—what shall I say to her?"

"Nothing. I said it all this morning. She doesn't love me any more—she would have passed me by without speaking had I not called to her. She'll be married to Willits before I come back—if I ever do come back. But leaving Kate is easier than leaving you. You have stuck to me all the way through, and Kate—well—perhaps she hasn't understood—perhaps her father has been talking to her—I don't know. Anyhow, it's all over. If I had had any doubts about it before, this morning's talk settled it. The sea is the best place for me. I can support myself anyway for a while until I can help you."

Yes! the boy was right, St. George had said to himself. It was all over between them. Kate's reason had triumphed at last. She, perhaps, was not to blame. Her experiences had been trying and she was still confronted by influences bitterly opposed to Harry, and largely in favor of Willits, for, weak specimen as Prim was, he was still her father, and in so important a step as her marriage, must naturally exercise authority. As for his own influence, that, he realized, had come to an end at their last interview: the whole thing, he must admit, was disappointing—cruelly so—the keenest disappointment of his life.

Many a night since he bid Harry good-by had he sat alone by that same fire, his dogs his only companions, the boy's words ringing in his ears: "Leaving Kate is easier than leaving you!" Had it been the other way and he the exile, it would have been nearer the truth, he often thought, for nothing in his whole life had left so great a void in his heart as the loss of the boy he loved. Not that he was ever completely disheartened; that was not his nature; there was always daylight ahead—the day when Harry would come back and their old life begin again. With this in store for him he had led his life as best he could, visiting his friends in the country,

entertaining in a simple, inexpensive way, hunting at Wesley, where he and Peggy Coston would exchange confidences and funny stories; dining out; fishing in the early spring; getting poorer and poorer in pocket, and yet never complaining, his philosophy being that it would be brighter in the morning, and it always was—to him.

And yet if the truth be told his own situation had not improved—in fact, it had grown steadily worse. Only one payment of interest had been made on the mortgage and the owner was already threatening foreclosure proceedings. Pawson's intervention alone had staved off the fatal climax by promising the holder to keep the loan alive by the collection of some old debts—borrowed money and the like—due St. George for years and which his good nature had allowed to run on indefinitely until some of them were practically outlawed. Indeed it was only through resources like this, in all of which Pawson helped, and with the collecting of some small ground rents, that kept Todd and Jemima in their places and the larder comfortably filled. As to the bank—there was still hope that some small percentage would be paid the depositors, it being the general opinion that the directors were personally liable because of the irregularities which the smash had uncovered—but this would take months, if not years, to work out.

His greatest comfort was in the wanderer's letters. These he would watch for with the eagerness of a girl hungry for news of her distant lover. For the first few months these came by every possible mail, most of them directed to himself; others to his mother, Mrs. Rutter driving in from Moorlands to compare notes with St. George. Then, as the boy made his way further into the interior the intervals were greater—sometimes a month passed without news of him.

“We are short-handed,” he wrote St. George, “owing to fever on the voyage out on the Ranger, and though I am supercargo and sit at the captain's table, I have to turn to and work like any of the others—fine exercise, but my hands are cracked and blistered and full of tar. I'll have to wear gloves the next time I dine with you.”

Not a word of this to his mother—no such hardships for her tender ears:

“Tell me about Kate, mother”—this from Rio—“how she looks; what she says; does she ever mention my name? My love to Alec. Is Matthew still caring for Spitfire, or has my father sold her?” Then followed the line: “Give my father my respectful regards; I would send my love, but he no longer cares for it.”

The dear lady did not deliver the message. Indeed Harry's departure had so widened the breach between the colonel and herself that they practically occupied different parts of the house as far removed from each other as possible. She had denounced him first to his face for the boy's self-imposed exile, and again behind his back to her intimates. Nor did her resolve waver even when the colonel was thrown from his horse and so badly hurt that his eyesight was greatly impaired. “It is a judgment on you,” she had said, drawing her frail body up to its full height. “You will now learn what other people suffer,” and would have kept on upstairs to her own room had not her heart softened at his helplessness—a new role for the colonel.

He had made no answer at the time: he never answered her back. She was too frail to be angry with, and then she was right about his being the cause of her suffering—the first cause of it, at least. He had not yet arrived at the point where he censured himself for all that had happened. In fact since Harry's sudden exit, made without a word to anybody at Moorlands except his mother and Alec, who went to town on a hurry message,—a slight which cut him to the quick—he had steadily laid the blame on everybody else connected with the affair;—generally on St. George for his interference in his peace-making programme at the club and his refusal, when ruined financially, to send the boy back to him in an humble and contrite spirit. Neither had he recovered from the wrath he had felt when, having sent John Gorsuch to ascertain from St. George the amount of money he had paid out for his son, Temple had politely sent Gorsuch, in charge of Todd, downstairs to Pawson, who in turn, after listening to Todd's whispered message, had with equal politeness shown Gorsuch the door, the colonel's signed check—the amount unfilled—still in Gorsuch's pocket.

It was only when the Lord of Moorlands went into town to spend an hour or so with Kate—and he was a frequent visitor prior to his accident—that his old manner returned. He loved the girl dearly and was never tired of talking to her. She was the only woman who would listen when he poured out his heart.

And Kate always welcomed him gladly. She liked strong, decided men even if they sometimes erred in their conclusions. Her grandfather, old Captain Barkeley, had had the same masterfulness. He had been in absolute command in his earlier years, and he had kept in command all his life. His word was law, and he was generally right. She was twelve years old when he died, and had, therefore, ample opportunity to know. It was her grandfather's strong personality, in fact, which had given her so clear an idea of her father's many weaknesses. Rutter, she felt, was a combination of both Barkeley and Prim—forceful and yet warped by prejudices; dominating yet intolerant; able to do big things and contented with little ones. It was forcefulness, despite his many shortcomings, which most appealed to her.

Moreover, she saw much of Harry in him. It was that which made her so willing to listen—she continually comparing the father to the son. These comparisons were invariably made in a circle, beginning at Rutter's brown eyes, taking in his features and peculiarities—many of them reproduced in his son's—such as the firm set of the lips and the square line of the chin—and ending, quite naturally, with the brown orbs again. While Harry's matched the color and shape, and often the fierce glare of the father's, they could also, she said to herself, shine with the soft light of the mother's. It was from the mother's side, then, that there came the willingness to yield to whatever tempted him—it may be to drink—to a false sense of honor—to herself: Harry being her slave instead of her master. And the other men around her—so far as yielding was concerned (here her brow would tighten and her lips straighten)—were no better. Even Uncle George must take her own “No” for an answer and believe it when she meant quite a different thing. And once more would her soul break out in revolt over the web in which she had become entangled, and once more would she cry herself to sleep.

Nobody but her old black mammy knew how tragic had been her sufferings, how many bitter hours she had passed, nor how many bitter tears she had shed. Yet even old Henny could not comfort her, nor was there any one else to whom the girl could pour out her heart. She had, it is true, kept up her intimacy with her Uncle George—hardly a week passed that she was not a visitor at his house or he at hers—but they had long since refrained from discussing Harry. Not because he did not want to talk about him, but because she would not let him—Of course not!

To Richard Horn, however, strange to say, she often turned—not so much for confidences as for a broader understanding of life. The thoughtful inventor was not so hedged about by social restrictions, and would break out in spontaneous admiration of Harry, saying with a decisive nod of his head, “A fine, splendid young fellow, my dear Kate; I recognized it first at St. George's dinner to Mr. Poe, and if I may say so, a much-abused young man whose only sin is that he, like many another about us, has been born under a waning star in a sky full of murky clouds; one that the fresh breeze of a new civilization will some day clear away”—a deduction which Kate could not quite grasp, but which comforted her greatly.

It delighted her, too, to hear him talk of the notable occurrences taking place about them. “You are wonderfully intelligent, my dear,” he had said to her on one occasion, “and should miss nothing of the developments that are going on about us;” and in proof of it had the very next day taken her to an exhibition of Mr. Morse's new telegraph, given at the Institute, at which two operators, each with an instrument, the men in sight of each other, but too far apart to be in collusion, were sending and answering the messages through wires stretched around the hall. She, at Richard's suggestion, had written a message herself, which she handed to the nearest operator who had ticked it to his fellow, and who at once read it to the audience. Even then many doubting Thomases had cried out “Collusion,” until Richard, rising in his seat, had not only endorsed the truth of the reading, but explained the invention, his statement silencing all opposition because of his well-known standing and knowledge of kindred sciences.

Richard's readings also, from which Kate was never absent, and which had now been resumed at his own house, greatly interested her. These of late had been devoted to many of Poe's earlier poems and later tales, for despite the scene at St. George's the inventor had never ceased to believe in the poet.

And so with these occupations, studies, investigations, and social pleasures—she never missing a ball or party (Willits always managing to be with her)—and the spending of the summer months at the Red Sulphur, where she had been pursued by half a dozen admirers—one a titled Englishman—had the days and hours of the years of Harry's absence passed slowly away.

At the end of the second winter a slight change occurred in the monotony of her life. Her constant, unwavering devotee, Langdon Willits, fell ill and had to be taken to the Eastern Shore, where the same old lot of bandages—that is of the same pattern—and the same loyal sister were impressed into service to nurse him back to health. The furrow Harry's bullet had ploughed in his head still troubled him at times, especially in the hot weather, and a horseback ride beside Kate one August day, with the heat in the nineties, had started the subsoil of his cranium to aching with such vehemence that Teackle had promptly packed it in ice and ten days later its owner in blankets and had put them both aboard the bay boat bound for the Eastern Shore.

Whether this new irritant—and everything seemed to annoy her now—had begun to tell on our beautiful Kate, or whether the gayety of the winter both at home and in Washington, where she had spent some weeks during the season, had tired her out, certain it was that when the spring came the life had gone out of her step and the color from her cheeks. Mammy Henny had noticed it and had coddled her the more, crooning and petting her; and her father had noticed it and had begun to be anxious, and at last St. George had stalked in and cried out in that breezy, joyous way of his that nothing daunted:

“Here, you sweetheart!—what have you been doing to your cheeks—all the roses out of them and pale as two lilies—and you never out of bed until twelve o'clock in the day and looking then as if you hadn't had a wink of sleep all night. Not a word out of you, Seymour, until I've finished. I'm going to take Kate down to Tom Coston's and keep her there till she gets well. Too many stuffy balls—too many late suppers—oyster roasts and high doings. None of that at Tom's. Up at six and to bed at ten. I've just had a letter from him and dear Peggy is crazy to have us come. Take your mare along, Kate, and you won't lack fresh air. Now what do you say, Seymour?”

Of course the Honorable Prim bobbed his honorable head and said he had been worried himself over Kate's loss of appetite, and that if Temple would, etc., etc.—he would—etc., etc.—and so Mammy Henny began to get pink and white and other fluffy things together, and Ben, with Todd to help, led Joan, her own beloved saddle horse, down to the dock and saw that she was safely lodged between decks, and then up came a coach (all this was two days later) and my lady drove off with two hair trunks in front and a French bonnet box behind—St. George beside her, and fat Mammy Henny in white kerchief and red bandanna, opposite, and Todd in one of St. George's old shooting-jackets on the box next the driver, with his feet on two of the dogs, the others having been loaned to a friend.

And it was a great leave-taking when the party reached the wharf. Not only were three or four of her girl friends present, but a dozen or more of the old merchants forsook their desks, when the coach unlimbered, most of them crossing the cobbles—some bare-headed, and all of them in high stocks and swallow-tail coats—pens behind their ears, spectacles on their pates—to bid the young princess good-by.

For Kate was still “our Kate,” in the widest and broadest sense and the pride and joy of all who knew her, and many who didn't. That she had a dozen beaux—and that some of them had tried to bore holes in each other for love of her; and that one of them was now a wanderer and another in a state of collapse, if report were true—was quite as it should be. Men had died for women a hundred times less worthy and a thousand times less beautiful, and men would die of love again. When at last she made up her mind she would choose the right man, and in the meantime God bless her for just being alive.

And she was never more alive or more charming than to-day.

“Oh, how delightful of you, Mr. Murdoch, and you too, Mr. Bowdoin—and Max—and all of you, to cross those wretched stones. No, wait, I'll come to you—” she had called out, when with a stamp of her little feet she had shaken the pleats from her skirt—adding when they had all kissed her hand in turn—“Yes—I am going down to be dairy-maid at Peggy Coston's,” at which the bald-headed old fellows, with their hands upraised in protest at so great a sacrilege, bowed to the ground, their fingers on their ruffled shirt-fronts, and the younger ones lifted their furry hats and kept them in the air until she had crossed the gang-plank and Todd and Mammy Henny, and Ben who had come to help, lost their several breaths getting the impatient dogs and baggage aboard—and so she sailed away with Uncle George as chaperon, the whole party throwing kisses back and forth.

CHAPTER XX

Their reception at Wesley, the ancestral home of the Costons, although it was late at night when they arrived, was none the less joyous. Peggy was the first to welcome the invalid, and Tom was not far behind.

“Give her to me, St. George,” bubbled Peggy, enfolding the girl in her arms. “You blessed thing! Oh, how glad I am to get hold of you! They told me you were ill, child—not a word of truth in it! No, Mr. Coston, you sha'n't even have one of her little fingers until I get through loving her. What's your mammy's name—Henny? Well, Henny, you take Miss Kate's things into her room—that one at the top of the stairs.”

And then the Honorable Tom Coston said he'd be doggoned if he was going to wait another minute, and he didn't—for Kate kissed him on both cheeks and gave him her father's message, congratulating him on his appointment as judge, and thanking him in advance for all the kindness he would show his daughter.

But it was not until she awoke next morning and looked out between the posts of her high bedstead through the small, wide-open window overlooking the bay that her heart gave the first bound of real gladness. She loved the sky and the dash of salt air, laden now with the perfume of budding fruit trees, that blew straight in from the sea. She loved, too, the stir and sough of the creaking pines and the cheery calls from the barnyard. Here she could get her mind settled; here, too, she could forget all the little things that had bothered her—there would be no more invitations to accept or decline; no promises she must keep. She and her Uncle George could have one long holiday—she needed it and, goodness knows, he needed it after all his troubles—and they would begin as soon as breakfast was over. And they did—the dogs plunging ahead, the two hand in hand, St. George, guide and philosopher, pointing out this and that characteristic feature of the once famous estate and dilating on its past glory.

“Even in my father's day,” he continued, his face lighting up, “it was one of the great show places of the county. The stables held twenty horses and a coach, besides no end of gigs and carryalls. This broad road on which we walk was lined with flower-beds and shaded by live-oaks. Over there, near that little grove, were three great barns and lesser out-buildings, besides the negro quarters, smoke-houses, and hay-ricks. Really a wonderful place in its day, Kate.”

Then he went on to tell of how the verandas were shaded with honeysuckles, and the halls, drawing-rooms, and dining-room crowded with furniture; how there were yellow damask curtains, and screens, and hair-cloth sofas and a harmonicon of musical glasses which was played by wetting one's fingers in a bowl of water and passing them over the rims—he had played on it himself when a boy; and slaves galore—nearly one hundred of them, not to mention a thousand acres of tillable land to plough and harrow, as well as sheep, oxen, pigs, chickens, ducks—everything that a man of wealth and position might have had in the old days, and about every one of which St. George had a memory.

Then when Tom's father, who was the sole heir, took charge (here his voice dropped to a whisper) dissolution proceedings set in—and Tom finished them! and St. George sighed heavily as he pointed out the changes:—the quarters in ruins, the stables falling to pieces, the gates tied up with strings or swinging loose; and the flocks, herds, and live-stock things of the past. Nor had a negro been left—none Tom really owned: one by one they had been sold or hired out, or gone off nobody knew where, he being too lazy, or too indifferent, or too good-natured, to hunt them up. The house, as Kate had seen, was equally neglected. Even what remained of the old furniture was on its last legs—the curtains patched, or in shreds—the carpets worn into holes.

Kate listened eagerly, but she did not sigh. It was all charming to her in the soft spring sunshine, the air a perfume, the birds singing, the blossoms bursting, the peach-trees anthems of praise—and best of all her dear Uncle George strolling at her side. And then everything was so clean and fresh and sweet in every nook and corner of the tumble-down house. Peggy, as she soon discovered, looked after that—in fact Peggy looked after everything that required looking after—and everything did—including the judge. Mr. Coston was tired, Peggy would say, or Mr. Coston had not been very well, so she just did it herself instead of bothering him. Since his promotion it was generally “the judge” who was too tired, being absorbed in his court duties, etc., etc. But it always came with a laugh, and it was always genuine, for to wait upon him and look after him and minister to him was her highest happiness.

Good for nothing as he would have been to some women—unpractical, lazy—a man few sensible wives would have put up with—Peggy adored him; and so did his children adore him, and so, for that matter, did his neighbors, many of whom, although they ridiculed him behind his back, could never escape the charm of his personality whenever they sat beside his rocking-chair.

This chair—the only comfortable chair in the house, by the way—had, in his less distinguished days, been his throne. In it he would sit all day long, cutting and whittling, filing and polishing curious trinkets of tortoise-shell for watch-guards and tiny baskets made of cherry-stones, cunningly wrought and finished. He was an expert, too, in corn-cob pipes, which he carved for all his friends; and pin-wheels for everybody's children. When it came, however, to such matters as a missing hinge to the front door, a brick under a tottering chimney, the straightening of a falling fence, the repairing of a loose lock on the smoke-house—or even the care of the family carryall, which despite its great age and infirmities was often left out in the rain to rust and ruin—these things must, of course, wait until the overworked father of the house found time to look after them.

The children loved him the most. They asked for nothing better than to fix him in his big chair by the fender, throw upon the fire a basket of bark chips from the wood-yard, and enough pitch-pine knots to wake them up, and after filling his pipe and lighting it, snuggle close—every bend and curve of the wide-armed splint-bottomed comfort packed full, all waiting to hear him tell one of his stories. Sometimes it was the tale

of the fish and the cuff-button—how he once dropped his sleeve-link overboard, and how a year afterward he was in a shallop on the Broadwater fishing for rockflsh when he caught a splendid fellow, which when Aunt Patience cleaned—(here his voice would drop to a whisper)—“What do you think!—why out popped the sleeve-link that was in his cuff this minute!” And for the hundredth time the bit of gold would be examined by each child in turn. Or it was the witch story—about the Yahoo wild man with great horns and a lashing tail, who lived in the swamp and went howling and prowling about for plunder and prey. (This was always given with a low, prolonged growl, like a dog in pain—all the children shuddering.) And then followed the oft-told tale of how this same terrible Yahoo once came up with Hagar, who was riding a witch pony to get to the witches' dance in the cane-brake, and how he made off with her to the swamp, where she had had to cook for him—ever—ever—ever since. (Long-drawn breath, showing that all was over for that day at least.)

Todd got the true inwardness of the situation before he had been many days at Wesley: for the scene with the children was often repeated when court was not in session.

“Fo' Gawd, Marse George, hab you had time to watch dat gemman, de jedge? Dey do say he's sumpin' great, but I tell ye he's dat lazy a fly stuck in 'lasses 'd pass him on de road.”

St. George laughed heartily in reply, but he did not reprimand him.

“What makes you think so, Todd?”

“Can't help thinkin' so. I wuz standin' by de po'ch yisterday holdin' Miss Kate's mare, when I yere de mistis ask de jedge ter go out an' git 'er some kindlin' f'om de wood-pile. He sot a-rockin' hisse'f in dat big cheer ob his'n an' I yered him say—'Yes, in a minute,' but he didn't move. Den she holler ag'in at him an' still he rock hisse'f, sayin' he's comin'. Den, fust thing I knowed out she come to de woodpile an' git it herse'f, an' den when she pass him wid 'er arms full o' wood he look up an' say—'Peggy, come yere an' kiss me—I dunno what we'd do widout ye—you'se de Lawd's anointed, sho'.'”

Kate got no end of amusement out of him, and would often walk with him to court that she might listen to his drolleries—especially his queer views of life—the simplest and most unaffected to which she had ever bent her ears. Now and then, as time went on, despite her good-natured toleration of his want of independence—he being always dominated by his wife—she chanced, to her great surprise, upon some nuggets of hard common-sense of so high an assay that they might really be graded as wisdom—his analysis of men and women being particularly surprising. Those little twinkling, and sometimes sleepy, eyes of his, now that she began to study him the closer, reminded her of the unreadable eyes of an elephant she had once seen—eyes that presaged nothing but inertia, until whack went the trunk and over toppled the boy who had teased him.

And with this new discovery there developed at last a certain respect for the lazy, good-natured, droll old man. Opinions which she had heretofore laughed at suddenly became of value; criticisms which she had passed over in silence seemed worthy of further consideration.

Peggy, however, fitted into all the tender places of her heart. She had never known her own mother; all she remembered was a face bending close and a soft hand that tucked in the coverlet one night when she couldn't sleep. The memory had haunted her from the days of her childhood—clear and distinct, with every detail in place. Had there been light enough in her mother's bed-room, she was sure she could have added the dear face itself to her recollection. Plump, full-bosomed, rosy-cheeked Peggy (fifteen years younger than Tom) supplied the touch and voice, and all the tenderness as well, that these sad memories recalled, and all that the motherless girl had yearned for.

And the simple, uneventful life—one without restraints of any kind, greatly satisfied her: so different from her own at home with Prim as Chief Regulator. Everybody, to her delight, did as they pleased, each one following the bent of his or her inclination. St. George was out at daybreak in the duck-blinds, or, breakfast over, roaming the fields with his dogs, Todd a close attendant. The judge would stroll over to court an hour or more late, only to find an equally careless and contented group blocking up the door—“po' white trash” most of them, each one with a grievance. Whenever St. George accompanied him, and he often did, his Honor would spend even less time on the bench—cutting short both ends of the session, Temple laughing himself sore over the judge's decisions.

“And he stole yo' shoat and never paid for him?” he heard his honor say one day in a hog case, where two farmers who had been waiting hours for Tom's coming were plaintiff and defendant. “How did you know it was yo' shoat—did you mark him?”

“No, suh.”

“Tie a tag around his neck?”

“No, suh.”

“Well, you just keep yo' hogs inside yo' lot. Too many loose hogs runnin' 'round. Case is dismissed and co't is adjourned for the day,” which, while very poor law, was good common-sense, stray hogs on the public highway having become a nuisance.

With these kindly examples before her, Kate soon fell into the ways of the house. If she did not wish to get up she lay abed and Peggy brought her breakfast with her own hands. If, when she did leave her bed, she went about in pussy-slippers and a loose gown of lace and frills without her stays, Peggy's only protest was against her wearing anything else—so adorable was she. When this happy, dreamy indolence began to pall upon her—and she could not stand it for long—she would be up at sunrise helping Peggy wash and dress her frolicsome children or get them off to school, and this done, would assist in the housework—even rolling the pastry with her own delicate palms, or sitting beside the bubbling, spontaneous woman, needle in hand, aiding with the family mending—while Peggy, glad of the companionship, would sit with ears open, her mind alert, probing—probing—trying to read the heart of the girl whom she loved the better every day. And so there had crept into Kate's heart a new peace that was as fresh sap to a dying plant, bringing the blossoms to her cheeks and the spring of wind-blown branches to her step.

Then one fine morning, to the astonishment of every one, and greatly to Todd's disgust, no less a person than Mr. Langdon Willits of “Oak Hill” (distant three miles away) dismounted at Coston's front porch, and throwing the reins to the waiting darky, stretched his convalescent, but still shaky, legs in the direction of the

living-room, there to await the arrival of “Miss Seymour of Kennedy Square,” who, so he informed Todd, “expected him.”

Todd scraped a foot respectfully in answer, touched his cocoanut of a head with his monkey claw of a finger, waited until the broad back of the red-headed gentleman had been swallowed up by the open door, and then indulged in this soliloquy:

“Funny de way dem bullets hab o' missin' folks. Des a leetle furder down an' dere wouldn't 'a' been none o' dis yere foolishness. Pity Marse Harry hadn't practised some mo'. Ef he had ter do it ag'in I reckon he'd pink him so he neber be cavortin' 'roun' like he is now.”

Willits's sudden appearance filled St. George with ill-concealed anxiety. He did not believe in this parade of invalidism, nor did he like Kate's encouraging smile when she met him—and there was no question that she did smile—and, more portentous still, that she enjoyed it. Other things, too, she grew to enjoy, especially the long rides in the woods and over to the broad water. For Willits's health after a few days of the sunshine of Kate's companionship had undergone so renovating a process that the sorrel horse now arrived at the porch almost every day, whereupon Kate's Joan would be led out, and the smiled-upon gentleman in English riding-boots and brown velvet jacket and our gracious lady in Lincoln green habit with wide hat and sweeping plume would mount their steeds and be lost among the pines.

Indeed, to be exact, half of Kate's time was now spent in the saddle, Willits riding beside her. And with each day's outing a new and, to St. George, a more disturbing intimacy appeared to be growing between them. Now it was Willits's sister who had to be considered and especially invited to Wesley—a thin wisp of a woman with tortoise-shell sidecombs and bunches of dry curls, who always dressed in shiny black silk and whose only ornament was her mother's hair set in a breastpin; or it was his father by whom she must sit when he came over in his gig—a bluff, hearty man who generally wore a red waistcoat with big bone buttons and high boots with tassels in front.

This last confidential relation, when the manners and bearing of the elder man came under his notice, seemed to St. George the most unaccountable of all. Departures from the established code always jarred upon him, and the gentleman in the red waistcoat and tasselled boots often wandered so far afield that he invariably set St. George's teeth on edge. Although he had never met Kate before, he called her by her first name after the first ten minutes of their acquaintance—his son, he explained, having done nothing but sound her praises for the past two years, an excuse which carried no weight in gentleman George's mind because of its additional familiarity. He had never dared, he knew, to extend that familiarity to Peggy—it had always been “Mrs. Coston” to her and it had always been “Mr. Coston” to Tom, and it was now “your Honor” or “judge” to the dispenser of justice. For though the owner of Oak Hill lived within a few miles of the tumble-down remnant that sheltered the Costons; and though he had fifty servants to their one, or half a one—and broad acres in proportion, to say nothing of flocks and herds—St. George had always been aware that he seldom crossed their porch steps or they his. That little affair of some fifty or more years ago was still remembered, and the children of people who did that sort of thing must, of course, pay the penalty. Even Peggy never failed to draw the line. “Very nice people, my dear,” he had heard her say to Kate one day when the subject of the younger man's family had come up. “Mr. Willits senior is a fine, open-hearted man, and does a great deal of good in the county with his money—quite a politician, and they do say has a fair chance of some time being governor of the State. But very few of us about here would want to marry into the family, all the same. Oh no, my dear Kate, of course there was nothing against his grandmother. She was a very nice woman, I believe, and I've often heard my own mother speak of her. Her father came from Albemarle Sound, if I am right, and was old John Willits's overseer. The girl was his daughter.”

Kate had made no answer. Who Langdon Willits's grandmother was, or whether he had any grandmother at all, did not concern her in the least. She rather admired the young Albemarle Sound girl for walking boldly into the Willits family—low born as she was—and making them respect her.

But none of Peggy's outspoken warnings nor any of St. George's silent acceptances of the several situations—always a mark of his disapproval—checked the game of love-making which was going on—the give-and-take stage of it, with the odds varying with each new shifting of the cards, both Peggy and St. George growing the more nervous.

“She's going to accept him, St. George,” Peggy had said to him one morning as he stood behind her chair while she was shelling the peas for dinner. “I didn't think so when he first came, but I believe it now. I have said all I could to her. She has cuddled up in my arms and cried herself sick over it, but she won't hold out much longer. Young Rutter left her heart all torn and bleeding and this man has bound up the sore places. She will never love anybody that way again—and may be it is just as well. He'd have kept her guessing all her life as to what he'd do next. I wish Willits's blood was better, for she's a dear, sweet child and proud as she can be, only she's proud over different things from what I would be. But you can make up your mind to it—she'll keep him dangling for a while yet, as she did last summer at the Red Sulphur, but she'll be his wife in a year or less—you mark my words. You haven't yet heard from the first one, have you?—as to when he's coming home?”

St. George hadn't heard—he sighed in return—a habit of his lately: No, not for two months or more—not since the letter in which Harry said he had left the ship and had gone up into the interior. He had, he told her, mentioned the boy's silence to Kate in a casual way, watching the effect the news produced upon her—but after the remark that the mails were always irregular from those far-away countries, she had turned the conversation into other channels, she having caught sight of Willits, who had just dismounted from his horse.

As to St. George's own position in the affair he felt that his hands were still so firmly tied that he could do nothing one way or the other. His personal intercourse with Willits had been such as he would always have with a man with whom he was on speaking terms, but it never passed that border. He was courteous, careful of his speech, and mindful of the young man's devotion to Kate, whose guardian for the time being he was, but he neither encouraged nor thwarted his suit. Kate was of age and was fully competent to decide for herself—extremely competent, for that matter.

How little this clear reader of women's hearts—and scores had been spread out before him—knew of Kate's,

no one but the girl herself could have told. That she was adrift on an open sea without a rudder, and that she had already begun to lose confidence both in her seamanship and in her compass, was becoming more and more apparent to her every day she lived. All she knew positively was that she had been sailing before the wind for some weeks past with everything flying loose, and that the time had now come for her either to “go about” or keep on her course.

Her suitor's family she had carefully considered. She had also studied his environment and the impression he made upon those who had known him longest:—she must now focus her mental lenses on the man himself. He had, she knew, graduated with honors, being the valedictorian of his class; had risen rapidly in his profession, and, from what her father said, would soon reach a high place among his brother lawyers. There was even talk of sending him to the legislature, where her own father, the Honorable Prim, had achieved his title. She wished, of course, that Mr. Willits's hair was not quite so red; she wished, too, that the knuckles on his hands were not so large and bony—and that he was not always at her beck and call; but these, she was forced to admit, were trifles in the make-up of a fine man. There was, however, a sane mind under the carrot-colored hair and a warm palm inside the knotted knuckles, and that was infinitely more important than little physical peculiarities which one would forget as life went on. As to his periods of ill health, these she herself could have prevented had she told him the whole truth that night on the stairs, or the day before when she had parried his direct proposal of marriage—a piece of stupidity for which she never failed to blame herself.

His future conduct did not trouble her in the least. She had long since become convinced that Willits would never again become intemperate. He had kept his promise, and this meant more to her than his having given way to past temptations. The lesson he had learned at the ball had had, too, its full effect. One he had never forgotten. Over and over again he had apologized to her for his brutal insolence in laying his profane hands on her dancing-card and tearing it to bits before her eyes. He had, moreover, deeply regretted the duel and had sworn to her on his honor as a gentleman that he would never fight another.

Each time she had listened quietly and had told him how much she was pleased and how grateful she was for his confidence and how such fine resolutions redounded to his credit, and yet in thinking it over the next day she could not help comparing his meek outbursts of sorrow with Harry's blunt statement made to her the last time she saw him in the park, when, instead of expressing any regret for having shot Willits, he had boldly declared that he would do it again if any such insult were repeated. And strange to say—and this she could not understand in herself—in all such comparisons Harry came out best.

But:—and here she had to hold on to her rudder with all her might—she had already made one mistake, tumbling head over heels in love with a young fellow who had mortified her before the world when their engagement was less than a few months old, making her name and affections a byword, and she could not and would not repeat the blunder. This had shattered her customary self-reliance, leaving her wellnigh helpless. Perhaps after all—an unheard-of thing in her experience—she had better seek advice of some older and wiser pilot. Two heads, or even three—(here her canny Scotch blood asserted itself)—were better than one in deciding so important a matter as the choosing of a mate for life. And yet—now she came to think it over—it was not so much a question of heads as it was a question of shoulders on which the heads rested. To turn to St. George, or to any member of the Willits kin, was impossible. Peggy's views she understood. Counsel, however, she must have, and at once.

