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HER WEIGHT IN GOLD

AND OTHER STORIES

By George Barr McCutcheon

1914

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HER WEIGHT IN GOLD

"Well the question is: how much does she weigh?" asked Eddie Ten Eyck with satirical good humour.

His somewhat flippant inquiry followed the heated remark of General Horatio Gamble, who, in desperation, had declared that his step-daughter, Martha, was worth her weight in gold.

The General was quite a figure in the town of Essex. He was the president of the Town and Country Club and, besides owning a splendid stud, was also the possessor of a genuine Gainsborough, picked up at the shop of an obscure dealer in antiques in New York City for a ridiculously low price (two hundred dollars, it has been said), and which, according to a rumour started by himself, was worth a hundred thousand if it was worth a dollar, although he contrived to keep the secret from the ears of the county tax collector. He had married late in life, after accumulating a fortune that no woman could despise, and of late years had taken to frequenting the Club with a far greater assiduity than is customary in most presidents.

Young Mr. Ten Eyck's sarcasm was inspired by a mind's-eye picture of Miss Martha Gamble. To quote Jo Grigsby, she was "so plain that all comparison began and ended with her." Without desiring to appear ungallant, I may say that there were many homely young women in Essex; but each of them had the delicate satisfaction of knowing that Martha was incomparably her superior in that respect.

"I am not jesting, sir," said the General with asperity. "Martha may not be as good-looking as—er—some girls that I've seen, but she is a jewel, just the same. The man who gets her for a wife will be a blamed sight luckier than the fellows who marry the brainless little fools we see trotting around like butterflies." (It was the first time that Eddie had heard of trotting butterflies.)

"She's a fine girl," was his conciliatory remark.

"She is pure gold," said the General with conviction. "Pure gold, sir."

"A nugget," agreed Eddie expansively. "A hundred and eighty pound nugget, General. Why don't you send her to a refinery?"

The General merely glared at him and subsided into thoughtful silence. He was in the habit of falling into deep spells of abstraction at such times as this. For the life of him, he couldn't understand how Martha came by her excessive plainness. Her mother was looked upon as a beautiful woman and her father (the General's predecessor) had been a man worth looking at, even from a successor's point of view. That Martha should have grown up to such appalling ugliness was a source of wonder, not only to the General, but to Mrs. Gamble herself.

Young Mr. Ten Eyck was the most impecunious spendthrift in Essex. He lived by his wits, with which he was more generously endowed than anything in the shape of gold or precious jewels. His raiment was accumulative. His spending-money came to him through an allowance that his grandmother considerately delivered to him at regular periods, but as is the custom with such young men he was penniless before the quarter was half over. At all times he was precariously close to being submerged by his obligations. Yet trouble sat lightly upon his head, if one were to judge by outward appearances. Beneath a bland, care-free exterior, however, there lurked in Edward's bosom a perpetual pang of distress over the financial situation.

What worried him most was the conviction that all signs pointed toward the suspension of credit in places where he owed money, and, Young Mr. Ten Eyck's sarcasm was inspired by a mind's-eye picture of Miss Martha Gamble. To quote Jo Grigsby, she was "so plain that all comparison began and ended with her." Without desiring to appear ungallant, I may say that there were many homely young women in Essex; but each of them had the delicate satisfaction of knowing that Martha was incomparably her superior in that respect.

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What worried him most was the conviction that all signs pointed toward the suspension of credit in places where he owed money, and, as he owed without discrimination, the future seemed hard to contemplate.

Prudent mothers stood defiantly between him and what might have been prosperity. He could win the hearts of daughters with shameful regularity and ease, but he could not delude the heads of the families to which they belonged. They knew him well and wisely.

The conversation between him and General Gamble took place in the reading-room of the Town and Country Club. There was a small table between them, and glasses.

"What is the market price of gold to-day, General?" asked Eddie impudently, after he had watched the old man's gloomy countenance out of the corner of his eye for the matter of three minutes or more.

The General regarded him with deep scorn. "Gold? What do you know about gold? You seldom see anything more precious than copper."

"That's no joke," agreed Eddie with his frank smile. "I am the only, original penny limit. That reminds me, General. I meant to speak of it before, but somehow it slipped my mind. Could you lend me—"

The General held up his hand. "I've been waiting for that, Eddie. Don't humiliate yourself by asking for a small amount. I haven't the remotest idea how much you already owe me, but it doesn't matter in view of the fact that you'll never pay it. You were about to request the loan of ten dollars, my boy. Why not ask for a respectable amount?—say, fifty dollars."

Eddie's heart leaped. "That's just the amount I meant to ask you to let me have for a week or two. 'Pon my word, it is."

"Well," said the General, taking a notebook from his pocket and carefully jotting down an entry with his gold-tipped pencil, "I cheerfully give it to you, Eddie. I shall credit your account with that amount. Fifty dollars—um! It is a new system I have concluded to adopt. Every time you ask me for a loan I shall subtract the amount from what you already owe me. In time, you see, the whole debt will be lifted,—and you'll not owe me a cent." Eddie blinked. A slow grin crept into his face as he grasped the irony in the General's scheme.

"Fine financing, General. It suits me to a dot. By the way, do you think you can spare another hundred or two?"

"The books are closed for the month," said the General placidly. He rang the bell on the table. "More ice, boy, and the same bottle. As I was saying, Eddie, I can't for the life of me see why you fellows are so blind when it comes to Martha. She is—"

"We are not blind," interrupted Eddie, not at all annoyed by his failure to negotiate the loan. "That's just the trouble. If a blind man came along, I've no doubt he could see something attractive in her."

"Damme! If she were my own daughter, I'd thrash you for that remark, sir."

"If she were your own daughter, you wouldn't be discussing her with a high-ball in your hand."

The General coughed. "Ahem! Eddie, I'd give a good deal to see that girl married. Leave the bottle on the table, boy. She will have money—a lot of it—one of these days. There are dozens of young men that we know who'd do 'most anything for money. I—By George!" He broke off to stare with glittering eyes at the face of the young man opposite. A great thought was expanding in his brain.

Eddie shifted nervously. "Why are you looking at me like that? I don't need it that badly."

"I'd never thought of you, Eddie,—'pon my word I hadn't. Not until this moment. You need money worse than any one I know. There isn't another girl in town who would marry you, and Martha WOULD. Believe me, she would! And let me tell you, sir, you couldn't find a truer wife than Martha. You—"

"She couldn't help being true," mused Eddie, rattling the ice in his empty glass. The General pushed the bottle toward him.

"She is a bit older than you, I'll admit," pursued the General reflectively. "Worth her weight in gold," he murmured with a sort of ecstasy in his voice.

Young Ten Eyck assumed an injured air. "I am poor, General Gamble, but I am NOT blind."

"She likes you," went on the older man, revelling in the new-found hope. "You don't amount to much,—and she knows it, I suppose,—but you can have her, my boy. She'll be the richest girl in Essex when I die. Take her, my boy; I gladly give my consent. Will you permit me to congratu—"

"One moment, if you please. In a case like this, you would NEVER die. It would be just my luck. No, I thank you. I decline the honour. If you could perform a miracle and transform her into REAL gold, I might consider the proposition, but not as it now stands."

"She weighs about one-eighty," said the General speculatively.

Eddie glanced at him sharply. "One hundred and eighty pounds in gold. Quite a pile, eh?"

The General was silent for a long time, permitting the vague idea to thrive in his harassed mind. His young companion was moodily trying to estimate the value of one hundred and eighty pounds of virgin gold.

At last the General reached a conclusion. It was a rather heroic effort. He relighted his cigar with trembling fingers.

"I suppose you haven't heard of the wedding present I intend to bestow upon the fortunate man who leads her to the altar!" said he, casting the fatal die.

"No; but a separate house and lot wouldn't be despised, I should say."

"Nonsense. By the way, Eddie, this must not go any farther. It's strictly entre nous. I don't want to have the dear girl pestered to death by fortune hunters. On his wedding day the man who marries Martha is to have the equivalent of her weight in double eagles. Isn't that ra—rather handsome?"

He sank back and waited for the seed to sink deeply into Ten Eyck soil. Eddie's eyelids flickered. The grin of a Cheshire cat came to his lips involuntarily and remained there without modification for the matter of an hour or two.

"Great!" he said at last.

"I must be on my way," observed the wily step-father, beating a retreat so hastily that Eddie missed the opportunity to scoff. But the contemplative smile remained just as he had left it.

Several days passed before the two met again. The General had sowed wisely, and he was reasonably certain of the harvest. He knew that it would be hard for young Ten Eyck to bring himself to the sacrificial altar; but that he would come and would bend his neck was a foregone conclusion. He went on the theory that if you give a man rope enough he'll hang himself, and he felt that Eddie was almost at the end of his rope in these cruel days.

As for Eddie, he tried to put the thought out of his mind, but as time went on he caught himself many times —(with a start of shame)—trying to approximate the worth of Martha Gamble on the basis set forth by her step-father. The second day after the interview he consulted a friend of his who happened to be a jeweller. From him he ascertained the present market value of twenty-four carat gold. So much for the start!

His creditors were threatening to sue or to "black-list" him; his friends long since had begun to dodge him, fearing the habitual request for temporary loans; his allowance was not due for several weeks. Circumstances were so harsh that even Martha appeared desirable by contrast. He felt an instinctive longing for rest, and peace, and—pecuniary absolution.

He was therefore deserving of pity when he finally surrendered to the inevitable. How he cursed himself—(and his creditors)—as he set out to find the General on that bright spring day when every other living creature on earth seemed to be happy and free from care. Kismet!

General Gamble was reading in a quiet corner of the Club. That is to say, he had the appearance of one reading. As a matter of fact, he had been watching Eddie's shy, uncertain evolutions for half an hour or more, and he chuckled inwardly. As many as ten times the victim strolled through the reading room, on the pretext of looking for some one. Something told the General that he was going to lose Martha.

At last Eddie approached him. He came with the swift impetuosity of a man who has decided and is afraid to risk a reaction.

"Hello, General," was his crisp greeting as he dropped into the chair which the astute old gentleman had placed, with premeditation, close to his own some time before. He went straight to the point. "I've been thinking over what you said the other day about Martha. Well, I'll marry her."

"You!" exclaimed the General, simulating incredulity. "You!"

"Yes. I'll be IT. How much does she really weigh?"

"Are—are you in earnest, my boy?" cried the other. "Why, she'll be tickled to death!"

"May I have her?"

"God bless you,—YES!"

"I suppose I ought to go up and see her and—and tell her I love her," said Eddie lugubriously. "Or," with a fine inspiration, "perhaps you wouldn't mind telling her for me. I—"

"Tell her yourself, you young rascal," cried the General in fine good humour, poking his prospective

stepson-in-law in the ribs.

Eddie winced. "You can do that to me now, but if you jab me in the ribs after I'm married I'll jab you in the eye."

"Good! I like your spirit. Gad, I love a fighting-man! And now, my boy, it seems to me there's no sense in delaying matters. You have my consent. As a matter of form you ought to get Martha's. She'll take you, of course, but I—I suppose she would like the idea of being proposed to. They all do. I daresay you two can settle the point in a jiffy in some quiet nook up at the—But, there! I shall not offer suggestions to you in an affair of the heart, my son. Will you be up to see her this evening?"

Eddie drew a long breath. "If—if she has no other engagement."

"Engagement?" gasped the General, with popping eyes. "She hasn't sat up after eight o'clock in four years, except on Christmas Eve. You won't be disturbed; so come around."

"Perhaps, to be sure of finding her up, I'd better come to dinner."

"By all means. Stay as late as you like, too. She won't get sleepy to-night. Not a bit of it." He arose to depart.

"Just a moment, General," said Eddie curtly. "We've got a few preliminaries to arrange before I commit myself. Here is a paper for you to sign. Business is business, you know, and this is the first really business-like thing I've ever done. Be good enough to read this paper very carefully before signing."

General Gamble put on his glasses and read the brief, but ample contract which bound him to pay to Edward Peabody Ten Eyck, on the day that he was married to Martha Gamble, for better or for worse, an amount equivalent to the value of her weight in pure gold. He hesitated for one brief, dubious moment, then called for pen, ink, and paper. When these articles were brought to him, he deliberately drew up a second contract by which Edward Ten Eyck bound himself to wed Martha Gamble (and no other) on a day to be named by mutual consent at a later date—but not very much later, he was privately resolved.

"Now," said he, "we'll each sign one. You sha'n't get the better of me, my boy."

Each signed in the presence of two waiters, neither of whom knew the nature of the instruments.

"Troy weight," said the General magnanimously. "She is a jewel, you know."

"Certainly. It's stipulated in the contract—twenty-four carat gold. You said pure, you remember. You may have noticed that I take her at the prevailing market price of gold. It is now four cents a carat. Twenty-four carats in a pennyweight. That makes ninety-six cents per pennyweight. Twenty pennyweight in an ounce, and there we have nineteen dollars and twenty cents per ounce. We'll—we'll weigh her in by ounces."

"That's reasonable. The price of gold isn't likely to fluctuate much."

"It must be distinctly understood that you keep her well-fed from this day on, General. I won't have her fluctuating. She hasn't any silly notions about reducing, has she?"

"My dear fellow, she poses as a Venus," cried the General. "Good! And here's another point: pardon me for suggesting it, but you understand that she's to weigh in—er—that is to say, her clothing is to be weighed in with her."

"What's that?"

"You heard what I said. She's to be settled for—dressed." "Good Lord, she isn't a chicken!"

"Nobody said she was. It is fit and proper that her garments should be weighed with her. Hang it all, man, I'm marrying her clothes as well as anything else."

"I will not agree to that. It's preposterous."

"I don't mean her entire wardrobe. Just the going-away gown and hat. You can't very well ask her to weigh herself without any—But as gentlemen we need not pursue the matter any farther. You shall have your way about it."

"She has a fine pair of scales in her bedroom. She weighs herself every night for her own gratification. I don't see why she can't do it once or twice for my sake."

"But women are such dreadful liars about their own weight. She'll be sure to lop off fifteen or twenty pounds in the telling. Hang it, I want witnesses."

The General assumed a look of distress. "Remember, sir, that you are speaking of your future wife. You'll have to take her word."

Eddie slumped down in his chair, muttering something about niggardliness.

"I suppose I'll have to concede the point." His eyes twinkled. "I say, it would be a horrible shock to you, General, if she were to refuse me to-night."

"She sha—WON'T!" said the General, setting his jaw, but turning a shade paler. "She'll jump at the chance."

Eddie sighed dismally. "Doesn't it really seem awful to you?"

"Having you for a son-in-law? YES."

"You know I'm only doing this because I want to set up in business for myself and need the money," explained the groom-elect in an effort to justify himself. "Oh, another little point. I'd almost forgotten it. I suppose it will be perfectly convenient for us to live with you for a year or two, until I—"

"No!" thundered the General. "Not by a long shot! You go to housekeeping at once, do you understand?"

"But think of her poor mother's feelings—"

"Her mother has nothing whatever to do with it, sir. See here, we'll put that in the contract." He was visibly disturbed by the thought of what the oversight might have meant to him. "And now, when shall we have the wedding?"

"Perhaps we'd better leave that to Martha."

"We'll leave nothing to anybody."

"She'll want to get a trousseau together and all that sort of thing. I'm ready to go through with it at any time, but you know what girls are." He was perspiring.

"Yes," said the General with a reminiscent light in his eye. "I daresay they all enjoy a few weeks of courtship and love-making."

Eddie gulped suddenly and then shot a quick, hunted look toward the buffet door.

"Have a drink?" demanded the other abruptly. He had caught the sign of danger.

They strolled into the buffet, arm-in-arm, one loving the world in general, the other hating everybody in it, including the General. Before they parted Eddie Ten Eyck extracted a solemn promise from his future step-father-in-law that he would ascertain Martha's exact weight and report the figure to him on the following day.

"It will seem easier if I know just about what to expect," explained the young man.

That very afternoon the General, with a timidity that astonished him, requested his stepdaughter to report her correct weight to him on the following morning. He kept his face well screened behind his newspaper while speaking, and his voice was a little thick.

"What for, father?" asked Martha, looking up from her book in surprise. Her eyes seemed to grow even larger than the lenses of her spectacles.

"Why, you see—er—I'm figuring on a little more insurance," he stammered.

"What has my weight to do with it?"

"It isn't life insurance," he made haste to explain. A bright idea struck him. "It is fire insurance, my dear."

"I don't see what my—"

"Of course you don't," he interrupted genially. "It's this way. The fire insurance companies are getting absurdly finicky about the risks. Now they insist on knowing the weight of every inmate of the houses they insure. Has something to do with the displacement of oxygen, I believe. Your mother and I—and the servants, too—expect to be weighed to-night."

"Oh," she said, and resumed her reading.

He waited for a while, fumbling nervously with his watch chain.

"By the way, my dear," he said, "what have you been doing to that bully chap, Eddie Ten Eyck?"

"Doing to him? What do you mean?"

"Just what I say."

"I haven't seen the miserable loafer in months," she said. Her voice was heavy, not unlike that of a man. For some reason she shuffled uneasily in her chair. The book dropped into her capacious lap.

"You've been doing something behind my back, you sly minx," he chided. "What do you think happened to-day?"

"To Eddie Ten Eyck?"

"In a way, yes. He came up to me in the Club and asked my permission to pay—er—court to you, my dear. He said he loved you better than—Hey! Look out there! What the dev—Hi, Mother! Come here quick! Good Heaven, she's going to die!"

Poor Martha had collapsed in a heap, her arms dangling limply over the side of the chair, her eyes bulging and blinking in a most grotesque manner. At first glance one would have sworn she was strangling. Afterwards the General denounced himself as an unmitigated idiot for having given her such a shock. He ought to have known better.

Mrs. Gamble rushed downstairs in great alarm, and it was not long before they had Martha breathing naturally, although the General almost made that an impossibility by the ruthless manner in which he fanned her with the very book she had been reading—a heavy volume which he neglected to open.

The whirligig room reduced itself to a library for Martha once more, not so monotonous as it once had been, no doubt, but still a library. Out of the turmoil of her own emotions, she managed to grasp enough of what the General was saying to convince herself that this was not another dream but a reality, and she

became so excited that her mother advised her to go to bed for a while before dinner, if she expected to appear at her best when Eddie arrived.

For the first time since early childhood, Martha blushed as she attempted to trip lightly upstairs. As a matter of fact, she DID trip on next to the top step and sprawled. Under ordinary circumstances she would have been as mad as a wet hen, but on this happy occasion she merely cried out, when her parents dashed into the hall below on hearing the crash:

"It's good luck to fall upstairs!"

The fires of life had been rekindled, and when such a thing happens to a person of Martha's horse-power, the effect is astonishing. At four o 'clock she began dressing for the coming suitor. When he arrived at seven, she was still trying to decide whether her hair looked better by itself or with augmentations.

Below, in the huge library, Eddie Ten Eyck sat disconsolate, nervously contemplating the immediate future. He was all alone. Not even a servant was to be seen or heard. It was as still as the Christmas Eve whose jingle we love so well.

Never in all his aimless existence had he felt so small, so unimportant, so put-upon as at this moment. His gaze, sweeping the ceiling of the library, tried to penetrate to the sacred precincts above. Even the riches and the stateliness of the Gamble mansion failed to reimburse his fancy for the losses it was sustaining with each succeeding minute of suspense. Dimly he recalled that General Gamble had spent nearly half a million dollars in the construction of this imposing edifice. The library was worth more than one hundred thousand dollars; the stables were stocked with innumerable thoroughbreds; the landed estate was measured by sections instead of acres; the stocks and bonds were—But even as he considered the question of assets, there surged up before him an overwhelming liability that brought the General's books to balance.

By this time, Eddie had become so proficient in the art of rapid calculation that he could estimate within a few ounces just what a person would have to weigh in order to be worth as much as the library, the mansion, or the bonds. The great Gainsborough that hung in the west end of the room corresponded in value (if reports were true concerning the price Gamble had asked for it) to a woman weighing a shade over two hundred and three pounds troy.

He lifted a handsome bronze figure from the library table and murmured: "It's worth a ten-pound baby, twenty-two hundred dollars and a fraction."

The General came in, followed closely by the butler, who bore a tray holding at least ten cocktails. After the greetings, Eddie glanced uneasily at the cocktails.

"Is—is it to be as big a dinner as all this?" he asked ruefully.

"Oh, no. Just family, my boy; we four. The women don't drink, Eddie, so help yourself."

Eddie gratefully swallowed three in rapid succession.

"I see you mean to make it absolutely necessary for me to take the gold cure," he said with a forlorn smile.

Martha put in an appearance at seven-thirty, having kept dinner waiting for half an hour, much to the amazement of those who had lived with her long enough to know her promptness in appearing for meals.

Mr. Ten Eyck, who was a rather good-looking chap and fastidious to a degree, did not possess the strength to keep his heart anywhere near the customary level. It went hurtling to his very boots. He shook hands with the blushing young woman and then involuntarily shrank toward the cocktails, disregarding the certainty that he would find them lukewarm and tasteless.

She was gotten up for the occasion. But, as it was not her costume that he was to embrace in matrimony, we will omit a description of the creation she wore. It was pink, of course, and cut rather low in order to protect her face from the impudent gaze of man.

Her face? Picture the face of the usual heroine in fiction and then contrive to think of the most perfect antithesis, and you have Martha in your mind's eye much more clearly than through any description I could hope to present.

She was squat. Her somewhat brawny shoulders sloped downward and forward—and perhaps a little sidewise, I am not sure about that. Her hair was straw-coloured and stringy in spite of the labour she had expended on it with curling-iron and brush. As to her face, the more noticeable features were a very broad, flat nose; a comparatively chinless under jaw, on which grew an accidental wisp of hair or two; a narrow and permanently decorated upper lip. When she smiled—well, the effect was discouraging, to say the least. Her eyes were pale and prominent. In spite of all this, practice in rouging might have helped her a little, but she had had no practice. Young men never came to the house, and it was not worth while to keep up appearances for the old ones who were content to dodder at the end of the way. You would say at a glance that she was a very strong and enduring person, somewhat along the lines of a suffragette ward politician.

The dinner was a genial one, after all. The General was at his best, and the wine was perfect. In lucid moments, Eddie found himself reflecting: "If I can drink enough of this I'll have delirium tremens and then I won't have to believe all that I see."

Martha had always called him Eddie. In fact, every one called him Eddie. He was that sort of a chap. To-night, he observed, with a hazy interest, she addressed him as Mr. Ten Eyck, and rather frequently, at that. It was: "Do you really think so, Mr. Ten Eyck?" or "How very amusing, Mr. Ten Eyck," or "Good gracious, Mr. Ten Eyck," until poor Eddie, unused to this distinction, reached a point where he muttered something in way of protest that caused the General to cough violently in order to give his guest a chance to recover himself

before it was too late.

After dinner the General and Mrs. Gamble retired somewhat precipitously, leaving the young people alone.

Eddie heaved a tremendous sigh of decision and bravely crossed the room. Martha was seated upon the davenport, nervously toying with her fan. He saw with misgiving that she evidently expected something was going to happen. Her eyes were downcast.

He stood silent and somewhat awed before her for many minutes, taking the final puffs at an abbreviated cigarette. Then he abruptly sat down at the opposite end of the couch. As he did so, she thought she heard him mutter something about "one hundred and seventy, at the lowest."

"So many people have given up playing golf, Mr. Ten Eyck," she said. "I am surprised that you keep it up."

"Golf?" he murmured blankly.

"Weren't you speaking of your score for the eighteen holes?"

He gazed at her helplessly for a moment, then set his jaw.

"Say, Martha," he began, in a high and unnatural treble, "I am a man of few words. Will you marry me? Oh! Ouch! What the dickens are you doing? O—oh! Don't jump at me like that!"

The details are painful and it isn't necessary to go into them. Suffice it to say, she told him that he had always been her ideal and that she had worshipped him from childhood's earliest days. He, on the other hand, confessed, with more truth than she could have guessed, that he had but recently come to a realisation of her true worth, and what she really meant to him.

She set the wedding day for November the eleventh,—just seven weeks off.

Before leaving,—she kept him until nearly twelve,—he playfully came up behind her as she stood near the table, and, placing his hands under her elbows, said:

"Hold 'em stiff now."

Then, to her amazement, he tried to lift her from the floor. He couldn't budge her.

"It's all right," he exclaimed exultantly and refused to explain.

That night in his dreams an elephant came along and stood for a while on his chest, but he was used to it by that time, and didn't mind.

The next morning, General Gamble reported by telephone that Martha weighed one hundred and sixty-eight pounds and nine ounces. A minute later, Eddie was at his desk calculating.

On the twenty-third of September she weighed two thousand and twenty-five ounces troy. At nineteen dollars and twenty cents an ounce she was then worth $38,880. With any sort of luck, he figured, she might be expected to pick up a few pounds as the result of her new-found happiness and peace of mind. Her worries were practically over. Contented people always put on flesh. If everything went well, she ought to represent at least $40,000 on her wedding day. Perhaps more.

He haunted the Country Club by day and the town clubs by night, always preoccupied and figuring, much to the astonishment of his friends and cronies. He scribbled inexplicable figures on the backs of golf cards, bar checks, and menus.

By the end of the first week he had made definite promises to all of his creditors. He guaranteed that every one should be paid before the middle of November. Moreover, he set aside in his calculations the sum of $7,000 for the purchase of a new house. Early in the second week he had virtually expended $15,000 of what he expected to receive, and was giving thanks for increased opportunities.

He called at the Gamble house regularly, even faithfully. True, he urged Martha to play on the piano nearly all of the time, but to all intents and purposes it was a courtship.

When the engagement was announced, the town—in utter ignorance of the conspiracy—went into convulsions. The half-dozen old maids in upper circles who had long since given up hope began to prink and perk themselves into an amazing state of rejuvenation,—revival, you might say. They tortured themselves with the hope that never dies. They even lent money to impecunious gentlemen who couldn't believe their senses and went about pinching themselves.

Eddie Ten Eyck's credit was so good that he succeeded in borrowing nearly five thousand dollars from erstwhile adamantine sceptics.

One day the General met him in the street. The old soldier wore a troubled look. "She's sick," he said without preamble. "Got pains all over her and chills, too."

"Is it serious?" demanded Eddie.

"I don't know. Neither does the doctor. He's waiting for developments. Took a culture to-day. She's in bed, however."

"SHE MUST NOT DIE," said Eddie, a desperate gleam in his eye. "I—can't afford to have anything like that happen now. Can't she be vaccinated?"

At the end of the second day thereafter it was known all over town that Martha Gamble was ill with typhoid fever. She was running a temperature of 104 degrees and two doctors had come up from New York to consult

with the Essex physician, bringing with them a couple of trained nurses. They said her heart was good.

After the consultation, the General and Eddie sat alone in the library, woebegone and disconsolate.

"They think they can pull her through," said the former vaguely.

"Curse 'em," grated Eddie; "they've GOT to do it. If there is the least prospect of her dying, General, I must insist that the wedding day be moved forward. I'll—I'll marry her to-day. By Jove, it might go a long way toward reducing her temperature."

"Impossible! We shall stick to the original agreement." "Confound you, I believe you are hoping she'll die before the eleventh of November. It would be just like you, General Gamble."

"I'm not hoping for anything of the sort, sir," thundered the other. "But, if it SHOULD happen—" He did not finish the sentence, but there was a green light in his eyes.

Eddie was silent for many minutes.

"And if she SHOULD die, where do I come in, or get off, or whatever is the proper thing to say in the circumstances? It wouldn't be fair to me, General Gamble. You know it wouldn't. It would be a damned outrage. Here am I, a devoted lover, eager to make her happy—to MAKE HER LAST MOMENTS happy ones, mind you, and you sit there and deny her the consolation of—"

"All's fair in love, my boy," said the General blandly.

"Rats!"

"Martha wasn't strong enough to stand the excitement. It was like a sudden and frightful change in the weather. Her constitution couldn't fight it off." "Constitution? Good Lord!"

"We ought to make allowances, my boy."

"I am in no position to make allowances. Are these doctors any good?"

"The best in New York City."

"And the nurses? Everything depends on good nursing."

"They are real Canadians."

"General, up to the time I was eleven years old I said my prayers every night. I'm going to begin again to-night," said Eddie solemnly, as he passed his hand across his brow.

The days went by with monotonous similarity. Bright or dark, wet or dry, they looked the same to Eddie Ten Eyck. At first he had been permitted to visit her once or twice a day, staying for a few minutes on each occasion. After a while the visits were stopped by the doctor's order. But still he haunted the Gamble mansion. He waylaid the doctor; he bribed or coerced the nurses; he watched the sick-room door with the eye of a hungry dog; he partook inordinately of the General's liquors. Martha was delirious, that much he was able to gather by persistent inquiry. She seemed obsessed with the idea that she and Eddie were to keep house in Heaven, with two cherubs and a hypodermic syringe.

Mrs. Gamble was deeply touched and not a little surprised by the devotion of her daughter's fiance. She turned to him in these hours of despair and gave to him a large share of her pity and consolation. She asked him to pray for Martha. He said he had been praying for some one else nearly all his life, but henceforth would put in a word for Martha.

The wedding day was near at hand when an unexpected and alarming complication set in. The doctors were hurriedly gathered in consultation. There was a crisis. One of the nurses confided to Mr. Ten Eyck that there was no hope, but the other declared that if the patient survived the eighth of November she would "be out of the woods." The eighth was three days off. Those three days were spent by Eddie in a state of fearful suspense. He implored Providence and Fate to stand by him until after the eleventh. He went so far as to add a couple of days to include the thirteenth, not being superstitious. The night of the eighth was a memorable one. No one in the Gamble house went to bed. The ninth came and then the doctors appeared with glad tidings. The crisis was past and there was every chance in the world for the patient to recover, unless of course, some unforeseen complication intervened.

Eddie staggered out to the stables and performed a dance of joy.

"What's her temperature?" he demanded of one of the grooms, absently repeating a question he had asked five thousand times during the past few weeks. "I beg your pardon, Smith." Then he hurried back to the house. Meeting one of the doctors he gripped him by the arm.

"Is she sure to live, doc—doctor?"

"Forever," said the doctor, meaning to comfort him.

"No!" gasped Eddie.

"Let me congratulate you, Mr. Ten Eyck. She is quite rational now and—pardon me if I repeat a sick-room secret—she declares that there shall be no postponement of the wedding. She is superstitious about postponements."

Eddie hesitated. "Ahem! Is—is she emaciated?"

"No more than might be expected."

"I—I hope she hasn't wasted very much."

"Skin and bones," said the doctor with the most professional bluntness.

Eddie mopped his brow. "You—you don't mean it! See here, doctor, you ought to advise very strongly against the—er—marriage at this time. Tell her it would kill her. The shock, I mean. I am willing to wait—GOD KNOWS, I am only too willing to wait—until she is strong and well and herself once more. Tell her—"

"Perhaps you would better talk it over with her father, Mr. Ten Eyck. I am not—"

"Her father—" began Eddie, but caught himself up.

"I would not answer for her safety if a postponement were even suggested. Her heart is set on it, my dear fellow. She will be strong enough to go through with it."

"But I want to be married in church."

"I daresay you will agree with me when I say that your feelings are not to be considered in a crisis of this kind," said the doctor coldly, and moved away.

At noon on the eleventh Martha awoke from a sound and restful sleep. Sweet lassitude enveloped her, but her mind went groping for something that had been troubling her in a vague sort of way for the last forty-eight hours.

"Is it the eleventh?" she whispered, stretching out her hand to the watchful nurse.

"Yes, my dear. Now try to go to sleep again—"

"Where is Mr. Ten Eyck?"

"Sh!"

"What time is it!"

"Now don't worry about the time—"

"Is it night or day?"

"It is noon."

"I am to be married at eight o'clock this evening, Miss Feeney."

"Yes, yes, I know," soothingly.

"You might send word to Mr. Ten Eyck that I shall be ready. He may forget the ring unless you tell him that—there—is—to be—no post—" She went to sleep in the middle of postponement.

While the nurses were preparing her for the ceremony, General Gamble sent word into the sick-room that the doctor desired her correct weight—for scientific purposes.

The patient, too weak to help herself, was lifted upon the scales, where she remained long enough for it to be seen that she weighed seventy-three pounds and eight ounces. She was then hustled into bed, but seemed to be in even better spirits than before, confiding to the nurses that she knew Mr. Ten Eyck was partial to slender women, and that if she had anything to do with it she'd never weigh more than one hundred and ten again, "as long as she lived."

"One hundred and ten is a lovely weight, don't you think, Miss Feeney!" she asked.

Miss Feeney was feeling her pulse. The other nurse was trying to stick a mouth thermometer between the patient's lips.

"It is a much lovelier weight than seventy-three," said Miss Feeney gently.

The General, in the privacy of his bed-chamber, reduced the pounds to ounces and found that Martha, in her present state, represented eight hundred and eighty-four ounces. He could not suppress a chuckle, even though he felt very mean about it. She was worth $16,972 in gold. Her illness had cost him approximately $2,000 in doctors' fees, et cetera, but it had cost Eddie Ten Eyck $21,911 in pure gold, with twenty cents over in silver.

It is said that the bridegroom almost collapsed when he looked for the first time upon his emaciated investment. It was worse than he had expected. She was literally "skin and bones."

Mechanically, semi-paralysed, he made the responses to the almost staccato words of the clergyman. The ceremony was hurried through at a lively rate, but to Eddie it seemed to take hours. Her fingers felt like a closed fan in his own pulseless hand. He replied "I do" and "I will" without really being aware of the fact, and all the time he was gazing blankly at her, trying to remember where he had seen her before.

Away back in the dim, forgotten ages there was a robust, squat, valuable figure; but—this! His brain reeled. He was being married to an utter stranger. His loss was incalculable.

We will speed over the ensuing months. It goes without saying that Martha became well and strong and abominably vigorous in the matter of appetite. Her days of convalescence—But why go into them? They are interesting only to the person who is emerging from a period of suffering and fasting. Why dwell upon the reflections of Eddie Ten Eyck as he saw an erstwhile stranger transformed into an old acquaintance before his very eyes? Why go into the painful details attending the stealthy payment of nearly $17,000 by the party

of the first part to the party of the second part, and why tell of the uses to which the latter was compelled to put this meagre fortune almost immediately after acquiring it? No one cares to be harassed by these miserable, mawkish details.

One really needs to know but one thing: the bridegroom soon stood shorn of all his ill-gotten gains, unless we except the wife of whom no form of adversity could rob him.

A month after the wedding, Eddie was eagerly awaiting the fourth quarterly instalment of his allowance. He was out of debt, it is true, but he never had been poorer in all his life. The thing that appalled him most was the fact that he had unlimited credit and did not possess the courage to take advantage of it. He could have borrowed right and left; he could have run up stupendous accounts; he could have lived like a lord. But Martha, before she was really able to sit up in bed, began to talk about something in a cottage,—something that made him turn pale with desperation,—and bread and cheese and kisses, entirely with an eye to thrift and what Eddie considered a nose for squalor. He couldn't imagine anything more squalid than a subsistence on the three commodities mentioned. In fact, he preferred starvation.

