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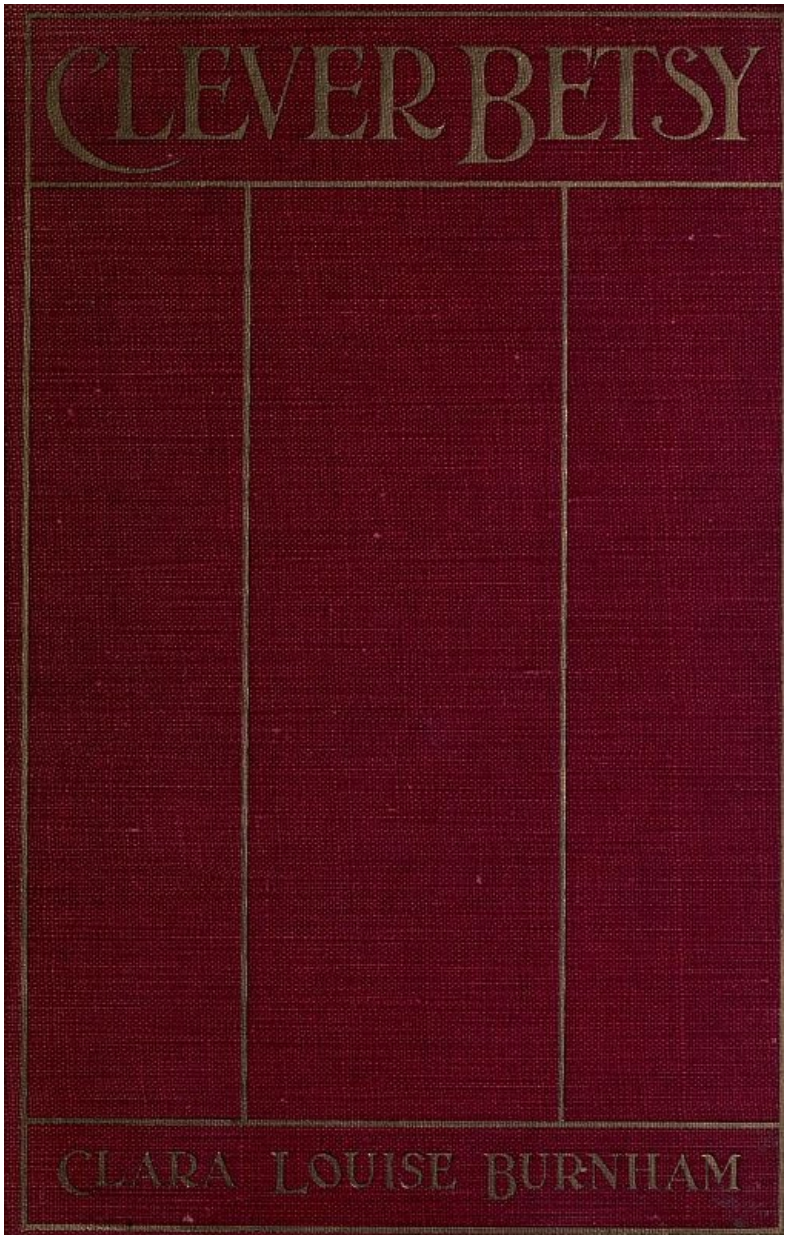

By Clara Louise Burnham

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HOUGHTON MIFFLIN COMPANY
BOSTON AND NEW YORK

CLEVER BETSY

SHE SANK INTO THE ARMS THAT CLASPED HER

CLEVER BETSY

A Novel

by

Clara Louise Burnham

With Illustrations by
Rose O'Neill

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CLEVER BETSY

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CHAPTER I
OPENING THE COTTAGE

"HELLO there!" The man with grizzled hair and bronzed face under a shabby yachting-cap stopped in his leisurely ramble up the street of a seaport village, and his eyes lighted at sight of a spare feminine figure, whose lean vigorous arms were shaking a long narrow rug at a cottage gate. "Ahoy there—The Clever Betsy!" he went on.

The energetic woman vouchsafed a sidewise twist of her mouth intended for a smile, but did not cease from her labors, and a cloud of dust met the hastened approach of the seaman.

"Here, there's enough o' that! Don't you know your captain?" he went on, dodging the woolen fringe which snapped near his dark cheek.

"*My* captain!" retorted the energetic one, while the rug billowed still more wildly. She was a woman of his own middle age, and the cloth tied around her head did not add to her charms; but [2] the man's eyes softened as they rested on her.

"Here! You carry too much sail. Take a reef!" he cried; and deftly snatching the rug, in an instant it was trailing on the walk behind him, while Betsy Foster stared, offended.

"How long ye been here, Betsy?"

"A couple o' days," replied the woman, adjusting the cheese-cloth covering more firmly behind her ears.

"Why didn't ye let a feller know?"

"Thought I wouldn't trouble trouble till trouble troubled me."

The man smiled. "The Clever Betsy," he said musingly. They regarded one another for a silent moment. "Why ain't ye ever clever to me?"

She sniffed.

"Why don't ye fat up some?" he asked again.

"If I was as lazy as you are, probably I should," she returned, with the sidewise grimace appearing again, and the breeze from the wide ocean a stone's throw away ruffling the sparse straight locks that escaped from her headdress.

"Goin' to marry me this time, Betsy?"

"No."

"Why not?" [3]

"Same old reason."

"But I *tell* ye," said the man, in half-humorous, half-earnest appeal, "I've told ye a dozen times I didn't know which I liked best then. If you'd happened to go home from singin'-school with me that night it would 'a' ben you."

"And I say it ain't proper respect to Annie's memory for you to talk that way."

"I ain't disrespectful. There never were two such nice girls in one village before. I nearly grew wall-eyed tryin' to look at you both at once. Annie and I were happy as clams for fifteen years. She's been gone five, and I've asked ye four separate times if you'd go down the hill o' life with me, and there ain't any sense in your refusin' and flappin' rugs in my face."

"You know I don't like this sort o' foolin', Hiram. I wish you'd be done with it."

"I ain't ever goin' to be done with it, Betsy, not while you live and I live."

"Have some sense," she rejoined. "We both made our choice when we were young and we must abide by it—both of us."

"You didn't marry the Bruce family."

"I did, too." [4]

Betsy Foster's eyes, suddenly reminiscent, did not suit in their expression the brusqueness of her tone. She saw again her young self, heart-sick with the disappointment of her girlish fancy, leaving this little village for the city, and finding a haven with the bride who became her friend as well as mistress.

"I did, too," she repeated. "It was my silver weddin' only last week, when Mr. Irving had his twenty-fourth birthday."

"Is Irving that old? Bless me! Then," hopefully, "if he's twenty-four he don't need to be tied to

your apron-strings. Strikes me you're as much of a widow as I am a widower. There ain't many o' the Bruce family left for you to be married to. After Irving's mother died, I can see plain enough why you were a lot o' help to Mr. Bruce; but when he married again you didn't have any call to look after him any longer; and seein' he died about the same time poor Annie did, you've been free as air these five years. You don't need to pretend you think such an awful lot o' the widder Bruce, 'cause I know ye don't. Don't ye suppose I remember how all your feathers stood on end when Mr. Bruce married her?"

Betsy gave a fleeting glance over her shoulder toward the window of the cottage. [5]

"'Twasn't natural that I should want to see anybody in Irving's mother's place, but she's—"

"I remember as if 'twas yesterday," interrupted Hiram, "how you said 'twas Irving she married him for; how that she could never keep her fingers out of any pie, and she didn't like the hats Mr. Bruce bought for Irving, so she married him to choose 'em herself."

Betsy's lips twitched in a short laugh. "Well, I guess there was somethin' in that," she answered.

Hiram pursued what he considered his advantage. "When Irving was on the football team at college, you told me yourself, standin' right by this gate, that she'd go to the game, and when she wasn't faintin' because he was knocked out, she was hollerin' at him how to play."

Betsy bridled. "Well, what's all this for?" she demanded.

"It's to show you plain as the nose on your face that if you ever was married to the Bruce family you're a widder now; just as much as I'm a widower."

"No, sir, for better or for worse," returned Betsy doggedly. [6]

"Get out. They're dead, Mr. and Mrs. Bruce, both dead; and the widder Bruce nothin' at all to you."

"Stepmother to Mr. Irving," declared Betsy.

"Well, he's used to it by this time. Had twelve years of it. Holy mackerel, that kid twenty-four! I can't realize it. His mother—"

"No, no," said Betsy quickly.

"Well, *she* anyway, Mrs. Bruce, went over to Europe to meet him last year, didn't she, when she took you?"

"Of course she did. He went abroad when he left college, and do you suppose she could stand it not to be in part of his trip and tell him what to do?"

"There now! It's plain how you feel toward *that* member o' the family."

"But I told you, didn't I? Can't you understand English? I told you 'for better or for *worse*.'"

"Go 'long, Betsy, go 'long! That husky football hero don't need you to fight his battles. If she presses him too hard, he'll get married himself. I guess he's got a pretty solid place in the bank. [7] When did you get back?"

"A month ago."

"Mrs. Bruce come down here with you?"

Hiram's eyes as he asked the question left his companion's face for the first time, and roved toward the windows of the cottage retreating amid its greenery.

As if his question had evoked the apparition, a light-haired lady suddenly appeared in the open doorway. She was a woman of about forty-five years, but her blonde hair concealed its occasional silver threads, and her figure was girlishly slender. She regarded the couple for a moment through her gold eye-glasses, and then came down the steps and through the garden-path.

"I thought I couldn't be mistaken, Captain Salter," she said graciously, extending one hand, ringed and sparkling, and with the other protecting the waves of her carefully dressed hair from the boisterous breeze.

The captain, continuing to trail the rug behind him, touched his cap and allowed his rough fingers to be taken for a moment.

"The Clever Betsy here was carrying too much sail," he explained. "I took 'em down."

Mrs. Bruce laughed amiably. [8]

"And found you'd run into a squall, no doubt," she responded, observing her handmaid's reddened countenance.

Mrs. Bruce's eyes could be best described as busy. There was nothing subtle about her glances. She made it quite evident that nothing escaped her, and the trim exactness of her dress and appearance seemed to match her observations.

"It seems good to be back in Fairport," she went on. "One summer's absence is quite enough,

though I plan to slip away just for a little while to take a look at the Yellowstone this year."

"That so? Should think you'd had travelin' enough for one spell," rejoined Hiram.

"Oh, it's an appetite that grows with what it feeds on, Captain Salter. I dare say you have been a rover, too. I know how all you sea-captains are."

"No'm. My line's ben fish, mostly."

"And," added Mrs. Bruce, "taking care of us poor land-lubbers in summer. My son was well satisfied with your sale of his boat. I don't know whether he will get another this summer or not. You'll be here as usual, I hope?"

"Looks that way." [9]

"I'm glad. I'm positively attached to the Gentle Annie."

"Haven't got her no more," returned Hiram quietly. "I've parted with her."

"Oh, I'm sorry. I suppose the new one's better."

"Well, she's just as good, anyway."

"But if she's not better, I don't see why you let the Annie go."

"'Taint always in our power to hold on to things when we'd like to," responded Hiram equably.

Mrs. Bruce's eyes shone with interest behind her bi-focals. "Poor man!" she thought. "How improvident these ignorant people are! Probably went into debt, and had to lose his boat, and calculated on doing enough business this summer to pay for the new one."

"And what," she asked, with an air of gracious patronage, "will you call this one? Gentle Annie second, of course."

He shook his head, his sea-blue eyes fixed intrepidly on the object of his affections, who regarded him threateningly.

"Can't be any Annie second," he returned quietly.

"Now I think you make a great mistake, Captain Salter," said Mrs. Bruce, with vigor. "For your own welfare I feel you ought to keep that name. The summer people have been attached to the Gentle Annie so long, and had such confidence in her." [10]

Hiram nodded; but Mrs. Bruce could not catch his fixed eye as she wished, to emphasize her point.

"They were right," he answered. "She was a good craft."

"Confidence in her and you too, I should have said, of course," went on the lady.

"Yes, we sort o' went together, pretty comfortable; but—well, I've lost her."

"Yes, but there's a good-will goes with the name. You make a great mistake not to keep it. Captain Salter and the Gentle Annie; people have said it so many years and had all their sails and their picnics and clambakes with you, it's like throwing away capital for you to take a new name for your boat. Now if you haven't already had it put on—"

"I have."

Hiram's eyes were steady, and his lady-love was nervously fighting with the jealous wind for her cheese-cloth headdress, her face apparently flushed by the effort, and her eyes defiant. [11]

"What have you named her?" asked Mrs. Bruce, in disapproval.

"The Clever Betsy."

"I don't like it, emphatically. It seems very strange, and it will to everybody."

"Yes, at first," rejoined Hiram imperturbably, "but you can get used to anything. It used to be Captain Salter and the Gentle Annie; but in future it's goin' to be Captain Salter and the Clever Betsy; and after a while that's goin' to seem just as natural as the other."

The speaker continued to rest his gaze on the narrow reddened countenance, which looked back furiously.

Mrs. Bruce attributed his averted face to shyness, but the direction of his glance gave her an idea.

"Well, I'm sure, Betsy, *you* should be pleased," she remarked. "One might think the boat was named for you."

"Betsy wasn't ever clever to me," said Hiram calmly. "She began spellin' me down at school here when we were children, and she's ben spellin' me down ever since."

Mrs. Bruce looked curiously at the frowning countenance of the capable woman who had meant so much in her husband's household. [12]

“Just like a snapdragon always,” went on Hiram slowly; “touch her and she’d fly all to pieces; and I guess you put on the finishin’ touch, takin’ her to Europe, Mrs. Bruce. She’s so toploftical to-day that she won’t scarcely speak to me.”

“Betsy was a good traveler; I wouldn’t ask a better,” said Mrs. Bruce absently. The subject of the boat’s name rankled. Her desire to coerce humanity for its own good was like a fire always laid and ready to be kindled, and Hiram had applied the match.

“What do *you* think of the new name, Betsy? Don’t you think your old friend would have done better to stick to the Gentle Annie?”

“That’s exactly what I think,” was the explosive response. “That’s the only name that’ll ever be connected with Cap’n Salter in this world, and he’d better make the most of it. Hiram, if you’re perishin’ to wear a trail I’ll make you one out o’ paper-cambric. Give me my rug. I want to go in the house.”

Salter motioned toward the speaker with his head, then met Mrs. Bruce’s eyes. [13]

“You heard?” he said. “That’s what I say. Snappy, snappy.”

“I’m very sorry,” said Mrs. Bruce impressively, “that it’s painted on. It’s a bad idea and won’t bring you luck.”

“Well now, we’ll see,” rejoined Hiram. “I feel just the other way round. I think it’s a good idea and will bring me luck. Folks’ll begin to say Cap’n Salter and the Clever Betsy, Cap’n Salter and the Clever Betsy, and first news you know there’ll be—”

He paused. Lightnings would have shot from Betsy Foster’s eyes had they been able to express all she felt; but the audacity of his look and manner conveyed a totally new idea to Mrs. Bruce.

“I wish you’d both come out with me this afternoon,” he went on. “I’ll show you just what a good, reliable, faithful craft I’ve got. A bit unsteady sometimes, mebbe, but that’s only because she’s smart and sassy; she always comes up to the mark in an emergency, and never goes back on her skipper. She’s fast, too, and—”

“Sailin’!” interrupted Betsy, unable to endure another moment. “I guess if you saw the inside o’ that cottage you wouldn’t talk to me about sailin’. If you’re so fond of peacockin’ with that rug, I won’t deprive you of it. You can leave it on the step when you get through.” [14]

Mrs. Bruce’s idea received confirmation by Betsy’s manner and her precipitate departure up the garden-path, and she looked at Hiram Salter blankly. Betsy Foster was the prop of her household. She was the property of the Bruce family. Did this man suppose for one moment that just because they had gone to school together, he could remove her from her useful position? What a selfish, impossible thought! Of course the man wasn’t in love with Betsy. Nobody could be in love with such a severely plain creature; and yet that fancy of the new boat and the new name! It argued a plan of wooing which had some poetry in it.

Here was an affair which Mrs. Bruce would certainly stop with a high hand if there were any real threat in it; but fortunately Betsy would consider it as unthinkable as she herself. If ever displeasure was writ large all over a woman it had been evident in Betsy Foster throughout the interview.

After a short reflective silence during which, both hands behind him, her companion waved the rug in gentle ripples, and met her gaze with an undisturbed smile, she spoke. [15]

“Do take my advice still, Captain Salter,” she said. “Wipe out the Clever Betsy and go back to the Gentle Annie.”

CHAPTER II
MISTRESS AND MAID

[16]

Mrs. Bruce remained with the captain at the gate for fifteen minutes longer before she re-entered the house. Hiram came as far as the door with her and laid the rug inside. He caught a glimpse of Betsy, stormily dusting and polishing in the living-room, but contented himself with touching his cap to Mrs. Bruce, and disappearing down the garden path.

That lady looked sharply at her factotum as she entered the room. Mankind loves a lover undoubtedly, as a rule; but there are exceptions. Mrs. Bruce decidedly did not love anybody who proposed to deprive her of her right hand: cook, waitress, lady's maid, housekeeper, either of which posts Betsy was capable of filling in the defection of the regular incumbent.

Betsy was a none-such, and Mrs. Bruce knew it sufficiently well to have swallowed her wrath on many previous occasions when her strong will had collided with that of her handmaid. During [17] her husband's lifetime Mrs. Bruce had discharged the New England woman several times in her most magnificent manner; but the ebullition had not been noticed by Betsy, who pursued the even tenor of her way as one who had more important matters to think of. Since Mr. Bruce's death his widow had not proceeded to such lengths, some intuition perhaps warning her that the spiritual cable which held the none-such to her service had lost its strongest strands and would not stand a strain.

She looked at the faithful woman now with a new curiosity. Mankind loves a lover. Yes, of course; but Betsy couldn't have a lover! The cheese-cloth binding the hair away from the high sallow forehead, taken in connection with the prominent thin nose and retreating chin, presented the class of profile which explains the curious human semblance taken on by a walnut when similarly coiffed. No—that designing sailor was tired of living alone. He wanted a housekeeper and a cook. How did he dare! Quite a blaze of indignation mounted in the breast of Betsy's fortunate owner. What a blessed thing that Betsy was the sort of woman who could see into a [18] millstone and could be trusted to flout her deceitful wooer to the end. Mrs. Bruce spoke with gracious playfulness.

"You never told me Captain Salter was a beau of yours, Betsy."

The other did not cease to beat up the cushions of the wicker chairs.

"I don't know as I ever did take the time to reg'larly sit down and give you my history, Mrs. Bruce," was the reply.

And that lady took a few moments to reflect upon the spirit of the crisp words, finally deciding to veer away from the subject.

"Now what can I do to help you, Betsy? I know you want everything spick and span before that cook comes to-morrow."

Betsy looked up.

"I've laid the silver out there on the dining-room table. You might clean it. Here, let me put this apron on you." And abruptly abandoning the cushions, the speaker hurried into the dining-room, divided from the living-room only by an imaginary line, and seizing an enveloping gingham apron, concealed Mrs. Bruce's trim China silk from head to foot.

The mistress sat down at the table and opened the silver-polish, and Betsy returned to her [19] work.

"I've been asking Captain Salter about the neighbors, and especially about my little protégée."

"Which one? Oh, you mean Mrs. Pogram's girl!"

"Yes, Rosalie Vincent. With that name and her pretty face and graceful figure, it did seem too bad that she shouldn't have her chance. I remember, though, you didn't altogether approve of my sending her away from washing Mrs. Pogram's dishes."

"Washin' Mrs. Pogram's dishes was real safe," returned Betsy. "Rosalie was pretty, and poor, and young; and that's a combination that had better stay right in the home village under some good woman's wing. Mrs. Pogram's a clever soul, though some like putty. If she hadn't been, she wouldn't have spared Rosalie, I s'pose."

"Oh, it wasn't for long," replied Mrs. Bruce. "I thought it only fair that the child should have one season's course in English, with such a yearning as she had after poetry and all things poetical. Such a doom as it seemed to be to peel Mrs. Pogram's vegetables and wash her dishes. I [20] can always discern an artist," added Mrs. Bruce complacently, "even in the most unlikely places; and that girl had a touch of the divine fire. I recognized it that day when she recited the bit of Browning up here."

Betsy's eyes happening to fall on the silver-polish, she remarked dryly.

"Well, whitin' 's safer than Brownin' for her sort, and I thought she was contented enough."

Betsy's two-year-old disapproval of this one of her mistress's undertakings revived. Education

was a good thing, without doubt, but according to Betsy's judgment it was best, under circumstances of such dependence as existed with Mrs. Pogram's pretty adopted child, to let well enough alone. Mrs. Pogram's principal motive in giving the girl a home had been the material help she could render, and it was a doubtful experiment to send her to the new environment of the city, and the novel companionship of her fellow students, unless her benefactress intended to prolong her watch over the young girl's fortunes; and this Betsy knew would not be the case; for long before Rosalie's term of study was ended, Mrs. Bruce's energies would be directed toward [21] superintending the affairs of somebody else. The girl's grateful letters had begun to be ignored some time before Mrs. Bruce joined her adored boy in Europe; and it is doubtful when she would have thought again of Rosalie Vincent, had she not returned to the village where the young girl had attracted her fleeting fancy.

"I gave her the wings to soar," she now added virtuously, "and I inquired of Captain Salter if she had used them. I found his report quite unsatisfactory."

"Why, where is Rosalie?" asked Betsy quickly, stopping her labors in the interest of her query.

"Captain Salter wasn't sure. He said he supposed Mrs. Pogram knew, but there had been some recent quarrel with a brother of Mrs. Pogram's and it had ended in Rosalie's going away."

"Soarin', perhaps," remarked Betsy dryly, grasping the legs of an unoffending table and giving it vicious tweaks with the dust-cloth. "Just as well folks shouldn't be given wings sometimes, in my opinion. When a bird's got plumage like Rosalie's, it'd better stick to the long grass. The [22] world's just full o' folks that if they catch sight o' the brightness never rest till they get a shot at it and drag it down."

"Was she so pretty? Let's see, was she dark or light? Oh, I remember her hair was blonde."

Betsy gave one look at her employer. It was entirely characteristic that two years should have sunk the village girl's memory in a haze.

Mrs. Bruce sighed and began to polish another fork. "It seldom pays to try to help people," she said. "I distinctly remember the girl had talent, and I thought she might get a position in one of the Portland schools if she had a little training and applied herself."

"Her letters to you certainly sounded as if she was workin' her best."

"Did they?" vaguely. "Perhaps they did. Well, very likely she has gone to take a position then."

"Not in summer time, I guess," remarked Betsy.

"I don't seem to remember any brother of Mrs. Pogram's," said Mrs. Bruce plaintively.

"Humph! You've probably bought ribbons of him lots o' times. He sells 'em up in Portland, and [23] I'll bet it's a strain on him every time he measures off over thirty-five and a half inches for a yard. Brown's his name. Loomis Brown; and it would seem more fittin' if 'twas Lucy. Such a hen-betty I never saw in all my days. I wonder if it's possible he took to shinin' up to Rosalie."

"Oh, he's a bachelor?"

"Law, yes. He wouldn't want to pay for a marriage license, but p'raps he took such a shine to Rosalie as she grew older that it spurred him on to the extravagance. No tellin'. If that's the case, no wonder she took wings."

"It's very tiresome," said Mrs. Bruce, "the way girls will marry after one has done one's best for them."

"Yes, Mrs. Bruce. The next time you take a fancy to a village girl, you give her a course in cookin' instead of English. She can jaw her husband all right without any teachin'; but it takes trainin' to make good bread."

Mrs. Bruce sighed leniently. "That is your point of view, naturally," she said. "You could hardly be expected to have that divining rod which recognizes the artistic. Strange how much better I remember that girl's gift and her unstudied gestures than I do her face." [24]

Betsy paused long enough in her undertakings to pull up the bib of her mistress's apron, which had slipped, endangering the pretty silk gown. There was a permanent line in Betsy's forehead, which might have been named "Mrs. Bruce the second"; but she fastened the apron as carefully now as she did all things pertaining to that lady's welfare, and made no reply to the reflection upon her æsthetic capabilities. Betsy would not have known the meaning of the word æsthetic, but she would have declared unhesitatingly that if it characterized Mrs. Bruce she was willing not to have it describe herself. Not that she had a dislike of her mistress. She took her as she found her. Mr. Bruce had been attached to her, and Betsy's duty was to the bearer of his name. She seldom contended with her mistress, nor had any argument. She said to herself simply that it was hard to teach an old dog new tricks; and while it might seem a trifle rough to mention an old dog in connection with a lady of Mrs. Bruce's attractive appearance, the sense of the axiom was extremely applicable, since Mrs. Bruce could become no more set in all essentials if she lived to [25] be a hundred.

Betsy very rightly realizing that avoidable discord was foolishness, lived her philosophy, and contented herself with mental reservations which would have astonished her complacent mistress mightily.

On the evening, twelve years ago, when Mr. Bruce announced to his housekeeper his impending marriage, she shouldered this cross resolutely.

He had been a man of few words, and on this occasion he said simply to the woman who had seen his happiness with the bride of his youth, “I find myself very lonely, Betsy. I am going to marry Miss Flushing.”

“Very well, sir,” she replied quietly, though her heart leaped to her throat and her thoughts flew to the twelve-year-old boy who was then at home on his vacation. “Have you told Mr. Irving, sir?”

She remembered the father’s face as he replied, “Yes. That boy, Betsy, is a manly little chap. Miss Flushing is devoted to him and has gained his affection already; but—it was a blow to him. I saw it. A surprise, a great surprise.”

Betsy remembered to this day how she bit her tongue to keep it from speaking. [26]

“He talked to me though,” the father had continued, “more like one man to another than like a child; but after being very civil about it, he announced that I mustn’t expect him to call her mother, because he should not be able to.”

Betsy had nodded. “Mr. Irving had a mother out of the ordinary, Mr. Bruce,” she replied very quietly, but with the hot blood pressing in her head; then she went up decorously to her room, closed the door, and indulged in one storm of weeping; after which she shouldered the cross above mentioned, which like all crosses heartily borne, lightened as the years went on.

One thing was certain. Greater devotion was never displayed by a stepmother; and if Irving Bruce had mental reservations, too, he did not divulge them to the faithful woman who was part of his earliest remembrance.

CHAPTER III
IRVING BRUCE

[27]

Mrs. Bruce had retired from her labors, but a vigorous cleansing process was still going on in the cottage, when a man's footsteps again sounded on the garden-path. Some one set a suit-case down on the porch, and then appeared in the doorway for a moment of inspection.

Betsy started at sight of the tall, gray-clad apparition.

"Mr. Irving!" she ejaculated, and the transfiguring expression which crossed her face gave the key at once to her loyalty. "Go 'way from here, we ain't a bit ready for you!" she said severely.

He strode forward and gently shook the speaker's angular shoulders instead of her busy hands.

"Great that I could get here so soon," he returned, continuing to rest his hands on her shoulders, while she looked up into the eyes set generously apart under level brows.

[28] "He ain't any job lot," she thought for the hundredth time, "he's a masterpiece." But all the time she was trying to frown.

"We ain't ready for you," she repeated. "The cook hasn't come."

"Bully!" ejaculated the unwelcome one. "It's the aim of my existence to catch you where there isn't any cook. Are the mackerel running?"

"You'll have to ask Cap'n Salter or some other lazy coot about that. Mackerel running! Humph! My own running has been all I could attend to the last two days. Mrs. Pogram's supposed to look after the cottage—air it and so on; but she always was slower'n molasses and I s'pose she don't get any younger nor spryer as the years go on. I've found mildew, yes, I have, *mildew*, in a number o' places."

The young man smiled, dropped his hands, and sauntered to a window overlooking the tumbling blue.

"She has what's-her-name there, that girl she adopted," he responded carelessly. "Why doesn't she shift such duties upon her?"

"Oh, you remember Rosalie, do you?" asked Betsy dryly, as she resumed her work.

[29] "To be sure. That was her name. Pretty name. Pretty girl. A real village beauty."

"Yes," said Betsy. "You very likely remember Mrs. Bruce took a lot of interest in her. Had her here to speak poetry one day."

"Oh, I remember her very well," returned the young man. "I don't recall the poetry though. So that was her forte. Apt to interfere with opening up and airing out other people's cottages, I suppose."

"Yes, if it's encouraged. Hers was encouraged."

Betsy's lips snapped together and her tone caused her companion to glance around at her over his shoulder.

"Mildew sort of got on your nerves, Betsy?" he asked, amused. "Don't worry. There's a free-for-all chemistry here that will fix it up in no time. Drop that duster and come and look at the ocean. It will steady you."

"Steady me!" Betsy gave a derisive grunt. "Tell that to the marines. I've had experience of its steadiness the last month, haven't I?"

Irving laughed at certain memories of his companion's walnut profile, with lips pursed in the throes of endurance.

[30] "You aren't a star sailor, are you?" he returned.

"I learned the meanin' o' one phrase o' Scripture; learned it for life. 'Unstable as water.' It fits some folks just splendid and you couldn't say anything worse about 'em. My! will I ever forget tryin' to wait on Mrs. Bruce and fix my hair in that stateroom! Never got my arms up that there didn't come a lurch and knock my elbow against the woodwork fit to break the skin."

"You ought to be better upholstered, Betsy," said Irving.

"And varnish!" she continued, with reminiscent loathing. "Shall I ever be able to use varnish again!"

"Joy!" exclaimed Irving. "Then I'm not in any danger of being shellacked! I never felt certain in childhood's happy hour that keeping me surgically clean would wholly satisfy you."

"No, sir," said Betsy warmly, "the ocean won't get me to look at it this summer. All diamonds, and blue sparkles, and white feathers, just as if butter wouldn't melt in its mouth; then when it gets you in its clutches, bangs you around from pillar to post and nearly blows the hair off your [31] head. I know its tricks now. It'll never deceive *me* again."

Irving smiled out at the maligned billows. “Looks pretty good to me,” he returned. “Wonder what I shall do about a boat. Has Mrs. Bruce said any more about the Yellowstone?”

“Yes, spoke of it this mornin’ to Cap’n Salter.”

“Oh, has she been out with Hiram already?”

“No, he was lally-gaggin’ around here for a while.”

“How is old Hiram?” The question was affectionate.

Betsy pushed an upturned rug under a table-leg.

“Oh, about as usual, I guess. Gets more like himself every year, same as we all do.”

“Well, he couldn’t do better. He’s a good sort.” Irving smiled at some memory. “I must have made that man’s life a burden. What a lot of patience he had! But when the end was reached, I can feel that hand of his come down on me, big as a ham, and toss me away as if I’d been a cunner he was throwing back. Mrs. Salter, too. Talk about salt of the earth! I suppose that must have been a stock Fairport pun during her life. Many a time she begged me off. The gentle Annie! [32] I should think so. Let’s see. How long has she been gone?”

“Five years.”

“And the captain has never taken notice since, has he?”

“Don’t ask *me*,” was the curt response; and a table was whisked completely around with a celerity which must have given it vertigo.

“Betsy! Betsy!” It was a cautious call which came quietly from the invisible.

Betsy straightened herself and moved toward it, and the silent moment was followed by the swift entrance of Mrs. Bruce.

“My *dear* boy!” she exclaimed, aggrieved. “I thought I heard a man’s voice. How long have you been here? Betsy, why didn’t you tell me!”

The young man’s eyes were kind as he turned and came to meet the speaker, and his manner seemed very quiet in contrast to her alert, fussy personality and the froufrou of her taffetas.

“Good-morning, Madama,” he said, returning her nervous embrace lightly. “I’ve asked Betsy so many questions since I broke in here, that she couldn’t in civility leave me.”

Betsy returned to her labors, deaf to her mistress’s remarks. She knew that Mrs. Bruce had a [33] chronic objection to her having a tête-à-tête, however short, with Irving. It was as if the widow were jealous of the twelve years’ advantage which her maid had over her; and notwithstanding Betsy’s humble position, her mistress constantly imagined that they referred, when together, to events which she had not shared, and spoke on subjects which would be dropped upon her appearance.

The newcomer slipped her hand through the young man’s arm, and moved with him as he returned to the window.

“Why didn’t you telegraph? How did you happen to come so soon?”

“Oh, I just saw that the bank was run by a lot of egoists who supposed that they could manage it without me, just as they have for thirty years, so I thought I would make the most of this last summer of their self-satisfaction, and take all that was coming to me, before I get into the harness.”

“Very wise; and I hope when you do get into harness you’ll never make such a slave of yourself as your dear father did.”

“You never can tell. I rather dread my own proclivities. If I should ever work as hard as I’ve [34] played, the business world is going to be jarred when I leap into it.”

Mrs. Bruce hung fondly on his arm, rejoicing in the hard muscle she felt through his light sleeve.

“Well,” she said, “I’m glad you could come. There is such a wonderful feeling of freedom in this restful spot. Sometimes,” pensively, “I think the greatest blessing we have in life is personal freedom. I suffocate without it, and it is astonishing how difficult it is to get, in the ordinary affairs of life.” Then, with sudden attention, “What makes you wear that tie with that suit? I don’t like it at all, anyway. That isn’t one that I gave you.”

The young man’s hand mechanically sought his throat. “No, Madama,” he admitted, still looking absently from the window.

“I should think, Irving, as many neckties as I pick out for you, you might wear one of them when you’re going to be with me.”

“But I can’t bear to wear your neckties,” he returned gently, “they’re so decorative in my room. To tie them all up and bury them under a collar and vest would be a shame. I hang them on [35] my tie-rack, where they can be admired morning, noon, and night. You know I keep trying to curb

your extravagance in that line. You'll impoverish yourself so that you can't wear silk stockings if you go on like this. Every few days a new tie to go on the rack."

"Nonsense," returned Mrs. Bruce curtly. "If I didn't have such good taste, of course I shouldn't venture to buy ties for a man; but even as a girl I was considered to have the most perfect taste. I was famous for it, and I'm sure, Irving, I've tried to instill it into you."

"You have, Madama," he returned soothingly, "and I think I'm a credit to you. Now come, I'm prepared to maintain that I've caught the infection, and that my taste is perfect, too." He stifled a yawn. "To prove it, I'll throw down the bone of contention, collar and all, and get into a sweater. I'm going to hunt up Hiram before lunch and swap lies for a spell."

So speaking the young man stepped out on the porch, picked up his suit-case, and walked through the spreading cottage until he came to his room, where Betsy was whisking things into readiness for his occupancy.

"There! Do you smell?" she asked, sniffing disapprovingly; "just like a cellar?" [36]

"No," he returned plaintively, "I don't think I do."

"I didn't say do *you*; I say, don't *it*," snapped Betsy, in no mood for badinage. "If you hadn't come so soon, I'd have had it aired out. I'd like to shake Mrs. Pogram till her teeth chatter."

Irving set down his suit-case.

"As I remember, Mrs. Pogram's teeth aren't calculated to chatter. They don't—what is the technical term now?"

Betsy grunted. "I do feel ashamed to have you come into such a comfortless place, Mr. Irving."

"I'd rather be here, Betsy, even if I have to wear a clothes-pin on my nose while unmaking my toilet. I can sleep on the porch, you know. You think—eh, Betsy, you think there's no use trying to side-step the Yellowstone?"

"We're as good as there," returned Betsy sententiously. "Mrs. Bruce says that when once you get into that bank, she might as well count on the wind that blows as you taking a vacation at any stated time; and you know it's got to be a stated time for the Yellowstone." [37]

Irving sighed.

"I hope we know our place, Betsy," he returned.

CHAPTER IV
MRS. POGRAM CONFIDES

[38]

HALF an hour afterward Mrs. Pogram, unconscious of Miss Foster's yearning to administer to her portly person a vigorous movement cure, walked leisurely up the village street. From one hand depended a long slender package which she held away from her black shawl by a string loop around her forefinger.

A merry whistling attracted her, and she perceived coming along the walk, at a swinging gait, a bareheaded young man in a sweater. In a few days the streets of the village would be largely populated by girls and men, all with an aversion to hats and sleeves. Mrs. Pogram was familiar with the type, and noted that this care-free person was an advance guard proving that the summer was here.

She eyed him, however, with lack-lustre eyes until he stopped suddenly before her.

"You don't know me," he said, taking his hands out of his pockets.

The corners of Mrs. Pogram's lips drew down and her chin drew in.

"Why, Irvin' Bruce, it's you!" she declared. "We haven't seen you in these parts for so long I [39] didn't know but you'd given up Fairport."

"Couldn't do that, Mrs. Pogram. You know how a man always returns to the scene of his crimes."

Mrs. Pogram again drew down the corners of her mouth and gave her gingerly-held package a shake.

"This pesky fish never will be done drippin'," she remarked.

"Been fishing?" asked her companion.

"Yes. I go fishin' on the wharf. It's cheaper than to the market and the walk does me good."

"You look well."

"I ain't well. It's kind o' hard for me to get around, and I miss Rosalie. She's gone off." Mrs. Pogram's voice took a whining note, and she indulged in a sniff of self-pity. "I donno as you ever saw Rosalie?"

"Oh yes, I've seen her."

"The way I come to take her, I was gettin' along in years and she was left alone in the world. She wanted a home and I wanted young hands and feet, so we'd 'a' got along real comfortable if it hadn't been for Loomis; and I've been more like a mother than a sister to Loomis, bein' so [40] much older, and I do think he might have let me have a little comfort without naggin' me all the time."

"Has he left Portland and come here to live with you?"

"Oh no, he's still in Chatham's store, but he can run down over Sunday any time, you know, and ever since Rosalie came he's done so a great deal."

"What could you expect?" returned Irving. "I remember her."

"Hey? Oh, yes, Loomis was awful pleased with her at first, but she didn't seem to take much of a fancy to him. Kinder laughed at him. Loomis *is* sort o' fussy. Anyway, she made him mad one day, and from that on he didn't give me any peace."

Mrs. Pogram sniffed again and gave her lachrymose package another shake so that its tears bedewed the walk as if she were weeping vicariously.

"He made you send the girl away?" asked Irving quickly, a line coming in his forehead at the remembrance of the mincing young clerk who had been the natural victim of many a prank of his own boyhood.

"Not *made* me, exactly," returned Mrs. Pogram, "but Rosalie got so she wouldn't stand it any [41] longer. You see," her complaining tone altering to one of some complacence, "though I ain't any millionairess, my estate ain't exactly to be sneezed at. The old Pogram mahogany and the silver that was my mother's are worth considerable; and Loomis was on pins for fear I'd give some of 'em to Rosalie. I give her a spoon once—it was real thin, Irvin', not worth much of anything in money, but it was a time when Rosalie'd taken care of me through a fever and I felt to give her somethin'; and law, from the way Loomis took on you'd 'a' thought I'd made him a poor man for the rest of his life. Honestly I was ashamed of him; and I kep' his actions away from Rosalie as much as I could; but she's smart, and she saw she'd gained Loomis's enmity by laughin' at him, and saw that he was gettin' kinder jealous of her about the things; and if she would only have been quiet, and spoken him fair, and we both kept our own counsel, I could have slipped many a little thing to her and he'd never 'a' known the difference. Things weren't ever the same after your mother gave her that winter at Lambeth. She never laughed at Loomis till after that, and [42] then came my sickness and I gave her the spoon, and from that time there wa'n't ever any

peace."

The line in Irving's forehead came again. "Then you don't think Mrs. Bruce's gift to Rosalie was an advantage."

"Well, I was willin' to spare her for her own good, for I could see what her longings were, and felt I hadn't ought to stand in her way. Loomis favored it because I think 'twas his idea then that he and Rosalie would both come into the Brown-Pogram estate one o' these days."

Irving lifted a hand to conceal some ebullition which escaped him at the thought of the ramshackle ancestral halls of the Pograms.

"As I say," continued Mrs. Pogram, "if Rosalie could have worked with me we'd ha' kep' Loomis smoothed down; but after the spoon trouble that young one acted like all possessed. Every time Loomis came she'd throw out remarks to scare him. 'Oh, Auntie Pogram,' she'd say, 'just look how exactly the right height this work-table is for me to set by. It's the real stuff this wood is;' and then she'd gaze at it kinder thoughtful. 'If this was polished up, that grain would [43] come out beautiful.' Then there is a silver slop-bowl and creamer that was my mother's. 'Oh, Auntie Pogram,' she'd say, and just clasp her hands and gaze at 'em like they was magnets and she a needle. 'How easy it is, after all, to tell the real antiquities from the made-up ones,' she'd say. 'How I do love that colonial pattern!' And all the time Loomis would fidget and run his fingers through his hair and get red in the face. After he'd go I'd talk to her, but she wouldn't do a thing but laugh till the tears come in her eyes." Mrs. Pogram nodded significantly. "But the day came when there was more tears and not so much laugh. Loomis got so he come down every Saturday night. He made a list of all the silver and he'd count 'em out, forks and spoons, every time he came. One Sunday night he said something real downright mean to Rosalie about beggars not bein' choosers. I spoke up for the girl then and there. I said Rosalie had earned everything she'd had from me and earned it fully. I can see her now standin' there, and the way her nostrils opened when she breathed. I don't think I ever saw her as good-lookin' as she was [44] that minute. Her light hair was just fluffin' out like a cloud, and her blue eyes turned nearly black, and her lips was bit in between her teeth till she scared me the way she looked at Loomis. Then she went out o' the room without a word. The next mornin' she didn't get up at half-past four to get Loomis's breakfast, the way she had to when he stayed Sunday nights. I hadn't thought she would, and I got up in my double-gown and found him drinkin' some cold milk, and growlin'. Loomis likes his coffee. I told him 'twas his own fault, and he told me to go to bed and stay there,—'twas all I was fit for." Mrs. Pogram sniffed again and shook the fish mechanically.

"I didn't hear any sound in Rosalie's room when Loomis slammed the front door; so after a spell I went in to find her and try to make peace, but—" the speaker shook her head—"there wa'n't any Rosalie. Her bed was made up neat and there was a note on her table. 'I love you, dear Auntie Pogram, but I can't stand it any longer. Don't worry about me. If I'm in any trouble I promise to write to you.'"

Here, the fish not seeming equal to the occasion, Mrs. Pogram dabbed some tears from her [45] own eyes.

"How long ago was this?" asked Irving.

"Only a few weeks, and I haven't heard another word."

"Your brother is satisfied, I suppose?"

"Well, he ain't real comfortable, 'cause he knows I don't mean to live and work all alone. I ain't fit to; and he's afraid now I'll pay wages that'll be a tax on the estate."

Irving muttered something under his breath.

"Hey?" inquired his companion plaintively.

"I'm sorry for all this, Mrs. Pogram. You must tell Betsy about it. Her head is full of sensible ideas. Perhaps she can help you."

"I'd like to see her," returned the other mournfully. "How are you all?"

"All well."

"You've been to Europe. Now I s'pose you'll settle down a spell."

"Alas, Mrs. Bruce decrees otherwise. We're off for the Yellowstone as soon as we can unpack and pack again."

"I hear it's real sightly out there," returned Mrs. Pogram, without enthusiasm. "I'll have to tell [46] Betsy to get some one else to look after the cottage, though; I ain't fit to hist mattresses." Another sniff. "Good-mornin', Irvin', I'm real glad I met you. Remember me to the folks."

CHAPTER V
ROSALIE VINCENT

[47]

A THRONG of pilgrims to the Yellowstone was emptying out of the cars upon the platform at Gardiner. The spectacular six-horse coaches were in waiting, and the customary competition and struggle for the outside seats began. Mrs. Bruce was wild-eyed in her determination to sit near the driver, and Irving turned to Betsy, who spoke promptly:—

"Never mind me, Mr. Irving. Just go up top with Mrs. Bruce. I'll go inside."

Which plan was accordingly carried out; and Mrs. Bruce was ensconced to her satisfaction where she could ask questions alternately of the driver and her son.

The jingling, gay teams started, and wound up the ascending road under a vast sky above the encircling hills and mountains. As they passed the Eagle's Nest Mrs. Bruce had her first qualm as to Betsy. Upon being told that the high-placed bundle of sticks perched on a cliff was indeed the domicile of the king of birds, she exclaimed:—

[48] "Oh, Irving, couldn't you stoop over and call down to Betsy to put her head out? That is such a purely American sight, and Betsy is so American!"

But Irving, objecting to this contortion, diverted his companion's attention.

As for Betsy, she preferred the seclusion from the sight of the six horses so dexterously tooled along the road, and felt that she saw all the scenery she cared for despite the roof of the stage. Miss Foster must have had an excellent conscience; she always accepted with such contentment her own society.

There was a chatter of voices in her ears from the other occupants of the stage, but her eyes rested absently on hillside and waterfall while she thought of Fairport and the deserted cottage whose condition was still far from satisfying her. Her thoughts roved, too, as they often did, to Rosalie Vincent. What was the girl doing, out in the world unprotected?

It seemed but a short time to Betsy before the coach swung around the circle in front of the Mammoth Hot Springs Hotel, and the passengers poured from the vehicle, watched by other crowds on the hotel piazza, who half resented the arrival of newcomers, for at this season food [49] and beds were at a premium.