Suddenly an inspiration thrilled her like an electric shock—one that sent the blood tingling to the very roots of her hair. Why had she not thought of it before! And it must be in the most casual way—quite as a matter of general conversation, he doing all the talking and she doing all the listening, for on no account must he suspect her purpose.

Within the hour she had tied the ribbons of her wide leghorn hat under her dimpled chin, picked up her shawl, and started off alone, following the lane to the main road. If the judge, by any chance, had adjourned court he would come straight home and she would meet him on the way. If he was still engaged in the dispensation of justice, she would wait for him outside.

She had judged wisely. Indeed she might have waited for days for some such moment and not found so favorable an opportunity. His Honor had already left the bench and was then slowly making his way toward where she stood, hugging the sidewalk trees the better to shade him from the increasing heat. As the day had promised to be an unusually warm one, he had attired himself in a full suit of yellow nankeen, with palm-leaf fan and wide straw hat—a combination which so matched the color and texture of his placid, kindly face that Kate could hardly keep from laughing outright. Instead she quickened her steps until she stood beside him, her lovely, fresh color heightened by her walk, her eyes sparkling, her face wreathed in smiles.

“You are lookin' mighty cute, my Lady Kate, in yo' Paisley shawl and sarsanet pelisse,” he called out in his hearty, cheery way. “Has Peggy seen 'em? I've been tryin' to get her some just like 'em, only my co't duties are so pressin'. Goodness, gracious me!—but it's gettin' hot!” Here he stopped and mopped his face, then his eyes fell upon her again: “Bless my soul, child!—you do look pretty this mornin'—jest like yo' mother! Where did you get all those pink and white apple-blossoms in yo' cheeks?”

“Do you remember her, Mr. Coston?” she rejoined, ignoring his compliment.

“Do I remember her! The belle of fo' counties, my dear—eve'ybody at her feet; five or six gentlemen co'tin' her at once; old Captain Barkeley, cross as a bear—wouldn't let her marry this one or that one—kep' her guessin' night and day, till one of 'em blew his brains out, and then she fainted dead away. Pretty soon yo' father co'ted her, and bein' Scotch, like the old captain and sober as an owl and about as cunnin', it wasn't long befo' everything was settled. Very nice man, yo' father—got to have things mighty partic'lar; we young bucks used to say he slept in a bag of lavender and powdered his cheeks every mornin' to make him look fresh, while most of us were soakin' wet in the duck-blinds—but that was only our joke. That's long befo' you were born, child. But yo' mother didn't live long—they said her heart was broken 'bout the other fellow, but there wasn't a word of truth in that foolishness—couldn't be. I used to see her and yo' father together long after that, and she was mighty good to him, and he was to her. Yes—all comes back to me. Stand still, child, and let me look at you—yes—you're plumper than yo' mother and a good deal rosier, and you don't look so slender and white as she did, like one of those pale Indian pipes she used to hunt in the woods. It's the

Seymour in you that's done that, I reckon.”

Kate walked on in silence. It was not the first time that some of her mother's old friends had told her practically the same story—not so clearly, perhaps, because few had the simple, outspoken candor of the old fellow, but enough to let her know that her father was not her mother's first love.

“Don't be in a hurry, child, and don't let anybody choose for you,” he ran on. “Peggy and I didn't make any mistakes—and don't you. Now this young son of Parker Willits's”—here his wrinkled face tightened up into a pucker as if he had just bitten into an unripe persimmon—“good enough young man, may be; goin' to be something great, I reckon—in Mr. Taney's office, I hear, or will be next winter. I 'spect he'll keep out of jail—most Willitses do—but keep an eye on him and watch him, and watch yo'self too. That's more important still. The cemetery is a long ways off when you marry the wrong man, child. And that other fellow that Peggy tells me has been co'tin' you—Talbot Rutter's boy—he's a wild one, isn't he?—drunk half the time and fightin' everybody who don't agree with him. Come pretty nigh endin' young Willits, so they say. Now I hear he's run away to sea and left all his debts behind. Talbot turned him neck and heels out of doors when he found it out, so they tell me—and served the scapegrace right. Don't be in a hurry, child. Right man will come bime-by. Just the same with Peggy till I come along—there she is now, bless her sweet heart! Peggy, you darlin'—I got so lonely for you I just had to 'journ co't. I've been telling Lady Kate that she mustn't be in a hurry to get married till she finds somebody that will make her as happy as you and me.” Here the judge slipped his arm around Peggy's capacious waist and the two crossed the pasture as the nearest way to the house.

Kate kept on her way alone.

Her only reply to the garrulous judge had been one of her rippling laughs, but it was the laughter of bubbles with the sediment lying deep in the bottom of the glass.

CHAPTER XXI

But all outings must come to an end. And so when the marsh grass on the lowlands lay in serried waves of dappled satin, and the corn on the uplands was waist high and the roses a mob of beauty, Kate threw her arms around Peggy and kissed her over and over again, her whole heart flowing through her lips; and then the judge got his good-by on his wrinkled cheek, and the children on any clean spot which she found on their molasses-covered faces; and then the cavalcade took up its line of march for the boat-landing, Willits going as far as the wharf, where he and Kate had a long talk in low tones, in which he seemed to be doing all the talking and she all the listening—“But nuthin' mo'n jes' a han'shake” (so Todd told St. George), “he lookin' like he wanter eat her up an' she kinder sayin' dat de cake ain't brown 'nough yit fur tastin'—but one thing I know fo' sho'—an' dat is she didn't let 'im kiss 'er. I wuz leadin' his horse pas' whar dey wuz standin', an' de sorrel varmint got cuttin' up an' I kep' him prancin' till Mister Willits couldn't stay wid her no longer. Drat dat red-haided—”

“Stop, Todd—be careful—you mustn't speak that way of Mr. Willits.”

“Well, Marse George, I won't—but I ain't neber like him f'om de fust. He ain't quality an' he neber kin be. How Miss Kate don' stan' him is mo'n I kin tell.”

Kate drove up to her father's house in state, with Ben as special envoy to see that she and her belongings were properly cared for. St. George with Todd and the four dogs—six in all—arrived, despite Kate's protestations, on foot.

Pawson met him at the door. He had given up his boarding-house and had transferred his traps and parcels to the floor above—into Harry's old room, really—in order that the additional rent—(he had now taken entire charge of Temple's finances)—might help in the payment of the interest on the mortgage. He had thought this all out while St. George was at Wesley and had moved in without notifying him, that being the best way to solve the problem—St. George still retaining his bedroom and dining-room and the use of the front door. Jemima, too, had gone. She wanted, so she had told her master the day he left with Kate, to take a holiday and visit some of her people who lived down by the Marsh Market in an old rookery near the Falls, and would come back when he sent for her; but Todd had settled all that the morning of his arrival, the moment he caught sight of her black face.

“Ain't no use yo' comin' back,” the darky blurted out. “I'm gwineter do de cookin' and de chamber-wo'k. Dere ain't 'nough to eat fo' mo'n two. When dem white-livered, no-count, onery gemmens dat stole Marse George's money git in de chain-gang, whar dey b'longs, den may be we'll hab sumpin' to go to market on, but dat ain't yit; an' don't ye tell Marse George I tol' yer or I'll ha'nt ye like dat witch I done heared 'bout down to Wesley—ha'nt ye so ye'll think de debble's got ye.” To his master, his only explanation was that Jemima had gone to look after her sister, who had been taken “wid a mis'ry in her back.”

If St. George knew anything of the common talk going on around him no one was ever the wiser. He continued the even tenor of his life, visiting and receiving his friends, entertaining his friends in a simple and inexpensive way: Once Poe had spent an evening with him, when he made a manly, straightforward apology for his conduct the night of the dinner, and on another occasion Mr. Kennedy had made an especial point of missing a train to Washington to have an hour's chat with him. In the afternoons he would have a rubber of whist with the archdeacon who lived across the Square—a broad-minded ecclesiastic, who believed in relaxation, although, of course, he was never seen at the club; or he might drop into the Chesapeake for a talk with Richard or sit beside him in his curious laboratory at the rear of his house where he worked out many of the problems that absorbed his mind and inspired his hopes. At night, however late or early—whenever he reached home—there was always a romp with his dogs. This last he rarely omitted. The click of the front-door latch, followed by his firm step overhead, was their signal, and up they would come, tumbling over each other in their eagerness to reach his cheeks—straight up, their paws scraping his clothes; then a

swoop into the dining-room, when they would be “downed” to the floor, their eyes following his every movement.

Nor had his own financial situation begun as yet to trouble him. Todd and Pawson, however, had long since become nervous. More than once had they put their heads together for some plan by which sufficient money could be raised for current expenses. In this praiseworthy effort, to Todd's unbounded astonishment, Pawson had one night developed a plan in which the greatly feared and much-despised Gadgem was to hold first place. Indeed on the very morning succeeding the receipt of Pawson's letter and at an hour when St. George would be absent at the club, there had come a brisk rat-a-tat on the front door and Gadgem had sidled in.

Todd had not seen the collector since that eventful morning when he stood by ready to pick up the pieces of that gentleman's dismembered body when his master was about to throw him into the street for doubting his word, and he now studied him with the greatest interest. The first thing that struck him was the collector's clothes. As the summer was approaching he had changed his winter suit for a combination of brown linen bound with black—(second hand, of course, its former owner having gone out of mourning) and at the moment sported a moth-eaten, crape-encircled white beaver with a floppy, two-inch brim, a rusty black stock that grabbed him close under the chin, completely submerging his collar, and a pair of congress gaiters very much run down at the heel. He was evidently master of himself and the situation, for he stood looking from Todd to the young lawyer, a furtive, anxious expression on his face that betokened both a surprise at being sent for and a curiosity to learn the cause, although no word of inquiry passed his lips.

Pawson's opening remark calmed the collector's suspicions.

“EXactly,” he answered in a relieved tone, when the plot had been fully developed, dragging a mate of the red bandanna—a blue one—from his pocket and blowing his nose in an impressive manner. “EXactly—quite right—quite right—difficult perhaps—ENORmously difficult but—yes—quite right.”

Then there had followed a hurried consultation, during which the bullet-headed darky absorbed every word, his eyes rolling about in his head, his breath ending somewhere near his jugular vein.

These details duly agreed upon, Gadgem bowed himself out of the dining-room, carrying with him a note-book filled with such data as:

2 fowling pieces made by Purdey, 1838.
3 heavy duck guns.
2 English saddles.
1 silver loving cup.
2 silver coasters, etc, etc.,

a list which Todd the night before had prompted and which Pawson, in his clear, round hand, had transferred to a sheet of foolscap ready for Gadgem in the morning.

On reaching the front door the collector stopped and looked furtively up the stairs. He was wondering with professional caution whether St. George had returned and was within hearing distance. If so much as a hint should reach Temple's ears the whole scheme would come to naught. Still in doubt, he called out in his sharpest business voice, as if prolonging a conversation which had been carried on inside:

“Yes, Mr. Pawson, please say to Mr. Temple that it is GADgem, of GADgem & Coombs—and say that I will be here at ten o'clock to-morrow—sharp—on the minute; I am ALways on the minute in matters of this kind. Only five minutes of his time—five minutes, remember—” and he passed out of hearing.

Todd, now duly installed as co-conspirator, opened the ball the next morning at breakfast. St. George had slept late, and the hands of the marble clock marked but a few minutes of the hour of Gadgem's expected arrival, and not a moment could be lost.

“Dat Gadgem man done come yere yisterday,” he began, drawing out his master's chair with an extra flourish to hide his nervousness, “an' he say he's commin' ag'in dis mornin' at ten o'clock. Clar to goodness it's dat now! I done forgot to tell ye.”

“What does he want, Todd?” asked St. George, dropping into his seat.

“I dunno, sah—said he was lookin' fo' sumpin' fo' a frien' ob his—I think it was a gun—an' he wanted to know what kind to buy fur him—Yes, sah, dem waffles 's jes' off de fire. He 'lowed he didn't know nuffin' 'bout guns—butter, sah?—an' den Mister Pawson spoke up an' said he'd better ask you. He's tame dis time—leastways he 'peared so.”

“A fine gun is rather a difficult thing to get in these days, Todd,” replied St. George, opening his napkin. “Since old Joe Manton died I don't know but one good maker—and that's Purdey, of London, and he, I hear, has orders to last him five years. No, Todd—I'd rather have the toast.”

“Yes, sah—I knowed ye couldn't do nuffln' fur him—Take de top piece—dat's de brownest—but he seemed so cut up 'bout it dat I tol' him he might see ye fur a minute if he come 'long 'bout ten o'clock, when you was fru' yo' bre'kfus', 'fo' ye got tangled up wid yo' letters an' de papers. Dat's him now, I spec's. Shall I show him in?”

“Yes, show him in, Todd. Gadgem isn't a bad sort of fellow after all. He only wants his pound of flesh, like the others. Ah, good-morning, Mr. Gadgem.” The front door had been purposely left open, and though the bill collector had knocked by way of warning, he had paused for no answer and was already in the room. The little man laid his battered hat silently on a chair near the door, pulled down his tight linen sleeves with the funereal binding, adjusted his high black stock, and with half-creeping, half-cringing movement, advanced to where St. George sat.

“I said good-morning, Mr. Gadgem,” repeated St. George in his most captivating tone of voice. He had been greatly amused at Gadgem's antics.

“I heard you, sir—I heard you DIStinctly, sir—I was only seeking a place on which to rest my hat, sir—not a very inSPIRing hat-quite the contrary—but all I have. Yes, sir—you are quite right—it is a VERY good morning—a most deLIGHTful morning. I was convinced of that when I crossed the park, sir. The trees—”

“Never mind the trees, Gadgem. We will take those up later on. Tell me what I can do for you—what do you want?”

“A GUN, sir—a plain, straightforward GUN—one that can be relied upon. Not for mySELF, sir—I am not murderously inclined—but for a friend who has commissioned me—the exact word, sir—although the percentage is small—comMISsioned me to acquire for him a fowling piece of the pattern, weight, and build of those belonging to St. George W. Temple, Esquire, of Kennedy Square-and so I made bold, sir, to—”

“You won't find it, Gadgem,” replied St. George, buttering the toast. “I have two that I have shot with for years that haven't their match in the State. Todd, bring me one of those small bird guns—there, behind the door in the rack. Hand it to Mr. Gadgem. Now, can you see by the shape of—take hold of it, man. But do you know anything about guns?”

“Only enough to keep away from their muzzles, sir.” He had it in his hand now—holding it by the end of the barrel, Todd instinctively dodging out of the way, although he knew it was not loaded. “No, sir, I don't know anything—not the very SMALLest thing about guns. There is nothing, in fact, I know so little about as a gun—that is why I have come to you.”

St. George recovered the piece and laid it as gently on the table beside his plate as if it had been a newly laid egg.

“No, I don't think you do,” he laughed, “or you wouldn't hold it upside down. Now go on and give me the rest.”

Gadgem emitted a chuckle—the nearest he ever came to a laugh: “To have it go ON, sir, is infinitely preferable than to have it go OFF, sir. He-he! And you have, I believe you said, two of these highly valuable implements of death?”

“Yes, five altogether—two of this kind. Here, Todd”—and he picked up the gun—“put it back behind the door.”

Gadgem felt in his inside pocket, produced and consulted a memorandum with the air of a man who wanted to be entirely sure, and in a bland voice said:

“I should think at your time of life—if you will permit me, sir—that one less gun would not seriously inconvenience you. Would you permit me, sir, to hope that—”

St. George looked up from his plate and a peculiar expression flitted across his face.

“You mean you want to buy it?”

The bill collector made a little movement forward and scrutinized St. George's face with the eye of a hawk. For a man of Temple's kidney to be without a fowling piece was like a king being without a crown. This was the crucial moment. Gadgem knew Temple's class, and knew just how delicately he must be handled. If St. George's pride, or his love for his favorite chattels—things personal to himself—should overcome him, the whole scheme would fall to the ground. That any gentleman of his standing had ever seen the inside of a pawn-shop in his life was unthinkable. This was what Gadgem faced. As for Todd, he had not drawn a full breath since Gadgem opened his case.

“Not EXactly buy it, sir,” purred Gadgem, twisting his body into an obsequious spiral. “Men of your position do not traffic in such things—but if you would be persuaded, sir, for a money consideration which you would fix yourself—say the ORIGinal cost of the gun—to spare one of your five—you would greatly delight—in fact, you would overWHELM with gratitude—a friend of mine.”

St. George hesitated, looked out of the window and a brand-new thought forced its way into his mind—as if a closet had been suddenly opened, revealing a skeleton he had either forgotten or had put permanently out of sight. There WAS need of this “original cost”—instant need—something he had entirely forgotten. Jemima would soon need it—perhaps needed it at that very minute. He had, it was true, often kept her waiting: but that was when he could pay at his pleasure; now, perhaps, he couldn't pay at all.

“All right, Gadgem,” he said slowly, a far-away, thoughtful look on his face—“come to think of it I don't need two guns of this calibre, and I am quite willing to let this one go, if it will oblige your friend.” Here Todd breathed a sigh of relief so loud and deep that his master turned his head in inquiry. “As to the price—I'll look that up. Come and see me again in a day or two. Better take the gun with you now.”

The fight had been won, but the risk had been great. Even Pawson could hardly believe his ears when Gadgem, five minutes later, related the outcome of the interview.

“Well, then, it will be plain sailing so long as the rest of the things last,” said Pawson, handling the piece with a covetous touch. He too liked a day off when he could get it. “Who will you sell the gun to, Gadgem?”

“God knows—I don't! I'll borrow the money on it somehow—but I can't see him suffer—no, sir—can't see him SUFfer. It's a pleasure to serve him—real gentleman—REAL—do you hear, Pawson? No veneer—no sham—no lies! Damn few such men, I tell you. Never met one before-never will meet one again. Gave up everything he had for a rattle-brain young scamp—BEGgared himself to pay his debts—not a drop of the fellow's blood in his veins either—incredible—inCREDible! Got to handle him like gunpowder or he'll blow everything into matchsticks. Find out the price and I'll bring the money to-morrow. Do you pay it to him; I can't. I'd feel too damn mean after lying to him the way I have. Feel that way now. Good-day.”

The same scene was practically repeated the following month. It was an English saddle this time, St. George having two. And it was the same unknown gentleman who figured as “the much-obliged friend,” Pawson conducting the negotiations and securing the owner's consent. On this occasion Gadgem sold the saddle outright to the keeper of a livery stable, whose bills he collected, paying the difference between the asking and the selling price out of his own pocket.

Gradually, however, St. George awoke to certain unsuspected features of what was going on around him. The discovery was made one morning when the go-between was closeted in Pawson's lower office, Pawson conducting the negotiations in St. George's dining-room. The young attorney, with Gadgem's assistance, had staved off some accounts until a legal ultimatum had been reached, and, having but few resources of his own left, had, with Todd's help, decided that the silver loving-cup presented to his client's father by the Marquis de Castullux could alone save the situation—a decision which brought an emphatic refusal from the owner. This and the discovery of Pawson's and Gadgem's treachery had greatly incensed him.

“And you tell me, Pawson, that that scoundrel, Gadgem, has—Todd go down and bring him up here immediately—has had the audacity to run a pawnshop for my benefit without so much as asking my leave?—peddling my things?—lying to me straight through?” Here the door opened and Gadgem's face peered in. He had, as was his custom, crept upstairs so as to be within instant call when wanted.

“Yes—I am speaking of you, sir. Come inside and shut that door behind you. You too, Todd. What the devil do you mean, Gadgem, by deceiving me in this way? Don't you know I would rather have starved to death than—”

Gadgem raised his hand in protest:

“EXactly so, sir. That's what we were afraid of, sir—such an uncomfortable thing to starve to death, sir—I couldn't permit it, sir—I'd rather walk my feet off than permit it. I did walk them off—”

“But who asked you to tramp the streets with my things uuder your arm? And you lied to me about it—you said you wanted to oblige a friend. There wasn't a word of truth in it, and you know it.”

Again Gadgem's hand went out with a pleading “Please-don't” gesture. “Less than a word, sir—a whole dictionary, less, sir, and UNabridged at that, if I might be permitted to say it. My friend still has the implement of death, and not only does he still possess it, but he is ENORmously obliged. Indeed, I have never SEEN him so happy.”

“You mean to tell me, Gadgem,” St. George burst out, “that the money you paid me for the gun really came from a friend of yours?”

“I do, sir.” Gadgem's gimlet eye was worming itself into Temple's.

“What's his name?”

“Gadgem, sir—John Gadgem, of Gadgem & Coombs—Gadgem sole survivor, since Coombs is with the angels; the foreclosure having taken place last month: hence these weeds.” And he lifted the tails of his black coat in evidence.

“Out of your own money?”

“Yes, sir—some I had laid away.”

St. George wheeled suddenly and stood looking first at Gadgem, then at Pawson, and last at Todd, as if for confirmation. Then a light broke in upon him—one that played over his face in uncertain flashes.

“And you did this for me?” he asked thoughtfully, fixing his gaze on Gadgem.

“I did, sir,” came the answer in a meek voice, as if he had been detected in filching an apple from a stand; “and I would do it again—do it over and over again. And it has been a great pleasure for me to do it. I might say, sir, that it has been a kind of exTREME bliss to do it.”

“Why?” There was a tremor now in Temple's voice that even Todd had never noticed before.

Gadgem turned his head away. “I don't know, sir,” he replied in a lower tone. “I couldn't explain it on oath; I don't care to explain it, sir.” No lie could serve him now—better make a clean breast of the villany.

“And you still own the gun?” Todd had never seen his master so gentle before—not under a provocation such as this.

“I do, sir.” Gadgem's voice was barely audible.

“Then it means that you have locked up just that much of your own money for a thing you can never use yourself and can't sell. Am I right?”

Gadgem lowered his head and for a moment studied the carpet. His activities, now that the cat was out of the bag, were fair subjects for discussion, but not his charities.

“I prefer not to answer, sir, and—” the last words died in his throat.

“But it's true, isn't it?” persisted St. George. He had never once taken his eyes from Gadgem.

“Yes, it's true.”

St. George turned on his heel, walked to the mantel, stood for an instant gazing into the empty fireplace, and then, with that same straightening of his shoulders and lift of his head which his friends knew so well when he was deeply stirred, confronted the collector again:

“Gadgem!” He stopped and caught his breath. For a moment it seemed as if something in his throat choked his utterance. “Gadgem—give me your hand! Do you know you are a gentleman and a thoroughbred! No—don't speak—don't explain. We understand each other. Todd, bring three glasses and hand me what is left of the old Port. And do you join us, Pawson.”

Todd, whose eyes had been popping from his head during the entire interview, and who was still amazed at the outcome, suddenly woke to the dangers of the situation: on no account must his master's straits be further revealed. He raised his hand as a signal to St. George, who was still looking into Gadgem's eyes, screwed his face into a tangle of puckers and in a husky whisper muttered, so low that only his master could hear:

“Dat Port, Marse George”—one eye now went entirely out in a wink—“is gittin' a leetle mite low” (there hadn't been a drop of it in the house for six months) “an' if—”

“Well, then, that old Brown Sherry—get a fresh bottle, Todd—” St. George was quite honest, and so, for that matter, was Todd: the Brown Sherry had also seen its day.

“Yes, sah—but how would dat fine ol' peach brandy de jedge gin ye do? It's sp'ilin' to be tasted, sah.” Both eyes were now in eclipse in the effort to apprise his master that with the exception of some badly corked Madeira, Tom Coston's peach brandy was about the only beverage left in the cellar.

“Well, the old peach brandy, then—get it at once and serve it in the large glasses.”

CHAPTER XXII

St. George had now reached the last stage of his poverty. The selling or pawning of the few valuables left him had been consummated and with the greatest delicacy, so as best to spare his feelings. That he had been assisted by hitherto unknown friends who had sacrificed their own balances in his behalf, added temporarily to his comforts but did not lessen the gravity of the present situation. The fact remained that with the exception of a few possible assets he was practically penniless. Every old debt that could be collected—and Gadgem had been a scourge and a flaming sword as the weeks went on in their gathering—had been rounded up. Even his minor interests in two small ground rents had, thanks to Pawson, been cashed some years in advance. His available resources were now represented by some guns, old books, bridles, another saddle, his rare Chinese punch-bowl and its teakwood stand, and a few remaining odds and ends.

He could hope for no payment from the Patapsco—certainly not for some years; nor could he raise money even on these hopes, the general opinion being that despite the efforts of John Gorsuch, Rutter, and Harding to punish the guilty and resuscitate the innocent, the bank would finally collapse without a cent being paid the depositors. As for that old family suit, it had been in the courts for forty-odd years and it was likely to be there forty-odd years more before a penny would be realized from the settlement.

Had he been differently constructed—he a man with scores and scores of friends, many of whom would gladly have helped him—he might have made his wants known; but such was not his make-up. The men to whom he could apply—men like Horn, the archdeacon, Murdoch, and one or two others—had no money of their own to spare, and as for wealthier men—men like Rutter and Harding—starvation itself would be preferable to an indebtedness of that kind. Then again, he did not want his poverty known. He had defied Talbot Rutter, and had practically shown him the door when the colonel doubted his ability to pay Harry's debts and still live, and no humiliation would be greater than to see Rutter's satisfaction over his abject surrender. No—if the worst came to the worst, he would slip back to Wesley, where he was always welcome and take up the practice of the law, which he had abandoned since his father's death, and thus earn money enough not to be a burden to Peggy. In the meantime something might turn up. Perhaps another of Gadgem's thumb-screws could be fastened on some delinquent and thus extort a drop or two; or the bank might begin paying ten per cent.; or another prepayment might be squeezed out of a ground rent. If none of these things turned out to his advantage, then Gadgem and Pawson must continue their search for customers who would have the rare opportunity of purchasing, direct “from the private collection of a gentleman,” etc., etc., “one first-class English saddle,” etc., etc.

“The meantime,” however, brought no relief. Indeed so acute had the financial strain become that another and a greater sacrifice—one that fairly cut his heart in two—faced him—the parting with his dogs. That four mouths besides his own and Todd's were too many to feed had of late become painfully evident. He might send them to Wesley of course, but then he remembered that no one at Tom Coston's ever had a gun in their hands, and they would only be a charge and a nuisance to Peggy. Or he might send them up into Carroll County to a farmer friend, but in that case he would have to pay their keep, and he needed the money for those at home. And so he waited and pondered.

A coachman from across the park solved the difficulty a day or two later with a whispered word in Todd's ear, which set the boy's temper ablaze—for he dearly loved the dogs himself—until he had talked it over with Pawson and Gadgem, and had then broken the news to his master as best he could.

“Dem dogs is eatin' dere haids off,” he began, fidgeting about the table, brushing the crumbs on to a tray only to spill half of them on the floor—“an' Mister Floyd's coachman done say dat his young marster's jes' a-dyin' for 'em an' don't cyar what he pay for 'em, dat is if ye—” but St. George cut him short.

“What did you say, Todd?”

“Why dat young marster dat's jes' come up f'om Ann'rundel—got mo' money den he kin th'ow 'way I yere.”

“And they are eating their heads off, are they?—and he wants to swap his dirty money for my—Yes—I know. They think they can buy anything with a banknote. And its Floe and Dandy and Sue and Rupert, is it? And I'm to sell them—I who have slept with them and ate with them and hugged them a thousand times. Of course they eat their heads off. Yes—don't say another word. Send them up one at a time—Floe first!”

The scene that followed always lingered in his mind. For days thereafter he could not mention their name, even to Todd, without the tears springing to his eyes.

Up the kitchen flight they tumbled—not one at a time, but all in a scramble, bounding straight at him, slobbering all over his face and hands, their paws scraping his clothes—each trying to climb into his lap—big Gordon setters, all four. He swept them off and ranged them in a row before his arm-chair with their noses flat to the carpet, their brown agate eyes following his every movement.

“Todd says you eat too much, you damned rascals!” he cried in enforced gayety, leaning forward, shaking his finger in their faces. “What the devil do you mean, coming into a gentleman's private apartments and eating him out of house and home!—and that's what you're doing. I'm going to sell you!—do you hear that?—sell you to some stingy curmudgeon who'll starve you to death, and that's what you deserve!... Come here, Floe—you dear old doggie, you—nice Floe!... Here, Dandy—Rupert—Sue!” They were all in his arms, their cold noses snuggled under his warm chin. But this time he didn't care what they did to his clothes—nor what he did to them. He was alone; Todd had gone down to the kitchen—only he and the four companions so dear to his heart. “Come here, you imp of the devil,” he continued, rubbing Floe's ears—he loved her best—pinching her nose until her teeth showed; patting her flanks, crooning over her as a woman would over a child, talking to himself all the time. “I wonder if Floyd will be good to them! If I thought he wouldn't I'd rather starve than—No—I reckon it's all right—he's got plenty of room and plenty of people to look after them.” Then he rose from his chair and drew his hand across his forehead. “Got to sell my dogs, eh? Turned traitor, have you, Mr. Temple, and gone back on your best friends? By God! I wonder what will come next?” He strode across the room, rang for Todd, and bending down loosened a collar from Dandy's neck, on which his own name was engraved, “St. George Wilmot Temple, Esquire.” “Esquire, eh?” he muttered, reading the plate. “What a damned lie! Property of a pauper living on pawnshops and a bill collector! Nice piece of

business, St. George—fine record for your blood and breeding! Ah, Todd—that you? Well, take them downstairs and send word to Mr. Floyd's man to call for them to-night, and when you come back I'll have a letter ready for you. Come here, you rascals, and let me hug one or two of you. Good Floe—good doggie." Then the long-fought choke in his throat strangled him. "Take them away, Todd," he said in a husky voice, straightening his shoulders as if the better to get his breath, and with a deep indrawn sigh walked slowly into his bedroom and shut the door behind him.

Half an hour later there followed a short note, written on one of his few remaining sheets of English paper, addressed to the new owner, in which he informed that gentleman that he bespoke for his late companions the same care and attention which he had always given them himself, and which they so richly deserved, and which he felt sure they would continue to receive while in the service of his esteemed and honored correspondent. This he sealed in wax and stamped with his crest; and this was duly delivered by Todd—and so the painful incident had come to an end.

The dogs disposed of, there still remained to him another issue to meet—the wages he owed Jemima. Although she had not allowed the subject to pass her lips—not even to Todd—St. George knew that she needed the money—she being a free woman and her earnings her own—not a master's. He had twice before determined to set aside enough money from former cash receipts to liquidate Jemima's debt—once from the proceeds of Gadgem's gun and again from what Floyd paid him for the dogs—but Todd had insisted with such vehemence that he needed it for the marketing, that he had let it go over.

The one remaining object of real value was the famous loving-cup. With this turned into money he would be able to pay Jemima in full. For days he debated the matter with himself, putting the question in a dozen different lights: it was not really HIS cup, but belonged to the family, he being only its custodian; it would reflect on his personal honor if he traded so distinguished a gift—one marking the esteem in which his dead father had been held, etc. Then the round, good-natured face and bent figure of his old stand-by and comfort—who had worked for him and for his father almost all her life—rose before him, she bending over her tubs earning the bread to keep her alive, and with this picture in his mind all his fine-spun theories vanished into thin air. Todd was summoned and thus the last connecting link between the past and present was broken and the precious heirloom turned over to Kirk, the silversmith, who the next day found a purchaser with one of the French secretaries in Washington, a descendant of the marquis.