Martha harped for hours at a stretch on how economically she could conduct their small establishment, once they got into the house he had bound himself to buy in his days of affluence. She seemed to take it for granted that she would be obliged to skimp and pinch in order to get along on what Eddie would be able to earn.

"Our meat and grocery bills will be almost nothing, Eddie dear," she said one day, with an enthusiasm that discouraged him. "You see, I mean to keep my figure, now that I've got it. I sha'n't eat a thing for days at a time. We'll have no meat, nor potatoes, nor sugar—"

"Just bread and cheese," said he wanly.

"And something else," she added coquettishly.

"Kisses are fattening," he said.

"Goodness! Who ever told you that?" she cried in dismay.

"A well-known specialist," he said, his mind adrift.

"Well, there is one thing sure, Eddie," she declared firmly; "we will not go into debt for anything. We positively must keep out of debt. I won't have you worrying about money matters."

"I'm not likely to," said he with conviction.

He then began to watch for signs of decrepitude in the General.

As soon as Martha was strong enough to travel, her step-father suggested that they go South for the winter instead of opening the little house down the street. He went so far as to offer to pay the expenses of the trip as a sort of belated wedding gift.

Eddie objected. He said that his real estate business was in such a state that he couldn't afford to leave it for a day.

"I didn't know you HAD a business," exclaimed the General.

"I am making arrangements to take up a Government claim in Alaska," said his son-in-law grimly.

"Great Scott!"

"I'm going to some place where I can DIG for gold."

"Are you in earnest?"

"Bitterly."

"And—and would you subject Martha to the rigours of an Alaskan winter in—"

"Inasmuch as we shall have to subsist on snowballs until you pass in your cheques, General, I think we'd better go where they are fresh and plentiful."

Fortunately for the bride and groom, everybody that was anybody in Essex gave them a wedding present. Not a few, in a fever of exultation, gave beyond their means, and a great many of them with unintentional irony gave pickle dishes. By the time they were ready to go into their new home, it was cosily, even handsomely furnished. The General, contrite of heart, spent money lavishly in trying to make the home so attractive for Eddie that he wouldn't be likely to desert it for something worse.

The groom's sense of humour was only temporarily dulled. He noted signs of its awakening when he assisted in the unpacking of four cheval mirrors, gifts to the bride from persons who may or may not have been in collusion but who certainly wanted Martha to see herself as others saw her, and, as it turned out, from all sides.

The glow of health—an almost superhuman health—increased in the countenance of Mrs. Edward Ten Eyck. Her hair was a bit slow in restoring itself, and a shade or two darker, but on the other hand, despite all she could do to prevent it, she resumed her natural proportions with a rapidity that was sickening.

It was not long before her figure was unquestionably her own.

Eddie tried to conceal his dismay. He even tried to drown it. Their first quarrel grew out of her objection to the presence of intoxicating liquors in the house.

"I don't approve of whiskey," she said flatly.

"But you had it at your house."

"You forget that he was only my stepfather."

"He isn't in the past tense yet," said he bitterly.

"I've always maintained that whiskey should be used for medicinal purposes only."

"Then please don't worry about it," said he curtly. "I've ordered a barrel of it."

"For—for medicinal purposes?" "Strictly."

She studied his face with uneasy alarm in her eyes.

"You—don't feel as though you were going to be ill, do you, dear?"

He moved to the opposite side of the table, involuntarily lifting his left elbow as if to shield himself. She stopped half-way. Then he laughed awkwardly and turned the subject.

One day he reached the startling conclusion, that she was getting heavier than she had ever been before. It required days of contemplation, scrutiny, and development of purpose before he could ask her to step onto the scales at the meat market.

A cold perspiration started on his forehead as he moved the balance along the bar and found it would be necessary to use the two-hundred pound weight instead of the one-hundred, the fifty, and divers small ones that had been sufficient in days of yore.

She weighed two hundred and three pounds.

At nine o 'clock that night some one took him home from the Essex Club, and Martha was in hysterics until the doctor, summoned with haste and vehemence, assured her that her husband was not dead.

The approach of springtime found Eddie in a noticeably run-down condition. Friends and acquaintances began to remark that he was "going to seed in a hurry," or "he's awfully run down at the heel," or "I've never seen such a change in a man."

He was no longer the gay, whilom, inconsequent man about town. The best proof of this was his utter lack of pride in the matter of dress and his carelessness in respect to his personal appearance. Once he had been the beau-ideal of the town. Nowadays he slouched about the streets with a cigarette drooping listlessly between his lips, his face unshaven, his clothes unpressed and dusty. There was always a hunted, far-away look in his eyes.

Habitues of the Club began to notice that he was once more making mathematical calculations on the backs of envelopes or the margins of newspapers and magazines. No one pretended to explain this queer habit of his, but they observed that his efforts represented sums in multiplication. Occasionally, as if to throw them off the track, he did a sum in subtraction, and there were frequent lapses into simplified addition.

It was noted, however, that the numerals one, nine, decimal, two and a cipher, invariably in that sequence, figured somewhere in every calculation.

General Gamble could have solved the mystery, but he maintained a rigid silence. In his heart, the old schemer nurtured a fear that sooner or later Eddie would commit suicide or run away, either of which would signify the return of Martha to the mansion she had deserted for a cottage. And he knew that if she ever came back it would be as a permanent visitor.

He encountered his son-in-law frequently at unexpected times and in unusual places, and was never without the feeling that the young man eyed him balefully. He could feel the intensity of that unwavering gaze for hours after meeting Eddie. It was an ardent, searching look that seemed to question his right to survive the day.

After such meetings, the General was wont to survey himself long and fearsomely in the first mirror or show window that presented itself. He began to wonder if he was in failing health. At times he thought he discerned signs of approaching decrepitude, but his doctor assured him that he was never healthier or happier than he appeared to be at this particular period in his life.

Still, he could not shake off the rather ghastly feeling that Eddie was secretly praying that his days were numbered.

One day at the Club he complained of a severe pain in his back, and the very next day he was shocked to find his son-in-law dressed in sombre black with a strip of crape around his arm. Immediately on seeing the General in his usual state of health, Eddie solemnly removed the band from his sleeve and, carefully rolling it up, stuck it into his waistcoat pocket.

"I'm saving it for a rainy day," said Eddie with a cold-blooded smile.

"Good Heaven!" said the General, and at once felt the pain return to his back.

"Have you seen Martha lately?" asked Eddie, tapping the bell on the table.

"Oh, yes," said the General, settling a little deeper into his chair. "She is looking remarkably well."

"Do you know what she weighs at present?"

"Of course not. She took the scales over to your house. Besides, I don't care a hang."

"Day before yesterday she weighed two hundred and ninety-eight pounds." His voice rose to a shrill screech. "It's a blamed outrage!" He dropped his chin into his hands and went on muttering vaguely, his eyes glued to the top button of the General's waistcoat.

"By Jove, she IS doing well."

"She can hardly walk. If she keeps on, she won't be able to see, either. Her eyes are almost lost. I screwed up the courage to take a long look at her to-day. She has lost her neck entirely and I haven't the remotest idea where her ears are."

"I—I DO feel sorry for you, Eddie," cried the General, moved by unexpected compunction.

Eddie rambled on. "Sometimes I sit down and actually watch her grow. You can notice, it if you look steadily for a given time."

The two sat stiff and silent for many minutes. Eddie stole a sly glance at his companion's ruddy face.

"You are a remarkably well preserved man, General," he ventured speculatively. "Would you mind telling me your age?"

"I am seventy-one, Eddie, if it is any encouragement to you," said the General eagerly.

"You look good for another ten years," said Eddie hopelessly.

"I am a little worried about my heart," prevaricated the General. He meant to be magnanimous. Eddie did not look up, but his eyes began to blink rapidly. "There is heart disease in the family, you know."

"Then maybe Martha has—er—has—"

"Has what, my son!"

"I forgot. She is only your step-daughter. I was worried for a moment, that's all."

In the fall of the year, Eddie announced to his father-in-law that Martha was tipping the beam at three hundred and fourteen pounds, three ounces, and increasing daily. The General gave vent to an uneasy laugh, whereupon Eddie, mistaking his motive, launched into a tirade that ended with the frantic wish that the old man would hurry up and die.

"Now, Eddie, don't talk like that! I have about made up my mind to do something handsome for you and Martha. I have practically decided to make her an allowance for clothing and so forth—"

"Clothing!" groaned Eddie. "She doesn't want clothes. What could she do with 'em? I am the one who needs clothes. Look at me. Look at the frayed edges and see how I shine in the back. There is a patch or two that you can't see. I put those patches on myself, too. Martha is so darned fat she can't hold a pair of trousers in her lap. Moreover, she can't sew with anything smaller than a crochet needle. Look at me! I am growing a beard so that people can't see my Adam's apple. That's how poor and thin I'm getting to be. Now just listen a minute; I'll give you a few figures that will paralyse you."

He jerked out his lead pencil and with the rapidity of a lightning calculator multiplied, added, and subtracted.

"She is worth $72,403.20 to-day. What do you think of that? Prove the figures for yourself. Here's the pencil."

"I don't care to—"

"The day of the wedding," went on Eddie wildly, "she weighed in at $16,972.80, I think. See what I mean? She's bulling the market and I can't realise a cent on her. She's gone up $55,430 in less than a year. Suffering Isaac! Why couldn't she have weighed that much a year ago?" He was so furious that he chopped off his words in such a way that they sounded like the barking of a dog.

The General pushed back his chair in alarm.

"Calm yourself, Eddie."

"Oh, I'm calm enough."

"Martha will be a very rich woman when I die, and you won't have to—"

"That sounds beautiful. But don't you see that she's getting so blamed fat that she's liable to tip over some day and die before I can find any one to help me set her up again? And if that should happen, will you kindly tell me WHERE *I* WOULD COME IN?"

"You are a heartless, mercenary scoundrel," gasped the General.

"Well, you would be sore, too, if this thing had happened to you," whined Eddie. He sprang to his feet suddenly. "By thunder, I can't stand it a day longer. Good-bye, General. I'm going to skip out."

"Skip out! Leave her? Is that what you mean?"

"Yes. She can always find a happy home with her mother and you. I'm off to the—"

"For Heaven's sake," cried the General hoarsely, "don't do that, Eddie. Don't you dare do anything like that. I—I—I am sure we can arrange something between us. I'm not a stingy, hard-hearted man, and you know it.

You deserve relief. You deserve compensation. I am your father-in-law and, damme, I'll not go back on you in your time of need. I'll make up the amount you have already lost, 'pon my soul I will, Eddie. Stand by your guns, that's all I ask."

A seraphic expression came into Eddie's face. "When?" he demanded.

"Immediately. Can you come to my house this evening? Alone, of course."

"I should say I can!" shouted Eddie, growing two inches taller in an instant. He took the package of crape from his pocket and threw it into a cuspidor. Then he sighed profoundly. "Gad, have you ever felt like another man, General? It's great."

As the General was past the point where he could risk saying another word, he maintained a strenuous silence.

Eddie indulged in an expansive grin. "You asked if I could come alone. That's the only way I can come. If you ever expect to see Martha, General, you will have to come to my house to do so. Do you remember that saying about Mahomet and the mountain?"

THE MAID AND THE BLADE

Over two centuries ago. Virginia, fair Virginia, in her most rugged, uncouth state, yet queen of all the colonies, rich in the dignity of an advanced settlement, glorious in prophecies and ambitions; the favoured ward of England's sovereigns, the paradise of her royal pillagers, the birthplace of American Freedom.

Jamestown was in the throes of a savage struggle, confined not to herself alone, but spreading to the farthermost ends of the apparently unbounded state. The capital fight was on, the contest waging between the town in which grew Bacon's rebellion and Williamsburg, in which William and Mary College had just been born, an infant venture that seemed but a mockery in the wilds. Boisterous, boasting Jamestown, since the rule of Berkeley and the unfortunate overthrow of Bacon, had resumed a state of composure which she had not known in the five preceding decades, and was beginning to look upon herself as the undisputed metropolis of the wilderness. The impudence of Williamsburg, with her feeble scholastic claims, was not even condemned—it was ignored.

The crude fort at Jamestown held a merry garrison, the Governor having impressed upon royalty across the sea the importance of troops in a land where unexpected rebellions against authority might succeed the partially triumphant uprising against Sir William in 1676. Bacon's death in the October of that year had lost the fight which had been fairly won, and it was wisdom which told the new Governor that troops were essential, even in time of peace.

The commander of the garrison was Colonel Fortune. The number and quality of his troops are not important factors in this tale.

Among the men were a dozen or more subalterns, fresh from England, undergoing their first rough work in the forests of Virginia. In this fledgling crowd were young Grafton, afterward a general; Mooney, Vedder, Hoicraft and others, whose names, with those of their Virginia companions went into colonial history.

Near the fort were the homes of the officers, the Governor's residence being but a short distance down the rough, winding lane, which was dignified by the name of street. Colonel Fortune's home was the handsomest, the merriest of them all, a typical frontier mansion. A mansion of those days could be little more than a cottage in these, yet the Colonel's was far brighter, gayer than the palace of today. In his house gathered chivalrous subalterns from English homes, stalwart Virginians of inherited gallantry, the men and women from whom sprung the first families of that blue blood which all Americans cherish lovingly and proudly.

His board was more hospitable than that of the Governor, his favours were coveted more eagerly even than were those of his superior. Stern, exacting, yet affable and courteous, he was the idol of a people whose hatred for those who ruled them had wrought ruin more than once. Mrs. Fortune, a lady of gentle birth closely related, in fact, to a certain branch of nobility, shared the power of her husband.

But there was a colonial queen whose reign was of more consequence to the youth of Jamestown than was that of the august person across the sea. She was queen of hearts, this daughter of theirs, airy Kate Fortune. Daintiest maid in all the land, famed for her wit, her follies, her merry loveliness, her dimples and her sunshine, she was the wiliest tempter who ever laid unconscious siege against man's indifference. The English officers called her an angel, the more deferential Virginians moaned that she was a witch, yet would not have burned her for the whole universe. On the contrary, they sacrificed themselves to the worship of her craft. War and strife were forgotten, the treacheries of the Indians were minimised, and a score or more of dreamers, awake or asleep, found their minds so full of dainty Kate that thought of else could work no means of entrance. In that year of our Lord, Jamestown was a veritable cauldron of rivals, fair suitors all, some bold, some timid, none hopeful.

Strange as it may appear to those who live these two centuries later, there were no jealousies, no bitterness

among them. In those good days the favoured man's best friends were his beaten rivals. Kate's kingdom was not large, was not glittering, but her sceptre was mighty. It was made of tenderness and beauty.

For two months the Governor's nephew had been her most ardent admirer, notwithstanding the fact that he had been in Virginia but sixty days. His surrender had been instantaneous.

Ordinarily the nephew of the Governor, who was a lord of the realm, might be considered a superior rival, but in this instance he was not even feared. He had come to Jamestown with exalted ideas. He dressed better, talked better and lived better, and he seemed to hold every man in the colony in disdain. Friendly, courteous even to the lowest soldier, he still gave forth the impression that he was condescending, not alone to those beneath, but to those above him. That this scion, this self-ordered perfect man, should have drifted to the colonies from the drawing-rooms of London only to fall in love with Kate Fortune seemed incredible.

Moreover, he had refused to wrestle in the contests at the fort, and had failed to fight the man who had warmly called him a coward in the presence of others.

Tales of his conduct in that and other exhibitions had been spread, and the good-looking young officer eventually became a laughing-stock. One day, however, he pulled the nose of an impudent lieutenant. When the red-faced lieutenant insisted upon satisfaction with swords he merely turned pale and ignored the challenge.

"I came here to fight the Indians, not to kill my comrades," he had said, and a disdainful laugh followed, bringing a flush to his face as he walked away.

Kate Fortune rather admired the easy elegance of the stranger, yet despised his lack of courage, the story having come to her promptly enough. She began to treat him coldly and he was at last driven to feel that he was her most unwelcome suitor. One day he bluntly asked her why she treated him so unkindly.

"Captain Studdiford, I will be frank with you," replied the girl. "How can you expect me to admire a man who submits to the ridicule of a whole company of men, not one of whom seems able to cope with him in strength or in the experience of arms? I am the daughter of an English soldier; that should be sufficient reason for my conduct. If I have mistreated you it was because I could not help it." She saw a look of pain come and go in his flushed face, hence the hasty apology, such as it was.

"So I am an object of derision to you, as well as to them," he observed, quietly. "I shall not intrude myself again, Miss Fortune. I am brave enough to tell you, for the first time, and in the face of your evident dislike, that I love you better than I ever dreamed I could love a woman." He was turning away in apparent indifference as he concluded this strange avowal.

Kate planted herself squarely before him, her pretty, perplexed face twitching between a smile and a frown, wonder fairly popping from her curious blue eyes.

"Isn't it cowardly to say that when you know how I feel? You are safe in confessing something that you already know I cannot consider," she said.

"I would rather not discuss it. You may treat it as a jest, as cowardice, or what you like. I cannot control your treatment of the best thing an honest man has to give a woman." It left the girl standing on the tips of her toes in sheer surprise. She was at no time a dignified queen, but she was an inquisitive one.

"But, Captain, you must not go away fearing that I—I shall treat lightly what you have said to me," she murmured.

"Fearing? Why should I fear your ridicule more than that of others? You are brighter, more bewitching, more tantalising than any woman I have ever known—you are maddening—do you hear? Ah, I crave your pardon for so far forgetting myself as to dwell upon a matter which I should have forgotten in your displeasure. By the way, I should like to tell you why I will not accommodate these young fools with a duel, why I have controlled my natural desire to resent their insults. I have fought one duel and I have killed a man. These men would have no more chance than that man had. You may tell them so. Farewell!"

She watched his tall figure move from her dooryard and disappear in the direction of the river. Then Kate sat down in the window and gazed half regretfully toward the opening in the timber through which he had passed.

It began to occur to her that Captain Studdiford was somehow the superior of any man she had ever seen. She felt a joy that he had fought a duel, although the thought that he had killed a man caused her to shudder. With the shudder, however, came the relieved feeling that he had not been the victim. Her face flushed faintly, too, as she recalled his strange avowal of love.

That same night a half dozen young men, with as many maids, dropped in to spend the chilly evening before the Colonel's roaring fires. They were toasting apples and chattering gaily when Kate suddenly turned to a young Virginian, and with taunting eyes, cried:

"Morton Trask, I know why Captain Studdiford would not fight a duel with you."

"So do I," responded Trask. "Because he feared me."

"'Twas no such reason. He says he does not choose to kill anything but Indians." A big laugh went up from the men.

"The fool! Did he say that to you?" cried Trask.

"He truly did; and, besides, he has fought and killed a man."

"Ho! Ho!" laughed Trask, disdainfully.

"Did he stab him in the dark?" questioned Farring.

"He lies if he says he fought aught save a boy," sneered Trask.

"Yet he pulled your valiant nose until it was red for near a week," said Kate, cheerily.

"Oh, would that I were at him—the coward!" cried Trask, white and trembling.

"You can pull his nose when next you meet him, Morton, it is your turn, you know," said Kate, laughingly, and Trask glared at the burning logs in angry silence.

"Please forgive me, Morton; I did not mean to hurt you by recalling a previous injury," cried Kate, and Trask's injury increased with her contrition.

"I cannot see why you defend the Captain, Miss Fortune," ventured Farring.

"Why not? He will not defend himself."

"But you surely cannot approve a coward?"

"Are you sure he is a coward?"

"I should consider myself one under the circumstances, I believe," he replied, evasively.

"Would it not be cowardly to fight Morton Trask if he knew he could kill him?"

"Bah!" came from the angry Trask.

"He could, at least, have given Trask satisfaction for an insult," said Varney. Kate wavered.

"That's true," she said; "he should have been a gentleman. Still, that does not prove him a coward."

"I'll wager that I can prove him a coward," observed Lieutenant Holmes. "And safely, too."

"'Twere wise to do it safely," supplemented Miss Fortune.

"One time at home we exposed a boasting captain, who would have had us think him the bravest man on earth—"

"But that does not seem to be Captain Studdiford's object," interrupted Kate.

"True," went on Holmes, "but that has nothing to do with it. This captain was one night approached by five of his fellow officers, disguised as highwaymen, and despite his declarations that he had fought dozens of such men, he ran like a hound, screaming murder all the way. Why not test your captain's courage as we tested ours, Miss Fortune?"

"In the first place, I could not be a very impressive highwayman, and in the second place, he might shoot."

"You have plenty of men at your command who would serve as Indians for such an experiment," speculated Varney.

"Egad! we all would!" exclaimed Holmes. "So you might!" she cried. "He would be willing to kill you if you were Indians."

"We might as well give up the plan, for we could not force him to leave town without a bodyguard," sneered Trask.

"Fie! That is easy. Miss Fortune could ask him to ride with her into the forest and he would go blindly enough," said Holmes.

"I?" cried Kate, blushing to think of herself in that position after Studdiford's proclamation. "I could not—would not do such a thing. Prove him a coward, but do not ask me to help you." "Holmes is right, and Miss Fortune should be willing to make the test. She is his defender; she cannot refuse to satisfy herself of her error in this harmless, yet effective way," announced big Farring, and every member of the party laid siege against Kate's faltering opposition. The fun of it all finally appealed to her and she rather timidly agreed to the proposition. How could she ask him to ride with her after what had passed between them? He would think her unwomanly and, strangely enough, with that thought she began to feel that she must have his good opinion. Yet she went, half dubiously, into the plot to prove a coward of the man she was beginning to admire.

The details of the scheme were submitted by the men, and were as follows: Kate was to ask him to ride horseback with her to "Big Fork," five miles through the forest, on some near afternoon, and the men were to bedeck themselves as Indians, attack them, take her from his custody and hurry her off into apparent captivity, whilst he trembled with fear and inaction.

"But suppose he should happen to be disappointing and shoot somebody," objected Lucy Gaines.

"Oh, he must have no chance to do that," said Varney. "Miss Fortune can induce him to discharge his pistols in some feat of marksmanship and we will swoop down before he can reload them."

"For shame!" cried Kate. "How could that be a fair test of bravery? An unarmed man against five brawny Indians! I'll have none of it. His pistols must remain undisturbed."

"But—good heavens!—he may kill us all," cried Trask.

"Well, how else is he to prove his courage? You must take your chances, gentlemen, with your coward. If he is a coward you need not fear his pistols, though he had a dozen; if he is not, then you may have to run from them."

"Allow us to capture you and offer him the privilege of fighting for your liberty, choosing his own weapons. If he agrees to fight for you, instead of taking his proffered freedom, we will leave the field to him and you may call him hero. That is fair, is it not?" proposed Farring.

"You will not hurt him?" asked Kate doubtingly.

"Hurt him? We shall not even catch him. He will leave you and fly for his life!" cried Trask.

"I tell you now, gentlemen, if he stands the test and disproves your taunts against his valour, my respect for him will be far more than you can ever hope to inspire. Yet, after all, it will be a diversion—it will be fun to see how he will act," mused the fair plotter.

It required all of Kate's courage and a dismal sacrifice of pride to suggest the ride to Captain Studdiford, but she did it the next morning, stopping him near the fort after having walked not thirty feet behind for more than two hundred yards. She was a trifle insecure as to her own valour in this preliminary step.

The rosiness of her cheeks might have been by others attributed to the chill of the December morn, but she knew they were the flames from an inward fire.

Captain Studdiford's heart thumped unusually fast as he looked down into the piquant face and big blue eyes, which for the first time since he had known her, wore a gleam bordering on embarrassment. They were very soft and timid this morning—there was something appealing in their tempting depths.

"May I not walk with you? I am going your way," were her first words as she reached his side.

"Whither, pray?"

"Oh, to—" and here she blushed, for in truth she had no destination—"to Anna Corwin's," she concluded in relief.

"But Mistress Corwin lives back yonder. How came you to be going this way?"

"Did I say Anna Corwin?"

"If I am not deaf."

"Then I must have meant some one else; to be sure I did—how queer of me. I am going to Lucy's. You cannot say, sir, that she does not live in this direction. I'll not walk with you if you are bound to be particular, though." Her little ears were very red.

"I beg you to forgive me and allow me to walk with you," cried the Captain eagerly.

"I like that much better. No matter if I were going to Anna's and chose a roundabout way, you should not be so impolite as to remonstrate. As a rule, Captain, the men prefer the roundabout way."

"Be it miles I would walk it with thee," cried he, smiling at her merry vanity.

"Oh, would you do that?" she asked, suddenly seeing her way clear. Yet, in spite of all, her composure deserted her and she blurted it out, turning red again. "I am dying to ride to 'Big Fork' tomorrow, but I have no one to accompany me. Would you like to go?" Then to herself, "What a fool he thinks me!"

"Gladly; but, are we sure there are no stray Indians about?" he asked, rather quickly.

"He is afraid," she thought, with strange disappointment. "If you are afraid, we will not go," she said a trifle coldly.

"Afraid? Not for myself, but for you. We will go if you like, and I should rejoice to meet all of the Indians in Virginia if it will please you."

So they made their plans, and she was so loth to leave him that he was forced to remind her that they had passed the home of Lucy Gaines a full furlong or more. He left her at the door, his heart exultant, hers all a-flutter.

The next afternoon the two rode forth from Jamestown and into the forest, following the well-made road which led to the westward beneath the red and yellowing oaks. Half an hour previous to their departure five young men had ridden from the home of Lucy Gaines, strange bundles strapped to their saddles. Above all things, they had cautioned Kate to demand the Captain's proof of marksmanship at a point near Big Fork.

It was with some consternation, notwithstanding all the plotting, that Kate observed the big pistols at the Captain's side and the heavy sword which jangled against his leg. That jangling sword gave her the tremors, and she cast many furtive glances toward its chain and scabbard. At last she was compelled to ask:

"How can you, I pray, use such a monstrous sword, Captain Studdiford? It must have been made for a giant." "It was; it was my great-great-grand-father's over a century ago. See! It is serviceable, even in my weak hand." He pulled the gleaming blade, long and heavy, from its scabbard, and swept it downward through the air so fiercely that it resembled a wide sheet of silver. Kate's blue eyes grew wide with apprehension, a cold chill seized upon her and her ruddy face paled. He returned the weapon to its sheath with such a forceful crash that she started violently in her saddle, her little teeth clicking in sheer affright.

"I could cleave a man's skull in twain as easily as you can cut an apple. Would that we could meet a warlike

Indian that I could show you how it merits my praise."

"Goodness!" gasped Kate hopelessly. "You would not strike a—a—man with it, would you?"

"If he were an enemy. For you, loved one, I could cut down an army." Their horses drew more closely side by side and the fierce, strong hand was gently laid upon her trembling fingers. Tenderly clasping the little one the big one raised it until it touched the lips of him who leaned across to kiss it. Their eyes met as he raised his head. His were full of love, hers with a pleading dread, the uncertain quiver between love and fear. Without a word he dropped the hand, suddenly sick at heart.

"I could die for her and she despises me," he groaned to himself.

"Oh, what have I—have we done?" she thought, a thousand fears gathering in her heart. "He is no coward and he will kill one of them! How can I tell him—how can I save their lives? He will despise me! That awful sword! A man's skull! Oh, dear! He called me loved one! How big and strong he is! He called me—how can I keep him from using the sword? The pistols I can manage and—perhaps they will not be there. He will kill them all—horror upon horror! What have I done? Oh!" the last exclamation was so loud and so sudden that the pale Captain turned quickly.

"What is it? What is it?"

She laughed wildly, even gleefully, almost in the face of her companion.

"Nothing—nothing at all!" she cried.

"I am glad to have afforded you amusement, Mistress Fortune. You may tear my heart to shreds."

Her manner changed instantly. Tears flew to the blue eyes and her hand crept toward him.

"Forgive me, pray, Captain Studdiford, I—I did not mean to hurt you. I—I—am very foolish, very unkind. You must hate me," she faltered.

"Hate you! How could I? You do not love me—why should I have hoped? I can but blame myself." Her hand had fallen to her side because he had not touched it. "And it is our last afternoon together."

"Last?" she repeated, faintly.

"Yes; for I shall not see you again."

"Oh—you—you—do not mean that!"

"I have asked to be transferred to Willamsburg. I—I have not one friend in Jamestown; why should I stay here?" he cried bitterly.

"But you have," she exclaimed, eagerly; "you have. I am your friend."

"Friend! That is not what I ask of you," he said, almost gruffly.

Silence, broken only by the clatter of the hoofs upon the road followed his words. In her confusion she had forgotten the terrible sword, but it recurred to her, and, with it, the thought which had given birth to her untimely mirth, the thought that was to lead her from the chief predicament into which she had been cast. She would ask the Captain to turn back to Jamestown at once, avoiding the possibility of conflict.

"Captain Studdiford, I believe we had better turn back." Her face grew crimson beneath his calm gaze. "As you like. You will grant me time to adjust my saddle girth; it is slipping," he said coolly, dismounting without another word.

They were fully three miles from the village, and in a dense piece of forest. On either side of the narrow road grew the thickest of underbrush with the great, gaunt trees stretching above like silent sentinels. The girl's mind was chaos; her thoughts were changing and interchanging like leaves before the whirling wind. She knew that she admired this man, and that something even sweeter was beginning to throb its way into her heart. A half smile came to her troubled face as she thought of the war-painted plotters two miles away, waiting to make a coward of her hero. A touch of remorse came to her as she remembered her part in the play, and that the plot would have been carried out had she not seen the great swing of that fearful sword. What havoc it would have wrought! And he was to leave Jamestown! Without a friend, he had said. How could he say that?

In the midst of these varying thoughts she allowed her softening eyes to wander from him toward the trees above and the straggling brush beneath their knotty limbs. A suppressed scream called the Captain's attention to her staring eyes. They were blinking with consternation.

Deep in the underbrush she had seen the form of an Indian warrior! Horrors! The sword!

"What do you see?" cried he, staring toward the now deserted brush.

"Nothing—nothing!" she gasped. "Yes—I mean, that red bird! See? Do shoot it for me—I must have it! Isn't it beautiful?" She was excitedly pointing toward a red bird in the top branches of a big oak.

He drew his pistols and deliberately aimed with one of them. The shot missed and the bird darted away.

"Oh, goodness!" she cried. "Try the other one!"

"But the bird is gone."

"Is it? So it is—but, quick! See if you can cut off that twig up there—the one with three red leaves. I wager

you cannot! Quick, and then we will ride for home."

"Why are you so excited?"

"I am not the least bit excited—I never am! Why do you not shoot at that twig?"

"You try it," he surprised her by saying, pushing a pistol into her hand. Without a word or aim she blazed away at the sky and his firearms were useless. She handed the smoking pistol to him with a laugh.

"Would it not be awful if Indians came upon us!" she cried, with strange exultation. "But mount, and race with me to the spring!"

As the Captain placed his foot in the stirrup a yell burst from the thicket, an arrow whizzed above their heads, and a half-a-dozen, fierce warriors were dashing toward them.

"Do not use your sword!" she screamed.

Before the bewildered soldier could catch his breath an ugly brave was in the road, not ten feet away, knife in hand. Out whizzed the sword!

Kate screamed in agony, clasping her hand over her eyes.

"They are friends! Do not strike!"

But it was too late. The streak of steel cut the air. A sickening thud, a gurgling howl, and the assailant fell, his head half severed from his body. An instant later the big Englishman was in his saddle. A second slash and an Indian at his side went down beneath the ancestral blade!

The two horses plunged forward as a brawny redskin grasped her arm and she felt herself being dragged to the ground. Then a hand clasped her other arm, a big form leaned over behind her, far across the back of her horse. She heard the hiss of something cutting the air, the crash as of splitting wood, a scream, of agony and the Indian's ruthless grasp was loosened. Her horse stumbled and seemed to totter beneath her, but again that arm from aloft exerted itself and it seemed as if she were being lifted to the tree tops. Almost before she could realise it she was upon another horse, clasped in the arm of its rider, and they were off like the wind.

Suddenly she felt the form of the man who held her so closely drop forward with a groan and then straighten again slowly. Exultant yells came from behind them, several arrows whizzed past, and then naught was heard but the thunder of the horse's hoofs upon the frozen road. As her eyes opened involuntarily, terror possessing them, they fell upon the scene far behind. Two hundred yards away her own horse lay struggling in the road, two human forms stretched near it, another dragging itself to the roadside. Three feathered Indians were some fifty yards nearer, gesticulating wildly. Her brain whirred and buzzed, and—consciousness was lost!

When she regained her senses she was lying upon the ground. With feeble eyes she glanced wonderingly about. To a tree near by a horse was hitched, beneath her body were the blankets from the horse and certain garments from the back of man. All was as a dream; she could account for nothing. Studdiford was leaning against the big oak, coatless and as pale as a ghost. Deep lines stretched across his brow and down his mouth; his eyes were closed, as if in pain.

An involuntary moan escaped her lips, and the Captain was at her side almost before it had died away. She was crying.

"Oh, what have I done! What have I done!"

"Calm, yourself, dearest! You are safe—entirely so. See, we are alone, far from those devils. It is but a mile to Jamestown. Be brave and we will soon be at home," he murmured hoarsely, kneeling at her side and lifting her to a sitting posture.

"Home! I can never go home! Oh, God, you do not know—you do not know!"

"There—there! Now, be quiet."

"How could you know? I am a murderess—I am the wretch! Kill me; I cannot live!" she wailed.

"Hush!" he cautioned, lovingly.

"You could not know—you did not know them, Captain Studdiford!" she cried, sitting bolt upright, glaring wildly about her, then shudderingly plunging her white face against his shoulder. "They were not Indians," she almost whispered.

"Not Indians!" he gasped.

"God forgive me—no! It was all a trick—to test your courage—forgive me—to test—to test—oh! and I allowed you to kill them!"

"Speak! Go on! What do you mean?" "They were our friends—not Indians! My dearest friends! Oh, how is it that I am not struck dead for this? Please heaven, let me die!" she wailed.

"My God!" he exclaimed, after the first bewildering shock. "A trick—and I have killed—oh, it cannot be true!" He leaped to his feet, allowing her to fall from his side to the ground, where she lay, a wretched, shivering heap. With a ferocious oath he snatched the big sword from the ground and turned upon her, with eyes blazing, muscles quivering.

She was looking up at him, those wide blue eyes gleaming piteously.

"Kill me!" she murmured, and closed the eyes to await the stroke.

His big arm relaxed, the sword fell from his nerveless grasp, clanging to the ground.

When she reopened her eyes after an age of suspense she saw him leaning against the tree, his body shaking with sobs. A second glance and she started to her feet alarmed.

His broad back was covered with blood. Near his left shoulder the clothing was torn and an ugly, gaping wound leered at her.

"Oh," she gasped; "you—you are hurt!"