Irving had looked out for the comfort of his party, and Mrs. Bruce's room satisfied her. They spent the day in the customary visits to beautiful terraces of heavenly tints built by boiling-hot scanty waterfalls, and at night laid them down to slumber well contented.

In a remote room of the hotel a young girl, after her evening's experience of standing upon her feet long hours, waiting upon hungry hordes of sightseers, was hastening to get ready for her night's rest, when the handle of her door was turned, and then as if some one outside was impatient of its resistance, it was shaken with energy.

The half-disrobed occupant of the room ran to hold the door.

"Who's there?" she demanded.

A sharp girlish voice replied imperatively, "It's me! Open the door quick!"

"You've made a mistake in the room," returned the girl inside. "This is mine."

"Is it, indeed!" shrilly. "Well, I guess if you don't open this door pretty quick, I'll have you sent flying!"

At which threat in the sharp voice, the girl inside opened the door and viewed in astonishment [50] the stormy-eyed young person who entered, beginning to pull out hairpins from her lofty pompadour as she came. "What did you think you were? A lay-over?" she demanded scornfully.

The other girl, her fair hair falling in ripples about her bare neck and arms, closed the door and regarded the newcomer with wide eyes.

"Is it your room, too?" she asked.

"Yes, it is," snapped the other, "and I hope it won't be any more disagreeable for you than it is for me."

"Oh—oh—of course not," returned the fair one. "I only thought it was so small—and the bed is so narrow—and I didn't know—"

"Well," returned the other, somewhat mollified, and with a yawn, "I saw down in the dining-room to-night that you were a green-horn. We're mighty lucky not to be in a bigger room with half-a-dozen girls. My name's Miss Hickey. What's yours?"

"Rosalie Vincent," responded the fair one, still standing rooted to her place while Miss Hickey removed a mammoth rat from her hair, and eclipsed with it one side of the wash-stand, which was dresser as well.

"Better get to bed, Miss Vincent. You'll have plenty of chances to stare at me, and you look as [51]

tired as I feel. I stayed down to help the pearl-divers awhile to-night."

"Pearl-divers?" echoed Rosalie.

"Yes. Dish-washers, Greenie. I'm a heaver like yourself; but we all have to turn in and help each other, once in a while. This is my third season. My first I waited on the sagebrushers."

"Who are they?" asked Rosalie, overawed by so much sophistication.

"Campers; but I like the hotels best. The dudes are more my style."

"What did you call me a few minutes ago? A lay-over?" asked Rosalie.

"Yes, those are the swells that stay more than one night. They're the princes of the Yellowstone and they have to pay like princes, too. All their dishes washed separately, separate food, separate everything. I thought you must think you were one to have a room all to yourself."

Miss Hickey here completed her hasty night-toilet and jumped into bed. "Come along, child. I'll make myself small against the wall."

"Indeed, I'm not a lay-over," said Rosalie, now hastening to follow the other's example. "I'm to [52]
be sent on with the crowd to-morrow."

"So am I," returned the other, with nasal sleepiness; "and I'm darned sorry, too. I like the swatties here better than at any post."

"Swatties?" echoed Rosalie helplessly.

"Soldiers, Greenie," drawled Miss Hickey. "You'll see a lot more of 'em before you see less. Now I ain't goin' to say another word to-night."

And Miss Hickey kept her word. Her sleep was as energetic as her waking; and Rosalie listened to her heavy breathing and stared wide-eyed into the darkness.

She had recognized the Bruce party at the evening meal. She had not been obliged to wait on them, and knew herself unobserved. But the discovery had excited her very much. Mrs. Bruce had been right when she said that Rosalie's was the artistic temperament. The independence, caution, and reserve of the New Englander were not her characteristics. She longed for companionship and some one with whom to sympathize in the present predicament; for predicament she felt it to be. How extraordinary that this should be the summer chosen by the [53]
Bruces for their visit to the National Park.

She thought of the irreverent punctuation which made a well-known quotation read: "There is a divinity which shapes our ends rough, hew them as we may."

She had believed Mrs. Bruce to be in Europe, and though that lady's natural preoccupation there explained the ignoring of her protégée's painstaking letters, it did not excuse it, or leave Rosalie the slightest hope that her benefactress continued to feel an interest in her. The fact was a hurt to the grateful girl, and the ever-present consciousness of it gave her a reason for desiring to leave Fairport, where the Bruces would return. This sensitiveness would not have induced her to leave Mrs. Pogram, had the latter's brother not made her stay unendurable, but it was a secret reason for being glad to escape.

Perhaps Mrs. Bruce and her son would not remember her at all; but she could not expect to escape Betsy Foster's recognition. So she lay there awake; at one moment longing for Mrs. Pogram's kindly, invertebrate protection, and wishing that Mrs. Bruce had never opened to her another world; and again feeling the fire of ambition to repay that lady every cent she had ever [54]
spent upon her. Rosalie's color pressed high as she imagined Mrs. Bruce's amazed scorn that the talents in which she had at least for a time believed, had carried their possessor no higher as yet than to be a waitress—a heaver, according to Miss Hickey—in the Yellowstone.

The girl must at last have dozed; for she shortly experienced a vigorous shaking from her companion.

"Here, here, hustle!" exclaimed Miss Hickey, not unkindly. Rosalie opened her eyes with such bewilderment that her companion laughed.

"Come on, blue eyes. You look like a baby. Get into your duds. We're off for Norris Basin, worse luck."

The sight of Miss Hickey's readjusted pompadour gave Rosalie a realizing sense of the situation.

"Oh, Miss Hickey," she exclaimed, as she hurried to the washstand, "are many people lay-overs?"

"Oh, you've got them on the brain, have you?" asked the other, proceeding with her own toilet. "Not many, 'cause it costs too much."

"I saw some people here last night who have lots of money—oh, lots and lots! Shouldn't you [55]
think they'd stay?"

"H'm. I only *hope* they will," rejoined Miss Hickey, "as long as we're going. The crowds are

fierce."

"I do hope they will!" Rosalie's echo was fervent. She almost summoned courage to tell her aggressive companion the situation; but one glance at the young woman's coiffure, which was now receiving the addition of a bunch of curls, arrested her.

Miss Hickey regarded her companion sharply.

"You ain't a heaver all the year," she remarked tentatively, "or else you wouldn't be afraid o' those rich folks. There's the tips, you know."

Rosalie was silent.

"Perhaps you was their waitress and ran off to see the world without giving notice."

"No, I wasn't that; but I—I know them, and—"

The speech drifted into silence.

"You know rich folks, do you? Lucky you."

"Not exactly. They—she—" stammered Rosalie, "they helped—educate me."

"Oh, you're educated, are you?" retorted Miss Hickey, giving her coiffure a satisfied lift. "Well, [56]
so am I. I'm a typewriter in Chicago, winters."

"Does—does it pay well?" asked Rosalie, with such serious wistfulness that Miss Hickey forgave her her rich acquaintances.

She grimaced. "Not so you'd notice it. I ain't goin' back this fall. You know the Yellowstone Company'll land you just as many miles from the Park as they brought you, and in any direction you say. Me for Los Angeles. I ain't afraid I can't make my living, and I'm sick o' bein' snowed on, winters, without any furs."

Rosalie looked enviously at the other's snapping black eyes.

"Wonder what savage we'll go over with," pursued Miss Hickey, stuffing her nightgown into a bag, and nonchalantly running her comb and toothbrush into her stocking.

"Over? Over?"

"Yes, over to Norris in the stage."

"Do you mean that *savages* drive them?" asked Rosalie, her eyes dilating.

Miss Hickey laughed. "Oh, you're more fun than a barrel o' monkeys," she observed. "The drivers certainly are savages. You can ask anybody in the Park."

Rosalie smiled faintly as she began twisting up her hair. "Oh, that's some more Park English, is [57]
it?" she asked.

"I hope it'll be Jasper," said Miss Hickey, "but we won't get to sit by him, anyway. The dudes all fight for the driver's seat. I'm going down now. Hurry up, Baby, or you'll catch it."

Rosalie obeyed in a panic, and was soon ready to follow. She dreaded the ordeal of the breakfast-room, and prayed that she might be delivered from the Bruces' table. Her heart came up in her throat when she saw them enter the door; but she was not obliged to wait upon them. As it happened, Miss Hickey had that station, and Rosalie devoted herself assiduously to a deaf gentleman who was traveling with his wife and a young woman at sight of whom Rosalie colored. "Oh, how small this big world is!" she thought; "but she won't remember me. We seldom met!"

The ordeal of breakfast was at last over, and Rosalie with relief yielded herself to Miss Hickey's orders, and presently the girls stood on the great piazza of the hotel, but on the edge of the crowd, watching the systematic filling of the stages which were starting on the tour around the Park.

"How shall we know when to go?" she asked of Miss Hickey, to whose side she clung in the [58]
confusion.

"Don't you worry about that," returned the other. "Have some gum?"

She offered several sticks of the same to Rosalie, who declined, wishing her veil were thicker as she glanced about, dreading to see the Bruce party, and longing to be safely away.

Miss Hickey slid a generous quantity of gum into her own mouth and then settled her hat more firmly on her pompadour by a rearrangement of largely gemmed hat-pins.

While she proceeded in an experienced manner to break up and chew the gum-sticks into a solacing sphere, her conversation continued, untrammeled by this effort.

"Don't you hear the agent calling the names off?" she asked. "They can't any of 'em say where they'll go any more'n we can. They're going to be took 'round the Park just like a kid out in its baby-wagon. They come when they're called, you bet; and they don't know where their bags are any more'n you do. When they get to the Fountain House their bags'll meet 'em in the hotel; then to-morrow mornin' they'll disappear again to meet 'em at the next place. Oh, it's a great system [59]

all right, if too many people didn’t come at once. They have awful times when there ain’t enough places for ’em to sleep, and six or seven get put in one room. These folks that are too exclusive to travel with a party are the ones that get left; for the conductors of these tours get to the hotels a little ahead o’ the other folks, and get all their people provided for; and it’s gallin’ to know you pay just as much as anybody and yet have to herd in with folks you never saw before—just the same as poor heavers like us.” And Miss Hickey gave her companion a nudge that nearly made her reel. “Weren’t you the mad kid last night?” she continued.

“I think you were the mad one,” rejoined Rosalie. “I was dazed.—O Miss Hickey!” She made the exclamation involuntarily; for the Bruce party came out of a door not far from where the girls were standing, and they were dressed for a move.

“Oh, they’re not lay-overs!” exclaimed Rosalie, retreating behind Miss Hickey’s broad shoulder.

“Who—them? Say, what’s the matter with you? Have you stole their diamonds?”

“Don’t you think they’re going in this next stage?” asked Rosalie nervously. “Do watch, Miss [60]
Hickey. You’re so tall you can see everything.” For the Bruces had moved to the other side of the piazza and were lost in the crowd.

“I waited on those folks at breakfast,” said Miss Hickey, craning her neck and chewing with such open vigor that she momentarily recalled a dog who endeavors to rid his back teeth of a caramel.

“I know you did,” replied Rosalie; “I saw.”

“Ain’t he grand!” exclaimed Miss Hickey. “I thought when I was pourin’ his coffee that he was just about the size I’d like to go through the Park with on a weddin’ trip. The way he said, ‘No sugar, please!’ Oh, it was just grand. It made me forget every swattie at the post. There ain’t an officer here that can stand up to him, I don’t think.”

“Do see if they are getting into that stage!” asked Rosalie, still in retreat behind her companion’s ample shoulder.

“Nit,” responded Mr. Bruce’s admirer sententiously. “That swell woman with him went down the steps to get in, but his nibs there that’s loadin’ ’em told her to chase herself.”

The crowd was dispersing with celerity.

“There ain’t but two stages left,” went on Miss Hickey, with excitement. “If they don’t go in [61]
that next one, we’re all booked to go together. Say, wouldn’t that be grand?”

“No! No! No!” exclaimed Rosalie, emerging from her barrier and watching with dilated eyes.

The stage swept up to the steps. The tourists swarmed into it like bees. Again Mrs. Bruce essayed to enter, and Rosalie could see Irving draw her back, while Betsy Foster stood impassive at a little distance, observing the scene with inexpressive eyes.

CHAPTER VI
THE LAST STAGE

[62]

"I SHOULD like to know why they put us in the last stage!" demanded Mrs. Bruce, in an irate tone.

"Many advantages," returned Irving, with a twinkle of his eyes toward Betsy.

"There are not, Irving Bruce, and you ought to have done something about it! Haven't we always heard about the dust of the Yellowstone?"

"Yes, that's why they oil the roads now," returned Bruce pacifically, "and we don't have to hurry, by this means, you see. Take our own time. Don't have to hurry past anything to make room for the next stage."

"I never could endure *leavings*!" exclaimed Mrs. Bruce, her eyes still snapping as the last stage came around the curve toward the steps.

Betsy attracted her attention.

"See those folks you said looked so aristocratic," she said quietly. "They're goin' with us."

[63] Mrs. Bruce followed the direction of her maid's meaning glance and observed the deaf gentleman's party of three. Insensibly Mrs. Bruce's ireful expression relaxed. There was that in the tone of this party which could lend distinction even to the last stage.

Mrs. Bruce gazed at the trio appreciatively.

"I marvel," she murmured to Betsy, "that they haven't their own equipage."

Betsy sighed with relief and felt that the day was won.

Having observed the dignified, florid-faced man with the white mustache, the tall woman in half-mourning, and the quiet young girl who accompanied them, Mrs. Bruce spoke again distinctly:—

"If I should not be taking any one's place on the driver's seat, I should like to sit there very much."

"We shall take turns as to that, I fancy," replied Irving. He noticed the small rubber device hanging about the neck of the deaf gentleman and turned to the lady beside him.

"Will you sit up in front to start off?" he asked, lifting his hat. "Your husband enjoys more through the eyes than through the ears, I observe."

[64] The lady, with whom smiles were evidently a rarity, met his eyes and essayed one. She thanked him, and turning to her companion pointed to the driver's place, as they moved down the steps.

The gentleman shook his head and motioned the lady into the middle seat of the stage, which she entered.

"But where is Robert?" she exclaimed in a sort of dignified panic. "Miss Maynard," turning to the companion who waited passively, "I thought you said you saw my son a moment ago."

"Yes, Mrs. Nixon, in the office," replied the girl.

"Henry! *Henry!*" pursued the lady, pushing against the deaf gentleman's shoulder both to attract his attention and to prevent his entering the stage. "Robert!" She mouthed the name distinctly and motioned toward the hotel. "*Robert!*"

"Damn Robert!" returned the other, under the usual impression of the deaf that his heartfelt expression was inaudible.

[65] As a matter of fact no one observed it in the confusion. Mrs. Bruce was absorbed in mounting to the coveted place with the driver. Irving offered to put Betsy up beside her; but Miss Foster declined. "Get right up there, Mr. Irving. I'm going in here behind you."

Meanwhile the two waitresses had obeyed a summons, and Rosalie with her head down and praying to be invisible hastened with her companion to the steps. Her prayer was answered, because all the party were too preoccupied to note the two girls who came swiftly by and entered the back seat of the stage. Moreover, at the same moment out from the door of the hotel came a young fellow in outing clothes and cap, who was greeted with well-bred rebuke by Mrs. Nixon, and a grunt of relief from the deaf gentleman, who put Miss Maynard into the seat and followed her.

"Well, I told you not to bring me, didn't I?" responded Robert. His voice was loud and cheery, and had, in his more gleeful moments, a trick of breaking into a high register with a joyous inflection which endeared him to those who enjoyed his conversation. He was clean, gay, and young; but if he possessed any beauty it was of the mind; and among his acquaintance there was a wide difference of opinion on this point.

[66] While his mother voiced her dignified rebuke, his quick eye glanced along the stage to take in its possibilities.

Rosalie was shrunk into the further corner of her seat, directly behind the Nixon party, and Miss Hickey, meeting his glance, chewed vigorously while lifting her head with an elegant air of impersonality.

In Robert's own mental vernacular he "passed up the gum."

The driver's seat was full, the alternative was the one in front of his mother's party, where Betsy Foster reigned alone. He stepped in beside her while he spoke to his mother.

"I told you not to bring me," he declared again, cheerfully. "I told you I'd be more trouble than I was worth."

"You actually detained the stage, dear. I was about to send your uncle Henry to find you."

Quick as a flash the culprit snatched the device which aided the deaf gentleman's hearing, and shrieked across it above the clatter of the stage.

"Don't you ever do it, Uncle Henry. Rise up and declare your rights. What if I am lost?"

"That's what I say," responded the older man, equably. "Small loss. One of my rights is not to [67]
have my ear-drums cracked. They're sufficiently nicked already."

He took back the rubber disk with decision.

Irving had turned around during this interchange and looked down from his high perch.

"Hello, Nixie," he said.

Robert leaned forward with alacrity, and took the down-stretched hand.

"*Et tu, Brute?*" he cried, his voice breaking joyously.

Betsy stole the first glance at her companion. His unfeigned gladness to see her idol was in his favor.

He turned to his mother: "Bruce of our class. Didn't you recognize him? Best fullback the college ever saw."

"I did think there was something familiar about that young man's face," responded Mrs. Nixon. "Most attractive; and such charming manners." Her carefully modulated voice fell agreeably on Miss Foster's ears. "He tried to give us the front seat; but the lady with him," Mrs. Nixon raised her eyebrows, "was so very anxious to secure it, that I was glad your uncle refused."

Mrs. Bruce turned and looked down to see Irving's friend, and exclaimed at once, beaming [68]
with interest:—

"I remember you perfectly, Mr. Nixon. You were so funny on Class Day." As Mrs. Bruce spoke, her eyes roved again to the young man's party.

"I remember you at the games too, Mrs. Bruce," replied the young fellow, rising, "and for the same reason. You were so funny! We're a couple of family parties, it seems. My mother, and my uncle, Mr. Derwent, are here, and at the first stop we'll all become acquainted."

So saying, Robert dropped back into his seat, and turning with scarce a pause to his mother, said explanatorily, "Brute's stepmother. An up-and-coming dame. You will have to meet her."

Mrs. Nixon frowned at him significantly and nodded her head toward Betsy's immovable back.

"All right," said Robert airily, and glanced at the woman who shared his place. The walnut profile impressed itself upon him for the first time, and in connection with the Bruces he now remembered the woman to whom Irving had been so attentive on various college occasions. "I'll [69]
be jiggered," thought the youth, "if it isn't Brute's nurse! Well, we are being chaperoned through the park, good and plenty."

Then he amazed his mother by addressing his companion.

"Why, how d' ye do? Why didn't you speak to me?"

Betsy gave her odd one-sided smile as she looked back at his cheerfully grinning countenance.

"It's all so long ago now, Mr. Nixon, I didn't suppose you'd remember me. I didn't know you at first."

"I'm not at all surprised. I've grown old and decrepit in the last two years; but to show you my mind isn't failing yet, I can tell you where I last saw you. It was in a gondola in Venice."

Betsy smiled and nodded.

"I remember your calling across to Mr. Irving very well, Mr. Nixon."

"Good. Your memory's all right, too."

Helen Maynard, sitting quiet and forgotten at Mrs. Nixon's elbow, looked at Robert with some approval for the first time. He swung around in his seat so suddenly that he accidentally caught [70]
her glance. Miss Maynard had a symmetrical little nose and mouth, and he liked the way she did her hair; and wearing her present expression it occurred to him for the first time that the young

woman, who was both his uncle's stenographer and his mother's companion, was rather fetching.

"Did you see the formation pretty thoroughly yesterday, Miss Maynard?" he asked briskly.

Her quickly averted eyes sought the splendid sweeps of Jupiter Terrace which the stage was now passing.

"Quite thoroughly," she replied briefly.

"We went the regular round," said Mrs. Nixon. "Your uncle was really bewitched with everything."

Mr. Derwent, his hands crossed upon the head of the stick he carried, sat in the isolation of the deaf; his eyes fastened upon the delicate and wonderful coloring of the stationary cascades of deposit, over which the water was trickling; building—ever building greater beauty with its puny persistence.

He caught his nephew's eye with a good-humored twinkle. "Great example of what industry will do," he remarked.

"Fierce!" replied Robert, and made an energetic dive for the rubber disk, which his uncle [71]
foiled by a quick move. The youth fixed Mr. Derwent with his gaze, and moved his lips with care to be distinct.

"I've always refused," he declared loudly, "to have the busy bee or the coral insect thrown at me; and I now add the Yellowstone water to the black list."

"If words," replied Mr. Derwent, "could build anything, you would rear temples of amazing height, Robert."

"And rare beauty," added the youth. "Don't forget that, please."

Miss Hickey changed her gum to the other side of her mouth. "Ain't he fresh?" she murmured to her companion. "Did you see the look I gave him when he come up to the stage? I tell you I wasn't goin' to have him crowdin' in here with us."

"I waited on them at breakfast," murmured Rosalie. "He's just jolly all the time."

Miss Hickey bridled. "Well, he wouldn't jolly me more'n once. I know his kind: awful fresh;" and the gum gave a vault and turn which only the most experienced can accomplish.

"And they're all friends!" murmured Rosalie apprehensively. [72]

"Oh, brace up!" returned Miss Hickey impatiently. "If you haven't stolen their spoons I don't see what you're so scared of; and you're too much of a baby to have done that."

"No, I never—never lived out anywhere," breathed Rosalie.

"Well, if you think it's such a disgrace to be a waitress in the Park, what did you come for?"

As Miss Hickey scented offense, her tone began to rise, and Rosalie grasped her arm pacifically. "No, no, it isn't that! It isn't in the least that!"

The girl's conscience squirmed a little as she made this reply, and she swallowed and went on. "It's a long story, too long to tell, and not interesting; but oh, Miss Hickey, do try to wait on the Bruces this noon, won't you, like a dear good girl!"

"'Twon't be up to me; but I'd be mighty glad to do it, you bet! Did you hear that fresh chap call him Bruty? *Bruty!* That prince! Well, I've got a name for *him* all right. Did you ever study about them heathen gods? I did. I've got an awful good education if I do say it; and there was one of [73]
'em so ugly if he walked by a clock it would stop. His name was—let's see; it was Calabash. Well, it just fits that feller to a T. If I looked like that, I'd go way back and sit down instead of fillin' the stage so't nobody can look at anybody but him."

"The girl with them seems to be a companion," whispered Rosalie. "I tried to get that sort of a place."

"Oh, shoot!" returned Miss Hickey, trying the endurance of the gum severely. "I could get that job easy, I know, on account of my education and knowin' my way round the way I do; but there ain't enough freedom to it. If we'd rather go to a Swattie ball now than to sleep, we have our choice; but a companion has got to be right on the job night and day."

Rosalie looked off at the distant mountains, and then back at the nape of Miss Maynard's pretty neck, and began to wonder if she was as lonely as herself. Apparently Mrs. Nixon addressed no one except her son, and Rosalie guessed that Miss Maynard, placed behind her employer's cold shoulder, was in reality as far removed from her as she herself felt with regard to her neighbor.

The beautiful, beautiful world! Rosalie sighed and leaned forward, the better to get the [74]
splendid sweep of vale and mountain, and suddenly caught the eyes of Robert Nixon, his arm thrown along the back of the seat as he turned to converse with his mother. Rosalie shrank back into her corner. Betsy Foster might turn around, too!

CHAPTER VII
THE NATIONAL PARK

[75]

PERCHED on the driver's seat, with Irving beside her, Mrs. Bruce was as near the zenith of contentment as falls to the lot of mortal.

The driver himself, philosopher as he was, discovered in the first three miles that it would not be necessary for him to volunteer any information, as everything he knew would be extracted from him, down to the last dregs of supposition.

"Three thousand feet of ascent in a mile, Irving! Think of it!" exclaimed Mrs. Bruce, as they neared the Hoodoo Rocks.

"I'd rather think of an ascent of one thousand feet in three miles," returned Irving. "It's less strain on the brain."

The driver gave him an appreciative glance across Mrs. Bruce's smart traveling hat.

"Oh, is that it?" she rejoined. "Perhaps I did get it a little twisted."

Here they came in full view of the desert of gaunt, pallid trees, amid the gigantic Hoodoo Rocks.

[76]

"Oh, what a dreadful scene!" exclaimed Mrs. Bruce. "Such a dreary stretch of death and desolation! Driver, why do they allow such a thing in the Park?"

A hunted expression came into the driver's eyes. He had been gradually growing more and more mechanical in his replies. Now he maintained a stony silence.

"If I were here at night, alone," continued Mrs. Bruce, "I should go straight out of my mind! I'm so temperamental I could not—I really could *not* bear it;" and she shuddered.

"Then I positively forbid your coming here alone at night," declared Irving. "We must preserve your mind, Madama, at all costs."

"But it's a blot on the Park. It's more suggestive than the worst Doré picture. Boo!" Mrs. Bruce shuddered again, and looked fearfully at the dead forest, sparse and wild, rearing its barkless trunks amid the giant rocks of wild and threatening form. "The government ought to do something about it."

"You flatter Uncle Sam," said Irving. "I don't think any one else expects him to move mountains."

[77]

"Well, they might train vines over it," suggested Mrs. Bruce; and the driver burst into some sound which ended in a fit of coughing, while Irving laughed.

The sudden beauty of the scenery diverted Mrs. Bruce from her plans for reform. Her enthusiasm over the view led her to turn and look down to catch Betsy's eye.

"Are you seeing?" she cried.

Betsy nodded several times to express appreciation.

"It's just like life, isn't it?" went on Mrs. Bruce pensively to her son. "Full of startling contrasts. Do you know, Irving, I think Mr. Nixon is talking to Betsy?"

"No doubt he remembers her," returned Irving. "He has seen her as often as he has you."

"That's true; but it's nice of him, just the same."

Irving smiled. "Nixie's got to talk," he remarked.

"But you know," said Mrs. Bruce, "there *are* snobs in the world."

"So I've heard."

"I like Mr. Nixon, anyway," she went on argumentatively. "It isn't necessary for a man to be handsome."

[78]

Irving sighed. "What a blessed relief that you think so, Madama! Otherwise I'm sure you'd call upon the Creator, and make it a subject of prayer."

"Irving, you're making fun of me."

"You know, Madama, that I never did such a thing."

The stage drew to a standstill. Rosalie Vincent's eyes were starry as she looked in worshipful silence, and she momentarily forgot her situation.

Miss Hickey gazed and chewed.

"I've got to have me a new apron," she said. "A chump in the kitchen burned one o' mine yesterday."

The stage moved on and paused again in the picturesque pass that leads to the Golden Gate,

while all eyes rested upon the Rustic Waterfall, whose tuneful grace as it leaps from ledge to ledge down the worn rock, speaks of life and beauty, striking after the desolation just passed.

Mrs. Bruce's suspended accusation was repeated as the horses started. "You do make fun of me, Irving," she said.

"No, no," he returned. "I simply recognize your spirit of knight-errantry. Glorious business." He smiled at her. "Journeying through the world and righting wrongs as you go." [79]

"I really do think the vines would be a lovely idea," she declared; and the driver coughed again.

"See how the Hoodoos prepared you to revel in the present beauty," said Irving. "You just said that it wasn't necessary for all men to be handsome. Same thing applies to landscape, doesn't it?"

"But his mother is very handsome, I think," replied Mrs. Bruce, her butterfly habit of mind coming in play; "and that gentleman,—did he say—"

"Are you talking about Nixie? Oh yes, his mother is *grande dame*, and I've heard him speak of that uncle, Mr. Derwent, often. He's the capitalist of the family, I believe."

"The girl," went on Mrs. Bruce, "seems to be a companion. I noticed Mrs. Nixon didn't say much to her."

"Is that the sign of companionship?" asked Irving. "Something for you to fix, Madama."

"She's a very ladylike looking girl," replied Mrs. Bruce.

"Nixie'll talk to her all right if she has ears," remarked Irving.

"It's very nice of him to be nice to Betsy. Who else is in the stage?" [80]

"I didn't notice."

"Driver," Mrs. Bruce turned to her bureau of information, "did you notice who is on the back seat of our stage?"

The driver's imperturbable lips parted. "They put two heavers in there, I believe," he replied.

"*Who?*" Mrs. Bruce spoke in italics.

"Waitresses from the hotel. They move them sometimes with the crowd."

Mrs. Bruce kept silence a moment to recover the shock. The presence of the Nixon party still proved the respectability of the last stage, however.

"Heavers! Is that your slang out here?" she asked at last, and laughed. "I hope that isn't descriptive of the way we're going to be waited on, Irving."

Rosalie's heart fluttered again on leaving the stage at Norris Basin; but the celerity with which the experienced Miss Hickey hurried her into the hotel to take up their duties aided her wish to be unnoticed. The verandas were alive with passengers already arrived, all ravenous from hours of coaching in the mountain air.

At last Rosalie, in her white gown and apron, stood in her appointed place, and the crowds [81] began to be let into the dining-room. Miss Hickey was at some distance from Rosalie, and the latter felt a little hysterical rise in her throat in the knowledge that the snapping black eyes were watching for Irving Bruce.

The Nixon party came before the Bruces, and Mr. Derwent spied Rosalie and hastened his dignified footsteps toward her table.

"The waitress we had this morning," he said to Mrs. Nixon. "She has a head on her."

"Sounds alluringly like champagne," murmured Robert to Miss Maynard, who ignored him.

Rosalie involuntarily gave a shy smile as Mr. Derwent nodded at her. She could have embraced them all in her gladness to be delivered from waiting on the Bruces, who now entered, and, tragical to relate, fell short of Miss Hickey's table. That damsel, however, being at once overwhelmed with orders from a famished group, had no time to mourn.

Mr. Derwent looked with pleasant eyes at Rosalie when he ordered his soup.

"You enjoyed the drive over," he said. "There are roses in your cheeks."

"Yes, sir. Consommé?" returned Rosalie faintly, the blush roses referred to deepening to [82] Jacqueminot.

Robert glanced up and saw that this was the fair girl who had kept so still behind her veil on the back seat all the morning.

"I take my hat off to Uncle Henry," he said, again addressing Helen Maynard, who was seated beside him. "He can see more out of the back of his head than I can with my eyes."

"I will order for us both," said Mrs. Nixon to Rosalie; and forthwith proceeded to do so with an air which forbade levity.

When Rosalie had received her orders and hastened from the room, Robert again unburdened himself.

“If I could get at that rubber ear of Uncle Henry’s,” he remarked to his demure neighbor, “I’d tell him he was a sad dog. A very good thing he brought me on this trip.”

“Mr. Derwent’s eyes mean more to him than ours do to us, naturally,” returned Helen.

“And I tell you,” returned Robert devoutly, “anybody endears himself to Uncle Henry who brings his coffee just right. That blonde must have done it this morning. How,” turning to his [83]
mother, “does my mother enjoy democratic traveling? This girl is a peach; but you should see the other one that was with her this morning in the coach. Did you?”

“No,” returned Mrs. Nixon coldly. “Why should I trouble myself about my neighbors? I came to see the scenery.”

“Well,” Robert shrugged his shoulders, “all is, you’ve missed a chance to see how a perfect lady should behave. Her gum-manners were a dream; but cheer up! You’ll have a chance this afternoon, doubtless.”

Here Rosalie brought the soup. Helen Maynard looked up at her and received a strange impression of familiarity.

“She looks like some one,” she said softly. “Who is it?”

“I know,” responded Robert promptly, “Hebe.”

“I haven’t met her yet,” returned Helen. “I’m climbing the mount of Olympus by slow and easy stages.”

“Now if you mean anything about *me*,” returned Robert briskly, “speak right out. I can’t cope with clever people. If you’re clever, I’m done for.”

“Oh!” ejaculated Helen softly. “Lambeth!” [84]

“Is that any relative to shibboleth?” effervesced Robert. “Because I can say it. See? Better let me in.”

“Lambeth is a school,” returned Helen, and stole another look at their busy waitress; “a school where I went.”

Irving Bruce had Betsy on his right hand, but Mrs. Bruce absorbed him; and Betsy sat looking before her, idly waiting for her meal. Her roving glance fell suddenly on Rosalie’s blond head as the girl was leaving the dining-room.

“Why, that looked like Rosalie Vincent,” she reflected; then thought no more of it until later, when, her eyes again roving to that table, she obtained a full view of the fair-haired waitress as the girl refilled Mr. Derwent’s glass.

Betsy held her knife and fork poised, while her steady-going heart contracted for a second. “That is Rosalie Vincent!” She held the exclamation well inside, and looked at her neighbors. They had evidently noticed nothing, and Betsy devoutly hoped they would not. It was doubtful whether Mrs. Bruce would recognize her protégée in any case; but instinctively Betsy desired to [85]
prevent her from doing so; and contrary to her habit of speaking only when she was spoken to, she began commenting on the scenery; and Mrs. Bruce was impressed with the unusual docility and willingness to be enlightened displayed by her stiff-necked maid, whose thoughts were busy during the whole of her mistress’s patronizing information.

“And some time, Betsy,” finished Mrs. Bruce, “I will show you some pictures by a great artist named Doré, illustrating the Inferno, and you will be reminded of the Hoodoo Rocks.”

Betsy listened and replied so respectfully that her mistress remarked on it afterwards to Irving.

“All this travel is developing that hard, narrow New England mind of Betsy’s,” she said. “You can see it.”

And all the time Miss Foster was in a mild Inferno of her own, for her heart had always warmed to Rosalie Vincent, who used frequently to make her the confidante of her small hopes and fears, and whose sunny, confiding nature had endeared her to Betsy, and often aroused an [86]
unspoken sympathy in the sordid conditions of the girl’s lot.

Betsy’s one ambition now was to get the Bruces out of the dining-room before Mrs. Bruce should discover where the wings she had bestowed upon Rosalie had fluttered.

“I won’t try to see the child,” thought Betsy, “but I’ll write to her as soon as we get away from here.” She cast a furtive glance at the young girl. “She looks like one o’ these pretty actresses,” she thought, “rigged up to wait on table on the stage.”

She saw that Rosalie was keeping an eye on the Bruce party, and nervous in the fear of recognition; and this added to her relief when, Mrs. Bruce’s appetite satisfied, she begged Irving to hurry so that they might view the smoking wonders without.

CHAPTER VIII
THE BLONDE HEAVER

[87]

"Isn't it remarkable," asked Mrs. Bruce, "that we were just talking about the Inferno?"

She, with her companions, had come down from the hotel into the hissing, steaming tract of the Norris Basin.

Deep rumblings were in their ears. Narrow plank-walks formed a footing amid innumerable tiny boiling springs, while the threatening roar of larger ebullitions and the heavy sulphurous odors of the air gave every indication that here indeed was the gateway to that region where our forefathers believed that the unlucky majority paid the uttermost farthing.

The Nixons had also elected to walk through the Basin, meeting the stage at a point farther on.

"Say, Brute," called Robert, "doesn't this beat New Year's for the time, the place, and the good resolution?"

Mrs. Nixon's nostrils dilated in disgust at the evil smells.

Irving caught a glimpse of her expression.

[88]

"Mrs. Nixon is making up her mind never again to do anything wrong," he remarked.

"I always said my Hades would be noise," she replied, "but I begin to think it will be odors."

"I always said *mine* would be dirt," declared Mrs. Bruce, "but I believe I'd prefer that to being boiled. Irving, don't you let go of me. This is the wickedest place I ever saw. Those little sizzling springs are just hissing to catch my feet."

The party stopped to watch the heavy plop-plop of a mud geyser.

"Now," said Robert, "while we're all thinking on our sins and properly humble, is the time to get acquainted. Mrs. Bruce, this is my mother, and my uncle Mr. Derwent, and Miss Maynard; and Mr. Bruce you all know by reputation."

Betsy had moved to a remote corner of the geyser.

"I never know just how to address that member of your party," said Robert to Irving.

[89]

The latter smiled. "She would tell you she was just Betsy. She's such a good soul that down East, in the village where she comes from, they call her Clever Betsy; and she's all that New England means by the adjective, and all that Old England means, too."

Meanwhile Rosalie Vincent was making her hasty preparations for another move, and to her came Miss Hickey in a state of high satisfaction.

"I'm staying, Baby," she cried, her eyes snapping. "I guess there must be a lot of lay-overs. Anyway they need me, and there's a Swattie ball to-night. Hurray!" Miss Hickey executed a triumphant two-step and knocked over a chair.

Rosalie seized her arm. "Can't I stay too, then?" she asked anxiously.

"No, you can't, Blue-eyes. You're to go."

"Oh, you go and let me stay!" begged Rosalie nervously.

"And lose the ball?" exclaimed Miss Hickey. "Well, believe *me*, you've got nerve!"

Rosalie looked as if she were going to cry, and Miss Hickey's good-nature prompted a bit of comfort.

"Besides, if you're afraid of the lock-up, this is your chance to side-step those folks. More'n as like as not they're among the lay-overs."

[90]

At this consideration Rosalie did brighten, and when the last stage came around, Miss Hickey was present to speed the parting heaver whose apprehensive glance about her saw no familiar figure.

"Oh, they *are* staying, Miss Hickey!" she exclaimed, in hushed tones.

The sophisticated Miss Hickey did not respond, but nodded affably to the driver.

Rosalie breathed a relieved farewell as she left the big-boned bulwark of her friend and obeyed the agent's signal to enter the back seat of the stage. The vehicle was empty but for a stout man with a field glass strapped across his shoulders who mounted to the seat beside the driver, and they started.

The whole stage to herself! Rosalie could scarcely believe it.

She listened to the strange noises in the air and watched the steam which, mounting high, would make one believe that the locality was alive with factories. The girl's curious gaze roamed about, and she thought wistfully of such travelers as might visit at their leisure the wonders about her.

There were great beauties, however, even for a heaver to enjoy. The morning's ride had been a keen pleasure in the intervals of her embarrassment. The profusion of wild flowers; monk's-hood, [91] hare-bells, and Indian paintbrush, had fed her eyes with their splashes of color; and the behavior of the wild animals made one think of the millennium. Sure of protection from being hunted and slain, the chipmunks sat up on their hind legs close to the road, to watch the stage go by, clasping their tiny hands beneath their chins, like children in ecstasy at seeing a pretty show. Frequently one would be seen sitting up and nibbling the seeds from a long stem of grass, which he held in such a manner that he appeared to be playing a flute. A big marmot here and there lay along a bough or rock, turning his head lazily to view the tourists through his Eden. Boiling springs and boiling rivers, hill, vale, mountain, and waterfall—all these had Rosalie enjoyed, even with the fear that the Bruces would turn around; and now! Think of making one stage of the picturesque journey with no companion but her own thoughts! It seemed too good to be true; and she soon found that indeed it was so.

The driver drew his horses to a walk, and Rosalie perceived that many of the other stages were in sight, some of them stopping, and that tourists were entering them from the roadside. [92]

Soon it became the turn of the last stage, and Rosalie's heart bounded to recognize all the companions of the morning.

She saw Mrs. Bruce gaze sharply at the stout man in her seat by the driver.

"Won't your mother go up there, Nixie?" asked Irving.

Mrs. Nixon refusing, her son put Miss Maynard up, the young woman climbing to the place with alacrity.

Rosalie turned her head to gaze fixedly at the other side of the road. She grew warm as she felt some one climb into the seat beside her, but did not turn her head back, even when the coach started.

Finding herself not addressed, presently she turned about and looked squarely into the eyes of Betsy Foster.

"How do you do, Rosalie?" said the latter composedly.

"O Betsy!" exclaimed the girl softly, and seized the older woman's hand with an appealing grasp.

Betsy gave her one-sided smile, and Rosalie's eyes filled.

"You don't seem surprised!" she said unsteadily. [93]

"I am, though," returned Betsy. "I supposed we'd left you behind at Norris."

"You saw me there! Did the—did Mrs. Bruce?"

Betsy shook her head. "No; and she hasn't yet; but I was thinkin' about you as we came up to the stage, and when all of a sudden I saw you, I thought I'd get in here."

The Nixon party were directly in front of them, and the Bruces in the next seat, and all were conversing busily among themselves.

"I'm so glad to see you, Betsy, that I can hardly bear it;" and a bright tear rolled swiftly down Rosalie's cheek, as she leaned back in her corner to regain her self-control.

"I've thought about you considerable," returned Betsy, "and I haven't been any too easy."

"I told Mrs. Pogram, I promised her, that if I were in any trouble I would write. How kind of you!" with a sudden burst of gratitude and a continued clinging to Betsy's slender fingers. "How kind of you to care!"

"Of course I cared, child," returned the other.

"And you saw me being a waitress!" [94]

"Yes. First-rate idea for college boys," answered Betsy quietly. "It's quite the fashion for a lot of 'em to help themselves through school that way. I don't know about it exactly for girls in a strange land,—little country girls that don't know anything about the world; I don't know whether I like it or not."

"It's a good way to see the world," said Rosalie, without enthusiasm.

"Yes; and ain't it a beautiful one out here? Is that what you did it for, Rosalie?"

"Partly—not exactly. I was getting away from Loomis."

Betsy nodded. "I heard he pestered you."

Rosalie looked off reminiscently. "I didn't tell Auntie Pogram, because I didn't want to hurt her feelings; but the reason Loomis began being so unkind to me was because I wouldn't marry him."

"I suspected as much," said Betsy.

"So long as he was Auntie Pogram's brother I knew there was no hope of escaping him if I

stayed there, and so—I ran away. It was selfish. My conscience has never felt easy; but I couldn't endure his insults."

"I suppose not," returned Betsy. Her tone was quiet, but there were sparks in her usually [95]
inexpressive eyes, and had Loomis Brown suddenly appeared it might have gone ill with his rapidly thinning hair.

"What did you do? How did you manage to get so far from home?" continued Betsy.

"I first went to a boarding-house that I knew of in Portland, and there I met a lady who had been taken ill and wanted to go back to her home in Chicago; but she had a little child and didn't feel able to travel with him alone; so she agreed to pay my fare to Chicago if I would help her home. I didn't know how I would ever get back, but it was getting away from Loomis, so I went. On the train I met a woman who spoke of a place in Chicago where they took girls to wait on table in the Yellowstone; so as soon as I could, I applied, and they took me and sent me out here."

"And do you like it?" asked Betsy, eyeing the mignonne face closely.

"No, of course I don't like it, exactly, and I've been frightened ever since I saw you all at the Mammoth Hot Springs, for I was sure Mrs. Bruce would be disgusted with me. She expected me to make some use of her kindness."

"Don't worry," returned Betsy dryly. "She's short-sighted, and ten to one she won't see you; [96]
and if she does, she probably won't remember you."

"I may yet, you know," said Rosalie eagerly, "I may yet reward her kindness; but I had no money, so I couldn't stop to see about any school position; and besides, Loomis lives in Portland."

"Oh, don't bother about him," said Betsy carelessly. "One donkey more or less that you meet in the street isn't goin' to affect you. He'll be busy wavin' his long ears at Mrs. Pogram's new help; for she'll have to get somebody. I went to see her just before we left, and heard the whole story."

Rosalie laughed softly, and her eyes filled again. "O Betsy, it's so long since I laughed!" she said; and her tone was so earnest and sad that Betsy averted her head and saw the scenery through a blur. "I was in the stage all this morning. It's a wonder you didn't feel how longingly I looked at the back of your head."

"You were?" asked Betsy, surprised. "Are you goin' with us all the way?"

"I don't know. I may be left anywhere. I thought I had left you this time and hoped so, Betsy, [97]
because I was afraid of Mrs. Bruce; but oh, how glad I am now! for it's such a comfort to see you, since you're not angry with me."

"Not a bit," replied Miss Foster, going to the length of patting the hand that held hers. "I would be, though, if you'd gone off and didn't write me or let me know where you were; but you didn't know that we were home."

"No. That's why I was so startled to see you at the Hot Springs. I had thought I was thousands of miles from any one who knew me."

"I shan't lose track of you again," declared Betsy quietly.

"O Betsy, do you care?" The girl drew closer to her neighbor's angular shoulder. The expression in her lovely eyes disconcerted Betsy as she met it. "There isn't any one else in the world to care. I've had lots of time since I left Chicago to think how alone I am, and I've been as disappointed in myself as Mrs. Bruce could be because I'm not brave about it. There have been moments at night when I was sorry, Loomis and all, that I ever left Fairport."

Betsy patted the hand again. "I do care, Rosalie. I won't ask you to promise me, because if you [98]
need to be bound by a promise you don't want me for a friend; but I tell you now that I expect you to keep in touch with me. I wish I could stay by you or keep you near me, but I can't. I can, though, be some help to you perhaps, one way or another, and I'll be glad to have you feel that way, and never get into a tight place without letting me know."

"I do promise, Betsy, so gratefully," began Rosalie; and then Mr. Derwent turned around and met her eyes with a kind smile in his. He indicated a point in the woods. Rosalie looked and descried the spreading antlers of a deer, which stood bright-eyed and motionless in the shadow and watched the stage go by. Mr. Derwent had been the first to discover the animal, but soon everybody in the stage was alert.

"Oh, the deer! Look at the deer!" sped from mouth to mouth.

"What a sermon to men-folks!" exclaimed Betsy. "The way the critters act in this Park is a wonder, just because men's savage instincts are restrained."