With the whole of the purchase money in his hands and his mind firmly made up he rang for his servant:

"Come along, Todd—show me where Aunt Jemima lives—it's somewhere down by the market, I hear—I'm going now."

The darky's face got as near white as his skin would allow: this was the last thing he had expected.

"Dat ain't no fit place for ye, Marse George," he stammered. "I'll go an' git her an' bring her up; she tol' me when I carried dat las' washin' down she wuz a-comin' dis week."

"No, her sister is sick and she is needed where she is. Get your basket and come along—you can do your marketing down there. Bring me my hat and cane. What's the matter with her sister, do you know?"

Again the darky hedged: "Dunno, sah—some kin' o' mis'ry in her back I reckon. Las' time Aunt Jemima was yere she say de doctor 'lowed her kittens was 'fected." (It was another invalid limping past the front steps who had put that in his head.)

St. George roared: "Well, whatever she's got, I'm going to pay my respects to her; I've neglected Aunt Jemima too long. No—my best hat—don't forget that I'm going to call on a very distinguished colored lady. Come, out with it. How far does she live from the market?"

"Jes' 'bout's far's from yere to de church. Is you gwine now? I got a heap o' cleanin' ter do—dem steps is all gormed up, dey's dat dirty. Maybe we better go when—"

"Not another word out of you! I'm going now." He could feel the money in his pocket and he could not wait. "Get your basket."

Todd led the way and the two crossed the park and struck out for the lower part of the city, near Jones Falls, into a district surrounded by one-and two-story houses inhabited by the poorer class of whites and the more well-to-do free negroes. Here the streets, especially those which ran to the wharves, were narrow and ill-paved, their rough cobbles being often obstructed by idle drays, heavy anchors, and rusting anchor-chains, all on free storage. Up one of these crooked streets, screened from the brick sidewalk by a measly wooden fence, stood a two-story wooden house, its front yard decorated with clothes-lines running criss-cross from thumbs of fence-posts to fingers of shutters—a sort of cat's-cradle along whose meshes Aunt Jemima hung her wet clothes.

On this particular day what was left of St. George Temple's wardrobe and bed linen, with the exception of what that gentleman had on his back, was either waving in the cool air of the morning or being clothes-pinned so that it might wave later on.

Todd's anxious face was the first to thrust itself from around the corner of a sagging, sloppy sheet. The two had entered the gate in the fence at the same moment, but St. George had been lost in the maze of dripping linen.

"Go'way f'om dar, you fool nigger, mussin' up my wash! Keep yo' black haid off'er dem sheets, I tell ye, 'fo' I smack ye! An' ye needn't come down yere a-sassin' me 'bout Marse George's clo'es, 'cause dey ain't done—" (here Temple's head came into view, his face in a broad smile). "Well, fer de lan's sakes, Marse George. What ye come down yere fer? Here—lemme git dat basket outer yo' way—No, dem hands ain't fit fer nobody to shake—My!—but I's mighty glad ter see ye! Don't tell me ye come fer dat wash—I been so pestered wid de weather—nothin' don't dry."

He had dodged a wet sheet and had the old woman by the hand now, her face in a broad grin at sight of him.

"No, aunty—I came down to pay you some money."

"You don't owe me no money—leastwise you don't owe me nothin' till ye kin pay it," and she darted an annihilating glance at Todd.

“Yes, I do—but let me see where you live. What a fine place—plenty of room except on wash-days. All those mine?—I didn't know I had that many clothes left. Pick up that basket, Todd, and bring it in for aunty.” The two made their way between the wet linen and found themselves in front of the dwelling. “And is this all yours?”

“De fust flo' front an 'back is mine an' de top flo' I rents out. Got a white man in dere now dat works in de lumber yard. Jes' come up an' see how I fixed it up.”

“And tell me about your sister—is she better?” he continued.

The old woman put her arms akimbo: “Lawd bress ye, Marse George!—who done tol' ye dat fool lie! I ain't got no sister—not yere!”

“Why, I thought you couldn't come back to me because you had to nurse some member of your family who had kittens, or some such misery in her spine—wasn't that it, Todd?” said St. George trying to conceal a smile.

Todd shot a beseeching look at Jemima to confirm his picturesque yarn, but the old woman would have none of it.

“Dere ain't been nobody to tek care ob but des me. I come yere 'cause I knowed ye didn't hab no money to keep me, an' I got back de ol' furniture what I had fo' I come to lib wid ye, an' went to washin', an' if dat yaller skunk's been tellin' any lies 'bout me I'm gwineter wring his neck.”

“No, let Todd alone,” laughed St. George, his heart warming to the old woman at this further proof of her love for him. “The Lord has already forgiven him that lie, and so have I. And now what have you got upstairs?”

They had mounted the steps by this time and St. George was peering into a clean, simply furnished room. “First rate, aunty—your lumber-yard man is in luck. And now put that in your pocket,” and he handed her the package.

“What's dis?”

“Nearly half a year's wages.”

“I ain't gwineter take it,” she snapped back in a positive tone.

St. George laid his hand tenderly on the old woman's shoulder. She had served him faithfully for many years and he was very fond of her.

“Tuck it in your bosom, aunty—it should have been paid long ago.”

She looked at him shrewdly: “Did de bank pay ye yit, Marse George?”

No

“Den I ain't gwineter tech it—I ain't gwineter tech a fip ob it!” she exploded. “How I know ye ain't a-sufferin' fer it! See dat wash?—an' I got anudder room to rent if I'm min' ter scrunch up a leetle mo'. I kin git 'long.”

St. George's hand again tightened on her shoulder.

“Take it when you can get it, aunty,” he said in a more serious tone, and turning on his heel joined Todd below, leaving the old woman in tears at the top of the stairs, the money on her limp outspread fingers.

All the way back to his home—they had stopped to replenish the larder at the market—St. George kept up his spirits. Absurd as it was—he a man tottering on the brink of dire poverty—the situation from his standpoint was far from perilous. He had discharged the one debt that had caused him the most anxiety—the money due the faithful old cook; he had a basketful of good things—among them half a dozen quail and three diamond-back terrapin—the cheapest food in the market—and he had funds left for his immediate wants.

With this feeling of contentment permeating his mind something of the old feeling of independence, with its indifference toward the dollar and what it meant and could bring him, welled up in his heart. For a time at least the spectre of debt lay hidden. A certain old-time happiness began to show itself in his face and bearing. So evident was this that before many days had passed even Todd noticed the return of his old buoyancy, and so felt privileged to discuss his own feelings, now that the secret of their mode of earning a common livelihood was no longer a bugbear to his master.

“Dem taters what we got outer de extry sterrups of dat ridin'-saddle is mos' gone,” he ventured one morning at breakfast, when the remains of the cup money had reached a low ebb. “Shall I tote de udder saddle down to dat Gadgem man”—(he never called him anything else, although of late he had conceived a marked respect for the collector)—“or shall I keep it fer some mo' sugar?”

“What else is short, Todd?” said St. George, good-naturedly, helping himself to another piece of corn bread.

“Well, dere's plenty ob dose decanter crackers and de pair ob andirons is still holdin' out wid de mango pickles an' de cheese, but dat pair ob ridin'-boots is mos' gone. We got half barrel ob flour an' a bag o' coffee, ye 'member, wid dem boots. I done seen some smoked herrin' in de market yisterday mawnin' 'd go mighty good wid de buckwheat cakes an' sugar-house 'lasses—only we ain't got no 'lasses. I was a-thinkin' dem two ol' cheers in de garret 'd come in handy; ain't nobody sot in em since I been yere; de bottoms is outen one o' dem, but de legs an' backs is good 'nough fer a quart o' 'lasses. I kin take 'em down to de same place dat Gadgem man tol' me to take de big brass shovel an' tongs—”

“All right, Todd,” rejoined St. George, highly amused at the boy's economic resources. “Anything that Mr. Gadgem recommends I agree to. Yes—take him the chairs—both of them.”

Even the men at the club had noticed the change and congratulated him on his good spirits. None of them knew of his desperate straits, although many of them had remarked on the differences in his hospitality, while some of the younger gallants—men who made a study of the height and roll of the collars of their coats and the latest cut of waistcoats—especially the increased width of the frogs on the lapels—had whispered to each other that Temple's clothes certainly needed overhauling; more particularly his shirts, which were much the worse for wear: one critic laying the seeming indifference to the carelessness of a man who was growing old; another shaking his head with the remark that it was Poole's bill which was growing old—older by a good

deal than the clothes, and that it would have to be patched and darned with one of old George Brown's (the banker's) scraps of paper before the wearer could regain his reputation of being the best-dressed man in or out of the club.

None of these lapses from his former well-to-do estate made any difference, however, to St. George's intimates when it came to the selection of important guests for places at table or to assist in the success of some unusual function. Almost every one in and around Kennedy Square had been crippled in their finances by the failure, not only of the Patapsco, but by kindred institutions, during the preceding few years. Why, then, they argued, should any one criticise such economies as Temple was practising? He was still living in his house with his servants—one or two less, perhaps—but still in comfort, and if he did not entertain as heretofore, what of it? His old love of sport, as was shown by his frequent visits to his estates on the Eastern Shore, might account for some of the changes in his hospitable habits, there not being money enough to keep up establishments both in country and town. These changes, of course, could only be temporary. His properties on the peninsula—(almost everybody had “properties” in those days, whether imaginary or real)—would come up some day, and then all would be well again.

The House of Seymour was particularly in the dark. The Honorable Prim, in his dense ignorance, had even asked St. George to join in one of his commercial enterprises—the building of a new clipper ship—while Kate, who had never waited five minutes in all her life for anything that a dollar could buy, had begged a subscription for a charity she was managing, and which she received with a kiss and a laugh, and without a moment's hesitation, from a purse shrinking steadily by the hour.

Only when some idle jest or well-meant inquiry diverted his mind to the chain of events leading up to Harry's exile was his insistent cheerfulness under his fast accumulating misfortunes ever checked.

Todd was the cruel disturber on this particular day, with a bit of information which, by reason of its source, St. George judged must be true, and which because of its import brought him infinite pain.

“Purty soon we won't hab 'nough spoons to stir a toddy wid,” Todd had begun. “I tell ye, Marse George, dey ain't none o' dem gwine down in dere pockets till de constable gits 'em. I jes' wish Marse Harry was yere—he'd fix 'em. 'Fo' dey knowed whar dey wuz he'd hab 'em full o' holes. Dat red-haided, no-count gemman what's a-makin up to Miss Kate is gwineter git her fo' sho—”

It was here that St. George had raised his head, his heart in his mouth.

“How do you know, Todd?” he asked in a serious tone. He had long since ceased correcting Todd for his oustpoken reflections on Kate's suitor as a useless expenditure of time.

“'Cause Mammy Henny done tol' Aunt Jemima so—an' she purty nigh cried her eyes out when she said it. Ye ain't heared nothin' 'bout Marse Harry comin' home, is ye?”

“No—not a word—not for many months, Todd. He's up in the mountains, so his mother tells me.”

Whereupon Todd had gulped down an imprecation expressive of his feelings and had gone about his duties, while St. George had buried himself in his easy-chair, his eyes fixed on vacancy, his soul all the more a-hungered for the boy he loved. He wondered where the lad was—why he hadn't written. Whether the fever had overtaken him and he laid up in some filthy hospital. Almost every week his mother had either come herself or sent in for news, accompanied by messages expressing some new phase of her anxiety. Or had he grown and broadened out and become big and strong?—whom had he met, and how had they treated him?—and would he want to leave home again when once he came back? Then, as always, there came a feeling of intense relief. He thanked God that Harry WASN'T at home; a daily witness of the shrinkage of his resources and the shifts to which he was being put. This would be ten times worse for him to bear than the loss of the boy's companionship. Harry would then upbraid him for the sacrifices he had made for him, as if he would not take every step over again! Take them!—of course he would take them!—so would any other gentleman. Not to have come to Harry's rescue in that the most critical hour of his life, when he was disowned by his father, rejected by his sweetheart, and hounded by creditors, not one of whom did he justly owe, was unthinkable, absolutely unthinkable, and not worth a moment's consideration.

And so he would sit and muse, his head in his hand, his well-rounded legs stretched toward the fire, his white, shapely fingers tapping the arms of his chair—each click so many telegraphic records of the workings of his mind.

CHAPTER XXIII

With the closing in of the autumn and the coming of the first winter cold, the denizens of Kennedy Square gave themselves over to the season's entertainments. Mrs. Cheston, as was her usual custom, issued invitations for a ball—this one in honor of the officers who had distinguished themselves in the Mexican War. Major Clayton, Bowdoin, the Murdochs, Stirlings, and Howards—all persons of the highest quality—inaugurated a series of chess tournaments, the several players and those who came to look on to be thereafter comforted with such toothsome solids as wild turkey, terrapin, and olio, and such delectable liquids as were stored in the cellars of their hosts. Old Judge Pancoast, yielding to the general demand, gave an oyster roast—his enormous kitchen being the place of all others for such a function. On this occasion two long wooden tables were scoured to an unprecedented whiteness—the young girls in white aprons and the young men in white jackets serving as waiters—and laid with wooden plates, and two big wooden bowls—one for the hot, sizzling shells just off their bed of hickory coals banked on the kitchen hearth, and the other for the empty ones—the fun continuing until the wee sma' hours of the morning.

The Honorable Prim and his charming daughter, not to be outdone by their neighbors, cleared the front drawing-room of its heavy furniture, covered every inch of the tufted carpet with linen crash, and with old black Jones as fiddler and M. Robinette—a French exile—as instructor in the cutting of pigeon wings and the

proper turning out of ankles and toes, opened the first of a series of morning soirees for the young folk of the neighborhood, to which were invited not only their mothers, but their black mammies as well.

Mr. and Mrs. Richard Horn, not having any blithesome daughter, nor any full-grown son—Oliver being but a child of six—and Richard and his charming wife having long since given up their dancing-slippers—were good enough to announce—(and it was astonishing what an excitement it raised)—that “On the Monday night following Mr. Horn would read aloud, to such of his friends as would do him the honor of being present, the latest Christmas story by Mr. Charles Dickens, entitled 'The Cricket on the Hearth.'” For this occasion Mr. Kennedy had loaned him his own copy, one of the earliest bound volumes, bearing on its fly-leaf an inscription in the great master's own handwriting in which he thanked the distinguished author of “Swallow Barn” for the many kindnesses he had shown him during his visit to America, and begged his indulgence for his third attempt to express between covers the sentiment and feeling of the Christmas season.

Not that this was an unusual form of entertainment, nor one that excited special comment. Almost every neighborhood had its morning (and often its evening) “Readings,” presided over by some one who read well and without fatigue—some sweet old maid, perhaps, who knew how to grow old gracefully. At these times a table would be rolled into the library by the deferential servant of the house, on which he would place the dear lady's spectacles and a book, its ivory marker showing where the last reading had ended—it might be Prescott's “Ferdinand and Isabella,” or Irving's “Granada,” or Thackeray's “Vanity Fair,” or perhaps, Dickens's “Martin Chuzzlewit.”

At eleven o'clock the girls would begin to arrive, each one bringing her needle-work of some kind—worsted, or embroidery, or knitting—something she could manage without discomfort to herself or anybody about her, and when the last young lady was in her seat, the same noiseless darky would tiptoe in and take his place behind the old maid's chair. Then he would slip a stool under her absurdly small slippers and tiptoe out again, shutting the door behind him as quietly as if he found the dear lady asleep—and so the reading would begin.

A reading by Richard, however, was always an event of unusual importance, and an invitation to be present was never declined whether received by letter or by word of mouth.

St. George had been looking forward eagerly to the night, and when the shadows began to fall in his now almost bare bedroom, he sent for Todd to help him dress.

“Have you got a shirt for me, Todd?”

“Got seben oh 'em. Dey wants a li'l' trimmin' roun' de aidges, but I reckon we kin make 'em do—Aunt Jemima sont 'em home dis mawnin'. She's been a-workin' on 'em, she says. Looks ter me like a goat had a moufful outer dis yere sleeve, but I dassent tell er so. Lot o' dem butters wanderin' roun' dat Marsh market lookin' fer sumpin' to eat; lemme gib dem boots anudder tech.”

Todd skipped downstairs with the boots and St. George continued dressing; selecting his best and most becoming scarf; pinning down the lapels of his buff waistcoat; scissoring the points of his high collar, and with Todd's assistance working his arms between the slits in the silk lining of the sleeves of his blue cloth, brass-buttoned coat, which he finally pulled into place across his chest.

And a well-dressed man he was in spite of the frayed edges of his collar and shirt ruffles and the shiny spots in his trousers and coat where the nap was worn smooth, nor was there any man of his age who wore his clothes as well, no matter what their condition, or one who made so debonair an appearance.

Pawson was of that opinion to-night when St. George, his toilet complete, joined him at the bottom of the stairs. Indeed he thought he had never seen his client look better—a discovery which sent a spasm of satisfaction through his long body, for he had a piece of important news to tell him, and had been trying all day to make up his mind how best to break it.

“You look younger, Mr. Temple,” he began, “and, if you will allow me to say so, handsomer, every day. Your trip to the Eastern Shore last spring did you no end of good,” and the young attorney crooked his long neck and elevated his eyebrows and the corners of his mouth in the effort to give to his sinuous body a semblance of mirth.

“Thank you, Pawson,” bowed St. George, graciously. “You are really most kind, but that is because you are stone blind. My shirt is full of holes, and it is quite likely I shall have to stand all the evening for fear of splitting the knees of my breeches. Come—out with it”—he laughed—“there is something you have to tell me or you would not be waiting for me here at this hour in the cold hall.”

Pawson smiled faintly, then his eyebrows lost their identity in some well-defined wrinkles in his forehead.

“I have, sir, a most unpleasant thing to tell you—a very unpleasant thing. When I tried this morning for a few days' grace on that last overdue payment, the agent informed me, to my great surprise, that Mr. John Gorsuch had bought the mortgage and would thereafter collect the interest in person. I am not sure, of course, but I am afraid Colonel Rutter is behind the purchase. If he is we must be prepared to face the worst should he still feel toward you as he did when you and he”—and he jerked his thumb meaningly in the direction of the dining-room—“had it out—in there.”

St. George compressed his lips. “And so Rutter holds the big end of the whip after all, does he?” he exclaimed with some heat. “He will find the skin on my back not a very valuable asset, but he is welcome to it. He has about everything else.”

“But I'd rather pay it somehow if we could,” rejoined Pawson in a furtive way—as if he had something up his sleeve he dare not spring upon him.

“Yes—of course you would,” retorted St. George with a cynical laugh, slipping on his gloves. “Pay it?—of course pay it. Pay everything and everybody! What do you think I'd bring at auction, Pawson? I'm white, you know, and so I can't be sold on the block—but the doctors might offer you a trifle for cutting-up purposes. Bah! Hand me my coat, Todd.”

A deprecatory smile flitted across the long, thin face of the attorney. He saw that St. George was in no mood for serious things, and yet something must be done; certainly before the arrival of Gorsuch himself, who was known to be an exact man of business and who would have his rights, no matter who suffered.

“I had a little plan, sir—but you might not fall in with it. It would, perhaps, be only temporary, but it is all I

can think of. I had an applicant this morning—in fact it came within an hour after I had heard the news. It seemed almost providential, sir."

St. George was facing the door, ready to leave the house, his shoulders still bent forward so that Todd could adjust his heavy cloak the better, when for the first time the anxious tone in Pawson's voice caught his attention. As the words fell from the attorney's lips he straightened, and Todd stepped back, the garment still in the darky's hands.

"An applicant for what?" he inquired in a graver tone. He was not surprised—nothing surprised him in these days—he was only curious.

"For the rooms you occupy. I can get enough for them, sir, not only to clear up the back interest, but to keep the mortgage alive and—"

St. George's face paled as the full meaning of Pawson's proposal dawned in his mind. That was the last thing he had expected.

"Turn me into the street, eh?" There was a note of pained surprise in his voice.

"I don't want you to put it that way, sir." His heart really bled for him—it was all he could do to control himself.

"How the devil else can I put it?"

"Well, I thought you might want to do a little shooting, sir."

"Shooting! What with? One of Gadgem's guns? Hire it of him, eh, and steal the powder and shot!" he cried savagely.

"Yes—if you saw fit, sir. Gadgem, I am sure, would be most willing, and you can always get plenty of ammunition. Anyway, you might pass a few months with your kinsfolk on the Eastern Shore, whether you hunted or not; it did you so much good before. The winter here is always wearing, sloppy and wet. I've heard you say so repeatedly." He had not taken his eyes from his face; he knew this was St. George's final stage, and he knew too that he would never again enter the home he loved; but this last he could not tell him outright. He would rather have cut his right hand off than tell him at all. Being even the humblest instrument in the exiling of a man like St. George Wilmot Temple was in itself a torture.

"And when do you want me to quit?" he said calmly. "I suppose I can evacuate like an officer and a gentleman and carry my side-arms with me—my father's cane, for instance, that I can neither sell nor pawn, and a case of razors which are past sharpening?" and his smile broadened as the humor of the thing stole over him.

"Well, sir, it ought to be done," continued Pawson in his most serious tone, ignoring the sacrifice—(there was nothing funny in the situation to the attorney)—"well—I should say—right away. To-morrow, perhaps. This news of Gorsuch has come very sudden, you know. If I can show him that the new tenant has moved in already he might wait until his first month's rent was paid. You see that—"

"Oh, yes, Pawson, I see—see it all clear as day," interrupted St. George—"have been seeing it for some months past, although neither you nor Gadgem seem to have been aware of that fact." This came with so grave a tone that Pawson raised his eyes inquiringly. "And who is this man," Temple went on, "who wants to step into my shoes? Be sure you tell him they are half-soled," and he held up one boot. He might want to dance or hunt in them—and his toes would be out the first thing he knew."

"He is Mr. Gorsuch's attorney, sir, a Mr. Fogbin," Pawson answered, omitting any reference to the boots and still concerned over the gravity of the situation. "He did some work once for Colonel Rutter, and that's how Gorsuch got hold of him. That's why I suspect the colonel. This would make the interest sure, you see—rather a sly game, is it not, sir? One I did not expect."

St. George pondered for a moment, and his eye fell on his servant.

"And what will I do with Todd?"

The darky's eyes had been rolling round in his head as the talk continued, Pawson, knowing how leaky he was, having told him nothing of the impending calamity for fear he would break it to his master in the wrong way.

"I should say take him with you," came the positive answer.

"Take him with me! You didn't think I would be separated from him, did you?" cried St. George, indignantly, the first note of positive anger he had yet shown.

"I didn't think anything about it, sir," and he looked at Todd apologetically.

"Well, after this please remember, Mr. Pawson, that where I go Todd goes."

The darky leaned forward as if to seize St. George's hand; his eyes filled and his lips began to tremble. He would rather have died than have left his master.

St. George walked to the door, threw it open, and stood for an instant, his eyes fixed on the bare trees in the park. He turned and faced the two again:

"Todd!"

"Yes, Marse George—" Two hot ragged tears still lingered on the darky's eyelids.

"To-day is Monday, is it not?—and to-morrow is boat day?"

"Yes, Marse George," came the trembling answer.

"All right, Pawson, I'll go. Let Talbot Rutter have the rest—he's welcome to it. Now for my cloak, Todd—so—and my neckerchief and cane. Thank you very much, Pawson. You have been very kind about it all, and I know quite well what it has cost you to tell me this. You can't help—neither can I—neither, for that matter, can Gorsuch—nor is it his fault. It is Rutter's, and he will one day get his reckoning. Good-night—don't sit up too late. I am going to Mr. Horn's to spend the evening. Walk along with me through the Park, Todd, so I can talk to you. And, Todd," he continued when they had entered the path and were bending their steps to the Horn house, "I want you to gather together to-morrow what are left of my clothes and pack them in one of those hair trunks upstairs—and your own things in another. Never mind about waiting for the wash. I'm going

down to Aunt Jemima's myself in the morning and will fix it so she can send the rest to me later on. I owe her a small balance and must see her once more before I leave. Now go home and get to bed; you have been losing too much sleep of late."

And yet he was not cast down, nor did his courage fail him. Long before the darky's obedient figure had disappeared his natural buoyancy had again asserted itself—or perhaps the philosophy which always sustains a true gentleman in his hour of need had come to his assistance. He fully realized what this last cowardly blow meant. One after another his several belongings had vanished: his priceless family heirlooms; his dogs; and now the home of his ancestors. He was even denied further shelter within its walls. But there were no regrets; his conscience still sustained him; he would live it all over again. In his determination to keep to his standards he had tried to stop a freshet with a shovelful of clay; that was all. It was a foolhardy attempt, no doubt, but he would have been heartily ashamed of himself if he had not made the effort. Wesley, of course, was not a very exciting place in which to spend the winter, but it was better than being under obligations to Talbot Rutter; and then he could doubtless earn enough at the law to pay his board—at least he would try.

He had reached the end of the walk and had already caught the glow of the overhead lantern in the hall of the Horn mansion lighting up the varied costumes of the guests as Malachi swung back the front door, revealing the girls in their pink and white nubias, the gallants in long cloaks with scarlet linings, the older men in mufflers, and the mothers and grandmothers in silk hoods. There was no question of Richard's popularity.

"Clar to goodness, Marse George, you is a sight for sore eyes," cried Malachi, unhooking the clasp of the velvet collar and helping him off with his cloak. "I ain't never seen ye looking spryer! Yes, sah, Marse Richard's inside and he'll be mighty glad ye come. Yes—jedge—jes's soon as I—Dat's it, mistis—I'll take dat shawl—No, sah, Marse Richard ain't begun yit. Dis way, ladies," and so it had gone on since the opening rat-a-tat-tat on the old brass knocker had announced the arrival of the first guest.

Nor was there any question that everybody who could by any possibility have availed themselves of Richard's invitation had put in an appearance. Most of the men from the club known to these pages were present, together with their wives and children—those who were old enough to sit up late; and Nathan Gill, without his flute this time, but with ears wide open—he was beginning to get gray, was Nathan, although he wouldn't admit it; and Miss Virginia Clendenning in high waist and voluminous skirts, fluffy side curls, and a new gold chain for her eyeglasses—gold rims, too, of course—not to mention the Murdochs, Stirlings, Gatchells, Captain Warfield and his daughter, Bowdoin, and Purviance. They were all there; everybody, in fact, who could squeeze inside the drawing-room; while those who couldn't filled the hall and even the stairs—wherever Richard's voice could be heard.

St. George edged into the packed room, swept his glance over the throng, and made his way through the laughing groups, greeting every one right and left, old and young, as he moved—a kiss here on the upturned cheek of some pretty girl whom he had carried in his arms when a baby; a caressing pat of approbation on some young gallant's shoulder; a bend of the head in respectful homage to those he knew but slightly—the Baroness de Trobiand, Mrs. Cheston's friend, being one of them; a hearty hand held out to the men who had been away for the summer—interrupted now and then by some such sally from a young bride as—"Oh, you mean Uncle George! No—I'm not going to love you any more! You promised you would come to my party and you didn't, and my cotillon was all spoiled!" or a—"Why, Temple, you dear man!-I'm so glad to see you! Don't forget my dinner on Thursday. The Secretary is coming and I want you to sit between him and Lord Atherton"—a sort of triumphal procession, really—until he reached the end of the room and stood at Kate's side.

"Well, sweetheart!" he cried gayly, caressing her soft hand before his fingers closed over it. Then his face hardened. "Ah, Mr. Willits! So you, too, must come under the spell of Mr. Horn's voice," and without waiting for a reply continued as if nothing had interrupted the joy of his greeting. "You should sit down somewhere, my dear Kate—get as near to Richard as you can, so you can watch his face—that's the best part of it. And I should advise you, too, Mr. Willits, to miss none of his words—it will be something you will remember all your life."

Kate looked up in his face with a satisfied smile. She was more than glad that her Uncle George was so gracious to her escort, especially to-night when he was to meet a good many people for the first time.

"I'll take the stool, then, dear Uncle George," she answered with a merry laugh. "Go get it, please, Mr. Willits—the one under the sofa." Then, with a toss of her head and a coquettish smile at St. George: "What a gadabout you are; do you know I've been three times to see you, and not a soul in your house and the front door wide open, and everything done up in curl papers as if you were going to move away for good and all and never coming back? And do you know that you haven't been near me for a whole week? What do you mean by breaking my heart? Thank you, Mr. Willits; put the stool right here, so I can look up into Mr. Horn's eyes as Uncle George wants me to. I've known the time, sir"—and she arched her brows at St. George—"when you would be delighted to have me look my prettiest at you, but now before I am halfway across the park you slip out of the basement door to avoid me and—No!—no—no apologies—you are just tired of me!"

St. George laughed gayly in return, his palms flattened against each other and held out in supplication; but he made no defence. He was studying the couple, his mind on the bearing and manner of the young man toward the woman he was pursuing so relentlessly. He saw that he had completely regained his health, his clear eyes and ruddy skin and the spring with which he moved denoting a man in perfect physical condition. He discovered, too, that he was extremely well dressed and his costume all that it should be—especially the plum-colored coat, which fitted his shoulders to perfection; his linen of the whitest and finest, each ruffle in flutes; the waist-coat embroidered in silk; the pumps of the proper shape and the stockings all that could be desired—except perhaps—and a grim smile crossed his face—that the silk scarf was a shade out of key with the prevailing color of his make-up, particularly his hair; but, then, that was to be expected of a man who had a slight flaw in his ancestry. He wondered if she had noticed it and studied her face for an answer. No! She had not noticed it. In fact there were very many things she was overlooking in these last days of his wooing, he thought to himself.

Suddenly he became occupied with Kate's beauty. He thought he had never seen her so bewitching or in such good spirits. From his six feet and an inch of vantage his eyes followed her sloping shoulders and tapering arms and rested on her laughing, happy face—rose-colored in the soft light of the candles—a film of lace looped at her elbows, her wonderful hair caught in a coil at the back: not the prevailing fashion but one most becoming to her. What had not this admixture of Scotch and Virginia blood—this intermingling of robust independence with the gentle, yielding feminine qualities of the Southern-born woman—done for this girl?

Richard clapped his hands to attract attention, and advancing a step in front of the big easy-chair which Malachi had just pulled out for him, raised his fingers to command silence.

All eyes were instantly turned his way. Alert and magnetic, dignified and charming, he stood in the full glow of the overhead chandelier, its light falling upon his snuff-brown coat with its brass buttons, pale-yellow waistcoat, and the fluff of white silk about his throat—his grave, thoughtful face turned toward Kate as his nearest guest, his glance sweeping the crowded room as if to be sure that everybody was at ease; Malachi close behind awaiting his master's orders to further adjust the chair and reading-lamp.

In the interim of the hush Kate had settled herself at Richard's feet on the low stool that Willits had brought, the young man standing behind her, the two making a picture that attracted general attention; some wondering at her choice, while others were outspoken in their admiration of the pair who seemed so wonderfully suited to each other.

“I have a rare story,” Richard began “to read to you to-night, my good friends, one you will never forget; one, indeed, which I am sure the world at large will never forget. I shall read it as best I can, begging your indulgence especially in rendering the dialect parts, which, if badly done, often mar both the pathos and humor of the text.” Here he settled himself in his chair and picked up the small volume, Malachi, now that his service was over, tiptoeing out to his place in the hall so as to be ready for belated arrivals.

The room grew silent. Even Mrs. Cheston, who rarely ceased talking when she had anything to say—and she generally did have something to say—folded her hands in her lap and settled herself in her arm-chair, her whole attention fastened on the reader. St. George, who had been talking to her, moved up a chair so he could watch Kate's face the better.