"Hurt!" he groaned. "They have killed me! You have killed me—you and your friends. I hope you—are—satisfied—with—your—see?" As he sank to the ground, he pointed feebly to the cruel arrow which he had torn from his side. It lay not far away, grim and bloody.

The horrified girl glanced at it helplessly and then at the unconscious man, unable to realise. Then she cried aloud in her agony and threw herself upon the prostrate form, moaning:

"Dead! Dead! Speak to me, Ralph—look up! I love you—I worship you! You shall not leave me!"

She kissed the pallid face, caressed the chilling head, sobbing:

"Forgive me—forgive me!"

An hour afterward the clatter of hoofs upon the road aroused her from the semi-conscious condition into which her grief had thrown her. Through the gathering darkness she saw horsemen approaching—Indian riders! A moment later they were dismounting at her side, and well-known voices were calling to her:

"Are you hurt?"

"What has happened?"

"Killed? My God!"

It was Farring, Trask and the other plotters, reeking with excitement. Their horses were wet from the fierceness with which they had been ridden.

"Do not touch him! You have killed him!" she cried, striving to shield the body from Farring's anxious touch.

"Killed him? Good God, Kate! where did you meet them!" cried Farring, as Trask pulled her from Studdiford's side.

"Are you not dead?" she finally whispered to the men.

"We? He killed three of them—split their heads! But the wretches put an arrow into him, after all. What a dreadful thing we have done! Fairly tricked him to his death!" cried poor Trask.

"Then—then it was not you?" cried Kate.

"Heavens, no! We found the Indians dragging their dead from the road, three miles back, and knew that something terrible had happened.

"Thank God! I am spared that! But he must not die—he shall not! I love him. Do you hear? I love him!"

For three weeks the victim of that ill-fated trick hung between life and death. Surgery was crude in the colonies, and the first evidence of restoration was due more to his rugged constitution than to the skill of his doctors. The poor fellow rolled and tossed upon one of Mrs. Fortune's soft beds, oblivious to the kind offices of those about him. They had taken him there at Kate's command, and she had worn herself to a shadow with anguish, love and penitence. She watched him by day and by night—in her restless dreams; her whole existence was in the tossing victim of her folly. Every twitch of that pain-stricken body seemed to show her that he was shrinking from her in hatred. Her pretty face was white and drawn, the blue eyes dark and pitiful, the merry mouth, plaintive in its hopelessness.

And those jovial tricksters—those who had jeered over his lack of courage, the testing of which they had undertaken! They were smitten by their own curses, haunted by their own shame. The fiery Trask, the polished Farring, the ingenious Holmes, with all of Jamestown, prayed for his recovery, and spared no pains to bring to life and health the man who had won that which they had relinquished hope of having—Kate's love. They were tender, sympathetic, helpful—true men and good.

Kate could not forget the look of disgust she had seen upon Studdiford's face as he stood above her with the great sword in his hand. His first thought had been to kill her!

Sitting beside him, bathing the fevered brow, caressing the rumpled hair, holding his restless hands, she could feel her heart thumping like lead, so heavy had it grown in the fear of his awakening.

Finally the doctors told her that he would recover, that the fever was broken. Then came the day when he slept, cool and quiet, no trace of fever, no sign of pain.

It was then that Kate forsook him, burying herself in her distant room, guilty and heart-broken, fearing above all things on earth, the first repellent glance he would bestow upon her. Once, while he slept, she peered through his door, going back to her room and her spinning with tears blinding the plaintive blue eyes.

At last, one day, her mother came from the Captain's room and said to her gently:

"Kate, Captain Studdiford asks why you do not come to see him. He tells me that for three days he has suffered because you have been so unkind. Go to him, dear; he promises he will not plead his love if it is so distasteful to you!"

Distasteful! The girl grew faint with wonder. Her limbs trembled, her lips parted, her eyes blurred and her ears roared with the rush of blood from her heart.

"Mother!" she whispered, at last, steadying herself against the wall. "Are you sure, Mother?"

"That he wants you? My child, his eyes fill with tears when he thinks of you. I have seen them moisten as he lies looking from the window."

But Kate was gone.

When Mrs. Fortune opened the door to the sick man's room soon afterward she drew back quickly, closed it again, and, lifting her eyes aloft, murmured:

"God make them happy!"

MR. HAMSHAW'S LOVE AFFAIR

Mr. Hamshaw was short, bald, pudgy—and fifty-seven. Besides all this, he was a bachelor, and one jolly one, at the time when this narrative opens. He lived in apartments pretty well downtown, where he was looked after with scrupulous care by a Japanese valet and an Irish "cook-lady." Mr. Hamshaw was forever discharging his valet and forever re-engaging him. Sago persistently refused to leave at the hour set for his departure, and Mr. Hamshaw finally came to discharge him every evening in order that he might be sure to find him at his post in the morning. Regularly, he would call Sago into the den, very red in the face over some wholly imaginary provocation.

"This ends it, Sago! You go! I've stood it as long as I can—or will. You leave the place tonight, sir—bag and baggage. I don't want to see your face again. Understand?"

"Yes, sir; very well, sir" Sago would respond with perfect equanimity. Sago engaged to be very, very English at such distinguished times.

"You go tonight."

"Yes, Mr. Hamshaw. May I ask what I have done to displease you, sir!"

"Never mind, sir! I'll tell you tomorrow. Don't bother me about it today. And, say, if you don't press this dinner coat of mine before tomorrow night I'll discharge you without a recommendation."

"Very good, sir."

Once when Sago threatened to leave unless Ellen, the cook, was dismissed, poor Mr. Hamshaw had a most uncomfortable half-hour. Young Mr. Goodrich from the bank was dining with him at the time. Now it was quite as hard to get rid of Ellen, notwithstanding the fact that she was constantly on the verge of leaving of her own accord, as it was to discharge Sago. The host prayed down to his comfortable boots that the threats of Sago might not grow louder than confidential hisses as he passed behind his chair in the capacity of butler, but he was counting without Ellen. There was a long, painful interval between courses, and then Ellen marched in from the kitchen, majestically attired for the street.

"I beg your pardon, Mr. Hamshaw, but this time I go for fair. It's aither me or the Chinee-"

"Blawst yer eyes!" snarled Sago in his very best English, mightily incensed.

"But, Ellen—" began Mr. Hamshaw, bowled over.

"Don't beg me to stay," she cried, glaring at Sago, who glared back safely from behind Mr. Goodrich's chair. "The dago has insulted me for the last toime. I'm sorry, sor, it had to come roight in the middle of dinner, sor, but it couldn't wait."

"Can't you subdue yourself till morning, Ellen? It is—"

"I can subjue meself, sor, but who the divil is to subjue the Malay? He's gone too far this—"

"I've only been doing my duty, sir," inserted Sago, drawing the salad spoon through his hand very much as a Samurai would have drawn a sword. "Ellen she—I mean her didn't—"

"Never mind, never mind," groaned Mr. Hamshaw, at bay. "You may both go. I fire—I discharge both of you! I'm sure, Mr. Goodrich, you will overlook this unfortunate—"

"Discharge me, sor?" half shrieked Ellen. "I never was discharged from a place in me loife. I won't stand for it! I'll lave, but I'll not be discharged. It's Sago that has to be discharged—not me."

"Discharge both of them, Mr. Hamshaw," advised Goodrich amiably. "I know where you can get an excellent cook and—"

"Oh, you do, eh? With recommindations, too, I suppose!" sniffed Ellen in a fine flare.

"The very best, my good woman."

"Well, I'd loike to see them," announced Ellen loyally. "No wan can cook for Mr. Hamshaw unless she gives the best of characters."

"She's a Japanese woman," explained Mr. Goodrich, "and they're said to be the best cooks in the world."

"The divil a step will I take out of this place to make way for a haythen Jap." Shebegan taking off her hat. "I'll have the squab on in a minute, Mr. Hamshaw, and I'll serve it, too." This last with a deadly look at Sago. "He says he'll quit if I don't. Well, I don't!"

"Will you make the dressing for the salad, sir, or shall I?" politely inquired Sago, ignoring Ellen completely.

"Have you decided to stay long enough for that purpose?" demanded Mr. Hamshaw.

"I have given notice, sir, that Ellen has to go," said Sago soberly.

"And I refuse to go for the loikes of you," retorted Ellen with great dignity.

"Then, Mr. Hamshaw, I shall remain until she does go. But go she must."

"I'll go when I get good and ready, Mr. Sago."

"We'll have the squab now, Sago," said Mr. Hamshaw.

"Very good, sir."

It was quite an old story among the members of the club, especially those who knew Mr. Hamshaw intimately, that he had once felt the inclination to take unto himself a wife. That, of course, was years and years ago, and it is hardly necessary to remark that the young woman, whoever she may have been, was not possessed of a responsive inclination. Result: Mr. Hamshaw not only refrained from marrying any one in all the subsequent years but astutely prevented any one from marrying him. It was quite true that at fifty-seven he was not a thing of beauty, but he had a heart of gold and was beloved by all the men and children who knew him. Certainly it is quite doubtful if he could have been all this had he married even the woman of his choice.

One day there came to the big apartment-house where lived Mr. Hamshaw and his two servants a most uncommon hullabaloo and sensation. It was an unheard-of proceeding for a tenant to move out of this amiable and exclusive establishment, and naturally, it was impossible for any one to move in. Of course, however, such contingencies as births, weddings, and funerals could not be provided against, and it was due entirely to the advent of a bride that the aforesaid uproar occurred. A widower on the second floor took unto himself a widow, and she was now being moved in with all her goods and chattels.

It would appear that the new Mrs. Gladding did not approve of her husband's furniture, his servants, or his own flesh and blood. As a consequence, they were departing jointly, and in their stead came substitutes from her former apartments in Eads Avenue. Mr. Gladding's two grown-up sons were shuffled off to bachelor quarters downtown and their rooms were turned over to Mrs. Gladding's two grown-up daughters—just out in society. The transfer was over at last, and, to the intense gratification of Mr. Hamshaw, the big building saw the last of its moving-vans, its plumbers and decorators, and the new Gladdings were as quietly ensconced as the old had been. It was not until the end of the second week thereafter that Mr. Hamshaw had his first glimpse of the two debutantes—the young Misses Frost.

But that one glimpse was his undoing.

All those years of constancy to his original inclination were blotted out as if by magic. His primeval affection was uprooted, turned over, and then jolted unceremoniously out of existence. One divided glimpse had restored vigour to his waning passion and it flamed with all the fury of coals that have smouldered long and lazily. The one distressing condition attached to this pleasant and refreshing restoration was the fact that he succumbed not to one, but to both of the Misses Frost—succumbed heartily and bodily, without the faintest hope of discrimination. He was in love with both at first sight. For the life of him he could not tell which he had seen first.

That very evening at the dinner hour he rode up and down in the elevator no less than a dozen times, and each time as he passed the second floor he hopefully but surreptitiously peered forth at the Gladdings' door. Once the car stopped to take some one on at this floor, and his dear old heart gave an enormous throb of anticipation, turning to disappointment an instant later when a messenger-boy slouched in.

"Find 'em at home?" asked the elevator-boy.

"Sure. Say, dey're wonders, ain't dey, dese society girls? I don't blame people for sendin' 'em violets."

Mr. Hamshaw could have slain No. 329 for his familiarity, but lost the opportunity in wondering what the young ladies would think if they received 10,000 violets from an unnamed sender. For days, be it said in all solemnity, Mr. Hamshaw waited and watched for glimpses of the young ladies—princesses he was calling them down in the neighbourhood of his rejuvenated heart. He neglected his business, ate at the most irregular hours, and finally gave himself up to the astonishing habit of walking up and down five flights of stairs. Sago and Ellen, united in worrying over these idiosyncrasies, were troubled deep down in their consciences.

The master took to standing out in front of the main entrance on bitterly cold days, smoking cigar after cigar. He said, in explanation, that it was unhealthy to smoke indoors. Twice in as many weeks he had glimpses of the young ladies. On both occasions they walked briskly past him with their pretty noses in the air. It was evident that they disdained carriages and street cars, for they struck off downtown with the stride of athletes.

"By Jove, they're fine specimens!" murmured Mr. Hamshaw, admiring their bonny figures from the doorway.

It is quite natural that he should have kept his secret from Sago and Ellen. Sooner would he have died than permit these staunch guardians to grasp the whole truth concerning his—he even felt guilty enough to call it "foolish"—infatuation. If the Misses Frost received frequent offerings of rare violets from an unmentioned source they were not so puzzled that they could find no one to thank even though it surprised the innocent young man in the extreme. If they took notice of the stout, bald old gentleman who shuffled his feet and looked conscious when they strode past it was not for him to know at that stage of the game. He felt so small after the weary weeks of watching that he went and had himself weighed, devoutly certain that he shrunk respectably. He even went in for a savage system of training, calculated to reduce his avoirdupois.

One day, while he was swinging along through the park, a mile and a half from home, trying to take off a few of the pounds that made him impossible to the willowy Misses Frost, he unexpectedly came upon his dual affinity. In his agitation he narrowly escaped being run down by a base and unsympathetic cab operated by a profane person who seldom shaved. As it was, he lost his hat. The wind whirled it over the ground much faster than he could sprint, with all his training, and brought it up against a bush in front of the young women. One of them sprang forward and snatched it up before it could resume its flight. Mr. Hamshaw came up puffing and confused, but radiant.

"Thank you, thank you, ever so much!" he panted. "Never mind the dust. It's been dusty before. Besides, it's an old one. I have a better one at home, and a silk—"

He brought himself up with a jerk, realising that he was jabbering like a fool. The young women were polite and respectful. Not a sign of derision appeared in their faces.

"Fierce wind, isn't it?" asked one of them, and it dawned instantly upon him that she was the one he loved. He jammed his hat far down upon his head, glancing, as he did so, at the other girl. She was smiling genially, her face rosy from the wind her sister condemned, and, with ruthless inconstancy, Mr. Hamshaw at once changed his mind. She was the one.

"Pardon me for the liberty," he said, "but I am Mr. Hamshaw. We are neighbours, you know. Live in the same building."

"Oh, is that so?" asked the taller of the two, and, to his dismay, he saw that her surprise was genuine.

"Yes; you are on the second—I am on the sixth."

"Where the Jap is?" asked the shorter one.

"He's my valet."

"Funny little thing, isn't it?"

"An excellent servant, Miss—"

"Look out, there goes your lid again! I'll get it—my legs are swifter than yours!" cried the tall athlete in petticoats, and off she sailed in pursuit.

"You need some one to chase your hat for you, Mr. Hamshaw," said the short one airily.

"Are you going our way?" asked the other, with a smile that could have led him to perdition.

"To the end of the earth," he murmured gallantly.

For the next ten minutes he walked on air. His heart was so light that it bobbed up and down like a fisherman's cork. He was not long in discovering that the tall one was Mame and the short one Lou—short for Marie and Louise, they explained on request!

"I see a good many boxes of flowers going up to your apartment," ventured Mr. Hamshaw, quite out of breath.

"Every day, and sometimes in between," said Marie.

"Ah, it's so nice to be popular!" he chirped. "And—and you can't blame the men, either, you know."

"You can't thank them, either, if they don't enclose their cards. Nearly every day there is a guessing match in the back parlour. It's poor form to send flowers without a card."

"By George, they're fine girls!" reflected Mr. Hamshaw. "Healthy, vigorous, full of life, and not a bit spoiled. Hang it all, I'm an ass to act like this! But I can't help it. A man is never too old to learn or to love. I'll play hob with some of these young dandies before I get through. Hamshaw, you've got to win one of these girls. But which one? There's the rub! It's awfully annoying!"

But it grew to be quite romantic. Mr. Hamshaw came to look upon himself as an up-to-date Romeo. The young ladies did not offer him any inducement to call upon them in their own home, but they frequently walked with him in the park of afternoons, and were astonishingly agreeable about candy, soda-water and

matinees. Their reluctance to lunch or dine with him downtown stamped them in his mind as something most admirable. He quite understood. And their devotion to their sick friend was truly beautiful. He never saw them but they were going to visit her. Miss Louise naively informed him that they gave her some of the violets he sent to them, but that she knew he wouldn't mind.

"Do you think she'd like it if I sent her some good books to read?" asked he, quite delighted.

"Sure," replied Miss Marie.

"How very unconventional," beamed Mr. Hamshaw to himself. "Hang it all, I wish I could decide between them! I think I'd look better with the short one, but—"

One day his nephew, young Jimmy Sprang, met him on the street and proceeded to twit him about his second childhood.

"What do you mean, sir?" demanded Mr. Hamshaw with great dignity and a sinking heart.

"Who are the fairies you're trotting—"

"Stop, sir!" thundered Mr. Hamshaw. "Not another word, sir! They are ladies, and not to be discussed by such a bounder as you."

At last Mr. Hamshaw decided to take Louise. "I'll tell her tomorrow," he said to himself, quite sure that it was only necessary to tell and not to ask. But that evening, just after returning from the club, he saw something that troubled and harassed him not a little. He saw and heard Sago talking to the Misses Frost—not only talking but in a manner so familiar that it must have been extremely nauseating to the cultured young women. The three were standing under the electric light at the corner, and the young women instead of appearing annoyed at the heathen's twaddle, seemed to be highly amused. Only the greatest exercise of self-restraint kept Mr. Hamshaw from kicking Sago into the middle of the next block.

Mr. Hamshaw was on the point of intervening when, to his utter consternation, the two young women started off up the street with Sago. To add to his misery, Sago did not come in at all that night. In response to Mr. Hamshaw's savage inquiry, Ellen, who attended him the next morning, said that Sago had gone to a dance on the West Side and had not turned up. Mr. Hamshaw sat bolt upright in bed and then collapsed.

The next afternoon he went home early, haggard and with a headache. His confidence was not gone, however. After arranging himself carefully—he refused to call for Sago—he boldly descended to the second floor. Then he lost his nerve. Instead of ringing the Gladding door-bell he walked on downstairs and out into the open air. At the corner he came plump upon Mr. Gladding himself, the step-father of the two girls.

"How are you, Mr. Hamshaw? Fine weather we're having," greeted the man from the second floor.

"I've just been to your flat," said Mr. Hamshaw.

"Indeed! Any one at home?"

"I don't know—that is, I didn't go in. You see—are you going home now, Gladding, or downtown?"

"Home, of course. I've been downtown all day. Anything you wanted to see me about, Mr. Hamshaw?"

"Oh, no—nothing important."

"Well, won't you come up with me now? By the way, I'd like you to meet my wife and her daughters."

"I know your daughters, I believe."

"Ah!"

"It is about one of them that I wish to speak with you, sir." They were on the second-floor landing by this time. "May I come in?"

"Certainly," said Mr. Gladding.

Mr. Hamshaw sat stiff and uncomfortable on the divan while Mr. Gladding rang for a maid. He also called down the hall to ask Mrs. Gladding and the young ladies to come in and greet Mr. Hamshaw.

"Before they come," began the latter, fidgeting nervously, "I want to say that I expect to marry Miss Frost. It's been hard work to choose between them—"

"What are you talking about?" gasped the father.

"I know I've done a most reprehensible thing in courting them—I mean her—in this manner, but, you see—"

At this juncture Mrs. Gladding entered the room, followed by two strange young women—sleepy, tired, scrawny young women, who looked at Mr. Hamshaw as if he were a sofa-cushion and nothing more.

"My wife—er—Mr. Hamshaw, and the Misses Frost," mumbled Mr. Gladding, bowled over completely.

"What's that?" shouted Mr. Hamshaw, coming to his feet and toppling over backward again. The others stared at him as if he were mad. "How—how many have you—I mean, how many daughters are there?"

"Two!" exclaimed Mrs. Gladding, freezing up immediately. The society young women relaxed into a giggle.

"Then—who—is this a joke?" gasped Mr. Hamshaw, perspiration starting in torrents.

"What do you mean, sir?" demanded Mr. Gladding.

"Where are Marie and Louise?" murmured Mr. Hamshaw.

Just then a trim maid appeared in the doorway—white-capped and aproned.

"Did you ring, Ma'am?—Good Heavens!"

It was Marie!

Mr. Hamshaw fainted without more ado, and the apartment was in an uproar. Everybody thought he was dead, and the Misses Frost promptly duplicated his swooning act.

When Mr. Hamshaw opened his eyes, Marie was standing near by with ammonia and wet towels.

"Where is Louise?" he asked weakly.

"She's went and married that awful little Jap of yours last night. Here, take another sniff at this. Go on; don't be afraid of it. I've give it to the young ladies regular for the last five years. What's that, sir?"

"Nothing—nothing," he whispered.

"You said something, sir."

"And you're not Miss Frost?"

"One of them scrawny—I beg pardon, sir! Did you think I was—"

"Well, if that's the case, I can tell you what I said a moment ago. I said 'D—n it all!' Where am I?"

"At Mr. Gladding's, sir."

"Is Sago upstairs?"

"No, sir; they've gone to the matinee on their wedding trip, Mr. Hamshaw."

"Oh!"

It was not what Mr. Hamshaw said but the way he said it.

THE GREEN RUBY

He was a very good-looking chap—this Cannable who lived in the civilised city of New Orleans. It is quite true that he came from an island in the sea, but as that island is known to geographers, great and small, as England, it is scarcely worth while to mention his migration as an achievement of civilisation. Moreover, it was known that he had eaten of human flesh, but it was not with the gusto of those ancient Fijis who banqueted on salubrious sailors and munchable ministers whenever they had the simultaneous chance and appetite.

He was one of three survivors of the ill-fated Graceby polar expedition, and as such he had been obliged to subsist for some days on whatsoever was set before him by the cook, a discreet but overpowering person who certainly would have been the sole survivor if the relief expedition had been delayed a few days longer. But that portion of Mr. Cannable's history sounds much better in whispers and it does not look pretty in print. He never repeated it of his own accord. The newspapers told it for him when he was too weak and exhausted to deny or affirm.

His uncle, Sir John Bolingbroke, sent him out from London soon after his return from the frozen North to represent great financial interests on the Cotton Exchange at New Orleans. For two years the young man stuck manfully to his post in the southern city, but it was an irksome restraint to one whose heart was turbulent with the love of travel and adventure. Just at the time when he was ready to resign his position and hie himself into the jungles of the Amazon on an exploring expedition two things happened, either of which was in itself sufficient to stay him for the while. In the first place, his uncle died and left him two hundred thousand pounds in good English money, and in the second place he met Agatha Holmes.

The two hundred thousand pounds, it is but just to say, might not have kept him from the equator, but it is doubtful if all, much less any specific portion of the globe, could have induced him to leave Agatha Holmes. And so it was that Mr. James Cannable—for short "Jimmy"—remained in New Orleans for many months, estimably employed in the business of evolving a plan that might permit him to journey to the world's end with two hundred thousand pounds in one hand and a certain girl's future in the other.

The months and the plans were profitable, it seems, for one splendid evening saw him at the altar-rail beside the fairest girl in all the Southland, the queen of a thousand hearts. Agatha Holmes became Mrs. Cannable, and thereby hangs a tale. It would appear, from all the current but unpublished records of social Louisiana, that Agatha had gone about shattering hearts in a most unintentional but effective fashion up to the time Mr. Jimmy Cannable refused to be routed. Certainly it is no blot upon this fair young coquette's fame to admit that she had plighted herself to at least four ardent suitors in days gone by, and it was equally her

own affair if she took every woman's privilege of shifting her fancy before she was ready to marry.

Unluckily for Agatha, however, she neglected to disengage herself properly from the most recent suitor next before Mr. Cannable. So far as that worthy was concerned the engagement still obtained, for he, poor chap, was down in Patagonia somewhere surveying for railroads and did not have the slightest means of ascertaining her change of affection. How was he to know that she had married Jimmy Cannable, and how was he to know that she had forgotten his very existence without a single pang of remorse? He only knew that he had starved himself to give her a diamond ring, to say nothing of the wonderful old ruby heirloom that had been in the family for centuries.

He told her at parting that no power on earth could keep him from some day reclaiming the heirloom and with it the hand of the girl who was to wear it all her life.

One day, out of the past and up from the wilds, came the word that Harry Green was on his way home after an absence of three years. Agatha Holmes had been Mrs. Cannable for three months and she had forgotten young Mr. Green as completely as if he never had been a part of her memory. A cablegram addressed to Agatha Holmes one day was delivered to Agatha Cannable. It simply said: "Am coming back at last for the ruby. Harry," and it was sent from London. She found herself wondering what he was doing in England and how long it would be before he could reach New Orleans, but it did not dawn upon her for three full days that he still imagined himself to be her tardy but accepted fiance. Then in the fulness of her joy she sat down and laughed over his amazement—perhaps his chagrin—when he learned that she was another man's wife.

At first thought she decided to tell Jimmy the news, permitting him to enjoy the fun as well, but the discretion which shapes woman's ends forestalled the impulse. There was much she could not explain in justice to herself, to say nothing of the other man who had gone away with her in his heart. True, it may not have been difficult to hold her immaculate in a heart surrounded by Patagonians, but there was something disturbing in the fact that he had been constant, after all. She recalled, with a slight shiver (which grew with time, by the way), that she had sworn to kill herself rather than to marry any one but Harry Green. It also came back to her memory that the hot-blooded Harry had promised faithfully, though fiercely, that he would accomplish that end for her in case she violated her oath.

It is sufficient to say that she was the most wretched young woman in New Orleans by the time Harry Green landed in New York. He telegraphed to her, announcing his arrival and his hasty departure for the Southern metropolis. Somehow the slip of paper read like a death-warrant to her peace of mind.

"How annoying it is to have an old affair revived like this," she wailed to herself. "Why couldn't he, too, have married some one else? How, in Heaven's name, will it end?" She thought of a thousand subterfuges through which she might avoid seeing him, but put them all aside with the recollection of his indomitable will. He would see her sooner or later; the inevitable could not be avoided.

She finally took to her bed with daily headaches, distractedly but stealthily studying a railroad time-table.

"He's leaving New York by this time. Good Heaven, he'll be in Mobile by one o'clock tomorrow, Pass Christian a few minutes later—oh, dear, I wonder if he will be terribly violent! Jimmy is noticing, too. He says I'm ill. He wants to take me to California, but I don't dare—I don't dare! Harry Green would be sure to follow. I know him—oh, how well I know him! He would—"

A servant came in to announce that Miss Carrithers was down stairs.

"Ask her to come up," sighed Agatha. "I'll tell her myself that I don't want to see her, but it won't mean anything to Betty. She'll stay all morning."

"Yes, ma'am," agreed the maid as she hurried away. A moment later Miss Carrithers fairly bounded into the darkened bed-chamber, her face full of excitement.

"Have you heard?" she gasped, dropping upon the side of the bed. "Harry Green's coming home. He's in New York now. Joe Pierce had a telegram."

"Yes, I know," said Agatha drearily.

"Have you heard from him—you?" demanded Miss Betty in amazement—and some little concern.

"Of course, Betty; why shouldn't I?" irritably.

"Oh, I suppose it's all right," said the other dubiously. "I was only thinking of the—of the old days."

"Betty," said Mrs. Cannable, sitting up suddenly and grasping her friend's hand, "I'm the most wretched creature on earth. I don't know what I'm to do."

"Is it about—about Harry Green?" "Yes. You see, dear, he—he doesn't know I'm married."

"Goodness, Agatha! You don't mean he—he still thinks you are engaged to marry him?"

"That's just it, Betty. I didn't tell him—in fact, I had forgotten all about him, away down there in Patagonia, wherever it is. He—"

"And, oh, he was so terribly in love with you—and you with him, too!"

"No, no; don't say that. It was so foolish. Besides, he's been gone nearly three years. How could he expect me to wait all that time? I haven't had a letter from him for more than a year. I counted it up today."

"Does Jimmy Cannable know about—him?"

"I don't know and I'm afraid to ask."

"Harry's a frightfully determined person," mused Betty Carrithers reflectively.

"He swore I should be his wife if we waited a thousand years."

"That's the one thing in your favour. When they swear such things as that they can't possibly mean all they say," said Miss Betty sagely. She was the prettiest and most popular girl in town, but she was a wise body for all that. Her trim little figure was surcharged with a magnetism that thrilled one to the very core; her brown eyes danced ruthlessly through one's most stubborn defences; her smile and her frown were the thermometers by which masculine emotions could be gauged at a glance. "It will be rather difficult to face him, won't it?"

"Betty, it's simply impossible! Think of Harry Green waiting all these years, believing in me, as constant as the sun—and then to find I've married some one else. You know I love Jimmy Cannable with all my heart. I can't bear the thought of what might happen if he and Harry quarrelled about—about those old days."

"Don't cry—don't be a goose! It's the commonest thing in the world. Every girl has had dozens of affairs."

"I know, but not just like this one. My husband wants to take me to California. I wish—oh, how I wish I could go! But Harry would follow—I know he'll be merciless."

Miss Carrithers was thoughtful for several minutes, paying slight heed to the doleful sobs from the bed.

"I'll tell you what, Agatha," she said at last; "I believe this affair can be managed easily enough if you will just leave town."

"Oh, Betty!" sitting up and looking at her friend hopefully.

"Of course, I never had a chance at Harry Green. You monopolised him. I liked him immensely—from a distance. You go away, and let me explain the situation to him."

It was the straw that the drowning person grasps, and Mrs. Cannable clutched it with a shriek of delight. She poured her story into the ears of her too loyal friend, who smiled confidently in response to her apprehensions.

Miss Carrithers did not exchange confidences, however; she merely gave promises to do her best. She was shrewd enough to know that if she confessed to Agatha that she had cared for Harry Green—from a distance—that capricious and perverse young person would have declined to retire from the field of strife. After all, Betty admitted to herself, it was not wholly a service of sacrifice she was granting her friend. There was something of a selfish motive in her loyalty.

"I'll love you forever if you will explain everything and send him away," said Agatha in the end.

"At least, I shall explain everything," agreed Betty complacently. Agatha blushed consciously as she drew a small diamond from among those on her fingers.

"I didn't know his address, so you see I couldn't send it back to him," she explained. "And, Betty, if you'll hand me my jewel box I'll ask you to return that—er—you remember my old ruby pendant!"

"Was—that—did he give it to you?"

"Yes. You don't know how I hate to give it up. Isn't it beautiful?" She reluctantly let the ruby slip from her fingers into those of her friend.

"Perfectly gorgeous," said Betty, fastening it about her neck and surveying herself in the cheval glass. "I'd give anything if it belonged to me."

"Now, excuse me a minute, dear. I'll telephone to Jimmy and tell him we'll start for California tonight. Harry gets here tomorrow at 4:45 on the limited."

"You can be well out of the way by that time," said pretty Miss Carrithers with a smile.

"And now, Betty, you will send him back to Patagonia, won't you?"

"I'll keep him away from California, my dear, that's all."

Miss Carrithers sat in her carriage outside the railroad station, waiting for the train that was to bring Harry Green into New Orleans. Outwardly she was cool, placid; inwardly she was a fever of emotions. He had telegraphed the time of his arrival to Agatha; Betty received and read the message. Mr. and Mrs. Cannable were miles westward, hurrying to California. It was one thing to say she would take certain responsibilities off the hands of the bride; it was altogether another proposition to sit there and wait for the man she had admired for four or five years with a constancy that surprised even herself. Her reflections at this specific hour were scarcely definable. Chief among them was a doubt—this doubt: Would Harry Green remember her? It seemed such an absurd doubt that she laughed at it—and yet cultivated it with distracting persistency.

The train was ten minutes late. A newsboy had made two trips to the train-board in quest of information. When the big locomotive finally thundered and hissed its way to a stand-still near the gates, Canal Street seemed to have become a maze of indefinite avenues, so dizzy had she grown of a sudden. Her eyes searched the throng that swept through the gates; at last she saw him approaching.

She had expected a tired, worn man, unfashionably dressed, eager-eyed and wistful. Instead, the tall fellow who came forth was attired in the most modern English garments; he was brown, fresh-faced, keen-eyed and prosperous looking. The same old Harry Green grown stronger, handsomer, more polished. His black eyes

were sweeping the street anxiously as if in search of some one. He did not see Betty Carrithers, and her heart sank.

Behind him stalked two gigantic negroes. They were the centre of all observation. People stared at the blacks who carried Harry Green's bags as if they were looking upon creatures just out of an Arabian Night's tale. Nearly seven feet tall and of Herculean proportions were these giants. It is no wonder that the crowd gaped and felt something like awe mingling with curiosity.

Mr. Green, erstwhile Patagonian surveyor, started at the sound of a soft voice close at hand, a voice in which grateful surprise was uppermost.

"Why, Harry Green! How do you do!" He turned and beheld Miss Carrithers. She was leaning forward in her carriage, her little gloved hand extended toward him impulsively. She was amazed to see a look of relief flash in his eyes. His smile was broad and wholesome as he gripped the little hand in a mighty brown one.

"Betty Carrithers!" he exclaimed. "Now, this is like home! By George, you haven't changed a bit."

"Don't you think so!" She flushed. "It's been several years, you know. A woman can change terribly in—"

"Ah, but you've just changed into a woman."

"And what a man you've grown to be," admiringly.

"I hope so. Patagonia would make a man of any one. Are you expecting some one?"

"I was; but I see every one has come out. Won't you let me take you up town? Goodness, who are those awful giants that stand over there all the time like guards?"

"They're from Patagonia. Call them anything you like; they don't understand English. They are my men of all work. Thanks, I will ride up with you. Tell him to stop at the St. Charles." Then he turned and spoke to the giants, who solemnly nodded their heads and climbed into a cab close by. Green seated himself beside Miss Carrithers. There was a hunted look in his eyes and a nervous tremor in his voice. "A sort of bodyguard, as it were, Betty. By the way, you haven't seen Agatha Holmes, have you? I telegraphed to her."

Miss Carrithers had braced herself for this question and she also had prepared an answer. She could not look at his face, however, despite her determination.

"Agatha Holmes! Is it possible you haven't heard? Don't you know that—that she is married?"

She knew in her heart it was a cruel blow, but it was the best way, after all. Instinctively she felt that he had ceased breathing, that his body was stiffening under the shock, that his eyes were staring at her unbelievingly. Imagine her surprise, even consternation, when, after a breathless moment, his tremendous sigh of relief was followed by the most cheerful of remarks.

"Good Lord!" he fairly gasped, "that simplifies matters!"

She turned like a flash and found his face radiant with joy. It was hard for her to believe her own senses. He actually was rejoicing; she had expected him to groan with despair. It is no wonder that her plan of action was demolished on the instant; it is not surprising that every vestige of resourcefulness was swept away by this amazing reverse. She stared at him so pathetically, so helplessly, that he laughed aloud.

"I know what you're thinking," he said, and there was no mistaking the lightness of his heart. "I don't blame you for being shocked if you thought I had come back to such a fate as you evidently pictured. Betty, by Jove, you'll never know how happy you've made me!"

"I—I am surprised. Agatha told me that you—you—"

"And she's really married? Never mind what she told you. It doesn't matter now. Is she happy?"