"Yes," said Rosalie. "I've been saying to myself over and over Emerson's poem,— [99]

'Who hath named the birds without a gun?'"

Betsy regarded her with the one-sided smile.

"Still speak poetry, do you, even though you do bring folks their soup?"

“Oh, yes.” Rosalie gave her head a sad little shake. “When I stop thinking and feeling poetry, I shall have stopped breathing.”

Everybody was commenting on the curious action of the beautiful wild creature in the forest, Robert declaring that he had buck fever.

When the excitement had subsided, he leaned forward to Irving’s ear.

“Your faithful retainer has found her tongue,” he said. “She and Uncle Henry’s Hebe are talking thirteen to the dozen.”

“Has Mr. Derwent a Hebe on board?”

“Yes. A genius who has brought him good coffee for two meals. Watch him head for her table this noon; and she’s unnecessarily pretty.”

Upon this Irving turned around and caught Betsy’s eye; then a glimpse of the blond young girl who was her companion.

“Glad she’s having a good time,” he said, turning back. Then to Mrs. Bruce, “Betsy has made friends with a pretty waitress back there.” [100]

“Oh, we still have the domestics, the heavers, with us, have we?” laughed Mrs. Bruce.

“Is that what they call them!” exclaimed Robert alertly, but continuing to speak softly. “Didn’t you see the other one we had this morning? The spearmint expert? Alas, she is no more; but if this one had stayed, I can tell you Uncle Henry would have stayed too.”

“O Robert!” exclaimed Mrs. Nixon, anxious to make a diversion, “could you get me some of that very peculiar red flower?”

The stage was climbing a gentle incline and Robert swung himself out and gathered the blossoms.

“Want some?” asked Irving of his companion.

Mrs. Bruce certainly did, and Irving accordingly jumped out, also. She turned to Mrs. Nixon, smiling.

“We’re pretty fortunate women,” she said.

Mrs. Nixon sighed. “Robert is such a scatterbrain,” she returned.

Mrs. Bruce continued her glance around, curious to see the waitress who had been the subject of remark. She saw a fair young girl wearing a veil; but her near-sighted glance awakened no memory. [101]

“I’m glad,” she thought, “that Betsy has some one to talk to.”

CHAPTER IX
THE FOUNTAIN HOUSE

[102]

It was late and cold when the party reached the Fountain House, and the big open fire burning in the office was a welcome sight.

Robert Nixon's prophecy was fulfilled, and Mr. Derwent managed to be waited upon by Rosalie at supper. The Bruce party happened to sit with their backs to that table, and indeed Betsy did not expect either of her companions to recognize the girl in this place and position so remote from the spot where they had known her but slightly.

Mrs. Pogram had often in past days spoken to Betsy of her husband's distant relatives the Vincents, once wealthy and highly placed, then reduced to financial ruin, illness, and death, leaving this pretty blossom alone on the family tree. The good lady had often mentioned, as being to Rosalie's credit, that she was without false pride or foolish reverting to the past of her luxurious childhood; and the situation had appealed to whatever was romantic in Betsy Foster's [103] breast. There had always been for her some atmosphere about Rosalie Vincent as of the exiled Princess in servitude, and the sweetness with which the girl undertook Mrs. Pogram's drudgery had oftentimes excited an admiration in Betsy which she never put into words.

She fought now with a sense of pathos that Rosalie should be hurrying back and forth under the orders of hungry travelers.

Irving commented at supper upon Betsy's sociability with the pretty waitress in the stage, and some instinct bade the good woman guard her secret.

"She is a very intelligent girl," Betsy replied. "It seems it's quite a common thing for nice poor girls to see the Park in this way."

"A very good idea, too," remarked Mrs. Bruce. "Just as the college boys wait on table in the White Mountain resorts."

Betsy breathed more freely. If Mrs. Bruce were going to approve this move of Rosalie's, it would be a relief. Fully able to fight her own battles, she shrank sensitively from hearing this girl discussed and criticised.

"That's what I say, too," she returned. "I think it shows good courage in a girl to strike out and [104] see something of the world. It shows character and enterprise."

Irving looked at his old friend curiously. It was unlike her to express so much. It was some embarrassment to Betsy to take her meals with her employers, as the herding together of crowds for food on this trip made necessary; and this was the first time she had opened her lips voluntarily at table.

In the mean time Rosalie was again winning laurels from the Nixons, and Helen Maynard looked up at her as she gave her orders.

When the party left the table, Helen lagged behind.

"Miss Vincent, Rosalie," she said low to the waitress, "don't you remember me at Lambeth?"

Rosalie colored.

"Yes; but please don't remember me!" she returned.

Helen eyed her sharply.

"I mean it," said Rosalie. "You're very kind, but I'll tell you some time."

She turned away, and Robert Nixon advanced toward them.

"Pardon me, Miss Maynard, I thought you were ahead of me." Then when they had moved [105] toward the door, he laughed. "Have you caught the infection? Mother is gravely considering getting the girl's address and having her come to Boston."

"She blushed like the traditional rose when I spoke to her," returned Helen, and said no more.

The recognition of her school-friend put Rosalie in a new flutter; and yet such was the joy of sitting on the back seat of the stage with Betsy that she had not the heart to hope for orders to stay at the Fountain House.

For the hundredth time she calculated what money Mrs. Bruce had expended on her course in English, and for the hundredth time felt herself wither under the scorn of that lady's eyes should she recognize her and discover that, after all, she had not been able to rise above the level where she was found.

"If I could only pay her! If I could only pay her!" sang through the girl's head like an ever-recurring refrain.

The sudden announcement that the Fountain Geyser was about to play caused a stampede among the guests of the hotel, and everybody who had wraps to withstand the cold of the July evening hastened out to be in time for the show.

Mrs. Bruce was greatly excited. “It’s a shame, a perfect shame that the Company don’t warn people to bring flannels and furs,” she said. “Even my sweater feels like muslin.” [106]

“You’re going to wear my overcoat, Madama,” said Irving, beginning to put it about her.

“No indeed, Mr. Irving,” burst forth Betsy, and was rewarded by a flash behind Mrs. Bruce’s eyeglasses.

“Do you suppose I should allow him, Betsy? What are you thinking of!”

As she spoke sharply, the offended woman drew away from her son, and Betsy hastened to mollify her.

“I’m going to wrap you up in my things, Mrs. Bruce,” she said.

The lady made a faint protest.

“Yes, ma’am, you let me, because you couldn’t drag me away from this fire anyway. I’d rather see flames spout than water to-night.”

Irving frowned. “You didn’t come across the continent for that, Betsy,” he began.

She gave him her one-sided smile. “I came across the continent because I had to,” she returned, meanwhile making her slender mistress shapeless under a large golf-cape. “I’ve been readin’ the guide-book; and I’ve got lots o’ geysers comin’ to me yet.” [107]

“I do think,” said Mrs. Bruce, when she and Irving were out of doors and hastening on their way to the widespread crust of the formation, “I do think Betsy might be more appreciative of her advantages. Almost any one else would value more the privilege of a visit to the Yellowstone.”

“Yes,” returned Irving dryly, “and the more the other one appreciated it, the less she’d lend you her golf-cape.”

Mrs. Bruce looked at him. “You always take Betsy’s part!” she exclaimed.

“I’m only showing you that you chose your companion wisely,” was the quiet reply. “There, Madama, it’s beginning. Can you sprint?”

Mrs. Bruce could sprint with any girl that lived, and they were soon on the outskirts of the shivering, eager crowd, and Mrs. Bruce was making little ineffectual hops in the endeavor to see over and between the heads of those in front of her. But instantly the fountain shot into the air and played in the mysterious twilight under a cold pale moon, and a hush fell upon all.

Betsy had the open fire practically to herself; and she sat before it, ruminating deeply. It seemed strange to think of Rosalie so near and yet so far. How she longed to get out into that forbidden department and lend the aid of her capable hands to whatever work the young girl was doing. She wondered what a day would bring forth. Possibly she should not see Rosalie again; and if the girl were sent on with them to-morrow to the Old Faithful Inn, she knew that the Bruces’ plan was to remain there for a few days, and there she would doubtless lose her definitely. [108]

“Mrs. Bruce used to call her her protégée!” she thought. A long determined breath came from Betsy’s breast. “She’s goin’ to be Betsy Foster’s protégée now, and I ain’t goin’ to lose sight of her.”

She continued to look thoughtfully into the leaping flames, and even her practical common sense was not proof against their age-long ability to show the gazer alluring possibilities.

A certain rough seaman mending his sail in far-off Yankee land little realized that, could his canvas be turned into a magic carpet, this was his psychological moment.

“I suppose,” Betsy was reflecting, “’tain’t Mrs. Pogram’s fault that she hasn’t as much backbone as a jelly-fish.” [109]

A broad, strong flame flew squarely up toward the chimney. “I suppose if—if I ever was—soft enough—to— Well, Hiram’s a good soul. He’d be kind as any father to Rosalie.”

Betsy suddenly realized that the fire was making her face hot, and she put up her hand to shield it.

Meanwhile Hiram Salter was placidly sitting cross-legged over his prostrate sail. A piece of twine held in his lips fell down each side of his chin, giving him some resemblance to a gigantic catfish.

A few days later he received a picture-postal from the Fountain House Hotel in the Yellowstone. It was dated on the evening when Betsy sat so long before the fire; and it read,—

DEAR H.:

Cold as Xmas here.

B. F.

And the good man never suspected that in reality it had never been as little cold for him in all his years of courtship as on the evening when that postal card was bought; and that in place of the curt message might truly have run a bit from Rosalie Vincent's repertoire:— [110]

Never the time and the place,
And the loved one, all together.

The next morning dawned bright. If Rosalie was in the breakfast-room, Betsy did not see her.

When later she entered the back seat of the last stage, Betsy looked about anxiously. Irving came to the step.

"Mrs. Bruce and Nixie are up there with the driver. I'm coming in with you," he said.

"Just wait one minute, Mr. Irving," returned Betsy. "If—if that young—waitress is going along with us, she'd feel—sort of embarrassed if—"

"Well—well,"—Irving looked up into the narrow face and laughed,—"this is the first time you ever turned me down."

He looked about. Mrs. Nixon, Miss Maynard, and Mr. Derwent were in the middle seat as before. The stout gentleman and another man were in the seat in front of them.

"And you'd put me in there with four hundred pounds of tourist?" went on Irving. "Nay, nay, Betsy. I'll get over there in the corner beyond you and promise to keep my place." [111]

"Oh, they're going to start," said Betsy in trepidation, "and—and she isn't here. Couldn't you get him to wait, Mr. Irving? I—"

Irving swung into the stage as the horses moved.

"My dear Betsy, we've ceased to be individuals. We're part of a system," he said as he seated himself beside her. "When the Park authorities say this stage moves, it moves."

Betsy leaned back, her lip caught under her teeth and her expression so abstracted that Irving stared at her curiously.

"I do believe," he said incredulously, "that Betsy Foster, clever Betsy, has fallen in love."

"How you talk!" returned his companion, recovering herself; and being quite conscious of Rosalie and a little conscious of her fire-lit fancies, an astonishing color rose under her sallow skin.

Irving laughed. "After all these years, our sedate Betsy—"

"How you act, Mr. Irving!" [112]

The speaker tried not to smile, but continued to look so guilty and red-faced that Irving's laughter grew.

"After all these years; the heart that I thought was mine—given to a heaver!"

"I'd like to have said good-by to her," said Betsy. "She's—she ain't the—the independent kind—and I—"

Irving looked at her kindly. "How does that big heart of yours find room in that slender body?" he asked. "Cats and dogs and horses and humans—it's all one to you. You've taken a brief to defend them all."

"Oh, Mr. Irving!"—Betsy looked off at the landscape,—"if I could defend them all!"

"Why that tragic look?"

"Your words made me think again, as I so often do, that in a world full of so much beauty as this, people are cuttin' up live animals in the name of science, and the law permits it."

Irving shook his head. He had heard before Betsy's horror-stricken views of vivisection.

"Human life is the most precious of all," he reminded her, now.

"Yes, but don't just as fine physicians as any say that the unnatural conditions in vivisection prevent any good coming from it? Yes, they do; and supposing it *did* do any good! Don't most civilized people believe in an after-life? If they're going to live to eternity anyway, and have got to pass through death some time, how can they be willing to have their lives in this world prolonged a few years at the cost of torturing innocent animals? That's what I say. How *can* they—and then expect any heaven awaits *them*?" [113]

"I haven't thought much about it," said Irving.

"Well, think now, then!" returned Betsy. "I know *I'd* rather die any time than have a live dog cut up on the chance of helping to keep me here a little longer; and I shouldn't dare show myself before the Maker of the dog if I wouldn't! And everybody who doesn't vote against it, and work against it, deserves to see their own pets on the rack. I guess that would bring it home to them!"

Betsy winked hard as she finished, and Irving patted her slight shoulder.

“I haven’t the slightest doubt that you’re right, Betsy, but for a few days we can’t do anything about it; and now let’s talk about something that makes you happy—heavers, for instance.” [114]

Betsy’s usually inexpressive eyes had a wistfulness in them as she turned toward the strong face she loved. “I can’t bear to have her any place where she could be called a heaver!” she responded.

“That young woman must be a wonder,” said Irving. “She’s the first, I’ll wager, to make a conquest of Betsy Foster in one day!”

“Your mother’s about the only one that ever did that, Mr. Irving.”

Betsy’s eyes fell upon a chipmunk by the roadside, sitting up and clasping its hands under its chin in the customary admiration of the stage.

“See that little critter?” she continued. “This girl is just as innocent as that chipmunk, and knows just as much o’ the ways o’ the world. It goes by her; and though her heart sort o’ comes up in her throat, she cheers up under the least kindness and is willin’ to admire everything and everybody.”

“Well, well! What an impression in one day on my unimpressionable Betsy!” Irving smiled, genuinely surprised by this unprecedented interest.

“That girl was the child o’ luxury,” went on his companion,—“lost everything, parents included, [115] and came to be practically a servant in the home of a poor relation. Got so persecuted by the attentions of a skinflint man who wanted her to be *his* drudge that she ran away, and somehow drifted into waitin’ on hungry folks in the Yellowstone!”

Irving smiled. “She told a story well, anyway. She has missed her vocation. Some one ought to tell her the pen is mightier than the knife and fork.”

“It’s easy to tell the truth,” returned Betsy, nettled by his tone.

Irving laughed. “For Clever Betsy, I do believe; but for most people always difficult, and usually unsafe.”

“H’m,” returned his companion, “this girl was tellin’ the truth and I know it.”

Here the stage stopped and the passengers dismounted to see a pool of great beauty which was out of sight from the road; and when they returned, Betsy’s abstraction had vanished; and although she evidently enjoyed Irving’s companionship on the long drive, not another word on the subject of her companion of yesterday could be elicited from her.

Once Mr. Derwent turned around and met her eyes. [116]

“Where is your young friend?” he asked.

Betsy shook her head. “She didn’t come,” she answered.

They had reached a point where the road forked; and Betsy’s glance was arrested by a sign placed at the point of divergence. It read:—

“All loose and pack animals take this road.”

Her lips twitched as she turned toward Irving.

“Do you s’pose,” she asked, “that all the loose and pack animals can read that?”

CHAPTER X
ON THE RIVERSIDE

[117]

Pools of heavenly tints; living emerald, and beryl; boiling springs, the scalding water bubbling with intense force; Nature's wonders ever varied, entertained the party on their way to the Old Faithful Inn,—the luxurious log-cabin of the Yellowstone.

Arrived there, each one took a long breath as if it were a Mecca reached. The examination of the curious and fascinating structure, with the woodsy green furnishings of the log bedrooms, which carried out the sylvan idea in all possible particulars, entertained the tourists until they were admitted to the dining-room.

Betsy looked with rather sad eyes upon the waitresses, and suddenly her heart gave a little jump, for unless those eyes deceived her, Rosalie Vincent was tripping busily about at the other end of the room.

Mr. Derwent did not espy her evidently, for he led his party to another table, and the Bruces stopped halfway down the room. Not a word said Betsy, but her slow color rose. The crowd was [118] great at this favorite place. Rosalie had evidently been sent on by the earliest stage, and Betsy shrewdly suspected that she would be kept here. She began planning at once an evening's visit with the girl.

Mrs. Bruce was delighted with the novelty of the Inn and so far had not suggested any improvements.

"We must drive right after dinner to some of these wonderful places," she said. "Isn't it restful to think we haven't to rush about and freeze to see Old Faithful, because it's so regular! It's a pity, though, that it doesn't play exactly every hour. There's five minutes or ten minutes over that you always have to remember."

Irving shook his head. "These careless authorities," he said.

Mrs. Bruce shrugged her shoulders. "I'm sure that was a very innocent remark," she retorted.

"Innocent to simplicity, Madama; but remember what you lose in convenience by the present schedule, you gain in mathematical exercise."

"I didn't come out here for mathematical exercise," began Mrs. Bruce; and went on to [119] comment on some of the beauties of the morning drive; but Irving lost the thread of her remarks, for he happened to catch sight of Rosalie Vincent, and looked again more closely.

Not to interrupt Mrs. Bruce's eulogies, he touched Betsy's hand and motioned with his head toward the blonde waitress.

"Isn't that the loved and lost?" he asked softly.

Betsy looked nonchalantly in the direction he indicated. "Why, so 'tis," she said quietly.

Mrs. Bruce turned her eyeglasses upon them. "Of course if you and Betsy want to talk, don't mind interrupting me."

"Thanks, Madama. I've been drying Betsy's tears all the morning shed for the loss of her blonde heaver; and I just discovered her, that's all. You'll excuse me, won't you?"

Mrs. Bruce peered near-sightedly down the hall, but saw nothing nearly so interesting as her soup, so returned to it.

Betsy waited for Irving's next words, expecting they might be of recognition; but he went on eating, as he added:—

"You'd better make it a point to see her, this trip, and tell her to try her hand at a pathetic tale [120] for the Maiden's Home Companion!"

Betsy gave a one-sided smile of relief. "Mrs. Bruce, you indulged this young man too much a spell back. He'd ought to been disciplined 'fore 'twas too late."

"That from you!" returned Mrs. Bruce complacently. "You never wanted me even to contradict him."

After dinner the men of the party put the four women into a wagon, whose driver was warranted to let Mrs. Bruce lose nothing which could be seen and heard in one afternoon, and started off for a tramp.

Their first pause was at the exquisite liquid flower known as the Morning Glory Pool. The wondrous color and shape of this spring held them long. Some one, either with a wish to test its depth, or desiring to furnish the blue morning glory with a pistil, had dropped a stick into its centre.

Irving smiled at his own thoughts. "The driver is lucky if Madama doesn't make him get out and fish for that stick," he thought.

After their ramble of an hour the friends halted near the Riverside Geyser, where the [121]

gathering crowd indicated that it would soon spout.

In moving about for desirable points of vantage, Mr. Derwent and Robert Nixon became separated from Irving, who from his greater height was satisfied with his position behind a knot of persons on the river bank. Among them was a young girl with her back to him. She was bareheaded and wore a white gown. Irving looked twice idly at her because her hair was pretty, and then noticed that a couple of soldiers, off duty, spoke to her and that she tried to repel them.

"Come now, Goldilocks," said one of them ingratiatingly, in his hoarse voice, "wasn't I introduced to you all right at Norris? Don't be stuck up."

He came closer, with open admiration. The girl made some soft reply, then turned, and there was no mistaking the look, half of annoyance and half of fear, in her childlike face.

Irving stepped forward instinctively, and recognized Betsy's friend. He had noticed in the dining-room that the girl bore a resemblance to some one he had seen, but he had not been able to locate it.

"O Mr. Bruce!" she ejaculated involuntarily, coming nearer as if for protection. [122]

The soldiers saw him lift his hat, and fell back.

"Rosalie—Miss Vincent—is it you?" said Irving, all Betsy's interest and concern explained in a flash.

She shrank away. "I—I didn't mean to speak to you," she said naïvely; and she cast down her eyes with an expression which sent a thrill of compassion across the man's heart-strings. He remembered Mrs. Pogram's lachrymose tale, and Betsy's romance of the morning. "I was afraid Mrs. Bruce would be offended to find me here, after all she has done for me," went on Rosalie, her heart beating fast; "but—but I couldn't help it."

The artless words and the graceful, culprit attitude were appealing.

"I saw you in the dining-room, but didn't remember you at first," answered Irving. "I dare say you wouldn't have chosen this work, but I hope you are getting some pleasure out of it."

Rosalie shook her head. "It is very beautiful, and—and it wouldn't be lonely if there weren't any—any people about; but I don't know how to get on very well with—with the others." [123]

Irving glanced over toward the young soldiers who were alive to Rosalie's tête-à-tête. He could imagine that this golden head, on which the mountain sun was glinting, would be a shining mark for local admiration. Betsy's disturbed feeling was becoming better understood with every moment.

"I had an hour to myself and I wanted so much to see this geyser play. I didn't wait for my hat or anything. I just ran." Rosalie put her hand to her bare head, apologetically.

"I've great curiosity to see this one, too," replied Irving. "Why don't we sit down till the show begins?" He indicated a spot on the greensward where a tree cast its shadow, for the afternoon sun was ardent.

"Please don't think you must stay with me," responded the girl, with a timid, grateful smile which made her prettier than ever. "I'm not really at all afraid of those soldiers. Perhaps I did meet them with a waitress at Norris who knows them all; and they don't mean any harm."

"I dare say not; but sit down, Miss Rosalie. It's as good a place to wait as any."

So she obeyed, quite frightened and happy. Frightened because she did not know what [124] moment her powerful benefactress might appear on the scene, and happy because—because—well, she had during two whole seasons admired Irving Bruce from afar and looked very wistfully at the girls who shared his summer fun; and now he was disposing his large person near her on the grass as if it were the most natural thing in the world.

"You and Betsy Foster had a long séance yesterday in the stage, didn't you?" he said, leaning on his elbow and looking up into the blue eyes that he could see were not quite at ease.

"Yes, indeed. Oh, what it was to get hold of Betsy's hand and sit beside her all the morning!"

"Why didn't she tell Mrs. Bruce and me that one of our old neighbors was in our party?"

"She knew," Rosalie flushed, "that I dreaded to have Mrs. Bruce know it."

"Why? I can't imagine why."

"Because Mrs. Bruce helped me so much, and meant me to do something so different. She gave me a course in English in the fine school at Lambeth, and she had a right to expect I would [125] be teaching, and doing her kindness credit."

"Time enough for that in the fall, I should think."

"But I haven't any position. I had no way to—to live until—I could get one." The speaker averted her face, not so quickly but that Irving saw the blue eyes were swimming.

Had Rosalie been the most artful of girls she could not have planned words and actions more

effective to win the championship of Mrs. Bruce's son, knowing as he did the history of her flight.

"I met Mrs. Pogram a few weeks ago in Fairport," he replied. "She told me of her loss of you."

Rosalie did not speak. She furtively wiped her eyes.

"Does Mrs. Pogram know where you are?"

"No. It seems unkind, for I know she is fond of me; but I promised her that if I were in any trouble I would write her; and if she knew where I was, her brother would know, and I—I can't endure him!" The girl finished with a flash of energy.

"You show faultless taste," returned Irving. "Don't be afraid of Mrs. Bruce. She won't expect [126] you to be teaching English in the Yellowstone."

"They have an English of their own," returned Rosalie. "Probably if you knew what I am, you wouldn't be talking to me as if I were a summer girl."

Her faint smile suddenly shone upon him, for she felt he meant to placate Mrs. Bruce.

Irving laughed. "I do know something of the Park lingo. You're taking another course in English, that's all."

"Yes, I am."

Rosalie suddenly thought of Miss Hickey and wondered what that young person would say if clairvoyance could show her this picture on the river bank.

"What are your plans, if it's a fair question?" Irving asked.

"I haven't any, Mr. Bruce." Again the anxious look in the blue eyes. "Of course, I finish the season in the Park. If I don't, I forfeit my expenses being paid to return."

"Did they bring you 'way from Portland?"

"No, from Chicago."

"Ah!" Irving raised his eyebrows, but asked no question. "You mustn't let us lose sight of you," [127] he added.

"That's very kind. What I have felt was that I mustn't let you catch sight of me," returned the girl naïvely. "I wasn't afraid of you, Mr. Bruce, for I didn't think you'd remember me at all; and—I do so appreciate your kindness."

Irving looked at her with considering eyes. Her half-timid, half-respectful manner was novel, and the little burst of gratitude with which she finished was most agreeable. He recalled that Betsy had said that this girl, apparently so alone in the world, had been born and reared in luxury. With the eye of a connoisseur he regarded her now, and pictured what a triumphant march her girlhood would have been had she remained in the class of Fortune's favorites.

Meanwhile Mr. Derwent and Robert Nixon, threading their way among the waiting knots of sightseers, approached the spot where the above conversation was taking place.

Mr. Derwent was first to perceive the pair.

"See there, Robert," he said, with his crisp, short manner of speech. "I think we've seen only one head that matches the Yellowstone?"

His nephew followed the direction of the other's fixed gaze. [128]

"Well, I'll—be—" he began, "if there isn't Brute, fussing our heaver."

Mr. Derwent laid a restraining hand on the arm of his companion, who made an instant move in his friend's direction.

"Not a bit of it," replied Robert, close to his uncle's ear. "It's up to us to rescue her. She isn't *his* heaver."

"She doesn't look as if she wished to be rescued," remarked Mr. Derwent; and the concern in his face moved his irreverent nephew to merriment.

"You see Hebe isn't a goddess, after all," he remarked into the rubber device which hung about his uncle's neck. "Just a nice, every-day heaver; and her hair's caught Brute. Let's go and see."

Mr. Derwent's face was impassive as he followed. The childlike eyes and the modest demeanor of the pretty waitress had greatly attracted him. He was sorry to find her like this.

Bruce sprang to his feet as they approached. He read mischief in Robert's eyes, and his own were unresponsive.

Robert nodded and grinned cheerfully at Rosalie before Irving could get possession of what [129] Robert termed his uncle's rubber ear. Then he said with a distinctness intended to awe and repress Nixie, "I have found an old friend, Mr. Derwent. A young lady whose home is where we go in summer. Let me present you to Miss Vincent."

Robert reconstructed his countenance as well as he could, and Mr. Derwent's face cleared as he raised his hat. "Mr. Nixon, Miss Vincent," went on Irving severely.

"I have waited on these gentlemen," said the girl, looking at Mr. Derwent.

"You deserted our stage this morning," he answered, and deliberately dropped upon the grass beside Rosalie, while she explained, blushing, how she had been hurried on early because of the crowds.

"Pooh!" said Robert aside to Irving. "Old friend of yours?" He snapped his fingers. "Piffle! Likewise gammon. She's fed us for two days."

"I'm glad to hear it," responded Irving stiffly. "Otherwise I couldn't quite understand your greeting of her as you came up."

Robert laughed unrestrainedly. "Just got off with my skin, eh?"

"She's all alone out here," said Irving, flushing under the sincerity of his friend's merriment, [130]
but continuing to scowl.

"She is, eh?" returned Nixie. "Then all I have to say is she must be the author of that spooky declaration, 'I'm never less alone than when alone.' See there," motioning with his head toward an advancing group of women, "there come the rest of us. We can't lose 'em."

CHAPTER XI
FACE TO FACE

[131]

The ladies had left their wagon, to move about and break the long drive by the view of the Riverside Geyser in action. As they approached their friends, Mrs. Nixon put up her lorgnette.

"Isn't that my brother sitting there on the grass?" she asked.

"Certainly it is, and there are the boys," rejoined Mrs. Bruce with satisfaction, hastening her steps.

Behind them followed Betsy Foster and Miss Maynard.

"To whom is Henry talking?" asked Mrs. Nixon. "Why,—why, Mrs. Bruce! I never knew him to do anything so strange! It's that waitress—that waitress that came on with us in the stage."

"I didn't notice her," returned Mrs. Bruce. "I was always sitting in front."

"She has waited on us at the hotels," said Mrs. Nixon, and her tone grew colder. "Men are so thoughtless. I liked the girl so much. I was seriously thinking of making an arrangement with her [132] for the fall—"

Here, as they had come within speaking distance, Mrs. Nixon's lips closed. Mr. Derwent's necessarily devoted attitude as he now tried to catch something Rosalie was saying settled the matter with Mrs. Nixon, and lost the girl her chance of an assured winter home.

Mrs. Bruce stared curiously at the bare golden head; and Miss Maynard and Betsy, following, descried Mr. Derwent and the waitress at the same moment.

"Rosalie!" said Helen Maynard, under her breath.

"Do you know her?" asked Betsy, in surprise.

"Yes. We were at school together."

Betsy's footsteps quickened, for she felt vaguely that Rosalie might indeed need protection now.

Mrs. Bruce began speaking with her usual energy.

"I'm so glad we're in time, Irving. I told that driver if he didn't get us back at the right moment to see this geyser play, he'd never be forgiven. We've been to the oddest place called Biscuit Basin; a great pool just covered with nicely browned biscuit. It made one hungry to look at them. [133] But the hot water we splashed through to get there! I shall be boiled yet in this place."

The moment Rosalie caught sight of Mrs. Bruce, she sprang to her feet with supple swiftness. Mr. Derwent deliberately arose and met his sister's disapproving eyes imperturbably. He put on the hat which for coolness he had been holding on his knee.

Rosalie flushed and paled and met Betsy's eyes so entreatingly that the latter stepped forward by her employer's side.

At that moment Mrs. Bruce for the first time gave her attention to the young girl.

"Why!" she said, and hesitated.

Irving knew that she was trying to place the memory of an individual who had once interested her.

"It is Miss Rosalie Vincent, Madama," he said quietly. "She surprised me a few minutes ago."

"It *is* Rosalie," said Mrs. Bruce; and approaching, she shook hands with the girl she had befriended. In the same moment her alert mind recalled all that Mrs. Nixon had just said.

A waitress. The waitress who had traveled in their stage. The waitress with whom Betsy had [134] talked yesterday.

Her manner cooled. The pupils of her eyes narrowed.

"I am surprised to see you here," she said.

"I knew you would be," was all the girl could answer, and her face burned.

Betsy spoke. "You wondered where her wings would carry her, Mrs. Bruce, and now you see. Good strong wings, you'll agree, to go 'way across the continent."

Rosalie lifted her eyes to her friend.

Mr. Derwent could not hear what was being said, but he gathered from the attitude of his sister and Mrs. Bruce and the painful crimson of Rosalie's face, that some arraignment was taking place.

"I suppose even the best of women are cats at heart," he reflected; then he spoke aloud. "Miss Vincent and I have been making discoveries. Her father was a connection of our family, and on

the Glee Club with me at college."

"Henry!" Mrs. Nixon seized the rubber disk that hung at his vest and spoke across it firmly. "I have just heard a man say that the geyser is beginning to play. Let us go closer to the bank." [135]

She took her brother's arm and led him away. Mrs. Bruce did the same with Irving, who exchanged one glance with Betsy over her head as he yielded.

Robert followed with Miss Maynard, and Betsy put her arm around Rosalie.

"Now then, that's over," she said.

The girl's eyes were still dilated and she did not speak.

Betsy gave her a gentle shake. "Brace up, Rosalie. Don't be such a trembling little bird. Your soul's your own.—Oh, my! Isn't that wonderful!" For the geyser now burst forth with a rushing volume of water which rose and arched across the river at a height of eighty feet.

Betsy and Rosalie hastened down the bank beyond the crowd, where they had a full view of the aerial waterfall sparkling in the sunshine as it plunged foaming into the river.

When the exhilarating show was over, Betsy turned to her companion.

"There! Ain't that worth a good bit o' sacrifice to see?"

The girl's hands were clasped on her breast, and her eyes shining.

"You look as admirin' as a chipmunk," said Betsy; and they both laughed. [136]

"Oh, supposing we were alone out here, Betsy! Wouldn't it be beautiful!" sighed the girl.

"'Twould, as sure as you're born; but we ain't bondholders, so we have to work our way, both of us; and it's worth it. That's what I say, and that's what I want you to feel."

"I wouldn't mind if no one else minded," said Rosalie meekly.

"Don't mind, anyway," returned Betsy stoutly. "That's what I was just sayin'. Your soul's your own—"

"But she spent so much money on me."

"How much?"

"I don't know; but if I could pay it back, and needn't care how her eyes look—"

"Very likely you will pay her some day. Meanwhile keep a stiff upper lip. Don't act as if you'd done anything wrong, 'cause you haven't."

"I'm not clever," mourned Rosalie. "Look at Helen Maynard. See what she has done. She was a poor girl, too. She was older than I, and we seldom met at school; but she studied practical [137] things. I was so happy, and my teachers so delightful, but what did it fit me for?"

"Nothin', and I knew it," responded Betsy bluntly.

"It made life brighter and fuller," said Rosalie, and her eyes looked away to where Betsy knew she could not follow. Her old idea of the princess in exile returned upon her with force as she gazed at the girl, for Rosalie drew herself up unconsciously; leafy shadows lay in her pensive eyes and brocaded her white gown, while an arrow of sunlight gilded the braided coronet of her hair.

"Although I went back to washing Mrs. Pogram's dishes, I didn't live in that kitchen," she went on softly. "There were great fields—green fields and pastures new, where my thoughts went roving."

They both kept silence for a space; then Rosalie came back from her short day-dream and met her friend's eyes. "I don't think I have a bad disposition?" she said questioningly.

"I've never seen any signs of it," returned Betsy dryly.

"There are moments when I wish I had borne with Loomis. One of them was when Mr. Derwent [138] said he had known my father; and Mrs. Nixon looked at me from such a lofty height!" The girl's cheeks burned again.

Betsy heaved a quiet sigh. "There's only one thing the matter with you, Rosalie." As she spoke, Betsy ran her fingers down the girl's backbone, and the latter squirmed away. "It's your spine."

"What's the matter with it?" asked Rosalie, startled.

"I don't know; but 'tain't stiff enough." Betsy smiled faintly into her companion's puzzled face. "Seems sort o' tough to be born a vine, and then not be given a thing to cling to." She shook her head. "You was born a vine, Rosalie, and now that the supports have been pulled out, you can either trail along the ground where every passer-by is likely to step on you, or you can reach around till you find a new support for yourself."

She paused, and Rosalie looked troubled and thoughtful.

"Vines ain't left altogether helpless," went on Betsy. "They're given lots o' tendrils, and they

lay hold o' the queerest and most unpromising things sometimes and begin to pull themselves up."

"But who wants to be a parasite!" exclaimed Rosalie. "They destroy!" [139]

"A wholesome vine only benefits," answered the other; "and it mustn't be content with shrinkin' along the ground and invitin' everybody to step on it, and hurt it. Even a vine has its own sort of backbone, its own power, and it hasn't a thing to fear. It'll find its place to climb if it looks up and not down."

"There's one trellis I wish I could have," said Rosalie wistfully, gazing at her friend, "and its name is Betsy Foster."

"Come now, Rosalie; that's pretty hard." The older woman's lips twitched. "I've got some flesh on my bones."

"O Betsy! Dear Betsy!" burst forth the girl lovingly. "Clever Betsy, as Captain Salter calls you."

"You know Hiram, do you?"

"Yes, indeed; and when I first came to Fairport,—it was the winter before Mrs. Bruce sent me to school,—he told me about you, and told me you'd be there in summer with this rich family, and that if I could get you for a friend it would be the best thing that could happen to me; and it has been, Betsy—except that it did give me that bitter-sweet school experience." The girl put her arm [140] around her companion. "Captain Salter told me so much about you—how you had always managed to do for people in the village. He thinks you're a wonder."

Miss Foster started to speak, but changed her mind and merely grunted. Then, after a silent moment of endurance of the girl's embrace, she changed the subject.

"Unwind that tendril now," she said, taking Rosalie's hand and moving her away; "and be careful, child, who you do reach out to," she added seriously.

"Oh, are you going, Betsy?" exclaimed the girl, troubled.

The woman hesitated. "You let me go tell Mrs. Bruce that I'll walk back to the hotel so they won't wait for me. They're probably all in the wagon by this time, and wonderin' where I am."

"I'll wait right here," returned Rosalie eagerly, and she stood watching Betsy's retreating figure with wistful eyes.

Miss Foster presented herself in the group who were waiting for the carriage, and announced to Mrs. Bruce her wish to walk back to the hotel.

BETSY! DEAR BETSY!

"With that girl, I suppose," said Mrs. Bruce, scorn in her voice. "Do as you please, Betsy. I've [141] certainly had one more lesson in letting well enough alone. It is likely she never would have grumbled with her bread and butter and left Mrs. Pogram, if I had not been the means of putting

ideas into her head. I'm obliged to admit that you were right, Betsy, when you talked to me about it a few weeks ago." Mrs. Bruce gave a little sigh. "I wish I weren't so warm-hearted and impulsive. Doesn't it lead one into lots of trouble, Mrs. Nixon?"

Mrs. Nixon was of the opinion that it did; and she still held by the arm a victim of misguided emotion. Irving and Robert had disappeared.

"Come home in the carriage with us, Henry," she said to her captive. "There will be a vacant place now."

There was still wandering upon the river bank among the overhanging trees a golden-haired dryad, whose presence caused the lady to desire the sanctuary of the park wagon for her brother until she could have a few words with him in private.

This she accomplished after they reached the hotel and she had lured him out upon the large [142] upper veranda, where reclining chairs invited wanderers to repose in the sunshine.

Mr. Derwent recognized the symptoms of extreme solicitude for his comfort, and smiles which were like flashes of heat-lightning. His sister was a woman of much poise, and heat-lightning seldom portends showers; still they had been known to arrive before the atmosphere could clear, and he had the ordinary masculine dread of them.

After accepting the chair beside his sister which she offered to him, he leaned back with every evidence of comfort, and his first words adroitly changed her aggression to defense.

"You take trifles far too seriously, Marion," he observed.

She stared, and he smilingly offered her the rubber disk.

"I don't know what you mean," she said.

"Oh, yes, you do."

Mrs. Nixon compressed her lips.

"You misunderstand entirely," she said at last. "I took a very great fancy to that young girl."

"It does you credit, Marion."

"And you've spoiled everything," she retorted. "I was going to arrange to have her come to us [143] in Boston."

"In what capacity?"

"Waitress, of course. And now you've made it impossible."

"It always would have been impossible. I couldn't think of allowing Gorham Vincent's daughter to wait on our table. I highly approve of having her come to us, however,—the charming creature."

"What are you thinking of?"

"Why, it seems she has no one belonging to her."

"Henry!" said Mrs. Nixon sonorously, "the home circle is sacred."

She was greatly startled; and she looked at the insouciant face and figure of her brother with repressed exasperation.

"It is a small circle in our case, certainly."

"Now that Robert is at home, we shall be three," returned the lady.

It was her house, and her home circle; and even though her wealthy bachelor brother was its most valuable asset, she did not intend to cede her rights.

There was a space of silence; then she spoke accusingly again.

"I have been thinking the last week, Henry, that perhaps in bringing your stenographer on this [144] trip, and making her of use to me also, you have had it in mind to suggest, on our return, that *she* remain with us."

Mr. Derwent's eyes were fixed on the landscape. He did not respond at once, and Mrs. Nixon, looking at him sharply, was in doubt whether to interpret his silence as a guilty one.

"Marion," he said at last, "do you often think of Alan?"

"Why—" Mrs. Nixon paused in her surprise at this irrelevancy,—"why, yes, I do." It was with an effort that her thought unclasped itself from the present, to revert to the unfortunate one of the family: the brother whose every effort to succeed in life had seemed to be thwarted; whose children had died, and whose own life had suddenly and unexpectedly closed before he had arrived at middle age.

Mr. Derwent's lips compressed under his white mustache, and his nostrils dilated.

Mrs. Nixon observed the change in his face with some dismay. She could not remember when

she had last heard him refer to their sorrow. For the first time she realized that this was perhaps because it had gone too deep.

He still kept his gaze ahead as he continued, in detached sentences: “I never sympathized [145] enough with Alan. I let him fight alone too long. I criticised when I should have carried him. There is no torture like that unavailing regret. Yesterday is dead, and repining is weakness. The only atonement I can make is to look on each individual need that presents itself before me, and ask myself what I would do now if that need was Alan’s.”

Mrs. Nixon was silent; her folded hands tightened. She was beholding an unsuspected wound, hidden always beneath her brother’s imperturbable exterior; and the apparition held her tongue-tied.

They both kept silence while the shadow crept along the veranda rail. At last Mr. Derwent spoke again in his ordinary manner, and with deliberation.

“I have had some such thought as you suspect concerning Helen Maynard.”

“Is the girl friendless? Where has she been living?” returned Mrs. Nixon defensively, conscious that when this subdued moment had passed, she should find a hundred embarrassments in the prospect of housing her brother’s stenographer.

“She has been living in a boarding-house. She has grandparents on a farm in the country.” [146]

Mrs. Nixon maintained an ominous silence. Her brother changed his position, and an odd look of amusement grew in his averted eyes.

“I have made up my mind to tell you what has been a secret up to now, Marion.”

This quiet sentence sent a stream of color over his companion’s face; evidence of a shock that sent a wild throng of thoughts careering through her brain.

Horrors! What was coming now? Her brother, whose fortune, as everybody knew, was to go to Robert; her brother, whose affliction made him averse to society! Could such a thing be as that this very narrowing of his social life had thrown him back on the society and sympathy of the neat, well-groomed girl, who was his right hand at the office.

Why, of course! and Mrs. Nixon called herself imbecile for never having feared it. She reproached herself wildly for not having provided better for his recreation. More card-parties, more reading aloud; more sympathy in the travel-lectures he enjoyed. Oh, fool that she had been! Probably he had escorted Miss Maynard to those very lectures, and she had elucidated the [147] pictures.

It took but a moment of time for all these considerations to tear across Mrs. Nixon’s mind, and he added:—

“I think it is time now to speak of it.”

With haunting visions of card-games never played, she responded unsteadily:—

“Pray do.”

Mr. Derwent pressed his finger-tips lightly together.

“Before I engaged Helen,” he began, “she had engaged me.”

Mrs. Nixon leaned back in her chair under pressure of faintness.

“Her grandparents came to me as a well-known lawyer and engaged me to undertake her cause in a lawsuit regarding a large fortune. I have been working on it for a long time, and success is in sight. The girl was being sensibly educated, and so at last it came about that I took her into the office for the convenience of us both.”

Mrs. Nixon’s face was a study; but her mind was not yet relieved.

“Miss Maynard is an heiress?” she asked.

“There is no doubt of it now. The red tape has been all measured off, and only a few matters of [148] form are left before she comes into her own.”

Mrs. Nixon sat in silence for a time.

“You know her so much better than I do, Henry,” she said at last, tentatively.

“Yes,” Mr. Derwent gave a quiet exclamation. “She is an excellent piece of mechanism. Her mind is as well ordered as her toilet. Not a hair out of place.”

The speaker’s manner and tone reassured his sister so far that she could give her thought to consideration of the girl in this new light, and to wondering what impression her own treatment had made upon her. Miss Maynard’s opinion would now be of importance. Mrs. Nixon was grateful that *noblesse oblige*, and that she could never be less than courteous to an inferior; a great convenience when one considers that an inferior sometimes surprises with as sudden a rise into prominence as is accomplished by a jack-in-the-box.

“And your idea, Henry—” she asked again.

“Was simply,” he answered, “that in her changed circumstances Helen will require the guidance of some older woman. There will be no ‘back to the farm’ for her, and I suspect that the old people will not wish to change their manner of living.” [149]

“Will she have very much?”

Mr. Derwent nodded. “Enough to make me glad her head is so level.”

“She must be exceedingly attached and very grateful to you,” said Mrs. Nixon, after a thoughtful pause, during which she tried to remember just how repressive her manner had been to her quiet companion.

“She doesn’t need to be grateful. She pays me. Helen is not impulsive.”

“You mean she has a cold nature,” returned Mrs. Nixon. “I do think, Henry, you might have told me all this when we started out on this trip.”

He shook his head. “It is because of a forwarded telegram which I received here this noon that I tell you now.”

Mrs. Nixon thought again.

“And you would like her to live with us,” she said thoughtfully.

“I only suggest it. I thought if you liked her—but Helen may have other views.”

“I see,” returned Mrs. Nixon slowly, “I see.” And she rocked in her chair with reflections wherein her lost waitress was forgotten.

CHAPTER XII [150]

THE FAITHFUL GEYSER

While this conversation was going on, Mrs. Bruce was sitting on the veranda below, waiting for Irving. He had promised to meet her in time for the next performance of the Old Faithful Geyser.

While she sat there she observed Betsy and Rosalie returning to the hotel, and her eyes narrowed as she regarded the girl's tall slender figure and free carriage.

"It is no wonder I was attracted," she thought; and now that the case had come before her again, and she had time to consider that her beneficiary had inflicted upon her a disappointment, Rosalie's proved incapacity took on the proportions of ingratitude. With Mrs. Bruce, even to suspect that her will was being thwarted was misery, and her gaze rested coldly on the girl now. At the same moment Irving and Robert came in sight; and Mrs. Bruce resented the fact that they hastened to approach Betsy, as she paused to say good-by to her companion.