Again Richard raised his voice:

“The time is of the present, and the scene is laid in one of those small towns outside London. I shall read the whole story, omitting no word of the text, for only then will you fully grasp the beauty of the author's style.”

He began in low, clear tones reciting the contest between the hum of the kettle and the chirp of the cricket; the music of his voice lending added charm to the dual song. Then there followed in constantly increasing intensity the happy home life of bewitching Dot Perrybingle and her matter-of-fact husband, John the Carrier, with sleepy Tilly Slowboy and the Baby to fill out the picture; the gradual unfolding of the events that led up to the cruel marriage about to take place between old Tackleton, the mean toy merchant, and sweet May Fielding, in love with the sailor boy, Edward, lost at sea; the finding of the mysterious deaf old man by John the Carrier, and the bringing him home in his cart to Dot, who kept him all night because his friends had not called for him; the rapid growth of a love affair between Dot and this old man, who turned out to be a handsome young fellow; the heart-rending discovery by John, through the spying of Tackleton, that Dot was untrue to him, she meeting the man clandestinely and adjusting the disguise for him, laughing all the while at the ruse she was helping him to play; the grief of John when he realized the truth, he sitting all night alone by the fire trying to make up his mind whether he would creep upstairs and murder the villain who had stolen the heart of his little Dot, or forgive her because he was so much older than she and it was, therefore, natural for her to love a younger man; and finally the preparations at the church, where Tackleton was to wed the beautiful May Fielding, who, broken-hearted over the death of her sailor boy, had at last succumbed to her mother's wishes and consented to join Tackleton at the altar.

For an hour Richard's well-modulated, full-toned voice rolled on, the circle drawing closer and closer with their ears and hearts, as the characters, one after another, became real and alive under the reader's magical rendering. Dot Perrybingle's cheery, laughing accents; Tackleton's sharp, rasping tones; John the Carrier's simple, straightforward utterances and the soft, timid cadence of old Caleb, the toy maker—(drowned Edward's father)—and his blind daughter Bertha were recognized as soon as the reader voiced their speech. So thrilling was the story of their several joys and sorrows that Kate, unconscious of her surroundings, had slipped from her low stool, and with the weight of her body resting on her knees, sat searching Richard's face, the better to catch every word that fell from his lips.

To heighten the effect of what was the most dramatic part of the story—the return of the wedding party to the Carrier's house, where Dot, Caleb, and his blind daughter awaited them—Richard paused for a moment as if to rest his voice—the room the while deathly still, the loosening of a pent-up breath now and then showing how tense was the emotion. Then he went on:

“Are those wheels upon the road, Bertha?”, cried Dot. “You've a quick ear, Bertha—And now you hear them stopping at the garden gate! And now you hear a step outside the door—the same step, Bertha, is it not—And now—”

Dot uttered a wild cry of uncontrollable delight, and running up to Caleb put her hand upon his eyes, as a young man rushed into the room, and, flinging away his hat into the air, came sweeping down upon them.

“Is it over?” cried Dot.

“Yes!”

“Happily over?”

“Yes!”

“Do you recollect the voice, dear Caleb? Did you ever hear the like of it before?” cried Dot.

“If my boy Edward in the Golden South Americas was alive—” cried Caleb, trembling.

“He is alive!” shrieked Dot, removing her hands from his eyes and clapping them in ecstasy; “look at him! See where he stands before you, healthy and strong! Your own dear son! Your own dear, living, loving

brother, Bertha!”

All honor to the little creature for her transports! All honor to her tears and laughter, when the three were locked in one another's arms! All honor to the heartiness with which she met the sunburnt, sailor-fellow, with his dark, streaming hair, halfway, and never turned her rosy little mouth aside, but suffered him to kiss it freely, and to press her to his bounding heart!

“Now tell him (John) all, Edward,” sobbed Dot, “and don't spare me, for nothing shall make me spare myself in his eyes ever again.”

“I was the man,” said Edward.

“And you could steal disguised into the home of your old friend,” rejoined the carrier...

“But I had a passion for her.”

“You!”

“I had,” rejoined the other, “and she returned it—I heard twenty miles away that she was false to me—I had no mind to reproach her but to see for myself.”

Once more Richard's voice faltered, and again it rang clear, this time in Dot's tones:

“But when she knew that Edward was alive, John, and had come back—and when she—that's me, John—told him all—and how his sweetheart had believed him to be dead, and how she had been over-persuaded by her mother into a marriage—and when she—that's me again, John—told him they were not married, though close upon it—and when he went nearly mad for joy to hear it—then she—that's me again—said she would go and sound his sweetheart—and she did—and they were married an hour ago!—John, an hour ago! And here's the bride! And Gruff and Tackleton may die a bachelor! And I'm a happy little woman, May, God bless you!”

Little woman, how she sobbed! John Perrybingle would have caught her in his arms. But no; she wouldn't let him.

“Don't love me yet, please, John! Not for a long time yet! No—keep there, please, John! When I laugh at you, as I sometimes do, John, and call you clumsy, and a dear old goose, and names of that sort, it's because I love you, John, so well. And when I speak of people being middle-aged and steady, John, and pretend that we are a humdrum couple, going on in a jog-trot sort of way, it's only because I'm such a silly little thing, John, that I like, sometimes, to act a kind of play with Baby, and all that, and make believe.”

She saw that he was coming, and stopped him again. But she was very nearly too late.

“No, don't love me for another minute or two, if you please, John! When I first came home here I was half afraid I mighn't learn to love you every bit as well as I hoped and prayed I might—being so very young, John. But, dear John, every day and hour I love you more and more. And if I could have loved you better than I do, the noble words I heard you say this morning would have made me. But I can't. All the affection that I had (it was a great deal, John) I gave you, as you well deserve, long, long ago, and I have no more left to give. Now, my dear husband, take me to your heart again! That's my home, John; and never, never think of sending me to any other.”

Richard Stopped and picking up a glass from the table moistened his lips. The silence continued. Down more than one face the tears were trickling, as they have trickled down millions of faces since. Kate had crept imperceptibly nearer until her hands could have touched Richard's knees. When Willits bent over her with a whispered comment a slight shiver ran through her, but she neither answered nor turned her head. It was only when Richard's voice finally ceased with the loud chirp of the cricket at the close of the beloved story, and St. George had helped her to her feet, that she seemed to awake to a sense of where she was. Even then she looked about her in a dazed way, as if she feared some one had been probing her heart—hanging back till the others had showered their congratulations on the reader. Then leaning forward she placed her hands in Richard's as if to steady herself, and with a sigh that seemed to come from the depths of her nature bent her head and kissed him softly on the cheek.

When the eggnog was being served and the guests were broken up into knots and groups, all discussing the beauty of the reading, she suddenly left Willits, who had followed her every move as if he had a prior right to her person, and going up to St. George, led him out of the room to one of the sofas in Richard's study, her lips quivering, the undried tears still trembling on her eyelids. She did not release his hand as they took their seats. Her fingers closed only the tighter, as if she feared he would slip from her grasp.

“It was all so beautiful and so terrible, Uncle George,” she moaned at last—“and all so true. Such awful mistakes are made and then it is too late. And nobody understands—nobody—nobody!” She paused, as if the mere utterance pained her, and then to St. George's amazement asked abruptly “Is there nothing yet from Harry?”

St. George looked at her keenly, wondering whether he had caught the words aright. It had been months since Harry's name had crossed her lips.

“No, nothing,” he answered simply, trying to fathom her purpose and completely at sea as to her real motive—“not for some months. Not since he left the ship.”

“And do you think he is in any danger?” She had released his hand, and with her fingers resting on the sleeve of his coat sat looking into his eyes as if to read their meaning.

“I don't know,” he replied in a non-committal tone, still trying to understand her purpose. “He meant then to go to the mountains, so he wrote his mother. This may account for our not hearing. Why do you ask? Have you had any news of him yourself?” he added, studying her face for some solution of her strange attitude.

She sank back on the cushions. “No, he never writes to me.” Then, as if some new train of thought had forced its way into her mind, she exclaimed suddenly: “What mountains?”

“Some range back of Rio, if I remember rightly. He said he—”

“Rio! But there is yellow fever at Rio!” she cried, with a start as she sat erect in her seat, the pupils of her eyes grown to twice their size. “Father lost half of one of his crews at Rio. He heard so to-day. It would be dreadful for—for—his mother—if anything should happen to him.”

Again St. George scrutinized her face, trying to probe deep down in her heart. Had she, after all, some

affection left for this boy lover—and her future husband within hearing distance! No! This was not his Kate—he understood it all now. It was the spell of the story that still held her. Richard's voice had upset her, as it had done half the room.

“Yes, it is dreadful for everybody,” he added. And then, in a perfunctory manner, as being perhaps the best way to lead the conversation into other channels, added: “And the suspense will be worse now—for me at any rate—for I, too, am going away where letters reach me but seldom.”

Her hand closed convulsively over his.

“You going away! YOU!” she cried in a half-frightened tone. “Oh, please don't, Uncle George! Oh!—I don't want you away from me! Why must you go? Oh, no! Not now—not now!”

Her distress was so marked and her voice so pleading that he was about to tell her the whole story, even to that of the shifts he had been put to to get food for himself and Todd, when he caught sight of Willits making his way through the throng to where they sat. His lips closed tight. This man would always be a barrier between him and the girl he had loved ever since her babyhood.

“Well, my dear Kate,” he replied calmly, his eyes still on Willits, who in approaching from the other room had been detained by a guest, “you see I must go. Mr. Pawson wants me out of the way while he fixes up some of my accounts, and so he suggested that I go back to Wesley for a few months.” He paused for an instant and, still keeping his eye on Willets, added: “And now one thing more, my dear Kate, before your escort claims you”—here his voice sank to a whisper—“promise me that if Harry writes to you you will send him a kind, friendly letter in return. It can do you no harm now, nor would Harry misunderstand it—your wedding is so near. A letter would greatly cheer him in his loneliness.”

“But he won't write!” she exclaimed with some bitterness—she had not yet noticed Willits's approach—“he'll never write or speak to me again.”

“But you will if he does?” pleaded St. George, the thought of his boy's loneliness overmastering every other feeling.

“But he won't, I tell you—never—NEVER!”

“But if he should, my child? If—”

He stopped and raised his head. Willits stood gazing down at them, searching St. George's face, as if to learn the meaning of the conference: he knew that he did not favor his suit.

Kate looked up and her face flushed.

“Yes—in one minute, Mr. Willits,” and without a word of any kind to St. George she rose from the sofa and with her arm in Willits's left the room.

CHAPTER XXIV

One winter evening some weeks after St. George's departure, Pawson sat before a smouldering fire in Temple's front room, reading by the light of a low lamp. He had rearranged the furniture—what was left of it—both in this and the adjoining room, in the expectation that Fogbin (Gorsuch's attorney) would move in, but so far he had not appeared, nor had any word come from either Gorsuch or Colonel Rutter; nor had any one either written or called upon him in regard to the overdue payment; neither had any legal papers been served.

This prolonged and ominous silence disturbed him; so much so that he had made it a point to be as much in his office as possible should his enemy spring any unexpected trap.

It was, therefore, with some misgivings that he answered a quick, impatient rap on his front door at the unusual hour of ten o'clock. If it were Fogbin he had everything ready for his comfort; if it were any one else he would meet him as best he could: no legal papers, at any rate, could be served at that hour.

He swung back the door and a full-bearded, tightly-knit, well-built man in rough clothes stepped in. In the dim light of the overhead lamp he caught the flash of a pair of determined eyes set in a strong, forceful face.

“I want Mr. Temple,” said the man, who had now removed his cap and stood looking about him, as if making an inventory of the scanty furniture.

“He is not here,” replied Pawson, rummaging the intruder's face for some clew to his identity and purpose in calling at so late an hour.

“Are you sure?” There was doubt as well as marked surprise in the man's tone. He evidently did not believe a word of the statement.

“Very sure,” rejoined the attorney in a more positive tone, his eyes still on the stranger. “He left town some weeks ago.”

The intruder turned sharply, and with a brisk inquisitive movement strode past him and pushed open the dining-room door. There he stood for a moment, his eyes roaming over the meagre appointments of the interior—the sideboard, bare of everything but a pitcher and some tumblers—the old mahogany table littered with law books and papers—the mantel stripped of its clock and candelabras. Then he stepped inside, and without explanation of any kind, crossed the room, opened the door of St. George's bedroom, and swept a comprehensive glance around the despoiled interior. Once he stopped and peered into the gloom as if expecting to find the object of his search concealed in its shadows.

“What has happened here?” he demanded in a voice which plainly showed his disappointment.

“Do you mean what has become of the rest of the furniture?” asked the attorney in reply, gaining time to decide upon his course.

“Yes, who is responsible for this business?” he exclaimed angrily. “Has it been done during his absence?”

Pawson hesitated. That the intruder was one of Gorsuch's men, and that he had been sent in advance on an errand of investigation, was no longer to be doubted. He, however, did not want to add any fuel to his increasing heat, so he answered simply:

“Mr. Temple got caught in the Patapsco failure and it went pretty hard with him, and so what he didn't actually need he sold.”

The man gave a start, his features hardening; but whether of surprise or dissatisfaction Pawson could not tell.

“And when it was all gone he went away—is that what you mean?” This came in a softened tone.

“Yes—that seems to be the size of it. I suppose you come about—some”—again he hesitated, not knowing exactly where the man stood—“about some money due you?—Am I right?”

“No, I came to see Mr. Temple, and I must see him, and at once. How long will he be gone?”

“All winter—perhaps longer.” The attorney had begun to breathe again. The situation might not be as serious as he had supposed. If he wanted to see Mr. Temple himself, and no one else would do, there was still chance of delay in the wiping out of the property.

Again the man's eyes roamed over the room, the bareness of which seemed still to impress him. Then he asked simply: “Where will a letter reach him?”

“I can't say exactly. I thought he had gone to Virginia—but he doesn't answer any of my communications.”

A look of suspicion crept into the intruder's eyes.

“You're not trying to deceive me, are you? It is very important that I should see Mr. Temple, and at once.” Then his manner altered. “You've forgotten me, Mr. Pawson, but I have not forgotten you—my name is Rutter. I lived here with Mr. Temple before I went to sea, three years ago. I am just home—I left the ship an hour ago. I'll sit down if you don't mind—I've still got my sea-legs on and am a little wobbly.”

Pawson twisted his thin body and bent his neck, his eyes glued to the speaker's face. There was not a trace of young Harry in the features.

“Well, you don't look like him,” he replied incredulously—“he was slender—not half your size, and—”

“Yes—I don't blame you. I am a good deal heavier; may be too a beard makes some change in a man's face. But you don't really doubt me, do you? Have you forgotten the bills that man Gadgem brought in?—the five hundred dollars due Slater, and the horse Hampson sold me—the one I shot?” and one of his old musical laughs rose to his lips.

Pawson sprang forward and seized the intruder's hand. He would recognize that laugh among a thousand:

“Yes—I know you now! It's all come back to me,” he cried joyously. “But you gave me a terrible start, Mr. Rutter. I thought you had come to clear up what was left. Oh!—but I AM glad you are back. Your uncle—you always called him so, I remember—your uncle has had an awful hard time of it—had to sell most of his things—terrible—terrible! And then, too, he has grieved so over you—asking me, sometimes two or three times a day, for letters from you—asking me questions and worrying over your not coming and not answering. Oh, this is fine. Now may be we can save the situation. You don't mind my shaking your hand again, do you? It's so good to know there is somebody who can help. I have been all alone so far except Gadgem—who has been a treasure. You remember him. Why didn't you let Mr. Temple know you were coming?”

“I couldn't. I have been up in the mountains of Brazil, and coming home went ashore—got wrecked. These clothes I bought from a sailor,” and he opened his rough jacket the wider.

“Yes—that's exactly what I heard him say—that's what he thought—that is, that you were where you couldn't write, although I never heard him say anything about shipwreck. I remember his telling Mr. Willits and Miss Seymour that same thing the morning he left—that you couldn't write. They came to see him off.”

Harry edged his chair nearer the fireplace and propped one shoe on the fender as if to dry it, although the night was fair. The mention of Kate's and her suitor's names had sent the blood to his head and he was using the subterfuge in the effort to regain control of himself before Pawson should read all his secrets.

Shifting his body he rested his head on his hand, the light of the lamp bringing into clearer relief his fresh, healthy skin, finely modelled nose, and wide brow, the brown hair, clipped close to his head, still holding its glossy sheen. For some seconds he did not speak: the low song of the fire seemed to absorb him. Now and then Pawson, who was watching him intently, heard him strangle a rebellious sigh, as if some old memory were troubling him. His hand dropped and with a quick movement he faced his companion again.

“I have been away a long time, Mr. Pawson,” he said in a thoughtful tone. “For three months—four now—I have had no letters from anybody. It was my fault partly, but let that go. I want you to answer some questions, and I want you to tell me the truth—all the truth. I haven't any use for any other kind of man—do you understand? Is my mother alive?”

“Yes.”

“And Alec? Is he all right?”

Pawson nodded.

“And my uncle? Is he ruined?—so badly ruined that he is suffering? Tell me.” There was a peculiar pathos in his tone—so much so that Pawson, who had been standing, settled into a chair beside him that his answers might, if possible, be the more intimate and sympathetic.

“I'm afraid he is. The only hope is the postponement in some way of the foreclosure of the mortgage on this house until times get better. It wouldn't bring its face value to-day.”

Harry caught his breath: “My God!—you don't tell me so! Poor Uncle George—so fine and splendid—so good to everybody, and he has come to this! And about this mortgage—who owns it?”

“Mr. Gorsuch, I understand, owns it now: he bought it of the Tyson estate.”

“You mean John Gorsuch—my father's man of business?”

“Yes.”

“And was there nothing left?—no money coming in from anywhere?”

Pawson shook his head: “We collected all that some time ago—it came from some old ground rents.”

“And how has he lived since?” He wanted to hear it all; he could help better if he knew how far down the ladder to begin.

“From hand to mouth, really.” And then there followed his own and Gadgem's efforts to keep the wolf from the door; the sale of the guns, saddles, and furniture; the wrench over the Castullux cup—and what a godsend it was that Kirk got such a good price for it—down to the parting with the last article that either or both of them could sell or pawn, including his four splendid setters.

As the sad story fell from the attorney's sympathetic lips Harry would now and then cover his face with his hands in the effort to hide the tears. He knew that the ruin was now complete. He knew, too, that he had been the cause of it. Then his thoughts reverted to the old regime and its comforts: those which his uncle had shared with him so generously.

“And what has become of my uncle's servants?” he asked—“his cook, Aunt Jemima, and his body-servant, Todd?”

“I don't know what has become of the cook, but he took Todd with him.”

Harry heaved a sigh of relief. If Todd was with him life would still be made bearable for his uncle. Perhaps, after all, a winter with Tom Coston was the wisest thing he could have done.

One other question now trembled on his lips. It was one he felt he had no right to ask—not of Pawson—but it was his only opportunity, and he must know the truth if he was to carry out the other plans he had in view the day he dropped everything and came home without warning. At last he asked casually:

“Do you know whether my father returned to Uncle George the money he paid out for me?” Not that it was important—more as if he wanted to be posted on current events.

“He tried, but Mr. Temple wouldn't take it. I had the matter in hand, and know. This was some three years ago. He has never offered it since—not to my knowledge.”

Harry's face lightened. Some trace of decency was still left in the Rutter blood! This money was in all honor owed by his father and might still become an asset if he and his uncle should ever become reconciled.

“And can you tell me how they all are—out at Moorlands? Have you seen my father lately?”

“Not your father, but I met your old servant, Alec, a few days ago.”

“Alec!—dear old Alec! Tell me about him. And my mother—was she all right? What did Alec say, and how did the old man look?”

“Yes; your mother was well. He said they were all well, except Colonel Rutter, whose eyes troubled him. Alec seemed pretty much the same—may be a little older.”

Harry's mind began to wander. The room and his companion were forgotten. He was again at Moorlands, the old negro following him about, his dear mother sitting by his bed or kissing him goodnight.

For an instant he sat gazing into the smouldering embers absorbed in his thoughts. Then as if some new vista had opened out before him he asked suddenly:

“You don't know what he was doing in town, do you? Was my mother with him?”

“No, he was alone. He had brought some things in for Mr. Seymour—some game or something, if I remember right. There's to be a wedding there soon, so I hear. Yes, now I think of it, it WAS game—some partridges, perhaps, your father had sent in. The old man asked about you—he always does. And now, Mr. Rutter, tell me about yourself—have you done well?” He didn't think he had, judging from his general appearance, but he wanted to be sure in case St. George asked him.

Harry settled in his chair, his broad shoulders filling the back. The news of Kate's wedding was what he had expected. Perhaps it was already over. He was glad, however, the information had come to him unsought. For an instant he made no reply to Pawson's inquiry, then he answered slowly: “Yes, and no. I have made a little money—not much—but some—not enough to pay Uncle George everything I owe him—not yet; another time I shall do better. I was down with fever for a while and that cost me a good deal of what I had saved. But I HAD to come back. I met a man who told me Uncle George was ruined; that he had left this house and that somebody had put a sign on it, I thought at first that this must refer to you and your old arrangement in the basement, until I questioned him closer. I knew how careless he had always been about his money transactions, and was afraid some one had taken advantage of him. That's why I was so upset when I came in a while ago: I thought they had stolen his furniture as well. The ship Mohican—one of the old Barkeley line—was sailing the day I reached the coast and I got aboard and worked my passage home. I learned to do that on my way out. I learned to wear a beard too. Not very becoming, is it?”—and a low, forced laugh escaped his lips. “But shaving is not easy aboard ship or in the mines.”

Pawson made no reply. He had been studying his guest the closer while he was talking, his mind more on the man than on what he was saying. The old Harry, which the dim light of the hall and room had hidden, was slowly coming back to him:—the quick turn of the head; the way his lips quivered when he laughed; the exquisitely modelled nose and brow, and the way the hair grew on the temples. The tones of his voice, too, had the old musical ring. It was the same madcap, daredevil boy mellowed and strengthened by contact with the outside world. Next he scrutinized his hands, their backs bronzed and roughened by contact with the weather, and waited eagerly until some gesture opened the delicately turned fingers, exposing the white palms, and felt relieved and glad when he saw that they showed no rough usage. His glance rested on his well-turned thighs, slender waist, and broad, strong shoulders and arms—and then his eyes—so clear, and his skin so smooth and fresh—a clean soul in a clean body! What joy would be Temple's when he got his arms around this young fellow once more!

The wanderer reached for his cap and pushed back his chair. For an instant he stood gazing into the smouldering coals as if he hated to leave their warmth, his brow clouded, his shoulders drawn back. He had all the information he wanted—all he had come in search of, although it was not exactly what he wished or what he had expected:—his uncle ruined and an exile; his father half blind and Kate's wedding expected any

week. That was enough at least for one night.

He stepped forward and grasped Pawson's hand, his well-knit, alert body in contrast to the loosely jointed, long-legged, young attorney.

“I must thank you, Mr. Pawson,” he said in his old outspoken, hearty way “for your frankness, and I must also apologize for my apparent rudeness when I first entered your door; but, as I told you, I was so astounded and angry at what I saw that I hardly knew what I was doing. And now one thing more before I take my leave: if Mr. Temple does not want his present retreat known—and I gather from the mysterious way in which you have spoken that he does not—let me tell you that I do not want mine known either. Please do not say to any one that you have seen me, or answer any questions—not for a time, at least. Good-night!”

With the closing of the front door behind him the exile came to a standstill on the top step and looked about him. Across the park—beyond the trees, close sheltered under the wide protecting roof, lay Kate. All the weary miles out and back had this picture been fixed in his mind. She was doubtless asleep as it was now past eleven o'clock: he would know by the lights. But even the sight of the roof that sheltered her would, in itself, be a comfort. It had been many long years since he had breathed the same air with her; slept under the same stars; walked where her feet had trodden. For some seconds he stood undecided. Should he return to the Sailors' House where he had left his few belongings and banish all thoughts of her from his mind now that his worst fears had been confirmed? or should he yield to the strain on his heart-strings? If she were asleep the whole house would be dark; if she were at some neighbor's and Mammy Henny was sitting up for her, the windows in the bedroom would be dark and the hall lamp still burning—he had watched it so often before and knew the signs.

Drawing the collar of his rough peajacket close about his throat and crowding his cap to his ears, he descended the steps and with one of his quick, decided movements plunged into the park, now silent and deserted.

As he neared the Seymour house he became conscious, from the glow of lights gleaming between the leafless branches of the trees, that something out of the common was going on inside. The house was ablaze from the basement to the roof, with every window-shade illumined. Outside the steps, and as far out as the curb, lounged groups of attendants, while in the side street, sheltered by the ghostly trees, there could be made out the wheels and hoods of carryalls and the glint of harness. Now and then the door would open and a bevy of muffled figures—the men in cloaks, the girls in nubias wound about their heads and shoulders—would pass out. The Seymours were evidently giving a ball, or was it—and the blood left his face and little chills ran loose through his hair—was it Kate's wedding night? Pawson had said that a marriage would soon take place, and in the immediate future. It was either this or an important function of some kind, and on a much more lavish scale than had been old Prim's custom in the days when he knew him. Then the contents of Alec's basket rose in his mind. That was why his father had sent the pheasants! Perhaps both he and his mother were inside!

Sick at heart he turned on his heel and with quickened pace retraced his steps. He would not be a spy, and he could not he an eavesdropper. As the thought forced itself on his mind, the fear that he might meet some one whom he would know, or who would know him, overtook him. So great was his anxiety that it was only when he had left the park far behind him on his way back to the Sailors' House, that he regained his composure. He was prepared to face the truth, and all of it whatever it held in store for him; but he must first confront his father and learn just how he stood with him; then he would see his mother and Alec, and then he would find St. George: Kate must come last.

The news that his father had offered to pay his debts—although he did not intend that that should relieve him in any way of his own responsibility to his uncle—kindled fresh hopes in his heart and buoyed him up. Now that his father had tried repeatedly to repair the wrong he had done it might only be necessary to throw himself on his knees before him and be taken back into his heart and arms. To see him, then, was his first duty and this he would begin to carry out in the morning. As to his meeting his mother and Alec—should he fail with his father—that must be undertaken with more care, for he could not place himself in the position of sneaking home and using the joy his return would bring them as a means to soften his father's heart. Yes, he would find his father first, then his mother and Alec. If his father received him the others would follow. If he was repulsed, he must seek out some other way.

This over he would find St. George. He knew exactly where his uncle was, although he had not said so to Pawson. He was not at Coston's, nor anywhere in the vicinity of Wesley, but at Craddock, on the bay—a small country house some miles distant, where he and his dogs had often spent days and weeks during the ducking season. St. George had settled down there to rest and get away from his troubles; that was why he had not answered Pawson's letters.

Striding along with his alert, springing step, he swung through the deserted and unguarded Marsh Market, picked his way between the piles of produce and market carts, and plunging down a narrow street leading to the wharf, halted before a door over which swung a lantern burning a green light. Here he entered.

Although it was now near midnight, there were still eight or ten seafaring men in the room—several of them members of his own crew aboard the Mohican. Two were playing checkers, the others crowded about a square table where a game of cards was in progress; wavy lines of tobacco smoke floated beneath the dingy ceiling; at one end was a small bar where a man in a woollen shirt was filling some short, thick tumblers from an earthen jug. It was the ordinary sailors' retreat where the men put up before, between, and after their voyages.

One of them at the card-table looked up from his game as Harry entered, and called out:

“Man been lookin' for you—comin' back, he says. My trick! Hearts, wasn't it?” (this to his companions).

“Do I know him?” asked Harry with a slight start, pausing on his way to his bedroom upstairs, where he had left his bag of clothes two hours before. Could he have been recognized and shadowed?

“No—don't think so; he's a street vendor. Got some China silks to sell—carries his pack on his back and looks as if he'd took up a extry 'ole in his belt. Hungry, I wouldn't wonder. Wanted to h'ist 'em fur a glass o' grog an' a night's lodgin', but Cap wouldn't let him—said you'd be back and might help him. Wasn't that it,

Cap?”—this to the landlord, who nodded in reply.

“How could *I* help him?” asked Harry, selecting a tallow dip from a row on a shelf, but in a tone that implied his own doubt in the query, as well as his relief, now that the man was really a stranger.

“Well, this is your port, so I 'ear. Some o' them high-flyers up 'round the park might lend a hand, may be, if you'd tip 'em a wink, or some o' their women folks might take a shine to 'em.”

“Looked hungry, did you say?” Harry asked, lighting the dip at an oil lamp that swung near the bar.

“Yes—holler's a drum—see straight through him; tired too—beat out. You'd think so if you see him. My play—clubs.”

Harry turned to the landlord: “If this man comes in again give him food and lodging,” and he handed him a bank bill. “If he is here in the morning let me see him. I'm going to bed now. Good-night, men!”

CHAPTER XXV

Should I lapse into the easy-flowing style of the chroniclers of the period of which I write—(and how often has the scribe wished he could)—this chapter would open with the announcement that on this particularly bleak, wintry afternoon a gentleman in the equestrian costume of the day, and mounted upon a well-groomed, high-spirited white horse, might have been seen galloping rapidly up a country lane leading to an old-fashioned manor house.

Such, however, would not cover the facts. While the afternoon was certainly wintry, and while the rider was unquestionably a gentleman, he was by no manner of means attired in velveteen coat and russet-leather boots with silver spurs, his saddle-bags strapped on behind, but in a rough and badly worn sailor's suit, his free hand grasping a bundle carried loose on his pommel. As to the horse neither the immortal James or any of his school could truthfully picture this animal as either white or high-spirited. He might, it is true, have been born white and would in all probability have stayed white but for the many omissions and commissions of his earlier livery stable training—traces of which could still be found in his scraped sides and gnawed mane and tail; he might also have once had a certain commendable spirit had not the ups and downs of road life—and they were pretty steep outside Kennedy Square—taken it out of him.

It is, however, when I come to the combination of horse and rider that I can with entire safety lapse into the flow of the old chroniclers. For whatever Harry had forgotten in his many experiences since he last threw his leg over Spitfire, horsemanship was not one of them. He still rode like a Cherokee and still sat his mount like a prince.

He had had an anxious and busy morning. With the first streak of dawn he had written a long letter to his Uncle George, in which he told him of his arrival; of his heart-felt sorrow at what Pawson had imparted and of his leaving immediately, first for Wesley and then Craddock, as soon as he found out how the land lay at Moorlands. This epistle he was careful to enclose in another envelope, which he directed to Justice Coston, with instructions to forward it with “the least possible delay” to Mr. Temple, who was doubtless at Craddock, “and who was imperatively needed at home in connection with some matters which required his immediate personal attention,” and which enclosure, it is just as well to state, the honorable justice placed inside the mantel clock, that being the safest place for such precious missives, at least until the right owner should appear.

This duly mailed, he had returned to the Sailors' House, knocked at the door of the upstairs room in which, through his generosity, the street vendor lay sleeping, and after waking him up and becoming assured that the man was in real distress, had bought at twice their value the China silks which had caused the disheartened pedler so many weary hours of tramping. These he had tucked under his arm and carried away.

The act was not alone due to his charitable instincts. A much more selfish motive influenced him. Indeed the thought came to him in a way that had determined him to attend to his mail at early dawn and return at sunrise lest the owner should disappear and take the bundle with him. The silks were the very things he needed to help him solve one of his greatest difficulties. He would try, as the sailor-pedler had done, to sell them in the neighborhood of Moorlands—(a common practice in those days)—and in this way might gather up the information of which he was in search. Pawson had not known him—perhaps the others would not: he might even offer the silks to his father without being detected.