"She adores her husband—young Jimmy Cannable. You know him. She will be crazy with joy, Harry, when she finds out that you, too, are happy. She was half mad with remorse and all that. It will—"

"Heavens, Betty, I thought I was the remorseful one. By George, I love you for telling me this!"

A shocking suspicion hurtled through her brain.

"You mean, there is—another woman?" she said with a brave effort. She even smiled accusingly.

"Some day I'll tell you all about it," he said evasively. "I—I suppose it would be all right for me to go round and call on Agatha this evening."

"She is not in town. California," said Betty.

"Great Scott! In California?" The dismay in his face was even greater than the relief of the moment before.

"Not exactly. She's on her way."

"By George, I wonder if I can catch her by wire? I must—I really must see her." He was so agitated that she observed beads of perspiration starting on his brow. She was mystified beyond description. Was he, after all, she found herself wondering, playing a part? Was it in his crafty heart to follow and kill Agatha Holmes!

"Oh, no,—you can't do that," she protested quickly. "Won't you—come out to dinner tonight?" she added somewhat confusedly. "We can talk over old times."

"Thanks, Betty, but I can't." At the same time he glanced uneasily at a cab which drove along close behind

them.

"You were going to call upon Agatha," she pouted.

"But not at dinner-time," he said, mopping his brow. "I'll come up about nine, if I may."

He came at nine, a trifle out of breath and uneasy in his manner. The great Green ruby hung from the chain that encircled Betty's slim, pretty neck. Its soft red eye glowed like a coal against the white skin, but if she thought to surprise him with it, she was to be disappointed. He did not look at it.

She did not know at the time that a giant Patagonian stood beneath the gas lamp at the corner above the Carrithers mansion in St. Charles Avenue. His gaunt, dark face was turned toward her doorway and his fierce eyes seemed to bore holes through the solid oak.

"I can't stay very late," he said almost as he responded to the greeting. "Confounded business engagement. Where is Agatha to stay in California?"

"I don't know. It wasn't decided. Perhaps they'll go to Japan."

"Good Lord!"

"You seem terribly interested, for a man who doesn't care," she said.

"I should say I am interested—but not in the way you think." After a moment's reflection, as he stood looking down upon her, he went on excitedly, "I'll tell you something, Betty. You're a good sort, and you can keep a secret as long as any woman—which isn't long, of course. But it will be long enough for me to get out of town first. I must go to California tomorrow. Wait! Don't look like that! I'm not going to annoy Agatha. She'll understand when she hears what I have to say. Have you ever noticed the ruby pendant that she wears—or wore, perhaps?"

"The big one she called her 'coal of fire' because it burned her conscience so terribly? Yes."

"Well, I gave it to her. I've just got to have it back. That's the whole story. That's what I'm here for. That's why that awful black devil is standing out there on the corner. See him? Under the gas lamp?" He drew the curtains aside and she peeped out. "He's waiting for me."

"What does it mean?" she cried, with a nameless dread creeping over her.

"He is there in the interest of my father-in-law," said Mr. Green.

"You—-your father-in-law?" she gasped, staring at him wildly.

"Yes—my wife's father," he said somewhat plaintively. He sat down near her, a nervous unsettled look in his eyes. She felt her heart turn cold; something seemed to be tightening about her throat. The light of hope that had been fanning began to flicker its way to extinction.

"You are married?" came from her stiff lips.

"Yes," he replied doggedly. "A year ago, Betty. I—I did not write to Agatha about it because I—I hoped that she'd never know how false I was to my promise. But, she's done the same thing; that takes a terrible load off my mind. I feared that I might find her waiting, you know. It would have been hard to break it to her, don't you see?"

To his amazement, she laughed shrilly, almost hysterically. In the flash of a moment's time, her feeling toward Harry Green began to undergo a change. It was not due to the realisation that she had lost all hope of having him for her own; it was, instead, the discovery that her small girlish love for him had been the most trivial of infatuations and not real passion. She laughed because she had pitied Agatha and Green and herself; she laughed, moreover, in memory of her deliberate eagerness to assume Agatha's burdens for purely selfish reasons.

"I know it's amusing to you," he agreed with a wry smile. "Everything amused you, as I remember, Betty. Do you remember that night in Condit's conservatory when you and I were hiding from—"

"Don't, please!" she objected, catching her breath painfully. "I was a foolish girl then, Harry. But tell me all about your—your wife. I am crazy to know."

He looked involuntarily toward the window before replying; she observed the hunted look in his eyes and wondered.

"There isn't much to tell. She lives in Patagonia," he said, somewhat sullenly. Then he glanced at his watch.

"What! Is she a—a native?" she cried.

"She was born there, but—Good Lord, you don't think she's black?"

"Or even a giantess," she smiled.

"She's white, of course, and she's no bigger than you, Betty. She isn't as pretty, I'll have to say that. But let's talk about something else. How am I to catch Agatha? It's imperative. 'Gad, it's life or death, Betty."

"What do you mean?" she asked, startled.

He swallowed painfully two or three times as he scraped the edge of the rug with his foot, looking down all the while.

"Well, you see, it's this way. I've married into a rather queer family. My—my wife's most damnably jealous."

"That isn't very queer, is it?"

"She has a queer way of being jealous, that's all. Somehow she's got it into her head that there's another woman up here in North America."

"Oh, I begin to see. And, of course, there isn't?"

"Certainly not. I love my wife."

"Good for you, Harry. I didn't think it of you," she said with a smile which he did not understand.

"Oh, I say, Betty, you are making fun of me."

"On the contrary, I'm just beginning to treat you seriously."

"I suppose I owe some sort of an explanation in connection with my remark about jealousy. It's due my wife."

"May I ask where she is at present?"

"She's on the range in Patagonia. I—I couldn't bring her here, you know. Betty, I want you to help me with Agatha. She's got that ruby and I simply have to get it back again. I'll tell you all about—about my marriage. Perhaps you'll understand. You see, I meant to be true to Agatha. But it was so cursed lonesome down there—worse than Siberia or mid-ocean. We were surveying near the west coast—rotten country—and I met her at her father's place. You see, they raise cattle and all that sort of thing there. Her old man—I should say Mr. Grimes—is the cattle king of Patagonia. He's worth a couple of millions easy. Well, to make a long story short, we all fell in love with Pansy—the whole engineering corps—and I won out. She's the only child and she's motherless. The old man idolises her. She's fairly good-looking and—well, she's being educated by private tutors from Buenos Aires. I'm not a cad to tell you. She's pure gold in spite of her environment."

"No doubt, if she's surrounded by millions."

"Don't be sarcastic. Some day she'll come in for the old man's money. She'll be educated by that time and as good as anybody. Then we'll come back to the States and she'll—well, you'll see. The only trouble is that she thinks there's a woman up here that I loved before I loved her. One day, shortly after we were married, she found a photograph of Agatha which I'd always carried around in my trunk. It was the picture in which she wore the Green ruby. Don't you remember it? Well, you can't imagine how she carried on. She acted like a sav—but I won't say it. She has had no advantages—yet, and she's a bit untrained in the ways of the world. Of course, she hated Agatha's face because it was beautiful. She complained to the old man. The worst of it all is that I had already shown her a picture of the ruby, taken from that eastern magazine, and she recognised it as the one on Agatha's neck. "Well, you should have heard the old—my father-in-law! Phew!"

"What did he say?" asked Betty, pitying him.

"I can't repeat it. He went on at a fearful rate about fellows of my stripe having wives in other parts of the world, and he was in a condition to commit murder before he got through. It all ended with a monstrous demand from my wife. She commanded me to produce the pendant. By George, Betty, I was in a frightful mess!

"I could only say it was in New Orleans. The old man looked holes through me and said he'd give me four months in which to produce it. Anything that Pansy demanded he'd see that she got it, if he had to shoot his way to it. You ought to see him! And, incidentally, she can shoot like Buffalo Bill herself. She shot a gaucho through the neck half a mile away."

"A gaucho?"

"Yes—a cowherder. Hang it, everybody carries a gun down there. Now you know why I'm here. The old man said if I didn't bring that ruby to my wife in a given time he'd find me and shoot me full of holes. She loves me, but she said she'd do the same thing. I've just got to have that ruby. They mean it."

"You poor boy," said Betty scornfully. "And I was feeling so sorry for you because of Agatha."

"It's no joke, Betty. These big blacks are my servants for appearance's sake only. They are in reality my keepers. The old man sent them along to see that I did come back, one way or another. They'd just as soon throttle me as eat."

"It would be easy to lose them up here, I should say."

"Well, I reckon you don't know a Patagonian. They can scent like a bloodhound and they never give up. Those fellows are here to attend to me, and they'll do it, never fear. Either one of them could thrash half the police in New Orleans. They are terrible! There's no escape from them. I'd thought of something desperate but—but Grimes himself is to be reckoned with. Sometimes I—I almost wish I hadn't won out."

"But think of the millions."

"The only thing I can think of, Betty, is that miserable ruby. I've got to recover it and sail for South America inside of ten days. And she's in California! Did you ever hear of such luck?"

Betty Carrithers walked over and looked from the window. The giant black was still under the street lamp and she could not repress a shudder as she glanced from time to time to the man on the couch. A feeling of pity arose in her breast. Harry Green was unworthy, after all. He was not what he had seemed to be to her in

those days of her teens. He was no longer an idol; her worshipful hours were ended. Instead, he was a weak, cringing being in the guise of a strong attractive man; he had been even more false than Agatha, and he had not the excuse of love to offer in extenuation. Pity and loathing fought for supremacy. Something was shattered, and she felt lonely yet relieved. Strangely, she seemed content in the discovery.

He was leaning forward, staring blankly at the rug, when she turned to resume her seat. A haggard face was raised to hers and his hand trembled as he jerked out his watch for the fourth time since entering the room.

"I'm a bit nervous," said he. "Time flies."

"Do you remember the fairy princesses of your childhood books?" she asked suddenly. "What would you say if one should quickly appear in real life?"

"What do you mean?"

"Outside stands the terrible ogre, ready to eat you up. Permit me to appear before you as the fairy princess. I can save you from death. My only regret is that I can not provide you with an enchanted tapestry, to waft you back to your lady love in the beautiful land of Patagonia. Here, behold! I restore to you the wonderful ruby!"

She unclasped the chain and dropped the great jewel into his shaking hand. He turned deathly white and then leaped up with a shout of incredulous joy. A hundred questions flew to his lips, faster than she could answer. She allowed him to babble on disjointedly for some time.

"Isn't it sufficient that I restore it to you? Why ask questions? It was my commission to do this thing. I'll confess it hasn't happened just as I anticipated, but what of that? Doubtless you recall this ring also. I think it signified an engagement. Take it. There may come a day when it will be ornamental as well as useful to your wife." He accepted the solitaire which she drew from her finger. His face was a study.

"Betty," he said, puzzled and helpless, "it—it isn't possible that it was you instead of Agatha that I gave these things to? I had typhoid fever down there. There are a lot of things I don't remember since then. It wasn't you, of course."

She laughed in his perplexed face—a good-humoured, buoyant laugh.

"If you can't remember, Harry, I shan't enlighten you. You have the ruby, isn't that enough?"

Ten minutes later he said good-bye to her and sallied forth into the night. She stood in the window and watched the huge sentinel stride off behind him like a gaunt shadow which could not be shaken off. That figure and another like it were to cling to his heels until he came to his journey's end. She smiled and shook her head pityingly as Harry Green passed out of her life at the corner below.

In her own room shortly afterward she took an old photograph from a drawer, looked at it a moment with a smile on her lips, and then tore it into many pieces.

"The strangest part of it is that I don't seem to mind," she said to herself, and that night she slept peacefully.

THE GLOAMING GHOSTS

PART I

Gloaming had been the home of the Gloames for two centuries at least. Late in the seventeenth century one of the forebears acquired the picturesque acres in Virginia and they have not been without a Gloame as master since that time. At the time when the incidents to be related in this story transpired, Colonel Cassady Gloame was the owner of the famous old estate and he was lord of the countryside. The power of the ancient Gloames was not confined to the rural parts of that vast district in southern Virginia; it was dominant in the county seats for miles around. But that is neither here nor there. The reader knows the traditional influence of every old Virginia family. It is like the royal household of an eastern monarchy. It leads, dominates, and sets the pace for all its little universe. No one cares to learn that the Gloames were the first family of them all; it does not matter especially that old Sir Henry settled there nearly a hundred years before the Revolution; it is simple history that some of the Gloames who followed after him fought like tigers for the

country in one war and just as hard against it in another. Let it be understood that Gloaming was two centuries old and that there was no fairer, prouder name in all Virginia than that which had been handed down to Colonel Cassady Gloame, the last of the race.

The rambling old house that faced the river was known from one end of the state to the other, not only for its age, but for its hospitality. The Gloames, whether wild or sedate, had always been famous for the warmth of their hearts. The blood was blue and the hearts were true, is what the world said of the Gloames. The years had made but little change in the seat of the Gloames. The mansion, except for the repairs that time demanded, was virtually the same as in the days of old Sir Henry. Nine generations of Gloames had begun life in the picturesque old house and it had been the pride of each. It had borne good Americans and blue Virginians. The architecture, like its children, seemed perennial. Time made few inroads upon the character of its lines. Its furnishings and its treasures were almost as antique. Decrepit age alone was responsible for the retirement of historic bits of furniture. The plate was as old as the hills, the service as venerable. Gloaming looked to be the great-great-grand-parent of every other habitation in the valley.

Colonel Cassady Gloame was the last of the long and illustrious race. He was going to the grave childless; the name would end with him. True, he would doubtless leave a widow, but what is a widow when one figures on the perpetuation of a name? The Colonel was far past sixty, his wife barely twenty-five. He loved her devotedly and it is only just to say that she esteemed him more highly than any other man in all the world. But there would be no children.

Mrs. Gloame, beautiful, cultured, gay as a butterfly, was the daughter of Judge Garrison of New York. She had been married for five years and she was not yet tired of the yoke. Her youth was cheerfully, loyally given over to the task of making age a joy instead of a burden to this gallant old Virginian. She was a veritable queen in this little Virginia kingdom. Though she was from the North, they loved her in the South; they loved her for the same reason that inspired old Colonel Gloame to give his heart and honour to her keeping—because they could not help it.

The Christmas holidays were always a season of great merriment at Gloaming. There never had been a Christmas Eve without festivities in the good old home of the Gloames. Sometimes, in the long array of years, there may have been sorrow and grief and trouble in the hearts of the inmates, but all such was dissipated when the Christmas bells began to ring. Even that terrible tragedy in the winter of 1769 lifted its shadow long enough to permit the usual happiness to shine through all the last week of the dying year.

There was always a genial house party in holiday times, and Gloaming rang free with the pleasures of the light-hearted. The Colonel himself was the merriest of the merry-makers, second only in enthusiasm to the sunny young wife from the North. The night of December 24, 1897, found the old mansion crowded with guests, most of whom were spending the week with the Gloames. There had been dancing and music and games, and eleven o'clock brought fatigue for even the liveliest of the guests. It was then that pretty Louise Kelly, of the Major Kellys of Richmond, peremptorily commanded the Colonel to tell the oft-told tale of the Gloaming Ghosts.

"Come to order," she cried to the guests in the double parlours. "Colonel Gloame is going to tell us about those dear old ghosts."

"Now, my dear Louise, I've told that story times without number to every soul in this house," remonstrated the Colonel. "You, to my certain knowledge have been an attentive listener for one hundred and nine times. Even though it brings upon my head the weight of your wrath, I must positively decline to—"

"You have nothing to say about it, Colonel Gloame," declared Miss Kelly definitely. "The first thing required of a soldier is duty. It is your duty to obey when commanded by the officer of the night. In the first place, you've not told the story to every one here. Lieutenant King has just confessed that he never has heard of the Gloaming Ghosts and, furthermore, he laughed when I told him that you boasted of real, live ghosts more than a hundred years old."

"Oh, we are very proud of our ghosts, Lieutenant King," cried Mrs. Gloame.

"I imagined that people lived in some terror of ghosts," ventured King, a young West Pointer.

"You couldn't drag the Colonel into the south wing up-stairs with a whole regiment of cavalry horses," said old Mr. Gordon, the Colonel's best friend.

"Tush," remonstrated the Colonel.

"There's a real ghost, a white lady who walks on air, who spends her time in the room whose windows look out over the low lands along the river," piped up little Miss Gordon, a grand-daughter in very short dresses.

"How romantic," laughed the Lieutenant.

The Colonel, despite his customary remonstrances, would not have missed telling the story for worlds. He liked to be coaxed. He was in his element when the score or more of eager guests, old and young, crowded into the room about him and implored him to go on with the tale.

"It's a mighty threadbare sort of a ghost we have here, my dear Lieutenant," he admitted at last, and there was a sigh of contentment from the lips of many. They knew the story would be forthcoming. "Poor old thing, I've told about her so often I'm afraid she'll refuse to come and visit us any more."

At this juncture, young Mr. Gates Garrison strolled leisurely into the room, coming from the dining-room where he had lingered with the apples and cider and doughnuts. He was a tall, fair young fellow of twenty-four, a year younger than his sister, the pretty Mrs. Gloame, and a senior in Columbia College. The Colonel stood with his back to the blazing grate, confronting the crowd of eager listeners, who had dragged chairs

and settees and cushions from all parts of the house to prepare the auditorium.

"Come here, Gates, and hear the ghost story," cried his sister, making room between herself and Miss Kelly.

"Same old story?" inquired the law student, stifling a yawn.

"Of course; come and sit between us."

"Oh, I'm not afraid of ghosts," replied Gates indifferently.

Miss Kelly looked daggers through her tender blue eyes.

"I wonder what that boy has on his mind?" murmured Mrs. Gloame anxiously.

"Nothing," responded Miss Kelly, sweetly. But the Colonel was beginning.

"Whatever you may think of this story," he began, "I can assure you that there is a very deep mystery attached to Gloaming and as I cannot offer the faintest explanation except to call your attention to the supernatural conditions which exist, I am obliged to admit that I, for one, firmly believe the house is haunted. For several generations the Gloame family, to an individual, has believed in the ghost of the south wing and our faith cannot be shaken. We have the evidence of our ears, our eyes, and of all who have undertaken to explode the theory. I'll be just as brief as possible, Major Harper, so you need not look at your wife's watch. My great-great-grandfather, Godfrey Gloame, was born in this house and he brought a beautiful bride here when he was married twenty-five years afterward. He was, as are all the Gloames, a Virginian of the old type, and he was a fire-eater, so the family records say. When he was married it was to a young lady of wealth and position in the North—a very gay and, if I must say it, a particularly—ah!—unsatisfactory mistress of a home." "What could you expect of a Yankee wife?" asked young Garrison, tantalisingly.

"They were different in those days," responded the grey old narrator, with a smile for his wife. "My great-great-grandmother was a beautiful woman, and she was well aware of that fact. Her husband was a jealous devil, as unreasonable as a jackass, and as stubborn as an ox. To make a long story short, after they had been married five years and had seen enough of the connubial hell to drive them both out of mind, he took a sudden fancy that she was false to him. A young Virginian, in fact, the very man who stood up with him at the wedding, was a frequent visitor at this house and was a decided favourite with my maternal ancestor. Godfrey went to drinking rather heavily, simply because he found it impossible to discover anything wrong in his wife's conduct—I may say that he had watched her, too, ladies and gentlemen. Being too honourable to accuse her of infidelity without having actual proof, he suffered in silence and his cups, all the time allowing the gap between them to grow wider and wider. One night he came home from Richmond late and saw his friend, Harry Heminway, leaving the place on horseback. Inflamed by jealousy, and drink, too, I reckon, he dashed up to his wife's room. I do not know what followed, for no one ever knew, but the next mornin' they found her dead on the bed, her throat cut from ear to ear in a most dreadful manner. He was dead on the floor, the same knife sticking in his breast. Their son, my great-grand-father, the famous General George W. Gloame, then a child of three, was lying on the bed with his mother, asleep."

"What beautiful nerves that kid must have had," muttered Gates.

"And did they never hang the murderer?" asked Lieutenant King.

"Good heavens, no! Didn't I say he had jabbed the knife into his own heart? How could they hang him? Well, all this happened in that room at the far end of the south wing—it's always locked now and has been for a hundred and thirty years. The furniture stands just as it was when that pair occupied the apartment. Now comes the strange part of the story."

"Ugh!" interrupted Miss Kelly, with a shudder. "Just hear how the wind whistles around the house. It positively gives me the shivers."

"Well, within a week after the murder queer things began to happen in that room," the Colonel went on. "Odd noises were to be heard, muffled screams came from behind the closed doors, and finally the people who lived here saw the white, ghostly form of my great-great-grandmother moving about in the room and in the halls. Ever since that time her spirit can be seen up there, for it comes around once in a while to see if anybody desecrates the room by trying to sleep in it. With my own eyes I have seen it—dozens of times. Since my marriage it has not been here, but I expect it almost any night."

George Washington appeared suddenly in the hall door and his stentorian though eminently respectable tones startled the entire assemblage, the Colonel included. There were a dozen little feminine shrieks and more than one man caught his breath sharply. George Washington was the butler at Gloaming.

"Majah Harpeh's kerridge, sah," he announced obsequiously.

"Oh, I'm so glad," gasped Miss Kelly, mightily relieved. Then, in confusion: "I mean, Mrs. Harper, that I'm glad it isn't the ghost, you know."

Half an hour later the parlours were deserted, except for the presence of a tall young man with a far-away, dissatisfied look in his eyes. In all the spare bed chambers guests were preparing for bed. Young Garrison had said good night to all of them and remained below stairs to commune with himself at the midnight hour.

For many minutes he sat before the fireplace, staring moodily at the flames. Gates Garrison admitted reluctantly that it was all very nice at Gloaming, that it was "a bully place to spend the holidays and all that, you know," but for a very well-defined reason he was wishing they were over and he was back in New York once more. He was in love. It is not unusual for a young man of his age to be desperately in love and it is by no means unusual that he should be in love with the most impossible of persons. Gates Garrison's affections at this period of his life were the property in fee simple of a very pretty and decidedly popular member of the

chorus at Weber & Field's. After convincing himself that he was quite alone in the huge old parlour, the hopeless Mr. Garrison guiltily drew from the inside pocket of his coat a thick and scrawly letter. Then he did things to this letter that in after years he would blush to acknowledge, if they remained a part of his memory. He kissed the scribble—undeniably. Then, with rapt eyes, he reread the lengthy missive from "Dolly." It had come in the morning mail and he had read it a dozen times. The reader is left to conjecture just what the letter contained. Mr. Garrison's thoughts were running something like this:

"Lord, if my sister knew about you, Dolly, she'd have so many fits that you couldn't count them. They think I'm an absolute stick when it comes to girls. If they only knew! What the deuce did I do with that photograph—ah, here it is. Inside vest pocket, left-hand side—just where it belongs."

He pulled a small photograph from his vest pocket and sat gazing at it rapturously. It was the portrait of the fair Dolly in tights. After a long scrutiny of this rather picturesque product of nature and the photographer, he arose and, with a sigh, turned off all the lights in the room, still holding the picture in his hand. The fire in the grate was now the only means of illumination in the parlour and the halls were dark. Reconsidering his impulse to go to bed, he threw himself in a chair before the grate, his elbow resting on the mahogany table at its right. There he devoted himself to—dreams. A wave of cold air crossing his back brought him from dreamland.

"Some one must have left a door open," he grumbled. He looked up and down the hall and then resumed his seat before the fire. A moment later the chilly draft struck him again. "Confound it! There's a devil of a draft from somewhere. It goes clean through me. Must be a crack in the floor. That's the trouble with these shacks that somebody's grandfather built before the flood." He vigorously poked up the fire and drew his chair a little closer to the circle of warmth.

Had he turned his head for an instant as he sat down he could have seen that he was not alone in the room. A tall, shadowy woman in white was standing in the hall door, looking pensively in upon him. For a full minute she stood there, hesitating between modesty and curiosity, and then turned as if to glide away.

Reconsidering, she smiled defiantly and more or less nervously, and then turned back into the room. Of course, he did not hear her as she approached. The mere fact that her filmy white dress was of the fashion in vogue before the Revolution should prove her identity to the reader. She was the Gloaming Ghost.

Gates Garrison was softly, tenderly addressing the photograph of the airy but not ethereal Dolly. The words were not for the ears of others. Even the infatuated lover would have despised the strain of softness in his tones had he known there was a hearer.

"If you could but speak to me," he was saying to the picture, "you'd make me happy, I know. You'd tell me that you love me. You'd tell me that you hate that meddlesome old man Ellison. You've got it just as bad as I have, haven't you, Dolly?"

"What a real woman she seems to be," exclaimed a soft silvery voice at his shoulder. Garrison whirled and looked up into the beautiful face of the ghost.

"Great Heaven!" he gasped, struggling to his feet, his eyes riveted to the face of the wraith.

"Only a part of it, my dear sir," corrected the ghost, with a rare smile in which courage struggled with diffidence. "Dear me, why do you stare at me so rudely?"

She was standing directly before him now, tall and straight. He was hanging to the mantelpiece, almost speechless.

"Who—what in Heaven's name are you?" he cried.

"Why, don't you know me? I am Mrs. Godfrey Gloame," she replied, a touch of resentment in her voice.

"The—the ghost?"

"That's what they call me," she admitted sadly. "It's such a horrid thing to be called, too. In reality, I'm merely a visitor from another world. There are many more of my kind in this room at this instant, sir, but you cannot see them. They are visible to me, however. If it interests you in the least, I can tell you that you are surrounded by ghosts. Please don't run! They can not hurt you. Why should they, even if they could? What a big, strong man you are to be afraid of such perfectly harmless, docile beings as we. Over in that corner, looking from the window, stands my daughter-in-law, Mrs. George Gloame. I saw her husband, my son, sitting in the hallway as I came through. Judging from their attitudes, they've had another of those horrid quarrels. I hope you'll pardon me for disturbing you. You looked so lonely I couldn't resist the desire to come in and see you as I was passing."

Gates was regaining his composure rapidly. The first uncanny shock was wearing off and he was confessing to himself that there was nothing to fear in the spectral bit of loveliness.

"I—I'm sure I appreciate the honour," he said, bowing low.

"Permit me to introduce myself," she went on, and he marvelled at her charm of manner. "I am the great-great-grandmother of Cassady Gloame, and the daughter of Van Rensselaer Brevoort, of New York. He is a millionaire."

"He must be a pretty old millionaire by this time, isn't he?"

"Oh, poor papa has been dead for a hundred and one years."

"Indeed? He isn't here, is he? I'm getting so I don't mind you in the least but I'd rather not meet any male—

er—ghosts, if you please." Mrs. Godfrey Gloame laughed unrestrainedly.

"Don't you know that we are nothing but spectral air?" she cried derisively.

"Ah, since you speak of it, I did feel your draft when you came in," he said. "But, if you will pardon me, Mrs. Gloame, there is something uncanny about you just the same. You'll admit that, I'm sure. How would you have felt when you were in the flesh to have had a horrible ghost suddenly walk in upon you?" "Oh, I am horrible, am I?" she said as she leaned toward him with an entrancing smile.

"Heavens, no!" he retracted. "You are a marvel of beauty. I don't wonder that your husband was jealous." She did not appear to have heard the last remark.

"How I used to live in terror of ghosts," she cried, looking about apprehensively. "Would you believe it, sir, up to the time I was married I could not bear the thought of being left alone in the house for a single minute of the night. The darkness, the mystic flicker of the lights, the stillness seemed to swarm with spirits—Oh, you don't know how I suffered with the fear of them."

"And after you got married—what then?"

"I soon had material spirits to contend with."

"How so?"

"That is an extremely personal inquiry, sir."

"I beg pardon if I have overstepped the bounds of politeness."

"I may as well tell you that my husband drank terribly. It's all over the country anyhow, I hear."

"The Gloame pedigree says that you drove him to it."

"I know that is what the Gloames claim, but it is a shameless slander. My poor, dear husband has told me since that he was wrong and he would give all he has on earth to set me aright in that hateful old pedigree. The poor fellow killed himself, you doubtless know. I was never so shocked in my life as when I heard that he had committed such a brutal act." Mrs. Gloame was looking sadly, reminiscently into the fire and there was a trace of tears in her voice.

"But, my dear madam, didn't he begin by slaying you?" exclaimed Gates in surprise.

"To be sure, he did destroy me first or I might have kept him from committing the awful crime of suicide," she said, despondently.

PART II

"But murder is so much worse than suicide," expostulated Garrison. "We hang men for murder, you know."

"I've a notion that it would be difficult to hang them for suicide. But you are quite wrong in your estimation of the crime. You do not know what it is to be murdered, I presume."

"Well, hardly."

"Nor what it is to commit suicide? Well, let me advise you, judging from what I know of the hereafter, get murdered in preference to committing suicide. I'd even suggest that you commit murder, if you are determined to do anything rash."

"And be hanged for it!" laughed Gates.

"You can be hanged or be d——d, just as you like," she said meaningly. "I wish you could talk to my husband if you are thinking of doing anything of the kind. I'm sure your young love affairs must be getting to the suicide stage by this time."

"But I don't want to kill anybody, much less myself. Oh, I beg your pardon," he cried suddenly. "Pray have a chair, Mrs. Gloame. It was unpardonable in me to let you remain standing so long. I've been a trifle knocked out, I mean disconcerted. That's my only excuse."

"You are not expected to know anything about ghost etiquette," she said sweetly, dropping into a chair at the side of the table farthest from the fire. Garrison had some fear that her vapoury figure might sink through the chair, but he was agreeably surprised to find that it did not. Mrs. Gloame leaned back with a sigh of contentment and deliberately crossed her pretty feet on the fender.

"Won't you sit nearer to the fire?" lie asked. "It's very cold tonight and you must be chilled to the bone. You are not dressed for cold weather." She was attired in a low-necked and sleeveless gown.

"I'm not at all cold and, besides, I did not bring my bones with me." He resumed his seat at the opposite side of the table. "Have you come far tonight?"

"From the graveyard a mile down the river. It is a beautiful cemetery, isn't it?"

"I am quite a stranger in these parts. Besides, I'm not partial to graveyards."

"Oh, dear me," she cried, in confusion. "The idea of my sitting here talking to a total stranger all this time. You must think me extremely bold."

"I am the bold one, madam. It's my first experience, you know, and I think I'm doing pretty well, don't you? By the way, Mrs. Gloame, my name is Gates Garrison, of New York, and my sister is the present Mrs. Gloame."

"The pretty young thing with the old Gloame husband?"

"Can't say she's pretty, you know. She's my sister."

"I passed her in the hall tonight."

"The dev—the deuce you did!" cried Gates, coming to his feet in alarm. "Then she must be lying out there in a dead faint." He was starting for the door when she recalled him.

"Oh, she did not see me. She merely shivered and asked a servant to close the door. An ill wind seems to be a north wind, so far as ghosts are concerned," she concluded pathetically. "So you are from New York. Dear New York; I haven't been there in a hundred and thirty-five years, I dare say. One in my position rather loses count of the years, you know. I suppose the place is greatly changed. And your lady-love lives there, too, I see."

"My lady-love?" demanded Gates, taken back.

"Yes, the girl who is so well dressed from her shoulders up," with a tantalising smile.

"You mean—this?" he asked, turning a fiery red as he tried to slip the picture of Dolly under a book.

"Let me see it, please. Who is she?" He was ashamed, but he held out the picture. A poorly disguised look of disgust crossed the startled features of Mrs. Godfrey Gloame.

"She's—a friend of the Colonel's," said Gates promptly.

"I should think his wife would do well to be on her guard. This is the first time I ever saw such a costume. In my day a woman would not have dared to do such a thing. Don't you know her?"

"Oh, casually," answered he, looking away.

"I'm glad to hear that. She is nothing to you, then?"

He shook his head in fine disdain.

"I don't care much for you men in these days, Mr. Garrison," she said.

"You're not complimentary."

"When I compare the men of my day—men like Godfrey—with the men of today, I thank Heaven I had the honour to be killed by a gentleman. You don't know how many unhappy wives I meet in the cemetery."

"Well, there are no women like you in this day, either. You are beautiful, glorious," he cried, leaning toward her eagerly. She shrank back with a laugh, holding her hands between his face and her own.

"How lovely," she sighed. "But keep away, please."

"Well, I should say," he exclaimed, his teeth almost chattering, so cold was the air that fanned his face. "I never got such a frost from a woman in all my life."

"If my husband had heard your words of flattery he would have created a terrible disturbance. He was fearfully jealous—a perfect devil when the spell came over him."

"A devil then and a devil now, I may infer."

"Oh, no; you do him an injustice. Godfrey really was an angel, and if he had not killed himself I think he would not now be in such an uncertain position. He is still on probation, you see."

"Between two fires, as it were."

"I think not. The last time I saw him he was shivering."

"I don't wonder," said Gates, ruefully, recalling the chill of a moment since. "Does he ever come here?"

"Not often. There are so many unpleasant associations, he says. It was here that the funeral took place and he has expressed very strong exceptions to the sermon of a minister who alluded to him as an unfortunate victim of his own folly. The idea! It would have been folly, indeed, for Godfrey to have lived after I was dead. Every woman in Virginia would have been crazy to marry him. And then one of the pall-bearers did not suit him. He had cheated Godfrey in a horse trade, I think."

"I should like to have known Godfrey Gloame."

"You would have admired him. He was the best pistol shot, the bravest man in all Virginia. Three times he fought duels, coming off victorious each time. He would have been an ideal husband if he had not been so indolent, so dissipated, and so absurdly jealous of Harry Heminway. I shall never forgive him for killing me on

account of poor Harry."

"Is that why he killed you?" asked Gates eagerly.

"He said so at the time, but he was sorry for it afterward. That is usually the way with jealous men."

"Whew!" exclaimed the man, starting up. "There's another draft, didn't you feel it?"

"It is my husband coming, I know his footstep," she said delightedly, looking toward the door.

"Holy smoke!" cried Gates, in alarm.

"Don't let him hear you speak of smoke. He is very touchy about it just now. Ah, come in, Godfrey, dear."

She crossed to the door to meet the tall, grey young man in the eighteenth century costume, Garrison looking on with open mouth, and rising hair.

Godfrey Gloame was a handsome fellow, albeit he was as transparent as glass. His hair was powdered with all the care of a dandy and his garments hung properly upon his frame. He kissed his wife and then glared at young Mr. Garrison.

"Who is this man, Beatrice?" he demanded, his hand going to his sword hilt. Mrs. Gloame caught the hand and there was passionate entreaty in her eyes. "Speak, woman! What are you doing here with him at this time of night?"

"Now, don't be cross, Godfrey," she pleaded. "It's only Mr. Garrison."

"And who the devil is Mr. Garrison?"

"What a very disagreeable ghost," muttered Gates, remembering that ghosts are harmless.

Mrs. Gloame led the unruly Godfrey up to the table and, in a delightfully old-fashioned way, introduced the two gentlemen.

"Mr. Garrison is the brother of my successor, the present mistress of Gloaming," she said.