The four stood a moment talking, and as Rosalie withdrew from the group Mrs. Bruce watched [151]
Irving follow her a few steps and then lift his hat as the girl shook her head and hurried away.

Robert, whistling loudly, ran up the steps of the hotel, and Mrs. Bruce scarcely nodded in response to his cheerful greeting as he went into the house.

She rose from her chair. "See the people going out there," she said to Irving, as he and Betsy approached. "I thought you would never come!"

"Five minutes' grace, Madama," said Irving, looking at his watch. "Don't get nervous." Betsy started to go into the house. Irving caught her by the arm. "Not a bit of it," he added. "You're going with us."

"Thank you, Mr. Irving. I meant to go out later," returned Betsy, always conscious of "acquiring merit" by leaving these two by themselves.

"I wouldn't trust you—I wouldn't trust you around the corner," returned Irving; and he kept his hold on the sleeve of Betsy's brown silk shirt-waist, so the three moved together out to the point of interest.

The Old Faithful has been talked about, written about, and visited so much and so long, that [152]
there remains nothing fresh to be said; but it is like any other classic,—perennial, exhilarating, and satisfying.

Mrs. Bruce, despite the fly in her amber, approached the mound of geyserite with lively anticipation, and watched with absorption the first spasmodic spurts that were flung from the crater's mouth.

Later, when the splendid volume of hot water sprang skyward, she and Betsy both forgot that there was a bone of contention between them. For minutes the rushing giant fountain, falling in a cloud of foam and spray, held itself against the azure sky; then, like a beautiful captive returning to its dungeon, fell back lower and lower, till only its tears coursed down the terraces they had formed, and lay in shallow basins, whose lovely tints they did not conceal.

Mrs. Bruce, feeling that she could suggest nothing that would improve this glorious ebullition, confined herself to exclamations.

"What a blessing there is a moon!" she said, as they turned back toward the hotel. "I can hardly wait for to-night. Where do you suppose the Nixons are? and that poor little Miss [153]
Maynard? If Mr. Derwent is making her write his letters instead of coming out here, I think it's a perfect shame."

"Sh! sh! Madama," said Irving. "Let everybody be innocent until he's proved guilty. Go into the house now and lie down, and let the world go wrong for a little while."

"I can't quite make Miss Maynard out, Irving. I tried to talk with her a number of times on our drive this afternoon, because I must say Mrs. Nixon is so very quiet I feel sorry for the girl; but she always was abstracted, and every time I spoke to her she seemed to have to bring her thoughts back from somewhere."

"From *him*, perhaps," suggested Irving.

"Well, perhaps so. I never thought of that." Mrs. Bruce shook her head. "Deliver me from sightseeing with a girl who is in love!"

Irving smiled. "I know I'm never coming to a place like this unless *she* is here, too."

"Oh, Irving, don't! That awful time will have to come, I suppose, but don't ruin this lucid interval by talking about it."

The young man seldom indulged in any covert interchange with Betsy, but now his eyes [154]
sparkled with fun as he caught his old friend's eye.

"Such a mother-in-law as you will make, Madama!" he exclaimed devoutly.

"That depends," returned Mrs. Bruce complacently. "If you let me pass upon the girl before

you commit yourself, I shall do my best."

"What pretty hair you must have had when you were twenty," said Irving irrelevantly, after a pause, regarding the fair head at his shoulder, for Mrs. Bruce was carrying her hat in her hand.

"I don't care for that left-handed compliment at all," she replied with spirit. "It's pretty now."

"It is, for a fact; but wasn't it still lighter, more golden, when you were twenty?"

"Yes, it was perfectly lovely," she returned. "The years play us all sorts of mean tricks, but one of the meanest is darkening one's hair. It was lovely at the time I was married; but at that time I suppose you didn't care whether I wore hair or corn-silk!"

"Corn-silk," repeated Irving abstractedly. "That's what it's like. Corn-silk."

"It isn't, you flatterer," returned Mrs. Bruce, with a little conscious laugh; and she gave a [155] triumphant side-glance at Betsy, who kept eyes ahead, fearing every moment that her mistress's complaisance would receive a shock in the comprehension of Irving's drift.

He understood the meaning of a swift glance suddenly sent him by Miss Foster, and began to whistle, softly.

As they neared the hotel he spoke. "Come to my room for a minute, Betsy, please. I need some sewing up, and I'll give it to you so you can take it over and sit by Mrs. Bruce to see that she obeys my order to take a nap."

Mrs. Bruce regarded him affectionately and went with docility to the greenwood of her bedroom; and Betsy, with no change of feature, followed Irving to his. When they were inside, he closed the door, seated Betsy in a green rocker, and put himself astride a straight chair.

"You know very well," said Betsy uneasily, "that if I stay, Mrs. Bruce will come over here."

"No, she won't," returned Irving, "for the best of reasons. She doesn't know which room I have."

"Well, give me your things quick," said Betsy.

"Why are you afraid, all of a sudden?" [156]

"I—" returned Betsy, hesitating, "I want to—to keep her happy."

"Not for your own sake, I'll bet."

"No. Give me your things, Mr. Irving."

The young man did not move. "Betsy," he said, "she *mustn't* stay here."

"Who mustn't stay where?" she returned, reddening.

"You heard Mr. Derwent say that they were related," went on Irving.

"You think," said Betsy, with rare sarcasm, "she'd be in better business writin' stories for some fireside paper, or imposin' on folks' credulity?"

Her companion magnanimously overlooked the thrust.

"She's too fine from head to foot, physically, and too fine in her innocence, to be touched with anything rough. She mustn't stay here."

"Who's to prevent it?" asked Betsy quietly, though Irving was unconsciously rewarding her for much of her devotion.

"I am."

"That ain't possible."

"Not only possible, but easy. Give her the money to go back to Portland to stay till we come. [157] She'll never know it's mine."

"No, sir! I won't do that. She'd never take so much money as that from me, and I'd have to tell her the truth. She's just possessed to pay Mrs. Bruce back, as it is. She'd rather work in their Park years than not do it."

Irving made an impatient sound, and Betsy shook her head.

"Mrs. Bruce is awful down on her. You'll find it out if you touch the subject any lower'n her hair. I know the symptoms."

"Well, what are you going to do, then?" asked Irving, frowning impatiently.

Miss Foster looked back at him, full.

"That ain't anything to any young man," she said impressively.

"You're going to do something, then?" he asked eagerly. "I don't want to go into that dining-room to-night. Do you like to see her there?"

He rose, spurned his chair, and walked up and down the log cage.

Betsy followed him with her eyes. “Look here, Mr. Irving. I love Rosalie Vincent.”

The pedestrian stopped, and hugged the speaker’s thin shoulders.

“And I don’t want to have any feelin’ stirred up against her. If you take any interest in her, just [158]
follow my advice, and while we’re all together here, don’t notice her, and, above all, don’t speak about her.”

“She’s like the bit of porcelain going down the river among the earthen jugs,” burst forth Irving.

“Then don’t throw a rock at her,” returned Betsy. “She’s got a ticklish enough time without that. Where are your things, Mr. Irving?” Betsy started from her chair in a sudden panic.

“Then have you any plan, Clever Betsy?” he persisted. “’Tisn’t enough just to be fond of her and—and *mope*.”

“You sassy boy!” exclaimed Betsy, concealing her inward exultation that Rosalie had a friend at court, albeit a dangerous one. “You mind your business and I’ll mind mine; and it wasn’t ever to mope.”

“Good for you, you old dear! I know you’ll do something for that—that wood-nymph.”

“Irving Bruce, give me your mendin’. Do you suppose there’ll be any naps till I get back?”

“Tell her I had to hunt for it.”

“I won’t lie for you or anybody else.” [159]

“I wouldn’t have you. It’s the absolute truth.” The speaker strode over to where his suit-case lay open on the floor.

Rummaging through its contents, he fished out a white silk negligée shirt and quickly tore it down the back.

Betsy sprang forward and cried out, but the deed was done. He pressed the garment into her arms and opened the door.

“That was *sinful*!” she exclaimed, regarding the rent.

“Not half so bad as hurting your immortal soul?” He laughed at her long face and pushed her gently out the door. “Remember now,” threateningly, “if you don’t do something, I will. I’m trusting you, Betsy.”

“That’s wicked. That’s just wicked,” said Miss Foster to herself, holding up to view the fine garment as she moved down the deserted hall.

CHAPTER XIII
THE HEIRESS

[160]

When Robert Nixon ran whistling into the hotel and took the stairs two at a time up to his room, he met his mother just coming in from the upper veranda, where she had had the interview with her brother.

"I want to see you, Robert," she said, so solemnly that he looked amused.

"Your tone takes me back to childhood's unhappy hour," he returned. "Which is it to be, a spanking or the closet?"

"Come into my room a minute," went on Mrs. Nixon.

"I do believe it's the spanking. Say, mamma, forget it. The geyser's just going to spout."

"I must speak to you first."

"'Tisn't fair," objected the youth, "because you do spout more than once an hour, you know." But he followed his stately mother into her room, for she looked more imposing than usual, and his curiosity was roused.

[161]

As soon as she had closed the door she turned to him.

"Where is Miss Maynard?" she asked.

Her son's eyebrows and shoulders both jerked upwards.

"You can search *me*," he responded.

"Sit down, Robert."

He obeyed the impressive order, and his mother seated herself opposite.

"What has that sleek, quiet little mouse been doing?" he asked. "I haven't seen her since we left the Riverside."

"Robert, I want you to *think*, and I want you to be serious."

"I'll do my best, but I'm rusty in both lines."

"I want you to tell me how my treatment of Miss Maynard has impressed you."

Robert whistled softly. "Offended, is she? Well, she ought to know that you're never effusive. I've tried to flirt with her a bit, and strike an average."

"Strike an average, Robert?" Mrs. Nixon spoke anxiously. "Tell me directly what you mean. Did my behavior make you feel that to be necessary?"

[162]

"Well," the son puffed out his lips, "what with Uncle Henry's deafness, and your Vere-de-Vere repose, it has seemed to me at times that it was rather dull for a maiden stowed there in the stage beside you. I made a few essays, as I say, to jolly her, but—well, I can't say they were successful. One doesn't care to have one's sweet and cheery conversation treated like the tunefulness of a string of sleigh-bells. Miss Maynard invariably makes me feel the drifting snow when I try to chirk her up."

"She'll be a success then," responded Mrs. Nixon, with conviction; and while her son stared at this comment, she went on: "I am glad of all the civility you have shown her, Robert. It is not natural to me, as you say, to be talkative or—or gushing, and yet I've always been perfectly civil to Miss Maynard. I'm sure of that. You never noticed anything else, did you?"

Robert looked as he felt, increasingly puzzled.

"No, mother. What's up? Has Miss Maynard been complaining to Uncle Henry?"

[163]

"No. *I* complain of your Uncle Henry that he has not been frank with me. When he suggested the convenience to him of taking his stenographer on this trip, and said she could hook my gowns, he should have told me that the very presentable, quiet girl I had so often seen in his office was a probable heiress."

"What?" Robert sat up and his voice broke into the high register. "You don't say so! I don't blame him. There's too many a slip about that sort of possibility."

"It's settled," said Mrs. Nixon solemnly. "It was settled to-day. She *is* one; and from what your uncle says, the fortune is large."

Robert clasped his hands and lifted his eyes. "I've always admired her nose. How much straighter it will be now!" he ejaculated devoutly.

"I insist, Robert," said Mrs. Nixon, "I must insist for once on your being serious. I'm very much pleased with you, and with what you tell me, because— Well, my son, I do not need to remind you that a vulgar person with money is a creature of no interest to me; but Miss Maynard is a lady. I have always granted it; and now she will need advice and directing. Her relatives live in the

[164]

country, and are too elderly to be available in any case. I should wish her to feel that she might turn to me; and I hope nothing in my behavior on this trip has had a—a tendency to estrange her."

"Your conduct has been to a stranger," returned Robert.

Mrs. Nixon lifted her head with a regal air in which there was nevertheless anxiety.

"I suppose for the sake of making a foolish pun you would say that, and make me uncomfortable."

Her son laughed, and going over to where she sat, put his arms around her unyielding form.

"Don't worry, mother. You may be a bit cool in your methods, but you arrive, just like a fireless cooker. How long has the heiress known of her good fortune?"

"Just to-day. Just since noon."

"Noon, eh? Did you see me escorting her at the Riverside show?"

"No," replied Mrs. Nixon lugubriously. "I was too much engaged in taking care of your Uncle Henry."

Robert straightened up and threw his head back for a hearty laugh.

"The Yellowstone is growing exciting," he said. "Heavers to right of us, heiresses to left of us. [165] Wayward brothers, and," striking his breast triumphantly, "wise sons!"

"Yes, Robert. You've done very well, I must say."

"Miss Maynard,—you observe that I speak the name with new and due reverence,—the heiress, I say, went to school with Hebe the heaver."

"Is it possible?" returned Mrs. Nixon coldly. "Did—did the waitress claim acquaintance?"

"Not a bit of it," rejoined Robert cheerfully. "Cousin turned the heiress down."

"Robert, what *are* you talking about?"

"Why, you heard Uncle Henry say we were related."

Mrs. Nixon made an exclamation. "Why must men of all ages lose their wits at sight of a pretty face?" she inquired of the ceiling.

"The conundrum of the ages, mamma, and I'm young yet, so I can't tell you; but if you hadn't been more of a sister than a mother you'd have watched my foresighted behavior. To tell the truth, when you glared at Hebe there by the river, I thought she was going to cry; so when Brute's mother buttonholed him and you took Uncle Henry by the ear, I sought refuge with the [166] stenographer, though the heaver looked pretty enough to eat. I knew Betsy would look after her."

"They were at school together?" repeated Mrs. Nixon, wondering.

"Sure as you're a foot high; and when the now valuable Miss Maynard accosted Hebe at the Fountain House, the lovely heaver begged her to forget it. There's a story attached to her. Brute told me—"

"Yes," interrupted Mrs. Nixon impatiently. "Mrs. Bruce told me what she had done for her. I dare say she has found her right place. There is no need of making a fuss over her."

Robert shook his finger at the speaker. "Careful, careful, mother. Supposing you should waken to-morrow morning and find that the heaver's uncle in India had passed to his fathers, and that Miss Vincent was likely to require the advice of an experienced chaperon."

Mrs. Nixon waved this nonsense aside with a gesture, and returned to the subject in hand.

"I think the thing for me to do is to find Miss Maynard now, tell her that Mr. Derwent has informed me of her good fortune, and congratulate her."

Robert rubbed his hands together with a malevolent and gleeful laugh. "Can't you hide me [167] behind the screen and send for her?" he begged.

Mrs. Nixon had risen and now drew herself up.

"What, pray, do you think would be so amusing about it? Do you think your mother would be less than dignified?"

"No, no, honey," rejoined her irreverent son, forcibly taking her reluctant hands. "I was only thinking of witnessing a friendly interview between an icicle and a stalactite." He chuckled again and clapped the maternal hands together, totally against the maternal will.

"You may go now, Robert, and—and, go on as you have begun." She pushed him toward the door. "You say the geyser is playing?"

"Was playing."

"Well, we must all see it the next time. Good-by, dear."

Closing the door behind him, the lady returned to her mirror and gave her hair some touches.

Then she started again to the door with intent to seek her “companion.”

As she reached it, she was met by a knock. [168]

She opened and came face to face with the object of her thoughts.

“Come in, come in, Miss Maynard,” she said, and there was a noticeable cordiality in her voice.

The trim girl, with her symmetrical little face and smooth brown hair, stepped just inside the door.

“I came to see if you wished to change your gown before tea.”

“I am not going to change it to-day. Come in. I wished to see you. Mr. Derwent has been telling me of your good fortune. I wish to congratulate you.”

There was no elation or change of manner in the quiet girl as she replied:—

“Thank you. Mr. Derwent has done fine work for me. You don’t wish my help, then?”

Mrs. Nixon hesitated. She knew that yesterday she would have said no, and closed the door, and she knew that Helen Maynard knew it; so though she desired to beg her to be seated for a chat, she indulged in no such stupidity.

“Did you see the geyser play?” she asked. “The Old Faithful?”

“No.” Helen Maynard had indeed been in her own room, careless of scenery, absorbed in the considerations that had held her captive since Mr. Derwent had shown his telegram. [169]

“My son says it has just played. Let us not miss the next show.”

“Do you wish me to come for you?”

The question was put in precisely the same tone and manner that Helen would have used yesterday, and Mrs. Nixon admired her poise.

“Thank you. I am going down into the office. I shall be glad to see the geyser with you when the time comes.”

Helen Maynard turned away, and a cynical little smile grew on her lips. Mrs. Nixon had tried nobly to keep her usual manner unchanged; but despite herself there was a warmth there unknown before, and Helen was alert to perceive it.

The girl hummed an air from “Faust” as she ran down the stairs of the gigantic log-cabin. It was the “Calf of Gold” that she sang.

She was, as Mr. Derwent had said, a very level-headed young woman, and under the present circumstances kept her joyous excitement under control; but she was alive in every fibre to the change in her life which these six figures to her credit were about to make. [170]

She had faced all that failure would mean; faced the prospect of a narrow life on the farm, or a struggling life in the city. In either case a life of early-to-bed and early-to-rise routine, against which all her tastes rebelled.

With the relaxation from strain had come a certain intoxication; but pride kept the girl externally calm. The patronizing Mrs. Bruce would scrutinize her now through those eye-glasses. She should never have a chance to say, “Set a beggar on horseback!” Irving Bruce would, perhaps, become aware of her existence. She exulted in the steadiness with which she had held Robert Nixon at a distance with his amiable raillery. She had done this from politic motives, knowing that if she were to remain in Mrs. Nixon’s good graces, only so could it be accomplished; but now it increased her satisfaction in the consideration of the subtle change in that lady’s manner toward her.

What a gulf now between herself and her acquaintance of Lambeth days! Mr. Derwent’s interest in Rosalie had merely served to get her into trouble.

Years ago on the farm Miss Maynard’s grandmother had said to her husband:— [171]

“Helen’s dreadfully high-headed. I don’t know whatever’ll become of her if she gets all that money.”

More than a slight mixture of contempt pervaded her thoughts of Rosalie now. No combination of circumstances would ever have forced *her* to wait on tourists in the Yellowstone. It did not raise the poor young waitress in Miss Maynard’s regard that Mr. Derwent had been attracted by her, and even claimed relationship. In that particular she shared Mrs. Nixon’s annoyance. Helen thought she might herself do something for Rosalie some day if the girl were really helpless, or had some sad reason for not desiring recognition.

In a few short hours Miss Maynard had floated up from the stratum occupied by the under-dog to the vantage-ground of the powerful, and her heart exulted.

As soon as she saw the Bruces she knew that they had heard the news. Mrs. Bruce approached her with an alert manner.

“I’m delighted to hear of your good fortune, Miss Maynard,” she said briskly; and Helen thanked her demurely.

“Do you hurry back to Boston?” added the lady. [172]

“Oh, no,” returned Helen quietly. “Mr. Derwent needs his stenographer as much as ever. I am not his only client.”

“I suppose not. Ha, ha, pretty good! Well, my dear Miss Maynard, I wish you all prosperity. I’ve always been attracted to you.”

“I do think, Irving,” said Mrs. Bruce to her son as they sat at supper, “it’s the strangest thing in the world to see so young a person absolutely stoical at such a time. If it had happened to me at her age I should have called upon everybody to rejoice with me!”

“Probably she is to the manner born,” returned Irving absent-mindedly. His thoughts were with the fair-haired girl whose round slender arms were bearing a tray across the dining-room.

“That is no work for Miss Vincent,” he observed tentatively.

“I don’t think we know,” returned Mrs. Bruce coolly.

“You said once,” remarked Betsy quietly, “that Rosalie was an artist; that you always knew ’em when you saw ’em. It does seem queer work for an artist.”

Mrs. Bruce stared at her companion in surprise. [173]

“Well, whose fault is it, I should like to know. She did have some talent. I tried to have it cultivated, but evidently she was too superficial. People find their level. You can’t help it.”

Betsy gave Irving such a repressive look that he swallowed some remark which had reached the end of his tongue. Then, again opening his lips, he gave Mrs. Bruce a *résumé* of what had happened to her protégée since her befriending of the girl.

“Well, why shouldn’t she have married Mrs. Pogram’s brother?” she returned carelessly.

“He is a cad, I tell you,” returned Irving, manfully repressing his rising wrath.

“Well,” Mrs. Bruce shrugged her shoulders, “the girl is a beggar. She can’t choose.”

The light that suddenly sparkled in Irving’s eyes made Betsy hasten to speak.

“You said when we were talkin’ about it that time, that it was a pity for girls who had those talents to get married. I guess Rosalie feels herself she has some talent.”

“Yes,” returned Mrs. Bruce, busily eating, and unconscious of the storm brewing beside her, “a [174]
talent for,” she laughed,—“heaving. She’s just a pretty doll, and it is amazing what fools a pretty face will make of men of all types and ages.” Mrs. Bruce laughed gleefully. “I shan’t forget Mrs. Nixon’s eyes when she saw her brother sitting on the grass and apparently making love to the girl. Now, take Miss Maynard, there’s strength and poise in the very lift of her head.” Mrs. Bruce looked across at the Nixon table approvingly. “I do hope, Irving, you will take a little pains to become acquainted with Miss Maynard. I understand the girl’s reserve now and her abstraction. I asked Robert if he and his mother had known about it, and he said they had not; but I’m not so sure about *him*;”—the speaker shook her head astutely;—“he has been very civil to the girl ever since we started.”

“Heavens! is that a sign?” exclaimed Irving testily.

Mrs. Bruce looked around at him and raised her eyebrows. “Why not, cross-patch? He is his mother’s son, and she has nearly refrigerated her poor companion. I’ve been quite nice to her.”
Mrs. Bruce returned to her omelet complacently. “It will make things pleasant now. Everybody is [175]
looking forward so to seeing the colored lights thrown on the geyser to-night. I think it would be nice of you, Irving, to take Miss Maynard out to see it. There’s a moon, too.”

“It would be very nice of me,” returned the young man savagely. “Colored lights on the geyser! I wonder if they paint lilies out here!”

He pushed his chair back from the table. “Will you and Betsy excuse me, Madama;” and without further apology Irving left the table and went out to the office, where on four sides of the great chimney were blazing generous open fires, that could roast an ox.

Mrs. Bruce turned to her companion.

“What has put Mr. Irving out of sorts?” she asked.

Betsy ate very busily. “’Tain’t best to notice his moods, Mrs. Bruce. You know that was always the best way to treat him.”

Mrs. Bruce looked across again at the Nixon table and laughed maliciously. “This isn’t Mrs. Nixon’s lucky day,” she said. “First her brother has to be lured from a siren, and then she has the shock of discovering that she has been entertaining an heiress unawares! Poor Mrs. Nixon! It will be sport to watch her now.”

CHAPTER XIV
THE LOOKOUT

[176]

In the comings and goings through the halls and veranda of the charming inn, Irving Bruce managed to lose his stepmother and find Betsy Foster, greatly to the latter's confusion; for it was time for the evening performance of the geyser.

Irving took his old friend by the arm. "You're going out there with me, Betsy," he said.

"Not without Mrs. Bruce, I ain't."

"Yes, you are. We're going to stray in the moonlight together."

"If you ever had another guess comin' you've got it now, Mr. Irving," declared Betsy firmly. "You find Mrs. Bruce right off."

Irving sighed and succumbed. Finding his adorer was an easy matter, and he did so without more ado. They joined the throng that moved toward the geyser, and as good fortune would have it, were in time to find one seat on the benches where Mrs. Bruce and Mrs. Nixon could sit together. Then Irving unostentatiously withdrew, and again catching Betsy by the arm took her a [177] few paces away. The silvery light of the clear moon bathed the cool mountain night.

"What have you decided to do, Betsy?" he asked.

"I suppose you mean Rosalie."

Irving gave the thin arm an impatient shake.

"Well," said Betsy coolly, "I haven't decided."

"If you don't do something, I shall."

"You ain't qualified," remarked Betsy curtly.

"Are you?" retorted her companion. "That thing mustn't be allowed to go on. That waitress business! That lovely flower subjected to orders and winks and tips. I won't stand it."

"Well now, you can't do a thing!" declared Betsy firmly.

"Are you going to?"

"I am, in my own time and way."

"Does your own time and way include letting Rosalie work the rest of the season?"

"Perhaps," said Betsy tersely. "You mustn't interfere, Mr. Irving. You'll only do harm."

Irving gave an exclamation. "There is one thing I can do: go away to-morrow. I'm not going to [178] stay here and watch it."

"But Mrs. Bruce—" began Betsy, troubled.

"Can do as she pleases," put in Irving. "I'll go to Yellowstone Lake and fish till she gets ready to follow."

"Oh, oh, oh! Mr. Irving!"

The exclamation was of joy, for in the earnestness of their talk Betsy had not noticed the preliminary spurts of water, and now the splendid captive stream burst its bonds and gushed skyward in the moonlight. Its banners of spray hung and floated cloud-like in the breeze; and while they gazed, all at once the pure white flushed to rose, then changed to violet, and presently a gauzy rainbow hung between earth and heaven, a thing of supernatural beauty.

"Do you suppose *she* is seeing this?" murmured Irving.

"Not a doubt of it," Betsy replied promptly. She feared that any other answer would send her companion to the commissary department of the inn.

Helen Maynard and Mr. Derwent were together watching the lovely sight when Robert Nixon [179] came upon them. His hands were in his pockets and he was whistling softly, as was his wont when the performance was not cheerfully piercing.

"May I come and stand by the rich lady?" he asked.

The geyser was just disappearing.

"How cold and blank the night seems to have turned!" said Helen pensively.

Robert struck his breast with his doubled fist.

"Cruel maiden!" he ejaculated, "why flout me thus? Say, Miss Maynard," he continued, in a voice changed to interest, "do you know you can make Uncle Henry hear better than anybody?"

"I have made a study of it," returned the girl composedly.

Robert gazed at her admiringly. “I think it was downright fine and heroic for Uncle Henry to crush those conspirators and get your shekels for you. He’s going to miss you like his right hand.”

“I hope he will miss me a little.” As she spoke Helen looked up at the fine head set so well on Mr. Derwent’s broad shoulders; at the white mustache, and gray hair, and all the features she [180] knew so well.

“I’ll bet she admires him,” thought Robert, following her gaze to the impassive face. “He’s a winner. If he only had his hearing he’d make us all take notice.”

Robert shook his head with the fleeting sympathy of prosperous youth.

The sightseers began to gravitate toward the hotel, and this trio moved with them.

Within the inn all was warmth and light. A Brobdingnagian corn-popper was produced, and one of the open fires being reduced to the proper condition, a cheerful crackling began as the corn bounded high in its ample prison.

“We’re in the land of bigness, Mrs. Nixon,” said Mrs. Bruce, as they sat at a comfortable distance from the heat.

“Indeed, yes,” returned that lady. “I was just saying to Miss Maynard that apparently the mountains set the pace here.”

As she spoke, Mrs. Nixon looked graciously at her companion, who occupied a neighboring chair.

“Were you, indeed!” thought Mrs. Bruce, amused. “I’m glad you’ve found out you can say something to the girl!”

“Irving,” she said aloud, looking up at her son as he stood, tall and abstracted, staring into the [181] mammoth fire, “why don’t you take Miss Maynard up to the Lookout. There must be a glorious view from there to-night.”

Without moving, Helen lifted her eyes to Irving and met his gloomy regard.

“I doubt if Miss Maynard cares to ascend a perpendicular corduroy road,” he answered. “I’m told it is eight stories up.”

“You might ask her,” remarked the girl herself, with composure.

“Surely,” laughed Mrs. Bruce. “It would be such a simple way of finding out.”

Irving had not the grace to smile. He continued to regard the humble companion of yesterday, the heiress of to-day, without moving.

“Would you?” he asked sententiously.

“Yes,” she replied promptly, and rose.

The proposition was so foreign to Bruce’s mood that it required a noticeable moment for him to pull himself together sufficiently to join the young lady with tolerable grace.

She gave him a comprehending glance as they moved toward the staircase.

“Probably all your life,” she said slowly, “you have done just what you liked. I have never done [182] anything I liked. I am beginning to-night.”

He looked at her in surprise.

“Yes, I know you don’t want to do this, but I do,” she added, “and that’s all I’m going to think of. It’s my turn.”

Mrs. Nixon and Mrs. Bruce followed them with their eyes.

“What a little thing Miss Maynard is,” remarked the latter. “See, she barely reaches Irving’s shoulder. I’ve always said he’d marry some mite of a creature. That’s the way tall men always do, and then giraffes of women have to mate with short ones.”

“I’m sorry Robert wasn’t here,” said Mrs. Nixon coldly. “He would certainly have obliged Miss Maynard with a better grace.”

“Irving *is* terribly indifferent,” returned Mrs. Bruce complacently. “If *I* want anything, he’s all alive at once; but when it’s a question of any other woman—” She finished with a significant gesture.

“I have endeavored,” said Mrs. Nixon, with stateliness, “to inculcate in Robert unvarying courtesy to all women.”

Mrs. Bruce began to grow warm under her ruching. “Yes, dear, I know,” she replied, with a [183] well-done sigh. “It’s so much easier when a man hasn’t distinguished himself especially at college. These football heroes—” she shook her head regretfully—“they do get spoiled, I admit, and grow careless. Then they reflect very little credit on their bringing-up. Excuse me a moment, Mrs. Nixon, I must speak to Betsy.” And Mrs. Bruce rose gracefully and departed on her fictitious

errand rather than sustain her friend's possible rejoinder.

"For if," she reflected, "the woman should say anything really *against* Irving it would spoil the rest of the trip. The idea! He might have treated Miss Maynard outrageously yesterday and Mrs. Nixon wouldn't ever have noticed it; but to-night she begrudges them a moonlight excursion."

Mrs. Nixon leaned back in her chair, breathing a little fast as her son and heir approached her.

"Where were you, Robert?" she asked rebukingly.

"Pacing the deck outside. I've no ambition to take the leading rôle in a barbecue."

"It's not so hot."

"Well, it's better now. Where's Brute?" [184]

Mrs. Nixon's nostrils dilated. "Your very well-named friend has taken Miss Maynard up to the Lookout," she returned suavely. "He made it very evident that he went under compulsion. I wished that you had been here."

"Led him *to* it, did she?" Robert laughed. "Good for her. I like to see Brute coerced. And girls like to do it. She's having the time of her life, never fear."

"I don't think so. It is a very disagreeable position for a young girl to be put in; and his manner was atrocious."

"Mother," Robert shook a sapient finger in her direction, "mother, there won't be any disagreeable positions for that young lady."

Mrs. Nixon regarded the speaker attentively.

"She strikes me as a person who has been biding her time," declared Robert. "At present she has arrived; and although she doesn't make any fuss about it, that little hand of hers, with no rings on it, is closing around the tail of this giddy old world, and if it doesn't turn to suit her, I think you'll find her giving it a twist in the other direction."

"I'm certainly at a loss to know what you mean, Robert. She has always displayed excellent [185] taste in her position. She has been entirely quiet and docile."

"Quiet, yes," replied Robert with a laugh, "but docile! That's all you know about it. My dear parent, mark my words. Don't you ever imagine that this is any *jeune fille* case, needing protection. Miss Helen Maynard is composed of two thirds sand and the other third grit."

The speaker closed his eyes and nodded his head slowly in a manner to express conviction.

"Well! I had no idea you were such a student of character."

"Not a bit of it," returned her son prosaically. "Never see anything till it hits me in the nose."

"Then I'm very dull," returned the other with some hauteur, "for no such thing has ever been obvious to me."

"She's fetching, oh, yes," allowed Robert, "and she'll make other people fetch, too. It cheers me to think she's making Brute toil up seven flights of log-stairs to look at the moon with her."

"She will be a success, just because she has herself so well in hand," declared Mrs. Nixon, [186] unwilling to view this subject lightly. "She is not a beauty, but well-gowned and with her self-possession she will pass for one."

"Oh, yes," agreed Robert lightly.

He had thrown himself into Mrs. Bruce's vacated chair, and there was silence for a span while the two gazed at the fire; then the lady spoke again, tentatively.

"However independent Miss Maynard may be, she will require a chaperon now."

"Yes, one well trained to follow at heel."

"Robert, I wish you wouldn't exaggerate so."

"Dear me, mamma mia," looking up in surprise at the impatient tone. "Why should it make *you* peevish?"

Mrs. Nixon's reply was dignified. "Because the duty may devolve upon me."

"Heavens! Why?"

"Well, your uncle Henry is very much attached to the girl. He has a natural interest in her welfare."

"Has he asked you to look after her?"

"He has suggested that we extend the hospitality of our home to her."

"Oh, come now!" ejaculated Robert. "When I'm to have a sister, please select a nice pussy one [187] with appealing eyes like—like Hebe the Heaver, for instance."

“There will be no sister about it,” returned Mrs. Nixon sharply.

“Mamma, mamma!” Her son turned lazily accusing eyes upon her. “Have you ulterior motives? Are you laying any traps for your little Robbie?”

Mrs. Nixon gave a faint laugh in spite of herself.

“My dear, I wish you weren’t quite such a goose. Is it likely that I should expect you to be interested in a combination of sand and grit?”

Robert looked back at the fire. “There’s no telling what a solicitous mother will expect when there are shekels in the balance. It would be a dangerous clash under the same roof, for you know I’m two thirds brass and the other third pure affection, and that’s a mixture akin to dynamite.”

Silence again for a space.

“What are you going to do when we get back to the Hub?” inquired Robert at last.

“We haven’t quite decided, your uncle and I.”

“I’m going to Fairport to sail with Brute.”

“You are? Well then, we shall be tempted to follow. Is it a possible place outside the cottages?” [188]

“Quite so, Brute says. Getting more so every year, because there’s a river flowing into the sea that gives the variety of canoeing. He says the Fairport Inn is getting to be quite dressy.”

“Why shouldn’t we all try it, then?” asked Mrs. Nixon.

“All?”

“Yes, all. It would be the best of ways for us to test Miss Maynard’s suitability. I shall not ask her to live with us without your consent, Robert,” finished Mrs. Nixon solemnly. “The home-circle is sacred.”

CHAPTER XV
AN EXODUS

[189]

WHATEVER interview Miss Maynard and Bruce may have had in the Lookout of the inn, it did not appear to have changed the young man's mood when later he sought his stepmother.

She was in her bedroom wrapped in a negligée when she admitted him.

"Was it very beautiful?" she asked eagerly.

"Very extensive; yes, fine," he replied.

"You must take me up there to-morrow, Irving."

"I don't think I shall be here to-morrow. That's what I came to speak to you about."

"Not be here!" repeated Mrs. Bruce in dismay. "Why, look at this room, Irving." The speaker indicated the woodsy interior. "Isn't it perfectly enchanting? I was just asking Betsy if she didn't feel like a dryad."

Irving glanced at Betsy, quite slim enough for the rôle, laying out her mistress's night paraphernalia on a second bed in the opposite corner of the green room. "I was just saying I [190] should like to stay here all summer. What do you mean by to-morrow, Irving?"

"Nothing that need disturb you at all. I hear alluring stories of fishing at the lake. I thought I would go there and wait till you came."

"Oh, dear!" returned Mrs. Bruce. "Is Nixie going too?"

"I haven't asked him yet. He may. I've seen all I care to see here. Thought I'd come and explain because I might get off before you're up in the morning."

"Oh Irving, I don't know that I want to stay with Mrs. Nixon!" Mrs. Bruce's tone indicated that she had suddenly found her doll stuffed with sawdust.

"Stay with Betsy and Miss Maynard then. You have an embarrassment of riches."

"Did you have a pleasant time with Miss Maynard? What is the demure little creature like when she gets off with a man?"

"Why, she gets on with him."

"Tell me, Irving."

"She is interesting," was the unenthusiastic reply. "She finds the situation a little heady, naturally."

"Well, it's absurd to see Mrs. Nixon suddenly so exercised about her. It may be catty of me, but [191] I was very glad you took her away."

"Oh no, she took me away." Irving's tone was colorless. While in the Lookout he had brought the conversation round to Rosalie Vincent. He had had a vague notion that this new-fledged heiress might be the maker of Rosalie's pathway into more congenial surroundings; but he had met cool indifference on the subject.

"Good-night, Madama." He kissed her forehead. "Good-night, Betsy. If you're not down to speed the parting guest, I will expect to see you some day on the shore of the lake, hailing me. Have a good time."

"Oh, Irving!" began Mrs. Bruce, holding open the door he tried to close; but he interrupted.

"Now get your beauty sleep, Madama. It's all settled. Good-night"; and the door closed.

The moon sailing over the Park sent a stream of light into Irving's bed-chamber. He watched it move from log to log, from wash-stand to chiffonier, and as it reached each new object he felt a fresh access of impatience at himself for wasting these silent hours.

He had seen Nixie before retiring, and that youth had jumped as joyfully at the fishing scheme [192] as any trout at the fly.

He had warmly declined to divulge his intentions to the family.

"I will leave a note addressed to mother on my table," he announced. "It will ask forgiveness and tell her that it will be of no use to try to find me."

"I have told Mrs. Bruce I'm going," rejoined Irving.

"With what result?"

"Oh, she didn't like it. She's crazy about it here."

"That's what I say," returned Robert triumphantly. "There's nothing like the note on the dresser. It has stood the test of ages."

And now Irving was wasting his time lying awake and watching the stealing moonlight.

“Coffee never affected me before,” he considered impatiently; then he sat up in bed and punched the unoffending pillows into new shapes and flung himself down on them.

He hoped *she* was not awake too. He lay quite still for a minute, picturing an aureole of golden hair, pillowed in a shabby room, and stood in awe a minute before the innocence of that childlike face in slumber.

Then he suddenly punched his pillow again, wishing it were the head of one who would [193]
presently waken her and call her below stairs to run patiently at the bidding of folk in a ruffianly early-morning mood.

He looked at his watch in the moonlight. The wonder is that his ireful gaze did not stop the repeater at three A. M.

His window commanded the mound of geyserite which made the inn famous. He leaped out of bed on a chance that the view might break the monotony.

Scarcely had he reached the window when, in the lonely loveliness of the night, up sprang the geyser—lowly at first, then higher and higher—like a thing of life, leaping toward the moon, scattering myriad diamonds from its banner of cloud. No artificial light now bathed its beauty. No crowd of humanity encircled it like clustering bees. Alone in the silvery light it mounted and mounted under the brooding stars that knew it so well. They sparkled, and beckoned to the beloved captive, who, holding herself at full height, could not quite reach their kisses, but sank back at last, reflecting their brightness in her tears as she vanished.

“And Rosalie weeps. I know she does,” thought Irving; “and I won’t stay to see it.” [194]

He jumped back into bed.

“It’s a beastly shame that I can’t do anything and nobody else will. Mr. Derwent says she’s a relative, and then goes doddering around and lets her bring him his coffee. When he gets to the lake, I’ll have a few words with him, Betsy or no Betsy. I’m just waiting to see if he means to do anything of his own accord. I wonder if my blood will run as cold as that, when I’m fifty. One thing sure, I shall never dare to fall in love, if just a matter of ordinary humanity can stir me up like this.”

The whack which his long-suffering pillow received as punctuation to this muttered speech was the last for that night. The philanthropist sank to slumber and wakened with a start and a sensation of being too late for something important.

He looked at his watch. It was just half an hour to stage time.

He jumped up, dashed some cold water over his head, pulled on some of his clothes, and stuffed the rest into his suit-case, which closed reluctantly and under the influence of muttered [195]
incantations such as may proceed from masculine youth in the anticipation of a stage-ride of twenty miles on an empty stomach.

Irving prided himself on being his own alarm-clock. He had especially requested not to be called, and in a nettled state of mind he finally pulled open his door and nearly tumbled over Betsy, seated in the corridor. Beside her on the floor reposed a tray. Odorous steam was rising from a brown pot thereon. She picked up the tray.

“You’ve got ten minutes,” she said calmly. “Open the door.”

She carried her fragrant burden into the bedroom and set it on the table. Irving would have followed that steam anywhere. He dropped his suit-case and drew up a chair.

“Good fairy!” he exclaimed as she filled his cup and he bit deep into the bread and butter. “Good genius! Betsy, have I ever been ungrateful to you? This ends it!”

She sat composedly, her watch in her hand. “Do chew a little, Mr. Irving.”

He laughed. “Sounds natural,” he said, busily devouring and drinking.

“Time’s up.”

He knew so well that she would give him the limit, that he rose like a shot, and picked up the [196]
suit-case.

“But why, Betsy,” examining her as they fled, “why are you hatted and suited in so finished a manner?”

“Because we’re goin’ with you,” replied Betsy equably.

“What? Why?”

“Because Mrs. Bruce didn’t sleep any, and neither did Mrs. Nixon; and we’re all goin’.”

There was no further time for talk. Irving had had the forethought to pay his bill the night before, and when he and Betsy stepped into the last stage it had all the familiar appearance of previous days except that no waitress was shrinking in a corner like a violet striving to hide beneath its leaves.

“Here we are,” said Robert cheerfully. “United we stand, divided we fall. We’re all going

fishing.”

“Irving, come here.”

Mrs. Bruce made room for him beside her, and the stage started. She was pale, and had made no effort to get the driver’s seat, where Miss Maynard and Robert had climbed at Mrs. Nixon’s suggestion.

“Let some one sit up there who has had a wink of sleep,” Mrs. Bruce had said sepulchrally. “If I [197] owned that inn, Irving Bruce, I would sell it for twenty-five cents.”

“Well well!” responded her son, so fortified by coffee and bread and butter, eaten where he was not obliged to look upon a captive maid, that he could smile. “I thought the inn was enchanting you into remaining all summer.”

“H’m!” ejaculated Mrs. Bruce. “It may be very fascinating by day; but by night it is Hades, nothing less—not a whit less.” And the speaker shook her head as one who should say that hours of argument would not persuade her to abate a jot of her denunciation. “Did you sleep any, Irving?”

“Why—not much. I think it must have been the coffee. You overdid it too, eh?”

“Coffee!” Mrs. Bruce glared palely at the suggestion. “There were two men in the room next to us. Logs between—nothing but logs. Irving, wouldn’t anybody with any sense or forethought have cemented between those logs?”

“So picturesque,” murmured Irving.

“Don’t let me ever hear the word again,” gasped Mrs. Bruce. “They said it all night. Didn’t [198] they, Betsy?”

“You said so, ma’am.”

“That’s it. I kept asking Betsy if she was awake. Didn’t I, Betsy?”

“Yes’m.”

“And she knows how they talked. They went out every hour—every hour, all night, Irving.” Mrs. Bruce made the repetition with an impressiveness mere print is powerless to convey. “Went to see the geysers and then slammed back into their room to talk about them. Oh!!”

“Too bad, Madama! You’re quite tired out. Now just rest a while. Don’t trouble to talk.”

“And the radiator, Irving.” Mrs. Bruce had not yet relieved her mind. “It cracked all night. The apparatus must be put in wrong. I called Betsy’s attention to it several times. She’ll remember.”

Miss Foster looked as if the memory of the night was liable to remain for some time as green as the room Mrs. Bruce had waked in.

“The hotel should be thoroughly done over,” declared Mrs. Bruce, “the walls chinked with cement and the steampipes looked to, or else in common honesty a placard should be nailed up, [199] reading: ‘For show only!’ If ever I was grateful for anything, it is that you had planned to go this morning, anyway. I shouldn’t have had the force to argue or persuade you.”

Irving thought of his own nocturnal perambulations, and turned toward the seat behind, where Mrs. Nixon was seated with her brother.

Her countenance wore a forbidding expression.

“Were you unfortunate also?” he asked.

“Really, Mr. Bruce,” she replied with deliberate distinctness, “I should not expect it to be a matter of general interest if I had been. Perhaps you remember what Emerson says apropos of retailing woes of that character to one’s morning companions. I quite agree with him.”

Having thus delivered herself, the lady’s lips closed in the curves of beauty which nature had bestowed upon them, and she again gave her attention to the landscape.

Mrs. Bruce made a grimace as she met her son’s amused eyes.

“Now,” she thought, “I suppose she thinks she is even with me for last evening.”

Mr. Derwent, unconscious of injuring his sister’s effect, addressed Mrs. Nixon. [200]

“You look done up, Marion. I am sorry you passed such a disturbed night.”

Mrs. Bruce pressed Irving’s arm and gave him a malicious side glance.

“You should all be equipped like myself for traveling,” continued Mr. Derwent rather grimly, “and take off your ear when you go to bed.”

“Poor gentleman,” thought Betsy. “How gladly he would lie awake to hear his neighbors, and if he could listen to the radiators snap, it would be music to him, I’ve no doubt.”

She glanced around at him. He had his hands crossed on the head of his stick in his usual posture.

“I wonder if I’ll ever dare talk to him! He looked so kind at Rosalie yesterday. If the fish bite good, perhaps Mr. Irving’ll forget her. Here’s hopin’ they will! I meant to have a real good visit with the child to-day. I must send her a card when we stop for lunch.”