With this plan clearly defined in his mind, he had walked into a livery stable near the market, but a short distance from his lodgings, with the silks in a bundle and after looking the stock over had picked out this unprepossessing beast as best able to take him to Moorlands and back between sunrise and dark.

As he rode on, leaving the scattered buildings of the town far behind, mounting the hills and then striking the turnpike—every rod of which he could have found in the dark—his thoughts, like road-swallows, skimmed each mile he covered. Here was where he had stopped with Kate when her stirrup broke; near the branches of that oak close to the ditch marking the triangle of cross-roads he had saved his own and Spitfire's neck by a clear jump that had been the talk of the neighborhood for days. On the crest of this hill—the one he was then ascending—his father always tightened up the brakes on his four-in-hand, and on the slope beyond invariably braced himself in his seat, swung his whip, and the flattened team swept on and down, leaving a cloud of dust in its wake that blurred the road for minutes thereafter.

When noon came he dismounted at a farmer's out-building beside the road—he would not trust the public-houses—fed and watered his horse, rubbed him down himself, and after an hour's rest pushed on toward the fork in the road to Moorlands. Beyond this was a cross-path that led to the outbarns and farm stables—a path bordered by thick bushes and which skirted a fence in the rear of the manor house itself. Here he intended to tie his steed and there he would mount him again should his mission fail.

The dull winter sky had already heralded the dusk—it was near four o'clock in the afternoon—when he passed some hayricks where a group of negroes were at work. One or two raised their heads and then, as if reassured, resumed their tasks. This encouraged him to push on the nearer—he had evidently been mistaken for one of the many tradespeople seeking his father's overseer, either to sell tools or buy produce.

Tying the horse close to the fence—so close that it could not be seen from the house—he threw the bundle of silks over his shoulder and struck out for the small office in the rear. Here the business of the estate was transacted, and here were almost always to be found either the overseer or one of his assistants—both of them white. These men were often changed, and his chance, therefore, of meeting a stranger was all the more likely.

As he approached the low sill of the door which was level with the ground, and which now stood wide open, he caught the glow of a fire and could make out the figure of a man seated at a desk bending over a mass of papers. The man pushed back a green shade which had protected his eyes from the glare of a lamp and peered out at him.

It was his father!

The discovery was so unexpected and had come with such suddenness—it was rarely in these later days that the colonel was to be found here in the afternoon: he was either riding or receiving visitors—that Harry's first thought was to shrink back out of sight, or, if discovered, to make some excuse for his intrusion and retire. Then his mind changed and he stepped boldly in. This was what he had come for and this was what he would face.

“I have some China silks to sell,” he said in his natural tone of voice, turning his head so that while his goods were in sight his face would be in shadow.

“Silks! I don't want any silks! Who allowed you to pass in here? Alec!” He pushed back his chair and moved to the door. “Alec! Where the devil is Alec! He's always where I don't want him!”

“I saw no one to ask, sir,” Harry replied mechanically. His father's appearance had sent a chill through him; he would hardly have known him had he met him on the street. Not only did he look ten years older, but the injury to his sight caused him to glance sideways at any one he addressed, completely destroying the old fearless look in his eyes.

“You never waited to ask! You walk into my private office unannounced and—” here he turned the lamp to see the better. “You're a sailor, aren't you?” he added fiercely—a closer view of the intruder only heightening his wrath.

“Yes, sir—I'm a sailor,” replied Harry simply, his voice dying in his throat as he summed up the changes that the years had wrought in the colonel's once handsome, determined face—thinner, more shrunken, his mustache and the short temple-whiskers almost white.

For an instant his father crumpled a wisp of paper he was holding between his fingers and thumb; and then demanded sharply, but with a tone of curiosity, as if willing the intruder should tarry a moment while he gathered the information:

“How long have you been a sailor?”

“I am just in from my last voyage.” He still kept in the shadow although he saw his father had so far failed to recognize him. The silks had been laid on a chair beside him.

“That's not what I asked you. How long have you been a sailor?” He was scanning his face now as best he could, shifting the green shade that he might see the better.

“I went to sea three years ago.”

“Three years, eh? Where did you go?”

The tone of curiosity had increased. Perhaps the next question would lead up to some basis on which he could either declare himself or lay the foundation of a declaration to be made the next day—after he had seen his mother and Alec.

“To South America. Para was my first port,” he answered simply, wondering why he wanted to know.

“That's not far from Rio?” He was still looking sideways at him, but there was no wavering in his gaze.

“No, not far—Rio was our next stopping place. We had a hard voyage and put in to—”

“Do you know a young man by the name of Rutter—slim man with dark hair and eyes?” interrupted his father in an angry tone.

Harry started forward, his heart in his mouth, his hands upraised, his fingers opening. It was all he could do to restrain himself. “Don't you know me, father?” was trembling on his lips. Then something in the sound of the colonel's voice choked his utterance. Not now, he thought, mastering his emotion—a moment more and he would tell him.

“I have heard of him, sir,” he answered when he recovered his speech, straining his ears to catch the next word.

“Heard of him, have you? So has everybody else heard of him—a worthless scoundrel who broke his mother's heart; a man who disgraced his family—a gentleman turned brigand—a renegade who has gone back on his blood! Tell him so if you see him! Tell him I said so; I'm his father, and know! No—I don't want your silks—don't want anything that has to do with sailormen. I am busy—please go away. Don't stop to bundle them up—do that outside,” and he turned his back and readjusted the shade over his eyes.

Harry's heart sank, and a cold faintness stole through his frame. He was not angry nor indignant. He was stunned.

Without a word in reply he gathered up the silks from the chair, tucked them under his arm, and replacing his cap stepped outside into the fast approaching twilight. Whatever the morrow might bring forth, nothing more could be done to-day. To have thrown himself at his father's feet would only have resulted in his being driven from the grounds by the overseer, with the servants looking on—a humiliation he could not stand.

As he stood rolling the fabrics into a smaller compass, a gray-haired negro in the livery of a house servant

passed hurriedly and entered the door of the office. Instantly his father's voice rang out:

“Where the devil have you been, Alec? How many times must I tell you to look after me oftener. Don't you know I'm half blind and—No—I don't want any more wood—I want these vagabonds kept off my grounds. Send Mr. Grant to me at once, and don't you lose sight of that man until you have seen him to the main road. He says he is a sailor—and I've had enough of sailors, and so has everybody else about here.”

The negro bowed and backed out of the room. No answer of any kind was best when the colonel was in one of his “tantrums.”

“I reckon I hab to ask ye, sah, to quit de place—de colonel don't 'low nobody to—” he said politely.

Harry turned his face aside and started for the fence. His first thought was to drop his bundle and throw his arms around Alec's neck; then he realized that this would be worse than his declaring himself to his father—he could then be accused of attempting deception by the trick of a disguise. So he hurried on to where his horse was tied—his back to Alec, the bundle shifted to his left shoulder that he might hide his face the better until he was out of sight of the office, the old man stumbling on, calling after him:

“No, dat ain't de way. Yer gotter go down de main road; here, man—don't I tell yer dat ain't de way.”

Harry had now gained the fence and had already begun to loosen the reins when Alec, out of breath and highly indignant over the refusal to carry out his warning, reached his side.

“You better come right back f'om whar ye started,” the old negro puffed; “ye can't go dat way or dey'll set de dogs on ye.” Here his eyes rested on the reins and forelock. “What! you got a horse an' you—”

Harry turned and laid his hand on the old servant's shoulder. He could hardly control his voice:

“Don't you know me, Alec? I'm Harry!”

The old man bent down, peered into Harry's eyes, and with a quick spring forward grabbed him by both shoulders.

“You my Marse Harry!—you!” His breath was gone now, his whole body in a tremble, his eyes bulging from his head.

“Yes, Alec, Harry! It's only the beard. Look at me! I didn't want my father to see us—that's why I kept on.”

The old servant threw up his hands and caught his young master around the neck. For some seconds he could not speak.

“And de colonel druv ye out!” he gasped. “Oh, my Gawd! my Gawd! And ye ain't daid, and ye come back home ag'in.” He was sobbing now, his head on the exile's shoulder, Harry's arms about him—patting his bent back. “But yer gotter go back, Marse Harry,” he moaned. “He ain't 'sponsible these days. He didn't know ye! Come 'long, son; come back wid ol' Alec; please come, Marse Harry. Oh, Gawd! ye GOTTER come!”

“No, I'll go home to-night—another day I'll—”

“Ye ain't got no home but dis, I tell ye! Go tell him who ye is—lemme run tell him. I won't be a minute. Oh! Marse Harry, I can't let ye go! I been dat mizzable widout ye. I ain't neber got over lovin' ye!”

Here a voice from near the office broke out. In the dusk the two could just make out the form of the colonel, who was evidently calling to some of his people. He was bareheaded and without his shade.

“I've sent Alec to see him safe off the grounds. You go yourself, Mr. Grant, and follow him into the highroad; remember that after this I hold you responsible for these prowlers.”

The two had paused while the colonel was speaking, Harry, gathering the reins in his hand, ready to vault into the saddle, and Alec, holding on to his coat-sleeves hoping still to detain him.

“I haven't a minute more—quick, Alec, tell me how my mother is.”

“She's middlin' po'ly, same's ever; got great rings under her eyes and her heart's dat heaby makes abody cry ter look at 'er. But she ain't sick, jes' griebin' herse'f to death. Ain't yer gwineter stop and see 'er? May be I kin git ye in de back way.”

“Not now—not here. Bring her to Uncle George's house to-morrow about noon, and I will be there. Tell her how I look, but don't tell her what my father has done. And now tell me about Miss Kate—how long since you saw her? Is she married?”

Again the colonel's voice was heard; this time much nearer—within hailing distance. He and the overseer were evidently approaching the fence; some of the negroes had doubtless apprised them of the course of Harry's exit.

Alec turned quickly to face his master, and Harry, realizing that his last moment had come, swung himself into the saddle. If Alec made any reply to his question it was lost in the clatter of hoofs as both horse and man swept down the by-path. In another moment they had gained the main road, the rider never breaking rein until he had reached the farm-house where he had fed and watered his horse some hours before.

Thirty-odd miles out and back was not a long ride for a hired horse in these days over a good turnpike with plenty of time for resting—and he had as many breathing spells as gallops, for Harry's moods really directed his gait. Once in a while he would give him his head, the reins lying loose, the horse picking his way in a walk. Then the bitterness of his father's words and how undeserved they were, and how the house of cards his hopes had built up had come tumbling down about his ears at the first point of contact would rush over him, and he would dig his heels into the horse's flanks and send him at full gallop through the night along the pale ribbon of a road barely discernible in the ghostly dark. When, however, Alec's sobs smote his ear, or the white face of his mother confronted him, the animal would gradually slacken his pace and drop into a walk.

Dominated by these emotions certain fixed resolutions at last took possession of him: He would see his mother at once, no matter at what cost—even if he defied his father—and then he would find his uncle. Whether he would board the next vessel heaving port and return to his work in the mountains, or whether he would bring his uncle back from Craddock and the two, with his own vigorous youth and new experience of the world, fight it out together as they had once done before, depended on what St. George advised. Now that Kate's marriage was practically decided upon, one sorrow—and his greatest—was settled forever. Any others that were in store for him he would meet as they came.

With his mind still intent on these plans he rode at last into the open door of the small courtyard of the livery stable and drew rein under a swinging lantern. It was past ten at night, and the place was deserted, except by a young negro who advanced to take his horse. Tossing the bridle aside he slipped to the ground.

“He's wet,” Harry said, “but he's all right. Let him cool off gradually, and don't give him any water until he gets dry. I'll come in to-morrow and pay your people what I owe them.”

The negro curry-combed his fingers down the horse's flanks as if to assure himself of his condition, and in the movement brought his face under the glare of the overhead light.

Harry grabbed him by the shoulder and swung him round.

“Todd—you rascal! What are you doing here? Why are you not down on the Eastern Shore?” His astonishment was so intense that for an instant he could not realize he had the right man.

The negro drew back. He was no runaway slave, and he didn't intend to be taken for one—certainly not by a man as rough and suspicious looking as the one before him.

“How you know my name, man?” He was nervous and scared half out of his wits. More than one negro had been shanghaied in that way and smuggled off to sea.

“Know you! I'd know you among a thousand. Have you, too, deserted your master?” He still held him firmly by the collar of his coat, his voice rising with his wrath. “Why have you left him? Answer me.”

For an instant the negro hesitated, leaned forward, and then with a burst of joy end out:

“You ain't!—Fo' Gawd it is! Dat beard on ye, Marse Harry, done fool me—but you is him fo' sho. Gor-a-mighty! ain't I glad ye ain't daid. Marse George say on'y yisterday you was either daid or sick dat ye didn't write an'—”

“Said yesterday! Why, is he at home?”

“HOME! Lemme throw a blanket over dis hoss and tie him tell we come back. Oh, we had a heap o' mis'ry since ye went away—a heap o' trouble. Nothin' but trouble! You come 'long wid me—'tain't far; des around de corner. I'll show ye sompin' make ye creep all over. An' it ain't gettin' no better—gettin' wuss. Dis way, Manse Harry. You been 'cross de big water, ain't ye? Dat's what I heared. Aunt Jemima been mighty good, but we can't go on dis way much longer.”

Still talking, forging ahead in the darkness through the narrow street choked with horseless drays, Todd swung into a dingy yard, mounted a flight of rickety wooden steps, and halted at an unpainted door. Turning the knob softly he beckoned silently to Harry, and the two stepped into a small room lighted by a low lamp placed on the hearth, its rays falling on a cot bed and a few chairs. Beside a cheap pine table sat Aunt Jemima, rocking noiselessly. The old woman raised her hand in warning and put her fingers to her lips.

On the bed, with the coverlet drawn close under his chin, lay his Uncle George!

CHAPTER XXVI

Harry looked about the room in a bewildered way and then tiptoed to St. George's bed. It had been a day of surprises, but this last had completely upset him. St. George dependent on the charity of his old cook and without other attendant than Todd! Why had he been deserted by everybody who loved him? Why was he not at Wesley or Craddock? Why should he be here of all places in the world?

All these thoughts surged through his mind as he stood above the patient and watched his slow, labored breathing. That he had been ill for some time was evident in his emaciated face and the deep hollows into which his closed eyes were sunken.

Aunt Jemima rose and handed the intruder her chair. He sat down noiselessly beside him. Once his uncle coughed, and in the effort drew the coverlet close about his throat, his eyes still shut; but whether from weakness or drowsiness, Harry could not tell. Presently he shifted his body, and moving his head on the pillow, called softly:

“Jemima?”

The old woman bent over him.

“Yes, Marse George.”

“Give me a little milk—my throat troubles me.”

Harry drew back into the shadow cast over one end of the cot and rear wall by the low lamp on the hearth. Whether to slip his hand gently over his uncle's and declare himself, or whether to wait until he dozed again and return in the morning, when he would be less tired and could better withstand the shock of the meeting, was the question which disturbed him. And yet he could not leave until he satisfied himself of just what ought to be done. If he left him at all it must be for help of some kind. He leaned over and whispered in Jemima's ear:

“Has he had a doctor?”

Jemima shook her head. “He wouldn't hab none; he ain't been clean beat out till day befo' yisterday, an' den I got skeered an'—” She stopped, leaned closer, clapped her hand over her mouth to keep from screaming, and staggered back to her chair.

St. George raised his head from the pillow and stared into the shadows.

“Who is talking? I heard somebody speak? Jemima—you haven't disobeyed me, have you?”

Harry stepped noiselessly to the bedside and laid his fingers on the sick man's wrist:

“Uncle George,” he said gently.

Temple lowered his head as if to focus his gaze.

“Yes, there is some one!” he cried in a stronger voice. “Who are you, sir?—not a doctor, are you? I didn't send for you!—I don't want any doctor, I told my servant so. Jemima!—Todd!—why do you—”

Harry tightened his grasp on the emaciated wrist. “No, Uncle George, it's Harry! I'm just back.”

“What did he say, Todd? Harry!—Harry! Did he say he was Harry, or am I losing my mind?”

In his eagerness to understand he lifted himself to a sitting posture, his eyes wandering uneasily over the speaker's body, resting on his head—on his shoulders, arms, and hands—as if trying to fix his mind on something which constantly baffled him.

Harry continued to pat his wrist soothingly.

“Yes, it's Harry, Uncle George,” he answered. “But don't talk—lie down. I'm all right—I got in yesterday and have been looking for you everywhere. Pawson told me you were at Wesley. I found Todd a few minutes ago by the merest accident, and he brought me here. No, you must lie down—let me help—rest yourself on me—so.” He was as tender with him as if he had been his own mother.

The sick man shook himself free—he was stronger than Harry thought. He was convinced now that there was some trick being played upon him—one Jemima in her anxiety had devised.

“How dare you, sir, lie to me like that! Who asked you to come here? Todd—send this fellow from the room!”

Harry drew back out of his uncle's vision and carefully watched the invalid. St. George's mind was evidently unhinged and it would be better not to thwart him.

Todd crept up. He had seen his master like this once before and had had all he could do to keep him in bed.

“Dat ain't no doctor, Marse George,” he pleaded, his voice trembling. “Dat's Marse Harry come back agin alive. It's de hair on his face make him look dat way; dat fool me too. It's Marse Harry, fo' sho'—I fotch him yere myse'f. He's jes' come from de big ship.”

St. George twisted his head, looked long and earnestly into Harry's face, and with a sudden cry of joy stretched out his hand and motioned him nearer. Harry sank to his knees beside the bed. St. George curved one arm about his neck, drew him tightly to his breast as he would a woman, and fell back upon the pillow with Harry's head next his own. There the two lay still, St. George's eyes half closed, thick sobs stifling his utterance, the tears streaming down his pale cheeks; his thin white fingers caressing the brown hair of the boy he loved. At last, with a heavy, indrawn sigh, not of grief, but of joy, he muttered:

“It's true, isn't it, my son?”

Harry hugged him the tighter in answer.

“And you are home for good?”

Again the pressure. “Yes, but don't talk, you must go to sleep. I won't leave you.” His own tears were choking him now.

Then, after a long pause, releasing his grasp: “I did not know how weak I was.... Maybe I had better not talk.... Don't stay. Come to-morrow and tell me about it.... There is no bed for you here... I am sorry ... but you must go away—you couldn't be comfortable.... Todd—”

The darky started forward—both he and Aunt Jemima were crying:

“Yes, Marse George.”

“Take the lamp and light Mr. Rutter downstairs. To-morrow—to-morrow, Harry.... My God—think of it!—Harry home! Harry home! My Harry home!” and he turned his face to the wall.

On the way back—first to the stable, where he found that the horse had been properly cared for and his bill ready and then to his lodgings,—Todd told him the story of what had happened: At first his master had firmly intended going to the Eastern Shore—and for a long stay—for he had ordered his own and Todd's trunks packed with everything they both owned in the way of clothes. On the next day, however—the day before the boat left—Mr. Temple had made a visit to Jemima to bid her good-by, where he learned that her white lodger had decamped between suns, leaving two months board unpaid. In the effort to find this man, or compel his employer to pay his bill, out of some wages still due him—in both of which he failed—his master had missed the boat and they were obliged to wait another week. During this interim, not wishing to return to Pawson, and being as he said very comfortable where he was with his two servants to wait upon him, and the place as clean as a pin—his master had moved his own and Todd's trunk from the steamboat warehouse where they had been stored and had had them brought to Jemima's. Two days later—whether from exposure in tramping the streets in his efforts to collect the old woman's bill, or whether the change of lodgings had affected him—he was taken down with a chill and had been in bed ever since. With this situation staring both Jemima and himself in the face—for neither she nor Mr. Temple had much money left—Todd had appealed to Gadgem—(he being the only man in his experience who could always produce a roll of bills when everybody else failed)—who took him to the stableman whose accounts he collected—and who had once bought one of St. George's saddles—and who then and there hired Todd as night attendant. His wages, added to what Jemima could earn over her tubs, had kept the three alive. All this had taken place four weeks or more ago.

None of all this, he assured Harry, had he told Gadgem or anybody else, his master's positive directions being to keep his abode and his condition a secret from everybody. All the collector knew was that Mr. Temple being too poor to take Todd with him, had left him behind to shift for himself until he could send for him. All the neighborhood knew, to quote Todd's own hilarious chuckle, was that “Miss Jemima Johnsing had two mo' boa'ders; one a sick man dat had los' his job an' de udder a yaller nigger who sot up nights watchin' de hosses eat dere haids off.”

Since that time his master had had various ups and downs, but although he was still weak he was very much stronger than he had been any time since he had taken to his bed. Only once had he been delirious; then he talked ramblingly about Miss Kate and Marse Harry. This had so scared Aunt Jemima that she had determined to go to Mammy Henny and have her tell Miss Kate, so he could get a doctor—something he had positively forbidden her to do, but he grew so much better the next day that she had given it up; since that time his mind had not again given way. All he wanted now, so Todd concluded, was a good soup and “a drap

o' sumpin warmin'—an' he'd pull thu'. But dere warn't no use tryin' ter git him to take it 'cause all he would eat was taters an' corn pone an' milk—an' sich like, 'cause he said dere warn't money 'nough fer de three—" whereupon Todd turned his head away and caught his breath, and then tried to pass it off as an unbidden choke—none of which subterfuges deceived Harry in the least.

When the two arrived off the dimly burning lantern—it was past ten o'clock—and pushed in the door of the Sailors' House, Todd received another shock—one that sent his eyes bulging from his head. That Marse Harry Rutter, who was always a law unto himself, should grow a beard and wear rough clothes, was to be expected —"Dem Rutters was allus dat way—do jes's dey mineter—" but that the most elegant young man of his day "ob de fustest quality," should take up his quarters in a low sailors' retreat, and be looked upon by the men gathered under the swinging lamp around a card table—(some of whom greeted Harry familiarly)—as one of their own kind, completely staggered him.

The pedler was particularly gracious—so much so that when he learned that Harry was leaving for good, and had come to get his belongings—he jumped up and insisted on helping—at which Harry laughed and assented, and as a further mark of his appreciation presented him with the now useless silks, in addition to the money he gave him—an act of generosity which formed the sole topic of conversation in the resort for weeks thereafter.

Board and lodging paid, the procession took up its return march: Harry in front, Todd, still dazed and still at sea as to the meaning of it all, following behind; the pedler between with Harry's heavy coat, blankets, etc. —all purchased since his shipwreck—the party threading the choked-up street until they reached the dingy yard, where the pedler dumped his pack and withdrew, while the darky stowed his load in the basement. This done, the two tiptoed once more up the stairs to where Aunt Jemima awaited them, St. George having fallen asleep.

Beckoning the old woman away from the bedroom door and into the far corner of the small hall, Harry unfolded to her as much of his plans for the next day as he thought she ought to know. Early in the morning—before his uncle was astir—he would betake himself to Kennedy Square; ascertain from Pawson whether his uncle's rooms were still unoccupied, and if such were the case—and St. George be unable to walk—would pick him up bodily, wrap him in blankets, carry him in his own arms downstairs, place him in a carriage, and drive him to his former home where he would again pick him up and lay him in his own bed: This would be better than a hundred doctors—he had tried it himself when he was down with fever and knew. Aunt Jemima was to go ahead and see that these preparations were carried out. Should Alec be able to bring his mother to Kennedy Square in the morning, as he had instructed him to do, then there would indeed be somebody on hand who could nurse him even better than Jemima; should his mother not be there, Jemima would take her place. Nothing of all this, he charged her, was to be told St. George until the hour of departure. To dwell upon the intended move might overexcite him. Then, when everything was ready—his linen, etc., arranged—(Jemima was also to look after this)—he would whisk him off and make him comfortable in his own bed. He would, of course, now that his uncle wished it, keep secret his retreat; although why St. George Wilmot Temple, Esq., or any other gentleman of his standing, should object to being taken care of by his own servants was a thing he could not understand: Pawson, of course, need not know—nor should any outside person—not even Gadgem if he came nosing around. To these he would merely say that Mr. Temple had seen fit to leave home and that Mr. Temple had seen fit to return again: that was quite enough for attorneys and collectors. To all the others he would keep his counsel, until St. George himself made confession, which he was pretty sure he would do at the first opportunity.

This decided upon he bade Jemima good-night, gave her explicit directions to call him, should his uncle awake (her own room opened out of St. George's) spread his blanket in the cramped hall outside the sick man's door—he had not roughed it on shipboard and in the wilderness all these years without knowing something of the soft side of a plank—and throwing his heavy ship's coat over him fell fast asleep.

CHAPTER XXVII

When the first glimmer of the gray dawn stole through the small window at the end of the narrow hall, and laid its chilled fingers on Harry's upturned face, it found him still asleep. His ride to Moorlands and back—his muscles unused for months to the exercise—had tired him. The trials of the day, too, those with his father and his Uncle George, had tired him the more—and so he had slept on as a child sleeps—as a perfectly healthy man sleeps—both mind and body drinking in the ozone of a new courage and a new hope.

With the first ray of the joyous sun riding full tilt across his face, he opened his eyes, threw off the cloak, and sprang to his feet. For an instant he looked wonderingly about as if in doubt whether to call the watch or begin the hunt for his cattle. Then the pine door caught his eye and the low, measured breathing of his uncle fell upon his ear, and with a quick lift of his arms, his strong hands thumping his broad chest, he stretched himself to his full height: he had work to do, and he must begin at once.

Aunt Jemima was already at her duties. She had tiptoed past his sleeping body an hour before, and after listening to St. George's breathing had plunged into her tubs; the cat's cradle in the dingy court-yard being already gay with various colored fragments, including Harry's red flannel shirts which Todd had found in a paper parcel, and which the old woman had pounced upon at sight. She insisted on making him a cup of coffee, but he had no time for such luxuries. He would keep on, he said, to Kennedy Square, find Pawson, ascertain if St. George's old rooms were still unoccupied; notify him of Mr. Temple's return; have his bed made and fires properly lighted; stop at the livery stable, wake up Todd, if that darky had overslept himself—quite natural when he had been up almost all night—engage a carriage to be at Jemima's at four o'clock, and then return to get everything ready for the picking-up-and-carrying-downstairs process.

And all this he did do; and all this he told Jemima he had done when he swung into the court-yard an hour

later, a spring to his heels and a cheery note in his voice that had not been his for years. The reaction that hope brings to youth had set in. He was alive and at home; his Uncle George was where he could get his hands on him—in a minute—by the mounting of the stairs; and Alec and his mother within reach!

And the same glad song was in his heart when he opened his uncle's door after he had swallowed his coffee—Jemima had it ready for him this time—and thrusting in his head cried out:

“We are going to get you out of here, Uncle George!” This with a laugh—one of his old contagious laughs that was music in the sick man's ears.

“When?” asked the invalid, his face radiant. He had been awake an hour wondering what it all meant. He had even thought of calling to Jemima to reassure himself that it was not a dream, until he heard her over her tubs and refrained from disturbing her.

“Oh, pretty soon! I have just come from Pawson's. Fogbin hasn't put in an appearance and there's nobody in the rooms and hasn't been anybody there since you left. He can't understand it, nor can I—and I don't want to. I have ordered the bed made and a fire started in both the chamber and the old dining-room, and if anybody objects he has got to say so to me, and I am a very uncomfortable person to say some kinds of things to nowadays. So up you get when the time comes; and Todd and Jemima are to go too. I've got money enough, anyhow, to begin on. Aunt Jemima says you had a good night and it won't be long now before you are yourself again.”

The radiant smile on the sick man's face blossomed into a laugh: “Yes—the best night that I have had since I was taken ill, and—Where did you sleep, my son?”

“Me!—Oh, I had a fine time—long, well-ventilated room with two windows and private staircase; nice pine bedstead—very comfortable place for this part of the town.”

St. George looked at him and his eyes filled. His mind was neither on his own questions nor on Harry's answers.

“Get a chair, Harry, and sit by me so I can look at you closer. How fine and strong you are my son—not like your father—you're like your mother. And you've broadened out—mentally as well as physically. Pretty hard I tell you to spoil a gentleman—more difficult still to spoil a Rutter. But you must get that beard off—it isn't becoming to you, and then somebody might think you disguised yourself on purpose. I didn't know you at first, neither did Jemima—and you don't want anybody else to make that kind of a mistake.”

“My father did, yesterday—” Harry rejoined quietly, dropping into Jemima's chair.

St. George half raised himself from his bed: “You have seen him?”

“Yes—and I wish I hadn't. But I hunted everywhere for you and then got a horse and rode out home. He didn't know me—that is, I'm pretty sure he didn't—but he cursed me all the same. My mother and old Alec, I hope, will come in to-day—but father's chapter is closed forever. I have been a fool to hope for anything else.”

“Drove you out! Oh, no—NO! Harry! Impossible!”

“But he did—” and then followed an account of all the wanderer had passed through from the time he had set foot on shore to the moment of meeting Todd and himself.

For some minutes St. George lay staring at the ceiling. It was all a horrid, nightmare to him. Talbot deserved nothing but contempt and he would get it so far as he was concerned. He agreed with Harry that all reconciliation was now a thing of the past; the only solution possible was that Talbot was out of his senses—the affair having undermined his reason. He had heard of such cases and had doubted them—he was convinced now that they could be true. His answer, therefore, to Harry's next question—one about his lost sweetheart—was given with a certain hesitation. As long as the memory of Rutter's curses rankled within him all reference to Kate's affairs—even the little he knew himself—must be made with some circumspection. There was no hope in that direction either, but he did not want to tell him so outright; nor did he want to dwell too long upon the subject.

“And I suppose Kate is married by this time, Uncle George,” Harry said at last in a casual tone, “is she not?” (He had been leading up to it rather skilfully, but there had been no doubt in his uncle's mind as to his intention.) “I saw the house lighted up, night before last when I passed, and a lot of people about, so I thought it might be either the wedding or the reception.” The question had left his lips as one shoots an arrow in the dark—hit or miss—as if he did not care which. He too realized that this was no time to open wounds, certainly not in his uncle's heart; and yet he could wait no longer.

“No—I don't think the wedding has taken place,” St. George replied vaguely. “The servants would know if it had—they know everything—and Aunt Jemima would be the first to have told me. The house being lighted up is no evidence. They have been giving a series of entertainments this winter and there were more to come when I last saw Kate, which was one night at Richard Horn's. But let us close that chapter too, my boy. You and I will take a new lease of life from now on. You have already put fresh blood into my veins—I haven't felt so well for weeks. Now tell me about yourself. Your last letter reached me six months ago, if I remember right. You were then in Rio and were going up into the mountains. Did you go?”

“Yes—up into the Rio Abaste country where they had discovered diamonds as big as hens' eggs—one had been sold for nearly a quarter of a million dollars—and everybody was crazy. I didn't find any diamonds nor anything else but starvation, so I herded cattle, that being the only thing I knew anything about—how to ride—and slept out on the lowlands sometimes under a native mat and sometimes under the kindly stars. Then we had a revolution and cattle raids, and one night I came pretty near being chewed up by a puma—and so it went. I made a little money in rawhides after I got to know the natives, and I'm going back to make some more; and you are going with me when we get things straightened out. I wouldn't have come home except that I heard you had been turned out neck and crop from Kennedy Square. One of Mr. Seymour's clerks stopped in Rio on his way to the River Plate and did some business with an English agent whom I met afterward at a hacienda, and who told me about you when he learned I was from Kennedy Square. And when I think of it all, Uncle George, and what you have suffered on account of me!”—Here his voice faltered. “No!—I won't talk about it—I can't. I have spent too many sleepless nights over it: I have been hungry and half dead, but I have kept on—and I am not through: I'll pull out yet and put you on your feet once more if I live!”