"And a devilish pretty woman, too. I've seen her frequently. By the way, I stopped in her bedchamber as I came through. But that's neither here or there. What are you doing here with this young whipper-snapper, Beatrice?"

"Let me explain, Mr. Gloame," began Gates hastily.

"I desire no explanation from you, sah," interposed Godfrey, towering with dignity. "You would explain just as all men do under like circumstances. Beatrice, I demand satisfaction."

"Be rational, Godfrey, for once in your life. It is beneath my dignity to respond to your insult," said Mrs. Gloame proudly.

"Good for you, Mrs. Gloame," cried Garrison approvingly. "You would be a bully actress."

"Sah, you insult my wife by that remark," roared Godfrey Gloame, and this time the sword was unsheathed.

"Oh, I'm not afraid of you, old chap," said Gates bravely. "You're nothing but wind, you know. Be calm and have a chair by the fire. Your wife says you have chills."

"I do not require an invitation to sit down in my own house, sah. I am Godfrey Gloame, sah, of Gloaming, sah."

"You mean you were—you are now his shade," said Gates. "Ah, that's the word I've been trying to think of—shade! You are shades—that's it—shades, not ghosts. Yes, Mr. Gloame, I've heard all about your taking off and I am sure that you were a bit too hasty. You had no license to be jealous of your wife—she assures me of it, and from what I've seen of her I'd be willing to believe anything she says."

"Ah, too true, too true! I always was and always will be a fool. It was she who should have slain me. Will you ever forgive me, Beatrice, forgive me fully?" said Godfrey, in deep penitence.

"I can forgive everything but the fact that you were so shockingly drunk the night you killed us," said she, taking his hands in hers.

"Oh, that was an awful spree! My head aches to think of it."

"It was not the murder I condemn so much as the condition you were in when you did it," she complained. "Mr. Garrison, you do not know how humiliating it is to be killed by a man who is too drunk to know where the jugular vein is located. My neck was slashed—oh, shockingly!"

"Yes, my dear sah, if I must admit it, I did it in a most bungling mannah," admitted her husband. "Usually I am very careful in matters of importance, and I am only able to attribute the really indecent butchery to the last few sups I took from General Bannard's demijohn. My hand was very unsteady, wasn't it, dearest?"

"Miserably so. See, Mr. Garrison, on my neck you can see the five scars, indications of his ruthlessness. One stroke should have been sufficient, a doctor told me afterwards. This one, the last,—do you see it? Well, it was the only capable stroke of them all. Just think of having to go through eternity with these awful scars on my neck. And it was beautiful, too, wasn't it, Godfrey?"

Garrison thought it must have been the prettiest neck ever given to woman.

"Divine!" cried Mr. Gloame warmly. "My dear sah, there never lived a woman who had the arms, the neck, and shoulders that my wife possessed. I speak reservedly, too, sah, for since my demise I have seen thousands. A shade has some privileges, you know."

"Godfrey Gloame!" cried his wife, suspiciously. "What have you been doing? Have you been snooping into the privacy of—"

"Now, my dear girl, do not be too hasty in your conclusions. You'll observe, Mr. Garrison, that I am not the only jealous one. I have merely seen some shoulders. Very ordinary ones, too, I'll say. Oh, I am again reminded that I want an explanation for your damnably improper conduct tonight, madam. This thing of meeting a man here at twelve o'clock is—"

"Goodness!" cried Mrs. Gloame anxiously. "It is not twelve, is it! I must hasten away by a quarter after twelve."

"It lacks considerable of that hour," said Gates. Turning to Godfrey Gloame, who was leaning against the mantel, he went on to explain: "You see, sir, I was reading here and your wife dropped in—blew in, I might say—all without my knowledge, very much as you did. She had had no invitation, we had made no date—I mean arrangement—and I was paralysed at first. Your wife is a perfect stranger to me. There is a disparity in our ages that ought to protect her. I am twenty-four and she is at least a hundred and fifty."

"Sir! I am but twenty-five!" exclaimed Mrs. Gloame indignantly.

"Madam, I must remind you that you have a great-great-grandson in Colonel Gloame the present, who, by the way, is very proud of his ancestry. But pardon my jesting, please. Would you like a little brandy or a glass of wine? It is a cold night, even for shades. Let me prepare a toddy—it won't take a minute, and I know how to get up a cracker-jack. New thing in all of the New York clubs."

After a moment of indecision the two Gloames sank into chairs beside the table. Godfrey waved his hand pleasantly, courteously, to the young New Yorker.

"My dear sah," he said, "your explanation of this rather unaccountable situation is entirely acceptable. I see the position clearly, just as it is, and I humbly apologise for afflicting you with an insinuation. Beatrice, I crave your forgiveness again. Your proffer of the toddy, Mr. Garrison, is timely and I should be happy to place my approval upon your particular concoction."

"Godfrey," cried his wife in distress, "you swore you would never drink another drop."

"But this shall be the last," he pleaded, "so help me—so help me—Moses."

Garrison set to work with the Colonel's decanters, concocting a brew over the spirit lamp, the two wraiths looking on in silent admiration.

"How like you Mr. Garrison is, Godfrey," said Mrs. Gloame.

"Except the water, my dear," agreed Godfrey, taking it for granted that she referred to his ability to mix drinks. "Do you use the water to cleanse the goblet, Mr. Garrison?"

"Chief ingredient, Mr. Gloame," explained Gates, and Godfrey's heart sank heavily.

"By the way, have a cigarette while I am busy with this."

He tossed his cigarette case to Godfrey, who inspected it and the contents curiously.

"Are they to smoke, sah?"

"Certainly, light up, if Mrs. Gloame doesn't object."

"It used to be we had nothing but tobacco to smoke," said Godfrey Gloame, lighting a cigarette from a coal in the grate.

"Will it make him ill?" asked Mrs. Gloame. "He has a very frail stomach."

"I think the smoke will mix very nicely with his stomach," said Gates. "For want of something better to say, I'll ask you how you spent the summer."

"For my part, I stayed at home with the old complaint: nothing to wear," said Mrs. Gloame. "I am curious to know where my husband was, however."

"Well, I didn't need anything to wear," said he, naively. "My summer was spent a long way from heaven, and I have just this much to say to you mortals: you did not know what you were talking about when you said that the past summer was hotter than—excuse me, Beatrice; I almost uttered a word that I never use in the presence of a lady."

"You don't mean to say you have gone to—to—oh, you poor boy!" cried Mrs. Gloame, throwing her arms about her husband's neck.

"Not yet, dearest," said Godfrey consolingly. "I was merely spending a season with an old friend, Harry Heminway. He asked about you and I told him you were so far above him that he ought to be ashamed to utter your name. Ah, Mr. Garrison has finished the toddy."

Garrison ceremoniously filled the goblets and handed them to his guests. Godfrey Gloame arose grandly, holding his glass aloft.

"Well, Mr. Garrison," he said, "I can only say to you that I am glad to have met you and that I am sincerely

sorry we have not been friends before. You have given us a very pleasant evening, quite unexpectedly, and I drink to your very good health." "Hold, sir!" cried Gates. "I am sure you will allow me to suggest an amendment. Let us drink to the everlasting joy of the fair woman who is your wife. May her shadow never grow less."

"Thank you," said she, "I bid you drink, gentlemen, and share the joy with me. Ah!" as she set the goblet down, "that is delicious."

"Superb!" cried her husband. "My dear sah, it thrills me, it sends a warmth through me that I have not experienced in a hundred and thirty-five years. How long do you expect to remain at Gloaming?"

"One week longer."

"I shall come again if you will but prepare another like this."

"You swore that this would be your last, Godfrey; are you as vacillating as ever!" cried his wife.

"I—oh, dearest, a few of these won't hurt me—you know they won't," came earnestly from the other wraith.

"If you touch another I shall despise you forever and forever," she cried firmly. "Take your choice, Godfrey Gloame."

"It's plain that I am doomed to eternal punishment, whichever way you put it," mourned poor Godfrey. "Take away the glasses, Mr. Garrison. I'll no more of it if my wife so disposes."

"Noble fellow," said Gates. "Have another cigarette!"

"Stay! I have heard that they are worse than liquor," objected Mrs. Gloame.

"I don't know but you are right," supplemented Gates.

"But I must have some sort of a vice, dear," pleaded poor Godfrey.

"Vice may be fashionable on earth, but if that's the case it was fashion that ruined us, you'll remember, Godfrey," she reminded him.

"That's worth thinking about," mused Garrison. "There is something deep in that observation. You spooks are—"

"'Spooks!" cried the Gloames, arising in deep resentment.

"I mean shades," apologised Gates. "You do say—"

"Pardon me," interrupted Godfrey, nervously, "but can you tell me what time it is?"

"Ten minutes after twelve, sir." "Oh, we must be going," cried Mrs. Gloame.

"What's the rush?" demanded Gates.

"We cannot stay out after twelve-fifteen, sah. We get an extra fifteen minutes on Christmas Eve, you know," explained Godfrey.

"We are led to believe that you stay out till the cock crows," said Gates.

"Oh, these absurd superstitions," cried Mrs. Gloame merrily. "How ignorant the people are. Are you going my way, Godfrey?"

"Yes, dear, and I care not what the direction may be. Good-night, Mr. Garrison."

"Good-night," added the beautiful Mrs. Gloame, "and a Merry Christmas. I sincerely hope we have not annoyed you."

"I have never enjoyed anything so hugely. No one will believe me when I tell this story at the club. Merry Christmas to both of you. You'll come again, won't you?"

They were at the door and looking back at him.

"If you care to come to the room in the south wing, you will find me there at most any time, Mr. Garrison," was her parting invitation. Gates was positive he heard Godfrey swear softly as they glided away in the darkness.

And no one did believe him when he told the story at the club.

WHEN GIRL MEETS GIRL

At a glance one would have said that they were desperadoes—the two of them. The one who stood outside the shadow of the black, low-lying wall was a brawny, sinister-looking woman whose age might have been

fifty or it might have been thirty, so deceptive was the countenance she bore. Her companion, a short, heavily built creature, slunk farther back into the protecting shadows and betrayed unmistakable signs of nervousness, not to say fear. At the corner below a shuddering automobile purred its ugly song, the driver sitting far back in the shelter of the top, her eyes fixed steadily upon the two who lurked in the shadow of the wall that surrounded the almost deserted club house. The woman who drove the car manifestly was of a station in life far removed from those who stood watch near the opening in the hedge-topped wall that gave entrance to the grounds of the Faraway Country Club. Muffled and goggled as she was, it was easily to be seen that she was of a more delicate, aristocratic mould than the others, and yet they were all of a single mind. They were engaged in a joint adventure, the character of which could not be mistaken.

The taller of the two women suddenly darted into the shadow, gripping the arm of her companion with a hand of iron.

"Sh! Here he comes. Remember now, Brown: no faltering. He's alone. Don't lose your nerve, woman."

"I'm new at this sort of thing, Quinlan," whispered the other nervously. "I don't like it."

"You're not supposed to like it, but you've got to see it through, just the same. Stand ready, and do what I told you. I'll take care of the rest."

A young man, tall and graceful, came swinging down the shrub-lined walk, whistling a gay little air, far from suspecting the peril that awaited him at the gate below. His cheery farewell shout to friends on the club-house veranda had been answered by joyous voices. It was midnight.

"Better wait awhile, old man," some one had called after him. "It's bound to rain cats and dogs before you get to the trolley."

"A little water won't hurt me," he had shouted back. "So long, fellows."

When he passed through the gate, under the single electric light that showed the way, and turned swiftly into the dark lane, threatening rolls of thunder already smote the air and faint flashes of lightning shot through the black, starless sky. A gust of wind blew a great swirl of dust from the roadway, filling his eyes and half blinding him. As he bent his half-turned body against the growing hurricane, a pair of strong arms seized him from behind; almost simultaneously a thick blanket from which arose the odour of chloroform was thrown over his head and drawn tight. Shrill, sibilant whispers came to his ears as he struggled vainly to free himself from those who held him.

Some one hissed: "Don't hit him, you fool! Don't spoil his face!"

He remembered kicking viciously, and that his foot struck against something hard and resisting. A suppressed screech of pain and rage rewarded the final conscious effort on his part. Very hazily he realised that he was being dragged swiftly over the ground, for miles it seemed to him, then came what appeared to be a fall from a great height, after which his senses left him.

The automobile leaped forward, swerved perilously at the sharp curve below the club gate and rushed off into the very teeth of the storm, guided by the firm, resolute hands of the woman at the wheel.

Once, when they had traversed a mile or more of the now drenched and slippery road, the woman who drove the car in its mad flight—unmistakably the master-mind in this enterprise—called back over her shoulder to the twain who held watch over the captive in the tonneau:

"Is he regaining consciousness? Don't let him go too long."

"He's all right, ma'am," said the taller of the two ruffians, bending her ear to the captive's breast. "Fit as a fiddle."

"Say, we'll get twenty years for this if we're nabbed," growled the burly one called Brown. "Kidnapping is a serious business—"

"Hold your tongue!" cried the woman at the wheel.

"Well, I'm only telling you," grumbled Brown, nervously straightening her black sailor.

"It isn't necessary to tell me," said the driver. Her voice, high and shrill in battle with the storm, was that of a person of breeding and refinement, in marked contrast to the rough, coarse tones of her companions.

Mile after mile the big machine raced along the rain-swept highway, back from the Hudson and into the hills. Not once did the firm hand on the wheel relax, not once did the heart of the leader in this daring plot lose courage. Few are the men who would have undertaken this hazardous trip through the storm, few men with the courage or the recklessness.

At last, the car whirled into a narrow, almost unseen lane, and, going more cautiously over the treacherous ruts and stones, made its way through the forest for the matter of a mile or two, coming to a stop finally in front of a low, rambling house in which lights gleamed from two windows on the ground floor.

The two strong-armed hirelings dragged their still inert prisoner from the car, and, without a word, carried him up the walk to the house, following close upon the heels of their mistress.

A gaunt old woman opened the door to admit the party, then closed it behind them.

Two days passed before Cuthbert Reynolds, one of the most popular and one of the wealthiest young men in New York, was missed from his usual haunts, and then the city rang with the news that he had disappeared as completely as if the earth had opened to swallow him in a hungry, capacious maw.

Heir to a vast estate, unusually clever for one so markedly handsome, beloved by half the marriageable young women in the smartest circles, he was a figure whose every movement was likely to be observed by those who affected his society and who profited by his position. When he failed to appear at his rooms in Madison Avenue,—he had no business occupation and therefore no office down town,—his valet, after waiting for twenty-four hours, called up several of his friends on the telephone to make inquiries. Later on, the police were brought into the case. Then the newspapers took up the mystery, and by nightfall of the third day the whole city was talking about the astounding case.

Those whilom friends who had shouted good-bye to him from the country club veranda were questioned with rigid firmness by the authorities. They could throw no light upon the mystery. The unusual circumstance of his returning to town by trolley instead of by motor was easily explained. His automobile had been tampered with in the club garage and rendered unfit to use. The other men were not going into town that night, but offered him the use of their cars. He preferred the trolley, which made connections with the subway, and they permitted him to go as he elected.

Naturally the police undertook to question his friends of an opposite sex. It was known that many of them were avowedly interested in him and that he had had numerous offers of marriage during the spring months of the year, all of which, so far as could be learned, he had declined to consider. As for possessing evil associates among women, there was no one who could charge him with being aught but a man of the most spotless character. No one, man or woman, had ever spoken ill of him in that respect. The police, to whom nothing is sacred, strove for several days to discover some secret liaison which might have escaped the notice of his devoted friends (and the more devoted one's friends are, the more they love to speculate on his misdemeanours), but without avail. His record was as clear as a blank page. There was not a red spot on it.

Gradually it dawned upon every one that there was something really tragic in his disappearance. Those who at first scoffed at the idea of foul play, choosing to believe that he was merely keeping himself in seclusion in order that he might escape for the while from the notably fatiguing attentions of certain persistent admirers, came at last to regard the situation in the nature of a calamity. Eligible young men took alarm, and were seldom seen in the streets except in pairs or trios, each fearing the same mysterious and as yet unexplained fate of the incomparable Reynolds. Few went about unattended after nightfall. Most of them were rigidly guarded by devoted admirers of an opposite sex. It was no uncommon thing to see a young man in the company of three or four resolute protectors.

In the meantime, Reynolds' relations had the reservoir dredged, the Hudson raked, the Harlem scooped, and all of the sinister byways of the metropolis searched as with a fine-tooth comb. A vast reward was offered for the return of the young man, dead, or alive or maimed. The posters said that $100,000 would be paid to any one giving information which might lead to the apprehension of those who had made way with him. The Young Women's Society for the Prevention of Manslaughter drafted resolutions excoriating the police department, and advocating wholesale rewriting of the law.

The loveliest of Cuthbert's admirers was Linda Blake, and the most unheralded. No one regarded her as a favourite rival, for no one took the slightest notice of her. The daughter of a merchant princess, she was somewhat beyond the pale, according to custom, and while she was an extremely pretty young woman she was still shy and lamentably modest. As third corresponding secretary of the Spinsters' League she was put upon dreadfully by four fifths of the members and seldom had a moment of her own in which to declare herself to be anything more than a drudge in the movement to establish equality among God's images. She had little time for social achievements and but little opportunity to escape from the Spinsters' League by the means looked upon as most efficacious. She loved Cuthbert Reynolds, but she was denied the privilege of declaring her love to him because she seldom got near enough to be seen by the popular bachelor, much less to speak to him except to pass the time of day or to hear him reply that his programme was full or that his mother was feeling better.

She had but three automobiles, whereas her haughty rivals possessed a dozen or more.

And yet it was Linda Blake who took the right and proper way to solve the mystery attending the disappearance of Cuthbert Reynolds, the pet of all the ladies.

Let us now return to Reynolds, whom we left on the threshold of that mysterious house in the hills back of Tarrytown. When he regained his senses—he knew not how long he had been unconscious—found himself in a small, illy furnished bed-chamber. The bed on which he was lying stood over against a window in which there were strong iron bars. For a long time he lay there wondering where he could be and how he came to be in this unfamiliar place. There was a racking pain in his head, a weakness in his limbs that alarmed him. Once, in his callow days, he had been intoxicated. He recalled feeling pretty much the same as he felt now, the day after that ribald supper party at Maxim's. Moreover, he had a vague recollection of iron bars but no such bed as this.

As he lay there racking his brain for a solution to the mystery, a key rasped in the door across the room. He turned his head. A gas jet above the wretched little washstand lighted the room but poorly. The door opened slowly. A tall, ungainly woman entered the room—a creature with a sallow, weather-beaten face and a perpetual leer.

"Where am I?" demanded he.

The woman stared at him for a moment and then turned away. The door closed swiftly behind her, and the key grated in the lock. He floundered from the bed and staggered to the door, grasping the knob in his eager, shaking hand.

"Open up, confound you!" he cried out. The only response was the fast diminishing tread of heavy footsteps on a stairway outside. He tried the window bars. The night was black outside; a cool drizzle blew against his

face as he peered into the Stygian darkness. Baffled in his attempt to wrench the bars away, he shouted at the top of his voice, hoping that some passer-by—some good Samaritan—would hear his cry and come to his relief. Some one laughed out there in the night; a low, coarse laugh that chilled him to the bone.

He looked at his watch. The hour was three. With his watch in his hand, he came to realise that robbery had not been the motive of those who held him here. His purse and its contents were in his pocket; his scarf pin and his gold cigarette ease were not missing. Lighting a cigarette, he sat down upon the edge of the bed to ruminate.

Suddenly his ear caught the sound of soft footsteps outside the door. They ceased abruptly. He had the uncanny feeling that some one was peeping through the keyhole. He smiled at the thought of how embarrassing it might have been.

"Get away from there!" he shouted loudly. There came the unmistakable sound of some one catching breath sharply and the creaking of a loose board in the floor. "A woman," he reflected with a smile.

"If this is a joke, I don't appreciate it," he said to himself, looking at himself in the mirror. After adjusting his disarranged necktie and brushing his hair, he sat down in the low rocker to await developments.

He had not long to wait. A resolute tread sounded on the stairway, and a moment afterward the door was thrown open to admit the tall athletic figure of a very handsome young woman. Reynolds leaped to his feet in amazement.

"Miss Crouch!" he cried, clutching the back of the chair. A slow flush of anger mounted to his brow. "Are you responsible for this beastly trick?"

She smiled. "I expected to hear you call it an outrage," she said quietly.

"Well, outrage, if it pleases you. What does it mean?"

She crossed the room and stood directly in front of him, still smiling. He did not flinch, but the light in her eyes was most disquieting.

"It means, my dear Cuthbert, that you are in my power at last. You'll not leave this house alive, unless you go forth as my husband."

He stared at her in utter amazement. "Your husband? My God, woman, have you no pride?"

"Bushels of it," she said.

"But I have refused to marry you at least a half-dozen times. That ought to be ample proof that I don't love you. To be perfectly brutal about it, I despise you."

"Thanks for the confidence, but it will do you no good. I am not the sort of woman to be thwarted, once my mind and heart are fixed on a thing. Whether you like it or not, you shall be my husband before you're a day older."

"Never!" he exclaimed, his eyes flashing.

Before he could make a move to defend himself, she clasped him in her strong, young arms and was raining passionate kisses upon his lips, his brow, his cheek.

Weak from the effects of the chloroform, his struggles were futile. He would have struck her had there been a weapon handy.

"I'll die before I'll marry you, Elinor Crouch," he shouted, freeing himself at last.

"We'll see about that," she said, standing off to survey him the better. "I'll give you until tomorrow night to submit to my demands, peaceably and sensibly. Then, if you are still obdurate, we'll see what starvation will do to—"

"You wouldn't starve me, you wretch," he cried in horror.

"It's a most efficacious way of bringing a man to terms," said Miss Crouch, fixing him with glittering eyes.

"By Jove," said he, shaking his head in despair, "I knew we'd come to this sort of thing if we passed that infernal law giving you women the upper hand of us."

"We only ask for equal rights, my friend," she said. "This is the sort of thing you men used to do and no one made a fuss about it. Now it's our turn to apply the whip."

"I'm blessed if I'll vote for another woman, if I live to be a million," he growled.

"Oh, yes, you will. You'll vote just as your wife tells you to vote, and there's the end to that. But, I can't stand here discussing politics with you. I give you until tomorrow night to think it over. A justice of the peace will be here to perform the ceremony. You know I love you. You know I'll make you a good wife—a devoted, adoring wife. I am fair to look upon. I am rich, I am of good family. Half the men in the town would give their boots to be in yours. You have but to say the word and we set sail this week on my yacht for a honeymoon trip to the ends of the earth. Everything that love and money can procure for you shall be—"

"Stop! I will hear no more. Leave the room! No! Wait! Where am I?"

She laughed softly. "You are where no one will ever think of looking for you. Good night!"

She turned and went swiftly through the door. With an execration on his lips, he sprang after her, only to

find himself confronted by two vicious-looking women with pistols in their hands. With a groan, he drew back into the room. The door closed with a bang, the key turned in the lock, and he was alone to reflect upon the horrors of the fate ahead of him.

Elinor Crouch was a beautiful girl, and an alluring one. Even though he hated her, he was forced to admit to himself that she was the most beautiful creature he had ever seen. Not once, but a hundred times, had he passed judgment upon her physical charms from a point of view obtained in his club window, but always there had been in his mind the reservation that she was not the sort of woman he would care to marry. Now he was beginning to know her for what she really was: a scheming amazon who would sacrifice anything to appease a pride that had been wounded by his frequent and disdainful refusals to become her husband.

Would she carry out her threat and starve him if he persisted in his determination to defy her? Could she be so cruel, so inhuman as that?

He was considerably relieved after the few hours of sleep that followed his interview with the fair Miss Crouch, to find a bountiful and wholesome breakfast awaiting him. True, it was served by an evil-appearing woman who looked as though she could have slit his throat and relished the job, but he paid little heed to her after the first fruitless attempts to engage her in conversation. She was a sour creature and given to monosyllables, this Quinlan woman.

Reynolds had been brought up to respect the adage concerning "a woman scorned." He knew that women in these days are not to be trifled with. If Elinor Crouch set about to conquer, the chance for mercy at her hands would be slim. There was absolutely no means of escape from his prison. Daylight revealed a most unpleasant prospect. The barred window through which he peered was fifty or sixty feet from the ground, which was covered with jagged boulders. On all sides was the dark, impenetrable forest which marks the hills along the Hudson. After a few minutes' speculation he decided that he was confined in an upper chamber of the pump house connected with the estate. Investigation showed him that the bars in the windows had been placed there but recently.

In considerable agitation he awaited the coming of night, fully determined that if the worst came to the worst he would accept starvation and torture rather than submit to the cruel demands of Elinor Crouch. He would die before he would consent to become her husband.

She came at nine o'clock, accompanied by a fat little woman in black, who was introduced as a justice of the peace.

"Well?" said his captor, with the most enticing smile. "Have you decided, Cuthbert?"

"I have," said he resolutely. "I want to warn you, Elinor, that you shall pay dearly for this outrage. I shall—"

"Then you consent?" she cried, her face aglow.

"No! A thousand times, no! I mean—"

"You are wasting your breath, Cuthbert Reynolds," she interrupted, a steely glitter in her eyes. "Justice Snow, will you proceed at once with the ceremony? I will not—"

Reynolds sprang past her with the agility of a cat and hurled himself through the half-open door, hoping to find the way momentarily clear for a dash to liberty. Even as hope leaped up in his breast it was destroyed.

Two brawny figures fell upon him at the landing and he was borne to earth with a fierceness that stunned him into insensibility.

When he regained consciousness a few moments later, he was lying bound on the bed. The grim figure of the redoubtable Quinlan sat in the rocker over against the door, and there was a scornful leer on her thin lips.

"Bread and water for you, my laddy-buck," said she, with a broad wink. "What a blithering fool you are. The finest lady in the land wants to make you her husband, and you kick up a row about it. You—"

"You go to the devil," said Reynolds savagely.

Quinlan laughed.

For four days and nights, he remained in the small, bare room. Each day brought his persecutor to his side, and on each occasion she went away baffled but hopeful. She pleaded, stormed and threatened, but he held steadfast to his resolve.

"I'll die a thousand times, you fiend, before I'll consent to this ceremony. Go on starving me, as you've set out to do. What will you have gained in the end?"

"At least the consolation of knowing that no other woman shall call you husband," she said vindictively.

He was thin, emaciated and hollow-eyed for lack of proper sustenance. His captors gave him barely enough food and drink to keep body and soul together. Once a day the gaunt Quinlan brought bread and water to his room, and once the beautiful Elinor forgot her cigarettes and a bonbon box on leaving him in a rage. He hid the boxes after emptying them, cunningly realising that if he ever escaped her clutches the articles would serve as incontrovertible evidence against her. But Quinlan and Brown, strong and vigorous, were more than a match for him in his weakened condition. They choked him until he revealed the hiding place of the two gold boxes. Then they beat him cruelly.

"If you tell the boss that we beat you up, young fellow, you'll get your come-uppin's good and plenty," said Quinlan savagely, as he fell back exhausted in the corner. "You keep your mouth closed, if you don't want it closed forever."

"If you have a spark of humanity in your soul, woman, you'll give me food," he cried. "I am dying. Have you no heart, either of you? See here, I'll give each of you enough money to keep you in comfort for the rest of your lives if you'll—"

"None o' that, Mr. Reynolds," snapped Quinlan. "What do you take us for? Men?"

"Gad, I wish you were," he exclaimed. "I'd thrash you within an inch of your lives if you were."

"Well, don't go to offering us money, that's all. We're women, and we don't sell out a friend. Say, ain't you about ready to give in to her? You'd better say the word. She'll make you the happiest man on earth. What's more, you'll get a good square meal the minute you say you'll marry her."

"I wouldn't marry her if she were the last woman in the world," he cried. "Listen to me! Haven't you two women husbands who are dear to you? Haven't you husbands—"

"They're both in the penitentiary, curse 'em," snarled Brown, clenching and unclenching her hands. "I wish I could get my hooks on that man of mine, that's all."

"Lucky dog!" said Reynolds.

"You bet he's a lucky dog. I believe he got sent up deliberately."

"Well, he's only got eight more years to serve, Brown," said Quinlan. "He'll come back to you for food and clothes. Then you can make up for this lost time."

"I'll do it, all right," said Brown, smiting the window sill with her huge fist. Quinlan chuckled.

That night Reynolds made his last stand. When Miss Crouch left him, he was almost ready to submit. Had she but known it, another five minutes of argument would have brought him to terms. Starvation had conquered him.

"If I live till morning," he kept repeating to himself in the solitude of his cell, "I'll give in. I can't stand it any longer. I shall go mad."

He fell back on the bed and lay staring at the ceiling, a beaten wreck. Delirium was at hand.

Sometime during the night he was aroused from a fitful slumber by a sound at his window. The night was very dark. He could see nothing, and yet he knew that some one was there—some one who would help him in his final hour of despair. Struggling weakly from the bed, he dragged himself to the bars. Beaching between them, his hand encountered the topmost rung of a ladder. Some one was ascending from below. He could feel the supports quiver, he could hear the ladder creak beneath the weight of a living, moving body.

A moment later, the dull outlines of a head and shoulders appeared in the black frame—the head of a woman! With a groan of despair he shrank back, thinking that the visitor was one who had come to torment him in some new fashion.

"Cuthbert!" whispered the woman on the outside. "Cuthbert, dear, are you there? Speak!"

He staggered to the window once more. Hope buoyed him up. The voice was not that of one of his inquisitors. It was low, sweet, gentle, yet quivering with anxiety.

"Yes, yes!" he whispered. "Who are you? For God's sake, get me out of this place. I am dying here."

"Thank God, you are alive," came the tense whisper from the woman. "I am not too late."

"Who are you?" He had discovered that her features were rendered unrecognisable by an ugly pair of motor goggles. A thick veil held her panama motor hat in place.

She laughed nervously, even shyly.

"Never mind, Mr. Reynolds," she said. "Enough to say that I am here to release you if it is in the power of woman to do so."

"You call me Mr. Reynolds now," he protested. "A moment ago it was 'Cuthbert dear.' Who are you, oh, my deliverer?"

"Don't ask, please. Not now. You shall know in good time. How long have you been here?"

"Ages, it seems. In truth, but five days. She is starving me to death."

"The fiend! Tell me, are you married to her?"

"No!"

"Then I shall do my best to save you." He reflected. Perhaps it would be leaping from the frying-pan into the fire.

"Just a moment, please. How am I to know that I am bettering my position by accepting liberty at your hands."

"Oho! You fear that I may want to marry you against your will? Is that it? Well, the instant you are free you shall be at liberty to go whither you please and to marry whosoever pleases you. Is that fair enough?"

"Forgive me for doubting you. But how are you to effect a rescue? I am guarded by powerful women who would make short work of you in combat. I can see that you are slight. They are huge, well-armed creatures. Are you—"

"Don't worry about me," she whispered eagerly. "I can take care of myself. And now, be patient. I must leave you. The only way to release you seems to be through the house itself. I have no saw or file, but wait! There is a saw and file in the tool box on my machine. How stupid of me! I'll be back in a jiffy. Don't lose heart."

She went rapidly down the ladder. He bethought himself when too late and lighted the gas. His watch showed him that it was two o'clock.

Vastly excited and strangely revived, he awaited her return, praying that she might not be intercepted by the minions of Elinor Crouch. An hour passed. He was about to give up in despair, confident that she had been summarily dealt with by the eagle-eyed Quinlan, when stealthy sounds came to his ears from the landing outside his door.

A key was gently inserted in the lock. He prepared to defend himself by grasping the small rocker in his weak, trembling hands.

The door opened a few inches, then swung wide. Instead of Elinor Crouch or her hirelings on the threshold stood the lithe, graceful figure of a girl in a grey motoring suit. She sprang into the room. The goggles were no longer in evidence, but the green veil hid her features quite completely.

"Quick! Follow me! I have accounted for the tall woman who stood guard on the stairway. We must get away before the others discover her body."

"Good God! Have you killed her?"

"I hope not. Just a little tap on the head with this wrench, that's all. She'll come out of it all right. Hurry! I've got a couple of friends watching outside. They'll give the alarm if we fail to appear at once."

"Men? Thank heaven!"

"No! Women! What good are men at a time like this? Merciful—are you going to faint?"

He sank to the floor with a groan, and the chair clattered against the wall with a noise that must have been heard throughout the house.

When he opened his eyes again, his head was pillowed on her knees and she was wildly whispering words of love and encouragement to him.

"My darling, speak to me. I am here to save you! Open your eyes. Look at me! Don't—Oh, thank Heaven! You are alive!"

He looked up into the now uncovered face and an expression of utter bewilderment grew in his eyes.

"Linda Blake!" he murmured. "Can it be possible?" His fingers tightened on her arm and a glad light leaped into his eyes.

She pulled down her veil in confusion.

"Don't look at me," she whispered. "I hope you didn't hear what I said to you."

"I heard every word, love of my life. I—Listen! What's that?" He sat bolt upright.

"Some one's coming!" she cried, springing to her feet and placing herself between him and the door. He saw a glistening revolver in her small, white hand.

"It's Elinor Crouch," he whispered. "Heavens, how I have come to hate those footsteps of hers."

Elinor Crouch, her face pale with anger and apprehension, dashed into the room an instant later. She was attired in a loose wrapper, secured at the waist by a handsome Oriental girdle. Her black hair hung in two long plaits down her back. It was apparent that she had made no effort to perfect a toilet before rushing up-stairs in response to the noise.

Her dark eyes scarcely took in the slight figure of Linda Blake. They were for the man on the floor, and for him alone.

"Thank Heaven, you are here!" she cried, in a voice thrilling with relief. "I was afraid you might have—"

"Stand back, Miss Crouch," interrupted Linda firmly. "Don't you dare to touch him."

"Who—who are you?" gasped Elinor, for the first time granting the girl a look of surprise, but not of fear. "Why, on my life, it's that Blake girl. Soho! This is your work, is it? May I inquire, Miss Blake, what you are doing in my house at this time of night?"

"I am not here to parley with you, Miss Crouch. Stand aside, please. If you attempt to stop us, I shall shoot you like a dog."

"Oh, you think you can take him away from me, do you? Well, we shall soon make short shrift of you, my excellent heroine. Brown! Quinlan! Here, at once!" She called angrily down the stairs.

Linda smiled. "I think you'll find that my friends have taken care of Brown and Quinlan."

As if to prove the declaration, a ringing voice came up the stairway from far below.

"Are you all right, Linda?" It was a woman's voice and it was full of triumph.

"We've fixed these two muckers down here. Shall we come up?"

"Stay where you are, girls. I can manage nicely by myself, thank you," called Linda. Then she turned to the infuriated Elinor, who had shrunk back against the wall, panting with rage and disappointment. "You'd better come with us peaceably, my woman," she said coldly, still keeping the revolver levelled at the person of her rival. "Don't make any trouble for us. If you show fight we'll be obliged to—Here!"