At the Thumb, Betsy had a chance to do this.

As soon as Mrs. Bruce discovered that they might make the remainder of their trip by water, she urged it. [201]

“I would just as lief go separately from Mrs. Nixon,” she said to her son, “until she has had a night’s sleep. Find out, Irving, whether they’re going by boat.”

It proved that all the places on the boat had been engaged, and as soon as Mrs. Bruce discovered this, her desire to proceed in that way was augmented; and many were the alterations she suggested in a management which contained possibilities of such poignant disappointment as hers.

Mrs. Nixon preserved a magnificent silence; but looked graciously upon her child, whose sallies appeared to have amused Miss Maynard out of her habitual demureness.

“They seem to get on very well together,” she remarked to her brother at a moment when they were alone.

He nodded. “Helen dares be a girl again,” he announced. “There is a great weight off her mind. Her cheeks seem to have grown plump over night.”

CHAPTER XVI
BETSY'S GIFT

[202]

THE Colonial Hotel that evening looked such a haven of rest to tired wanderers, that as soon as it was settled that they could get rooms Mrs. Nixon and Mrs. Bruce were able to smile on each other again.

The mountain lake lay calm in the waning light, and strings of fish being brought in caused excitement among the men.

"One thing you must do, Irving," said Mrs. Bruce, looking graciously upon Helen, "is to take Miss Maynard to that place where you stand on shore and catch trout, and then whisk it right over into a boiling spring and cook it before you take it off the hook."

"Miss Maynard has only to command me," rejoined Irving.

"I am going fishing with Mr. Derwent," said Helen. So subtle were the changes in the mental atmosphere of the last few days, so complete the step from subserviency to dominance, that any exhibition of coquetry with the two young men would have been considered legitimate by their [203] natural guardians. It was the absence of all archness in the girl that concerned Mrs. Nixon, and the quiet declaration just made disturbed her.

She secured her son's attention.

"You surely won't oblige your uncle Henry to act as cavalier to a young girl," she said.

"What?" asked Robert. "Oh, you mean the fishing." He laughed with a mischievous flash of the eyes which brought color into his mother's cheeks. "Afraid she'll fish for him as well as with him, eh? Well, I think perhaps you have *raison*."

"Robert, why *are* you such a tease? I wish you would choose a time when I am not so nervous and tired. I've never thought of such a thing, foolish boy!"

"I told you to count ten before you asked her to live with us."

"Don't you like her, dear?"

"Yes, I think she's good stuff; but—you know what I told you. If she comes to live with us, she'll run the ranch. You hear me. I don't care to have anybody pull my wires. When I hop, I want it to be from my own pure lightness of heart."

Mrs. Nixon looked thoughtful. "I intend to count ten, Robert. I told you that a month at the [204] Fairport Inn would reveal a great deal."

"I think it will," agreed Robert dryly.

"Meanwhile," continued Mrs. Nixon with some asperity, "you can either leave her entirely to Irving Bruce or you can do your part toward entertaining her."

Robert threw an arm around his mother's shoulders and gave her a squeeze which ruffled her dignity into a heap.

"You're no wire-puller, honey," he said. "Better leave it alone."

Mrs. Nixon wriggled herself free.

"Mrs. Bruce is so conceited about her stepson," she said warmly, "that I really have some feeling about it, Robert. I confess it frankly."

"Well, mamma dear, they shouldn't tease her! As I've spent the whole day with Miss Maynard, you should be satisfied with the proof of your son's fascinations. She might have dived off the driver's seat into Brute's arms, and she didn't do it. Be comforted."

"I know Mrs. Bruce will make Irving take her to see the bears after supper. You watch! And you might just as well do it yourself."

"Oh no," Robert shook his head. "I'd rather be free to climb a tree. Speaking of supper, come; [205] and talk loudly, please, while I take my first mouthful, so the guests won't hear it fall."

Mrs. Nixon sighed and went with him.

When the party rose from the table there was a general movement to the back of the hotel to view the bears.

Mrs. Bruce, quite restored by supper and the prospect of a night's rest, held Betsy's arm as a sign to Irving that he was at liberty.

He and Robert sauntered on together, talking of the morrow's fishing, and the others followed.

Mr. Derwent was thoughtful. His sister leaned on his arm and Helen walked on his other side.

"So you were at school with Miss Vincent?" he said.

"Yes; a short time. It seems Mrs. Bruce gave her a short course."

The girl's tone was cool; but Mrs. Nixon noted, as she had done before, the cleverness with which she conveyed her distinct words, and the ease with which her brother understood.

"Didn't you like her very much?"

"No, not especially. I had no occasion to know her well." [206]

"H'm! She seemed to me so appealing. Very modest and engaging."

"I dare say she is," returned Helen carelessly. "Oh, there! See? That black bear and her cubs!"

For the following fifteen minutes the party watched the bears. They heard the mother give the cubs warning under suspicion of a cinnamon bear's approach, and saw the babies scamper fleetly up a tree, followed by mamma; then, presently reassured, the whole family came down and proceeded with their meal.

Wires were stretched to prevent the human guests from trespassing beyond certain limits, and soldiers were on duty, for it is difficult to believe that the animals are not tame, and the curious would approach them.

While the party watched, the cinnamon bear did appear, headed for the garbage-heap, and the house of black bear took to the woods in a body. Then came a grizzly, and the conquering cinnamon unostentatiously disappeared.

"It is very interesting," wailed Mrs. Bruce, "but why don't the management provide clothespins for the guests' noses?"

Robert had gravitated to Helen's side. [207]

"When we get across the Styx," he murmured, "I'm going to follow that woman up. I'm as sure as if I'd seen it, that her halo won't fit."

"And Mr. Bruce is so nice to her!" said Helen.

There was gayety that night in the hotel office. An orchestra played, and there was dancing. Both the young men danced with Helen, then Irving wandered off to see about fishing-tackle, and Robert floated on with the girl, whose cheeks glowed.

"How well they dance together!" said Mrs. Nixon to Mrs. Bruce complacently.

"Yes," returned the latter. "Mr. Nixon being shorter is a better height for her than Irving."

"Robert is quite tall enough," said Mrs. Nixon.

"Yes, for Miss Maynard," returned Mrs. Bruce.

Neither of them had slept as yet, and their sitting together at all had a savor of reckless daring.

Betsy was deeply engaged at the counter where pictures and postal-cards were sold.

"I don't know," she thought, "as it would be anything out of the way if I should get that whole [208]
set o' postal cards and send 'em to Hiram. Poor soul, he can't travel any, and they'd sort o' illustrate my talk if I ever told him anything about the trip."

As she meditated thus, Betsy's slow color rose, for her New England conscience remarked rather tartly that this plan for giving pleasure to her patient admirer was not without ulterior motives, and pretense was useless.

"Don't I know," she mused defensively, "that it would just make Hiram's life over to have the child in his house? Old Mrs. Bachelder would like nothin' better than to move all her traps over instead of comin' by the day."

All of which goes to show that Clever Betsy's wits were still busy with Rosalie's problem, and that she desired to settle it without committing herself to a surrender to the able seaman.

"As for postal cards, I guess I wouldn't have grudged Hiram that much pleasure if Rosalie Vincent had never come to the Yellowstone; and he and I—I mean he and Rosalie can enjoy lookin' at 'em evenin's."

Upon which, with conscious innocence and a withering disregard of the presumptuous inner [209]
voice, Betsy put down her money and took the set of cards in its neat case.

As she did so, Mr. Derwent sauntered up to the stand; the smile which always rested more in his eyes than on his lips was evident as he noticed Betsy's concentrated interest.

"Finding some pretty things?" he asked.

She nodded vigorously. Mr. Derwent would have been surprised to know how constantly his image had held possession of this woman's thoughts since yesterday afternoon.

Hiram Salter was a bird in the bush, and no matter how wary, Betsy felt that she could lure him—yes, upstart conscience, even without the aid of postal cards!—to come to her and eat out of her hand; but Mr. Derwent was the bird already in that hand so far as physical neighborhood was concerned. She had wondered through many hours how she could compass a conversation with

the deaf gentleman which others should not overhear.

Betsy looked wildly around for a likely spot for a vociferous tête-à-tête. There was a corridor which ran out of the large office in each direction, and from which opened the first-floor bedrooms.

Would the elegant Mr. Derwent think she was quite mad if she endeavored to lead him down [210] one of these, and was there a chance of her accomplishing the move without the observation of the two tabby-cats? Yes, as a truthful biographer I must admit that this was the title bestowed by Rosalie's champion upon two complacent ladies since the playing of the Riverside Geyser yesterday afternoon.

Mr. Derwent's voice interrupted her swift thoughts.

"What have you been finding that is pretty? Is there anything here I ought to get?"

Betsy repeated her vigorous nodding and addressed the saleswoman.

"Let me see that water-color of the canyon again, please."

"A water-color, eh?" said Mr. Derwent; then as Betsy looked at him in surprise, he smiled again.

"These capricious ears of mine like a racket," he said. "The more the orchestra and the clatter of voices and feet deafen you, the more they make me hear. That's pretty, that's very pretty."

The clerk had produced the picture, and Mr. Derwent gazed upon the waterfall, the spray [211] dashing up its golden cliffs; and Betsy gazed eagerly at him. He could hear her. That was more exciting than the prospect of seeing on the morrow this climax of beauty in the great Park.

"We ought not to have looked at this until after we had visited the canyon," suggested Mr. Derwent. "Paint is cheap, and disappointments are bitter."

"The picture's just beautiful, though," said Betsy.

"And not a bit too bright," declared the clerk. "There couldn't any picture do justice to it."

"You like it, do you, Miss Foster? Did you buy one?"

"No, sir. I've got a postal of it, though, in this set of cards."

"I will take this," said Mr. Derwent to the clerk, passing her the water-color.

While the picture was being put into its envelope, and the clerk was making the change, Betsy's wits were working fast. How, *how* to make the most of this golden opportunity! She shrank from the appearance of begging even for the winning girl she had left behind her. It did not help matters nor lessen her embarrassment to have her companion hand her the envelope [212] containing the water-color.

"With my compliments, Miss Foster," he said with a bow.

"For me!" burst forth Betsy, flushing under her mingled emotions.

"A souvenir," he returned. "It is really pretty."

"Oh, it's a gem, and I do thank you!" exclaimed Betsy. "Oh dear, how can I now!" was her mental moan. "It's exactly like sayin' one good turn deserves another. I hate to be those kind o' folks that give 'em an inch and they'll take an ell."

While she hesitated, fearing every moment that the prize would turn and saunter back to his people, Mr. Derwent lingered.

"I have been very glad," he said, regarding Betsy's narrow, excited face, "of your kindness to the little Miss Vincent."

Now Rosalie was not little. She was an upstanding daughter of the gods, meriting their trite description; and the adjective warmed Betsy's heart and filled her with courage. That, and the tone of the words, gave her a welcome cue. She looked wistfully into the kind eyes.

"It's one o' the hardest things I've ever done to leave Rosalie at that inn," she said. [213]

"I didn't like it either," responded her companion quietly. "Let us come over in this corner and talk a bit."

Betsy followed, an inward pæan of thanksgiving going up from her good heart.

Irving was still talking fishing-tackle at a desk at the opposite end of the office. Miss Maynard was frisking in a two-step with Robert, and the two mothers chaperoned her gravely and with increasing sleepiness, while the orchestra rang its rhythmic changes. Betsy, standing a little at one side of the crowd, told again the story of Rosalie's life to an attentive listener, who in his turn recounted to her certain circumstances of the Vincent losses.

"And it has come to this, has it," said Mr. Derwent, "that this young girl hasn't a friend in the world except you and me?"

“That’s it,” responded Betsy promptly. “That is—” she added hurriedly—“we’re the only safe ones she’s got.”

“How is that?” Mr. Derwent smiled leniently. “A lover? I shouldn’t wonder at that.”

“Oh, no, not a lover. I should hope not! Good gracious!” [214]

Betsy’s manner and precipitate speech made Mr. Derwent smile again.

“You don’t mean that big boy in our stage with two mothers, neither of whom owns him?”

Betsy’s wandering eyes looked so desperately embarrassed that the speaker could not forbear pressing her a little.

“Two mothers; one of whom he loves and one who loves him.”

Miss Foster started. “Oh, Mr. Derwent,” she gasped, and now her eyes met his in fright.

“Very well,” he said, “whoever it is, I think we shall be equal to the case without his help. They tell me you’re called Clever Betsy. Now let’s see whether you’re well-named. Let’s talk ways and means a little.”

And Betsy did talk: talk as she had seldom done since Irving’s mother went to sleep one night in her arms.

She told Mr. Derwent of a friend of her childhood, one Hiram Salter, and laid bare her designs on that mariner’s hearth and home.

Mr. Derwent listened, nodding sometimes, and when she had finished, he spoke.

“And this talent of Rosalie’s,—this elocutionary business? Would there be any field for her [215] perhaps in Fairport, as a teacher?”

Betsy looked dubious. “Maybe. It’s a pretty well-to-do village all times o’ year; but that could come afterward. If I just once knew she was safe in a home! She could likely get into a school somewhere later.”

“Well-to-do, you say,” repeated Mr. Derwent thoughtfully. “Do the people there entertain? Parlor entertainments pay pretty well.”

“No,” replied Betsy slowly, fixing her interlocutor with a gaze which little by little seemed to see beyond him. “Folks there wouldn’t think they could—spend money—that way—”

Her voice trailed off and there was a silent space, while Mr. Derwent wondered at her altered expression. Suddenly her gaze focused on him again and her hard hands clasped the water-color against her breast. “Mr. Derwent, I’ve got an idea!” she said in a changed tone.

“Of course you have,” he replied encouragingly. “It’s a peculiarity of clever people.”

“Let me tell you what I’ve thought;” and Betsy proceeded to do so with eagerness.

“I believe it would work,” returned Mr. Derwent thoughtfully, when she had finished. “Follow [216] that up, Betsy. May I call you Betsy?”

“Of course, Mr. Derwent. I ain’t anything else; and if you knew how I felt towards you for befriendin’ Rosalie, you’d know that you might call me anything.” Bright tears glistened in the good gray eyes.

“The first thing to do, then, is to write Rosalie a letter. Come, we’ll do it now,” he answered. “I must talk with her. We will have her come to the canyon.”

CHAPTER XVII
SUNRISE

[217]

On the following morning there was a reaction of good spirits in all the party.

The men went out early on the lake, and the ladies were enthusiastic over the trout they ate for breakfast in consequence. Harmless jests passed between the mothers; Helen Maynard lost somewhat of her reserve, and as for Betsy, her narrow face beamed upon everything and everybody indiscriminately as the party journeyed onward to the Canyon Hotel.

After luncheon they all drove to Inspiration Point, and looked upon the Grand Canyon, the sight of whose beauty is an epoch-making experience in the life of the most blasé.

The Grand Canyon in Arizona is larger, grander than perhaps any of the world's physical wonders; but it is too colossal to be grasped. Its very distances are so vast that a bluish veil seems hung before its battlements and minarets, while its river, a mile below, might as well be cotton wool lying stationary in the depths. One sees without believing, and gasps without [218] grasping. There is as much of awe as of joy in beholding the Arizona wonder.

But in the Yellowstone lies a revelation of beauty which bathes the soul in a dream of loveliness, so surpassing, so overwhelming, that it is inconceivable that one could receive more into the ecstatic consciousness. Majesty it has and impressive vastness; but not more than can rejoice the eye and thrill the heart.

When finally the party were returning to the hotel for dinner, Irving turned a grave face upon Betsy's glowing countenance.

"You don't seem to have anything on your mind," he said.

"Not a thing," she rejoined promptly.

"I wish I could wash my hands of the affair as easily," he said crushingly.

"Mr. Irving," a smile rippled over Betsy's thin lips, "I haven't had a chance to tell you that I talked with Mr. Derwent last night."

"You did, eh?" The young man's face changed to alert attention.

"He feels just the way we do. It's goin' to be all right."

"*Jubilate!*" ejaculated Irving. "How?"

"Oh, I can't tell you now. You go right on trustin' me—or rather you'd better begin!"

"You're a good soul, Clever Betsy! When does she stop?" [219]

"As soon as it's right."

Irving uttered an exclamation of impatience.

"Don't show your ignorance o' business methods," said Betsy smiling. "You go on with your fishin'. Everything's goin' to be all right, and I'll tell you about it later."

Thus reassured, Irving obeyed. He went on fishing; he tramped to Artist's Point with Miss Maynard, Nixie, and Mr. Derwent, and at night went to his rest without having cross-examined Betsy further.

He knew every shade of expression in her good, immobile face, and satisfaction was too clearly writ upon it for him to doubt that all was well. Let her have her little mystery, if she derived enjoyment from it. Of course all Irving cared for was to know that Rosalie was properly looked after,—the details were really immaterial.

Toward the following morning he found himself on the shore of the Firehole River, again waiting for the Riverside Geyser to play. As the water began to spout, he suddenly noticed that Rosalie Vincent was in a canoe in the middle of the river, just in the path of the irresistible liquid [220] catapult. He flung off his coat preparatory to jumping into the water, and at the same time shouted her name repeatedly.

A mixture of sheepishness and relief greeted his sudden view of the ceiling of his bedroom. His own voice rang in his ears. He glanced at the window. Streaks of light were showing in the sky. An idea occurred to him.

"I shall never have such another chance," he thought. In fifteen minutes more he was dressed and stealing like a burglar down the corridor and out the door of the hotel.

The sky was brightening fast, and he started on a jog-trot in the direction of the canyon.

The stillness, the loveliness of that morning,—the only sounds those of Nature undisturbed and uninterrupted! What fine exhilaration was in the air! Had no reward followed that run over the mountain road, Irving Bruce would have remembered it all his days as unique in rare enjoyment; but when at last he passed out from the shadows and stood upon a vantage-point commanding the superb gorge, what words can describe the grandeur of the pageant, as the rising sun

brightened the flaming walls of the canyon, and whitened the tempestuous water which paused on an awful brink before thundering into the deeps below,—a compact mass of shimmering silver foam! [221]

A strange ecstasy forced moisture into the watcher's eyes; but suddenly as his glance swept down the cliff his heart seemed to stop beating. On a jutting rock below him a woman was standing. She wore a white gown and was bareheaded. While he looked she seemed to become terror-stricken, and retreating, her back to the falls, clung to the hoary rock like a frightened dove.

As in his dream Irving shouted, "Rosalie! Rosalie!" but the mad roar of water fortunately drowned his voice as he plunged down the path that led to the jutting rock.

If the girl should faint or fall, there was nothing to prevent her slipping over the edge and rolling into the awful chasm, and it seemed to the man an eternity before he scrambled to a foothold beside her and seized the white gown. She lifted dilated eyes to his face, then gave a smile of heavenly relief and sank into the arms that clasped her.

He scowled down while he held her close.

"Are you crazy?" he demanded.

"Oh!" was all she could breathe.

"Don't you faint!" he exclaimed again, as ferociously as before. [222]

"No—I won't," she murmured. She was very white as she pushed herself from him.

He clasped her hand tightly.

"Don't look down. Put your foot there." He indicated a spot with his own foot and stepped ahead of her.

Thus, little by little, he led her upon the steep trail, and they climbed to the upper ground.

"That was a crazy thing to do!" repeated the man when they stood in safety.

"The water—drew me," she answered faintly.

She was more than ever like a nymph, her eyes appealing in her white face under the gold of her hair.

"Aren't you cold? Where are your wraps?" viewing her white dress.

She looked about helplessly. "I had a sweater. I must have dropped it somewhere. No, oh no, Mr. Bruce;" for Irving was taking off his coat.

"Nonsense! Of course I shall. How many layers do you suppose I need? See my sweater-vest?" He put her arms in his coat-sleeves and buttoned it close to her throat. "I'm glowing. I ran all the way." [223]

"How wonderful that you came!" She said it very quietly, apparently still under the spell of her moment of panic.

He kept his eyes upon her. "I dreamed about you. I dreamed that you were in danger."

She looked at him curiously. "Is that why you came?"

"Perhaps. Who can tell?" His face had cleared, and he looked into hers, so still and lovely above the rough coat. "I am very angry with you, Rosalie."

"Oh no, you can't be. It looked very easy. See."

From where they stood, the jutting rock below did look ample and tempting.

"But I'm sorry I frightened you," she added, and looked up at him with an enchanting smile.

The new day had begun. The solemn pines towered above them. On a crag below clung an eagle's nest, and the parent birds circled and soared above the emerald-green river, returning to the young with food.

"It seems," said the man slowly, "as if we were alone in this stupendously beautiful world." [224]

"My head went round and round," she returned dreamily. "I wonder how long I could have held there."

He shuddered. "Did life suddenly seem well worth living?" he asked.

"Yes indeed," she returned. "It seemed that, yesterday. A wonderful thing has happened to me. I'm not a heaver any more."

"Tell me all about it. When did you come? What does it mean to find you here at dawn as if you had rained from the skies?"

"Mr. Derwent doesn't want me to stay in the Park. He thinks there is other work I can do. He cared a great deal for my father, and for his sake he will take care of me and guide me, he says, if

I will be obedient.” The speaker lifted her eyes again to those which studied her. “It’s easy to be obedient to pleasant orders, isn’t it? He wants to send me right back to Boston.”

She paused, and Irving nodded with satisfaction.

“I quite understand,” she went on quietly, “why he wishes me to go a little ahead of your party.” Irving frowned.

“It’s all right. I have felt very much humiliated—” she went on. [225]

“Absurd, ridiculous,” interjected Irving hotly; but she finished her sentence as if he had not spoken.

“Betsy says I am a vine, and wish too much to cling, and haven’t backbone enough; but Mr. Derwent’s interest puts backbone into me. I feel that surely there is a place for me somewhere—”

“Where,” interrupted her companion, “where in Boston are you going?”

“He will take care of it all, he says. Isn’t it wonderful? I don’t wonder that he loved my father.” The girl’s eyes shone. “He says that they were very close at one time, and that old friends can never be replaced. It makes me think of what Holmes said:—

> “‘There is no friend like the old friend, who has shared our morning days,
> No greeting like his welcome, no homage like his praise:
> Fame is the scentless sunflower, with gaudy crown of gold;
> But friendship is the breathing rose, with sweets in every fold!’”

The girlish voice was like music above the smothered roar of many waters. As Irving listened and looked, he understood the warmth of Mrs. Bruce’s brief enthusiasm. [226]

There was a pause, and the two feasted their eyes upon the glories before them.

“It is absurd that you shouldn’t go back to Boston with us,” said Irving at last.

“I’d much rather not, Mr. Bruce. I fear if Mr. Derwent had insisted on that, I should have rebelled. You are kind to take an interest—”

“An interest!” burst forth Irving, and arrested himself. He smiled. “Didn’t I pick you off that cliff a few minutes ago?”

She looked at him with an expression which nearly banished his self-control.

“We don’t hear much about man-angels,” she said, “but you looked like one to me at that moment—one of Botticelli’s—you know how ready they always look to scowl?”

She laughed softly.

“I was furious with you,” said Irving. “So remember I have part interest in you after this. Mr. Derwent is all very well, but—

> “‘There is no friend like the old friend, who has shared our morning days.’

These are our morning days, Rosalie.”

“Yes, and the morning hours of them,” she agreed. “Since I knew I was to leave to-day I felt I could not waste the time in sleeping. I wanted—oh! how I wanted—how I have dreamed of seeing the sun rise in this canyon! Perhaps,” she looked at him wistfully, “perhaps it would have been my last sunrise but for you.” [227]

Irving’s heart beat faster, and his jaw set. He could feel again the yielding form that had clung to him.

“No one would have known,” she went on in a dreamy tone. “Even Mr. Derwent would have thought I had disappeared purposely and would have marveled at my ingratitude; but—” her voice changed and she looked up into Irving’s eyes, smiling,—“they might all have talked about me and said critical things, yet Betsy would have believed in me,—believed and suffered. Dear Betsy!”

“How about me? How about the friend of your morning days?” asked Irving.

“Oh, you only began to be that this morning. You would never have given the matter a thought; and even Helen Maynard knows me too slightly to have defended me.”

“Miss Maynard has found a gold-mine in the Yellowstone. Did Mr. Derwent tell you?”

“No, indeed. What do you mean?” [228]

“She turns out to be an heiress, and only discovered it here.”

“How beautiful!” Rosalie’s eyes looked away pensively. “Any fortunate discovery becomes glorified by being made here. How happy she must be! It is so fine to have time to work at what you love to do!”

“Yes,” answered Irving. “That is the Eldorado for each of us.

"'And only the Master shall praise us,
And only the Master shall blame;
And no one shall work for money,
And no one shall work for fame,
But each for the joy of the working;
And each in his separate star
Shall draw the Thing as he sees It
For the God of Things as They Are!'"

Rosalie's eyes were bright as she met his.

"And I think Mr. Derwent means to let me work in my star. It's such a little star, but I feel it in me to succeed, and if the day should come when I vindicate myself to—to people that are disappointed in me now and don't understand, I shall be happy, *happy*."

"Happiness is largely a matter of—of friendship, as you said a few minutes ago," said Irving. "I [229]
want you to remember that you may always call upon me; that I am at your service. I swear you shall never be disappointed."

Rosalie returned his earnest regard with serious eyes.

"You saved my life," she said.

"I don't think so," he returned. "You would have stooped in a minute and crept to a place of safety on the trail."

"Then why were you so savage with me?" she asked. "It would have been necessary for me to stand up on that rock, and to take a short step across to terra firma. It seems as if I never could have done it."

"Oh, yes. The giddiness would have passed in a minute, and you would have done it. Self-preservation is the first law of life."

Rosalie shook her head slowly. "Then you have a bad temper. You were frightfully cross."

"That was merely discipline. You should never go to a place like that unless I am with you."

"You!"

The girl's tone of extreme wonder brought the color to her companion's face. He replied, [230]
however, with *sang-froid*. "Yes. I'll take you down there now if you'd like to try it again."

She shook her head slowly.

"No."

He laughed. "Discreet second thought, eh?"

"No, I'm not afraid, with you," she replied quietly. "But I don't care to go again." A pause, then she continued: "I must go back to the hotel. I leave to-day."

"And we to-morrow. It is a shame. I wish you'd let me—"

"No, Mr. Bruce, not for anything," she returned earnestly. "Let Mr. Derwent take care of it, and—if we meet again here, will you kindly not talk to me?"

"Just as you say. I will go back to the hotel with you now; but this is our good-by. Give me both your hands, Rosalie."

She obeyed. Their eyes met. She colored richly, looking like an embodiment of the morning as she stood against the sombre green of the stately pines. Freedom was before her: freedom to live, and to work, with the knowledge that she was no longer alone in the world. That was cause enough for the happiness that shone in her eyes; but that was not filling her thoughts to [231]
overflowing while Irving clasped her rough little hands close. It was the remembrance of the pounding terror of his heart in the moment when they had clung together on the dizzy rock.

"Don't forget, Rosalie. I am your ally."

She stood silent, her starry gaze not dropping before his.

"Friendship is going to mean a great deal to us," he went on. "I feel it. Remember; for—

"'Friendship is the breathing rose, with sweets in every fold.'"

CHAPTER XVIII
HOMEWARD BOUND

[232]

WHEN Betsy Foster awoke that morning she was full of excitement.

She assisted Mrs. Bruce as usual with her toilet, and at the first possible moment hastened to the apartment of her contraband protégée.

She found Rosalie in her cheap traveling dress of golden brown, and with her hat on.

She was sitting before a table on which was a breakfast-tray, and she was sipping coffee.

"That's right, Betsy. Come and see the lay-over," she said. "I feel still as if I needed identification."

The night before, her supper had been served in the same way and place by Mr. Derwent's order, and he and Betsy had, unsuspected, spent an hour here with the girl, planning her movements, and allowing her new benefactor to become somewhat acquainted with his old friend's daughter.

[233] Mr. Derwent had no desire to stir up questioning, and there was every chance now that Rosalie would get off by the morning stage without being observed.

"Is it really I, Betsy, sitting here and being waited on like this, and being cared for by such adorable people?"

The girl had risen on Betsy's entrance, and embraced her, pressing her fresh cheek against the thin one where a bright spot burned.

"Now, now, you can hug me a fortnight hence," said Betsy. "Sit down and finish your breakfast."

She glanced at the bed. The coverings were neatly laid over the foot-board, and the pillows were plump and smooth.

"How did you sleep, child?" she continued as Rosalie returned to her coffee. "The pillows look as if you hadn't touched 'em."

"I don't always use a pillow," returned the girl evasively.

"You look kind o' pale. I don't believe you slept real good."

"What does it matter?" Rosalie held her friend with wistful, glowing eyes. "Why should one lose the consciousness of happiness even for ten minutes?"

[234] There was a little contraction of Betsy's heart. So young a creature to be economical of happiness; but the intensity of the girl's eyes disturbed her.

"Now you mustn't get so wrought up over things, Rosalie. Make it a rule to be mejum in everything. I always have, and I find it the best way."

A low laugh escaped the girl as she met the kind gaze. Had Betsy ever stood in the midst of roaring immensity, an atom in the whirl of colossal, dreadful beauty, and fallen from dire panic into the close embrace of safety, with the beat of a kingly heart upon hers? Poor Betsy! Poor everybody in the wide universe except Rosalie Vincent!

The good woman went on talking, and the girl heard not a word. She was back beneath the pines watching the eagles at their nest, in a rainbow chasm.

"Gracious, child!" said Betsy at last, laughing and pulling the suit-case out of Rosalie's hands. "You look like a sleep-walker; let me put those things in there. And now you stay right here until I come back and tell you when to come downstairs. What have you got to keep you warm? It'll be cold stagin' to-day."

"I had a sweater," said Rosalie absently. "I lost it somewhere in the canyon."

[235] "In the canyon?" repeated Betsy mechanically. Then she repeated the words explosively. "What do you mean, Rosalie Vincent? Have you been out there this mornin'?"

Rosalie looked the picture of detected guilt.

"Well I guess you *are* a genius! You're as crazy as the best of 'em."

"You wouldn't have had me leave this place without seeing it?" said the girl.

Betsy bit her lip. "Well, I guess that's about so," she said. "It *would* seem cruelty; but you see Mr. Derwent thought you'd better be ahead of us, and he and I both know, if anybody does, what it is to stir up a strife o' tongues! And I s'pose in the hurried arrangement everything sort o' slipped into insignificance compared to smugglin' you out o' the Park."

Betsy's tone had turned from accusation to apology. "So you really have seen the canyon," she added, pausing, and regarding the pale face.

“I saw the sunrise there,” returned Rosalie.

“My stars!” ejaculated Betsy. “If I could see that, seems if I wouldn’t care if I never saw another sight in this world.”

“I don’t,” returned Rosalie quietly; and the blue gaze went far beyond Betsy’s sallow, [236]
wondering countenance. “I was born again in the canyon.”

Her look startled Betsy. “Be mejum, Rosalie,” she said. “You’ll wear yourself out if you feel too much. Be mejum. It’s a splendid rule.”

It came about that Mr. Derwent effected his protégée’s departure without disturbance.

Betsy complained to Mrs. Bruce of the cold of the morning and advised her not to stand on the veranda to view the loading of the stages. Mrs. Nixon would not do this in any case, and Robert had taken Helen out for a stroll.

Only Irving Bruce paced the piazza among the crowd, and when Mr. Derwent put Rosalie into the stage he met her eyes once.

Mr. Derwent saw him, and wondered if he had recognized the brown bird. He prepared himself for an explanation, and approached the young man.

“Pretty snappy drive they’re in for this morning,” he said.

“It is rather fresh,” replied the latter. “I was just wondering if Miss Vincent had wraps enough.”

Mr. Derwent regarded him curiously. “You recognized her then?” [237]

“Yes.”

“I take great interest in that girl,” said Mr. Derwent.

“I am not surprised.”

“I am sending her out of the Park.”

“If you hadn’t, I should,” said Irving.

“It’s scarcely a case for your assistance,” returned Mr. Derwent dryly. “But I wish to say that I appreciate your refraining from approaching her just now.”

Irving thought of the white dove that had clung to his breast.

“You showed good taste,” went on Mr. Derwent, “and an appreciation of the fact that this is a case where ‘the least said, the soonest mended,’ applies.”

“Quite so,” answered Irving equably; and Mr. Derwent, once more nodding approval of him, went into the house.

What a drive it was that morning for Rosalie! Betsy had wrapped around her, beneath her coat, a woolly “fascinator” of her own, and even without it, it is doubtful if the girl would have recognized temperature. Every little creature of the woods, as it came fearlessly from its covert, [238]
seemed to congratulate her on being alive with them; like them safe from being hunted, free to love, to work.

Arrived at Norris for luncheon, who should come to wait on her at table but Miss Hickey.

The young woman stood above the blonde girl’s chair, and impersonally called the menu to whomever it might concern.

Rosalie looked slowly around at her, her golden-brown veil pushed up from her face.

“Miss Hickey,” she said softly.

“Goodness, Baby! *You!*”

The waitress’s eyes stared and snapped; but business pressed, and it was not until the end of the meal, when Rosalie lingered for the purpose, that Miss Hickey had opportunity to slake her burning thirst for information.

“Been fired?” she asked sympathetically.

“No, I left.”

“Struck a gold mine? How are you goin’ to pay your way back?”

“Some friends are sending me back.”

Miss Hickey eyed her scrutinizingly. “You look as happy as if you’d lost twenty-five cents, and found ten dollars.”

“I am happy. Oh, Miss Hickey, I’m so happy!”

“Who’s with you, Baby? I’ll skin ’em if they’re doin’ you mean.” [239]

“No one’s with me. I’m all alone. I’m going to Boston alone.”

“Sent? Or sent *for*?” inquired the other, still unsatisfied.

“Sent,” returned Rosalie with a seraphic smile.

“By those folks you were scared of?” asked Miss Hickey, with sudden inspiration.

“No, the other people. Do you remember the deaf gentleman with gray hair?”

“No, I don’t, Blue-eyes.” Miss Hickey spoke sharply. “The grayer they are, the worse they are. That’s *my* experience.”

“Oh, he’s so good!” exclaimed Rosalie, “and he is a friend of my father’s, and he wants to help me.”

“Well, I hope he does. How’s that grand young feller, Mr. Bruce. Seen him lately?”

“Yes, I’ve seen them all. They’re enjoying the Park. How have you been, Miss Hickey? I can’t realize it’s only a few days since I saw you. It seems years.”

“Oh, I’ve been busier’n a nest o’ snakes, doin’ nothin’. Been laid up most ever since you were here.”

“I’m afraid the Swattie ball was too much,” returned Rosalie, smiling; “and I’m sorry, so [240]
sorry!”

She put out her hand.

“I didn’t want to go without seeing you again,” she went on, giving Miss Hickey’s a tight pressure. “I shall always remember you gratefully.”

“Well, I’m glad to see you too; and see you in so much luck. I hope it’s all right.” The black-eyed girl spoke doubtfully.

“The rightest thing in the world,” returned Rosalie; and black eyes, no matter how sophisticated, could not meet hers and doubt it.

“You’re goin’ right on to the Mammoth?” inquired Miss Hickey.

“Yes, and leave there to-night.”

“Ain’t you the grand lady! What’s your hurry?”

“Why,” Rosalie smiled mischievously, “those other people—the ones I was afraid of—will be here to-morrow.”

“Hot on your trail, eh?” said the other. “Well, you’re a galoot to go alone, when you might be in the stage with Mr. Bruce. If he’s comin’ here to-morrow I’ll be on the watch for him, believe *me*!”

There were showers of rain and hail all the afternoon while Rosalie coached to the Mammoth [241]
Hot Springs. When the girl saw again the veranda where she had trembled behind Miss Hickey’s shoulder, it seemed to her that a magic wand had transformed her life; and so it was. All the way she found her path smoothed by the forethought of her benefactor; and the long journey to Boston was made with no consciousness of care or tedium.

The newly-fledged, exultant heiress left behind at the Colonial Hotel little knew that the famous lawyer through whom her own fortune had found its rightful owner had bestowed still greater relief and courage upon her humble school friend.

Clever Betsy kept her poise admirably. She did not approach Mr. Derwent, nor ask him a question.

When the party returned to Norris they little suspected how a pair of black eyes in the dining-room were, in Miss Hickey’s vernacular, “sizing them up.”

Had burning glances visible effect, Mr. Derwent’s scrupulously brushed head would have shown several bald spots. The examination was on the whole satisfactory, and, joyous to relate, [242]
Miss Hickey succeeded in waiting upon Irving Bruce.

He came to luncheon a little late, and thus sat away from his party.

As he ate his dessert, to his surprise the waitress lingering beside his chair opened her lips and spoke.

“I remember you folks real well,” she said. “I was in your stage when you come on from Mammoth.”

Irving glanced up, and as her words reached his abstracted consciousness, he looked suddenly interested.

“You were with Miss Vincent, then,” he replied.

“M’hm,” admitted Miss Hickey with elegant ease. “I seen her yesterday,” she added, as the young man did not press the matter. “She’s quit.”

“You saw her yesterday?” he repeated eagerly. “How was she?”

“Oh-*ho*!” ejaculated Miss Hickey, mentally. “You take notice, do you?”

“Perter’n a chipmunk,” she returned aloud. “Say,” meeting Irving’s uplifted gaze, “is that gent with the bum ear, the deef gent, I mean,—is he on the level?”

“Why—certainly. Did—did Miss Vincent—” [243]

“Yes, she did. She told me he was sendin’ her back. Say; do you know her?”

“Yes, slightly.”

“Then you know that she’d believe Satan if he smiled on her. I’d like to know that she’s in good hands. That’s what I’d like to know.”

Irving Bruce smiled upon Miss Hickey, a bright light in his eyes.

“Do you see the thin-faced lady over there, the one with the brown waist?” he asked.

“Sure. The hatchet-faced one.”

“Miss Vincent is in her hands,” said Irving; “and they’re the best hands in the world.”

He rose.

“Well, believe *me*, I’m glad to hear it,” was the hearty response.

Irving smiled upon Rosalie’s friend again, and gave her a tip which not only supplied her with candy for weeks to come, but gave her food for thought as well.

“Maybe I didn’t butt in just right!” she reflected. “Oh, he’s just grand! Good for Baby! I guess she’s goin’ some!”

Betsy bided her time. She was sure that before the party reached Boston, Mr. Derwent would again open the subject of their mutual interest. [244]

Irving’s silence upon it awakened no suspicion in her faithful breast. She had assured him that all was well, and adjured him to trust her; and, his mind set at rest, the thought of Rosalie had slipped out of it, which, considering that he belonged to Mrs. Bruce, was the best thing that could happen.

Betsy’s expectation was well-founded. One afternoon after their train had left Chicago, and there came a lull in the interminable games of bridge which had whiled the hours away, Mr. Derwent approached the seat where Betsy sat alone, viewing the flying landscape—flat but not unprofitable.

“May I sit here a minute?” he asked.

She gave him a one-sided smile of welcome. A veil was wrapped around her head in much the same fashion in which she wore a cheese-cloth on cleaning days at home.

They talked for half an hour; the noise of the train increasing, as it always did, the ease of Mr. Derwent’s hearing.

Mrs. Bruce glanced at them more than once, well pleased with the satisfied expression on her handmaid’s countenance.

She addressed Mrs. Nixon. [245]

“What an extraordinarily kindly man your brother is!” she said.

“The best in the world,” agreed Mrs. Nixon impressively.

Had either of them heard the directions he was giving Betsy at that moment, they would have edited their praise.

Helen Maynard and both the young men were occupying a section opposite, showing one another card tricks, and Mrs. Nixon and Mrs. Bruce with quiet minds discussed their summer wardrobes, and the Fairport Inn.

By a strange coincidence the subjects being discussed by Betsy and Mr. Derwent were precisely the same.

CHAPTER XIX
MRS. BRUCE'S HEADACHE

[246]

"Be it ever so humble," said Mrs. Bruce, "there's no place like home!"

She was standing again on the veranda of her summer cottage, where Betsy was airing and beating pillows.

"Pretty good place," agreed Betsy. "I'm glad I ain't goin' to see a trunk for months; but—" she hesitated unwontedly, and then continued, "I'd like to go to Boston for a couple o' days, Mrs. Bruce, if you can spare me."

"Dear me, when we've just arrived?"

"The cook's all right, and you've got Mr. Irving and his friend both here—"

"A lot of good they are," retorted Mrs. Bruce. "They've lived with Captain Salter ever since we came."

Betsy said nothing. Mrs. Bruce had the uncomfortable realization which seized her at times that, although her None-such went through the form of asking her permission, she would in fact do exactly what she thought best.

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"It's such a queer thing for you to want to do, Betsy," she continued, "to go back into the heart of the city immediately. Of course Mrs. Nixon felt obliged to stay a few days with Miss Maynard, to order some gowns—"

"Do you want to send her any word?"

"Yes, I promised to look at the rooms at the inn and see what they had."

"Can't I do that for you?" asked Betsy.

"Why, yes, I wish you would."

"I can go this afternoon just as well as not," remarked Betsy quietly.

"Don't it beat all, the way things come round all right if you just don't fidget?" she thought.

The middle of the afternoon found her on the way to the pretty inn, set on a slight rise of ground above the river. Mr. Beebe, the proprietor, was a Fairport man, an old friend of Betsy's, whose provincial ideas had for years been in process of changing and forming by contact with the summer people for whom he catered; and what had once been a barn-like structure known as the Fairport Hotel, now showed as a modern inn, with verandas and a pretense to fashion.

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Mr. Beebe welcomed Betsy with effusion, rallied her on her travels and her worldly experience, and at last settled down to listen to her business.

When finally she arose to go, he remarked:—

"Well, seems if there wasn't any end to the new-fangled notions a feller's got to listen to and adopt to keep up with the times. I haven't forgot how clever you were to my wife when she was sick a couple o' years ago, and I don't like to turn down anything you ask of me."

"I appreciate your kindness, Sam, but you ain't goin' to lose money by this plan. You know we are all pretty proud o' the Inn. If Mrs. Bruce wasn't she'd never a recommended it to the Nixons. They're folks that are used to the best; and we'd like to see it have all the attractions any resort has. Mark my words, you'll thank me for this, instead o' me you, though I ain't underratin' your good feelin'. Good-by, Sam."

Clever Betsy left the place with a springing step.

She found her mistress in a rather injured frame of mind when she reached the cottage. It wore upon the lady that the None-such was going to desert her post for two days.

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"That's the worst of having a person like Betsy," she thought; "one gets so dependent. It's humiliating. I feel just like asking her not to go, but I couldn't bring myself to do that."

So Mrs. Bruce compromised by being silent and wearing an abused air.

"Once in a while Betsy will do a real selfish thing," she reflected; and she demanded of memory to stand and deliver the last occasion when her housekeeper had displayed base ingratitude. Memory appearing to find the task difficult, she resorted to deep sighs and an ostentatious headache.

Betsy was amused, but also somewhat touched.

"She ain't anything but a child, never was, and never will be," she thought. "You can't get out of a barrel what ain't in it."

She told her mistress of the pleasant rooms at the inn available because of having suddenly been given up by their usual occupants. "I'll go see Mrs. Nixon and tell her about 'em," she added. "Mr. Beebe's promised to hold 'em till Wednesday."

Mrs. Bruce put her hand to her forehead, but apparently was too far gone, sunk among her cushions, to reply.

"I think it would be real nice for you to do a lot o' sailin' while I'm gone," said Betsy cheerfully. [250]

"That's just about as considerate as you are!" returned Mrs. Bruce, with remarkable fire for one in the languorous stage of headache. "You know very well that at the best of times I don't care very much for sailing."

"I thought with Mr. Irving and Cap'n Salter both, you felt real safe, and enjoyed it," said Betsey pacifically; and Mrs. Bruce had sundry disconcerting memories of hiking hilariously with her hand on her boy's shoulder.

"Don't you suppose," she said with a superior air, "that I ever make a pretense of enjoying things for Irving's sake?"

Betsy's lips twitched. "You acted so natural you took me in," she returned meekly.

Mrs. Bruce sank back again among her pillows.

"I'll make out a list for all the meals while I'm gone," said Betsy comfortingly, "and give it to the cook. You see, Mrs. Bruce, one o' my friends that's lived in the country and is very inexperienced, wants to get a few clothes in the city. She don't know where to go or what to pay, and I told her I'd come in for a couple o' days and help her. You won't scarcely miss me before [251] I'm back."

"I must say, Betsy," declared her mistress faintly, "some people would have waited until there was no guest in the house."

"I'm real sorry I can't wait," returned Betsy gently; "but I'm goin' to arrange for the meals, as I say, so you won't have a mite o' trouble, and Mr. Nixon always makes everything jolly."

Mrs. Bruce made no reply, and Betsy left the room.

Going out on the street, she heard a piercing whistle down the street, executing a classic which would inspire a bronze image to cake-walk.

Betsy did not attempt any fancy steps, but she started on a long, energetic stride in the direction of the shrill ragtime.

She waved her hand with a gesture which she knew would check Robert's effervescence.

He waved his cap in return.