St. George laid his hand tenderly on the young man's wrist. He knew how the boy felt about it. That was one of the things he loved him for.

“And so you started home when you heard it,” he went on, clearing his throat. “That was just like you, you dear fellow! And you haven't come home an hour too soon. I should have been measured for a pine coffin in another week.” The choke was quite in evidence now. “You see, I really couldn't go to Coston's when I thought it all over. I had made up my mind to go for a week or so until I saw this place, and then I determined I would stop with Jemima. I could eke out an existence here on what I had left and still feel like a gentleman, but I couldn't settle down on dear Peggy Coston and be anything but a poltroon. As to my making a living at the law—that was pure moonshine. I haven't opened a law book for twenty years and now it's too late. People of our class”—here he looked away from his companion and talked straight at the foot of the bed—“People of our class my boy,” he repeated slowly—“when they reach the neck and crop period you spoke of, are at the end of their rope. There are then but two things left—either to become the inmate of a poorhouse or to become a sponge. I prefer this bare room as a happy medium, and I am content to stay where I am as long as we three can keep body and soul together. There is—so Pawson told me before I left my house—a little money coming in from a ground rent—a few months off, perhaps, but more than enough to pay Todd back—he gives Jemima every cent of his wages—and when this does come in and I can get out once more, I'm going to order my life so I can make a respectable showing of some kind.”

He paused for a moment, fastened his gaze again on Harry, and continued:

“As to my going back to Pawson's, I am not altogether sure that that is the wisest thing to do. I may have to leave again as soon as I get comfortably settled in my bed. I turned out at his bidding before and may have to turn again when he says the word. So don't kindle too many fires with Pawson's wood—I hadn't a log to my name when I left—or it may warm somebody's else's shins besides mine,” and a merry twinkle shone in his eyes.

Harry burst out laughing.

“Wood or no wood, Uncle George, I'm going to be landlord now—Pawson can move out and graze his cattle somewhere else. I'm going to take charge of the hut and stock and the pack mules and provisions—and with a gun, if necessary—” and he levelled an imaginary fowling-piece with a boyish gesture.

“Don't you try to move anybody without an order of the court!” cried St. George, joining in the merriment. “With that mortgage hanging over everything and Gorsuch and your father cudgelling their brains to foreclose it, you won't have a ghost of a chance. Come to think of it, however, I might help—for a few weeks' expenses, at least. How would this do?” Here he had all he could do to straighten his face: “'Attention now—Hats off in the court-room. For sale or hire! Immediate delivery. One first-class gentleman, in reasonable repair. Could be made useful in opening and shutting doors, or in dancing attendance upon children under one year of age, or in keeping flies from bedridden folk. Apply, and so forth,' Gadgem could fix it. He has done the most marvellous things in the last year or two—extraordinary, really! Ask Todd about it some time—he'll tell you.”

They were both roaring with laughter, St. George so buoyed up by the contagious spirit of the young fellow that he insisted on getting out of bed and sitting in Aunt Jemima's rocking chair with a blanket across his knees.

All the morning did this happy talk go on:—the joyous unconfined talk of two men who had hungered and thirsted for each other through weary bitter days and nights, and whose coming together was like the mingling of two streams long kept apart, and now one great river flowing to a common outlet and a common good.

And not only did their talk cover the whole range of Harry's experiences from the time he left the ship for his sojourn in the hill country and the mountains beyond, and all of St. George's haps and mishaps, with every single transaction of Gadgem and Pawson—loving cup, dogs and all—but when their own personal news was exhausted they both fell back on their friends, such as Richard Horn and old Judge Pancoast; when he had seen Mr. Kennedy and Mr. Latrobe—yes, and what of Mr. Poe—had he written any more?—and were his habits any better?—etc., etc.

“I have seen Mr. Poe several times since that unfortunate dinner, Harry; the last time when he was good enough to call upon me on his way to Richmond. He was then particularly himself. You would not have known him—grave, dignified, perfectly dressed—charming, delightful. He came in quite late—indeed I was going to bed when I heard his knock and, Todd being out, I opened the door myself. There was some of that Black Warrior left, and I brought out the decanter, but he shook his head courteously and continued his talk. He asked after you. Wonderful man, Harry—a man you never forget once you know him.”

St. George dragged the pine table nearer his chair and moistened his lips with the glass of milk which Jemima had set beside him. Then he went on:

“You remember Judge Giles, do you not? Lives here on St. Paul Street—yes—of course you do—for he is a great friend of your father's and you must have met him repeatedly at Moorlands. Well, one day at the club he told me the most extraordinary story about Mr. Poe—this was some time after you'd gone. It seems that the judge was at work in his study late one snowy night when his doorbell sounded. Outside stood a man with his coat buttoned close about his throat—evidently a gentleman—who asked him politely for a sheet of paper and a pen. You know the judge, and how kind and considerate he is. Well, of course he asked him in, drew out a chair at his desk and stepped into the next room to leave him undisturbed. After a time, not hearing him move, he looked in and to his surprise the stranger had disappeared. On the desk lay a sheet of paper on which was written three verses of a poem. It was his 'Bells.' The judge has had them framed, so I hear. There was enough snow on the ground to bring out the cutters, and Poe had the rhythm of the bells ringing in his head and being afraid he would forget it he pulled the judge's doorbell. I wish he'd rung mine. I must get the poem for you, Harry—it's as famous now as 'The Raven.' Richard, I hear, reads it so that you can distinguish the sound of each bell.”

“Well, he taught me a lesson,” said Harry, tucking the blanket close around his uncle's knees—“one I have never forgotten, and never will. He sent me to bed a wreck, I remember, but I got up the next morning with a

new mast in me and all my pumps working."

"You mean—" and St. George smiled meaningly and tossed his hand up as if emptying a glass.

"Yes—just that—" rejoined Harry with a nod. "It's so hot out where I have been that a glass of native rum is as bad as a snake bite and everybody except a native leaves it alone. But if I had gone to the North Pole instead of the equator I would have done the same. Men like you and father, and Mr. Richard Horn and Mr. Kennedy, who have been brought up on moderation, may feel as they choose about it, but I'm going to let it alone. It's the devil when it gets into your blood and mine's not made for it. I'd like to thank Mr. Poe if I dared, which I wouldn't, of course, if I ever saw him, for what he did for me. I wouldn't be surprised if he would give a good deal himself to do the same—or has he pulled out?"

"He never has pulled in, Harry—not continuously. Richard has the right of it. Poe is a man pursued by a devil and lives always on the watch to prevent the fiend from getting the best of him. Months at a time he wins and then there comes a day when the devil gets on top. He says himself—he told me this the last time I saw him—that he really lives a life devoted to his literary work; that he shuts himself up from everybody; and that the desire for society only comes upon him when he's excited by drink. Then, and only then, does he go among his fellows. There is some truth in that, my son, for as long as I have known him I have never seen him in his cups except that one night at my house. A courteous, well-bred gentleman, my boy—most punctilious about all his obligations and very honest about his failings. All he said to me the next day when he sobered up—I kept him all that night, you remember—was: 'I was miserably weak and inexcusably drunk last night, Mr. Temple. If that was all it would make no difference; I have been very drunk before, and I will be very drunk again; but in addition to my being drunk I insulted you and your friends and ruined your dinner. That makes every difference. Don't let it cause a break between us. Let me come again. And now please brush it from your mind. If you knew how I suffer over this fiend who tortures and gloats over me you'd only have the greatest pity for me, in your heart.' Then he wrung my hand and left the house."

"Well, that's all any of us could do," sighed Harry, leaning back in his chair, his eyes on the ceiling. "It makes some difference, however, of whom you ask forgiveness. I've been willing to say the same kind of thing to my father ever since my affair with Mr. Willits, but it would have fallen on deaf ears. I had another trial at it yesterday, and you know what happened."

"I don't think your father knew you, Harry," protested St. George, with a negative wave of his hand.

"I hope he didn't—I shouldn't like to think he did. But, by heaven! it broke my heart to see him, Uncle George. You would hardly know him. Even his voice has changed and the shade over his eyes and the way he twists his head when he looks at you really gave me a creepy feeling," and the young man passed his fingers across his own eyes as if to shut out some hideous object.

"Was he looking straight at you when he ordered you from the room?"

"Straight as he could."

"Well, let us try and think it was the beard. And that reminds me, son, that it's got to come off, and right away. When Todd comes in he'll find my razors and—"

"No—I'll look up a barber."

"Not down in this part of the town," exclaimed St. George with a suggestive grimace.

"No—I'll go up to Guy's. There used to be an old negro there who looked after us young fellows when our beards began to sprout. He'll take care of it all right. While I'm out I'll stop and send Todd back. I'm going to end his apprenticeship to-day, and so he'll help you dress. Nothing like getting into your clothes when you're well enough to get out of bed; I've done it more than once," and with a pat on his uncle's shoulder and the readjustment of the blanket, he closed the door behind him and left the room.

"Everything is working fine, auntie," he cried gaily as he passed the old woman who was hanging out the last of her wash. "I'll be back in an hour. Don't tell him yet—" and he strode out of the yard on his way uptown.

CHAPTER XXVIII

Intruders of all kinds had thrust their heads between the dripping, slightly moist, and wholly dry installments of Aunt Jemima's Monday wash, and each and every one had been assailed by a vocabulary hurled at them through the creaky gate, and as far out as the street—peddlers; beggars; tramps; loose darkies with no visible means of support, who had smelt the cooking in the air—even goats with an acquired taste for stocking legs and window curtains—all of whom had either been invited out, whirled out, or thrown out, dependent upon the damage inflicted, the size of the favors asked, or the length of space intervening between Jemima's right arm and their backs. In all of these instances the old cook had been the broom and the intruders the dust. Being an expert in its use the intruders had succumbed before they had gotten through their first sentence. In the case of the goat even that privilege was denied him; it was the handle and not the brush-part which ended the argument. To see Aunt Jemima get rid of a goat in one whack and two jumps was not only a lesson in condensed conversation, but furnished a sight one rarely forgot—the goat never!

This morning the situation was reversed. It was Aunt Jemima who came flying upstairs, her eyes popping from her head, her plump hands flattened against her big, heaving bosom, her breath gone in the effort to tell her dreadful news before she should drop dead.

"Marse George! who d'ye think's downstairs?" she gasped, bursting in the door of his bedroom, without even the customary tap. "Oh, bless Gawd! dat you'se outen dat bed! and dressed and tryin' yo' po' legs about the room. He's comin' up. Got a man wid him I ain't neber see befo'. Says he's a-lookin' fer somebody! Git in

de closet an' I'll tell him you'se out an' den I'll run an' watch for Marse Harry at de gate. Oh, I doan' like dis yere bus'ness," and she began to wring her hands.

St. George, who had been listening to the old woman with mingled feelings of wonder and curiosity, raised his hand to silence her. Whether she had gone daft or was more than usually excited he could not for the moment decide.

"Get your breath, Jemima, and tell me what you're talking about. Who's downstairs?"

"Ain't I jes' don' tol' yer? Got a look on him make ye shiver all over; says he's gwineter s'arch de house. He's got a constable wid him—dat is, he's got a man dat looks like a constable, an'—"

St. George laid his hands on the old woman's shoulders, and turned her about.

"Hush your racket this instant, and tell me who is downstairs?"

"Marse Talbot Rutter," she wheezed; "come f'om de country—got mud all ober his boots."

"Mr. Harry's father?"

Aunt Jemima choked and nodded: there was no breath left for more.

"Who did he ask for?" St. George was calm enough now.

"Didn't ask fer nobody; he say, 'I'm lookin' fer a man dat come in yere las' night.' I see he didn't know me an' I neber let on. Den he say, 'Hab you got any boa'ders yere?' an' I say, 'I got one,' an' den he 'tempted ter pass me an' I say, 'Wait a minute 'til I see ef he's outen de bed.' Now, what's I gwineter do? He doan' mean no good to Marse Harry an' he'll dribe him 'way ag'in, an' he jes' come back an' you gittin' well a-lovin' of him—an'—"

An uncertain step was heard in the hall.

"Dat's him," Jemima whispered hoarsely, behind her hand, "what'll I do? Doan' let him come in. I'll—"

St. George moved past her and pushed back the door.

Colonel Rutter stood outside.

The two men looked into each other's faces.

"I am in search, sir," the colonel began, shading his eyes with his fingers, the brighter light of the room weakening his sight, "for a young sailor whom I am informed stopped here last night, and who... ST. GEORGE! What in the name of God are you doing in a place like this?"

"Come inside, Talbot," Temple replied calmly, his eyes fixed on Rutter's drawn face and faltering gaze. "Aunt Jemima, hand Colonel Rutter a chair. You will excuse me if I sit down—I am just out of bed after a long illness, and am a little weak," and he settled slowly into his seat. "My servant tells me that you are looking for a—"

St. George paused. Rutter was paying no more attention to what he said than if he had been in the next room. He was straining his eyes about the apartment; taking in the empty bed from which St. George had just arisen, the cheap chairs and small pine table and the kitchen plates and cup which still held the remains of St. George's breakfast. He waited until Jemima had backed out of the door, her scared face still a tangle of emotions—fear for her master's safety uppermost. His eyes again veered to St. George.

"What does it all mean, Temple?" he asked in a dazed way.

"I don't think that subject is under discussion, Talbot, and we will, therefore, pass it. To what do I owe the honor of this visit?"

"Don't be a damned fool, St. George! Don't you see I'm half crazy? Harry has come back and he is hiding somewhere in this neighborhood."

"How do you know?" he inquired coolly. He did not intend to help Rutter one iota in his search until he found out why he wanted Harry. No more cursing of either his son or himself—that was another chapter which was closed.

"Because I've been hunting for him all day. He rode out to Moorlands yesterday, and I didn't know him, he's so changed. But think of it! St. George, I ordered him out of my office. I took him for a road-peddler. And he's going to sea again—he told Alec as much. I tell you I have got to get hold of him! Don't sit there and stare at me, man! tell me where I can find my son!"

"What made you suppose he was here, Talbot?" The same cool, measured speech and manner, but with a more open mind behind it now. The pathetic aspect of the man, and the acute suffering shown in every tone of his voice, had begun to tell upon the invalid.

"Because a man I've got downstairs brought Harry here last night. He is not positive, as it was quite dark, but he thinks this is the place. I went first to the Barkeley Line, found they had a ship in—the Mohican—and saw the captain, who told me of a man who came aboard at Rio. Then I learned where he had put up for the night—a low sailors' retreat—and found this peddler who said he had sold Harry the silks which he offered me. He brought me here."

"Well, I can't help you any. There are only two rooms—I occupy this and my old cook, Jemima, has the other. I have been here for over a month."

"Here! in this God-forsaken place! Why, we thought you had gone to Virginia. That's why we have had no answers to our letters, and we've hunted high and low for you. Certainly you have heard about the Patapsco and what—"

"I certainly have heard nothing, Talbot, and as I have just told you, I'd rather you would not discuss my affairs. The last time you saw fit to encroach upon them brought only bitterness, and I prefer not to repeat it. Anything you have to say about Harry I will gladly hear. Go on—I'm listening."

"For God's sake, St. George, don't take that tone with me! If you knew how wretched I am you'd be sorry for me. I am a broken-down man! If Harry goes away again without my seeing him I don't want to live another day. When Alec came running back last night and told me that I had cursed my son to his face, I nearly went out of my mind. I knew when I saw Alec's anger that it was true, and I knew, too, what a brute I had been. I

ran to Annie's room, took her in my arms, and asked her pardon. All night I walked my room; at daylight I rang for Alec, sent for Matthew, and he hooked up the carryall and we came in here. Annie wanted to come with me, but I wouldn't let her. I knew Seymour wasn't out of bed that early, and so I drove straight to the shipping office and waited until it was open, and I've been hunting for him ever since. You and I have been boys together, St. George—don't lay up against me all the insulting things I've said to you—all the harm I've done you! God knows I've repented of it! Will you forgive me, St. George, for the sake of the old days—for the sake of my boy to whom you have been a father? Will you give me your hand? What in the name of common sense should you and I be enemies for? I, who owe you more than I owe any man in the world! Will you help me?”

St. George was staring now. He bent forward, gripped the arms of his chair for a better purchase, and lifted himself to his feet. There he stood swaying, Rutter's outstretched hand in both of his, his whole nature stirred—only one thought in his heart—to wipe out the past and bring father and son together.

“Yes, Talbot—I'll forgive you and I'll help you—I have helped you! Harry will be here in a few minutes—I sent him out to get his beard shaved off—that's why you didn't know him.”

The colonel reeled and but for St. George's hand would have lost his balance. All the blood was gone from his cheeks. He tried to speak, but the lips refused to move. For an instant St. George thought he would sink to the floor.

“You say—Harry... is here!” he stammered out at last, catching wildly at Temple's other hand to steady himself.

“Yes, he came across Todd by the merest accident or he would have gone to the Eastern Shore to look me up. Listen!—that's his step now! Turn that door knob and hold out your hands to him, and after you've got your arms around him get down on your knees and thank your God that you've got such a son! I do, every hour I live!”

The door swung wide and Harry strode in: his eyes glistening, his cheeks aglow.

“Up, are you, and in your clothes!” he cried joyfully, all the freshness of the morning in his voice. “Well, that's something like! How do you like me now?—smooth as a marlinspike and my hair trimmed in the latest fashion, so old Bones says. He didn't know me either till he got clear down below my mouth and when my chin began to show he gave a—”

He stopped and stared at his father, who had been hidden from sight by the swinging door. The surprise was so great that his voice clogged in his throat. Rutter stood like one who had seen an apparition.

St. George broke the silence:

“It's all right, Harry—give your father your hand.”

The colonel made a step forward, threw out one arm as if to regain his equilibrium and swayed toward a chair, his frame shaking convulsively, wholly unstrung, sobbing like a child. Harry sprang to catch him and the two sank down together—no word of comfort—only the mute appeal of touch—the brown hand wet with his father's tears.

For some seconds neither spoke, then Rutter raised his head and looked into his son's face.

“I didn't know it was you, Harry. I have been hunting you all day to ask your pardon.” It was the memory of the last indignity he had heaped upon him that tortured him.

“I knew you didn't, father.”

“Don't go away again, Harry, please don't, my son!” he pleaded, strangling the tears, trying to regain his self-control—tears had often of late moistened Rutter's lids. “Your mother can't stand it another year, and I'm breaking up—half blind. You won't go, will you?”

“No—not right away, father—we'll talk of that later.” He was still in the dark as to how it had come about. All he knew was that for the first time in all his life his father had asked his pardon, and for the first time in his life the barrier which held them apart had been broken down.

The colonel braced himself in his seat in one supreme effort to get himself in hand. One of his boasts was that he had never lost his self-control. Harry rose to his feet and stood beside him. St. George, trembling from his own weakness, a great throb of thankfulness in his heart, had kept his place in his chair, his eyes turned away from the scene. His own mind had also undergone a change. He had always known that somewhere down in Talbot Rutter's heart—down underneath the strata of pride and love of power, there could be found the heart of a father—indeed he had often predicted to himself just such a coming together. It was the boy's pluck and manliness that had done it; a manliness free from all truckling or cringing. And then his tenderness over the man who had of all others in the world wronged him most! He could hardly keep his glad hands off the boy.

“You will go home with me, of course, won't you, Harry?” He must ask his consent now—this son of his whom he had driven from his home and insulted in the presence of his friends at the club, and whom he could see was now absolutely independent of him—and what was more to the point absolutely his own master.

“Yes, of course, I'll go home with you, father,” came the respectful answer, “if mother isn't coming in. Did she or Alec say anything to you about it before you left?”

“No, she isn't coming in to-day—I wouldn't let her. It was too early when I started. But that's not what I mean,” he went on with increasing excitement. “I want you to go home with me and stay forever; I want to forget the past; I want St. George to hear me say so! Come and take your place at the head of the estate—I will have Gorsuch arrange the papers to-morrow. You and St. George must go back with me to-day. I have the large carryall—Matthew is with me—he stopped at the corner—he's there now.”

“That's very kind of you, father,” Harry rejoined calmly, concealing as best he could his disappointment at not being able to see his mother.

“Yes! of course you will go with me,” his father continued in nervous, jerky tones. “Please send the servant for Matthew, my coachman, and have him drive up. As for you, St. George, you can't stay here another hour. How you ever got here is more than I can understand. Moorlands is the place for you both—you'll get well

there. My carriage is a very easy one. Perhaps I had better go for Matthew myself."

"No, don't move, Talbot," rejoined St. George in a calm firm voice wondering at Talbot's manner. He had never seen him like this. All his old-time measured talk and manner were gone; he was like some breathless, hunted man pleading for his life. "I'm very grateful to you but I shall stay here. Harry, will you kindly go for Matthew?"

"Stay here!—for how long?" cried the colonel in astonishment, his glance following Harry as he left the room in obedience to his uncle's request.

"Well, perhaps for the balance of the winter."

"In this hole?" His voice had grown stronger.

"Certainly, why not?" replied St. George simply, moving his chair so that his guest might see him the better. "My servants are taking care of me. I can pay my way here, and it's about the only place in which I can pay it, and I want to tell you frankly, Talbot, that I am very happy to be here—am very glad, really, to get such a place. No one could be more devoted than my Todd and Jemima—I shall never forget their kindness."

"But you're not a pauper?" cried the colonel in some heat.

"That was what you were once good enough to call me—the last time we met. The only change is that then I owed Pawson and that now I owe Todd," he replied, trying to repress a smile, as if the humor of the situation would overcome him if he was not careful. "Thank you very much, Talbot—and I mean every word of it—but I'll stay where I am, at least for the present."

"But the bank is on its legs again," rebounded the colonel, ignoring all reference to the past, his voice gaining in volume.

"So am I," laughed St. George, tapping his lean thighs with his transparent fingers—"on a very shaky pair of legs—so shaky that I shall have to go to bed again pretty soon."

"But you're coming out all right, St. George!" Rutter had squared himself in his chair and was now looking straight at his host. "Gorsuch has written you half a dozen letters about it and not a word from you in reply. Now I see why. But all that will come out in time, I tell you. You're not going to stay here for an hour longer." His old personality was beginning to assert itself.

"The future doesn't interest me, Talbot," smiled St. George in perfect good humor. "In my experience my future has always been worse than my past."

"But that is no reason why you shouldn't go home with me now and let us take care of you," Rutter cried in a still more positive tone. "Annie will be delighted. Stay a month with me—stay a year. After what I owe you, St. George, there's nothing I wouldn't do for you."

"You have already done it, Talbot—every obligation is wiped out," rejoined St. George in a satisfied tone.

"How?"

"By coming here and asking Harry's pardon—that is more to me than all the things I have ever possessed," and his voice broke as he thought of the change that had taken place in Harry's fortunes in the last half hour.

"Then come out to Moorlands and let me prove it!" exclaimed the colonel, leaning forward in his eagerness and grasping St. George by the sleeve.

"No," replied St. George in appreciative but positive tones—showing his mind was fully made up. "If I go anywhere I'll go back to my house on Kennedy Square—that is to the little of it that is still mine. I'll stay there for a day or two, to please Harry—or until they turn me out again, and then I'll come back here. Change of air may do me good, and besides, Jemima and Todd should get a rest."

The colonel rose to his feet: "You shall do no such thing!" he exploded. The old dominating air was in full swing now. "I tell you you WILL come with me! Damn you, St. George!—if you don't I'll never speak to you again, so help me, God!"

St. George threw back his head and burst into a roar of laughter in which, after a moment of angry hesitation, Rutter joined. Then he reached down and with his hand on St. George's shoulder, said in a coaxing tone—"Come along to Moorlands, old fellow—I'd be so glad to have you, and so will Annie, and we'll live over the old days."

Harry's re-entrance cut short the answer.

"No father," he cried cheerily, taking up the refrain. He had seen the friendly caress and had heard the last sentence. "Uncle George is still too ill, and too weak for so long a drive. It's only the excitement over my return that keeps him up now—and he'll collapse if we don't look out—but he'll collapse in a better place than this!" he added with joyous emphasis. "Todd is outside, the hack is at the gate, and Jemima is now waiting for him in his old room at home. Give me your arm, you blessed old cripple, and let me help you downstairs. Out of the way, father, or he'll change his mind and I'll have to pick him up bodily and carry him."

St. George shot a merry glance at Harry from under his eyebrows, and with a wave of his hand and a deprecating shake of his head at the colonel said:

"These rovers and freebooters, Talbot, have so lorded it over their serfs that they've lost all respect for their betters. Give me your hand, you vagabond, and if you break my neck I'll make you bury me."

The colonel looked on silently and a sharp pain gripped his throat. When, in all his life, had he ever been spoken to by his boy in that spirit, and when in all his life had he ever seen that same tenderness in Harry's eyes? What had he not missed?

"Harry, may I make a suggestion?" he asked almost apologetically. The young fellow turned his head in respectful attention: "Put St. George in my carriage—it is much more comfortable—and let me drive him home—my eyes are quite good in the daytime, after I get used to the light, and I am still able to take the road. Then put your servant and mine in the hack with St. George's and your own luggage."

"Capital idea!" cried Harry enthusiastically "I never thought of it! Attention company! Eyes to the front, Mr. Temple! You'll now remain on waiting orders until I give you permission to move, and as this may take some time—please hold on to him, father, until I get his chair" (they were already out on the landing—on the very

plank where Harry had passed the night) “you'll go back to your quarters... Here sir, these are your quarters,” and Harry dragged the chair into position with his foot. “Down with you... that's it... and you will stay here until the baggage and hospital train arrives, when you'll occupy a front seat in the van—and there will be no grumbling or lagging behind of any kind, remember, or you'll get ten days in the calaboose!”

Pawson was on the curbstone, his face shining, his semaphore arms and legs in action, his eyes searching the distance, when the two vehicles came in sight. He had heard the day boat was very late, and as there had been a heavy fog over night, did not worry about the delay in their arrival.

What troubled him more was the change in Mr. Temple's appearance. He had gone away ruddy, erect, full of vigor and health, and here he was being helped out of the carriage, pale, shriveled, his eyes deep set in his head. His voice, though, was still strong if his legs were shaky, and there seemed also to be no diminution in the flow of his spirits. Wesley had kept that part of him intact whatever changes the climate had made.

“Ah, Pawson—glad to see you!” the invalid called gaily extending his hand as soon as he stood erect on the sidewalk. “Back again, you see—these old derelicts bob up once in a while when you least expect them.” And he wrung his hand heartily. “So the vultures, it seems, have not turned up yet and made their roost in my nest. Most kind of you to stay home and give up your business to meet me! You know Colonel Talbot Rutter, of Moorlands, I presume, and Mr. Harry Rutter—Of course you do! Harry has told me all about your midnight meeting when you took him for a constable, and he took you for a thief. No—please don't laugh, Pawson—Mr. Rutter is the worst kind of a thief. Not only has he stolen my heart because of his goodness to me, but he threatens to make off with my body. Give me your hand, Todd. Now a little lift on that rickety elbow and I reckon we can make that flight of steps. I have come down them so many times of late with no expectation of ever mounting them again that it will be a novelty to be sure of staying over night. Come in, Talbot, and see the home of my ancestors. I am sorry the Black Warrior is all gone—I sent Kennedy the last bottle some time ago—pity that vintage didn't last forever. Do you know, Talbot, if I had my way, I'd have a special spigot put in the City Spring labelled 'Gift of a once prominent citizen,' and supply the inhabitants with 1810—something fit for a gentleman to drink.”

They were all laughing now; the colonel carrying the pillows Todd had tucked behind the invalid's back, Harry a few toilet articles wrapped in paper, and Matthew his cane—and so the cortege crawled up the steps, crossed the dismantled dining-room—the colonel aghast at the change made in its interior since last he saw it—and so on to St. George's room where Todd and Jemima put him to bed.

His uncle taken care of—(his father had kept on to Moorlands to tell his mother the good news)—Harry mounted the stairs to his old room, which Pawson had generously vacated.

The appointments were about the same as when he left; time and poverty had wrought but few changes. Pawson, had moved in a few books and there was a night table beside the small bed with a lamp on it, showing that he read late; but the bureau and shabby arm-chair, and the closet, stripped now of the young attorney's clothes to make room for the wanderer's—(a scant, sorry lot)—were pretty much the same as Harry had found on that eventful night when he had driven in through the rain and storm beside his Uncle George, his father's anathemas ringing in his ears.

Unconsciously his mind went back to the events of the day;—more especially to his uncle's wonderful vitality and the blissful change his own home-coming had wrought not only in his physique, but in his spirits. Then his father's shattered form, haggard face, and uncertain glance rose before him, and with it came the recollection of all that had happened during the previous hours: his father's brutal outburst in the small office and the marvellous effect produced upon him when he learned the truth from Alec's lips; his hurried departure in the gray dawn for the ship and his tracing him to Jemima's house. More amazing still was his present bearing toward himself and St. George; his deference to their wishes and his willingness to follow and not lead. Was it his ill-health that had brought about this astounding reformation in a man who brooked no opposition?—or had his heart really softened toward him so that from this on he could again call him father in the full meaning of the term? At this a sudden, acute pain wrenched his heart. Perhaps he had not been glad enough to see him—perhaps in his anxiety over his uncle he had failed in those little tendernesses which a returned prodigal should have shown the father who had held out his arms and asked his forgiveness. Why was he not more affected by the sight of his suffering. When he first saw his uncle he had not been able to keep the tears back—and yet his eyes were dry enough when he saw his father. At this he fell to wondering as to the present condition of the colonel's mind. What was he thinking of in that lonely drive. He must be nearing Moorlands by this time and Alec would meet him, and later the dear mother—and the whole story would be told. He could see her glad face—her eyes streaming tears, her heart throbbing with the joy of his return.

And it is a great pity he could not have thus looked in upon the autocrat of Moorlands as he sat hunched up on the back seat of the carryall, his head bowed, the only spoken words being Matthew's cheery hastening of his horses. And it is even a greater pity that the son could not have searched as well the secret places of the man's heart: such clearings out of doubts and misgivings make for peace and good fellowship and righteousness in this world of misunderstanding.

That a certain rest had come into Rutter's soul could be seen in his face—a peace that had not settled on his features for years—but, if the truth must be told, he was far from happy. Somehow the joy he had anticipated at the boy's home-coming had not been realized. With the warmth of Harry's grasp still lingering in his own and the tones of his voice still sounding in his ears, try as he might, he yet felt aloof from him—outside—far off. Something had snapped in the years they had been apart—something he knew could never be repaired. Where there had once been boyish love there was now only filial regard. Down in his secret soul he felt it—down in his secret soul he knew it! Worse than that—another had replaced him! “Come, you dear old cripple!”—he could hear the voice and see the love and joy in the boy's eyes as he shouted it out. Yes, St. George was his father now!

Then his mind reverted to his former treatment of his son and for the hundredth time he reviewed his side of the case. What else could he have done and still maintain the standards of his ancestors?—the universal question around Kennedy Square, when obligations of blood and training were to be considered. After all it

had only been an object lesson; he had fully intended to forgive him later on. When Harry was a boy he punished him as boys were punished; when he became a man he punished him as men were punished. But for St. George the plan would long since have worked. St. George had balked him twice—once at the club and once at his home in Kennedy Square, when he practically ordered him from the house.