Elinor Crouch suddenly threw herself forward. The movement was so unexpected that she was upon Linda before the girl could fire. Twice the revolver was discharged in a vain attempt to end the struggle at its beginning, and both bullets came so near to hitting Reynolds that he hastily rolled under the bed, from which position he watched the contest in some security but with a great deal of interest.

The combatants swayed back and forth across the narrow room, locked in a tight embrace. The Crouch woman was the larger and stronger, but her adversary was lithe and sinewy and as cool as a veteran in the line of battle. She succeeded in tripping the heavier woman, resorting to a new trick in wrestling that had just come into practice among athletic women, and they went to the floor with a crash, Reynolds' rescuer on top.

He crawled forth to assist her, keeping his eye on the pistol all the while. Weak as he was, he succeeded in sitting upon Miss Crouch's head while Linda attempted to secure her arms with the thick veil she had torn from her hat. He suffered excruciating pain when the furious Elinor bit him severely, but called out words of encouragement to the brave girl who fought so valiantly for him.

Just as Elinor Crouch relaxed with a groan of despair, two eager young women dashed into the room. In a jiffy, the late mistress of the situation was bound securely, hand and foot, and Linda Blake stood triumphant and lovely over her foe.

"We'll turn you over to the police," she said, smiling down upon the ghastly face of Elinor Crouch.

"For God's sake, spare me," groaned the unhappy captive. "It was all for love, Cuthbert. I—"

But Cuthbert Reynolds had already passed from the room, leaning feebly on the arm of his deliverer.

"How did you trace me here, dear?" he asked as they slowly descended the stairs.

"I found out that she was having her mail forwarded to the village over yonder, and I knew that she owned this place in the woods. I only had to put two and two together, Cuthbert. You—you don't mind if I call you Cuthbert, do you?"

He pressed her arm closer to his side. "You are a darling, Linda. I'll marry you tomorrow if you say the word."

She kissed him rapturously.

"It's too good to be true," she sighed.

QUIDDLERS THREE

CHAPTER I

THE THREE VAN WINKLES

It was not because Mr. Van Winkle had no love for his sons that he turned the three of them out of his house and home, but because he loved them well. There was Courtney Van Winkle—nicknamed "Corky" by his irrepressible brothers—and, besides him, the twins, Jefferson and Ripley. Courtney was thirty, the twins twenty-six. Jeff and Rip were big, breezy fellows who had rowed on their college crew and rowed with the professors through five or six irksome and no doubt valueless years; Courtney was their opposite in every particular except breeziness. But he was not breezy in the same way. He was the typical society butterfly, chatty to the point of blissfulness and as full of energy as a pint bottle of champagne. You could never by any stretch of the fancy liken him to anything so magnificent as a quart. Dapper, arrogant, snobbish, superior was he, and a very handy man to have about if one wanted to debate the question: Should spats be worn this year the same as last, or why WILL the common herd!

He had never done a stroke of work in his life. Nor, for that matter, had his towering, able-bodied brothers. They took the not unnatural stand that it wasn't necessary. Were they not the sons of the very rich Mr. Van Winkle? Wasn't he accountable for their coming into the world and wasn't he therefore responsible for them

up to the very banks of the Jordan? Of course, he was. No one will pretend to deny it. Work is intended only for those who long for a holiday, not for him who begins a vacation the day he is born. Such was the attitude of the Van Winkle boys, if not their argument.

For years old Bleecker Van Winkle had paid for their automobiles, their polo ponies, their pony ballets, their lobsters and other glorifications, and he had finally reached the conclusion that while it was practically impossible for him to part with his money, he was nevertheless a fool. So he sat him down to think. As the result of his cogitations—long-drawn-out—he turned over a leaf in the Van Winkle family history.

"Boys," said he, at the end of a rather stupefying half-hour for them, "you've heard what I have to say. You know that I love you all. You will agree that I have been a fond, foolish and over-indulgent father. As I've said before, it is my fault entirely that you are triflers and spendthrifts. I should have done better by you. You are college men. At least, you are CALLED college men, because, with the unceasing aid of well-paid tutors you managed to get your degrees. I regret, however, to say that you are not educated men. You are socially cultivated, but that's all. I am to be blamed for all this. Now I am paying the penalty. What I have just disclosed to you is the result of painful deliberation and with your welfare in mind, not my own. You have agreed at last to my proposition, not, I fear, willingly, but because there is no alternative. I have given Jeff and Ripley an excellent education in baseball, swimming, golf and Broadway. No doubt either of you could get a job as a professional baseball player. Courtney has been thoroughly polished by contact with society. He should have no trouble at all in earning quite a decent living by teaching the nouveau riche how to behave in polite society. If, in ten years, you all come to me and convince me that you have actually acquired something of a fortune without any assistance from me, I shall be happy to kill the fatted calf and divide it with you. Please bear in mind the little statement in regard to my last will and testament. Get it into your heads clearly. At my death my fortune goes to the three of you, share and share alike, but it is to be held in trust for ten years thereafter, principal AND INCOME intact. Note that, please: and income. It is possible, even probable that I may alter the will later on, but now it stands in just that way."

They looked at each other blankly for a long time after the old gentleman left the room. The expression in Courtney's cock-a-doodle face was beyond description. The world had come to an end! The twins were unable to lounge with their accustomed ease and elegance. They sat bolt upright for perhaps the first time in their lives. To them, the world was just beginning, and it was a hard, cold, unfriendly world that lay before them.

In exactly one week from that day the three of them were to start out in the world to make men of themselves. Each was to have two thousand dollars in money and each was to start the journey free from debt. Mr. Van Winkle agreed to square up every pecuniary debt of honour and every debt of folly. They were to shift for themselves, and they were to have a fair start. For at least three years they were to absent themselves from his home, support themselves without assistance from him, and report progress whenever they felt inclined to do so. He did not even require them to do that much unless they wished, but he assured them that he would be proud and happy if they could report PROGRESS.

"I don't ask you to get rich in ten years. You couldn't do it honestly, my lads. All I ask is that you support yourselves honourably and be as respectable as possible in this day and age. Don't try to be too respectable. People will discredit you. They always do. Be square." He had said this to them in the course of the amazing monologue.

"I can't live more than a month on two thousand dollars," whimpered Courtney, long after the old man had closed the door behind him. "Why, he hasn't the remotest idea what it costs to keep up one's end in society here in New York. I—"

"Shut up, Corky," growled Ripley. "We want to think."

"Don't call me Corky," snarled his brother. "You know I detest it, even when I'm feeling cheerful, and God knows I don't want to be spoken of lightly today."

"Do you mean that as a joke?"

"A joke? Oh, I see. I suppose you connect 'cork' and 'light' in your effort to—"

"Thank Heaven," broke in Jefferson, a shadow of relief crossing his doleful face, "we are spared one thing."

"What's that?" said Ripley.

"The pleasure of lending money to Corky."

Courtney's face fell. He had intended to ask his brothers for a small loan, and was ready to argue that they, being strong, healthy beasts, would survive as long on fifteen hundred dollars as he could possibly hope to exist on three thousand.

"I'm not asking for alms, confound you."

"By Jove!" exclaimed Ripley, with a gleam of joy in his eyes. "Didn't the governor say he'd settle all of our debts, giving us a clean bill to start with?"

"He did, bless his heart," said Jeff.

"Precious little good that will do me," lamented Courtney.

"Well, it may do me a lot of good. In settling your debts, Corky, it occurs to me he'll have to fork over that twenty-seven hundred dollars you owe me."

"Clever head, Rippy," shouted Jeff. "He owes me a matter of fifteen or sixteen hundred. Fine work. The old gentleman can't go back on the debts of honour. He'll have to settle for Corky's—"

"You go to thunder," grated Corky. "Do you suppose I'm going to see the governor stung by you two vampires? In the first place, it was HIS money I borrowed from you. In the second place—"

"Right you are, Corky," agreed Rip. "It WAS his money. We absolve him but not you. If the time ever comes when you are able to pay it back to me, out of your own pocket, I'll be pleased to collect. We'll let it go at that."

"I expect to starve to death inside of—"

"Oh, no, you won't. Neither of us will go so far as that." It was Jefferson who spoke. He arose and stretched his long, muscular frame. "Do you know, I think the pater is absolutely right in this thing. He—"

"RIGHT?" shrieked Courtney.

"Yes, right. We ARE loafers. We waste time over trifles. He wants to be proud of us if such a thing is possible. I don't blame him. If I ever have a son I'll know how to bring him up."

"This is no time to be sentimental, Jeff," said Courtney, with deep irony in his voice. "We are confronted by a catastrophe. Unlike most catastrophes, it awaits our pleasure. We are expected to walk up and shake hands with it and say, 'I'm glad to meet you, old chap,' or something of the sort."

"It IS a pretty howdy-do, I'll admit," said Rip thoughtfully. "Still, I agree with Jeff. The governor's right."

"You always agree with each other," said Courtney, pacing the floor in his despair.

"Don't pull your hair like that, Corky," cautioned Jeff, with a good-humoured grin. "You've got to be very saving from now on."

"A miserable pittance, a bagatelle," groaned Courtney.

"It IS getting thin," commented Rip.

"Eh? I'm not talking about hair, damn it!"

"Be a man, Corky," cried Jeff cheerfully.

"I asked you not to call me 'Corky,' didn't I?" He glared at his big brother. "How can you stand there grinning like an imbecile with all this hanging over you?"

Jefferson's smile expanded. "If dad can make men of all three of his sons, he won't have to die to go to heaven. He'll BE there."

"And you fellows could have married those awful Sickler girls without half trying last winter," groaned Courtney. "A million apiece in their own right! My Lord, if you could only have looked ahead!"

"We did!" cried the twins in unison.

A cunning gleam leaped into Courtney's watery eyes. He drew a long breath.

"I wonder—" he began, and then stopped.

"No," said Jeff, divining his thoughts. "You proposed to both of 'em, Corky. It's no use. You are NOT the Van Winkle twins."

After a time, they fell into a discussion of plans and possibilities. Their father had not left a loophole through which they could fire at random. His sentence was clean-cut. They could not fall back upon him for support, help or advice. It was all very clearly set forth. They were to find their own road and travel it to the bitter end.

"I'm willing to work," said Jeff. "The trouble with me is I don't know what to tackle first."

"That's my fix," said his twin.

"Well, I know the first thing I'm going to do," said Courtney, springing to his feet. And he did it an hour later. He succeeded in borrowing ten thousand dollars from a millionaire who had come to New York from Cleveland to live and die a Gothamite. With sublime disregard for the thing called conscience, Courtney included this new debt in the list to be prepared for his father, and permitted the old gentleman to settle without so much as a qualm of self-reproach. He considered it high finance, I believe. His brothers lived up to his estimate of their astuteness by never even thinking of a ruse so clever. Corky congratulated himself on getting a long start over them. Moreover, he had something else in mind. It will be disclosed later on.

A week later Mr. Van Winkle said good-bye to his sons, and they set out upon their travels somewhat after the fashion laid down by those amiable gentlemen who conceived fables and fairy tales and called them the Arabian Nights. You may recall the Three Sons of the Merchant, and the Three Princes, and the Three Woodmen, not to speak of innumerable trios who served Messrs. Grimm and Andersen with such literary fidelity.

The Van Winkle brothers started out rather late in life to make men of themselves. Inasmuch as they elected to start in separate and distinct grooves and as their courses were not what you might call parallel, we are likely to gain time and satisfaction by taking them up one at a time. We must not lose sight of the fact that they set out to acquire three separate and distinct fortunes.

Courtney set sail almost immediately for a land where "Corky" was an unheard-of appellation—or epithet as he was wont to regard it—and where fortunes hung on bushes, if one may be allowed to use the colloquialism. He went to France. It may seem ridiculous to seek fortunes in France, but he was not looking for French

fortunes. He was much too clever a chap for that. He was after American money, and he knew of no place where it was easier to get it than in France. By France, he meant Paris. If one is really smart, one can find a great many American dollars in Paris. For that matter, if one is a good bridge player and has the proper letters—not of credit but of introduction—he can make a splendid living in any land where civilisation has gained a substantial foothold. Nothing is so amiable as civilisation. It actually yearns for trouble, and it will have it at any cost. It is never so happy as when it is being skilfully abused. As a society parasite, Corky had learned that it is easier to fool a man who has brains than it is to fool one who hasn't any at all. He had come in contact with both varieties, and he knew. And as for women, one can always fool them by looking pensive. They cannot bear it.

Possessed of a natural wit, a stunted conscience and an indefatigable ego, he had no fear that his twelve thousand, slightly reduced by this time, would see him well along on his journey toward affluence.

Corky was well known in Paris. He had spent many a day and many a dollar there. At this season of the year, the capital was filled with New York, Philadelphia and Boston people whom he knew and with whom he might have fraternised if he had felt inclined. But he aimed higher. He hitched his wagon to the setting sun and was swept into the society of Middle and Far Western tourists; people with money they did not know how to spend; people who needed expert advice; people who hankered for places at Newport but had to be satisfied with Sugar Hills. His New York acquaintances knew him too well, but no better than he knew them. They had no money to waste on education. They needed all they could scrape together to keep the wolf out of Wall Street. He had no use in this direful emergency for frugal society leaders; he was after the prodigal climber.

Before he had been in Paris a week he was accepting invitations to dine with solid gentlemen from Des Moines and Minneapolis and having himself looked up to with unquestioned ardour by the wives thereof. Was he not the gay Mr. Van Winkle, of New York? Was he not the plus-ultra representative of the most exclusive society in the United States? Was he not hand in glove with fabled ladies whose names were household words wherever the English language is broken? Yes! He was THE Van Winkle! The son of A Van Winkle! And what a WONDERFUL game of bridge he played! It was a pleasure to lose money to him.

He soon found, however, to his discomfiture, that the daughters of these excellent westerners were engaged to be married to young gentlemen who were at work like himself in getting a fortune, but along different lines. So far as he could find out, they were so busy making headway in the commercial world that they wouldn't be able to afford a trip to Europe until they were somewhere in the neighbourhood of fifty-five or sixty. Their sweethearts were taking it while they could.

If Courtney had been as good-looking as either of his brothers—or as both of them, for that matter, because there wasn't much choice between them—he might have played havoc with the chances of more than one man at home, but he was no Adonis. To be perfectly candid, he was what a brawny Westerner would call a "shrimp." There is no call to describe him more minutely than that.

Most of his new friends wanted to have supper at Maxim's or to go to the Bal Tabarin. They wouldn't believe him when he insisted that these places were not what they used to be, and that Montmartre was now the fashionable roistering ground. So he took them to Maxim's and was glad of it afterwards. There wasn't a New Yorker in sight.

One night, after a rather productive game in the apartments of a family from Cedar Rapids, he proposed a supper at Maxim's. His host not only fell in with the proposition, but insisted on giving the supper himself. Corky was very polite. He took into consideration the fact that Mr. Riggles was a much older man than himself, and allowed him to have his own way.

It was at Maxim's that he first saw the Grand Duchess. She wasn't really a lady of title, but she looked the part so completely that he spoke of her as the "Grand Duchess" the instant his shifty gaze fell upon her. That is to say, she was painted, bewrinkled, bewigged, begowned, bejewelled and—(I was about to say be-dabbed)—for all the world like a real duchess, and she smoked a long cigarette in a still longer holder, and blew smoke through her nostrils with great APLOMB and but very few coughs.

His companions bowed to her. She waved her hand in amiable response.

"Who is she?" demanded Corky of his hostess. He almost whispered it.

"Oh, she's a silly old thing from Wisconsin. Did you ever see such a get-up?"

"It's marvellous. I thought she was a grand duchess."

"That's what SHE thinks, if airs count for anything. I think she's a freak."

"I suppose she was good-looking in her day," remarked his hostess's husband, appraising the grande dame with calculating eyes.

"Do you think they're real?" asked Corky, and his hostess said she thought they were. He did not give a name to them, but they were so overpoweringly prominent that she knew what he meant. It was almost impossible to see anything but pearls when one looked in the direction of the Grand Duchess. Corky couldn't help thinking how dangerous it was for the lady to wear such a fortune at Maxim's.

He listened with keen ears to the story of the "silly old thing from Wisconsin." She was a widow of sixty-five and she had been traversing Europe from end to end for several years in quest of a coronet. Many millions in gold had she, but even the most impecunious of noblemen had given them a wide berth,—reluctantly, perhaps. Reversing the order of things, she was not seeing Europe; she was letting Europe see her.

No one in Maxim's so gay and kittenish and coy as she! She was the essence of youth. Her hair was as

yellow as gold and so thick and undulating that one could not help wondering how far down her back it would drop if released. Her lips were red with the rich, warm blood of youth and her cheeks bore the bloom of the peach. The Grand Duchess was a creation. To make sure that every one knew she was present, she chattered in a high, shrill voice in Malapropian French, and giggled at everything.

"She is amazing," said Corky for the third time during supper. "And no one will marry her?"

"Not recently," said his host. "What do you mean?"

"I mean no one has married her in the last forty years. There WAS one, of course, but he died a few years back. That's why she wears a pearl mourning wreath around her neck, and a cloth-of-gold gown. He was in trade, as the English would say."

"She IS amazing," said Corky for the fourth time. "By Jove, do you know I'd like to meet her."

"Nothing so easy," said the other. "Come along now. I'll present you. She'll be tickled to death to meet a real Van Winkle."

Five minutes later Corky was drinking his own health in the presence of the Grand Duchess from Wisconsin.

"I have heard so much of you, Mr. Van Winkle," she said. "Is it true that you are a descendant of that aristocratic old Rip?"

Corky couldn't help blushing. He begged her not to get her Van Winkles mixed, and she tapped him on the knuckles with her pearl-studded fan.

At five o'clock that morning, Corky stood before the mirror in his bed-chamber and stared very intently at his somewhat wavering features. Notwithstanding the champagne, he recognised a very stern resolve in the reflection.

"I'm going to marry that woman," he said with grave precision.

CHAPTER II

THE GRAND DUCHESS

He went about it deliberately. According to report, the Grand Duchess was worth fifteen millions. Corky was not satisfied to accept rumour as fact, so he undertook an investigation on his own account. From reliable sources, he soon learned that she possessed but ten millions, but, he argued, it was better to know it in the beginning than to wait until she died to find out that her fortune had undergone the customary shrinkage. Moreover, he ascertained that she frequented half the baths in Europe in the effort to prolong a fast declining sense of humour—on the principle, no doubt, that life is a joke and death is not. She had a family of grown children in the States, but even that did not alarm Corky. He felt sure there would be enough to go around. Of course, it wasn't the nicest thing in the world being married to a woman more than twice one's age, but if everything went as he hoped, it might not be so very long before he could begin looking about for a wife half as old as himself. One sickening fear troubled him, however. She might insist on a house at Newport and a seat in the Inner Circle. She had that look about her.

He had the shrewdness to treat her with the disdain that his social position warranted. It was part of his plan of action to make her long for the opportunity to look down upon people instead of forever staring up at them from a grovelling attitude. He knew her kind as he knew the first three letters of the alphabet. On the other hand, he was politely attentive, incomparably epigrammatic, and as full of exquisite mannerisms as the famous Brummel himself. In a word, he was THE Van Winkle, and she but a passer-by.

By day he schemed, by night he lifted orisons to the gods and dreamed of the fruits thereof. Something seemed to tell him that if he didn't get her before she was sixty-six the quest would be hopeless. Experience had shown him that women see themselves as they really are after they are past sixty-five. Moreover, they become absolutely insane on the subject of self-preservation so far as money is concerned. They seem to feel that their rainy day is imminent, if not actually at hand. No matter how many millions they may possess, they lurk in the shadow of the poor-house. Men at sixty-five become podagrical and sour, perhaps, but they are not as much worried by thoughts of the poorhouse as they are by visions of the play-house.

Corky was to be seen everywhere with the Grand Duchess. (We may as well continue to speak of her as the Grand Duchess since every one in Paris was calling her that, now that she had been so aptly dubbed by the clever Mr. Van Winkle.) He drove in the Bois with her, and he drove without shame or embarrassment. He was the life of her big and little feasts at Pre Catalin and D'Armenonville. He sat in her box at the Opera; he translated the conspicuously unspeakable passages in all of the lively but naive comedies; he ordered her champagnes and invented hors d'oeuvres so neoterical in character that even the Frenchmen applauded his genius. And, through all, he was managing very nicely to keep his twelve thousand snugly to himself.

There were times when he could have cursed his own father—and perhaps did—but that is not relevant to

this narrative.

In proper sequence he led the Grand Duchess through all the reflected phases of society and came at last to the juncture where his own adroitness told him it was time to speak of the glories of Newport and the wonders of New York as seen only from the centre of the inner Circle. There was a vast difference between the Outer Rim and the Inner Circle; he did not say it in so many words, but she had no trouble in divining it for herself. She was dazzled. She was beginning to understand that a palace in Fifth Avenue was no more than a social sepulchre unless it could be filled day and night with the Kings and Queens of Gotham. She felt very small, coming out of the Middle West.

It wasn't very difficult for him to secure for her an invitation to the American Ambassador's ball, or to the pacific functions ordered by the French President, but it was not so easy to bring about introductions to the New York women of fashion who happened to be in Paris from time to time during the summer. The Grand Duchess read the newspapers. She always knew when New York notables were in the city, and she was not slow to express a desire to meet them. He could arrange it, of course. And then, on meeting them, she would at once insist on giving a dinner or a supper at Pre Catalin, or, on finding that they couldn't scrape up a spare evening,—to make it afternoon tea. Poor Corky shrivelled at such times.

"If she wasn't so DAMNED girlish!" he used to say to himself.

"Tell me," she said to him late one afternoon as they were driving home through the Champs Elysees; "is it true that servants' wages are lower in New York City than any place else in the country? I've always heard so."

She was looking at people through her magnificent lorgnon, and people undeniably were looking at her. There were many wonderful women in the Bois that day, but none so worthy of a stare as she.

Corky pricked up his ears. It looked like a "feeler."

"Perceptibly lower," he said.

"And food is higher, they say."

"Ah," said he, "but so are the buildings."

"How much do you think I could live on per year in New York!"

"Why do you enquire?"

"For instance," said she. It grated on his nerves when she used such expressions as "for instance."

"Well, it depends on how well you intend to live."

"I want to live as well as anybody else."

"Then I should say that you couldn't very well manage on less than ten thousand a year." He knew he was equivocating but was fearful that if he said a hundred thousand she would take alarm.

"That isn't very much," she said, with a perplexed frown. "I had an idea that if I wanted to live in style it would cost somewhere around seventy-five or a hundred thousand. I know a woman from Iowa who lives at the Ritz-Carlton and goes about some—although not in the real smart set—and she says it costs five or six thousand a month, just puttering. Maybe you've met her out in society. Her name is Bliggs."

"Bliggs? Um! Name's not familiar. Of course, you CAN spend a hundred thousand easily in New York if you get into the right set," he said.

"That's just the point," said she. "If I get into the right set. I've got ample means, Mr. Van Winkle, if—"

"They scorn money," said he flatly.

She drew in her breath quickly. "I suppose they do," she sighed. "Sometimes I really believe it's a handicap to have a lot of money."

"I know a good many charming Western women who have married into the smart set," he said slowly.

"And did they stick?" she enquired.

"Stick?" he gasped.

"I mean, did they make good—that is, were they PERMANENTLY received?"

"Oh, yes! Some of them have become leaders. It's really only a matter of marrying the right man."

She was silent as they drove across the Place de la Concorde.

"I suppose it's almost out of the question unless one does marry into it," she said finally.

"Or UP to it," he suggested. His sordid little heart was beating rather jerkily.

"Won't you stop in and have tea with me?" she asked suddenly.

He thought rapidly. "I'm sorry. I'm having tea with some New York people at the Ritz. Awfully sorry. People I shouldn't like to offend or I'd send an excuse. You understand, I hope."

Her jaws were set. He shot a furtive glance at the thickly plastered face and inwardly pitied himself while outwardly rejoicing.

"Some of the people who entertain baboons at dinner, I suppose," she said through compressed lips.

He smiled. "And poodles," he supplemented with perfect amiability and more truth than he knew. She sniffed. "I'm afraid you don't approve of our little larks. We've got to have something new once in a while or we'd die of ennui."

"Umph!" was her simple response, but he noted the pensive, wistful look in her eyes.

She set him down at his hotel. "Can't you dine with me at half past eight? I sha'n't ask any one else. I'm terribly blue today. You WILL come and cheer me up, won't you?"

"With pleasure," he said, bowing very low over her gloved hand, which was amazingly lumpy with invisible rubies and diamonds. "So good of you."

While dressing for dinner he repeated the oft-repeated process of reducing the Grand Duchess to a tangible result. Supposing she had as many as fifteen years longer to live, and supposing her income to be only $400,000 a year, there was still compensation in the calculation that he would be but forty-five and that no matter how extravagant she might become there was small likelihood of the principal ever being disturbed. (On one point he meant to be very rigid: she should be kept out of Wall Street.) Furthermore, allowing for the shares that would go to her three grown daughters and their husbands (if they had them), he could be reasonably certain of at least three million dollars. Fifteen into three million goes two hundred thousand times, according to long division. Two hundred thousand dollars a year is what it came to in round numbers. He figured it as a rather handsome salary, more than he could earn at anything else. Of course, if it should happen to be but twelve years, the remuneration, so to speak, would be $250,000; eleven years $272,727 and a fraction; ten years $300,000; nine—well, he even figured it down to the unlikely term of two years. And all this without taking into consideration the certainty that her fortune would increase rather than diminish with the years to come.

On another point he meant to be firm, even adamant. If they were to be married at all, it would have to be without the least delay, In fact, he would advise making rather a secret of it until after the ceremony. Two weeks at the outside for the engagement period, he should say. Something told him that if her daughters got wind of the affair they would have the Grand Duchess locked up in a sanitarium for the remainder of her days. Besides, the suspense would be terrific.

They dined tete-a-tete. She had gorgeous apartments in the Elysee Palace Hotel; a private dining-room and a beautiful view of the great avenue. The evening was warm. The windows were open and from the outside came the noises of a Parisian night. A soft July moon lent radiance to an otherwise garish world, and a billion stars twinkled merrily. It seemed to Corky, as he looked up into the mellow dome, that he had never known the stars to twinkle so madly as they twinkled on this fateful night. There were moments of illusion when he was sure that the moon itself was twinkling. He laid it to his liver.

The little gold clock on the mantelpiece was striking ten when he began clearing his throat for action. He always remembered that it was precisely ten o'clock, because he had to look intently at the diminutive face of the thing to make sure that it wasn't striking twenty or thirty. It seemed to go on forever. They were still in the dining-room and quite alone. For some uncanny reason the Grand Duchess had not giggled once since the coffee was served. She was ominously patient.

"I've been thinking about what you said this afternoon," said Corky irrelevantly. She had just mentioned the weather.

"Indeed?"

"Yes. You put an idea into my head. Now, please don't say it! It's such a beastly banal joke, don't you know, that one about ideas. Would you mind answering a few questions?"

She began fanning herself. "If possible, Mr. Van Winkle," she said. "But I can tell you in advance that I never tell any one my age."

"Quite right," said he in a matter-of-fact tone. "It's nobody's business." He appeared to be thinking.

"Well, go ahead and ask," said she.

"I don't know just how to begin."

"What is it you want to know?" she enquired encouragingly.

"How old are your daughters?"

"Oh!" she exclaimed, leaning back in her chair in a sort of collapse. "What do you want to know that for?"

"Well, I'm leading up to something else, if you must know."

She brightened up a bit. "They're rather young, of course."

"Naturally," said he. "But HOW young?"

"Mary is—let me see—I can't just recollect—"

"You needn't be afraid to tell me the truth," he said graciously. "It won't make the least difference."

"Well, Mary is thirty-three. She's the married one. Edith—"

"Is one of 'em married?" he exclaimed, his face clouding.

"She's divorced at present. She married a scamp in the East who wanted her for her money, and—"

"Never mind," interrupted Corky hastily. "I don't care to hear the family scandal. Where does she live?"

"New York City, most of the time. You may have seen her. She goes out a great deal, I hear: I'm not certain whether she's gone back to her maiden name or retains her ex-husband's. His name is Smith." "I see," said Corky, abstractedly. "Good looking?"

"Mary? Yes, indeed. Stunning. I'm sure you'll admire her, Mr. Van Winkle."

"I wish you'd call me Courtney."

"I suppose I might just as well begin," she said resignedly. He started, and was silent for a moment.

"The others: are they married?"

"No. Edith is twenty-five and Gwendolyn twenty-three. They're at home."

"Why don't they travel with you?"

She looked positively aggrieved. "They are really very domestic in their tastes," said she. "They were over with me three years ago, but prefer America."

"Are they engaged?"

"Not to my knowledge."

"They'd tell you if they were, wouldn't they?"

"If they thought it was any of my business," she said sharply. Corky was in no condition to flush. It was a pallid hour for him.

"I suppose they have ample means of their own," he ventured.

"They manage pretty well."

"Was nothing left to them outright?"

"Some real estate."

"I see. Everything else went to you?"

"Oh, dear, no. He left $10,000 to his only sister. I sued to get it back, but lost. I always hated her."

"There was considerably more than $10,000 in the estate, of course," he said quickly.

She smiled and closed one eye very slowly. "I should rather think so," she said. He was silent, pondering deeply. "Can you think of anything more to ask?"

"I'm trying to think if there is," he replied frankly. She gave him a few minutes. "I can't recall anything more at this moment," he announced. "Oh, just a moment! Was there anything mentioned in the will about your never marrying again?"

"Not a word," said she triumphantly.

"Good!" said he, and arose somewhat unsteadily from his chair.

The Grand Duchess held up her hand to check the words on his lips.

"Sit down," she said brusquely. "I've got a few questions I'd like to ask of you, Corky."

"Corky! Good Lord, don't call me THAT. Where did you hear that name—"

"I saw it in the Herald. It's the only thing I have against you. I can't help thinking of you as a sort of monument to my poor dead husband. Have I never told you that he had a cork leg? Well, he had. He lost a real leg at Gettysburg. My husband was a big, brave man, Courtney. He wasn't a polished society chap and he didn't know much about grammar, but he was as fine and honest and noble as any man who ever lived. But this is no time to discuss the qualifications of a man as big and grand as my husband. It—it seems like sacrilege. What I want to know is this: how old is your father?"

"What?"

"What is his age?"

"My fa—What's that got to do with it?"

"To do with what?" sharply.

He stammered. "Why,—er—with the qualifications of your husband."

"Nothing at all."

"Well, he's about sixty."

"Vigorous?"

"Good Lord! Certainly."

"And very rich, as I'm informed."

"All this is very distasteful to me."

"And your brothers? Are they worthy young men?"

"Of course," angrily.

"Don't flare up, please. And now, what is your income?"

"MY income? Why, this is positively outrageous! I—"

"Maybe I should have said 'allowance.'"

Corky swallowed hard. "I'm not a rich man, if that's what you want to know. I'll be perfectly honest with you. I'm horribly poor."

Her face brightened. "Now you are talking like a man. You must not forget I am from the West. We like frankness. And yet, in spite of your poverty, you really are received in the Smart Set? How do you manage it?"

"Men are always in demand," admitted Corky, making a wretched error in diplomacy. He was thankful to see that it went unnoticed. "That is, men who are worth while."

The Grand Duchess settled back in her chair, and softly patted her coiffure, choosing to stroke the curls immediately above her ears.

"Well?" she invited, calmly, deliberately.

"I'd like to marry you," said Corky.

"Do you expect me to say 'yes'?"

"I do."

"Well, I'll let you know in the morning."

"I prefer to have my answer now."

"I've got to think it over."

"Haven't you been thinking it over for some time?" he demanded impatiently.

"I'll admit that I am in love with you," she said coyly.

He shuffled his feet uneasily. "And you also will admit that I am in love with you, won't you?"

"Are you?"

"How can you ask?"

"Well, prove it."

"Won't I be proving it beyond all question if I marry you?"

She sighed. "That isn't the way I was wooed years ago."

"You forget that it was long before my time. Custom changes, my dear. I love you in the present, up-to-date fashion, not as they did in the unsettled West."

She pondered. "How much of an allowance will you expect?"

"Whatever you choose to settle upon me, I shall be happy to divide equally with you. That's the only way we can carry on our social campaign."

"Well, I'll marry you, Corky."

He blinked his eyes two or three times. "When?" he enquired, and absently looked at his watch.

"Next Saturday," she said.

"Good!" said he.

When he got back to his hotel he found awaiting him there a letter from his brother Ripley. The news it brought caused him to thank his lucky stars that his fortune would be safe on Saturday.

Jefferson and Ripley were making their fortunes in a middle-west city, following the ancient and honourable pursuit of the golf-ball as instructors in rival country clubs. They seemed to be a bit uncertain as to what they would follow during the winter, but both of them were thinking rather seriously of getting married.

The news that caused Gorky's eyes to bulge came in the last casual paragraph of the letter. "Oh, by the way," wrote Rip, "the governor has just been married. I suppose you haven't heard of it. He had his appendix out six weeks ago and married his night nurse as soon as he was up. Well, so long. I'm giving a lesson at 10:30. Good luck."

CHAPTER III

THE TWINS

The twins went fortune-seeking in a more complaisant way. They were big and hardy and the world had no real terrors for them. As twins should go, they fared forth together in quest of the road to wealth. They had been told that it lay toward the West and that it grew broader as one drew nearer the land of the setting sun. The West was the place for young men with ambitions. That expression had been ding-donged into their ears by college mates from Los Angeles and Seattle ever since they had learned that these two towns were something more than mere dots on the map.

They had heard so much of the two cities that they decided to try Omaha or some other place of that character before definitely putting their strength against the incomprehensibly sagacious gentlemen who were responsible for the supremacy of Seattle and Los Angeles over all other towns on the continent.

As was their wont, they went about the thing casually and without worry. They could not buckle down to work until after the wedding of a friend in Chicago, a classmate at college. He had asked them to act as ushers. The twins were especially well-qualified to serve as ushers. Since graduating they had performed that service for no fewer than twenty members of the class and were past-masters at the trade. It was only fair and right that they should usher for old Charley Whistler, although the name was not quite as familiar as it ought to have been. They couldn't quite place him, but so long as he had done them the honour to ask them to take part in his wedding, they were reasonably secure in the belief that he was all right. Before leaving New York, they spent several hundred dollars on a joint wedding present, a habit acquired when they first came out of college and which clung to them through many marriages, no doubt because of the popularity of the phrase: "Know all men by these presents, etc."

They were somewhat surprised on reaching Chicago to learn that Charley Whistler did not live there at all, but in W——, a thriving city not far removed from the Illinois metropolis. They could not have been expected to know that dear old Charley lived in W—— when they didn't even know there was such a place as W—— to live in. They heard all about the place from Charley, however. It seemed to be a city of distilleries. Everybody there was rich because everybody owned a distillery.

"Come out and visit us," said Charley after he had told them what a wonderful place it was. "I'm so busy I can't take more than two weeks for a honeymoon. Any time after the first of June will be convenient, boys. I'll show you a REAL town."