"Where's Mr. Irving?" she asked as soon as he could hear her.

"He's helping Cap'n Salter with the sail. They didn't appreciate my services, so I came away."

"I just wanted to tell you, Mr. Nixon, that I'm goin' to Boston." [252]

"Giddy creature! The whirl of the city drawing you so soon?"

"I'm goin' to tell your mother what rooms there are at the inn, and if you have any message—"

"I have. Tell her it's great here, and to let me know as soon as she's through using the car, because I want to bring it down—or up."

"I will. Say, Mr. Nixon,"—they were strolling toward the house, Betsy hanging back unaccountably,—"I hope you and Mr. Irving'll be sort of attentive to Mrs. Bruce for a couple o' days."

"Sure thing. I'm eternally attentive to her. What's up?"

"Well—she doesn't like to have me go; has the habit of me, you know; and I've got to go, that's all there is about it."

"Sad! sad!" ejaculated Robert. "Frightful thing—habit. You seemed so mild out in the Yellowstone I hadn't an idea you couldn't endure the quiet of the country a week."

"Now I'm relyin' quite a lot," said Betsy, "on your foolishness."

"What?" inquired the young man, his voice breaking. [253]

"Mrs. Bruce can impose on Mr. Irving—I mean,—you know what I mean, she can make him fall in with her moods; while you—well, you're just as good as a rattle to—"

"Betsy,—now, Betsy, beware! I have average poise, I hope, still I'm only human. My head can be turned!"

Betsy smiled. "I don't know as I exactly make you understand what I mean—"

"Oh, yes, you do. Your meaning is as clear as clear limping water. Please don't be any more definite or I may burst into tears; and it's in every etiquette book that I ever read, that it isn't proper to make the company cry."

"Yes, that's the way," said Betsy with satisfaction. "Just chatter to her like that, and she'll—"

“Betsy! Cruel one! How can I impress you!”

“Now listen,”—they were drawing near the house—“Mrs. Bruce’ll act sick when you go in. I don’t mean she’s actin’, but she don’t like things to go the way she hasn’t planned ’em; and she’s a real dependent little lady, and you and Mr. Irving must keep her as happy as a lark while I’m [254] gone. I’ve got to get off early in the mornin’, and I may not get a chance to see him alone at all; so you tell him I’m real sorry, and I’ll hurry back, and you take her with you everywhere, and look out for her and—and I’m goin’ around this back way. She’s right in the livin’-room. You’ll find her.”

Betsy disappeared with guilty haste, and Robert, smiling to himself and whistling softly, mounted the steps.

“Once there was a book,” he thought, “named ‘Pink and White Tyranny.’ Madama’s an anachronism. She belongs in it.”

He presented himself cap in hand at the door of the room where Mrs. Bruce lay motionless on a thickly pillowed divan.

“Any admittance?” he asked.

The sufferer stirred. “Is that you, Nixie?” she returned faintly.

He advanced to the divan. “Dear me, what’s this? You were so fit this morning.”

“Oh, I’ve been quite upset.”

“You look it. Absolutely knocked down. Nothing serious, I hope?”

“Where’s Irving?”

“Mending a sail with Captain Salter. They were so disrespectful to me that I came home.” [255]

“I’m very poor company, I’m afraid,” said the hostess languidly.

“But at least you appreciate me, Mrs. Bruce. You don’t hurt my feelings every second word you utter. Mayn’t I sit here by you,”—the speaker took a chair close to the divan,—“and rub your head, perhaps? My mother will tell you I’m a cracker-jack at it.”

Mrs. Bruce gave an inarticulate exclamation of dissent.

“I should expect you to rub my hair off,” she exclaimed faintly.

“It doesn’t look like that kind,” returned Robert innocently.

Her eyes were closed, but she could feel his, brightly curious, fixed upon her coiffure.

“You make me nervous, Nixie. Would you mind taking a book?”

“A thousand pardons, dear hostess! Of course I will. I did just want to ask your advice about the car, though.”

“What car?” Mrs. Bruce’s eyes opened.

“Ours. I think when mother gets through dressing Miss Maynard, we’d better have it here. Don’t you?”

“The roads are excellent,” replied the prostrate one. [256]

“Of course it’s Uncle Henry’s car, but it’s all in the family.”

“We haven’t one, just now,” said Mrs. Bruce. “We sold it when we went to Europe; and Irving is such a merman we thought we wouldn’t do anything about a new one till we went back to town.”

“I suppose you have an electric for yourself,” said Robert.

“I’m going to have one as soon as we get back. I’ve always thought I was too timid to drive it, but of late I’ve come to feel that I don’t like to be the only woman that hasn’t one.”

“Oh, you are just the person to drive an electric,” said Robert, his eyes twinkling as Mrs. Bruce unconsciously raised herself to a sitting posture among the pillows. “You’ll spin down to the bank every afternoon and bring Brute home.”

“I really do think you’re right, Nixie,” returned his hostess plaintively. “I have a very cool head, and it’s all nonsense that I couldn’t drive an electric even in the Boston cowpaths, while in the Parks—”

“Oh, my dear Mrs. Bruce, never think that Brute will accompany you there!” [257]

“Why not?” The question had all the usual crispness.

“Such a stately method of locomotion will not commend itself for his sportive hours. What car does he think of getting?”

The question opened a flood-gate; and for the next fifteen minutes, talk of pros and cons

regarding different high-class motors snapped with an ever-increasing vivacity in the erstwhile chamber of suffering.

Once Betsy came near the door and listened.

“But *that* car doesn’t have to be cranked,” she heard her mistress declare in bright tones.

She nodded with satisfaction and ran upstairs to put her belongings in a suit-case.

CHAPTER XX
BETSY'S APPEAL

[258]

TRUE to her promise, Betsy stayed but two days in Boston, and Mrs. Bruce, having had a very good time in her absence, was graciously pleased to let bygones be bygones when she returned.

"Was your shopping successful?" she asked.

"Yes, we did real well," was the reply. "I didn't know there was so many good ready-made things folks could get."

Mrs. Bruce smiled leniently.

"Rather awful things," she said, "but I suppose they did very well for your friend from the country."

"Yes, she'll look real good in 'em after she's fitted to a few alterations. Miss Maynard's been gettin' some ready-made ones."

"She has?" ejaculated Mrs. Bruce with interest.

"Yes; they showed 'em to me, some of 'em, when I went to Mrs. Nixon's; and they're elegant."

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"Oh, yes; with Miss Maynard's pocket-book, one can find very good things; and since they're coming here for the rest of the season, she doesn't need much. You say Mrs. Nixon wired for the rooms?"

"Yes, right off; and they think they'll get here Saturday."

That evening Irving Bruce, descrying Betsy stooping over her sweet-pea bed, joined her.

"How is Miss Vincent?" he inquired.

Betsy rose and regarded him.

"Set a spell," he continued, drawing her down upon a garden-seat.

"I haven't got anything to tell you, Mr. Irving."

"Nonsense," remarked the young man easily. "Don't you suppose I know that you went to town to get clothes for somebody? Mrs. Bruce told me that. Of course it was Rosalie. Whose gift? Yours or Mr. Derwent's?"

"Mr. Derwent's," responded Betsy after a reluctant pause.

"I hope they are proper for the seashore."

"They're real simple, and pretty, and good; just like her."

"Tell me what you bought."

[260]

Irving brought his sun-burned face close to Betsy's and hung his hand over the back of the seat close to her shoulder.

Betsy pressed her lips together.

"If you don't I'll hug you, and Mrs. Bruce is up there on the piazza, looking."

"Mr. Irving, behave yourself!"

Betsy essayed to rise, and was brought back swiftly by the strong hand.

"I can see her in everything if you'll just describe it."

"Well," said Betsy reluctantly, casting a glance toward the piazza, "we got her a black lace."

"Too old, I should think."

"No, no, 'tain't," Betsy forgot her reluctance in defense. "It's sort o' half low neck and has fluffy things on it—real pretty."

"What else?"

"A white lace one— Oh, she does look just like an angel in it, Mr. Irving!"

The speaker suddenly remembered herself, and her lips snapped together.

Irving frowned slightly. "Well, Mr. Derwent is blowing himself."

[261]

"He gave me five hundred dollars, Mr. Irving, and told me to fit that child out!" Betsy could not resist imparting her joyous news. "Oh,"—she heaved a long, eloquent sigh,—"I've had one good time, I tell you! I wanted to stay longer, but I promised Mrs. Bruce; and the everyday things she can get herself. She's smart, and knows that the plainest things look best on her; because the Creator's made her so she don't need any trimmin' up. I went to Mrs. Nixon's house, and there they were dressin' Miss Maynard out of a bottomless purse; but I'll match my girl against her."

Irving, attentive, watched the narrow face glow.

“And where did you say Rosalie is living?”

“I didn’t say,” replied Betsy with a return of caution.

“Not at Mrs. Nixon’s, I suppose.”

“Well, I guess not. While I was examinin’ Miss Maynard’s finery, I was glad I didn’t have a pain in my head so that they could see my thoughts. If they’d known Mr. Derwent’s money was buyin’ another girl’s outfit they’d ’a’ needed a smellin’ bottle. You know, Mr. Irving, I thought perhaps Miss Maynard comin’ into that fortune would ’a’ liked to help Rosalie in some way. It really surprised me ’cause she didn’t.”

“Miss Maynard’s head is in the clouds for the present. Very likely when she comes to earth she will be more interested in other people.” [262]

Betsy looked at the speaker affectionately. “You always was a generous boy,” she said. “Never could be hired to knock anybody.”

“I’m going to knock you, right off this seat, if you don’t tell me without any beating about the bush, where Rosalie Vincent is. I expect to go to Boston in a few days. I might help her choose her hats.”

Betsy’s eyes met his earnestly. “Now, look here. You’ve been as good as gold ever since we left the lake. You haven’t asked me a question.”

“That’s why you ought to answer me now, instantly.”

“I’m not goin’ to tell you.” Betsy spoke deliberately. “Rosalie’s got to make her own way in the world. Mr. Derwent knows that outside appearances count for a lot in her line o’ business, and he’s givin’ her this outfit, just as he’d give a boy a little capital to start him. She’s goin’ to try an experiment, and I ain’t goin’ to say anything about it. It’s an idea o’ my own, and if it turns out all right, I’ll believe my good angel put it into my head; but if folks like you—young men—play the fool, it won’t turn out well; and then I’ll know it was a caper o’ my bad angel. You needn’t scowl and look as if you’d eat up any other man who looks at her. You’re the one o’ the lot I’m most afraid of, and you’re very likely to see her.” [263]

Irving sprang to his feet as if he had been shot.

“Betsy, have you—is it possible—” he nearly choked in his excitement—“have you found her some place on the stage—vaudeville?”

Miss Foster, after her first jump, swallowed, and looked at him in exasperation.

“Will you sit down and not scare a body into a fit?”

“Have you, I say!” he demanded fiercely. “I’ll see Derwent to-night if he’s had anything to do with this.”

“For the land’s sake, Irving Bruce, you’re actin’ like a natural-born fool—but I love you for it!” The gray eyes sparkled. “Sit down on this bench.”

He obeyed, but his eyes still devoured her.

“I can’t leave Mrs. Bruce, can I? If Rosalie went on the stage I’d have to go with her, wouldn’t I? Do act as if you had some common sense.” [264]

“You frightened me,” said Irving.

“Well, you nearly gave *me* heart disease.”

Irving did not smile. His expression made it difficult for his companion to proceed; but there was no time like the present. She seldom had opportunity to talk with the young man alone, and Robert was amusing his hostess on the porch.

“As I said a minute ago, Mr. Irving, you’re a generous boy, and always were. You’re likely to see Rosalie Vincent sooner or later, and you’ll be put to the test. You know in your inmost heart that you don’t care a thing about her except the way you would a pretty picture, or statue, that you’d come across. You don’t know her at all in the first place, so any attention you pay her would be just for your own selfish fun, and you’ve said so much to me about her, that I’m afraid you *will* seek her if you get the chance—just for her beauty, poor child.”

Irving’s thoughts had flown back to the canyon, and a train of memories stirred him.

“She will attract a great many besides me,” he said. “If there’s ever any need of shielding her, I sha’n’t stand aside, you may be sure.” [265]

“You’re the only one she needs shielding *from*, Mr. Irving.” Betsy spoke with slow, gentle emphasis. “I tell Rosalie to be mejum, but she don’t know *how*. It isn’t in her. I’d feel meaner’n pusley to say this to you, if ’twan’t meaner not to. She’s set you up, the way a girl will, in a special niche of her heart. How she come to I can’t see, ’cause she never talked with you more’n once or twice. She don’t know that I notice this, but she’s shown it a number o’ times the last two days. Now she hasn’t had a chance yet to know men worth knowin’; and if you happen to meet

her anywhere, and just treat her pleasant but real formal, she'll get over this fancy—it's all just a part of her poetry and the notions she lives among all the time, in her own thoughts. It don't amount to anything, now; but it could if you acted selfish. I told you before that I love her, Mr. Irving. She hasn't got a person to take care of her but me. I'm glad she's a girl all out o' the question for you, because Mrs. Bruce would never think she was good enough, and would make her unhappy; and as long as she *is* out o' the question I ain't afraid to ask the son o' your father [266] and mother, the two finest people I ever knew in my life, to keep away from her; not flatter her; not show her any attention. She's as modest as a daisy, and got no more worldly experience than one. Lots o' men admire that kind a little while, and then tread on it without even noticin' that they have."

Irving during this speech had sunk his hands in his pockets, and his eyes were fixed on his outstretched pumps. Betsy regarded him anxiously through a moment of silence.

"Do you ever wish we were back in the canyon?" he asked. "I do."

"Mr. Irving!" she ejaculated. "I don't believe you've heard a word I've been saying."

"I have; but I doubt most of it. You're in love with me yourself, Betsy. That's what's the matter with you."

"H'm. Perhaps I might be if I could forget how cross you were when you were teethin' and how you tore your clothes, and got all stuck up with jam. Your mother trusted me perfectly. Whenever I carried you to her and said, 'Please spank him, ma'am,' she always did it without a question." Betsy's tone was vainglorious.

Irving threw back his head, and his ringing laugh caused Mrs. Bruce to look wonderingly down [267] the garden.

"An absolute monarchy, eh?" he responded. "And you have the habit so, you want to tyrannize over me still?"

"Don't leave me with the feelin' that you want to shirk out of it by foolin'," pursued Betsy, refusing to smile, and rising, conscious of Mrs. Bruce's gaze.

Irving rose also and threw his arm tenderly around her thin shoulders as they moved toward the house.

She tried to escape, but the gentle vise held.

"You've made me feel very sentimental, referring as you have to our past, Betsy," he said emotionally. "Know'st thou these verses, beginning—

"'There is no friend like the old friend, who has shared our morning days' (and teething nights!)"

"Please, Mr. Irving!"

With a desperate wriggle, Betsy escaped, and moved swiftly around toward the back door of the cottage.

"Did she refuse you?" called Nixie, as his friend stretched portentously, and then came on up [268] the steps.

"Absolutely."

"It must be a habit of hers," remarked Mrs. Bruce. "Captain Salter has been returning to the charge for years, so I've heard lately."

"Great work!" declared Nixie with zest. "He looks like a sea-dog that can hold on. I must have some fun with the great and only Betsy."

"If you do," remarked Irving lazily, "I'll have some fun with you that will make you an interesting invalid for the rest of the summer."

"Highty-tighty!" exclaimed Nixie. "I believe sonny is in earnest, Mrs. Bruce."

"Doubtless," she returned, with some bitterness. "Betsy has a true knight."

"I *am* in earnest," said Irving quietly. "Betsy's private affairs are as much to be respected as your mother's. Hands off."

"I spoke to her about the captain once," said Mrs. Bruce. "He'd been as much as making love to her under my very eyes, and I put some innocent question, but—" the speaker shrugged her shoulders—"she snubbed me."

"Quite right," said Irving promptly. [269]

"The man's crazy," declared Mrs. Bruce, "if he thinks Betsy could be persuaded to leave us, and go and drudge for him. Of course that's all he wants her for; and she *is* clever. She knows it."

"I don't agree with you," said Irving mildly. "Old Hiram's in love with her. To his eyes she looks just the same as she did when they went to school together."

"He shall have her then!" ejaculated Nixie enthusiastically. "I shall make it my pleasure, in slight, unostentatious ways, to throw them together."

“Wretch!” exclaimed Mrs. Bruce. “Destroyer of homes! Do you want to give me nervous prostration?”

“Did you ever try to throw Betsy anywhere she didn’t want to go?” inquired Irving.

“That’s my comfort,” groaned Mrs. Bruce. “She looked at Captain Salter as if she could eat him when he told us what he had named the boat.”

Nixie laughed. “She’s a character, isn’t she? I’m not far from in love with her myself.”

CHAPTER XXI
A RAINY EVENING

[270]

THE various and sundry hatchets which had been brandished in the mental atmosphere between the natural guardians of those two heroes, Irving Bruce and Robert Nixon, were all decently buried by the time the Yellowstone party were about to be reunited at Fairport.

Mrs. Bruce had quite the glow of a hostess as she placed flowers in the rooms of the expected ones; and Mrs. Nixon had invited the Bruce household, of which her son was to continue to be one, to dine with them at the inn on the evening of their arrival.

They had a cosy corner of the dining-room to themselves when the time came.

Helen Maynard looked charming in an evening gown of pale pink chiffon. The quiet little chrysalis familiar to their Yellowstone stage had yielded up a butterfly upon which Mrs. Nixon looked with pride as the work of her hands, noting with satisfaction the admiring curiosity in the eyes of the three men.

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Even Helen's demureness was not proof against the radiance of her content to-night as they took their places at the table. She was seated between the two young men, whose coats of tan provoked much comment from the newcomers.

When they had taken their places, Robert looked about with his usual cheerfulness.

"All present or accounted for but Hebe," he declared. "It seems as if she ought to materialize and bring us our soup."

Irving gazed at him. "You saw nothing unfitting, then, in that office for her?"

The speaker's manner was always quiet, but his boon companion recognized the tone.

"Brute of my heart!" ejaculated the latter, "'I would not live alway,' but a little longer, please! You'll pardon the natural yearnings of an affectionate nature. I can't help missing lovely Hebe."

"There is a more familiar face than Miss Vincent's that we are missing," said Helen. She turned to Mrs. Bruce. "How is Clever Betsy?"

"Very well indeed, thank you," returned that lady. "She is evidently more than grateful to be on her native heath again. I think I never knew Betsy in such good spirits as she has shown the past week."

[272]

"I noticed it in Boston," said Helen. "When she came to see us she seemed so happy. She said the best part of any trip, no matter how delightful, was getting home again."

While Helen Maynard spoke, she had a habit of turning at short intervals to Mr. Derwent as if to include him in all she said; and such was his ability to understand her, that his eyes sent her an acknowledgment even when there was no occasion for him to speak.

This time, however, he did answer.

"I don't wonder at Betsy. I like the looks of this place very much myself."

"And the taste of it," added Robert, eating his soup with a seaman's appetite. "This is very good, for a hotel. For myself, I live in a private family, and I pity you all. Mrs. Bruce has a cook with whom I'm liable to elope."

"I'll show her off to you some day soon," said Mrs. Bruce graciously.

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Betsy Foster was meanwhile enjoying the unwonted sole possession of the cottage. While she straightened the chaos in the young men's rooms, a smile was on her lips, and a light of excitement burned in her eyes.

When all was neat within doors and she had eaten her simple supper, she went out on the veranda, and seating herself in the best rocker, rocked, and hummed one of Robert's most abandoned two-steps.

While she was thus enjoying the *dolce far niente* of her unobserved evening, a light rain began to fall.

"I don't know as I'm sorry if it does rain," she murmured. "It'll keep 'em in the house, and I want 'em all to be there. I'm sure it'll please Mr. Derwent."

While she thus reflected, a square-shouldered, sturdy, masculine figure entered the gate and came up the garden-path.

Betsy showed no surprise at his appearance. The pleasant light continued in her eyes as she arose.

"How do you do, Hiram?" she said, as he came up the steps. "Take the big chair."

"Well!"

The sea-blue gaze scrutinized her as the guest's hard hand held hers until she jerked it away with decision.

"Take the big chair," she repeated.

"Ye'd rather give me that than your hand, eh?" returned Hiram, and he seated himself on the [274] edge of the flexible wicker.

"Sit back, and take comfort," said Betsy, returning to her rocker.

Captain Salter obeyed, moving cautiously.

"Well, travelin' does improve folks, they say. I can see you're improved, Betsy."

"You thought there was need of it, did you?"

"Well, I should think so! I knew the minute I got your note this afternoon that you was beginnin' to get more reasonable. To have you do somethin' real decent like askin' a feller to come and see you, showed that you was broadenin' out, Betsy, broadenin' out. Folks all gone to the inn to dinner, eh?"

"Yes. I thought it would be a good chance for me to hear some o' the town gossip."

"'Tis. Real good. It's all over Fairport that you and me's goin' to be married this fall." Betsy stopped rocking. "The name o' the boat kind o' started it up—"

"You might have known it would, Hiram Salter!" said Betsy accusingly.

"O' course I did. What d'ye s'pose I named her for?"

"'Twas a mean trick, Hiram!" [275]

Captain Salter changed the blade of grass he was chewing to the other side of his mouth. "Why, certainly," he responded. "Ye didn't s'pose I wouldn't descend to mean tricks, did ye? We heard even when we was goin' to school that all's fair in love and war."

She looked at him for a moment with a baffled gaze, then she spoke.

"I don't believe a word of it," she said defiantly. "Everybody that knows me knows I ain't ever goin' to marry anybody. I wouldn't anyway now—after you namin' the boat. Do you s'pose I'd marry a man that shows right out plain that he's a tyrant?"

Captain Salter emitted a low rumbling laugh, and sat quiet in his all-embracing chair.

"Tell me what's doin' in town," asked Betsy in a different tone. "How's Mrs. Pogram gettin' along without Rosalie?"

"Oh, she's havin' a fierce time. She no sooner gets settled with somebody to help her, than Loomis upsets everything with some of his fool doin's."

"I'm goin' to surprise you," said Betsy, slowly, "more'n you ever was surprised in your life, Hiram."

"How so? Goin' to marry me this evenin'?" [276]

"I found Rosalie Vincent out in Yellowstone Park."

"Pshaw! Ye don't say so! By the way, Betsy, I was glad o' those sightly pictures you sent me. Course I s'pose they're all lies—just advertisin'—"

"No, indeed!" exclaimed Betsy eagerly. "You never saw anything so beautiful. I—"

"Yes," interrupted Hiram, "I've got 'em pinned up on the wall, and, come October, you'll tell me all about it evenin's. I cal'late what with Europe and all the globe-trottin' you've done lately, I'm goin' to have a wife that'll beat that She-Herod-Sady that told the Arabian Nights, all holler; and what's more, you won't ever be afraid ye'll get yer head cut off; so ye'll be ahead of her, every way."

"Hiram," said Betsy severely, "what do you think o' my findin' Rosalie 'way out there?"

"I think 'twas part of her good luck."

"What good luck has the child ever had?"

"That, and all that come of it."

Betsy stared, a little disappointed at her admirer's foreknowledge.

"Has Mr. Irving told you—" she began. [277]

"Irving hasn't had a chance to tell me much. That Nixie feller talks to beat the clapper of a bell."

"But you like him, don't you, Hiram? He's an awful nice, kind boy."

"I guess he will be when I get him trained," returned Hiram equably. "He's beginnin' to understand that I'm the cap'n o' the Betsy."

“If you knew how disagreeable that sounds, you’d never say it in my presence!”

Hiram lifted the sea-blue eyes, and fixed hers with their gaze.

“That sentence has got more music in it,” he declared slowly, “than any other in the English language. I’ll be good to you, Betsy—as good as a man knows how to be to a woman. You’ve taken care o’ folks for the last twenty years. I want the job o’ takin’ care o’ you the next twenty.”

He looked very manly as he said it, his strong figure leaning square shoulders toward her. A swift vision chased through her brain of her precious boy henceforth busy in the bank by day, and in society by night; of Mrs. Bruce’s increasing querulousness and exactions, stretching out into an indefinite future.

The captain’s fireside, and herself mistress of his hearth and home, suddenly showed with an attraction she had never felt before; as if it were a haven of shelter from that monotonous other future, with its stern sense of duty, and its occasional high-lights. [278]

“I believe you cal’late to tire me out, Hiram.”

“Shouldn’t wonder,” he returned, leaning back again and biting his blade of grass.

“Why don’t you ask me about Rosalie?” said Betsy. “What do you know?”

“Why, Irving told me that you found her out there, and wheedled some old gent into payin’ her way back East again, and that she was in Boston now, and that you’re keepin’ an eye on her.”

“Old gentleman!” repeated Betsy indignantly. “If you call yourself one, then he is. He’s just about your age.”

“I’m just the right age to be a bridegroom,” responded Captain Salter promptly.

“I hope Mr. Irving didn’t say anything about this before Mr. Nixon. It’s a secret.”

“No. He got a chance at me alone while we was mendin’ a sail. He told me mum was the word. I’ll bet a cookie, Betsy, that now you’ve got Rosalie in Boston you don’t know what to do with her.” [279]

Betsy gave her one-sided smile, and Hiram continued: “Irving says you think a sight o’ the girl; and I’ve been sort o’ cogitatin’ about the whole business; and I finally made up my mind to tell ye that if ye want her to live with *us*, I haven’t a mite of objection.”

The speaker could see by his lady-love’s countenance that this bait glittered.

“I *had* thought, Hiram,” she returned ingratiatingly, “that seein’ you and Rosalie are such good friends, you might let Mrs. Bachelder move over to your place; then Rosalie could go there.”

Captain Salter gave his rare, broad smile.

“My! but you’re a good planner, ain’t you!”

“Would you—would you think of it, Hiram?” she asked, with some timidity.

“Not if I wanted to keep real well, I wouldn’t. Now don’t waste time in foolishness, Betsy. I’ve ben gettin’ ready for ye for years, and I *am* ready. Everything’s taut and ship-shape, and I’ve got a margin that’ll let Rosalie in, easy. We’ll be as cosy as bugs in rugs next winter.”

Captain Salter was an experienced fisherman. The expression on Betsy’s face was such that he believed the bait was swallowed. [280]

“If obstinacy would get folks into the kingdom,” she observed, “your chances for bein’ an archangel would be real good, Hiram Salter.”

He let the reel spin, and the coveted fish dart away with the line.

“I always did hang onto an idea like a puppy to a root,” he said. “It’s kind o’ ingrained in my nature; but you’ll know best, Betsy. You’ve got to be ’tarnally unselfish to somebody in order to be happy; and you think it over. See if ’tain’t about time you changed the place and kept the pain.”

He rose, and Betsy did also. For a wonder she didn’t answer him.

“Good-night,” he said. “It was real clever of you to let me come this evenin’.”

He did not even take her hand at parting. He lifted the shabby yachting-cap and looked at her narrow, inscrutable face. “Good-night,” he said again, and was gone down the garden-path.

Betsy remained some minutes standing in the same position.

“I meant to ask him a hundred questions.” The reflection rose at last from the confusion of her thoughts. “He’s such a gump it makes it hard to talk to him; keeps goin’ back to say the same thing over and over, just like a poll-parrot, till he puts me out so I don’t know what I *did* want to say to him.” [281]

As she went into the cottage, the picture of the upright figure, and the clean, bronzed, weather-beaten face went with her.

The appealing blue of Rosalie’s eyes seemed to plead with her. “Oh, if I only knew how she’s gettin’ along!” thought Betsy.

Captain Salter was right to smile into the darkness as he plodded down the street. The fish was darting here and there through the unresisting water after its fright, still proudly conscious of its own volition; but the bait was swallowed. The fisherman believed it was a matter of time, now.

CHAPTER XXII
THE WHITE DOVE

[282]

THE dinner-party at the inn continued to be a merry one.

"I'm sorry it rains," said Mrs. Bruce, looking at the dewy panes when at last they rose from table. "I wanted you to see how pleasant the outlook is from the verandas."

The proprietor passed near them as they moved into the spacious living-room of the inn.

"Why couldn't you have a pleasant evening for us, Mr. Beebe?" asked Mrs. Bruce.

"Sorry I couldn't," he returned. "I'm goin' to make up for it the best I can, though. I've got an entertainment for you if you'll take your friends to that other end o' the room."

"Music!" groaned Irving. "I feel in my bones that somebody is going to sing. Us for the porch, Nixie."

This party had been last to leave the dining-room, and already a large group of guests had gathered in the living-room, and were waiting. Irving was already taking long, quiet strides away [283] from the scene of danger when Robert caught him by the arm.

"Heavens, Brute!" he gasped. "Look there! *Is* it—or isn't it!"

Irving turned, and beheld at the other end of the room Rosalie Vincent, dressed in white, standing quietly, looking about her and smiling a little as if in question of her audience, and wondering what she should do for them.

Irving's heart gave the most acrobatic bound of its existence. He stood fixed in his tracks.

"Do you see who that is, mother?" inquired Robert, leaning over the ladies.

Mrs. Bruce's busy eyes sought her lorgnette.

Helen Maynard was first to realize who it was that stood there tall and fair in the fleecy white gown, with the golden coronet of her hair shining as her only ornament, and her bare throat and arms, round and slender against a dark background.

"Most extraordinary!" exclaimed Mrs. Nixon. "I never saw such a resemblance."

She looked over at her brother in a neighboring chair. He was smoothing his mustache; and he nodded at her in reply.

"Why, it *is* Hebe!" declared Robert, and his voice cracked high. "I never saw anything so lovely [284] in my life."

"*How* did it happen?" inquired Mrs. Bruce. She looked at Irving. His face was tense and scowling. "Tell me, Irving," she demanded in low tones. "How in the world did she get here?"

"How should I know?" he returned; and so irefully that Mrs. Bruce stared at him. Why in the world should it make him angry?

Irving's heart kept on its quickened pace. So this was what Betsy meant by saying he was likely to see her; why she had adjured him to keep away from her. She had said—Irving's eyes devoured the white dove; but Rosalie began to speak, and again her voice was music.

"I scarcely know what you would like to hear this rainy evening," she said, "but I think I will begin by going back to first principles, and telling you the story of Red Riding Hood."

Mrs. Bruce's lips would scarcely meet.

"What self-possession!" she murmured; and then for a time all speculation ceased, for the voice of a child began to narrate the classic in the language of a child, and Rosalie carried her [285] audience with her. The little unobserved details of the infantile manner, its occasional abstractions and recalls to the subject, the catching of the breath, and a myriad other peculiarities, were all in evidence, and repeated laughter encouraged the story-teller.

Her big-eyed wonder and horror when she arrived at the thrilling crisis where the wolf devoured Red Riding Hood's grandmother, "before she even had time to put on her spectacles to see who it was ate her up," brought down the house; and when the tale drew to a close the clamor of tongues gave witness that Rosalie was a success.

"Isn't she sweet!"—"Did you *ever* hear anything so natural!" sped from mouth to mouth. "What a lovely creature she is, and so unaffected!"

And Rosalie stood there looking about, unconsciously smiling, and tingling to her finger-tips with gladness that she had not disappointed Mr. Derwent, whom she could see sitting at the other end of the room.

Mr. Beebe came laughingly to Mrs. Bruce as a Fairport summer oracle.

"Say, ain't she all right?" he demanded triumphantly. [286]

“Where—” asked Mrs. Bruce, stammering in her eagerness, “how did you happen to get her?”

“’Twas Clever Betsy’s doings. Didn’t she tell you? Seems Miss Vincent wanted a job o’ this kind for the summer, and Betsy thought she’d work me; and I’m mighty glad she did. The girl is onto her job. There, she’s goin’ to give another.”

The speaker hurried off, while Rosalie’s sweet voice began on one of the Riley favorites that bring tears as well as smiles.

Mrs. Bruce did not hear a word. She leaned back in her chair, a prey to conflicting emotions. She saw Mr. Derwent rise and change his position to one in the background of those who were closest to the speaker.

Robert Nixon stooped close to her ear. “You can’t lose the Yellowstone party,” he said, “and aren’t you the proud lady!”

It was an innocent speech on the part of the irresponsible Nixie, but it started the regulating of Mrs. Bruce’s confused thoughts. She realized that he was referring to the perspicacity with which she had recognized Rosalie’s gifts in an unpromising past, and the munificence with which she had cultivated them; so she sat on a fence, as it were, undecided on which side to get down. [287]

She viewed the faces of the absorbed listeners, and considered that she might indeed accept the part of complacent patroness of this young heroine of the evening; might ask no questions, raise no objections, and behave as though this were the natural and expected outcome of her own perception and generosity; but her irritable vanity and love of managing whispered loudly that she had been outwitted.

Who had loosed Rosalie from the engagement in the Park? Who had paid her transportation east? Who had housed her since? Who had procured the dainty gown in which she now stood, and doubtless a trunk-full more if she were to live and entertain in this inn, as Mr. Beebe had plainly stated was the case? He had also plainly stated the answer to these various phases of one conundrum. Betsy it was, of course! For whom else had the clever one deserted her post of duty and gone to Boston to help a friend from the country to buy clothes? Did she really suppose that Mrs. Bruce was too dense to see completely through this millstone? [288]

Yes, it was plain. The savings of a lifetime had been squandered by Betsy Foster, who must be in her dotage to have done such a thing; squandered on this blonde girl with the appealing, darkening eyes, who was this minute swaying her listeners to smiles and tears.

By this time Mrs. Bruce had decided on which side of the fence to get down, and she did so with energy; and glared across it at Rosalie and her poor dupe, the once clever Betsy.

To think of Betsy being such a traitor as not to ask her mistress’s advice, seeing that this was Mrs. Bruce’s affair, and she would be the best judge of what was right to do!

The offended woman glanced again at her son. Rosalie had not driven the unconscious frown from his tense face.

“I’m sure he suspects the same thing,” she reflected. “He is so loyal to Betsy, he will be outraged.”

Helen Maynard was another who heard as little of Rosalie’s recitation as Mrs. Bruce. Her mental questions were the same. Whose magic wand could have accomplished this transformation in the short time? [289]

A cloud had descended on the heiress’s evening. She remembered the questions Irving Bruce had put to her in the Look-Out at Old Faithful Inn. She knew then that he was trying to probe her interest in her unfortunate school friend, and she remembered the hard obstinacy that at that time rose in her heart against Rosalie. Why, before she had had time to find herself in her new situation, should she begin to take care of and plan for another girl? Her first suspicion and her first look when she recognized Rosalie this evening had been directed toward Irving Bruce; but if his amazement were not unfeigned, he was more capable in histrionics than Rosalie herself.

It was a Saturday evening, and the week-end influx of men had given Proprietor Beebe an extra satisfaction in the presentation of a successful novelty on this rainy night.

Irving Bruce watched the faces of the men, some of whom he knew, and others not, and glared upon all alike because of the open admiration in their eyes for his white dove—more and more his, with every comment that he saw being made upon her; with every ring of applause bestowed upon her efforts to please. [290]

He knew what would happen when this was over. Men as well as women would press upon the young girl to thank her, and he knew with what modest gratitude Rosalie would accept their tributes. He could see Mr. Beebe going about on the outskirts of the crowd, proud of her beauty and success, and knew that he would introduce to her anybody who asked it.

Irving drew near to Mrs. Bruce’s chair and stooped over.

“Join her when this is over, will you, Madama? I don’t believe she has any chaperon.”

“No, I thank you,” was the clear response. “I think I never saw any one who required it less.”

Irving bit his lip. “Don’t speak that way,” he begged. “You know they’ll begin dancing after this. Beebe will make it possible for every Tom, Dick, and Harry to dance with her.”

“Which will be very much to her taste, I imagine,” retorted Mrs. Bruce.

Helen Maynard heard the whispered colloquy. She knew that if, at the close of Rosalie’s [291] efforts, she herself should go forward and join the girl, stand beside her, put her on a par with the guests, Irving Bruce would never forget it of her.

She leaned back in her chair, her heart beating a little fast. By nature she loved power. She had begun to taste it to-night. Aware of looking her best, aware of the sunshine; of approval rained upon her by Mrs. Nixon and Mrs. Bruce, and the frank admiration of the young men, there was a still sweeter triumph for her in the expression of Mr. Derwent’s eyes, which roved over her faint rose-color with an amused kindness at first, but lingered with a surprise and admiration which she treasured eagerly. Suddenly all was changed. There was a centre of attraction toward which all eyes gravitated. Mr. Derwent had risen and left their party to go nearer. Irving Bruce believed that Rosalie needed protection from a too violent belle-ship. Should she go across this room, and stand as a sort of maid-of-honor to this white and gold pauper princess?

Nixie leaned over her chair. Again his random words hit the mark and might carry the day. [292]

“By Jove!” he whispered to Helen, “you two girls will look stunning together. You must let me take you over there as soon as Hebe gets through.”

Helen’s lips compressed and she did not reply.

Rosalie was about to give her last recitation. It was a tender sketch, but with plenty of comedy.

A mother was rocking her baby and singing him to sleep, with periodic interruptions from her other children whom she dismissed with varying manner and replies.

It was excellently done. Rosalie’s singing was simple and natural, her voice sympathetic, and when the lullaby finally died away, and she rose and bent her lovely head above the baby as she laid him in an imaginary bed, there were plenty of dim eyes among her auditors.

The absolute stillness broke as the girl rose and smiled again upon her listeners,—the modest, deprecatory smile the Yellowstone party knew so well.

Irving’s eyes shone. “Mrs. Nixon,” said he to that lady, “may I take you over to speak to Miss [293] Vincent? She is in strange surroundings and will appreciate it.”

“Well,” replied Mrs. Nixon with a surprised and regal lift of the head, “the girl certainly does charming work. I’m quite willing to tell her so.”

She rose and took Irving’s offered arm, and they moved away. Mrs. Bruce held her lip between her teeth; her face burned, her eyes filled with tears of anger and mortification.

“Great Scott!” ejaculated Robert, still winking hard, “that girl made my nose tingle. She has one of these silly voices, you know, that go way in and knock on your heart, and if you try to steel yourself, it just opens the door and walks in any way. Come on, let’s all three go over and tell her she’s a dandy. Look at ’em crowd around her! She’s like a drop of honey in fly-time.”

Mrs. Bruce and Helen rose undecidedly.

“Say, look at Uncle Henry!” exclaimed Robert with a joyous squeak. “Isn’t he Johnny-on-the-spot though? Those chaps aren’t going to have it all their own way.”

Mrs. Bruce pressed her handkerchief to her lips, for she too saw Mr. Derwent move a little in [294] advance of the other guests, and after holding Rosalie’s hand a moment in congratulation, draw it within his arm and stand beside her while the kindly, effusive crowd drew near.

Helen Maynard shrugged her shoulders. “That settles it, Mrs. Bruce,” she said. “Mr. Derwent has evidently decided to make her a success. Very nice for her, isn’t it? We may as well go and speak to her, I suppose.”

Mrs. Bruce moved with them in silence. Robert glanced at her with comprehension.

“Darn Brute,” he thought. “Why did he want to go and get mother in wrong here!” To his simple mind it was difficult to grasp the mental processes of his hostess; but he saw her emotion. “I’ll chance a jolly, anyway,” he reflected.

“You must feel like a lady Columbus,” he said to Mrs. Bruce, with an admiring air.

“Oh, no, Nixie,” she rejoined. “I feel like a cipher. Nothing more.”

In his whole life Irving had never slighted her before. For that girl’s sake he had not hesitated to punish her. This was Betsy’s doing,—all her doing.

So the waves of heat and hurt passed over her as she crossed the room on Nixie’s arm, seeing, [295] ahead of her, Irving devotedly talking to Mrs. Nixon as they moved toward the star of the evening.

CHAPTER XXIII
THE DANCE

[296]

With the approval of her audience ringing in her ears, and Mr. Derwent's kindly presence and support to bridge over the awkward first moments that assail the drawing-room entertainer when her work is done, Rosalie might scarcely have been able to keep her slender white slippers touching earth but for an anchor, a ball and chain, which Betsy had in all kindness attached to her on the last evening they spent together.

They had sat on the edge of the bed in their boarding-house, talking, and Betsy plunged boldly into a subject that lay heavy on her heart.

"I feel just as certain as I sit here," she said, "that you're goin' to make a success of it at that inn."

"O Betsy,—" the young girl took her friend's hand joyously,—"I like to hear you say so, and I do really believe I can please them because I love to do it so."

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"You've showed me a lot o' your pieces, and it's a sensible selection. You ain't goin' to tear up the ground and try to be a Burnhard. You're goin' to make 'em laugh, and if they're as soft as I am, you're goin' to make 'em cry, same as you have me to-night. That's where you've got good judgment. You've got as sweet a voice as I ever heard, and your glass tells you you're good-lookin'."

The girl leaned toward her eagerly. "Do you think I'm very pretty, Betsy?" she asked.

"Yes; and it's a good thing for your work; but listen here, Rosalie, it ain't a good thing for anything else."

The girl laughed. "You silly, dear Betsy!" she exclaimed.

"Mr. Irving was talkin' about somebody in your line o' work lately; and I listened hard on your account. He said she wa'n't any good—her programmes wasn't. He said she didn't have 'the instinct of the entertainer'! Those were his very words. I said 'em over to myself so's to remember; for I saw his point."

"Do you think he'll believe that I have?" The girl's azure eyes darkened as she asked it.

[298]

"Yes, I do. The way you've made me act silly to-night, shows that you know how to make folks laugh while they're cryin'; and that's as near the secret o' success as any one can come, I guess; but it ain't goin' to be all roses, dear child." Betsy patted the hand that held hers. It was hard for her to dim the blue light shining upon her so hopefully. "I said your good looks were a disadvantage, and they are from the minute you stop actin'. We happened to speak of Mr. Irving just now, so I'll take him for an example. He's the apple o' my eye, Rosalie, and I believe in him just as much as I do in any man, as far as intentions go; but he'll be one of a whole lot o' young men you'll meet at the inn, and you're a little bit acquainted with him, and he's sure to enjoy your work, and your good looks, and he's liable to flatter you, and when the summer's over—"

Betsy could scarcely go on, the expression of the blue eyes was changing so fast as their gaze clung to her; but she braced herself.

"*That'll* be over, too. Men-folks are selfish. They don't know what they're doin'. Irving Bruce has inherited quite a lot o' money. He knows dozens o' the finest girls in Boston. Mrs. Bruce probably expects that some crown princess from the other side o' the water'll be over here after him yet. Have a good time, Rosalie," Betsy again patted the relaxed hand, which she could feel tremble, "but be mejum. I speak this way to you because I know your disposition, and your unhappiness would cut me deep."

[299]

The girl withdrew her hand quietly. "Thank you," she said.

"Old Kill-joy that I am!" thought poor Betsy as she lay awake that night, and knew that Rosalie was awake beside her; but the very effect of her words convinced her that it was necessary to have spoken them; and when she supplemented this by her appeal to Irving later in the garden, she felt that she had done her worst, and her best; and whatever came, her conscience was clear.

As Rosalie stood in the living-room of the inn to-night, her hand within Mr. Derwent's arm, she was too excited to be conscious that it was his action which heightened the effusiveness of the guests. They might laugh and weep under her efforts to entertain them, but many who would not have taken her hand afterward advanced graciously when it was quickly whispered that the man beside her was Henry Derwent of Boston.

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"Your brother is a trump!" murmured Irving to Mrs. Nixon.

The lady looked resigned.

"When Henry takes it into his head to befriend any one," she said, "he carries his point. Since the day he found, out there in the Park, that this girl was the daughter of his old friend, I suppose he has never really forgotten her. It is like him to be so rejoiced in this change in her fortunes that he immediately takes her under his wing."

“He’s a trump!” repeated Irving.

Mrs. Nixon was dimly aware that Mrs. Bruce would be fuming at her action, for she had overheard her refusal of Irving’s request.

“I can’t do otherwise than stand by my brother,” thought Mrs. Nixon. “I can’t help it if she is offended.”

And now they had reached Rosalie, and for the first time Irving noticed that she was very pale.

He had counted on a special look from those blue eyes,—a look that would recall the last time they had stood together, in a world of beauty created for them alone.

He heard Mrs. Nixon say in her grave, sonorous tones:—

“Your work is charming!” [301]

And yet he had not caught her eye.

Betsy had said—fond, foolish Betsy! who could suppose that she would be so imaginative, Betsy had said—and the expression and manner with which Rosalie now turned to him at last, gave the lie direct to all those implications.

“Good-evening, Mr. Bruce. How tanned you are!” the girl said, raising her eyebrows with a little smile, as if they had met yesterday on Tremont Street.

Then she turned to meet a couple of young men who pressed forward under the guidance of Mr. Beebe.

“These gentlemen are anxious to meet you, Miss Vincent, and say some pretty things. Mr. Ames and Mr. Foster, Miss Vincent, and Mr. Derwent, too.”

Mr. Derwent inclined his head, his hand hanging by his side, and Rosalie’s tightened on his arm as she turned from Irving to meet the somewhat embarrassed expressions of enthusiasm from the young men, who seemed to find Rosalie’s immobile and white-mustached companion somewhat of a bar to their loquacity.