And yet he could not but admit—and at this he sat bolt upright in his seat—that even according to his own high standards both St. George and Harry had measured up to them! Rather than touch another penny of his uncle's money Harry had become an exile; rather than accept a penny from his enemy, St. George had become a pauper. With this view of the case fermenting in his mind—and he had not realized the extent of both sacrifices until that moment—a feeling of pride swept through him. It was HIS BOY and HIS FRIEND, who had measured up!—by suffering, by bodily weakness—by privation—by starvation! And both had manfully and cheerfully stood the test! It was the blood of the DeRuyters which had put courage into the boy; it was the blood of the cavaliers that had made Temple the man he was. And that old DeRuyter blood! How it had told in every glance of his son's eyes and every intonation of his voice! If he had not accumulated a fortune he would—and that before many years were gone. But!—and here a chill went through him. Would not this still further separate them, and if it did how could he restore in the shortest possible time the old dependence and the old confidence? His efforts so far had met with almost a rebuff, for Harry had shown no particular pleasure when he told him of his intention to put him in charge of the estate: he had watched his face closely for a sign of satisfaction, but none had come. He had really seemed more interested in getting St. George downstairs than in being the fourth heir of Moorlands—indeed, it was very evident that he had no thought for anybody or anything except St. George.

All this the son might have known could he have sat by his father in the carryall on this way to Moorlands.

CHAPTER XXIX

The sudden halting of two vehicles close to the horse-block of the Temple Mansion—one an aristocratic carryall driven by a man in livery, and the other a dilapidated city hack in charge of a negro in patched overcoat and whitey-brown hat, the discharge of their inmates, one of whom was Colonel Talbot Rutter of Moorlands carrying two pillows, and another a strange young man loaded down with blankets—the slow disembarking of a gentleman in so wretched a state of health that he was practically carried up the front steps by his body-servant, and the subsequent arrival of Dr. Teackle on the double quick—was a sight so unusual in and around peaceful Kennedy Square that it is not surprising that all sorts of reports—most of them alarming—reached the club long before St. George had been comfortably tucked away in bed.

Various versions were afloat: “St. George was back from Wesley with a touch of chills and fever—” “St. George was back from Wesley with a load of buckshot in his right arm—” “St. George had broken his collar-bone riding to hounds—” etc.

Richard Horn was the first to spring to his feet—it was the afternoon hour and the club was full—and cross the Square on the run, followed by Clayton, Bowman, and two or three others. These, with one accord, banged away on the knocker, only to be met by Dr. Teackle, who explained that there was nothing seriously the matter with Mr. Temple, except an attack of foolhardiness in coming up the bay when he should have stayed in bed—but even that should cause his friends no uneasiness, as he was still as tough as a lightwood knot, and bubbling over with good humor; all he needed was rest, and that he must have—so please everybody come to-morrow.

By the next morning the widening of ripples caused by the dropping of a high-grade invalid into the still pool of Kennedy Square, spread with such force and persistency that one wavelet overflowed Kate's dressing-room. Indeed, it came in with Mammy Henny and her coffee.

“Marse George home, honey—Ben done see Todd. Got a mis'ry in his back dat bad it tuk two gemmens to tote him up de steps.”

“Uncle George home, and ill!”

That was enough for Kate. She didn't want any coffee—she didn't want any toast or muffins, or hominy—she wanted her shoes and stockings and—Yes everything, and quick!—and would Mammy Henny call Ben and send him right away to Mr. Temple's and find out how her dear Uncle George had passed the night, and give him her dearest love and tell him she would come right over to see him the moment she could get into her clothes; and could she send anything for him to eat; and did the doctor think it was dangerous—? Yes—and Ben must keep on to Dr. Teackle's and find out if it was dangerous—and say to him that Miss Seymour wanted to know IMMEDIATELY, and—(Here the poor child lost her breath, she was dressing all the time, Mammy Henny's fingers and ears doing their best) “and tell Mr. Temple, too,” she rushed on, “that he must send word by Ben for ANYTHING and EVERYTHING he needed” (strong accent on the two words)... all of which was repeated through the crack of the door to patient Ben when he presented himself, with the additional assurance that he must tell Mr. Temple it wouldn't be five minutes before she would be with him—as she was nearly dressed, all but her hair.

She was right about her good intentions, but she was wrong about the number of minutes necessary to carry them out. There was her morning gown to button, and her gaiters to lace, and her hair to be braided and caught up in her neck (she always wore it that way in the morning) and the dearest of snug bonnets—a “cabriolet” from Paris—a sort of hood, stiffened with wires, out of which peeped pink rosebuds quite as they do from a trellis—had to be put on, and the white strings tied “just so”—the bows flaring out and the long ends smoothed flat; and then the lace cape and scarf and her parasol;—all these and a dozen other little niceties had to be adjusted before she could trip down her father's stairs and out of her father's swinging gate and on through the park to her dear Uncle George.

But when she did—and it took her all of an hour—nothing that the morning sun shone on was quite as lovely, and no waft of air so refreshing or so welcome as our beloved heroine when she burst in upon him.

“Oh!—you dear, DEAR thing!” she cried, tossing her parasol on Pawson's table and stretching out her arms toward him sitting in his chair. “Oh, I am so sorry! Why didn't you let me know you were ill? I would have gone down to Wesley. Oh!—I KNEW something was the matter with you or you would have answered my letters.”

He had struggled to his feet at the first sound of her footsteps in the hall, and had her in his arms long before she had finished her greeting;—indeed her last sentence was addressed to the collar of his coat against which her cheek was cushioned.

“Who said I was ill?” he asked with one of his bubbling laughs when he got his breath.

“Todd told Ben—and you ARE!—and it breaks my heart.” She was holding herself off now, scanning his pale face and shrunken frame—“Oh, I am so sorry you did not let me know!”

“Todd is a chatterer, and Ben no better; I've only had a bad cold—and you couldn't have done me a bit of good if you had come—and now I am entirely well, never felt better in my life. Oh—but it's good to get hold of you, Kate,—and you are still the same bunch of roses. Sit down now and tell me all about it. I wish I had a better chair for you, my dear, but the place is quite dismantled, as you see. I expected to stay the winter when I left.”

She had not given a thought to the chair or to the changes—had not even noticed them. That the room was stripped of its furniture prior to a long stay was what invariably occurred in her own house every summer: it was her precious uncle's pale, shrunken face and the blue veins that showed in the backs of his dear transparent hands which she held between her own, and the thin, emaciated wrists that absorbed her.

“You poor, dear Uncle George!” she purred—“and nobody to look after you.” He had drawn up Pawson's chair and had placed her in it beside the one he sat in, and had then dropped slowly into his own, the better to hide from her his weakness—but it did not deceive her. “I'm going to have you put back to bed this very minute; you are not strong enough to sit up. Let me call Aunt Jemima.”

St. George shook his head good-naturedly in denial and smoothed her hands with his fingers.

“Call nobody and do nothing but sit beside me and let me look into your face and listen to your voice. I have been pretty badly shaken up; had two weeks of it that couldn't have been much worse—but since then I have been on the mend and am getting stronger every minute. I haven't had any medicine and I don't want any now—I just want you and—” he hesitated, and seeing nothing in her eyes of any future hope for Harry, finished the sentence, with “and one or two others to sit by me and cheer me up; that's better than all the doctors in the world. And now, first about your father and then about yourself.”

“Oh, he's very well,” she rejoined absently. “He's off somewhere, went away two days ago. He'll be back in a week. But you must have something to eat—GOOD things!”—her mind still occupied with his condition. “I'm going to have some chicken broth made the moment I get home and it will be sent fresh every day: and you must eat every bit of it!”

Again St. George's laugh rang out. He had let her run on—it was music to his ears—that he might later on find some clue on which he could frame a question he had been revolving in his mind ever since he heard her voice in the hall. He would not tell her about Harry—better wait until he could read her thoughts the clearer. If he could discover by some roundabout way that she would still refuse to see him it would be best not to embarrass her with any such request; especially on this her first visit.

“Yes—I'll eat anything and everything you send me, you dear Kate—and many thanks to you, provided you'll come with it—you are the best broth for me. But you haven't answered my question—not all of it. What have YOU been doing since I left?”

“Wondering whether you would forgive me for the rude way in which I left you the last time I saw you,—the night of Mr. Horn's reading, for one thing. I went off with Mr. Willits and never said a word to you. I wrote you a letter telling you how sorry I was, but you never answered it, and that made me more anxious than ever.”

“What foolishness, Kate! I never got it, of course, or you would have heard from me right away. A number of my letters have gone astray of late. But I don't remember a thing about it, except that you walked off with your—” again he hesitated—“with Mr. Willits, which, of course, was the most natural thing for you to do in the world. How is he, by the way?”

Kate drew back her shoulders with that quick movement common to her when some antagonism in her mind preceded her spoken word.

“I don't know—I haven't seen him for some weeks.”

St. George started in his chair: “You haven't! He isn't ill, is he?”

“No, I think not,” she rejoined calmly.

“Oh, then he has gone down to his father's. Yes, I remember he goes quite often,” he ventured.

“No, I think he is still here.” Her gaze was on the window as she spoke, through which could be seen the tops of the trees glistening in the sunlight.

“And you haven't seen him? Why?” asked St. George wonderingly—he was not sure he had heard her aright.

“I told him not to come,” she replied in a positive tone.

St. George settled back in his chair. Had there been a clock in the room its faintest tick would have rung out like a trip-hammer.

“Then you have had a quarrel: he has broken his promise to you and got drunk again.”

“No, he has never broken it; he has kept it as faithfully as Harry kept his.”

“You don't mean, Kate, that you have broken off your engagement?”

She reached over and picked up her parasol: “There never was any engagement. I have always felt sorry for

Mr. Willits and tried my best to love him and couldn't—that is all. He understands it perfectly; we both do. It was one of the things that couldn't be."

All sorts of possibilities surged one after the other through the old diplomat's mind. A dim light increasing in intensity began to shine about him. What it meant he dared not hope. "What does your father say?" he asked slowly, after a pause in which he had followed every expression that crossed her face.

"Nothing—and it wouldn't alter the case if he did. I am the best judge of what is good for me." There was a certain finality in her cadences that repelled all further discussion. He remembered having heard the same ring before.

"When did all this happen?—this telling him not to come?" he persisted, determined to widen the inquiry. His mind was still unable to fully grasp the situation.

"About five weeks ago. Do you want to know the very night?" She turned her head as she spoke and looked at him with her full, deep eyes.

"Yes, if you wish me to."

"The night Mr. Horn read 'The Cricket on the Hearth,'" she answered in a tone of relief—as if some great crisis had marked the hour, the passing of which had brought her infinite peace. "I told him when I got home, and I have never seen him since."

For some seconds St. George did not move. He had turned from her and sat with his head resting on his hand, his eyes intent on the smouldering fire: he dare not trust himself to speak; wide ranges opened before him; the light had strengthened until it was blinding. Kate sat motionless, her hands in her lap, her eyes searching St. George's face for some indication of the effect of her news. Then finding him still silent and absorbed in his thoughts, she went on:

"There was nothing else to do, Uncle George. I had done all I could to please my father and one or two of my friends. There was nothing against him—he was very kind and very considerate—but somehow I—" She paused and drew a long breath.

"Somehow what?" demanded St. George raising his head quickly and studying her the closer. The situation was becoming vital now—too vital for any further delay.

"Oh, I don't know—I couldn't love him—that's all. He has many excellent qualities—too many maybe," and she smiled faintly. "You know I never liked people who were too good—that is, too willing to do everything you wanted them to do—especially men who ought really to be masters and—" She stopped and played with the top of her parasol, smoothing the knob with her palm as if the better to straighten out the tangle in her mind. "I expect you will think me queer, Uncle George, but I have come to the conclusion that I will never love anybody again—I am through with all that. It's very hard, you know, to mend a thing when it's broken. I used to say to myself that when I grew to be a woman I supposed I would love as any other woman seemed content to love; that no romance of a young girl was ever realized and that they could only be found in love stories. But my theories all went to pieces when I heard Mr. Horn that night. Dot's love for John the Carrier—I have read it so often since that I know the whole story by heart—Dot's love for John was the real thing, but May Fielding's love for Tackleton wasn't. And it seemed so wonderful when her lover came home and—it's foolish, I know—very silly—that I should have been so moved by just the reading of a story—but it's true. It takes only a very little to push you over when you are on the edge, and I had been on the edge for a long time. But don't let us talk about it, dear Uncle George," she added with a forced smile. "I'm going to take care of you now and be a charming old maid with side curls and spectacles and make flannel things for the poor—you just wait and see what a comfort I will be." Her lips were trembling, the tears crowding over the edges of her lids.

St. George stretched out his hand and in his kindest voice said:

"Was it the carrier and his wife, or was it the sailor boy who came back so fine and strong, that affected you, Kate?—and made you give up Mr. Willits?" He would go to the bottom now.

"It was everything, Uncle George—the sweetness of it all—her pride in her husband—his doubts of her—her repentance; and yet she did what she thought was for the best; and then his forgiveness and the way he wanted to take her in his arms at last and she would not until she explained. And there was nothing really to explain—only love, and trust, and truth—all the time believing in him—loving him. Oh, it is cruel to part people—it's so mean and despicable! There are so many Tackletons—and the May Fieldings go to the altar and so on to their graves—and there is often such a very little difference between the two. I never gave my promise to Mr. Willits. I would not!—I could not! He kept hoping and waiting. He was very gentle and patient—he never coaxed nor pleaded, but just—Oh, Uncle George!—let me talk it all out—I have nobody else. I missed you so, and there was no one who could understand, and you wouldn't answer my letters." She was crying softly to herself, her beautiful head resting on her elbow pillowed on the back of his chair.

He leaned forward the closer: he loved this girl next best to Harry. Her sorrows were his own. Was it all coming out as he had hoped and prayed for? He could hardly restrain himself in his eagerness.

"Did you miss anybody else, Kate?" There was a peculiar tenderness in his voice.

She did not raise her head nor did she answer. St. George waited and repeated the question, Slipping his hand over hers, as he spoke.

"It was the loneliness, Uncle George," she replied, evading his inference. "I tried to forget it all, and I threw open our house and gave parties and dances—hardly a week but there has been something going on—but nothing did any good. I have been—yes—wretchedly unhappy and—No, it will only distress you to hear it—don't let's talk any more about it. I won't let you go away again. I'll go away with you if you don't get better soon, anywhere you say. We'll go down to the White Sulphur—Yes—we'll go there. The air is so bracing—it wouldn't be a week before all the color would come back to your cheeks and you be as strong as ever."

He was not listening. His mind was framing a question—one he must ask without committing himself or her. He was running a parallel, really—reading her heart by a flank movement.

"Kate, dear?" He had regained his position although he still kept hold of her hand.

“Yes, Uncle George.”

“Did you write to Harry, as I asked you?”

“No, it wouldn't have done any good. I have had troubles enough of my own without adding any to his.”

“Were you afraid he would not answer it?”

She lifted her head and tightened her fingers about his own, her wet eyes looking into his.

“I was afraid of myself. I have never known my own mind and I don't know it now. I have played fast and loose with everybody—I can't bind up a broken arm and then break it again.”

“Wouldn't it be better to try?” he said softly.

“No, I don't think so.”

St. George released her hand and settled back in his chair; his face grew grave. What manner of woman was this, and how could he reach the inner kernel of her heart? Again he raised his head and leaning forward took both her hands between his own.

“I am going to tell you a story, Kate—one you have never heard—not all of it. When I was about your age—a little older perhaps, I gave my heart to a woman who had known me from a boy; with whom I had played when she was a child. I'm not going into the whole story, such things are always sad; nor will I tell you anything of the beginning of the three happy months of our betrothal nor of what caused our separation. I shall only tell you of the cruelty of the end. There was a misunderstanding—a quarrel—I begging her forgiveness on my knees. All the time her heart was breaking. One little word from her would have healed everything. Some years after that she married and her life still goes on. I am what you see.”

Kate looked at him with swimming eyes. She dimly remembered that she had heard that her uncle had had a love affair in his youth and that his sweetheart had jilted him for a richer man, but she had never known that he had suffered so bitterly over it. Her heart went out to him all the more.

“Will you tell me who it was?” She had no right to ask; but she might comfort him the better if she knew.

“Harry's mother.”

Kate dropped his hands and drew back in her seat.

“You—loved—Mrs.—Rutter—and she—refused you for—Oh!—what a cruel thing to do! And what a fool she was. Now I know why you have been so good to Harry. Oh, you poor, dear Uncle George. Oh, to think that you of all men! Is there any one whose heart is not bruised and broken?” she added in a helpless tone.

“Plenty of them, Kate—especially those who have been willing to stoop a little and so triumph. Harry has waited three years for some word from you; he has not asked for it, for he believes you have forgotten him; and then he was too much of a man to encroach upon another's rights. Does your breaking off with Mr. Willits alter the case in any way?—does it make any difference? Is this sailor boy always to be a wanderer—never to come home to his people and the woman he loves?”

“He'll never come back to me, Uncle George,” she said with a shudder, dropping her eyes. “I found that out the day we talked together in the park, just before he left. And he's not coming home. Father got a letter from one of his agents who had seen him. He was looking very well and was going up into the mountains—I wrote you about it. I am sorry you didn't get the letter—but of course he has written you too.”

“Suppose I should tell you that he would come back if he thought you would be glad to see him—glad in the old way?”

Kate shook her head: “He would never come. He hates me, and I don't blame him. I hate myself when I think of it all.”

“But if he should walk in now?”—he was very much afraid he would, and he was not quite ready for him yet. What he was trying to find out was not whether Kate would be glad to see Harry as a relief to her loneliness, but whether she really LOVED him.

Some tone in his voice caught her ear. She turned her head quickly and looked at him with wondering gaze, as if she would read his inmost thoughts.

“You mean that he is coming, Uncle George—that Harry IS coming home!” she exclaimed excitedly, the color ebbing from her cheeks.

“He is already here, Kate. He slept upstairs in his old room last night. I expect him in any minute.”

“Here!—in this room!” She was on her feet in an instant, her face deathly pale, her whole frame shaking. Which way should she turn to escape? To meet him face to face would bring only excruciating pain. “Oh, why didn't you tell me, Uncle George!” she burst out. “I won't see him! I can't!—not now—not here! Let me go home—let me think! No—don't stop me!” and catching up her cape and parasol she was out the door and down the steps before he could call her back or even realize that she had gone.

Once on the pavement she looked nervously up and down the street, gathered her pretty skirts tight in her hand and with the fluttered flight of a scared bird darted across the park, dashed through her swinging gate, and so on up to her bedroom.

There she buried her face in Mammy Henny's lap and burst into an agony of tears.

While all this had been going on upstairs another equally important conference was taking place in Pawson's office below, where Harry at Pawson's request had gone to meet Gadgem and talk over certain plans for his uncle's future welfare. He had missed Kate by one of those trifling accidents which often determine the destiny of nations and of men. Had he, after attending to the business of the morning—(he had been down to Marsh Market with Todd for supplies)—mounted the steps to see his uncle instead of yielding to a sudden impulse to interview Pawson first and his uncle afterward, he would have come upon Kate at the very moment she was pouring out her heart to St. George.

But no such fatality or stroke of good fortune—whatever the gods had in store for him—took place. On the contrary he proceeded calmly to carry out the details of a matter of the utmost importance to all concerned—one in which both Pawson and Gadgem were interested—(indeed he had come at Pawson's suggestion to discuss its details with the collector and himself):—all of which the Scribe promises in all honor to reveal to

his readers before the whole of this story is told.

Harry walked straight up to Gadgem:

“I am very glad to see you, Mr. Gadgem,” he said in his manly, friendly way. “You have been very good to my uncle, and I want to thank you both for him and for myself,” and he shook the little man's hand heartily.

Gadgem blushed. St. George's democracy he could understand; but why this aristocrat—outcast as he had once been, but now again in favor—why this young prince, the heir to Moorlands and the first young blood of his time, should treat him as an equal, puzzled him; and yet, somehow, his heart warmed to him as he read his sincerity in his eyes and voice.

“Thank you, sir—thank you very much, sir,” rejoined Gadgem, with a folding-camp-stool-movement, his back bent at right angles with his legs. “I really don't deserve it, sir. Mr. Temple is an EXtraordinary man, sir; the most EXtraordinary man I have ever met, sir. Give you the shirt off his back, sir, and go NAked himself.”

“Yes, he gave it to me,” laughed Harry, greatly amused at the collector's effusive manner: He had never seen this side of Gadgem. “That, of course, you know all about—you paid the bills, I believe.”

“PREcisely so, sir.” He had lengthened out now with a spiral-spring, cork-screw twist in his body, his index finger serving as point. “Paid every one of them. He never cared, sir—he GLOried in it—GLOried in being a pauper. UNaccountable, Mr. Rutter—Enormously unaccountable. Never heard of such a case; never WILL hear of such a case. So what was to be done, sir? Just what I may state is being done this minute over our heads UPstairs”: and out went the index finger. “Rest and REcuperation, sir—a slow—a very slow use of AVAILable assets until new and FURther AVAILable assets could become visible. And they are here, sir—have arRIVED. You may have heard, of course, of the Patapsco where Mr. Temple kept the largest part of his fortune.”

“No, except that it about ruined everybody who had anything to do with it.”

“Then you have heard nothing of the REsuscitation!” cried Gadgem, all his fingers opened like a fan, his eyebrows arched to the roots of his hair. “You surPRISE me! And you are really ignorant of the PHOEnix-like way in which it has RISen from its ashes? I said RISen, sir, because it is now but a dim speck in the financial sky. Nor the appointment of Mr. John Gorsuch as manager, ably backed by your DIStinguished father—the setting of the bird upon its legs—I'm speaking of the burnt bird, sir, the PHOEnix. I'm quite sure it was a bird—Nor the payment on the first of the ensuing month of some eighty per cent of the amounts due the ORIGinal depositors and another twenty per cent in one year thereafter—The cancelling of the mortgage which your most BEnevolent and HONorable father bought, and the sly trick of Gorsuch—letting Fogbin, who never turned up, become the sham tenant—and the joy—”

“Hold on Mr. Gadgem—I'm not good at figures. Give me that over again and speak slower. Am I to understand that the bank will pay back to my uncle, within a day or so, three-quarters of the money they stole from him?”

“STOLE, sir!” chided Gadgem, his outstretched forefinger wig-wagging a Fie! Fie! gesture of disapproval—“STOLE is not a pretty word—actionable, sir—DANgerously actionable—a question of the watch-house, and, if I might be permitted to say—a bit of COLD lead—Perhaps you will allow me to suggest the word 'maNIPulated,' sir—the money the bank maNIPulated from your confiding and inexperienced uncle—that is safer and it is equally EXpressive. He! He!”

“Well, will he get the money?” cried Harry, his face lighting up, his interest in the outcome outweighing his amusement over Gadgem's antics and expressions.

“He WILL, sir,” rejoined Gadgem decisively.

“And you are so sure of it that you would be willing to advance one-half the amount if the account was turned over to you this minute?” cried Harry eagerly.

“No sir—not one-half—ALL of it—less a TRIfling commission for my services of say one per cent. When you say 'this minute,' sir, I must reply that the brevity of the area of action becomes a trifle ACUTE, yes, ALARMingly acute. I haven't the money myself, sir—that is, not about my person—but I can get it in an hour, sir—in less time, if Mr. Temple is willing. That was my purpose in coming here, sir—that was why Mr. Pawson sent for me, sir; and it is but fair to say that you can thank your DIStinguished father for it all, sir—he has worked night and day to do it. Colonel Rutter has taken over—so I am inFORMED—I'm not sure, but I am inFORMED—taken over a lot of the securities himself so that he COULD do it. Another EXtraordinary combination, if you will permit me to say so—I refer to your father—a man who will show you his door one minute and open his pocketbook and his best bottle of wine for you the next,” and he plunged himself down in his seat with so determined a gesture that it left no question on Harry's mind that he intended sitting it out until daylight should there be the faintest possibility of his financial proposition being accepted.

Harry walked to the window and gazed out on the trees. There was no doubt now that Mr. Temple was once more on his feet. “Uncle George will go now to Moorlands,” he said, decisively, in a low tone, speaking to himself, his heart swelling with pride at this fresh evidence of his father's high sense of honor—then he wheeled and addressed the attorney:

“Shall I tell Mr. Temple this news, about the Patapsco Bank, Mr. Pawson?”

“Yes, if you think best, Mr. Rutter. And I have another piece of good news. This please do not tell Mr. Temple, not yet—not until it is definitely settled. That old suit in Chancery has been decided, or will be, so I learned this morning and decided in favor of the heir. You may not have heard of it before, Gadgem,” and he turned to the collector, “but it is one of old General Dorsey Temple's left-overs. It has been in the courts now some forty years. When this decision is made binding,” here he again faced Harry—“Mr. Temple comes in for a considerable share.”

Gadgem jumped to his feet and snapped his fingers rapidly. Had he sat on a tack his rebound could not have been more sudden. This last was news to him.

“SHORN lamb, sir!” he cried gleefully, rubbing his palms together, his body tied into a double bow-knot. “Gentle breezes; bread upon the waters! By jiminy, Mr. Rutter, if Mr. Temple could be born again—figuratively, sir—and I could walk in upon him as I once did, and find him at breakfast surrounded by all his

comforts with Todd waiting upon him—a very good nigger is Todd, sir—an exCEPtionally good nigger—I'd—I'd—damn me, Mr. Rutter, I'd—well, sir, there's no word—but John Gadgem, sir—well, I'll be damned if he wouldn't—" and he began skipping about the room, both feet in the air, as if he was a boy of twenty instead of a thin, shambling, badly put together bill collector in an ill-fitting brown coat, a hat much the worse for wear, and a red cotton handkerchief addicted to weekly ablutions.

As for Harry the glad news had cleared out wide spaces before him, such as he had not looked through in years; leafy vistas, with glimpses of sunlit meadows; shadow-flecked paths leading to manor-houses with summer skies beyond. He, too, was on his feet, walking restlessly up and down.

Pawson and Gadgem again put their heads together, Harry stopping to listen. Such expressions as "Certainly," "I think I can": "Yes, of course it was there when I was last in his place," "Better see him first," caught his ear.

At last he could stand it no longer. Dr. Teackle or no Dr. Teackle, he would go upstairs, open the door softly, and if his uncle was awake whisper the good news in his ear. If anybody had whispered any such similar good news in his ear on any one of the weary nights he had lain awake waiting for the dawn, or at any time of the day when he sat his horse, his rifle across the pommel, it would have made another man of him.

If his uncle was awake!

He was not only awake, but he was very much alive.

"I've got a great piece of news for you, Uncle George!" Harry shouted in a rollicking tone, his joy increasing as he noted his uncle's renewed strength.

"So have I got a great piece of news for you!" was shouted back. "Come in, you young rascal, and shut that door behind you. She isn't going to marry Willits. Thrown him over—don't want him—don't love him—can't love him—never did love him! She's just told me so. Whoop—hurrah! I Dance, you dog, before I throw this chair at you!!"

There are some moments in a man's life when all language fails;—pantomime moments, when one stares and tries to speak and stares again. They were both at it—St. George waiting until Harry should explode, and Harry trying to get his breath, the earth opening under him, the skies falling all about his head.

"She told you so! When!" he gasped.

"Two minutes ago—you've just missed her! Where the devil have you been? Why didn't you come in before?"

"Kate here—two minutes ago—what will I do?" Had he found himself at sea in an open boat with both oars adrift he could not have been more helpless.

"DO! Catch her before she gets home! Quick!—just as you are—sailor clothes and all!"

"But how will I know if—?"

"You don't have to know! Away with you, I tell you!"

And away he went—and if you will believe it, dear reader—without even a whisper in his uncle's ears of the good news he had come to tell.

CHAPTER XXX

Ben let him in.

He came as an apparition, the old butler balancing the door in his hand, as if undecided what to do, trying to account for the change in the young man's appearance—the width of shoulders, the rough clothes, and the determined glance of his eye.

"Fo' Gawd, it's Marse Harry!" was all he said when he could get his mouth open.

"Yes, Ben—go and tell your mistress I am here," and he brushed past him and pushed back the drawing-room door. Once inside he crossed to the mantel and stood with his back to the hearth, his sailor's cap in his hand, his eyes fixed on the door he had just closed behind him. Through it would come the beginning or the end of his life. Ben's noiseless entrance and exit a moment after, with his mistress's message neither raised nor depressed his hopes. He had known all along she would not refuse to see him: what would come after was the wall that loomed up.

She had not hesitated, nor did she keep him waiting. Her eyes were still red with weeping, her hair partly dishevelled, when Ben found her—but she did not seem to care. Nor was she frightened—nor eager. She just lifted her cheek from Mammy Henny's caressing hand—pushed back the hair from her face with a movement as if she was trying to collect her thoughts, and without rising from her knees heard Ben's message to the end. Then she answered calmly:

"Did you say Mr. Harry Rutter, Ben? Tell him I'll be down in a moment."

She entered with that same graceful movement which he loved so well—her head up, her face turned frankly toward him, one hand extended in welcome.

"Uncle George told me you were back, Harry. It was very good of you to come," and sank on the sofa.

It had been but a few steps to him—the space between the open door and the hearth rug on which he stood—and it had taken her but a few seconds to cross it, but in that brief interval the heavens had opened above her. The old Harry was there—the smile—the flash in the eyes—the joy of seeing her—the quick movement of his hand in gracious salute; then there had followed a sense of his strength, of the calm poise of his body, of the clearness of his skin. She saw, too, how much handsomer he had grown,—and noted the rough sailor's clothes. How well they fitted his robust frame! And the clear, calm eyes and finely cut features—no shrinking from responsibility in that face; no faltering—the old ideal of her early love and the new ideal of her sailor boy

—the one Richard's voice had conjured—welded into one personality!

“I heard you had just been in to see Uncle George, Kate, and I tried to overtake you.”

Not much: nothing in fact. Playwriters tell us that the dramatic situation is the thing, and that the spoken word is as unimportant to the play as the foot-lights—except as a means of illuminating the situation.

“Yes—I have just left him, Harry. Uncle George looks very badly—don't you think so? Is there anything very serious the matter? I sent Ben to Dr. Teackle's, but he was not in his office.”

He had moved up a chair and sat devouring every vibration of her lips, every glance of her wondrous eyes—all the little movements of her beautiful body—her dress—the way the stray strands of hair had escaped to her shoulders. His Kate!—and yet he dare not touch her!

“No, he is not ill. He took a severe cold and only needs rest and a little care. I am glad you went and—” then the pent-up flood broke loose. “Are you glad to see me, Kate?”

“I am always glad to see you, Harry—and you look so well. It has been nearly three years, hasn't it?” Her calmness was maddening; she spoke as if she was reciting a part in which she had no personal interest.

“I don't know—I haven't counted—not that way. I have lain awake too many nights and suffered too much to count by years. I count by—”

She raised her hand in protest: “Don't Harry—please don't. All the suffering has not been yours!” The impersonal tone was gone—there was a note of agony in her voice.

His manner softened: “Don't think I blame you, Kate. I love you too much to blame you—you did right. The suffering has only done me good—I am a different man from the one you once knew. I see life with a wider vision. I know what it is to be hungry; I know, too, what it is to earn the bread that has kept me alive. I came home to look after Uncle George. When I go back I want to take him with me. I won't count the years nor all the suffering I have gone through if I can pay him back what I owe him. He stood by me when everybody else deserted me.”

She winced a little at the thrust, as if he had touched some sore spot, sending a shiver of pain through her frame, but she did not defend herself.

“You mustn't take him away, Harry—leave Uncle George to me,” not as if she demanded it—more as if she was stating a fact.

“Why not? He will be another man out in Brazil—and he can live there like a gentleman on what he will have left—so Pawson thinks.”

“Because I love him dearly—and when he is gone I have nobody left,” she answered in a hopeless tone.

Harry hesitated, then he asked: “And so what Uncle George told me about Mr. Willits is true?”

Kate looked at him furtively—as if afraid to read his thoughts and for reply bowed her head in assent.