"There's only one real town," said Jefferson, his mind drifting back to Manhattan Island.

"Only one," said Ripley.

"Bosh! Say, how many distilleries has New York got? Answer that, will you?"

"I don't know, but I'll bet ten dollars we could drink up in three months all the whiskey you can make in W—— in a whole year."

Charley was silenced. He could only remark: "Well, there's more money in making it than there is in drinking it." The twins assented. "Anyhow, I wish you fellows could come out and see what we've got there. I'd like to get some of the Van Winkle millions interested in our village."

The twins exchanged glances. "The Van Winkle money is pretty well tied up," said Jeff.

"Well, it won't be forever, will it? I want to get you young fellows interested. And say, I can introduce you to some of the finest girls this side of Paradise. The burg is full of 'em. Why, I've heard New Yorkers say that they'd never seen so many pretty women or better dressed ones than we've got right there in—"

"I know," interrupted Rip. "That's what you hear in every city in America, big or little. And it's always the poor, impressionable New Yorker who says it, the fellow who has to put up with the depressing homeliness and dowdiness of Fifth Avenue. Give us a rest, Charley."

"Have you got a baseball team there?" demanded Jeff sarcastically.

"Sure! A peach, too. We're leading the league."

"What league?"

"The Peewee Valley League, of course. Two country clubs, too, with brand new golf courses. Oh, we're getting to the front, let me tell—"

"Why two?"

Charley stared. "Great Scott! Haven't you heard? It's been in all the papers. The row in the Wayside Country Club? It's only two years old, but, by George, they've had enough quarrels to last a New York club a century. There was a split last fall, and a new club was formed—the Elite Country Club. All the nicest people in town belong to the Elite. Lot of muckers run the Wayside. If you—-"

"Which one has the distilleries?" asked Pip. "Both. The whiskey people can't very well discriminate, don't you see? Same as the breweries. It's good business for them to support both clubs. Good Lord, it's six o'clock. You fellows will have to be at the church at seven sharp, you know. Better dress pretty soon. So long. See you later."

The long and short of it was that the Van Winkle twins DID go out to W——. They remained in Chicago for three weeks looking for work at teas, bridge-parties, theatre-parties and luncheons at all of the country clubs. They played golf and tennis when not engaged in looking for work. Their joint four thousand dollars, pooled, had dwindled to barely half that amount, but they were cheerful. Their only prayer was that no one else in the class of '08 would decide to get married before the summer was over.

W—— is a thriving, bustling, aggressive town in the Mississippi Valley. It is not necessary to describe it in detail. The Van Winkles were put up at the Commercial Club, the W—— Club and the two country clubs. Charley Whistler attended to that. He was so proud of his two distinguished ushers that he sadly neglected his bride in showing them off to acquaintances during the first week of their stay.

Almost the first thing he did was to introduce them to the Barrows sisters, treasured by W—— as her "fairest daughters." Every one in town, including the editors, spoke of them familiarly as "Toots" and "Beppy" Barrows, applying nicknames that had grown up with them and had no connection whatever with the names they received when christened. They were young, rich, lovely and apparently heart-whole. Charley Whistler, being newly-wedded, wanted every one else in the world to get married. He was continually saying that there was "nothing like it," and resented some of the ironic rejoinders of men who had been married all their lives, to hear them talk about it. So he made haste to introduce the twins to the beautiful Barrows girls.

With a perfectly beautiful fidelity to the fitness of things, the two Van Winkles fell prostrate before the charms of the two young ladies, and spent nearly a month looking for work in their delightful company. It was not until they realised that their funds were reduced to almost nothing that they came down to earth with a thud. They had less than one hundred dollars between them and destitution.

Sitting in the shade of a huge old oak near the first tee on the Elite Club course, awaiting the appearance of the young women with whom they were to play a mixed foursome, the twins fell to discussing a subject they had dreaded to contemplate much less to broach.

"Jeff," said Rip, poking a dandelion with the head of his mashie, "lend me fifty till next week."

"Fifty what?" enquired Jeff gloomily.

"Cents, of course," said Rip. "But I'll take it in dollars if you happen to have them."

"We're up against it, old boy," said his brother, lighting a fresh cigarette. "What's to be done?"

"I suppose we'll have to clear out," sighed Rip. "We can't go on in this way. They are the finest, best girls I've ever known, and it's a bloody shame to—to go on."

"Right-o! We've just got to clear out while our credit is good. I hate to do it, though. I—I don't mind confessing that I'm heels over head in love with her. It's a damned shame, isn't it?"

"You're no worse off than I am," groaned Rip. "We are a nice pair of Romeos, aren't we? Good Lord, what will they think of us when they find us out?"

"Well," mused Jeff, "they're sensible darlings. Maybe they'll understand."

"Never! These western girls are not brought up to understand such blighters as we are. We are a species known only to the effete East. No; they will not understand. God knows I'm willing to work. The trouble is, I haven't time."

"Well, we'll have to work, steal or starve."

"I can't steal and I won't starve. I'm afraid we'll have to move on farther west. Cow-punching isn't bad if one —Here they come. Not a word, old boy. We'll talk it over tonight. It's my notion we'd better move on tomorrow while we've got the wherewithal. I'm not mean enough to borrow money from Whistler and I haven't the face to ask Uncle George to help us out. Darn him, I think he's the one who put it into father's head to do this—"

"Sh!" hissed the other, coming to his feet as the trim, trig figures of the Barrows girls drew near.

"Sorry to keep you waiting," said Toots, the elder of the two. "Mrs. Garvin was telling a story in the locker room." Toots was an exquisite blonde, tall, slender and lithesome.

"I've been slicing horribly of late, Mr. Van Winkle," said Beppy, frowning prettily. "Can you straighten me out? What am I doing that's wrong?" She was dark and brilliant, and quite as tall as her sister. One would go miles to find two more comely maids than these.

"Standing too far away from the ball," said Jeff, to whom the remark was addressed.

"I don't see why the club doesn't hire a professional," complained she. "He could get rich showing the members how to play the sort of golf they needn't be ashamed of."

"Three fourths of them don't know the difference between a mashie and a mid-iron," said Toots. "We learned in England, you know."

"By Jove!" exclaimed Rip, apropos of nothing. A great light beamed in his face.

"By Jove!" repeated Jeff, divining his thought.

Then, just to prove that they understood each other, they drove at least two hundred and fifty yards off the first tee, straight down the course. Jeff showed Beppy how to overcome the slice. She got a hundred and fifty yard ball.

"For heaven's sake!" she exclaimed, surprised by her own prowess. "How wonderful! And how easy, when you know how."

With singular coincidence of purpose, the two Van Winkles set about to teach their partners how to play better golf than they had ever played before. By the time they were playing the long eighth hole, the young men were so exercised over the discovery of a vocation that they sliced badly into the rough. Trudging side by side through the tall grass, looking for balls which the caddies had lost, they addressed each other in excited undertones.

"Nothing could suit me better," said Jeff.

"It's like finding money. Lessons at three dollars an hour and the privilege of selling all the golf balls to the players. How's that? Shall we tackle it?"

Jeff experienced a momentary pang of doubt. "Of course we'd lose our standing as amateurs. We'd be professionals, you know."

"What's the odds? Even amateurs have to live, old son."

"What will the girls think of us?" dolefully.

"They can't blame us for earning an honest dollar."

"A Van Winkle earning an honest dollar!" scoffed Jeff, with a short laugh. "It's incredible. No one will believe it."

"Here's what I think," said Rip seriously. "We ought to make a clean breast of everything those girls. Tell 'em just how we stand. I'll stake my head they'll stand for it."

"Tell 'em we've been kicked out by the governor?" gasped Jeff.

"Sure. A rich man's sons earning their daily bread by the sweat of their brow. Horrible ogre of a father, d'ye see? Romance of the highest order. By ginger, Jeff, I'm strong for it. It's honest work and I'm not ashamed of it."

The Barrows girls witnessed the strange spectacle of two brothers in quest of golf-balls shaking hands with each other in the centre of a wire-grass swamp, and blinked their beautiful eyes in amazement.

At the "nineteenth hole," over tea and highballs, the Van Winkle twins made humble confession to the high priestesses of W——. They did not spare themselves. On the contrary, they confessed their utter worthlessness and paid homage to the father who had sent them out in the world to retrieve themselves.

"And what do you think of the scheme?" asked Rip at the end of a lengthy and comprehensive explanation of the project in mind.

"Fine!" cried the two girls in a breath. "Then, the first thing to do is to convince the club that it needs a professional," said Jeff eagerly. He was looking into Beppy's big brown eyes.

"But it doesn't need TWO," spoke Toots.

The four faces fell. "I never thought of that," murmured Jeff.

"The Wayside Club has no instructor," cried Rip, grasping at a straw.

"But no one thinks of going to Wayside," protested Toots. "They are perfectly dreadful."

"Still they could be taught how to play golf," said Rip. "In any event, beggars can't be choosers. We both want to stay in W——."

"Well, there's only one way out of it," said Beppy quickly. "You, Ripley, apply to the Wayside for the position. Jefferson has already spoken for the place here."

"He has not!" exclaimed Toots indignantly.

"He has! I am on the golf committee, so that settles it. I'll call a meeting of the committee tomorrow—"

"I don't see why Ripley should be sacrificed—"

"Wait, girls," broke in Ripley with a laugh. "It's very flattering to us, but please don't quarrel on our account. We can settle it nicely by flipping a coin."

"Heads," said Jefferson without hesitation. He won. "Sorry, old chap."

"We shall have to join Wayside," lamented Toots. "Oh, how I hate it."

"I wouldn't join until you see whether I land the place," advised Ripley. "I suppose I COULD go to some other city."

Both girls uttered such a harmonious protest against that alternative, that he said he wouldn't consider leaving his brother for anything in the world.

"I know the president of Wayside," said Beppy consolingly. "He used to be in business with father. I'll see him tomorrow and tell him—-"

"See him TODAY," advised Toots firmly.

"You are adorable," whispered Rip as he walked beside her toward the automobile. "I wish I could do something to show how much I appreciate your—your friendship." Her response was a most enchanting smile. Under his breath he said: "Gad, I'd like to kiss you!" It is barely possible that thoughts speak louder than words and that she heard him, for she said something in reply under her own breath that would have made it a very simple matter for him to kiss her if he had been acquainted with the silent tongue.

The Van Winkle twins, in anticipation of success crowning their efforts to become professional instructors in the two country clubs, outlined a splendid and cunning campaign for themselves. By inspiring a fierce rivalry between the would-be golfers of the two clubs, they could build up a thriving practice in their chosen profession. The rivalry was already bitter along other lines. If they could get the men of the clubs into a fighting humour over the golf situation, there would be no end to the lessons they would demand of their instructors. By using a little strategy, the twins figured they could keep the clubs in a state of perpetual tournament. The results would be far-reaching and gratifying.

Before the end of the week, the redoubtable sons of old Bleecker Van Winkle, "leaders of cotillions in the Four Hundred and idols of Newport and Bar Harbor," (according to the local press), were installed as instructors in the rival clubs. Everybody in town, except the conspiring Barrows girls, regarded the situation as a huge joke. The fashionable young "bloods" were merely doing it for the "fun of the thing." That was the consensus of opinion. The news was telegraphed to the New York papers and the headlines in Gotham were worth seeing. The twins winked at each other and—played golf.

Be it said to their credit, they were soon earning twenty-five or thirty dollars a day—and saving half of it!

So intense was the golf fever in W—— that the middle of July found the links of both clubs so crowded that it was almost impossible to play with anything except a putter. Nearly every foursome had a gallery following it and no one spoke above a whisper after he entered the club grounds, so eager were the members to respect the proprieties of golf. Men who had but lately scoffed at the little white ball now talked of stymies and lies and devits as if they had known them all their lives. Hooks, tops and slices were on every man's tongue, and you might have been pardoned for thinking that Bunker Hill was smack in the centre of W——, and that Col. Bogie had come there to be beaten to death in preference to being executed in any other city in the world.

The merry Van Winkles, good fellows and good sports that they were, thrived with the game, and kept straight down the course of true love as well.

"Jeffy," said Rip one evening after returning from a rather protracted call on Toots Barrows, "I have asked her to marry me."

"So have I," said Jeff, who had returned with him from the Barrows home. "I wonder what the governor will say?"

"I'm not worrying about him. I'm wondering what the girls' mother will say."

"No one will say we are marrying them for their money, that's positive. Everybody here thinks we've got millions and millions."

"Oh, by the way, did she accept you!"

"Certainly. Did she accept you?"

"Of course. Another thing, did she say anything to you about hurrying the thing along a bit, so as to have it over with before her mother gets wind of it?"

"By George, she did. That's odd, isn't it? She's afraid her mother will object to her marrying a New Yorker. Got some silly prejudice against the Four Hundred. I said it couldn't happen any too soon for me. We had a sort of a notion next week would be about right."

"It suits me," said the other. They shook hands. "I want to say, here and now, that I love her with all my heart and soul, and I'll never let her rue the day she married me. I love her, old son."

"Not a blamed bit more than I do," said Jeff fervently. "She's the best ever!"

The next morning they saw by the newspaper that their father had married his night nurse in the hospital and was going up into Maine to recover!

That same day, on the seventh tee of the Elite course, Toots promised to marry Ripley two weeks from Wednesday. At Wayside Beppy told Jefferson she would marry him at the same time, but I think it was on the ninth green.

"Mother will be wild when we cable the news to her," said she.

CHAPTER IV

The fortnight between that fateful day on the links and the Wednesday aforesaid, was full of surprising complications for the Van Winkle and Barrows families.

The two girls went into fits of hysteria on receipt of a cablegram from their mother in Paris announcing her marriage to Mr. Courtney Van Winkle, of New York. They were still more prostrated on learning from their wide-eyed sweethearts that not only was Courtney their step-father but he was on the point of becoming their brother-in-law as well. A still greater shock came the day of their own double wedding which took place in the Barrows mansion on Ardmore Avenue in the presence of a small company of guests. It developed that the Mrs. Smith who nursed old Mr. Van Winkle and afterwards married him was their divorced sister, Mary, who had not only grown tired of a husband but of nursing other women's husbands as well. The situation was unique.

"Good heavens," said Rip, after the ceremony which linked the entire Barrows family to the Van Winkles, "what relation are we to each other?"

"Well," said his wife, "for one thing, you are my uncle by marriage."

"And I am my father's brother-in-law. By the same argument, the governor becomes his own son's son-in-law. Can you beat it?"

"Your brother becomes your father, and my mother is my sister. Now, let's see what else—"

"And your sister is now your mother-in-law. By the way, has she any children?"

"Two little girls," said Toots.

"That makes poor old Corky a grandfather," groaned Rip.

Pretty much the same conversation took place between Jeff and Beppy.

"Corky is my father-brother," said Jeff, summing it all up.

On the high seas, Mr. and Mrs. Courtney Van Winkle threshed out the amazing situation, and in the mists of the Maine coast, the flabbergasted father of the three young men who fared forth to make men of themselves agonised over the result of their efforts.

"When I am quite strong again, my dear," said he to the comely ex-nurse—who, by the way, had engaged a male attendant to take her place in looking after the convalescent gentleman, "we must have a family gathering in New York. What is your mother like?"

"She is like all women who marry at her age," said she without hesitation—and without rancour. "She's very silly. What sort of a person is your son?"

"I don't know," said Mr. Van Winkle with conviction.

We will permit three months to slip by. No honeymoon should be shorter than that. It is meet that we should grant our quiddlers three and their excellent parent the supreme felicity of enjoying the period without being spied upon by a mercenary story-teller. But all interests, as well as all roads, lead to a common centre. The centre in this case was New York City.

It goes without saying that the Barrows girls, Edith and Gwendolyn, preferred New York to W—— as a place of residence. They married New Yorkers and it was only right and proper that they should love New York. Possessing a full third of the enormous fortune left by their distilling father, they maintained that they could afford to live in New York, even though their husbands remained out of employment for the rest of their natural lives. We already know that Mrs. Corky Van Winkle longed for a seat among the lofty, and that Mrs. Bleecker Van Winkle had married at least two gentlemen of Gotham in the struggle to feel at home there. Therefore, we are permitted to announce that Jefferson and Ripley Van Winkle resigned their positions as golf-instructors the instant the wedding bells began to ring, and went upon the retired list with the record of an honourable, even distinguished career behind them. They said something about going into "the Street," and their amiable and beautiful wives exclaimed that it would be perfectly lovely of them. But, they added, there was really no excuse for hurrying.

We come now to the family gathering in the palatial home of Mr. Courtney Van Winkle, just off Fifth Avenue (on the near east side), and it is December. Corky's wife bought the place, furnished. He couldn't stop her. The only flaw in the whole arrangement, according to the ambitious Grand Duchess, was the deplorable accident that admitted a trained nurse into the family circle. It would be very hard to live down. She never could understand why Mr. Van Winkle did it!

The twins and their brides were occupying enormous suites at one of the big hotels, pending the completion of a new and exclusive apartment building in Fifth Avenue. They had been in town but a week when Courtney and the Grand Duchess returned from Virginia Hot Springs, where they had spent November. Old Mr. Van Winkle was just out of the hospital after a second operation: an adhesion. He was really unfit for the trip up town from the old Van Winkle mansion; nevertheless, he made it rather than disappoint his new—(I use the word provisionally)—daughter-in-law, who had set her heart upon having the family see what she had bought. I am not quite certain that she didn't include Corky in the exhibit.

There were introductions all around. Mr. Van Winkle, senior, was presented to his mother-in-law and to his sisters, and, somewhat facetiously, to his father-in-law, his brothers, his sons and his daughters. Corky had the pleasure of meeting his three sons-in-law, his three daughters-in-law, his two sisters, his brothers, his

father and his granddaughters-in-law. The twins—but why continue? Puzzles of this character provide pleasure for those who choose to work them out for themselves, and no doubt many who have followed the course of this narrative are to be classed among them.

Of course, in his own home Corky sat at the head of the table, but it is not to be assumed that he was the undisputed head of the family, although he may have advanced claims to the distinction because of his position as father-in-law to every one else of the name. Mr. Van Winkle, pere, jocosely offered to relinquish the honour to his son, and the twins vociferously shouted their approval.

"You are the oldest member of the family by marriage, Corky," said Jeff, and was rewarded by a venomous stare from his joint mother-and-sister-in-law.

"How you talk!" said the Grand Duchess, suddenly remembering her lorgnette. The stare became intensified. "Isn't the house attractive, Mr. Van Winkle?" she asked, turning to the old gentleman, with a mirthless smile.

"Are you addressing me, my dear, as your son-in-law or as your father-in-law?" enquired Mr. Van Winkle.

"Why do you ask?" she demanded.

"Because if you are speaking to me as your son, I prefer to be called Bleecker."

"Stuff and nonsense, Mr. Van Winkle! Why, I scarcely know you."

"Won't you tell me your Christian name? I can't very well go about calling my daughter MISSIS Van Winkle."

"Minervy—I mean Minerva. Of course, I shall expect you to call me Minerva. I—I suppose it is only right that I should call you Bleecker. Isn't it an odd situation?"

"I should say so," put in Rip. "I'll have to give up calling you father, Bleecker. You are my brother now."

"I don't think we should carry a joke too far," said his father severely.

"It's no joke," said Kip. "Is it, Father Corky?"

"See here, confound you, don't get funny," snapped Corky from the head of the table. "You forget the servants."

"I'm not ashamed to have them hear me call you father, Corky," protested Rip. "I'll shout it from the house top if you think there's any doubt about my sincerity."

"Don't tease, Ripley," said Toots. "Your poor brother is dreadfully embarrassed."

"You must go with me to the dressmaker's tomorrow, girls," said the Grand Duchess, effectually putting a stop to the discussion. "I shall be there all day trying on gowns, and I want your opinions."

"Didn't you have anything made in Paris, Mother?" cried Toots and Beppy in unison.

"She did," said Corky emphatically. "We paid duty on seventy-three gowns, to say nothing of other things."

"But they are all out of fashion by this time," said Mrs. Corky, joyously. "They are at least three months old. I'm getting everything new. The season promises to be an unusually brilliant one, doesn't it, dear?"

Every one waited for Gorky's reply. He appeared to have swallowed something the wrong way. It was just like them to wait, CONFOUND them, thought he resentfully.

"Yes," said he, so succinctly that the four ladies were bitterly disappointed. For them, the topic called for the most elaborate treatment. "I shall give a big ball right after the holidays," said the Grand Duchess, determined to keep the subject going. "Corky and I have been going over the list of invitations this week. We mean to make it very select. On a rough estimate, we figure that the affair won't cost a cent less than fifty thousand—"

"My dear!" cried Corky, rapping violently on the table with his fork in his agitation.

"That's a pearl-handled fork," his wife reminded him, going very red under her rouge.

At this juncture Jefferson arose and, clearing his throat, began a toast to the brides.

"On your feet, gentlemen! Here's to the four Mrs. Van Winkles, the fourest of the fair—I mean the fairest of the four—ouch!—the fairest—of—the—fair. May they never know an hour of remorse! May their hearts always beat time to the tune of love we shall sing into their lovely ears, and may they be kind enough to forgive us our transgressions while they listen to our eternal and everlasting song! Drink, gentlemen!"

As the four gentlemen drained their glasses, the four ladies applauded the eloquent Jeff.

"You must write that out for Corky, Jefferson," cried his mother-in-law. "He may have an opportunity to spring it—"

"Ahem!" barked Corky, quite viciously.

"I am sure we shall all love one another and be happy to the end of our days," cried Mrs. Bleecker Van Winkle, an extremely handsome woman of thirty-three.

"Good for you, Mother!" shouted Rip, with enthusiasm and every one laughed, Corky the loudest of all.

Beppy rose half way out of her seat and peered down the table in the direction of her sister Mary.

"Stop holding hands, you silly things!" she cried, shaking her finger at Bleecker Van Winkle and his wife.

"I'm not holding hands," cried Mary.

"She was feeling my pulse," explained the old gentleman hastily.

As a matter of fact, when Mary undertook to bestow upon her husband the caress known as "holding hands" she invariably took his wrist between her thumb and forefinger and absent-mindedly counted ten or twelve before realising her mistake.

The father of the three young men took this particular moment to revoke, in a very diplomatic way, the sentence he had declared a few months earlier in the year. Without saying it in so many words, he gave them to understand that he considered their fortunes made and warmly congratulated them upon the successful issue of their endeavours. He made so bold as to state that he took upon his own shoulders all of the trivial mistakes they may have made during years of adolescence, and gave to them the glory of achieving success when failure might have been their lot because of the foolish adoration of a doting parent. It was a very pretty speech, but the boys noticed that he carefully refrained from acknowledging that they had made men of themselves.

"And now," said he, in conclusion, "permit me to paraphrase the toast of that amiable ancestor whom fiction has given to us, the ancient Rip whose days will be longer than ours, whose life will run smoothly through centuries to come: 'May we all live long—and prosper'!"

They drank it standing.

The Grand Duchess beamed. "So that dear old gentleman WAS your ancestor after all. How glad I am to know it!"

"Yes, my dear daughter," said her venerable son-in-law, running his fingers through his niveous thatch, "he was the first of the time-wasting Van Winkles."

THE LATE MR. TAYLOR

Hawkins was not a drinking man. To be sure, he took a glass of something occasionally, but he thoroughly understood himself at the time. He took it to be companionable, that was all. Therefore, in view of what happened to him on one unforgetable night, it is well to know that Hawkins bore an impeccable reputation for sobriety. Likewise, his veracity never had been seriously questioned.

The night was bitterly cold—so cold, in fact, that Hawkins relished the prospect of remaining in-doors. There was a blizzard blowing fifty knots an hour. Hawkins rarely used the word "mile," it may be said; he was of a decidedly nautical turn ever since the memorable trip to Europe and back. He was middle-aged and a bachelor. This explains the fact that he was a man of habits if not of parts. For years he had lived in cosy apartments on the fifth floor, surrounded by unmistakable signs of connubial joy, but utterly oblivious to these pertinent manifestations. Away back—I should say abaft—in the dim past he had given some little thought to matrimony but she was now almost beyond memory.

Each day after Hawkins had balanced the books at the bank—and they always balanced, so methodical was Hawkins—he went for his stroll in the park. Then came dinner, then a half hour or so of conversation with the other boarders, and then the club or the theatre. Usually he went home early in the night as he always went to town early in the morning. The occasions were not infrequent when he could smile grimly and pityingly upon one or more of his companions of the night before as they passed him on their belated way home long after dawn. It was then that Hawkins drew himself a trifle more erect, added a bit of elasticity to his notably springy stride, and congratulated himself warmly on being what he was.

Soon after eight o'clock on the night of the great blizzard, Hawkins forsook the companionship of the disgruntled coterie downstairs and retired to his library on the fifth floor. His suite consisted of three rooms—and a bath, as they say when they talk of letting them to you. There was a library, a bed chamber and a parlour with broad couches against two of the walls. Sometimes Hawkins had friends to stay all night with him. They slept on the couches because it did not make any difference to them and because Hawkins was of a philanthropic turn of mind when occasion demanded.

He got into his dressing gown and slippers, pulled the big leather chair up to the blazing grate, and prepared for a long and enjoyable visit with one Charles Dickens. A young woman of charm and persistence had induced him, only the week before to purchase a full set of Dickens with original Cruikshank engravings—although Hawkins secretly confessed that he was sceptical—and it was not like him to spend money without getting its full value in return. It was with some show of gratitude then that he looked upon the blizzard which kept him indoors for the night. Years ago he had read "Oliver Twist" and "David Copperfield," but that was the extent of his acquaintance with Dickens. Now that he had the full set on his shelves, it behooved him to read the great Englishman from beginning to end.

"This is a terrible night," he mused, as he ran his eye along the row of green and gilt books, and "Bleak House" seems especially fit for the hour. "We'll begin with that."

Outside the wind howled like mad, shrieking around the corners as if bent on destroying every bit of harmony in the world. It whistled and screamed and gnashed its way through the helpless night, the biting sleet so small that it could penetrate the very marrow of man. Hawkins serenely tucked his heels into the cushions of the footstool and laughed at the storm.

"I sha'n't be disturbed tonight, that's sure," he thought, complacently. "No one but a drivelling idiot would venture out in such a blizzard as this unless absolutely driven to it. 'Gad, that wind is something awful! I haven't heard anything like it since last February and that was when we had the coldest night in forty years, if one can believe the weather bureau." Here Hawkins allowed "Bleak House" to drop listlessly into his lap while he indulged in a moment or two of retrospection. "Let's see; that was said to have been the deadliest cold snap Chicago has ever known. Scores of people were frozen to death on the streets and many of them in their homes. I hope there is no one so luckless as to be homeless tonight. The hardiest man would be helpless. Think of the poor cab-drivers and—oh, well, it doesn't help matters to speculate on what may be happening outside. I shudder to think, though, of what the papers will tell in the morning."

The midnight hour was close at hand before Hawkins reluctantly and tenderly laid "Bleak House" on the library table, stretched himself and prepared for bed. The blizzard had not lost any of its fury. Indeed, it seemed to have grown more vicious, more merciless. Hawkins, in his pajamas, lifted the curtain and sought a glimpse of the night and its terrors. The window panes were white with frost. He scraped away the thick layer and peered forth into the swirling storm.

"Worse than ever," he thought, a troubled look in his eyes. "Poor devils, who ever you are, I feel for you if you're out in all this."

He turned off the lights, banked the fire on the grate and was soon shivering between the icy sheets of his bed. It seemed to him they never would get warm and cosy, as he had so confidently expected. Hawkins, being a bank clerk, was a patient and enduring man. Years of training had made him tolerant even to placidity. As he cuddled in the bed, his head almost buried in the covers, he resignedly convinced himself that warmth would come sooner or later and even as the chills ran up and down his back he was philosophic. So much for system and a clear conscience.

Gradually the chill wore away and Hawkins slumbered, warm and serene despite the wrath of the winds which battered against the walls of his habitation. At just what minute sleep came he did not know. He heard the clock striking the hour of twelve. Of that he was sure, because he counted the strokes up to nine before they ran into a confused jangle. He remembered wondering dimly if any one had been able to distinguish the precise instant when sleep succeeds wakefulness. At any rate, he slept.

The same little clock struck twice a few minutes after a sudden chill aroused him to consciousness. For a moment or two he lay there wondering how he came to be out-of-doors. He was so cold and damp that some minutes of wakefulness were required to establish the fact that he was still in his own room and bed. It struck Hawkins as strange that the bedclothes, tucked about his head, seemed wet and heavy and mouldy. He pulled them tightly about his shivering body, curled his legs up until the knees almost touched the chin and—yes, Hawkins said damn twice or thrice. It was not long until he was sufficiently awake to realise that he was very much out of patience.

Presently he found himself sniffing the air, his nostrils dilating with amazement. There was a distinct odour of earth, such as one scents only in caverns or in mossy places where the sun is forever a stranger. It was sickening, overpowering. Hawkins began to feel that the chill did not come from the wintry winds outside but from some cool, aguish influence in the room itself. Half asleep, he impatiently strove to banish the cold, damp smell by pulling the coverlet over his head. His feet felt moist and his knees were icy cold. The thick blanket seemed plastered to his black, wet and rank with the smell of stagnant water.

"What in thunder is the matter with me?" growled he, to himself. "I never felt this way before. It's like sleeping in a fog or worse. A big slug of whiskey is what I need, but it's too infernal cold to get out of bed after it. How the dickens is it that typhoid fever starts in on a fellow? Chilly back and all that, I believe,—but I can't recall anything clammy about it."

The more he thought of it the more worried he became; more earnest became his efforts to shut out the chilly dampness. It occurred to him that it would be wise to crawl out and poke up the fire in the next room. Then he remembered that there was a gas grate in his bedroom, behind the bureau. Of course, it would be quite a task to move the bureau and even then he might find that the gas pipe was not connected with the burner. The most sensible proceeding, he finally resolved, would be to get up and rebuild the fire and afterward add an overcoat and the cherished steamer rug to the bed coverings. Damper and damper grew the atmosphere in the room. Everything seemed to reek with the odour of rotting wood and mouldy earth; his nostrils drank the smell of decaying vegetation and there seemed to be no diminution. Instead, the horrible condition appeared to grow with each succeeding breath of wakefulness.

The palms of his hands were wet, his face was saturated. Hawkins was conscious of a dreadful fear that he was covered with mildew. Once, when he was a small boy, he had gone into a vault in the cemetery with some relatives. Somehow, the same sensations he felt on that far-off day were now creeping over him. The room seemed stifled with the smell of dead air, cold and gruesome. He tried to convince himself that he was dreaming, but it was too easy to believe the other way. Suddenly his heart stopped beating and his blood turned to ice, for there shot into his being the fear that some dreadful thing was about to clutch him from behind, with cold, slimy hands. In his terror he could almost feel the touch of ghastly fingers against his flesh.

With rigid, pulseless hands he threw the soggy covers from his face and looked forth with wide startled

eyes. His face was to the wall, his back—(his cringing back)—to the open room. Hawkins was positive that he had heard the clock strike two and he knew that no hour of the winter's night was darker. And yet his eyes told him that his ears had lied to him.

It was not inky darkness that met his gaze. The room was draped in the grey of dawn, cold, harsh, lifeless. Every object on the wall was plainly visible in this drear light. The light green stripes in the wall paper were leaden in colour, the darker border above was almost blue in its greyness. For many minutes Hawkins remained motionless in his bed, seeking a solution of the mystery. Gradually the conviction grew upon him that he was not alone in the room. There was no sound, no visible proof that any one was present, but something supernatural told him that an object—human or otherwise—was not far from his side. The most horrible feeling came over him. He was ready to shriek with terror, so positive was his belief that the room was occupied by some dreadful thing.

Even as he prepared to turn his face toward the open room, there came to his ears the most terrifying sound. Distinctly, plainly he heard a chuckle, almost at the bedside. A chuckle, hollow, sepulchral, mirthless. The hair on Hawkins's head stood straight on end. The impulse to hide beneath the covers was conquered by the irresistible desire to know the worst.

He whirled in the bed, rising to his elbow, his eyes as big as dollars. Something indescribable had told him that the visitor was no robber midnight marauder. He did not fear physical injury, strange as it may seem.

There, in the awful grey light, sitting bolt upright in the Morris chair, was the most appalling visitor that man ever had. For what seemed hours to Hawkins, he gazed into the face of this ghastly being—the grey, livid, puffy face of a man who had been dead for weeks.

Fascination is a better word than fright in describing the emotion of the man who glared at this uncanny object. Unbelief was supreme in his mind for a short time only. After the first tremendous shock, his rigid figure relaxed and he trembled like a leaf. Horror seemed to be turning his blood to ice, his hair to the whiteness of snow. Slowly the natural curiosity of the human mind asserted itself. His eyes left the face of the dread figure in the chair and took brief excursions about the room in search of the person who had laughed an age before. Horror increased when he became thoroughly convinced that he was alone with the cadaver.

Whence came that chuckle?

Surely not from the lips of this pallid thing near the window. His brain reeled. His stiff lips parted as if to cry out but no sound issued forth.

In a jumbled, distorted way his reason began to question the reality of the vision, and then to speculate on how the object came to be in his room. To his certain knowledge, the doors and windows were locked. No one could have brought the ghastly thing to his room for the purpose of playing a joke on him. No, he almost shrieked in revulsion, no one could have handled the terrible thing, even had it been possible to place it there while he slept. And yet it had been brought to his bedroom; it could not have come by means of its own.

He tried to arise, but his muscles seemed bound in fetters of steel. In all his after life he was not to forget the picture of that hideous figure, sitting there in the tomb-like grey. The face was bloated and soft and flabby, beardless and putty-like; the lips thick and colourless; the eyes wide, sightless and glassy. The black hair was matted and plastered close to the skull, as if it had just come from the water. The clothes that covered the corpse were wet, slimy and reeking with the odour of stagnant water. Huge, stiff, puffy hands extended over the ends of the chair's arms, the fingers twice the natural size and absolutely shapeless. Truly, it was a most repulsive object. There was no relief in the thought that the man might have entered the room alive, in some mysterious manner, for every sign revealed the fact that he had been dead for a long time.

Hawkins, in his horror, found himself thinking that if he were to poke his finger suddenly into the cheek of the object, it would leave an impression that hours might not obliterate.

It was dead, horribly dead, and—the chuckle? His ears must have deceived him. No sound could have come from those pallid lips—

But the thing was speaking!

"It is so nice and warm here," came plainly and distinctly from the Morris chair, the voice harsh and grating. Something rattled in each tone. Hawkins felt his blood freeze within him and he knew his eyes were bulging with terror. They were glued upon the frightful thing across the room, but they saw no movement of the thick lips.

"Wha—What?" gasped Hawkins, involuntarily. His own voice sounded high and squeaky.