“Hope to see you again, Miss Vincent, when the dancing begins,” said Mr. Ames as they withdrew. [302]

Now came Robert and his companions.

“Dancing?” repeated Robert in a high key. “Anybody taken your first waltz, Miss Vincent?” Rosalie shook her head.

“Mine, then. Is it?”

“If you wish,” said the girl, and then took Mrs. Bruce’s mechanically offered hand.

This lady had keyed herself to one master-effort, and she said now:—

“You know, I always believed you could.”

“Oh, thank you, Mrs. Bruce!”

Rosalie’s smile of gratitude, her low tone, and the sudden moisture that dimmed her eyes, should have touched the heart of her benefactress; but that organ could not hold another emotion. Mrs. Bruce slightly bowed and smiled, and moved slowly away.

At Robert Nixon’s invitation to Rosalie, Helen bit her lip. “Rude,—incredibly rude cub!” she thought. “I’ll never forgive him for that!”

The clinging of Rosalie to Mr. Derwent’s arm was another item in her disfavor; and Helen approached, her habitual self-control standing her in good stead, but all the rose-color of the opening of her evening turned to ashes of roses. [303]

“I had no idea you were so proficient, Miss Vincent,” she said calmly. “Why haven’t you gone into this long ago?”

Rosalie met her cool regard admiringly.

“Things have changed for us both wonderfully since we met in the Park,” she said. “You look very lovely to-night.”

“Oh, really?” Helen gave a little laugh and quietly met Mr. Derwent’s eyes. “How kind!”

“Me next,” said Robert. “We’ll have to beat it in a minute, ’cause there are a lot more coming; but I want to tell you you’re a wonder. My nose felt like your foot when it’s asleep, and a pearly tear coursed down my rounded cheek—”

Here the speaker was pushed aside, and found it best to skip after Helen’s pink robe.

“Brute says this floor’s all right when the minions get the rugs up,” he said, as he joined her. “They don’t have any cards here, but you’ll give me the—yes, the second dance, won’t you—and the—yes, I remember you dance like a fairy. You must give me a lot.”

Robert ended in a rush of crimson embarrassment as Helen moved steadily onward toward the corner where Mrs. Nixon had taken a seat. [304]

"Thank you," she returned. "It is fortunate for me that you dance as well as you do other things; because after all, I'm a stranger here, you know, and beggars mustn't be choosers."

Mrs. Nixon received the pair with a smile. "Well, my dears," she said, "we've all done our duty, haven't we?"

"*Pourvu seulement* she doesn't tell mamma," thought Robert with a sinking of the heart.

"Haven't we?" he responded airily. "And look at my noble uncle—I'm not quite sure whether his name is Quixote or Casabianca; but I hope he'll get off the rug soon, so it can be taken up."

"Yes," responded Mrs. Nixon graciously. "I'm glad there's to be dancing, for I may be a fond mamma, but I do think when you and dear Helen dance, that the poetry of motion is reached. Where has Mrs. Bruce disappeared to?"

"Never end your sentences with a preposition, mother! But despite your inelegance I will go and find her for you;" and Robert moved away, his eager eyes searching, but not for Irving's stepmother. He soon descried the tall outline of his friend, standing alone in the dusk of the veranda, and he charged upon him. [305]

"Brute, I've put my foot in it!" he ejaculated.

Irving turned slowly and regarded him.

"That's all you ever take it out for, so far as I can discover," he replied pessimistically.

"Cruelly unjust, but I'll pass it by. Say, there aren't so many peaches here but that you can do me a favor."

"Say on."

Robert made a grimace of rueful self-disgust.

"Of course I ought to have taken the first dance with Helen Maynard."

"You couldn't do anything else."

"Yes, I could. I can always do things that to others would seem impossible. To me they're mere bagatelles. I'm about to be snubbed evermore by the heiress, and disinherited by mother."

"Speak out."

"It was an attack of emotional insanity. They always come out of a clear sky, and she was *so* enchanting—" [306]

"Who?"

"Hebe. I asked her for the first dance, in Helen's presence."

Irving looked the culprit over from head to foot.

"Well," he remarked, with a severity which seemed disproportionate to the occasion, "you *are* the limit!"

"And a transfer!" added Robert humbly. "Now you're the only person that can save the day—I mean the evening. If you'll go in, this minute,—go in eagerly, you know, just as soon as she sees you, fall over your own feet in your hurry,—do the thing handsomely, why, you'll be acting like a friend! Get your breath as well as you can, and ask her for the first dance. So you will avert the storm from your tried and true Nixie!"

Irving looked unpromisingly gloomy. "I wasn't thinking of dancing to-night," he said.

"Well, think of it quick, now." Robert dragged at his reluctant companion. "Put on a gilt edge by asking for the second one, too. She can't give it to you, because I've engaged it. When you see me in the light, you'll think I've turned gray in a single night; but it's only the frosty rime that she cast over me when she accepted. Beside, you've got to ask Miss Vincent, haven't you? You seem to have in*flu*ence with mamma, and I'd rather you'd bring her over to be chaperoned than do it myself. Uncle Henry can't play watchdog very well when it comes to partners." [307]

Irving allowed himself to be shoved and pulled toward the door. He felt the force of Nixie's last argument, but he was still conscious of a strange disappointment in the carelessness of Rosalie's greeting. Betsy's earnest talk had fallen upon a wondering credulity, because of the tenderness that he had felt for this girl from the beginning,—a feeling totally different from anything he had ever experienced.

Her self-possession, and fleeting notice of himself just now, had given him an odd shock, and opened his eyes to the fact that he had given absurd weight to Betsy's words.

Now, under Robert's vigorous appeal, he shook himself together.

"I'm a worse sentimental idiot than dear old Betsy," he thought.

Robert, lurking cautiously in the background, viewed his friend's deliberate advance to Mrs. Nixon's corner, and heaved a sigh of relief. [308]

Slinking into the hall with intent to seek Rosalie, he saw her, still leaning on the arm of Mr. Derwent, who was leading her, also, toward the corner where Mrs. Nixon sat enthroned. Robert remained unostentatiously behind the jamb of the door, and his small bright eyes twinkled appreciatively as he watched his uncle place a chair near by for his charge.

"Mrs. Bruce has slid out of it," he thought gleefully, "and mamma is Hebe's chaperon, willy-nilly. I'll bet she don't like it a little bit! Now, Nixie, look bland and don't let your upper lip wiggle. You may pull it off yet!"

The rugs had been swiftly removed, and the music started. A number of couples swung promptly out upon the floor.

Robert saw Irving say something to Rosalie, and then smile and bow to Helen, who rose and floated away with him.

Then, only, Robert, with an expression of singular innocence, came leisurely across the floor to his mother's corner.

She looked at him with a fixed regard, and her nostrils dilated. [309]

"Where were you, Robert?" she asked. "Irving has taken Helen out for the first dance."

"Just like him," returned Robert brazenly. "Mother, you must accustom yourself to such blows, or your parental pride will be constantly wounded. I'm not one, two, three with Brute where girls are concerned, but I've had to learn to turn a sunny side to the world in spite of it, and weep only when alone. I don't want to grow cynical, but I find that it is too true that others care little for our sorrows. Miss Vincent, shall we show them how to do this?"

Rosalie rose, smiling a farewell to Mr. Derwent, and started off in such perfect step with her partner that he emitted a joyous exclamation.

"Perhaps Hebe isn't some dancer!" he said. "Say, do you mind my calling you Hebe? It takes so much less time than Terpsichore."

"Mr. Nixon, your mother didn't like this at all," said Rosalie.

"Well, when you come right down to it," remarked her partner philosophically, "there are so few things she does like." [310]

"But—ought you not to have had this with Miss Maynard?"

"Some carping critics might say so,—Look out, there! Didn't we duck neatly under Brute's elbow? The fact is, Miss Vincent, I've graduated in almost every line except diplomacy; and *you*—you just swept me off my feet to-night. No—don't be afraid I shall try to flirt with you. That requires diplomacy, too, and I make too many breaks ever to be successful at it. I was crazy about you to-night, and when I heard Ames say 'dancing,' I blurted my innocent wish right out. I'm just a child of nature—fresh, unspoiled."

Rosalie laughed. "I've heard people say you were fresh," she said.

"Naughty, naughty!" returned Robert.

"No, you're the naughty one," said the girl. "You've put me in a disagreeable position."

"I don't believe it, Hebe. I know you are enjoying this."

She sighed. "You do dance like a—a ribbon," she admitted.

Robert laughed. [311]

"And what has Helen to complain of?" he asked. "Hasn't she the great and only Brute? I'm making the most of your approval of my dancing before you try it with him. He is one of these haughty heroes, who h-excel in everything, you know."

"Including flirting, I suppose," said Rosalie.

"Couldn't say. He's never flirted with me. Humble observation, however, would deduce that all he ever does is to allow himself to be made love to."

Rosalie swallowed, and essayed a laugh.

"Companionship with Brute has made me a socialist, socially, Hebe. Here I am, cheerful, willing to please—average good-looking. Yes, I maintain it. Now, Hebe, am I not average good-looking? Don't speak too quickly. Remember, Chinese, African, American-Indian—"

"Oh, Mr. Nixon,"—Rosalie did laugh now,—"how can you talk so constantly, and dance too?"

They were passing Mrs. Nixon, and that lady heard the girlish laugh. She sighed.

"She certainly dances well. Helen said she was noted for it at school. I suppose she is a really artistic creature; but Robert should have been here in time to ask Helen. College has absolutely ruined his manners." [312]

Mrs. Nixon leaned toward her brother, who was watching his *protégée*, pleased in her pleasure.

“Where can Mrs. Bruce be?” she asked.

“I don’t know,” was the reply. “I suppose she has many friends here.”

But Mrs. Nixon doubted if sociability were keeping her friend away.

“I’m afraid she’s pouting somewhere,” she reflected. “I don’t see how I could have done any differently. It wasn’t *my* fault that she refused to go with Irving. It is annoying to have this incident occur right at the outset of our stay. It would be stupid of her to be offended. Really that Vincent girl from first to last has given us a great deal of annoyance!”

CHAPTER XXIV
THE CLASH

[313]

When Robert returned Rosalie to her place near Mrs. Nixon, a number of men who had experienced a clinching of their admiration by the view of her dancing, hastened to approach.

Many of the same people came to the inn, season after season, and Irving knew most of them. Some were Harvard men known to Robert as well, and he at last being alive to Helen's situation, the group around the two girls soon became extremely animated. Amidst the strife of tongues Irving made his way to Rosalie.

"This is ours?" he said.

As they moved away, she spoke: "I hope I sha'n't offend any one. I haven't the least idea what I've promised to do."

In a sort of dream she started in the dance. This was Fairport. In fifteen minutes she could be standing in Mrs. Pogram's kitchen, where the clock ticked loud above the oilcloth shelf, and [314] Loomis Brown counted the silver she had washed.

What a gulf had lain between this inn, with its airily dressed girls and their cavaliers, and the chill, dusky room where at dawn she had made Loomis's coffee before he took the early train to Portland. Her hand tightened on Irving's arm while she recalled the amorous advances of Mrs. Pogram's brother, and his change, after her repulsion, to anger and a mean revenge.

A long, inaudible breath came quivering to her lips as she glided on under her partner's perfect guidance. Rosalie loved dancing as only the artistic nature can love it, and the rising and falling waves of music went to her brain like wine.

"Cruel Betsy! Wise Betsy!" she thought.

"Do you remember," said Irving, "the last time I held you like this?"

"I'm afraid I'm very dull," she replied. "Did we dance together in some previous incarnation?"

"Don't you wish to remember, Rosalie?"

"Indeed I do," she rejoined brightly. "Your dancing couldn't be improved."

Irving kept silence. He was entirely aware that he was beginning exactly as Betsy had implored [315] him not to do; but he began to suspect shrewdly that Betsy's lecture was a shield which had two sides, and that one of them had been presented to this girl. Hadn't his mentor said that Rosalie—and the latter's totally changed manner—

"Betsy will end by making a conceited ass out of me," he reflected, with the relief human nature finds in discovering some one else to blame for its discomfort.

The dance over, he took his partner out on the veranda, where couples were promenading in the damp coolness. He found some chairs in a remote corner.

"These are tolerably dry," he said. "Shall we sit here?"

"I mustn't," she answered.

"Why not? Too cold?"

"Not for me, but too damp for my gown."

Irving glanced over it in the dusk. "I have an idea that that is something pretty fine," he said. "I want to see the black one."

Rosalie colored. "Shame on Betsy!" she said, laughing. "Has she told everybody?"

"No one but me, you may be sure. Betsy knows that I am so perfectly trustworthy, she tells me [316] everything. Did she ever give me a character to you?"

"Yes—No—I don't know. Let's go into the house, Mr. Bruce. This gown must last me for years, and *years*."

Irving obediently led the girl within doors, where, in a corner of the hall, in lieu of palms, were set Christmas trees in tubs. Into a seat behind these he ushered her.

"I'm afraid my next partner can't find me here," she said doubtfully.

"We have the next together."

"Oh, I don't think so, Mr. Bruce!"

"I know it, Rosalie. I wonder why I venture to call you Rosalie."

As he spoke Irving took up her fan and began to use it as he gazed at her girlish profile.

"I don't know," she returned, a little pulse beating in her throat. "I think, myself, Miss Vincent would sound better."

“Ah, Betsy!” thought Irving, closing his teeth. “I’ll pay you for this.”

“What need of formality between sworn friends?” he asked.

“I’m starting out on a new life, Mr. Bruce,” she said, turning and looking at him with a direct gaze.

She seemed to him enchanting. He knew, better than she, that she was starting out in a new [317] life; and he begrudged it, strangely. He knew her to be all unconscious as yet of her own charm and power. He dreaded the opening of those clear eyes that as yet were so modest—the windows through which one perceived her innocence. While he was justly angry with Betsy for rousing unthought-of suspicion and caution, he could not deny the justice of her sympathy.

He met the blue gaze with a smile that set the pulse to beating faster.

“You don’t intend to forget old friends for new, do you?” he asked.

“‘There is no friend like the old friend, who has shared our morning days,’

you know. This little audience was enthusiastic over you, and audiences always will be; but—

“‘Fame is the scentless sunflower, with gaudy crown of gold,’

remember.”

“It’s unkind to laugh at me,” returned the girl, with surprising heat. “You know I have no thought of fame.”

“Rosalie, Rosalie!” he exclaimed and seized her hand protectingly. “I’m not laughing at you. I [318] believe you could have fame if you wish and work; but somehow I don’t want the people to have a right to gaze at you, and listen, and applaud.”

A strange film came over her eyes as she still looked at him. It was as if she withdrew herself as she took her hand away.

“I suppose,” she said, “that people who have always had their own way are subject to such fancies.”

“Betsy said that to you!” he exclaimed, acutely.

She shook her head but did not speak.

“Betsy knows nothing of our compact.” He leaned toward her, and she shrank, but kept her golden head proudly lifted. “Betsy knows nothing of the moment when we stood above the eagles and knew what in life was—

“‘the breathing rose, with sweets in every fold.’

Why do I call you Rosalie? Because it means *you*. It is one of the ‘sweets’ that came to me then—”

“Mr. Bruce,” the girl interrupted him, “Betsy *does* know nothing of it; but if she did, Betsy is [319] something more than clever, she is wise. She probably doesn’t read Emerson, but if she did, it would be her own thought that she would put into his words: ‘Our friendships hurry to short and poor conclusions, because we have made them a texture of wine and dreams, instead of the tough fibre of the human heart.’” The speaker took a firm hold on the sweet voice that threatened to break. “That morning was a time of wine and dreams. I’ve always been a child. I’ve always dreamed dreams; but to-night I am awake, I am starting out in real life, with my eyes open.” Those eyes had been downcast, but now she lifted them again to her companion’s flushed face. “I shall be very glad if you help me—and not hinder.”

“The tough fibre of the human heart,” repeated Irving.

“Yes,” returned the girl. “It is a slow growth,—but it holds.”

A black-coated biped hovering before the Christmas trees, now retreating and now advancing undecidedly, heard his name with relief.

“Is that you, Mr. Ames?” asked Rosalie, rising with decision. The young man addressed [320] doubled around the end of the grove with eager agility.

“I didn’t intend to hide,” laughed the girl.

Irving rose also, and when the two had gone, sank back on the seat, playing absently with the fan he still held.

His thoughts were busy, and his teeth tightly closed.

“What do I want, anyway?” he reflected. “Which is Betsy: a meddlesome busybody, or a guardian angel? I’ll take no chances on the angel proposition. She’s a busybody. I’ll see her to-morrow.”

Irving shook his head threateningly, and a sudden nervous twist of his strong fingers broke a couple of sticks of the pretty fan. He frowned in dismay, and fitted them together in the futile manner inseparable from the occasion.

“Must last her years and years,” he reflected. “Well, it’s up to me to get her another fan, that’s

evident." And with a clearing of the countenance as if this consideration presented distinct consolation, he rose and wandered out of the arbor. "I wonder where Madama is," he reflected. She had not come into his mind since her refusal of his request drove him to Mrs. Nixon. "How [321]
am I to revive her interest in Rosalie?" he wondered as he moved down the hall.

As soon as Mrs. Bruce had made her perfunctory acknowledgment to Rosalie, she slipped from Robert's side, unnoticed by a culprit absorbed in his own misdemeanors, and with one glance after Irving and Mrs. Nixon, who were returning to the other end of the room, she moved into the hall, and up the stairs of the inn.

She made no effort to curb the hot resentment that possessed her in every fibre. Her one desire was to reach the cause of her suffering, and wreak her sense of outrage upon her.

It was half an hour after Captain Salter's departure, and Betsy was smiling to herself as she wound the living-room clock. Her thoughts were with Rosalie; confident of the girl's success, yet half-frightened by the chance of fortune which had united the Yellowstone party to witness her début. She imagined the scene in the spacious living-room of the hotel. Had the rain not fallen, she had meant to ask Hiram to take her over there, that she might look in through the windows and see the dear child standing, the cynosure of all eyes, even if she could not hear her voice. [322]

She felt certain of Mr. Derwent's satisfaction in her. As a contraband guest at the Canyon Hotel, Rosalie had recited for him in her room, and to-night Betsy's heart swelled in the realization that he was seeing the first fruits of his generosity.

Doubts of Mrs. Bruce's approval did sweep occasionally, like filmy clouds, across the clear happiness of her mind; but the importance of Rosalie's good fortune was paramount, and Betsy was able to sweep them away.

Suddenly she heard the sound of wheels stopping before the gate. She glanced at the clock.

"So early?" she thought. "They can't be comin' home now."

In a minute more some one ran up the steps, and Mrs. Bruce, in a long light wrap, a chiffon scarf falling from her elaborately dressed hair, came swiftly into the room.

Betsy met the flashing eyes in dismay. She hurried to meet her.

"Mercy! Mrs. Bruce—" she said, nerving herself for some disaster. "How white you are! Has something happened? Or are you ill?"

With her care-taking impulse Betsy tried to remove her mistress's wrap, but the lady twitched [323]
away from her. She had been nursing her wrath to keep it warm, and it was very warm indeed; but something in Betsy's presence, in the gaze of those honest eyes, threatened to make the enormity of the latter's offense shrink. Mrs. Bruce was obliged to remember the attitude of Irving's head as he walked away with Mrs. Nixon, careless of her own opinions or feelings, forgetful of her,—utterly forgetful of her for the first time in her remembrance. Her narrow mind, tenacious of its two idols,—her own importance and her boy,—suffered intensely.

"Stand away from me!" she cried; and Betsy, too dumfounded to move, stared mutely while the vials of Mrs. Bruce's wrath began to pour out.

"We have been too kind to you. You forget your place. What right had you to do such a thing as to place Rosalie Vincent where she must be accepted as a companion by people of our class? What right had you to interfere so with the pleasure of our summer? Ask yourself why you told me nothing about it. You will say, if you are honest, that it was because you knew I would not [324]
approve. I have done everything for the Vincent girl that has been done. I had a right to be consulted, at least. But you, forgetting that you were my servant, went on, managing to ruin our summer, spending, like a fool, your long years' savings to bring that girl east, and dress her unsuitably, leaving me, and putting me to inconvenience in order to do so, going entirely out of your sphere, and making yourself a special providence. You think yourself so clever! Clever Betsy, indeed! Your head is turned. It is largely our fault!"

She paused, panting. Betsy stood in the same spot, but her anxious face had settled into lines of stony stillness. Only her eyes kept fixed on Mrs. Bruce's face.

"Speak!" cried the latter, hysterically. "How did you dare do this thing?"

There was another space of silence, then Betsy did speak.

"Is there anything more you want to say about it, Mrs. Bruce?"

The lady shrugged her shoulders angrily, and moving to the divan dropped off her downy wrap.

"I suppose nothing that I can say will pierce through your self-conceit; but I am willing to have [325]
any explanation you have to offer. You think you've outwitted everybody, and you've succeeded in getting your own way; but it's nothing to be proud of, Betsy—and old age will be coming upon you, and you'll think of that money a good many times, I can tell you."

She paused again, and looking up found Betsy's grave eyes following her. There was another short silence, then Betsy spoke.

"Mrs. Bruce, when you are thinkin' this evenin' over, as you will, there's just one thing I'll ask

you to remember. It’s an old sayin’ out o’ the far east: ‘Of the unspoken word you are master. The spoken word is master o’ you.’ Good-night.”

With this Betsy walked out of the room without one backward look, and Mrs. Bruce stood, baffled, and trembling with her own excitement.

Alone, she sank on the divan with her face buried in the pillows.

It was quite within the range of possibility that at this moment Irving was dancing with Rosalie Vincent, and did not even observe her own absence from the room.

She sobbed, stifling the sound in the pillows lest Betsy should hear and return to her assistance, believing her to be repentant. It was like Betsy to refuse to answer her; to treat her like a child; to throw upon her, by her manner, the blame of all that occurred. It was infuriating; unbearable. Her breath came in spasms, and she fought for her self-control. [326]

CHAPTER XXV
WHITE SWEET PEAS

[327]

Captain Salter, in his five years of widowhood, had fallen into habits that varied but little from day to day. He cooked his own breakfast, and was off to his boat, or to the long shed where in winter he built them for other people, before Mrs. Bachelder set foot within his doors.

This Sabbath morning he rose, shaved, and made his customary demi-toilet, then went out to the stove and set the kettle to boil.

He lingered for a minute, smiling, before the Yellowstone postal-cards, his thoughts busy with the events of the evening before.

He held an imaginary reel in his hands and began slowly winding the invisible line.

"Take your time, Miss Betsy," he hummed.

His cottage stood on a corner of land, facing out to sea. Rocks were to the left of it, a stony beach to the right. His boat-house was in sight. A flower-garden was in front, with a path that ran down between the beds.

[328]

Many a summer visitor had admired the position of the little white house, and tried to tempt Hiram to part with it; but his grandfather had built it, and the captain's invariable reply to would-be purchasers was: "I haven't come to that, yet."

By habit he now moved to the window to note the sea's mood. Some strange object caught his eye. His head went forward, his eyes seemed to bulge. A woman was seated on the rustic bench outside. Her back was toward him as she watched the rolling waves. She was dressed in dark brown, with hat and veil; and a traveling-bag reposed on the seat beside her.

"Steady, Hiram, steady!" he murmured, making long silent strides to the inner room, and catching up his coat. He gave two strokes of the brush to his stiff hair, and then strode out on tiptoe again to the window.

"'Twa'n't any dream," he muttered. "She's there! Steady! Look out for the boom!"

He opened the door, and as Betsy turned her head, he spoke, quite as if it had been his daily custom to greet her at six-thirty A. M. in his garden.

"Good-mornin'. Things look kind o' washed up and shinin' after the rain, don't they?"

[329]

His keen eyes studied his caller's face as he advanced with a casual air.

"It's a beautiful mornin'," returned Betsy, her hand clasping the top of her bag tightly, and bright spots coming in her pale cheeks.

"You look as if you was goin' off jauntin' again," said Hiram, feeling his way with care. "Gettin' to be such a traveler you don't make anythin' of dartin' off and dartin' back again, like a—like a swaller."

The lump in Betsy's throat would not let her speak. Her silence mystified the captain more than anything she could have said. Determined not to frighten her, he plunged into generalities.

"I think it's about time you paid a visit to my garden. Don't you think it's lookin' good? If you'd a seen them lilies o' the valley a month ago 'twould 'a' done your heart good. They're a-spreadin' so, I donno but the cottage'll have to git up 'n git. I remembered what you said once—that is," added Hiram, correcting himself lest his visitor should rise and fly,—"my mother was always set on sweet peas, I try to have plenty of 'em."

[330]

"They're perfectly beautiful," said Betsy, her eyes resting on the riot of color that embedded the white house in violet and rose and white. "I think it's my favorite flower."

"That's what you said—" began Hiram eagerly, and then cleared his throat and stammered. "My mother—yes, she used to say they was like butterflies, just swayin' on the stem, and ready to fly."

Betsy met his eyes as he stood apart, his stalwart figure uneasily moving, now toward her and then away, in his eager embarrassment. Something in her look drew him close to the seat.

"There ain't any train for an hour yet," he said gently. "I s'pose you took a bite, but you'll have breakfast with me, won't you, Betsy, 'fore I take ye over to the depot? I s'pose you're leavin' again."

"Yes."

She said it gravely, and dropped her eyes from his kind face.

"For how long this time?"

"Forever."

The word was spoken quietly; but her lips quivered.

"*What?*" The man started, and frowned.

YOU'LL HAVE BREAKFAST WITH ME, WON'T YOU?

"Oh, Hiram,"—the lips were quivering still, and she paused, then reached up a hand which was quickly lost in both of his,—"can't you see? I've come home." [331]

There were only the rocks, and the beach, and the waves that hissed and broke, to look upon them.

Instantly Hiram was beside her on the garden-seat, with Betsy in his arms, her thin cheek pressed against his broad chest, and sobs convulsing her slender body.

He scowled, and smiled at the restless sea across his precious burden. Not a word he said, but his big hand patted her in gentle rhythm, and once he kissed her temple.

At last she pushed herself from him, and sat up.

"There's one favor I'm goin' to beg," she said, with pauses, her handkerchief still at her eyes. "That is, that you won't ask me why. I feel as if I couldn't go over it."

"My Betsy," replied the captain slowly, "there was only one question I ever wanted to ask o' you. I did it a good many times, 'cause you didn't give the right answer. Now you've done it, and I sha'n't ask ye anything more."

"And Hiram," she went on, struggling for self-control, "I have a feelin' as if—as if I didn't want it—to happen here."

"What?" asked the captain, doubtfully, "breakfast?" [332]

"No—no—the—I feel as if I didn't want any minister in Fairport."

"I see." He nodded. "Leave it to me, Betsy. Leave everything to me. I know I'm a blunderer lots o' times; but I'll attend to this *right*. I love ye." He drew her down again on his comfortable shoulder. "Will ye come in?" he asked, after a minute.

"No. I'll stay out here, Hiram."

"All right." He kissed her forehead. "To think ye'll stay!" he said softly. "That's the wonderful part of it. To think ye'll stay!"

He went into the house and brought a calico cushion with him from somewhere, putting it behind her back. She accepted it, too spent to smile.

Hiram saw her pallor, and hastened the breakfast. Soon a little table appeared before the garden-seat, and coffee and toast and eggs were speedily forthcoming.

He sat beside her, and arranged everything with the utmost care.

"How good you are!" she said, once. Otherwise she was silent, and so was he.

Before they had finished, a small boy entered the gate with papers under his arm. His jaw [333]
dropped as he recognized the captain and a guest at breakfast under the ragged balm-of-Gilead tree.

“B’Judas, I forgot him,” muttered the host. “Come here, sonny.”

The boy obeyed, and mechanically handed the captain his paper while keeping unwinking eyes on Betsy. “Now d’ye want to earn a quarter?”

“Yus.”

“Well, go to Mrs. Bachelder and tell her somethin’ for me. Think ye can?”

“Yus.”

“She’s ben wantin’ to go to Portland and do some tradin’. Can you tell her that I’ve got some business to do that’ll keep me away all to-day and she needn’t come over to get dinner?”

“Yus.”

“And she can go up town to-day or to-morrer mornin’ and do her tradin’ if she wants to. Can ye tell her that?”

“Yus.”

“Well, go on then. Here’s yer quarter. Go right there from here. D’ye hear?”

“Yus.”

“If I find to-morrer that ye haven’t done it, I’ll use ye for porgie-bait. Understand?” [334]

“Yus.”

With this the boy removed his eyes from Betsy for the first time, and ran at a dog-trot toward the beach.

“I never saw that child,” said Betsy.

“No. There’s another generation comin’ up. He won’t be able to tell Mrs. Bachelder who’s havin’ breakfast with me; and when she comes home from Portland she’ll get a letter tellin’ her she’s lost her job.”

“I’ll write it,” said Betsy. “She’s a good soul.”

“You’ll write it!” The captain was standing, and he paused, a cup and saucer in each hand, and gazed at her admiringly. “Clever Betsy! and she’s mine.”

“She’s taken good care of you, Hiram. I want her to know we appreciate it.”

“We!” repeated the radiant man. “You care that I’ve been took good care of, Betsy?”

The coffee had restored some energy to the guest. She gave her one-sided smile. “I do wish, Hiram,” she said deprecatingly, “that you wouldn’t feel you’ve got so much in gettin’ me.”

To her consternation he dropped the gold-banded old china he had been holding. Both cups fell [335]
in tinkling pieces on the ground as he wiped his eyes, and blew his nose lustily.

“O Hiram!” she cried, starting.

“Never mind, dear.” The man’s breath caught. “I didn’t notice. I had to work at the pumps. Our ship o’ matrimony is bein’ launched. Let’s say we broke ’em on purpose over it. Nothin’ was too good. Set still.”

And Betsy did. She leaned back against the calico cushion and let her faithful lover carry away the table, while she watched the sea, and breathed the sumptuous perfume of the sweet peas.

The last thing Hiram carried into the house was the traveling-bag. Her hand went out to it involuntarily as he picked it up; but he looked at her, and she leaned back again, and let it go.

At last he took his knife, and going about the flowers, cut a large bunch of white sweet peas. These he tied with a piece of linen thread, and Betsy smiled as he gave them to her. He watched while she fastened them in the front of her white waist.

“Are you ready now?” he asked. [336]

For answer she rose, and together they moved down to the floating wharf, and Hiram handed her into the row-boat by which they went out to the Clever Betsy.

It took some time to unfurl the sails and put them up, and Betsy went into the little cabin and made acquaintance with her namesake.

It was queer, she thought, that it didn’t seem queerer to be here, and irresponsible of all things earthly except Hiram. Even Rosalie did not need her. Last night’s arraignment was proof positive of her success.

Her duty was here now, and nowhere else; and the wonderful feature of the position was that

it seemed so natural, and—yes, so sweet. As the boat bounded forward, borne on strong white wings, Betsy's heart seemed to soar also into some new and freer region. Some wireless message from a New England ancestry reached her.

"Is it right to be so happy?" she asked herself. Suddenly she turned and met Hiram's eyes.

"This is a long leg, Betsy," he said quietly. "Come over and sit against this cushion. I want to get my hand on ye and know it ain't a dream." [337]

"Yes, it's right!" answered Betsy's heart, and she obeyed.

CHAPTER XXVI
IN BETSY'S ROOM

[338]

Mrs. Bruce did not sleep much after her stormy ebullition. She heard Irving and Robert come in, and knew that Irving came softly to her door and tried it. Finding it locked, he moved away as quietly. She knew he was feeling a tardy anxiety about her, and she wept again.

Toward morning she fell asleep, and when next her eyes opened, the sun was high.

Only the slumberous sound of the sea broke the Sabbath stillness.

From force of habit Mrs. Bruce put her hand out to touch the bell on the table beside her bed. It always summoned Betsy with the cup of hot water she liked to drink before she rose.

She arrested her own movement. What! Was Betsy to be allowed to fall into the usual routine and minister to her mistress's needs as if nothing had happened?

[339]

Summon her? Certainly not. Betsy must be made to feel that a change had taken place, and that she must exhibit some regret before she could be received back into favor.

So Mrs. Bruce arose and made her toilet, and donning a negligée of silk and lace, proceeded to the dining-room.

Irving and Robert were already there, and Alice, the cook, was putting breakfast on the table. Irving strode forward to meet her. He noted her heavy eyes as he kissed her forehead.

"Pardon, Madama, I thought you weren't coming down. Nixie and I are in a hurry, and as long as Betsy was busy with you, I asked Alice to put the things on the table."

Mrs. Bruce moved to her place. "Betsy hasn't been with me," she said.

"She hasn't? The poor dear must be ill then," said Irving with concern. "Alice says she hasn't been downstairs. Go up, will you," he continued to the cook who was just leaving the room, "please go up to Betsy's room and see what is the matter."

[340]

The three seated themselves, and Mrs. Bruce's dainty hands grew busy with the coffee percolator. Irving's furtive glances assured him that there had been a storm. Discretion suggested that no reference be made to last evening. Fearing therefore that Nixie might err in that line, he hastened to speak.

"We've a great plan on for to-day, Madama," he began, "and you're in it."

"That is certainly surprising," rejoined the lady.

"We tried to find you at the inn to tell you about it last night," said Nixie with insistent cheer, "but you were so exclusive, nobody knew where you were, and at last we found you had come home."

Mrs. Bruce's lips compressed firmly and her eyes could not lift above the percolator.

Irving stepped warningly on his friend's foot under the table. At this juncture Alice returned. She seemed to be laboring under some excitement which made her forget her previous embarrassment in the unfamiliar region of the dining-room.

"Betsy isn't there," she said.

"Queer," remarked Irving, without looking up from the egg he was breaking.

"She's *gone*!" declared the girl.

"Look on the dresser!" burst forth Robert dramatically. "The note will be found."

[341]

Mrs. Bruce paused, coffee-cup in hand, and looked at the cook, but did not speak.

"All right, Alice," said Irving carelessly. "She has run into a neighbor's."

"No, sir, it looks queer up there," returned the girl, her brogue increasing. "The bedclothes is all folded. Not a thing is on the dresser, sir. She's *gone*."

Alice's blank expression began to be reflected in Irving's face.

"Folded? What does that signify?" he asked.

"'Tis her trunk there too, sir. Locked and strapped it is. Sure she niver said a word to me!"

Irving pushed his chair back from the table. He looked at Mrs. Bruce. She had grown very white.

"Very well, Alice," he said quietly. "I'll see what it means. Thank you. You may go."

The Irish girl withdrew, marvelling as she went.

Robert looked from mother to son, puzzled at their seriousness.

"Did you know this, Madama?"

“Certainly not,” she replied stiffly.

“Do you believe it?”

“I don’t know what to think. Betsy grows more erratic every day. She didn’t bring my hot water this morning.” [342]

Irving studied her face an instant more, then he left the room and ran upstairs to Betsy’s room. It was dismantled. The dresser, where a flexible case had always stood open, containing six pictures of himself from babyhood to college days, was bare, even of a cover. A trunk, locked and strapped, stood a little way out from the bare wall.

Irving sat down on it in the desolate chamber, unnerved by the shock; and although the riddle seemed a horribly easy one to solve, the solution was so repulsive that he prayed to find another explanation.

Mrs. Bruce’s early disappearance from the inn, her heavy eyes this morning, Betsy’s warnings and exhortations to him in the Park, and Mrs. Bruce’s exhibition of unfriendliness to Rosalie last night, all pointed to one conclusion. His teeth clenched as he sat there, thinking back from his earliest remembrance, and all along through his life, of the unselfish care which a fine nature had devoted to his family. And this was the end. It was a nightmare. It was impossible, unthinkable.

Robert Nixon, left alone with his hostess, had seldom spent a more uncomfortable season than that first five minutes after Irving’s departure. [343]

Mrs. Bruce stared straight before her, her face wearing an expression of fright and obstinacy.

Robert, with increasing embarrassment, began to feel that he was in the midst of some mysterious crisis, and fervently wished himself in the bosom of his family at the inn.

“I’m sorry to see you look so tired, Mrs. Bruce,” he said, when the long minutes had made the silence impossible.

“Shouldn’t you think he’d come down by this time?” she asked in a strained voice. “You see how it is, Nixie. Betsy rules this household with a rod of iron. Here is Irving upset, won’t eat his breakfast, just because she has taken a notion for an early stroll.”

Robert did not answer, and a cuckoo popping out of its door and remarking that it was half-past nine, made him jump nervously.

An instant later Mrs. Bruce pushed her chair back from the table, unable longer to endure the suspense.

“You’ll excuse me, Nixie, if I see—” she said, and rose. The laces of her silken gown trailed so hurriedly through the door, that Robert had time but to take a step after her. [344]

He sank back in his chair.

“Well, what does it all mean?” he murmured. “This is a cozy little vacation breakfast!”

Mrs. Bruce held her lip between her teeth as she mounted the stairs.

“Whatever has happened,” she thought, “I shall hold my own. What I said to Betsy was nothing but the truth. Irving will cross-question me, but I don’t care—”

Her excitement was at fever-heat by the time she reached the open door of Betsy’s room.

She paused there and supported herself against the jamb. What she saw acted like a shower-bath upon her.

The familiar walls were stripped, the breeze blew through the silent, empty room, and there, seated on the trunk, was Irving, his face buried in his hands, his broad shoulders convulsed.

The only time she had ever seen him weep was when his father died. This room, too, seemed like the chamber of death.

“Irving!” she cried out in sudden pain, and ran to him. [345]

He put out one hand and held her off. She pressed her own lips with her fingers to hold their quivering, and stared at him, miserably.

He rose from the trunk, walked over to the window, and stood there with his back to her, controlling himself and wiping his eyes.

Betsy’s words seemed to echo in her heart as she stood, hesitating and wretched.

“Of the unspoken word you are master. The spoken word is master of you.”

Her breath came fast. “Why has she done this, Irving?” she asked unsteadily.

“That is for you to tell,—if you will,” he answered. His voice was low and thick.

She drew a long sobbing breath. He had pushed her away. He had shrunk from her.

“You blame me, do you, before you have heard a word?” she asked.

“Let’s not have any nonsense, or justification,” he answered, without turning. “Something has occurred which I would have given ten years of my life to prevent.”

The iron entered his listener’s soul. All her body trembled. She did not know that at this very moment he was fighting for her against his own heart; forcing himself to remember her love for [346]
him, and the long years of her devotion. A petty, petted woman, he reminded himself, whose shallows he had perceived even as a child; and he controlled the anger against her which filled him; setting a guard upon the tongue that longed to lash her until her pitiful vanity should be dead beyond recall. She stood there, mute, and he continued to stand with his back to her.

“You left the inn last night, in anger,” he said at last.

“Hurt! So hurt, Irving,” she cried.

“You came home and wreaked your ill-temper on Betsy—Betsy, whose little finger is of more worth than your whole body and mine.”

Mrs. Bruce panted and flushed. “I did talk to her of her ill judgment—you don’t know, Irving—what do you think of her spending her savings of years on Rosalie Vincent?”

“She didn’t.”

“Why, of course she did. Who else paid the hundreds of dollars which brought her here and equipped her?”

“An old friend of her father’s family. Betsy had no need to spend a cent for her, although she [347]
would have asked nothing better, I have no doubt; because her life has been spent in doing for others. She knew that Rosalie would not accept such gifts from her, because that girl is a kindred noble soul.”

Mrs. Bruce took a step backward in this destruction of the very foundation of her defense.

“I don’t ask to know all the pitiful scene that took place. This,” Irving indicated the desolation of the room with a wave of his hand, “this speaks. Betsy has gone—”

“She did it in revenge,” cried Mrs. Bruce. “She knew how it would make you suffer. She wanted to punish me.”

“Alas!” said Irving, “I know Betsy. She has been driven out of my father’s house—*my* house—without first talking to me; without putting her good arms around my neck—” The speaker’s voice stopped short; his shoulders were again convulsed.

Mrs. Bruce stood in the same spot, watching him with miserable eyes, wringing her hands.

“Don’t—don’t say such things, Irving. Don’t feel so. I’ll—I’ll do anything. I’ll find her and—and apologize—I was mistaken—I’ll say so.”

Irving made a gesture of repression. She gazed at him, mute and miserable. [348]

At last he turned and faced her. She was a figure to excite compassion in that moment, as she met the regard of his reddened eyes.

“It is too late for that, Madama. The break has come. It can’t be mended. Betsy would never go in this way if there were a possibility of her coming back.”

A sense of her own loss came to Mrs. Bruce with the kinder tone of Irving’s voice.

“I wish to speak to you also of another matter; of the cause of your excitement last night, before we part.”

“Part!” she repeated acutely.

“I mean only leaving this room. I wish for your own sake that you may regret the unwomanliness of your attitude toward Miss Vincent—Rosalie.”

Mrs. Bruce lifted questioning, dilated eyes.

“To think that it was she—that innocent girl, who could move you to cause this disaster. Examine your own consciousness. See what it is that could give the Powers of Darkness such easy access and sway.”

“I was jealous, Irving—jealous of Mrs. Nixon—”

“And angry because you could not dominate the situation,” added Irving. [349]

A painful color burned Mrs. Bruce’s face.

“I’m going to tell you,” he went on after a pause, “that no girl I have ever met has attracted me as Rosalie Vincent does.”

“Irving!”

“I’ve known many charming girls. They are all in one class. She is in another. I don’t understand it. I don’t know what it may mean. I tell you this because it may mean everything to me; and I feel it is due you to know it, since your sentiment toward Rosalie seems so strong. Then

you can decide what your attitude will be for the remainder of the summer."

Mrs. Bruce regarded him, her lips apart.

After a pause he spoke in his ordinary voice.

"We planned last evening that the Yellowstone party should go on a picnic to-day with Captain Salter. Do you care to go?"

She shook her head.

"Nor I. I would give a great deal to have this day, alone." Again his throat closed.

"To mourn! to mourn!" thought Mrs. Bruce, wretchedly.

"But I can't. I must go at once to see the captain, and then up to the inn. Good-by, Madama." [350]
He approached and laid a hand on her shoulder. He realized the blow he had given her. "We must do the best we can," he said, and left the room.

She stood there, long, in the same position.

"I wonder," she thought confusedly, "if I am not the most miserable woman in the world."

After a while she moved, and spoke through a tube which led to the kitchen. She told Alice that she would not need to get any dinner. Then she went to her room and closed the door. Stillness reigned again but for the subdued roar of waves.

"Some one will come for her trunk," she reflected. "If she took a morning train it will have to be expressed."

She held to that thought in the long hours of exhaustion that followed. Some one would come for the trunk, and she must not be asleep.

The middle of the afternoon a wagon stopped before the house. Mrs. Bruce was off her bed, alertly.

The feet of the expressman sounded on the stairs. Mrs. Bruce met him in the upper hall. To her relief it was a stranger who appeared.

"A trunk to go from here?" he said. [351]

"Yes." She led the way. "Is it prepaid?" she asked as he laid hands upon it.

"No."

"Sha'n't I do it then? Where is it to go?" The speaker's heart beat fast under the careless words.

"No, ma'am. No need. Cap'n Salter's good."

"Captain—" She arrested herself. "Oh, it's to go to the captain's."

"Yes, ma'am."

Mrs. Bruce returned to her room and sat on the side of the bed in deep meditation. Betsy might store her possessions in the house of an old friend until her plans were made.

The sense of desolation that overtook her as the trunk had disappeared submerged her afresh; and Irving's words returned to pierce her.

Rosalie Vincent—in a class by herself. Her splendid Irving, whose career was to have made her life one pageant of gratified pride.

She sank upon her pillows with a groan. Her world was falling about her like a flimsy house of cards.

In the evening she heard him come in. He had to pass her room to get to his. She stood in the [352]
open doorway.

"Did you enjoy your picnic, dear?" she asked, as he appeared.

"We didn't have any. I found Captain Salter's house deserted, and his boat gone. I've been taking a long walk."

"Indeed! I thought perhaps you would find—find Betsy at Captain Salter's."

"Why?" the question was quick.

"Her trunk went there this afternoon."

"Madama!"

Mrs. Bruce felt a faint satisfaction in the amazement her information conveyed.

"I wonder—" said Irving; and repeated vaguely, "I wonder."

"I thought she might be storing it there," hazarded Mrs. Bruce meekly.

Irving stood, thinking, for a minute, but to her disappointment he made no reply.

“Good-night,” he said, and kissed her forehead as he had always done.

He went on to his room, his thoughts busy.

The house was deserted. The boat was gone. That was what she had done, then.

“Betsy! Dear Betsy!” he murmured. [353]

He looked at his watch, then took a sudden determination.

Like a thief he stole downstairs without a sound, and out of doors.

Then he started on a slow, steady run down the village street. It was not a long pull to the isolated cottage among the rocks, and when he came in sight of it he was rewarded by seeing a light in the windows.

Stealthily drawing near, he peered within. There he could see a cheerful tea-table, and Captain Salter and Betsy eating their late supper.

A lump rose in his throat. The trunk still stood on the piazza, and he passed it, to open the door gently. Smiling and dim-eyed he stood before the pair, who pushed their chairs back from the table.