“Didn't he love you enough?” There was a certain reproach in his tone, as if no one could love this woman enough to satisfy her.

“Yes.”

“What was the matter then? Was it—” He stopped—his eagerness had led him onto dangerous, if not discourteous, grounds. “No, you needn't answer—forgive me for asking—I had no right. I am not myself, Kate—I didn't mean to—”

“Yes, I'll tell you. I told Uncle George. I didn't like him well enough—that's all.” All this time she was looking him calmly in the face. If she had done anything to be ashamed of she did not intend to conceal it from her former lover.

“And will Uncle George take his place now that he's gone? Do you ever know your own heart, Kate?” There was no bitterness in his question. Her frankness had disarmed him of that. It was more in the nature of an inquiry, as if he was probing for something on which he could build a hope.

For a brief instant she made no answer; then she said slowly and with a certain positiveness:

“If I had I would have saved myself and you a great deal of misery.”

“And Langdon Willits?”

“No, he cannot complain—he does not—I promised him nothing. But I have been so beaten about, and I have tried so hard to do right; and it has all crumbled to pieces. As for you and me, Harry, let us both forget that we have ever had any differences. I can't bear to think that whenever you come home we must avoid each other. We were friends once—let us be friends again. It was very kind of you to come. I'm glad you didn't wait. Don't be bitter in your heart toward me.”

Harry left his chair and settled down on the sofa beside her, and in pleading, tender tones said:

“Kate—When was I ever bitter toward you in my heart? Look at me! Do you realize how I love you?—Do you know it sets me half crazy to hear you talk like that? I haven't come here to-day to reproach you—I have come to do what I can to help you, if you want my help. I told you the last time we talked in the park that I wouldn't stay in Kennedy Square a day longer even if you begged me to. That is over now; I'll do now anything you wish me to do; I'll go or I'll stay. I love you too much to do anything else.”

“No, you don't love me!—you can't love me! I wouldn't let you love me after all the misery I have caused you! I didn't know how much until I began to suffer myself and saw Mr. Willits suffer. I am not worthy of any man's love. I will never trust myself again—I can only try to be to the men about me as Uncle George is to everyone. Oh, Harry!—Harry!—Why was I born this way—headstrong wilful—never satisfied? Why am I different from the other women?”

He tried to take her hand, but she drew it away.

“No!—not that!—not that! Let us be just as we were when—Just as we used to be. Sit over there where I can see you better and watch your face as you talk. Tell me all you have done—what you have seen and what sort of places you have been in. We heard from you through—”

He squared his shoulders and faced her, his voice ringing clear, his eyes flashing: something of the old

Dutch admiral was in his face.

“Kate—I will have none of it! Don't talk such nonsense to me; I won't listen. If you don't know your own heart I know mine; you've GOT to love me!—you MUST love me! Look at me. In all the years I have been away from you I have lived the life you would have me live—every request you ever made of me I have carried out. I did this knowing you would never be my wife and you would be Willits's! I did it because you were my Madonna and my religion and I loved the soul of you and lived for you as men live to please the God they have never seen. There were days and nights when I never expected to see you or any one else whom I loved again—but you never failed—your light never went out in my heart. Don't you see now why you've got to love me? What was it you loved in me once that I haven't got now? How am I different? What do I lack? Look into my eyes—close—deep down—read my heart! Never, as God is my judge, have I done a thing since I last kissed your forehead, that you would have been ashamed of. Do you think, now that you are free, that I am going back without you? I am not that kind of a man.”

She half started from her seat: “Harry!” she cried in a helpless tone—“you do not know what you are saying—you must not—”

He leaned over and took both her hands firmly in his own.

“Look at me! Tell me the truth—as you would to your God! Do you love me?”

She made an effort to withdraw her hands, then she sank back.

“I—I—don't know—” she murmured.

“YOU DO—search again—way down in your heart. Go over every day we have lived—when we were children and played together—all that horror at Moorlands when I shot Willits—the night of Mrs. Cheston's ball when I was drunk—all the hours I have held you in my arms, my lips to yours—All of it—every hour of it—balance one against the other. Think of your loneliness—not mine—yours—and then tell me you do not know! You DO know! Oh, my God, Kate!—you must love me! What else would you want a man to do for you that I have not done?”

He stretched out his arms, but she sprang to her feet and put out her palms as a barrier.

“No. Let me tell you something. We must have no more misunderstandings—you must be sure—I must be sure. I have no right to take your heart in my hands again. It is I who have broken my faith with you, not you with me. I was truly your wife when I promised you here on the sofa that last time. I knew then that you would, perhaps, lose your head again, and yet I loved you so much that I could not give you up. Then came the night of your father's ball and all the misery, and I was a coward and shut myself up instead of keeping my arms around you and holding you up to the best that was in you, just as Uncle George begged me to do. And when your father turned against you and drove you from your home, all because you had tried to defend me from insult, I saw only the disgrace and did not see the man behind it; and then you went away and I stretched out my arms for you to come back to me and only your words echoed in my ears that you would never come back to me until you were satisfied with yourself. Then I gave up and argued it out and said it was all over—”

He had left his seat and at every sentence had tried to take her in his arms, but she kept her palms toward him.

“No, don't touch me! You SHALL hear me out; I must empty all my heart! I was lonely and heart-sore and driven half wild with doubts and what people said, my father worse than all of them. And Mr. Willits was kind and always at my beck and call—and so thoughtful and attentive—and I tried and tried—but I couldn't. I always had you before me—and you haunted me day and night, and sometimes when he would come in that door I used to start, hoping it might be you.”

“It IS me, my darling!” he cried, springing toward her. “I don't want to hear any more—I must—I will—”

“But you SHALL! There IS something more. It went on and on and I got so that I did not care, and one day I thought I would give him my promise and the next day all my soul rebelled against it and it was that way until one night Mr. Horn read aloud a story—and it all came over me and I saw everything plain as if it had been on a stage, and myself and you and Mr. Willits—and what it meant—and what would come of it—and he walked home with me and I told him frankly, and I have never seen him since. And now here is the last and you must hear it out. There is not a word I have said to him which I would recall—not a thing I am ashamed of. Your lips were the last that touched my own. There, my darling, it is all told. I love you with my whole heart and soul and mind and body—I have never loved anybody else—I have tried and tried and couldn't. I am so tired of thinking for myself,—so tired,—so tired. Take me and do with me as you will!”

Again the plot is too strong for the dialogue. He had her fast in his arms before her confession was finished. Then the two sank on the sofa where she lay sobbing her heart out, he crooning over her—patting her cheeks, kissing away the tears from her eyelids; smoothing the strands of her hair with his strong, firm fingers. It was his Kate that lay in his grasp—close—tightly pressed—her heart beating against his, her warm, throbbing body next his own, her heart swept of every doubt and care, all her will gone.

As she grew quiet she stretched up her hand, touching his cheek as if to reassure herself that it was really her lover. Yes! It was Harry—HER Harry—Harry who was dead and is alive again—to whom she had stripped her soul naked—and who still trusted and loved her.

A little later she loosened herself from his embrace and taking his face in her small, white hands looked long and earnestly into his eyes, smoothing back the hair from his brow as she used to do; kissing him on the forehead, on each eyelid, and then on the mouth—one of their old-time caresses. Still remembering the old days, she threw back his coat and let her hands wander over his full-corded throat and chest and arms. How big and strong he had become! and how handsome he had grown—the boy merged into the man. And that other something! (and another and stronger thrill shot through her)—that other something which seemed to flow out of him;—that dominating force that betokened leadership, compelling her to follow—not the imperiousness of his father, brooking no opposition no matter at what cost, but the leadership of experience, courage, and self-reliance.

With this the sense of possession swept over her. He was all her own and for ever! A man to lean upon; a

man to be proud of; one who would listen and understand: to whom she could surrender her last stronghold—her will. And the comfort of it all; the rest, the quiet, the assurance of everlasting peace: she who had been so torn and buffeted and heart-sore.

For many minutes she lay still from sheer happiness, thrilled by the warmth and pressure of his strong arms. At last, when another thought could squeeze itself into her mind, she said: “Won't Uncle George be glad, Harry?”

“Yes,” he answered, releasing her just far enough to look into her eyes. “It will make him well. You made him very happy this morning. His troubles are over, I hear—he's going to get a lot of his money back.”

“Oh, I'm so glad. And will we take him with us?” she asked wonderingly, smoothing back his hair as she spoke.

“Take him where, darling?” he laughed.

“To where we are going—No, you needn't laugh—I mean it. I don't care where we go,” and she looked at him intently. “I'll go with you anywhere in the world you say, and I'll start to-morrow.”

He caught her again in his arms, kissed her for the hundredth time, and then suddenly relaxing his hold asked in assumed alarm: “And what about your father? What do you think he will say? He always thought me a madcap scapegrace—didn't he?” The memory brought up no regret. He didn't care a rap what the Honorable Prim thought of him.

“Yes—he thinks so now,” she echoed, wondering how anybody could have formed any such ideas of her Harry.

“Well, he will get over it when I talk with him about his coffee people. Some of his agents out there want looking after.”

“Oh!—how lovely, my precious; talking coffee will be much pleasanter than talking me!—and yet we have got to do it somehow when he comes home.”

And down went her head again, she nestling the closer as if terrified at the thought of the impending meeting; then another kiss followed—dozens of them—neither of them keeping count, and then—and then —.....

And then—Ben tapped gently and announced that dinner was served, and Harry stared at the moon-faced dial and saw that it was long after two o'clock, and wondered what in the world had become of the four hours that had passed since he had rushed down from his uncle's and into Kate's arms.

And so we will leave them—playing housekeeping—Harry pulling out her chair, she spreading her dainty skirts and saying “Thank you, Mr. Rutter—” and Ben with his face in so broad a grin that it got set that way—Aunt Dinah, the cook, having to ask him three times “Was he gwineter hab a fit” before he could answer by reason of the chuckle which was suffocating him.

And now as we must close the door for a brief space on the happy couple—never so happy in all their lives—it will be just as well for us to find out what the mischief is going on at the club—for there is something going on—and that of unusual importance.

Everybody is out on the front steps. Old Bowdoin is craning his short neck, and Judge Pancoast is saying that it is impossible and then instatly changing his mind, saying: “By jove it is!”—and Richard Horn and Warfield and Murdoch are leaning over the balcony rail still unconvinced and old Harding is pounding his fat thigh with his pudgy hand in ill-concealed delight.

Yes—there is no doubt of it—hasn't been any doubt of it since the judge shouted out the glad tidings which emptied every chair in the club: Across the park, beyond the rickety, vine-covered fence and close beside the Temple Mansion, stands a four-in-hand, the afternoon sun flashing from the silver mountings of the harness and glinting on the polished body and wheels of the coach. Then a crack of the whip, a wind of the horn, and they are off—the leaders stretching the traces, two men on the box, two grooms in the rear. Hurrah! Well, by thunder, who would have believed it—that's Temple inside on the back seat! “There he is waving his hand and Todd is with him. And yes! Why of course it's Rutter! See him clear that curb! Not a man in this county can drive like that but Talbot.”

Round they come—the colonel straight as a whip—dusty-brown overcoat, flowers in his buttonhole—bell-crowned hat, brown driving gloves—perfectly appointed, even if he is a trifle pale and half blind. More horn—a long joyous note now, as if they were heralding the peace of the world, the colonel bowing like a grand duke as he passes the assembled crowd—a gathering of the reins together, a sudden pull-up at Seymours', everybody on the front porch—Kate peeping over Harry's shoulder—and last and best of all, St. George's cheery voice ringing out:

“Where are you two sweethearts!” Not a weak note anywhere; regular fog-horn of a voice blown to help shipwrecked mariners.

“All aboard for Moorlands, you turtle-doves—never mind your clothes, Kate—nor you either, Harry. Your father will send for them later. Up with you.”

“All true, Harry,” called back the colonel from the top of the coach (nobody alighted but the grooms—there wasn't time—) “Your mother wouldn't wait another hour and sent me for you, and Teackle said St. George could go, and we bundled him up and brought him along and you are all going to stay a month. No, don't wait a minute, Kate; I want to get home before dark. One of my men will be in with the carryall and bring out your mammy and your clothes and whatever you want. Your father is away I hear, and so nobody will miss you. Get your heavy driving coat, my dear; I brought one of mine in for Harry—it will be cold before we get home. Matthew, your eyes are better than mine, get down and see what the devil is the matter with that horse. No, it's all right—the check-rein bothered him.”

And so ended the day that had been so happily begun, and the night was no less joyful with the mother's arms about her beloved boy and Kate on a stool beside her and Talbot and St. George deep in certain vintages—or perhaps certain vintages deep in Talbot and St. George—especially that particular and peculiar old Madeira of 1800, which his friend Mr. Jefferson had sent him from Monticello, and which was never

served except to some such distinguished guest as his highly esteemed and well-beloved friend of many years, St. George Wilmot Temple of Kennedy Square.

CHAPTER XXXI

It would be delightful to describe the happy days at Moorlands during St. George's convalescence, when the love-life of Harry and Kate was one long, uninterrupted, joyous dream. When mother, father, and son were again united—what a meeting was that, once she got her arms around her son's neck and held him close and wept her heart out in thankfulness!—and the life of the old-time past was revived—a life softened and made restful and kept glad by the lessons all had learned. And it would be more delightful still to carry the record of these charming hours far into the summer had not St. George, eager to be under his own roof in Kennedy Square, declared he could stay no longer.

Not that his welcome had grown less warm. He and his host had long since unravelled all their difficulties, the last knot having been cut the afternoon the colonel, urged on by Harry's mother—his disappointment over his sons's coldness set at rest by her pleadings—had driven into town for Harry in his coach, as has been said, and swept the whole party, including St. George, out to Moorlands.

Various unrelated causes had brought about this much-to-be-desired result, the most important being the news of the bank's revival, which Harry, in his mad haste to overtake Kate, had forgotten to tell his uncle, and which St. George learned half an hour later from Pawson, together with a full account of what the colonel had done to bring about the happy result—a bit of information which so affected Temple that, when the coach with the colonel on the box had whirled up, he, weak as he was, had struggled to the front door, both hands held out, in welcome.

“Talbot—old fellow,” he had said with a tear in his voice, “I have misunderstood you and I beg your pardon. You've behaved like a man, and I thank you from the bottom of my heart!”

At which the stern old aristocrat had replied, as he took St. George's two hands in his: “Let us forget all about it, St. George. I made a damned fool of myself. We all get too cocky sometimes.”

Then there had followed—the colonel listening with bated breath—St. George's account of Kate's confession and Harry's sudden exit, Rutter's face brightening as it had not done for years when he learned that Harry had not yet returned from the Seymours', the day's joy being capped by the arrival of Dr. Teackle, who had given his permission with an “All right—the afternoon is fine and the air will do Mr. Temple a world of good,” and so St. George was bundled up and the reader knows the rest.

Later on—at Moorlands of course—the colonel, whose eyes were getting better by the day and Gorsuch whose face was now one round continuous smile, got to work, and had a heart-to-heart—or rather a pocket-to-pocket talk—which was quite different in those days from what it would be now—after which both Kate and Harry threw to the winds all thoughts of Rio and the country contiguous thereto, and determined instead to settle down at Moorlands. And then a great big iron door sunk in a brick vault was swung wide and certain leather-bound books were brought out—and particularly a sum of money which Harry duly handed over to Pawson the next time he drove to town—(twice a week now)—and which, when recounted, balanced to a cent the total of the bills which Pawson had paid three years before, with interest added, a list of which the attorney still kept in his private drawer with certain other valuable papers tied with red tape, marked “St. G. W. T.” And still later on—within a week—there had come the news of the final settlement of the long-disputed lawsuit with St. George as principal residuary legatee—and so our long-suffering hero was once more placed upon his financial legs: the only way he could have been placed upon them or would have been placed upon them—a fact very well known to every one who had tried to help him, his philosophy being that one dollar borrowed is two dollars owed—the difference being a man's self-respect.

And it is truly marvellous what this change in his fortunes accomplished. His slack body rounded out; his sunken cheeks plumped up until every crease and crack were gone, his color regained its freshness, his eyes their brilliancy; his legs took on their old-time spring and lightness—and a wonderful pair of stand-bys, or stand-ups, or stand-arounds they were as legs go—that is legs of a man of fifty-five.

And they were never idle, these legs: there was no sitting cross-legged in a chair for St. George: he was not constructed along those lines. Hardly a week had passed before he had them across Spitfire's mate; had ridden to hounds; danced a minuet with Harry and Kate; walked half-way to Kennedy Square and back—they thought he was going to walk all the way and headed him off just in time; and best of all—(and this is worthy of special mention)—had slipped them into the lower section of a suit of clothes—and these his own, although he had not yet paid for them—the colonel having liquidated their cost. These trousers, it is just as well to state, had arrived months before from Poole, along with a suit of Rutter's and the colonel had forwarded a draft for the whole amount without examining the contents, until Alec had called his attention to the absurd width of the legs—and the ridiculous spread of the seat. My Lord of Moorlands, after the scene in the Temple Mansion, dared not send them in to St. George, and they had accordingly lain ever since on top of his wardrobe with Alec as chief of the Moth Department. St. George, on his arrival, found them folded carefully and placed on a chair—Todd chief valet. Whereupon there had been a good-natured row when our man of fashion appeared at breakfast rigged out in all his finery, everybody clapping their hands and saying how handsome he looked—St. George in reply denouncing Talbot as a brigand of a Brummel who had stolen his clothes, tried to wear them, and then when out of fashion thrown them back on his hands.

All these, and a thousand other delightful things, it would, I say, be eminently worth while to dilate upon—(including a series of whoops and hand-springs which Todd threw against the rear wall of the big kitchen five seconds after Alec had told him of the discomfiture of “dat red-haided gemman,” and of Marse Harry's good fortune)—were it not that certain mysterious happenings are taking place inside and out of the Temple house

in Kennedy Square—happenings exciting universal comment, and of such transcendent importance that the Scribe is compelled, much against his will—for the present installment is entirely too short—to confine their telling to a special chapter.

CHAPTER XXXII

For some time back, then be it said, various strollers unfamiliar with the neighbors or the neighborhood of Kennedy Square, poor benighted folk who knew nothing of the events set down in the preceding chapters, had nodded knowingly to each other or shaken their pates deprecatingly over the passing of “another old landmark.”

Some of these had gone so far as to say that the cause could be found in the fact that Lawyer Temple had run through what little money his father and grandmother had left him; additional wise-acres were of the opinion that some out-of-town folks had bought the place and were trying to prop it up so it wouldn't tumble into the street, while one, more facetious than the others, had claimed that it was no wonder it was falling down, since the only new thing Temple had put upon it was a heavy mortgage.

The immediate neighbors, however,—the friends of the house—had smiled and passed on. They had no such forebodings. On the contrary nothing so diverting—nothing so enchanting—had happened around Kennedy Square in years. In fact, when one of these humorists began speaking about it, every listener heard the story in a broad grin. Some of the more hilarious even nudged each other in the waist-coats and ordered another round of toddies—for two or three, or even five, if there were that number of enthusiasts about the club tables. When they were asked what it was all about they invariably shook their heads, winked, and kept still—that is, if the question were put by some one outside the magic circle of Kennedy Square.

All the general public knew was that men with bricks in hods had been seen staggering up the old staircase with its spindle banisters and mahogany rail; that additional operatives had been discovered clinging to the slanting roof long enough to pass up to further experts grouped about the chimneys small rolls of tin and big bundles of shingles; that plasterers in white caps and aprons, with mortar-boards in one hand and trowels in the other, had been seen chinking up cracks; while any number of painters, carpenters, and locksmiths were working away for dear life all over the place from Aunt Jemima's kitchen to Todd's bunk under the roof.

In addition to all this curious wagons had been seen to back up to the curb, from which had been taken various odd-looking bundles; these were laid on the dining-room floor, a collection of paint pots, brushes, and wads of putty being pushed aside to give them room—and with some haste too, for every one seemed to be working overtime.

As to what went on inside the mansion itself not the most inquisitive could fathom: no one being permitted to peer even into Pawson's office, where so large a collection of household goods and gods were sprawled, heaped, and hung, that it looked as if there had been a fire in the neighborhood, and this room the only shelter for miles around. Even Pawson's law books were completely hidden by the overflow and so were the tables, chairs, and shelves, together with the two wide window-sills.

Nor did it seem to matter very much to the young attorney as to how or at what hours of the day or night these several articles arrived. Often quite late in the evening—and this happened more than once—an old fellow, pinched and wheezy, would sneak in, uncover a mysterious object wrapped in a square of stringy calico, fumble in his pocket for a scrap of paper, put his name at the bottom of it, and sneak out again five, ten, or twenty dollars better off. Once, as late as eleven o'clock, a fattish gentleman with a hooked nose and a positive dialect, assisted another stout member of his race to slide a very large object from out the tail of a cart. Whereupon there had been an interchange of wisps of paper between Pawson and the fatter of the two men, the late visitors bowing and smiling until they reached a street lantern where they divided a roll of bank-notes between them.

And the delight that Pawson and Gadgem took in it all!—assorting, verifying, checking off—slapping each other's backs in glee when some doubtful find was made certain, and growing even more excited on the days when Harry and Kate would drive or ride in from Moorlands—almost every day of late—tie the horse and carry-all, or both saddle-horses, to St. George's tree-boxes, and at once buckle on their armor.

This, rendered into common prose, meant that Harry, after a prolonged consultation with Pawson and Gadgem, would shed his outer coat, the spring being now far advanced, blossoms out and the weather warm—and that Kate would tuck her petticoats clear of her dear little feet and go pattering round, her sleeves rolled up as far as they would go, her beautiful arms bare almost to her shoulders—her hair smothered in a brown barege veil to keep out the dust—the most bewitching parlor-maid you or anybody else ever laid eyes on. Then would follow such a carrying up of full baskets and carrying down of empty ones; such a spreading of carpets and rugs; such an arranging of china and glass; such a placing of andirons, fenders, shovels, tongs, and bellows; hanging of pictures, curtains, and mirrors—old and new; moving in of sofas, chairs, and rockers; making up of beds with fluted frills on the pillows—a silk patchwork quilt on St. George's bed and cotton counterpanes for Jemima and Todd!

And the secrecy maintained by everybody! Pawson might have been stone deaf and entirely blind for all the information you could twist out of him—and a lot of people tried. And as to Gadgem—the dumbest oyster in Cherrystone Creek was a veritable magpie when it came to his giving the precise reason why the Temple Mansion was being restored from top to bottom and why all its old furniture, fittings, and trappings—(brand-new ones when they couldn't be found in the pawn shops or elsewhere)—were being gathered together within its four walls. When anybody asked Kate—and plenty of people did—she would throw her head back and laugh so loud and so merrily and so musically, that you would have thought all the birds in Kennedy Square park were still welcoming the spring. When you asked Harry he would smile and wink and perhaps keep on

whispering to Pawson or Gadgem whose eyes were glued to a list which had its abiding place in Pawson's top drawer.

Outside of these four conspirators—yes, six—for both Todd and Jemima were in it, only a very few were aware of what was really being done. The colonel of course knew, and so did Harry's mother—and so did old Alec who had to clap his hand over his mouth to keep from snickering out loud at the breakfast table when he accidentally overheard what was going on—an unpardonable offence—(not the listening, but the laughing). In fact everybody in the big house at Moorlands knew, for Alec spread it broadcast in the kitchen and cabins—everybody EXCEPT ST. GEORGE.

Not a word reached St. George—not a syllable. No one of the house servants would have spoiled the fun, and certainly no one of the great folks. It was only when his visit to Moorlands was over and he had driven into town and had walked up his own front steps, that the true situation in all its glory and brilliancy dawned upon him.

The polished knobs, knocker, and the perfect level and whiteness of the marble steps first caught his eye; then the door swung open and Jemima in white apron and bandanna stood bowing to the floor, Todd straight as a ramrod in a new livery and a grin on his face that cut it in two, with Kate and Harry hidden behind them, suffocating from suppressed laughter.

“Why, you dear Jemima! Howdy—... Why, who the devil sent that old table back, Todd, and the hall rack and —What!” Here he entered the dining-room. Everything was as he remembered it in the old days. “Harry! Kate!—Why—” then he broke down and dropped into a chair, his eyes still roaming around the room taking in every object, even the loving cup, which Mr. Kennedy had made a personal point of buying back from the French secretary, who was gracious enough to part with it when he learned the story of its enforced sale—each and every one of them—ready to spring forward from its place to welcome him!

“So this,” he stammered out—“is what you have kept me up at Moorlands for, is it? You never say a word to me—and—Oh, you children!—you children! Todd, did you ever see anything like it?—my guns—and the loving cup—and the clock, and—Come here you two blessed things and let me get my arms around you! Kiss me, Kate—and Harry, my son—give me your hand. No, don't say a word—don't mind me—I'm all knocked out and —”

Down went his face in his hands and he in a heap in the chair; then he stiffened and gave a little shiver to his elbows in the effort to keep himself from going completely to pieces, and scrambled to his feet again, one arm around Kate's neck, his free hand in Harry's.

“Take me everywhere and show me everything. Todd, go and find Mr. Pawson and see if Mr. Gadgem is anywhere around; they've had something to do with this”—here his eyes took in Todd—“You damned scoundrel, who the devil rigged you out in that new suit?”

“Marse Harry done sont me to de tailor. See dem buttons?—but dey ain't nuthin' to what's on the top shelf —you'll bust yo'self wide open a-laughin', Marse George, when ye sees what's in dar—you gotter come wid me —please Mistis an' Marse Harry, you come too. Dis way—”

Todd was full to bursting. Had his grin been half an inch wider his ears would have dropped off.

“An' fore ye look at dem shelves der's annuder thing I gotter tell ye;—an' dat is dat the dogs—all fo' oh em is comin' in the mawnin'. Mister Floyd's coach-man done tole me so,” and with a jerk and a whoop, completely ignoring his master's exclamation of joy over the return of his beloved setters, the darky threw back the door of the little cubby-hole of a room where the Black Warrior and his brethren had once rested in peace, and pointed to a row of erect black bottles backed by another of recumbent ones.

“Look at dat wine, will ye, Marse George,” he shouted, “all racked up on dern shelves? Dat come f'om Mister Talbot Rutter wid dis yere cyard—” and he handed it out.

St. George reached over, took it from his hand, and read it aloud:

“With the compliments of an old friend, who sends you herewith a few bottles of the Jefferson and some Sercial and old Port—and a basket or two of Royal Brown Sherry—nothing like your own, but the best he could scare up.”

Soon the newly polished and replated knocker began to get in its liveliest work: “Mrs. Richard Horn's compliments, and would St. George be pleased to accept a basket of Maryland biscuit and a sallylunn just out of the oven.” Mrs. Bowdoin's compliments with three brace of ducks—“a little late in the season, my dear St. George, but they are just up from Currytuck where Mr. Bowdoin has had extremely good luck—for Mr. Bowdoin.” “Mrs. Cheston's congratulations, and would Mr. Temple do her the honor of placing on his sideboard an old Accomack County ham which her cook had baked that morning and which should have all the charm and flavor of the State which had given him birth—” and last a huge basket of spring roses from Miss Virginia Clendenning, accompanied by a card bearing the inscription—“You don't deserve them, you renegade,” and signed—“Your deserted and heart-broken sweetheart.” All of which were duly spread out on the sideboard, together with one lone bottle to which was attached an envelope.

Before the day was over half the club had called—Richard acting master of ceremonies—Kate and old Prim —(he seemed perfectly contented with the way everything had turned out)—doing the honors with St. George. Pawson had also put in an appearance and been publicly thanked—a mark of St. George's confidence and esteem which doubled his practice before the year was out, and Gadgem—

No, Gadgem did not put in an appearance. Gadgem got as far as the hall and looked in, and, seeing all the great people thronging about St. George, would have sneaked out again to await some more favorable occasion had not Harry's sharp eyes discovered the top of his scraggly head over the shoulders of some others, and darted towards him, and when he couldn't be made to budge, had beckoned to St. George, who came on a run and shook Gadgem's hand so heartily and thanked him in so loud a voice—(everybody in the hall heard him)—that he could only sputter—“Didn't do a thing, sir—no, sir—and if I—” and then, overwhelmed, shot out of the door and down the steps and into Pawson's office where he stood panting, saying to himself—“I'll be tuckered if I ain't happier than I—yes—by Jingo, I am. JIMminy-CRIMminy what a man he is!”

And so the day passed and the night came and the neighbors took their leave, and Harry escorted Kate back to Seymours' and the tired knocker gave out and fell asleep, and at last Todd said good-night and stole down to Jemima, and St. George found himself once more in his easy chair, his head in his hand, his eyes fixed on the dead coals of a past fire.

As the echo of Todd's steps faded away and he began to realize that he was alone, there crept over him for the first time in years the comforting sense that he was once more under his own roof—his again and all that it covered—all that he loved; even his beloved dogs. He left his chair and with a quick indrawing of his breath, as if he had just sniffed the air from some open sea, stretched himself to his full height. There he stood looking about him, his shapely fingers patting his chest; his eyes wandering over the room, first with a sweeping glance, and then resting on each separate object as it nodded to him under the glow of the candles.

He had come into his possessions once more. Not that the very belongings made so much difference as his sense of pride in their ownership. They had, too, in a certain way regained for him his freedom—freedom to go and come and do as he pleased untrammelled by makeshifts and humiliating exposures and concealments. Best of all, they had given him back his courage, bracing the inner man, strengthening his beliefs in his traditions and in the things that his race and blood stood for.

Then as a flash of lightning reveals from out black darkness the recurrent waves of a troubled sea, there rushed over him the roll and surge of the events which had led up to his rehabilitation. Suddenly a feeling of intense humiliation and profound gratitude swept through him. He raised his arms, covered his face with his hands, and stood swaying; forcing back his tears; muttering to himself: “How good they have been—how good, how good! All mine once more—wonderful—wonderful!” With a resolute bracing of his shoulders and a brave lift of his chin, he began a tour of the room, stopping before each one of his beloved heirlooms and treasures—his precious gun that Gadgem had given up—(the collector coveted it badly as a souvenir, and got it the next day from St. George, with his compliments)—the famous silver loving cup with an extra polish Kirk had given it; his punch bowl—scarf rings and knick-knacks and the furniture and hangings of various kinds. At last he reached the sideboard, and bending over reread the several cards affixed to the different donations —Mrs. Cheston's, Mrs. Horn's, Miss Clendenning's, and the others. His eye now fell on the lone bottle—this he had not heretofore noticed—and the note bearing Mr. Kennedy's signature. “I send you back, St. George, that last bottle of old Madeira, the Black Warrior of 1810—the one you gave me and which we were to share together. I hadn't the heart to drink my half without you and so here is the whole and my warmest congratulations on your home-coming and long life to you!”

Picking up the quaint bottle, he passed his hand tenderly over its crusted surface, paused for an instant to examine the cork, and held it closer to the light that he might note its condition. There he stood musing, his mind far away, his fingers caressing its sides. All the aroma of the past; all the splendor of the old regime—all its good-fellowship, hospitality, and courtesy—that which his soul loved—lay imprisoned under his hand. Suddenly one of his old-time quizzical smiles irradiated his face: “By Jove!—just the thing!” he cried joyously, “it will take the place of the one Talbot didn't open!”

With a mighty jerk of the bell cord he awoke the echoes below stairs.

Todd came on the double quick:

“Todd.”

“Yes, Marse George.”

“Todd, here's the last bottle of the 1810. Lay it flat on the top shelf with the cork next the wall. We'll open it at Mr. Harry's wedding.”

[THE END]

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