“Well, *Irving*!” cried the captain’s big voice.

He extended a welcoming hand, but the visitor did not see it. He had fallen on his knees beside the bride’s chair, and buried his face in her lap.

She put both arms around his shoulders as she had done a hundred times to console some childish grief, and sudden tears rained from the eyes she raised to her husband. [354]

The captain rose, and walked over to the window.

Irving lifted his cheek to Betsy’s breast.

“Mr. Irving, dear,” she said brokenly, “you know—”

“Yes. Don’t explain. Don’t speak. I know. But I remember, Betsy. I remember so much, that I couldn’t stay away. My mother and you, Betsy. My mother and you.—So much.—So much that I can’t say—But my heart is full of it—and I wanted to kiss you—to kiss you before I went to sleep.”

“Darling boy! Darling child!” said Betsy, and pressed her cheek against his hair.

Then she kissed him tenderly, and he her, and he rose, and with a parting caress of his hand upon hers, crossed to the bridegroom, quietly blowing his nose by the window.

“Congratulations,” he said thickly.

The captain seized his offered hand speechlessly, and a mighty mutual grip ensued.

Then Irving slipped out of the open door, closed it softly behind him, and ran down the garden’s perfumed path.

CHAPTER XXVII
BETSY RECEIVES

[355]

Betsy's letter to Mrs. Bachelder was a lighted match to a fuse. Within an hour Betsy's Fairport, to a man, woman, and child, knew that she had linked her fortunes to Captain Salter's.

Mrs. Pogram was one of the first to call upon the bride. Enveloped in a black shawl, and moving with heavy deliberation, the mournful lady walked up the path bordered with fragrant pinks, and looked with lugubrious but appreciative eyes about the sunny garden of the rock-bound cottage.

Betsy saw her coming, and opened the door.

"That's right, Mrs. Pogram. This is neighborly," she said.

The visitor regarded her with doleful curiosity, examining her gingham dress and white apron, and the smooth arrangement of her trim head, with approval.

"You look awfully well, Betsy," she said.

"Will you come in, or do you like to sit out here in the sunshine?"

[356]

Mrs. Pogram sniffed. "The grass is kind o' damp, I guess," she objected.

"Perhaps it is," said Betsy. "Come in, then. Before another summer we're goin' to have a real nice veranda all across the front."

"How you talk!" returned the caller, following her inside and accepting a cushioned rocker. "It sounds good to hear of anybody prosperin'. I haven't scarcely got my breath since I heard o' your marriage. And they say you wasn't married in Fairport. They say you took the boat and went off and had a preacher from Mere Point row out with a witness and get aboard and marry you, 'cause Hiram wanted the knot tied on the sea; said he was goin' to have a sailor's knot and make a sure thing of it. And then I heard you all danced a hornpipe!"

Betsy laughed into the curious face with its down-drawn lips. "What a good time somebody had spinnin' that yarn," she said. "Now tell me about yourself, Mrs. Pogram."

"It looks awful comfortable here," declared the visitor wistfully. "I didn't know as you and Hiram was goin' to get married."

"Well, you see we did. I'm your neighbor now, for good."

[357]

"'Tis good, Betsy. 'Tis so."

The visitor rocked as she inspected. Her gloomy garb and countenance in the cheerful room gave an effect as of a portly raven in a solarium.

"If you'd 'a' give folks some warnin'," she went on, "you'd 'a' had presents from your well-wishers and old friends. Why was you so suddent, Betsy?"

The hostess directed a one-sided smile toward the open window, near which she was sitting. "Sometimes things that seem sudden have been a long time growin'," she said.

"I s'pose so. I think a sight of you," declared the visitor with a sniff. "I'd like nothin' better'n to give you a spoon if I thought there was any hope o' Loomis not noticin' it; but Loomis is goin' to get married himself, and he's more'n ever set on keepin' the estate together. I've been thinkin' a whole lot about it, 'cause I've decided that when he's got his own home I'd ruther make a division. I'd ruther have less and not be pestered."

"I would, too," said Betsy.

"And if that time ever comes, you can count on me for a spoon."

[358]

"Thank you," returned the bride. "Don't worry about it, Mrs. Pogram. I think even more of the will than the deed."

"Well, I heard from Rosalie at last," announced the caller. "She was in Boston, and had found some old friend of her father's who was doin' for her. She didn't say much, just a real pleasant little note, sayin' she was all right and would let me hear again soon." Mrs. Pogram lowered her voice, lest her brother's dapper astral body might be floating near. "Her note cheered me up consid'able, Betsy, and I've been thinkin' that after Loomis was married I could have Rosalie back again, just as well as not!"

Betsy's face grew inscrutable. "I saw Rosalie in Boston myself," she began; and at that moment the door, which had been ajar, opened, and the girl herself appeared before them.

She wore a dark-blue sailor suit, her sleeves were rolled up, and her face was alight with feeling.

"I heard my name!" she cried. "Oh, Betsy, I've just learned about you!"

[359]

In an instant the two were locked in each other's arms, while Mrs. Pogram, her mouth open, her eyes winking as if to dispel cobwebs, leaned back in her chair.

“Do you see my visitor?” asked Betsy.

“Why, Auntie Pogram! You?” said the girl; and hastening to the sombre figure, she kissed her. “I was coming to see you to-day,” she went on. “It was my first opportunity. Everything has happened so fast.”

“You’re—” stammered Mrs. Pogram amazedly, “you’re livin’ in Fairport, Rosalie?”

“Yes, at the inn.”

If it were possible for Mrs. Pogram’s back to cling more limply to her chair, it did so now.

The girl laughed. “Yes, it’s a fairy story, Auntie Pogram, but I’m living at the inn and paying for my board in the pleasantest way.”

“Waitin’ on table?” asked Mrs. Pogram.

“No;” the girl flushed and laughed. “Speaking pieces, just the way I used to do for you.”

“You don’t say so! I was just tellin’ Betsy, Loomis is goin’ to get married; and then I want you to come back to me, Rosalie.”

A creeping nausea stole around the girl’s heart.

“Thank you,” she said, “but I’ve grown so conceited I believe I can make my own living.” [360]

Betsy watched her in fond silence; and Rosalie returned to her side. “I just looked in to hug you and to say I’m glad,” she said. “I’ll come again, soon.”

“What are you going to do to-day?” asked Betsy.

“I’m going canoeing with Mr. Nixon.”

“With Mr. Nixon,” repeated Betsy.

She was sorry they could not speak alone. She saw by the girl’s face there was much she was repressing.

“The people are planning a Yellowstone picnic with Captain Salter,” continued Rosalie. “We’re to sail to some far-away beach and have a clambake. Don’t forget that you’re a Yellowstoner even if you are a bride.”

“Rosalie,” returned Betsy, “if the people are kind enough to suggest my goin’ on any o’ these excursions, I want you to tell ’em that I’d rather not.”

The girl stood silent for a moment. Robert had told her as much as he knew, which was the mere fact of the marriage. He had asked nothing of Irving, and had not mentioned Betsy’s flight; [361] but Rosalie guessed enough to understand.

“You can tell them that my weddin’ was a very hurried one and that I’m busy, and will be all summer,” added Betsy.

The girl inspected the room.

“I was here once before,” she said. “How different it looks!”

Betsy smiled. “I guess Cap’n Salter kept the blinds shut a good deal,” she returned. “I calc’late to make it look real nice here before I get through.”

Rosalie looked at her wistfully. “Isn’t it fun!” she said. “It’s a pretty cottage, and as for what you see from here—why, the inn has nothing like it.”

A man’s step crunched the garden-path and a knock sounded at the door. Robert Nixon appeared.

“May I come in?” he cried cheerfully. “Mrs. Betsy!” he added, as the hostess started up, “I thought it would be a good time to run over and pay my respects, for I knew you had company anyway, and I wanted you to know that I bear no malice for your unkindness in the past.”

Betsy shook hands with him heartily. “Mrs. Pogram, this is Mr. Nixon,” she said. [362]

Mrs. Pogram’s eyes had found their greatest width, and they remained there, unwinking, while Robert bowed.

“Any time’s a good time, Mr. Nixon,” went on the hostess. “The latch-string will be always out.”

“Say, this is pretty nice, do you know it?” exclaimed Robert, looking about. “Such a corking view!”

Seeing Betsy in her usual trim garb, and with no line of care in her forehead, the young man asked himself if she could bear any relation to that tragical Sunday morning.

“You look as if you’d always been here,” he said.

“I really feel that way,” replied Betsy. “Sit down, Mr. Nixon.”

“I’d like to, but I can’t. I have to take this young lady and bear her off to my light canoe. Brute’s gone to Boston and it’s my innings.”

Betsy saw Rosalie’s blush and the sudden gravity of her face.

“She’s got ’em all cinched up there at the inn,” he rattled on. “Have to stand in line now to get an hour of her. Good-by, Betsy—I don’t have to call you Mrs. Salter, do I?” [363]

The bride laughed and reassured him, and with a few more words the young people disappeared.

“Who’s he?” asked Mrs. Pogram sepulchrally.

“A young man from Boston. We met him in the Yellowstone.”

“Rosalie said—” began the visitor.

“Yes,” interrupted Betsy, returning to her seat with a repressed sigh. “I’ll explain.”

Then she told her caller the outline of Rosalie’s experience, foreseeing that much future heartburning would be averted by frankness.

“Rosalie and I came pretty close out there,” she finished, “and this house’ll be her headquarters next winter if she has idle times; which I don’t think she will.”

“But after Loomis is married—” began Mrs. Pogram.

“Yes, but you see we didn’t know Loomis was goin’ to be married, and Cap’n Salter’s very fond o’ Rosalie, and we’ve made our plans.”

“Oh!” said Mrs. Pogram reflectively. “She looks like a new girl. I didn’t know as she was so pretty.” [364]

“Some evenin’ soon,” said Betsy kindly, “you’ll come over here to supper with me, and I’ll fix it up with Sam Beebe to let us go to the inn and sit in some corner outside an open window, and we’ll see and hear Rosalie give her little show. You’ll be real pleased with her.”

“I guess I shall,” returned Mrs. Pogram, in a sort of maze. “I guess I shall. There was always somethin’ out o’ the ordinary about her. I used to think it was that made Loomis mad.” Mrs. Pogram’s eyes looked into a void. “He’s goin’ to marry a real nice girl—poor thing!” she added.

Delicacy restrained Betsy from inquiring which of the contracting parties was thus apostrophized by a fond sister, and in a few minutes her caller left.

By a strange coincidence Mrs. Pogram was present a week later, when one afternoon Captain Salter approached his cottage laden with a heavy wooden case which he carried on his shoulder. He groaned in spirit as he beheld through the window the visitor’s ample sable proportions.

“That’s goin’ to be Betsy’s trouble,” he muttered. “Everybody thinks too darned much of her.” [365]

He gave the caller a cheerful nod, however, as he entered the living-room. He was too happy himself not to let good cheer overflow upon all mankind.

Betsy regarded the heavy case with surprise.

“What ye been sendin’ to Boston for?” he asked, lowering his burden.

“Nothin’. To Boston? There’s some mistake.”

She approached and read the inky address. “Mrs. Hiram Salter.” The name was clear.

Hiram brought some tools and opened the wooden box, then began to take out the packing within.

“It’s a weddin’ present,” exclaimed Mrs. Pogram, throwing back her shawl in the excitement of the moment, and thanking the lucky star which had made her keep on from the market to the Salter cottage.

Tissue paper began to come into view.

Hiram looked at Betsy. “I guess I’ve gone as far as I darst,” he said.

Color came into her cheeks as she lifted out package after package and laid them on the table. Mrs. Pogram rocked violently. [366]

Captain Salter lifted away the wooden case and packing.

An envelope caught Betsy’s eye. She opened it and read the card within.

“O Hiram!” she exclaimed brokenly. “It’s Mr. Irving!”

“Irvin’ Bruce,” cried Mrs. Pogram, raising herself in her chair and dropping back again.

Betsy gave the card to her husband.

He read on it: “To dear Betsy, with her boy’s love.”

A slow, broad smile grew on Hiram's bronzed face, and he watched motionless while Betsy opened her treasures.

Only Mrs. Pogram's breathless ejaculations broke the stillness.

"I never!—I never did!—Fit for a queen!—And I wanted to give you a spoon!"

For the morocco cases held silver with the rose pattern which Irving knew that Betsy loved.

There were a dozen tea-spoons, half a dozen table-spoons, and the same number of forks and silver knives. A silver teapot, cream-pitcher and sugar-bowl of colonial design crowned the show. [367] Every article except the knives was engraved with an F. upon which Captain Salter gazed with admiration.

The good soul could not even begrudge Mrs. Pogram's presence at the unveiling of so much splendor; for the raven more nearly resembled a lark now, in her chirps and cries of joy.

Hiram held his wife in an embrace while they stood looking upon the array.

"You want to bring the burglars down on me, that's what you want, Betsy."

"Oh, it's too handsome, too handsome!" Betsy was murmuring. "Mr. Irving hadn't ought to spent so much money!" She held the card against her breast.

"I hain't a particle of objection," said Hiram jovially. "Would *you* have, Mrs. Pogram?"

The latter was eyeing the tea-set.

"It's lots like mine," she answered, with recovered recollection of the Brown-Pogram estate. "I'm just bound and determined Loomis's wife shan't have my tea-set!"

"We can't do anything but eat, to do justice to it, Betsy," went on Hiram.

And she turned her head and buried her face on his breast, while he kept his arms around her. [368]

Mrs. Pogram began to be inspired with the idea that perhaps the pair would not mind being left alone for a little while.

"Betsy's kind o' worked up," she said leniently, to Hiram. "She set so much store by Irvin'. I'll just go on, and see her some other time."

Some of Mercury's fleetness was lent to the visitor's heavy sandals as she considered the number of neighbors she could see on her way home; and before bed-time that night, it was known in Fairport that the Bruce family had given to Captain Salter's bride a complete dinner-service of solid silver, a watch studded with diamonds, and Oriental rugs for every room in the cottage!

CHAPTER XXVIII
GOOD-BY, SUMMER

[369]

One errand which Irving Bruce performed in Boston besides buying Betsy's wedding present, was to seek out a poor relation of his step-mother's in her suburban home, and carry her back with him to Fairport.

He wired: "Miss Frost is returning with me."

And such was Mrs. Bruce's loneliness, and worry, and desire to hide from her friends, that never did poor relation receive a more cordial welcome.

Miss Frost, a bird-like little person with a high apologetic voice, was bewildered with joyful excitement.

"I haven't a *thing* to wear, my dear, not a thing!" she cried to her hostess on her arrival; "but Irving was so *perfectly* lovely, he wouldn't let me *wait* for *anything*; and he told me how you've let that valuable Betsy go to this faithful lover of *years*, so like you, always to think of *others*, and Irving says you're *tired*, so that really perhaps I *can* take some care of you, and it will be such a [370] *joy* to feel that I'm not *useless* in this beautiful, beautiful spot, and you never *could* look anything but *pretty*, Laura, but I do think you *show* the natural fatigue of *travel*," etc., etc.

This combination of flattery and confidence bound up some of Mrs. Bruce's wounds. She did make the newcomer useful, not only in the actual labor of housekeeping, but as an excuse for not going where she did not wish to be.

But meanwhile she lived a life within herself which her cousin never suspected. Daily the battle between love and pride was renewed. Robert Nixon remained with them, and through him, more than through Irving, she learned of Rosalie's continued vogue.

She declined the sailing party which went out with Captain Salter, and Miss Frost was with difficulty persuaded to go in her place.

Upon her return, blown and dishevelled, but joyful, Mrs. Bruce met her cousin with veiled eagerness.

"Did they think it very strange of me not to come, Lavinia?"

"Why of course they were *disappointed*," chirped the little woman, endeavoring to tuck up the [371] flying strands of her gray hair; "but when I told them how you felt it a *duty* to rest *absolutely* for a week, they understood. I told them how I disliked to leave you alone, but that you never *could* think of your*self*, and were determined I should have the pleasure, and so I *came*; and oh, Laura, it was the most *lovely* sail; I did wish every *minute* for you!"

Mrs. Bruce in her chastened state drank in the praise which she knew was sincere.

"Lavinia Frost is really a much more agreeable person to have about than Betsy," she thought.

Those clear eyes of Betsy's which had always seemed to read her through and through, appeared to her mental vision now as she mounted the stairs after her cousin, and followed her to her room, remaining with her while the visitor repaired the ravages of wind and wave.

"Do you think Mrs. Nixon enjoyed the excursion?" asked Mrs. Bruce.

Miss Frost raised her hands and dilated her eyes expressively. "I'm afraid not! She's not a good sailor; but the *young* people—Oh, what a good time they did have, Laura!"

A little contracting pain, grown familiar, seized the listener. [372]

"Go on. Tell me about it," she replied quietly.

"Well, you know how *amusing* Mr. Nixon always is," began Miss Frost, spreading cold cream over her sunburn; "(so *like* you, dear Laura, to give me this cream). He and Miss Maynard—such an *elegant* girl, Miss Maynard—and dear Irving, and that *lovely* creature Miss Vincent, all four sang together."

"Did they? Did they sing well?"

"Yes, *indeed*; but you know they're so full of *fun* they couldn't stick to anything serious, and Miss Vincent sang some coon songs. O Laura, that girl is *wonderfully* talented. She made Mr. Derwent laugh as hard as the boys. *Splendid*-looking man, Mr. Derwent. I really—I expect I'm a silly old thing, but I couldn't *help* weaving *romances* out in that boat, those four delightful young people were so *tempting* to the *imagination*."

"Really?" asked Mrs. Bruce. "How did you pair them off in your own mind?"

"I didn't have to pair them off," twittered the little woman. "Irving was beside that *charming* [373] young creature with the gold crown,—you know the way that broad soft braid goes around her head,—he was beside her all the time. I just *hoped* she appreciated his attentions; but do you know I watched them *closely*, and I never saw her look at him *once*! She was pleasant and gay all the time,—but I just said to myself, can—it—be *possible* that that girl is more attracted by our droll Nixie than by that *prince*? I've often heard you say you dreaded Irving's falling in love;

you've always been so like brother and sister, it isn't to be wondered at; but when Mr. Nixon told me what a good *angel* you'd been to that talented girl, I thought I could *see* that you had your little plans!"

Lavinia Frost closed one eye, and nodded knowingly at her cousin, whose flushed face disclosed nothing.

"I told him that was the way you'd gone through *life*. I told him about the stove you gave me for my living-room, and now what a grand outing you were giving me here, and so thoughtfully letting me feel myself of some *use*. O Laura, it's a splendid thing to be rich and powerful, but it's better still to have that big heart and soul that *uses* the power to spread *blessings* along the [374] paths of others less fortunate!"

Mrs. Bruce kept silent. Miss Frost washed the cream from her hands and began winding up her sparse hair.

"It's awfully thin, you see. Not much more than nine hairs, Laura," she laughed, "three behind to braid, and one on each side to puff. I don't *want*," she continued after a silence, "to see anything you don't *wish* me to, but I *could*—not—help—thinking that Irving admired that girl *extremely*; and though I know you're above such considerations, I couldn't help being *glad* she was well-connected as well as beautiful. One of the Derwent family. Think of it! Mr. Nixon told me so, and it was plain to see that Mr. Derwent thinks the world of her. Such an elegant man! And what do you suppose he said to me, Laura? As we were leaving the boat he said with such a *charming* bow—perfectly *charming*! He said, 'I think in some way you have been given the wrong *name*, Miss Frost. *I* think it should be Miss *Spring*!" Lavinia gave a joyous but apologetic giggle. "Wasn't that a perfectly *lovely* thing for him to say?"

Mrs. Bruce regarded the speaker thoughtfully. [375]

"Lavinia," she said, "how should you like to stay with me?"

"Stay with you—my *dear*?" The little woman stood stock-still, the dress skirt she was about to put on, in her hand.

"Yes,—keep house for me in Boston."

"Why, Lavinia, it would be *heaven*—but, how *can* I!"

"Why can't you? It is only to give up a few rooms in somebody else's house. You're quite alone."

"I suppose I am," replied Lavinia slowly, "but somehow I never realize it."

What a wealth of implication lay in the simple words! Mrs. Bruce could not appreciate that, but she persisted in her plan, which had been gradually taking form for days.

A capable, useful, refined admirer was what her beaten and dependent soul yearned for.

Tears dimmed Lavinia's eyes when at last she accepted the offer.

"Laura!" she exclaimed, with touching sincerity, "you have been planning this beautiful thing for me! *That* is why Irving brought me here. Dear Irving, always so courteous, he has been, to [376] your relatives! Dear Laura, when do you *ever* take time to think of yourself!"

One day in the second week in September, Betsy stood by a window in her cottage and saw Rosalie, in hat and street dress, enter the garden. She watched the girl unnoticed, and saw her turn and look seaward. Clouds were scudding along the sky, and swallows circling against the strong breeze. Presently Rosalie came up the path.

Betsy threw open the door. "Welcome home!" she said, and embraced her.

"I'm the most fortunate girl in the world," declared Rosalie.

Betsy took the bag she carried. "Let me show you your room," she said.

With happy pride she led the guest up the narrow stairs, and ushered her into a comfortable little bower, hung in white dimity.

Rosalie turned, and gave her hostess another hug. "Why should you be so good to me?" she exclaimed.

"Because you're all the little girl I've got," returned Betsy. "See what a nice cozy corner that makes for your trunk!"

Rosalie regarded her affectionately. "I have the greatest news for you," she said. "I can only [377] stay two days."

"Answers to the advertisement, eh?" asked Betsy with interest.

"Better than that! How wonderfully good people are! Mr. Derwent actually went to Portland weeks ago, and managed somehow, so that yesterday I received a summons from the Moore School to come and take up my work there. It seems that some of the faculty have heard me at the inn, and it's settled, practically."

“All the better, child. Cap’n Salter and I’d never get tired o’ havin’ you here, but you wouldn’t be satisfied with an idle winter in Fairport. Come in my room and sit down for a chat. I’m doin’ some mendin’, and we can settle all the affairs o’ the nation.”

Rosalie followed into the front room, and seated herself by a low window looking out on the gray billows.

“Good-by, summer,” she said, as if to herself.

Betsy glanced at her and sat down by the bed where were scattered articles of clothing.

“The swallows are making them ready to fly, [378]
Wheeling out on a windy sky—”

sang the girl softly.

“Well,” said Betsy, “when you take ’count o’ stock, what sort of a summer has it been?”

“Wonderful.”

“That may be,” returned Betsy, “but how about the net result. Would you like to live it over again?”

“Yes, indeed!” was the fervent reply. “*No*, Betsy! What am I talking about! No, I wouldn’t. I might not do so well again.”

“How do you mean?” asked the other, beginning to make a lattice-work across the vacant toe of a man’s sock. “Do you mean professionally?”

“Not altogether,” answered the girl slowly.

“Oh, you mean socially too, eh?”

“Yes.”

Silence, while the breakers struck and burst on the rock at the left of the cottage.

“Whom have you over here?” Rosalie rose and moved to the dresser where a flexible leather case stood in a semi-circle. “Captain Salter?” She picked up the case. “Irving!” she added in a different tone, and studied the six pictures with down-drooped face.

“See the envelope standin’ there against the glass? You can open it. It came with my silver.” [379]

Rosalie obeyed. “Oh!” she said softly.

Presently Betsy spoke again: “I’ve heard a lot about how popular you’ve been all summer. Says I to myself, there’s safety in numbers, says I.”

“Yes,” agreed Rosalie, “there’s safety in numbers.”

She returned the card to its envelope.

“Take the pictures over to the window if you’d like to,” said Betsy, mending busily.

“No, thank you,” returned the girl; and placing the case as she had found it, she came back to her seat.

“The Nixon party got off all right, I s’pose,” said Betsy. “Mr. Nixon came over to say good-by. Did you know Mr. Derwent took supper with the cap’n and me one night?”

“Yes. He is greatly taken with Captain Salter.”

“We had a real good time,” said Betsy, “and he praised the supper.”

“There are no suppers as good as yours. Nixie and I had made him hungry telling him about the dinner we had with you that day.”

“And my boy never broke bread with me once,” said Betsy sadly. “I couldn’t ask him away from [380]
Mrs. Bruce.”

“Betsy,” asked Rosalie wistfully, “whatever did happen?”

Betsy shook her head. “Nothin’ you need worry about, child.”

“But that’s just what troubles me. I’ve always believed it was about me.”

“Rosalie,”—Betsy lifted her eyes from her work for a minute,—“do you know it says in the Bible that God makes the wrath o’ man to praise him? or somethin’ like that? I’ve thought of it often since I’ve been livin’ here. There had to be some kind of an explosion for Hiram to get his rights. I see now he’s only got his rights.”

“But one thing is very strange,” said Rosalie. “The few times I’ve spoken with Mrs. Bruce this summer, she has been quite polite to me. Do you know about this cousin who is with her, this cunning little Miss Frost, more like a canary-bird than any one I ever saw? Well, she adores Mrs. Bruce, and do you know it has seemed to me that Mrs. Bruce is trying to live up to it. Wouldn’t that be strange?”

Betsy dropped her work and regarded the speaker. [381]

“Miss Lavinia Frost,—I know her well. She don’t *seem* to wear spectacles, but she’s got a pair on all the time. Rose-color. Mrs. Bruce went out to her rooms once and she didn’t like the looks of ’em, and she took one of her notions and fixed ’em up with a handsome stove, and an arm-chair, and some other nice things, and Miss Frost never could get over it.”

“Mrs. Bruce is going to keep her with her.”

“Fine!” exclaimed Betsy. “Nothin’ could be better.” She shook her head and resumed her work. “Here’s hopin’ Miss Frost’ll never lose those magnifyin’ spectacles!”

“You never saw any one admire another more sincerely. Why, she takes it for granted that Mrs. Bruce made *me*, and is in love with her work.”

Betsy dropped her hands.

“‘God moves in a mysterious way,
His wonders to perform!’”

she declared. “Rosalie,” she added gently, “I wouldn’t wonder one mite if Lavinia Frost livin’ with Mrs. Bruce would be the makin’ o’ *her*. What do we all want? We want love. Mrs. Bruce hasn’t [382] drawn it to herself from the folks that’s lived closest to her. She’s had some sharp lessons, from what Mr. Irving says, and now, when the plough’s gone deep, and the soil’s softer, this cheerful little lover may be takin’ her just at the right time, and will make a big difference in her.”

“Why, I seem to see it begin,” returned Rosalie. “She’s so much more gentle, and Miss Frost chirps and twitters around her, and waits on her—”

Betsy nodded. “That’s right,” she said with satisfaction. “That’s good. She loves bein’ made of. I b’lieve that’ll work well.”

There was another silence, which Betsy broke.

“I understand you’ve got somethin’ for me,” she said.

The girl looked around, puzzled.

“Why,—why no, Betsy.”

“Mr. Irving says so.”

Rosalie regarded her calmly, but the faint color deepened in her cheeks.

“I don’t know what he means.”

“Well, I don’t know who else should.” Betsy took a letter out of her pocket and tossed it across to her guest, who opened it, and read:—

> Dear Betsy,—I’m feeling very important because they’ve wired for me from [383] the bank. I can’t even run over to the cottage to see you, because I must make a train. I’ve asked Rosalie to give you a hug for me. Good-by.
>
> Your devoted
> Boy.

“Oh, you mean that,” said Rosalie quietly, refolding the note.

“Of course I mean that. Do you suppose I want to be cheated out o’ his hugs?”

The girl smiled and shook her head. “I certainly haven’t any of them,” she said.

“But he found time to go over and say good-by to you, I notice.”

“Yes, he came. Mrs. Bruce and Miss Frost are to follow him in a day or two.”

“What do you think o’ the young man, now you’ve summered him?” asked Betsy quietly.

“If I didn’t think well of him I’d never dare to tell you so.”

“Perhaps not. Has he been specially attentive to any one o’ the girls at the inn?”

Rosalie twisted the curtain tassel and looked out at the sea.

“Yes,” she answered after some moments. “If I hadn’t known—if you hadn’t told me that—even [384] if he *were*, the ending of the summer would end his remembrance, I might have been—well, pretty silly a good many times.”

Betsy looked up. “I hope I haven’t made a mistake, or spoiled any o’ your good times, dear.”

“No,” answered the girl. “I’ve been more than glad of all your warnings. Everybody has been so kind, and there have been so many people who wanted to do things for me, that it was made easy in one way. I could avoid him without it’s looking strange to him, or any one else.”

“Was there,” asked Betsy, “was there any other o’ the young men that you liked—just as well?”

Rosalie turned and gave her a look. There was the darkening of the eyes that Betsy

remembered, and the lip was caught under the girl's teeth.

Betsy fumbled with her darning-egg, dropped her eyes, and cleared her throat.

"That child won't *ever* learn to be mejum!" she thought.

"You've worked and played pretty hard, I guess," she said, presently. "You're some thin, [385]
Rosalie. I've been noticin' it lately. I hope you feel real good."

"Never better," was the reply. "I'm eager to go to work—real work. I hope I can make the girls like me."

"Law, child, you'll have to fight 'em off," was the reply. "Did—did you and Mr. Irving part real friendly?"

"Oh, certainly. I must show you something he gave me a good while ago."

The girl rose and went to her own room. Betsy laid down her work and gazed ahead. "Ain't she made o' the real stuff, though!" she thought. "I guess Irving Bruce has found out that porcelain's pretty strong sometimes!"

Here Rosalie returned and put into her friend's hands an exquisite white fan, whose carved sticks Betsy examined with admiration.

"If he's given you this?" she said, looking up questioningly.

"He had to, I suppose," returned the girl, "practically; he broke mine the first night we met at the inn. It was part of my outfit. I couldn't object to his making it good."

Betsy laughed at the prosaic tone, and looked back at the rich toy.

"He made it good, all right," she remarked. "When you need another outfit you can pawn this." [386]

"It is very handsome," said Rosalie, regarding her possession, while the downcast eyes darkened again under their drooping lids.

CHAPTER XXIX
THE NEW YEAR

[387]

Autumn with its crystalline days and frosty nights gave Betsy glorious views from her windows, but played havoc with her garden.

Hiram had long ago put up his boat, and now he began building a small launch that Irving Bruce had ordered for the following season.

With Thanksgiving Day came Rosalie. Hiram brought her home from the station in high satisfaction, and it seemed as if Betsy could never hear enough of her pleasant work in the school.

"I'm bein' awful mean and selfish," announced Betsy. "I haven't asked one person to dinner with us. Seems if we couldn't share our little girl with anybody else to-day."

"Yes," said Hiram, "seems if some special dispensation o' common sense had been given Betsy, for our benefit, Rosalie. I'll have ye know I keep an asylum. Never know any day I come home to dinner who I'll find here. They get *their* Thanksgivin' three hundred and sixty-four days a year. I [388] maintain we deserve the sixty-fifth."

"Don't be such a goose, Hiram," laughed his wife. "This is all 'cause Mrs. Pogram wanted to see you to-day, Rosalie. I told her you were comin' for the whole Christmas vacation, and she should see you then."

During dinner Rosalie told many things about the school and her work, and afterward the trio sat around an open fire while the first snow of the season flung its stars upon the window-panes.

"Do you hear from any o' the Boston folks?" asked Betsy.

"Yes, I have, once or twice. I must show you some pictures I brought. They're in my suit-case."

Rosalie ran upstairs to the cold little white room.

"Do you know, Betsy," said Hiram, as he sat in a corner where the smoke from his pipe curled up the chimney with that of the blazing logs, "do you know I used to think last summer Irvin' Bruce was as set on Rosalie as I am on you. I minded my own business, but I wasn't blind; and b'gosh I was surprised that he let her teach school this winter. D'ye s'pose she could 'a' given [389] him the mitten?"

"No, I don't, Hiram. Pshaw! You know how young men tag after a pretty girl who can sing and dance and cut up and amuse 'em. When it comes to marryin', folks like the Bruces want some one in their own set. Mr. Irving—"

"Here they are," said Rosalie, returning. "Irving Bruce had some of our kodaks enlarged. He said I might keep these, so I brought them. I knew Captain Salter would like to see himself as others see him."

The Clever Betsy was indeed immortalized. There were pictures of her exterior and interior; and her captain held his pipe in his hand as he looked upon the excellent likenesses of himself and his passengers. Gay, smiling pictures they were, except for his own dark countenance; and in each photograph in which Irving Bruce appeared, he was next to Rosalie.

The captain gave his wife a look of which she was conscious, but which she refused to receive.

"Set be hanged," he muttered to himself.

"What?" asked Rosalie. "Aren't they good? I'm going to leave one of them with you and Betsy. [390] Now, choose."

"This one, then!" returned the captain.

In it Rosalie had one knee on the seat. Her wavy hair was flying in a halo, and she was laughing. Close behind her was Irving Bruce. He was standing, his arm outstretched in some gesture.

"That isn't *my* choice," said Betsy. "I'd rather have this."

She picked up a photograph of the Clever Betsy under full sail. Gallantly she was breasting a high sea.

"Why in the world!" objected Hiram; and she caught his eyes with an expression he seldom saw.

"Don't you want the children?" he began.

She smiled a little. "I've no objection to the children," she answered, "but I want—the boat."

Hiram gazed at her with slow comprehension, then he dropped the photographs and smoothed his wife's hair as she bent over her choice.

"That's right," he said radiantly. "That's *your* story, Rosalie," handing a photograph to her. "This is ours."

The girl looked at the pair, wondering, and wistful. She had not learned that the heart is never old. [391]

"Tell us more news from Boston," said Betsy when they were again settled around the fire, Rosalie on a low stool pressed close to her side.

"It is all pleasant. I had such an amusing letter from Nixie. He says Helen is swimming to the top of the social wave, that his mother is busier than a hen with one chicken, and that he himself sobs heavily in corners owing to her neglect. He says the Bruce household is serene, all but Miss Frost, who is too happy to be serene. If she has one drive a week with Mrs. Bruce in her electric, he says she talks about her cousin's generosity the next six days. Nixie says Mrs. Bruce seems really ashamed to complain of anything—"

"There," interpolated Betsy gladly; "it's workin'."

"Yes," said Rosalie, "such a cheery little woman is a sermon. It makes me think of some verses I have seen:—

"'Just being happy is a fine thing to do;
Looking at the bright side, rather than the blue;
Sad or sunny musing, is largely in the choosing,
And just being happy is brave work and true.'"

"That's gospel, that is," remarked Hiram. "You learn that, Betsy, and say it to me every time you plan to have Mrs. Pogram to dinner." [392]

Rosalie went back to her school-work with good courage, refreshed by the visit to her friends. Early in December she received a formal but kind note from Mrs. Nixon asking her to spend the Christmas holidays with her.

She smiled as she read it. Mr. Derwent was behind the invitation, she knew, and Robert reinforced it by one of his hare-brained but hearty epistles, begging her to accept, and promising her a luridly enthralling experience.

She was glad she could tell them that her promise was given to Betsy for the holidays. There would be a strange pleasure, she thought, in seeing her summer playground in the embrace of winter. The starry Thanksgiving snow had vanished by morning; but now, Betsy said, the great rock near the cottage looked like a giant's wedding-cake.

The weeks wore on, and the evergreen time drew near. On Christmas morning Rosalie wakened in her white room under the eaves of the Salter house. It had been furnished with an air-tight stove in honor of her visit, and Betsy came in early to make a roaring fire.

"Merry Christmas, Betsy!" cried the girl, sitting up. [393]

"It will be, child," returned Betsy, "with you for a treat." She kissed her guest. "You look like Aurora," she added, in irrepressible admiration of the girl's soft coloring in the white couch. "I know, 'cause I saw her picture in Europe till I knew her as well as anybody in the family album. To think you might have waked up in the Nixon house this mornin'! You could 'a' run around in automobiles, and danced, and had a real girl's good time; and here you are, mewed up with two homespun folks like us, in a snow-bank, with the ocean for a front yard, black enough to bite you! I felt guilty when I waked up. Honestly, I did."

"Well, stop it, Betsy. This is the one place in the world I want to be these holidays. Do you believe me?"

Betsy shook her head. "It seems too good to be true; but your eyes do look as if you meant it. Here's a big can o' hot water, dear, and when you come down, I'll give you some buckwheat cakes as good as you ever tasted."

Betsy had maligned the landscape. Rosalie looked out on spotless snow, but all the trees visible along the village street were cased in ice. Every twig sparkled as the sun gained dominion over the sullen sea, and shone on the dazzling, mammoth wedding-cake. [394]

The week passed quickly and happily. Mrs. Pogram gave a dinner for the Salters and their guest, after Loomis and his *fiancée* had returned to Portland. Captain Salter made Rosalie recite to him the verses in praise of happiness, all the time he was marching to the function.

It was a season of content. Betsy could not doubt it as she looked at the deepening roses in the girl's cheeks, and the way her eyes sparkled as she came into the house, stamping the snow from her boots, on the return from some errand with Hiram.

Mr. Beebe, learning of her presence, took the biggest sleigh from the inn stable and gave them a long exhilarating ride into the country, and an oyster supper when they returned.

On the last evening of the year Rosalie sat before the open fire with Betsy. Captain Salter had gone out on some errand in the village, and Rosalie, on her favorite little stool, leaned her head against Betsy's knee and watched the leaping flames. How remote, on an evening like this, seemed the great world from this little cottage-by-the-sea! [395]

"One has so much time here, to think, Betsy," said the girl.

The other gave her one-sided smile. "Well, yes,—holidays, we do," she rejoined.

“You are always busy,” admitted Rosalie. “How happy you and the captain are!”

“We think we couldn’t be happier,” returned Betsy. “It’s been a wonderful year for both you and me, Rosalie.”

“Yes, it has,” returned the girl dreamily. “A year ago to-night—No! I must forget all that.”

Betsy patted her shoulder. “Yesterday is dead,” she said quietly.

Rosalie’s eyes lifted slowly to the other’s face.

“Not all the yesterdays,” she said, and looked back at the fire.

Betsy continued to pat her. The good woman reflected concerning Irving Bruce with an effort at self-control and fairness; but a great longing that this girl should have her heart’s desire passed over her like a wave.

A crunching of the snow sounded without. If Rosalie had been intending to confide in her, the chance was lost. For the first time Betsy regretted to hear her husband’s step. [396]

“There’s Captain Salter,” said Rosalie.

The door opened. “Come in and get dry,” said Betsy, without looking around. She felt compunction for her momentary disloyalty.

“Thanks, I don’t care if I do.”

The women both started and turned. Irving Bruce stood there, his broad shoulders sparkling with snow. He set down his suit-case and stamped his feet. “You’ll have to build a porte-cochère, Betsy. The hack dumped me at the back fence.”

The firelight fell on Rosalie as she stood, flushing.

“Mr. Irving, *dear*!” cried Betsy, flying at him, considerations of hostess and friend stumbling over one another in the sudden chaos of her mind. “What does this mean?”

“I just thought I’d run down and see the New Year in with you. Where are your manners, Rosalie? You might say you’re glad to see me.”

Betsy saw his eyes and rejoiced.

“Of course I am,” returned the girl, “but we country people aren’t used to shocks.”

He left his fur-lined overcoat in Betsy’s arms, unconscious that he was burdening her; and she clasped it to her breast as if it had been part of himself. Her boy and her girl! Her boy and her girl! And they were standing there, their hands clasping, and their eyes meeting. [397]

Irving had not taken the uninteresting journey from Boston, and ploughed through the Fairport snow to see the New Year in with her. He had not broken away from the holiday gayeties of which Betsy had experience, to visit herself and Hiram in their snow-drift. Betsy’s heart exulted, and her cheeks were red.

“Sit up to the fire, Mr. Irving. I’m goin’ to make you some coffee,” she said.

“I didn’t ask if you had any room for me, but a blizzard seems to be starting. I can’t go to the inn, now.”

“I guess I can put you somewhere. If you don’t like the accommodations you can sit up all night. There’s plenty o’ logs in the wood-box.”

“I rather think I should like that. Have to see the New Year in, anyway. No use making two bites of a cherry.”

Just as the coffee was being poured, Captain Salter came in. “My, but that smells good!” he said; then, perceiving the new-comer—“Irvin’ Bruce, is that you?” he roared jovially. “Well, you’re a good one. You’ll be disappointed though. I haven’t got the boat far enough along yet for you to tell anything about it. I know you said you’d run up here, but I calc’lated to let you know when.” [398]

“Too bad,” returned Irving. “I hope you don’t mind my coming, though.”

“Tickled to death, tickled to death,” responded Hiram, receiving his coffee from his wife’s hand and with it a look which made him blink once or twice in doubt.

“See the New Year in? Yes indeed,” he cried in answer to Irving’s explanation of his presence. “That’s just what we’ll do. I haven’t set up in years; but we’ll just sit around this fire, and tell yarns—”

“Hiram Salter,” said his wife, “if you think for one minute that we’re goin’ to do any such thing, I *don’t*. I’ve got to get up and get the breakfast, and you’ve got to get up and build fires. As if we couldn’t trust the New Year to come in respectably; and if you can’t, why, Rosalie and Mr. Irving will attend to it.”

The captain looked at her, astonished. Under cover of removing the cups and saucers to the kitchen, he spoke low to his consort. “Go to bed?” he asked. “Where’s your politeness, Betsy?” [399]

“Where’s your common sense, Hiram Salter! You think Irving Bruce has ploughed down here to talk boats with *you*?”

Hiram scratched his head, and his eyes widened. “Why, I said that very thing to you the other night,” he protested, “and *you* said—”

“Never mind what I said! Just get upstairs as quick as you can.”

“Come with me, Mr. Irving,” said Betsy, returning to the living-room. “Here’s a little closet where you can’t much more’n turn around, but I guess you’ll sleep well. It’s a feather-bed.”

They stood alone in the chamber, and he closed the door and took her by the shoulders in the old familiar way.

“You remember our talk one night in the garden?” he asked.

“Yes, as if it was yesterday,” she answered.

“Do you apologize?”

“No,” she laughed.

“I think you poisoned the mind of the party of the second part. Confess if you did. I mean it; for [400]
if you didn’t, I’ve broken three engagements, and traveled all day for nothing.”

“Yes—I—*did*!” returned Betsy boldly.

“Do you apologize?”

“Not a bit of it.”

They looked at each other in the dusk. “Well, are you glad I came?”

“If you hadn’t, Mr. Irving,” replied Betsy slowly, “I don’t know but I’d ’a’ given back the silver!”

Irving pressed her hands and laughed.

In a little while the Salters said good-night to their guests. “You can see, Irvin’, whether I’m hen-pecked,” said the captain meekly, as he mounted the stairs.

“You’re an awful warning,” replied Irving.

“Would it do any harm,” asked Hiram in a stage-whisper when they reached their room, “if I should yell down to ’em to look out the window and see the weddin’-cake?”

Betsy locked the door.

Rosalie was sitting passive on her stool by the fire. A rich color mantled in her cheeks, but eyes and lips were grave. She was regaining self-possession. Perhaps Irving had indeed come on account of the boat.

He seated himself in the chair Betsy had vacated, and watched the firelight play on Rosalie’s [401]
hair.

“How do you suppose it looks in the canyon to-night?” he asked, after a silence.

She shook her head. “I’m glad we can’t see.”

“And I,” he agreed. “I have it here.” He touched his breast.

“Tell me about Nixie, and Helen,” said Rosalie with sudden brightness.

“Time enough for that next year,” returned Irving. He laid his watch on his knee; and for a minute they both watched the tiny second-hand, inexorably hurrying.

“How quiet it is!” he said. “What a place for the year to die. I have a kindness for this old year, Rosalie. I should dread to see it go if I didn’t have such hopes for the new.”

“Yes, your business prospects are brilliant, Mr. Derwent told me once.”

“Betsy Foster,” said Irving slowly, “‘Clever Betsy,’ that deep, dark, deceitful, and designing woman who is upstairs now, wide-awake, wondering what I am saying to you, talked to you once about me, and told you to remember that men were deceivers ever. She warned you against me. She’s given me an up-hill pull all summer.”

Rosalie’s heart fluttered wildly. [402]

“I wasn’t sure until I had been back in Boston for weeks that I loved you; but I suspected it. I know that I have nothing more than a fair chance, if I have that; but I’m sure now, Rosalie, that you are the one woman in the world for me. You’re the combination of everything I ever admired in any girl. If there is no one that has a better right, give me the chance to win you. I’ve come here to ask you that.”

She sat so immovable that Irving stooped forward. The face she lifted had the darkening eyes, the trembling lips, that Betsy had seen.

“When you caught me from the cliff,” she said, “I felt your heart beat. The sunrise in the

canyon was the sunrise of my life. Every pulse of my heart since that morning has beaten with the pulse of yours.”

He looked at her, wonder, incredulity, joy, holding him motionless for a space; then in the still, snow-bound cottage, golden with firelight, Rosalie’s lover took her in his arms. “My dove!” he murmured.

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Transcriber’s Notes:

Obvious punctuation errors repaired. Varied hyphenation was retained.

Page 279, “foolishnes” changed to “foolishness” (time in foolishness)

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