"I've been so cursed cold," responded the corpse, and there were indications of comfort in the weird tones. "Say, I've had a devil of a time. It's good to find a warm spot again. The Lord knows I've been looking for it long enough."

"Good Lord! Am I crazy? Is it actually talking?" murmured Hawkins, clutching the bedclothes frantically.

"Of course, I'm talking. Say, I'm sorry to have disturbed you at this time of night, but you wouldn't mind if you knew how much I've suffered from this terrible cold. Don't throw me out, for God's sake. Let me stay here till I thaw out, please do. You won't put me out, will you?" The appeal in those racking tones was too grotesque for description.

"I wouldn't—wouldn't touch you for a million dollars," gasped Hawkins. "Good Heavens, you're dead!"

"Certainly. Any fool could tell that," answered the dead man, scornfully.

"Then—then how do you come to be here?" cried the owner of the room. "How can you be dead and still able to talk? Who placed you in that chair?"

"You'll have to excuse me, but my brain is a trifle dull just now. It hasn't had time to thaw out, I fancy. In the first place, I think I came up the fire escape and into that window. Don't get up, please; I closed it after me. What was the next question? Oh, yes—I remember. It isn't an easy matter to talk, I'll confess. One's throat gets so cold and stiff, you know. I kept mine in pretty good condition by calling out for help all the time I was in the water."

"In the—water?"

"Yes. That's how I happen to be so wet and disagreeable. You see, I've been out there in the lake for almost a year!"

Hawkins fell back in the bed, speechless. He started with fresh terror when he passed his hand over his wet forehead. The hand was like ice.

"There's a lot of them out there, you may be sure. I stumbled over them two or three times a day. No matter where you walk or float, you're always seeing dead people out there. They're awful sights, too,—give one the shivers. The trouble with most people who go to the bottom is that they give up and are content to lie there forever, washed around in the mud and sand in a most disgusting way. I couldn't bear the thought of staying down there for ages, so I kept on trying to get out. Shows what perseverance will do, doesn't it?"

"You don't mean to say that—that—Good Lord, I must have brain fever!" cried poor Hawkins hoarsely.

"Do I annoy you? I'll be going presently, although I hate to leave this warm corner. But you can rest assured of one thing: I'll never go near that lake again. All the weight in the world couldn't drag me to the bottom after what I've gone through. It's not right, I know, to trespass like this. It's a rank shame. But don't be hard on me, Mr.—Mr.—?"

"I don't know it," groaned Hawkins, who could not have told his name if his life was at stake. He had forgotten everything except the terrible thing in the Morris chair.

"My name is—or was—Taylor, Alfred B. Taylor. I used to live in Lincoln Avenue, quite a distance out. Perhaps you have heard of me. Didn't the newspapers have an account of my disappearance last February? They always print such stuff, so I'm sure they had something about me. I broke through the ice off Lincoln Park one day while walking out toward the crib."

"I—I remember," Hawkins managed to whisper. "You were the Board of Trade man who—who—"

"Who took one chance too many," completed the dead man, grimly. "A Board of Trade man often gets on very thin ice, you know," the sepulchral laugh that oozed from those grey lips rang in the listener's ears till his dying day. "These clothes of mine were pretty good the day I went down, but the water and the fishes have played havoc with them, I'm afraid. It strikes me they won't hold together much longer."

"You—you don't look as though you'd hold together very long yourself," ventured Hawkins, picking up a little courage.

"Do I look that bad?" asked Mr. Taylor, quite ruefully. "Well, I daresay it's to be expected. I've been plodding around on the bottom of the lake for a year and the wear and tear is enormous. For months I was frozen stiff as a rail. Then summer came along and I was warmed up a bit. The terrible cold snap we're having just now almost caught me before I got out of the water. The trouble was, I lost my bearings and wandered miles and miles out into the lake. Then it was like hunting a needle in a haystack to find dry land. I'm sure I travelled a circle for hundreds of miles before I accidentally wandered upon the beach down there by the Fresh Air place. I really believe this is a colder night than the first one I spent in the lake, and that day was supposed to be a record breaker, I remember. Twenty-six below zero, if I'm not mistaken. By George, I'm warming up nicely in here. I feel like stretching a bit!"

"For God's sake, don't!" almost shrieked Hawkins, burying his head beneath the covers.

"Very well, since you object," came to his muffled ears. "You must be very warm in that bed. I'd give all I have in the world if I could get into a nice warm bed like that once more."

Hawkins peeped from beneath the cover in dire apprehension, but was intensely relieved to see that the terrible Mr. Taylor had not changed his attitude. The eyes of the watcher suddenly fixed themselves on the visitor's right hand. The member was slowly sliding off the arm of the chair. Fascinated, Hawkins continued to watch its progress. At last, it dropped heavily from its resting place. The position of the corpse changed instantly, the sudden jerk of the dead weight pulling the body forward and to one side. The head lolled to the right and the lower jaw dropped, leaving the mouth half open. One eyelid closed slowly, as if the cadaver was bestowing a friendly wink upon his host.

"Very awkward of me," apologised Mr. Taylor, his voice not so distinct, his words considerably jumbled on account of the unfortunate mishap to his mouth.

"Get out of here!" shrieked Hawkins, unable to endure the horror any longer. "Get out!"

"Oh, you don't mean that, do you?" pleaded the thing in the chair. "I'm just beginning to feel comfortable and—"

"Get out!" again cried Hawkins, frenzied.

"It's rotten mean of you, old man," said Mr. Taylor. "I wouldn't turn you out if our positions were reversed.

Hang it, man, I'd be humane. I'd ask you to get into bed and warm up thoroughly. And I'd set out the whiskey, too."

But Hawkins was speechless.

"Confound your penurious soul," growled Mr. Taylor, after a long silence, "I've a notion to climb into that bed anyhow. If you want to throw me out, go ahead. I'm used to being knocked about and a little more of it won't hurt me, I guess. Move over there, old man. I'm going to get in."

With a scream of terror, Hawkins leaped up in the bed. The dead man was slowly rising from the chair, one eye fixed on the ceiling, the other directed toward the floor. Just as the awful body lurched forward, Hawkins sprang from the bed and struck out frantically with his clenched hand. The knuckles lodged against the bulging brow of the dead man and they seemed to go clear to the skull, burying themselves in the cushion-like flesh. As the horrid object crashed to the floor, Hawkins flew through the library and into the hall, crying like a madman.

Other occupants of the building, awakened by the frightful shrieks, found him crouching in a corner on one of the stair landings, his wide eyes staring up the steps down which he had just tumbled. It was an interminably long time before he could tell them what had happened and then they all assured him he had been dreaming. But Hawkins knew he had not been dreaming.

Three of the men who went to his bedroom came hurriedly down the stairs, white-faced and trembling. They had not seen the corpse but they had found plenty of evidence to prove that something terrible had been in Hawkins' bedroom.

The window was open and the chair which stood in front of it was overturned, as if some one had upset it in crawling out upon the fire escape platform. One of the men looked out into the night. He saw a man crossing the street in the very face of the gale, running as if pursued. It was too dark to see the man's face, but the observer was sure that he turned twice to look up at the open window. The figure turned into an alley, going toward the lake.

The Morris chair was wet and foul-smelling, and the floor was saturated in places. A piece of cloth, soaked with mud, was found beneath the window sill. Evidently it had been caught and torn away by the curtain hook on the window sash. Hawkins would not go near the room and it was weeks before he was able to resume work at the bank.

And, stranger than all else, the dead body of a man was found in the snow near the Fresh Air Sanitarium the next morning, but no one could identify the corpse. The man had been dead for months.

THE TEN DOLLAR BILL

A CHRISTMAS STORY

Mr. and Mrs. Digby Trotter had been married just five years. Five years before Digby had gone to his father to tell him that he intended to marry Kate Anderson. The old gentleman grew very red in the face and observed, more forcibly than considerately:

"You must be a dod-gasted idiot! You get married? And to that brainless little fool whose father exhorts or extorts religion for $600 a year at that miserable little church over there on Queen Street—is that the girl you mean?" And then Trotter, pere, ceased speaking to look searchingly into his son's face; an embarrassed smile brightened his grim old countenance and he went on, good humour growing stronger in each succeeding word: "You rascal! Why did you tell me that? Do you know, for a moment, I actually thought you were in earnest, and—well, demme! it did work me up a little. I ought to have known better, too—but, then, you did say it as if you meant it. Excuse me, boy; I guess I'm the fool, myself."

"That remains to be seen, sir," was the most polite thing that his son could say under the circumstances, taking his hands out of his pockets and putting them back again at once. "You see, it's this way, Father, you laughed too soon. It's not so devilish much of a joke as you think. I meant it."

Mr. Trotter's smile faded away as does the sunshine that hides itself in the dusk of eventide. Father and son grew warm in the discussion of this most amazing determination on the part of the latter and it all came to a sharp end when both lost temper. When Digby jammed his hat down over his eyes, buttoned close his overcoat and dashed out of the bank into the street, he might have been heard to say, as a parting shot:

"I'll marry her now if I starve for two thousand years!"

And marry her he did.

Trotter, senior, did not attend the wedding, did not send the young couple a present, nor a greeting; in fact, he did nothing but ignore them completely. He had told Digby that he would never forgive him and had gone so far as to call on poor little Dr. Anderson, the unfortunate possessor of a pretty daughter and a $600 charge, expressing himself as earnestly averse to the union of their children. When he had concluded his

interview with the minister the latter was extremely pale and nervous, but he was master of the situation. He stood, holding open the door to his plain, pitiful old study and Mr. Trotter, very much injured and crestfallen, was passing out with these words stinging his ears:

"I am sorry, sir—just as sorry as you. I like Digby; he is a good, open-hearted boy, but I had hoped to see Kate better wedded!" Then he closed the door and seated himself in the old cushioned chair, staring at the grate until the glare seemed to hurt his eyes. At least, they grew very hot and dry, then streaming wet.

And so they were married five years ago. Since then their struggle had been a hard one; both ends would not meet, no matter how firmly Digby persevered in his efforts to bring about such a union. He would not, could not ask his father for assistance, nor would that patient, faithful little wife have permitted him to harbour such a design had he weakened in his avowed intention to "get along without a dollar from dad." Notwithstanding their feeble warfare against privation, in which defeat hovered constantly over fields where victory seemed assured, theirs had been a happy sort of misery. Digby loved Kate and Kate worshipped him; his pity for her was overwhelmed by the earnestness with which she pitied him. No struggle of his failed but that she shouldered and bore the failure with him, cheering him when he felt like lagging, smiling when he despaired the deepest. Between them a speck of joy grew larger, brighter each day despite the gloom that surrounded it. Their child was their one possession of worth, 4-year-old Helen—sunny-faced Helen—Helen who suffered none of the pangs because of the sacrifices made by those whose darkness she illumined.

Trotter had married Kate with a heart overrunning with the glorious ambition of untried youth, the happy confidence of strength, fully convinced that nothing was necessary toward securing success save the establishment of a purpose. And that is quite, quite the fact.

They began with a dollar and they had seen but few, since the beginning, that they could call their own. Too late did Digby learn that he knew but little and that the world was full of young men whose beginning in life had been so much worse than his that necessity had made them equal to the struggle for which he had been so illy prepared by an indulgent parent. Digby found the banks in which he had hoped to secure positions thronged with clerks and accountants who had worked slowly, painfully from the bottom upward. Grey-haired men, whose lives had been spent in the one great battle for gold, told him of their years in the patient ranks; thoughtful-faced young men told him how they had been office boys, messenger boys, even janitor boys, in the climb up the Matterhorn of success. Here he was a man of 25, strong, bright and the possessor of an unusual intelligence, a college man, a rich man's son, but poorer than the smallest clerk that had ever bent his throbbing, ambitious head over the desk in his father's bank, and who had often envied the life of his employer's son. Now that son was beneath them all because he did not know how to work!

Work—toil—slave! The definition of success.

At first the failures originating from inexperience had been of small consequence to Digby. His old-time independence resisted the harsh criticisms of his first employers and he had, on more than one occasion, thrown away fair positions because the spirit could not endure the thumb of mastery. For months he rebelled against the requirements of servitude, but gradually it dawned upon him that though the rich man was his father he was no longer the rich man's son.

So, when the first year of their wedded life had rolled by, Digby Trotter, still neat, still independent, yet not so defiant—wore a haggard look which could no longer be disguised. The once fashionable garments were beginning to look shabby; his recently purchased clothing had come from the bargain counters in cheap "ready-made" establishments; his once constantly used evening dress suit hung in a closet, lonely and forlorn, minus the trousers. He was keeping the books in a street car office and his salary was $40 a month.

When, at the close of their first happy, miserable year, her father died and their baby was born, many changes came. They were forced to take the house for themselves and had to be accountable for the rent. Dr. Anderson had given them the right to call his home their own so long as he should live and it was the earnings of two men that kept the little establishment crowded with happiness, if not comforts, during his lifetime. One day a blow came to them. The landlord ejected them. Kate wept as she passed out through the little front gate, leaving behind the dear old home with its rose bushes, its lilacs, its gravelled walks, perhaps forever. Digby buttoned his coat tightly about his thinning figure and scowled as he followed her through the gate. He scowled at that invisible fate which preceded them both. Now, at the end of five years, they were living in a tenement house, a crowded, filthy place, ruled by a miserly, relentless landlord, whose gold was his god.

The young husband had been employed by many men and in many occupations during these five years. Fate pursued him always, despite his dogged determination, his earnest efforts to surmount the obstacles which crowded his path to happiness and peace. If a reduction was necessary in a working force he was one of the first to go: if any one was to be superseded by a new and favoured applicant he was the one. On many occasions he had taken up his coat and hat, stepping to the pavement with the crushed heart of a despairing man, tears in his wistful eyes, his tired brain filling, almost bursting with the thoughts of the little woman whose brave eyes would grow large and bright when he told her of the end, and who would kiss him and bid him not to despair. He could almost hear her suppressed sob as he thought of her, her head upon his shoulder, her soft voice blaming herself for having dragged him down to this.

In this warfare of poverty they had seen many hungry days, many hardships, but neither had relinquished faith in Digby's ability to baffle adversity and stem the tide. Like tennis balls, they had been batted from one end of the year to the other, and now, at this time, Digby Trotter and wife had become members of New York's "floating population." Seldom did they live in one place more than three months, sometimes less than one. Frequently they moved because their surroundings were so distasteful to Kate, whose natural sense of refinement was averse, not to poverty and squalor, but to the vice with which it often is associated in districts where an ignorant and vicious element flocks as if drawn by the magnetism of sin.

A man of strong will was Digby, and a woman of wonderful strength of purpose was his wife, or he would have lost heart, and lost her in the end. Only once had he come home to her intoxicated, driven to it through despair and by what he thought to be approaching illness. On awakening from the drunken sleep shame made him fear to meet the eyes of her who suffered with him. But she had gently said:

"Don't be ashamed, Digby; poor, dear boy! You couldn't help it, I know. But, dear, do try to be strong, stronger than ever, for baby's sake if not for your own and mine. We shall all be happy yet, I'm sure we shall, if you—if you will but resist that one misfortune."

He never drank another drop of liquor.

Then, at last, the brave little woman took in plain sewing, greatly to Digby's anguish and mortification. Never had he felt so little like a man as when she showed so plainly that it was necessary for her to assist in the maintenance of the little household over which he presided. The few dollars that she could earn kept them supplied with food—at least part of the time. His odd jobs helped; the dollar that he earned once in a while was made to go a long way. Not once did she complain, not once did she cry out against the son who had taken his father's curse for her sake. There are but few women who would be so considerate.

When he came home at nights, climbing the wearisome steps that led to their miserable home near the roof of the vast building he knew that she would smile and kiss him, that the baby would laugh and climb gaily upon his knee, and he knew that he would not have to tell her that he had failed to find the coveted employment. His face would be the indicator, and, beneath her first smile of welcome, he could always distinguish the searching glance of anxiety; under her warm kiss he could feel the words:

"Poor boy! I am sorry; you have tried so hard!"

Their home was poor, poorer than Digby had thought any man's home could be, but there was no sign of the filth that characterised the condition of other homes in the house. Mrs. Trotter kept it clean, kept it neat, and kept it as bright as possible. While they were as poor, if not poorer than the other inhabitants of this roofed world, they were looked upon as and called "the aristocrats." No poverty could remove nor deface the indelible stamp of superiority which good blood and culture had given them as birthrights. Their apparel was cleaner than anything of its kind in the building, fairly immaculate when compared with the wretched garb of the beings who were looked upon as human but who were—well, they were unfortunate to have that distinction; something less would have been more fitting.

When occasion presented, Digby would bring home flowers, plucked from the gardens that he passed. Kate would bedeck the room with the blossoms, her eyes glistening as she thought of the lovely spot she had known five long years ago. Once in awhile the more beautiful of his tributes would adorn her coal black hair, lending wealth to what seemed so much like waste.

They had curtains for their windows, too—muslin, of course—and, although the windows were almost paneless, they presented quite a home-like appearance, especially from the street, eight floors below. Heavy wads of cloth served as glass in most of the vacant places, but they did not serve well as light filterers. Besides all these valuables they owned a bedstead, a stove, some chairs, a table, a sewing machine and a mirror. Not another family in the house owned a mirror.

But they were lovers ever—the same, sweet comrades in love. The baby was their Cupid at whose shrine they worshipped. She ruled their affections and there was no kingdom wider than her domain. Digby, covered with shame, despair and bitterness against the world, turned himself loose into the pasture of joy when she cooed her authority; romped like a boy whose heart had never felt as heavy as a chunk of lead; talked to her, sang to her with a voice that had never felt the quiver of dismay. Upon these sad pleasantries Mrs. Trotter smiled her worship. Better than all, Digby had never been compelled to walk with her for two or three hours in the middle of the night. It is said that she was the only child on earth that never had the colic.

On the 23d of December in the year of our story, Digby had gone, bright and early, to the big queensware store of Balling and Peet, word having reached him that they needed extra help during the holidays. When he neared his old haunts, the prominent downtown streets, instead of going boldly along the sidewalks as of yore, he slunk through alleys and across corners avoiding all possible chance of meeting the acquaintances of bygone days, the men about town, the women he had known, none of whom would know him now. It was not that he feared their recognition, but that they would refuse to look at him at all.

The morning was bright and crisp, cold and prophetic of still greater chill. Men in great overcoats passed him, muffled to the chin, their whiskers frosty with the whitened air of life that came from tingling noses; ruddy cheeks abounded on this typical winter day. Mr. Trotter possessed no overcoat, but presumably following the fashion set out by other wintry pedestrians, his thin sack coat was buttoned tightly and the collar turned up defiantly. His well-brushed though seedy Derby looked chilly as it topped off his shivering features. His face was blue, not ruddy. Here and there he passed companions in poverty, but their rags were worse than his, their faces more haggard. Never did he feel more like the gentleman than when he saw what he could be if he were not one.

Something jaunty beneath his brow-beaten spirits told him that he was to have work, that his mission would be productive of the result so long desired. In three months he had earned but ten days' wages and he had found it rather difficult, not to say annoying to be a gentleman with nothing on which to keep up outward appearances.

With an exultant feeling he approached the big store, but as he entered it the old trepidation returned, the old anxiety, the old shudder at the thought of failure. Being directed to the manager of the busy establishment, he accosted him in the office, something like meekness underlying the apparent straightforwardness to which his manly exterior seemed so well acquainted.

The manager was different from others of his ilk. He greeted the applicant kindly and told him to come back the next day at noon and he would be set to work in the express department. If he proved satisfactory he would be retained during the whole week, perhaps permanently. They were looking for good men there, he said. Digby's whole being seemed lighter than it had been for months when he left the place and hurried homeward.

Kate's heart thumped strangely when she heard him coming down the long hall with great rapid strides, so unlike the usual slow, deliberate tread. She opened the door to admit him and when he clasped her in his arms and rained kisses upon her face she knew that she was but receiving the proofs of her sudden guess. Their frugal meal was dispatched slowly, the diners allowing their tongues to display greater diligence than their teeth. They were all very happy.

The great rush of business was at its height when Digby strode between the counters of Balling and Peet's store the next day noon, on his way to the office. Hundreds of people thronged the place, and he could not help thinking of the days when he, a lad, had accompanied his mother to this same great store where purchases were made that now seemed like dreams to him. The smallest priced article that stood on the counters was now beyond his power of possession. Mr. Sampson, the manager, was in the office when Digby entered.

"Ah, you are here, I see," he said, but his voice was not so friendly as it had been on the day before. "I am sorry, Mr.—Mr.—"

"Trotter," volunteered Digby, forgetting to add the servile "sir." His heart was cold with apprehension.

"We were forced by rush of business this morning to put extra men to work much earlier than I had expected. Not knowing your address I could not notify you, and we have filled the places with men who came in early. We did not expect the rush quite so early, you see. I am sorry, sir. Perhaps we can do something for you later on."

Digby's eyes were misty, but there was a gleam of proud resentment beneath the mist. His first thought was: "How can I go home and tell her of this?"

"Have you nothing else, sir, that I can do?" he asked, from the depths of his disappointment. He actually hated the man who had failed to remember him—unreasonably, he knew, but he hated him.

"Nothing, I believe, Mr.—Mr. Potter—no, there is nothing at all. Good day." The manager turned to his desk and Digby, smarting to the very centre of his heart, shot a glance of insulted pride toward him, while beneath his breath there welled the unhappy threat: "I'll some day make you remember me! I'll not always be at the bottom."

Defiantly he strode from the office, banging the door after him indignantly. The manager looked around in mild surprise and muttered:

"Poor devil! I suppose he hasn't had a drink all day."

When Digby reached the sidewalk the bright sunlight sent him tumbling back into the reality of his position. Hardly knowing what he did, he turned the corner, meeting the cutting wind from the west. The moisture that came into his tired eyes as he walked dejectedly along, however, was not caused by the wind. It came from the cells of shame, disconsolation and despair.

Ahead of him on the busy thoroughfare walked an old-time friend, Joe Delapere. But a few years ago they had been boon companions, running the same race, following the same course together. Now one slunk along, shorn of his rapid spurs, while the other sped the gay course in happy unconcern. If Joe had a care it was over his love affairs, and, as he had admitted, they were annoyances more than cares after he had ceased to care. Digby was bitter against the world he had once inhabited, his father more than all the rest of it together. That was the difference between their ways of looking at the world.

Delapere stepped to the edge of the sidewalk and hailed a cab, a sudden and increasing flurry of snow changing his desire to walk into the necessity of riding. Cabby came dashing up and Joe pulled forth his well filled purse.

"Get me to No. — Morton avenue in five minutes and another dollar is yours. Be brisk, now!" Selecting a bill, he handed it to the driver and sprang into the cab. To his box climbed the well-urged driver, crack went his whip and once more the boon companions went their different ways—in different fashion.

But as Delapere thrust his purse back into his coat pocket something fluttered to the gutter. Digby's hungry eyes saw at a glance that it was a bank note, and, calling to the cabman, he rushed to curbing and fished the bill from the slush.

A ten dollar bill! And the cabman had not heard his shout! Putting his cold fingers to his lips he gave vent to that shrill whistle which always attracts the attention of Jehu, but the cabby was earning his extra dollar and heard nothing, saw nothing, felt nothing but the big flakes that struck his tingling face Digby stopped at the corner and saw the cab disappear down the street.

"I'll take it to him tomorrow," he resolved. As he started to put the bill into his pocket the thought came to him that Kate and the baby were suffering. All the way home he battled with his conscience, striving to convince himself that Delapere had not dropped the note, that it belonged to him by virtue of discovery, and that he deserved it if any one in the world did. At last there came a solution. He would explain it all to Kate and take her advice. He knew she would insist that he take it to the owner at once, and his conscience was temporarily eased. But, he would have to confess that he had failed to find work! Ah, that was the rub!

Another thought! Why should he tell her he had failed! Why not deceive her? He had the amount of a week's wages in his pocket and he had but to absent himself from the house during the days to carry out the deception. Conscience was gone—everything was gone except the desire to shield the ones at home.

At 5 o'clock he climbed the stairs, feeling like a joint thief and millionaire, possessing the sort of conscience that both ignore. Kate met him at the door of their room and he smiled gaily as he kissed her then snatched the baby from between his feet where she had planted herself precipitously. Kate was looking at him when he took his seat near the stove in which burned the remnants of store boxes that he had found that morning. His eyes could not meet hers when she asked:

"Is it all that you thought it would be, Digby?"

"Yes; I am pleased with the place. I only hope it will be permanent."

"Didn't they give you any satisfaction about the time that they will need you?"

"Not over a week, they said, but there is chance for a permanent place, of course."

"What—er—what are they to pay you, dear?"

"Ten dollars a week—it will be a great help, won't it? The rent can be paid and you can have something warm to wear and—and—" then he interrupted himself to stir up the fire, a wave of guilt causing him to withdraw from the ordeal imposed by her trusting blue eyes. "By the way, Kate, we must be quite merry tonight—isn't that so, Nell? Pop's got a job!" And with forced gaiety he juggled the laughing child toward the ceiling. "We ought to eat, drink and be merry. But—" (lugubriously)—"what have we to eat and drink, not counting the merriment, Kate?"

"Bread, liver and water—a feast, isn't it? But, oh, Digby, how many there are who have not even that. And tomorrow is Christmas, too. What shall we have for our grand dinner?"

"We'll have to have a change, to be sure—you can warm over the water, liver and bread."

"I have a few cents left, dear—I could have sent with you for a few little extras for tonight, too. I wish I had; it would be so jolly, wouldn't it?"

"I haven't had a cent for so long that I—I don't know how it would feel. Keep your money, Kate; I'll have some tomorrow. I have made arrangements to draw my pay every day." He felt like a murderer as he sat there with that fortune in his trousers pocket. Then he danced and romped with Helen as only he could romp. In the midst of one of the wildest figures Kate suddenly seized his arm and cried.

"Digby Trotter! Stoop over, this instant! Why, what kind of a wife am I? Good gracious, but you need a patch there—it's positively disgraceful. How long have you been going around with that hole there?"

"I don't know—in fact, I had not observed it," he answered, like a shame-faced boy.

"And your coat is so short, too. Take them off at once and I'll put a patch there before I do another thing."

"I'll have to go to bed, my dear. Can't you patch 'em with 'em on me?"

"Of course not! I'd certainly sew them fast to your person. Go to bed, if you please, then. I'll promise not to be long."

And so the head of the house had to go to bed while its mistress repaired the garment.

"Say, Kate," called out Digby from the bed, where he was playing with the baby, "that's a positive proof that I've been compelled to sit around a good deal this year, isn't it?"

"The evidence is certainly damaging," she replied, laughingly, her fingers busy with the repairs.

"Do the knees require patching, deary?"

"Not in the least; they are the soundest part of the pants," said his wife.

Just then something slipped from one of the pockets and fell noiselessly to the floor, Kate's eyes catching sight of it as it fluttered before them.

A ten dollar bill!

And he had told her that he had no money! Poor bewildered Kate picked up the bill and sat staring at it with wide-spread eyes, her thoughts chaos. Had he been lying to her all along? Was there money in his pockets all these months through which she had slaved to help him keep their little home together? Deep into her unwilling heart sank a shaft of distrust, the first it had ever felt. Then for shame she tried to withdraw the shaft, to ease the pain it had caused, but with all her tugging the thought went deeper, beyond control, becoming rooted, settled in that long unblemished home of fidelity, love and trustfulness.

A hundred excuses came to his defence, but her bewildered brain could not complete them; they became chaotic conflicts between devotion and suspicion. No sooner did she see her way clear than it was blocked again. There was the bill! It had fallen from his pocket—more money than she had known him to possess in months. And with that bill in his pocket he had wilfully told her that he had no money, not even a cent. Distrust grew stronger, faith faded away, resentment flooded the heart of the loving little woman, and the years of happy misery she had spent with him became the memory of deception and neglect. Tears welled up in the glittering eyes; then her teeth came firmly together as if to suppress the emotion with which she found herself struggling. The bitterness of reproach came to her as she turned toward the bed on which frolicked the husband and the child. The child! He played, toyed with the little one, whose every want he had forgotten,

with money in his selfish pockets. His wife found herself beginning to hate, to despise him.

But words refused to come, the reproach was unuttered, for a sudden thought intervened. The thought was mother to a resolution and Digby Trotter was spared.

"I guess I'll go down town," said Digby when he stood clothed as he had been before Kate discovered the necessity for a patch. "Perhaps I can get a chance to help some one of the store-keepers this evening and earn enough to get up a little dinner for tomorrow." He was buttoning his little coat tightly around his neck as he made this declaration, and he noticed that Kate did not respond. "Come, kiss popper good-bye," he cried to the child and the response was ready, eager. Then he looked at Kate's quiet figure bending over the sewing near the candle flame. A cold chill shot over him, piercing deeper than the chills of the night without. Something like fear, suspense, grew in his heart as he bent his eyes upon the form of one who had never allowed him to leave her presence without a kiss, a cheery word. For an instant the thought came to him that she had at last ceased to love the useless beggar, the robber of her joys, the man who had dragged her from comfort to this life of squalor. With inconsiderate swiftness came the memory of the days when he and the same Joe Delapere had been rivals for her love, both rich and influential. She had chosen the one who bore her down; perhaps now she was regretting the choice in a heart that longed for the other. She had spoken of Joe frequently during the past two weeks and had told him of numerous accidental meetings with his old-time rival. But, in an instant more, his heart had revolted against this gross suspicion, hardly formed, and he almost cursed himself for the moment of doubt. Dear, dear little Kate!

"Kate," he said, "aren't you going to kiss me?" He was astonished by the flushed face she turned toward him and at the wavering eyes which met his in a fashion so strange that he felt a second chill go through his being.

"Certainly, dear," she said, coming to his side. "Baby shall not undo me in politeness."

"Affection would sound better," he said, taking her cold, almost lifeless hands in his. He stooped to kiss the lips upturned to his, but drew back, a dismal uncertainty taking possession of him. "What is the matter, Kate? Tell me, dear. Don't you want to kiss me?" He could not prevent the moisture from dimming his eyes, drawn by the pride which felt itself put to shame.

"I'll kiss you whether I want to or not," she said, smiling vaguely, and their lips met—both cold, fearful.

As Digby hurried down the long, narrow stairways and out in the biting air his fear and apprehension grew. Wonder, even dismay, charged upon him, and his excited imagination recalled the many little short-comings he had observed in Kate's behaviour of late, all of which began to assume startling proportions, convincing him beyond all doubt that something was wrong, woefully wrong. Could it be possible that he had lost her love, her respect? Had she at last ceased to love the unfortunate being who had battled so feebly in her behalf? Ah, his heart waxed sore; he felt not the frost without, but the chill within. What was he to do? What was left to do? He had started from home intending to purchase a turkey, some toys for Helen, some sweet little remembrance for the wife he had thought so loving, but his happy designs had been frustrated. The chilling heart refused to return to the warmth of expected joy, to recognise the feelings of anticipation.

"Ah, well," he sighed, almost aloud, to the hurrying wind, "what else can I expect? I have done all I could; no man could do more and no woman could have borne more than she. Truly she has borne too much—I cannot blame her—but, oh, how can she—how can she turn against me now. After all—after all!"

For blocks he rambled on in this manner, seeing no one as he passed, observing nothing. At last his face grew brighter and a momentary shadow of joy overspread it.

"I'll take home the turkey, the toys and the shawl to them. They shall have them if Delapere never sees his money again—if Kate never kisses me again in her life. I'll tell her the truth about the money!"

Nevertheless it was with a guilty feeling that he ran his hand into his trousers pocket to fondle the bill. The fingers wriggled around in the depths, poking into every corner, searching most anxiously. Then the other dived into the opposite pocket and the fingers found no bill. With a startled exclamation he came to a standstill on the sidewalk and a vigorous investigation was begun, his expression growing more bewildered and alarmed as the search grew more hopeless. The bill was gone! Lost!

Passers-by noticed the abstracted man fumbling in his pockets, muttering to himself, and one man asked, cheerfully:

"Lost something, pardner?"

Digby Trotter did not answer. He walked slowly down the street, his cold hands reposing listlessly in his empty pockets, his heart in his boots, his eyes looking vacantly toward his heart.

"It wasn't mine; I had no right to it," he murmured, time and again. Aimlessly about the streets he wandered, turning homeward at last, depressed, despising himself, ready to give up in spirit. He was going home to Kate, expecting no love to greet him, feeling in his heart that he deserved none.

As he passed the crowded stores he saw the turkeys, the chickens, the oysters, the apples—all of which he might have bought with the lost bill. "What use is there to be honest?" he asked of himself. Without knowing what he did, nor from whence came the resolution, he discovered that he determined to steal a turkey! And he did not feel guilty; it seemed as if he had no conscience. Something stilled that hitherto relentless foe to vice which virtue calls conscience and his whole being throbbed with the delights of the sin that is condemned in the ten commandments. Stealing? "Thou shalt not steal." But he did not feel that he was stealing, so where was the sin? Despising only the level to which his fortunes had fallen he saw without a conscience, without a moral fear. It all seemed so natural that he should take home a turkey, the cranberries

and all the little "goodies" that his spare table required to make it strain with surprise on the glad day-tomorrow.

Digby forgot that he had lost the bill, forgot that Kate had treated him so strangely, forgot that but an hour ago he had been lamenting the wrong he was doing Joe Delapere in spending his money. Approaching a big grocery and general provision store he calmly stepped inside, passing along the counters with the air of a man who lived solely on turkey and wine sauce. Scores of purchasers thronged the big establishment and dozens of clerks were kept busy, providing for them.

As Mr. Trotter walked through the store he viewed the baskets which stood along the counters, laden with the belongings of customers, ready for the delivery wagons or for their owners who had left them while they visited other stores. Nearly every basket contained a bird of some sort—a Christmas dinner, in fact. Each had a slip of paper on which the name of the owner was written. As he passed the second counter he observed a well-filled basket and he stopped to examine the name. "Mrs. John P. Matthews," was written on the slip. This was his basket, thought he, calmly and without compunction. Then he began to price the articles on the shelves near by. This was his style of bargaining:

"What is your cocoa worth a pound? Sure it's fresh?"

"Certainly, sir; it's Baker's best."

"Baker's? We never use it. Let me look at that chocolate. I guess I'll take some of it"—and his hand went slowly into his pocket—"but, hold on! We've got chocolate! Confound my forgetfulness; I'll buy out your store directly. Do you keep mince meat?"

"Yes, sir—over at that counter. Just step over there, please. Mr. Carew will wait on you."

Digby felt that he had established an identity at the counter on which stood the Matthews basket, so he walked over to the other counter, priced sweet potatoes, and was immediately directed to the provision department in the rear. He found the potatoes too high, the apples too sweet, the macaroni too old and the buckwheat not the brand he used—all of which was quite true.

Ten minutes later he drifted back to the second counter, smiled cheerfully at the clerk, picked up the basket and started for the door, stopping beside a barrel of dried apples to run his fingers through the contents and to nibble one of the gritty chunks. He was squeezing his way hastily through the crowd, nearing the door, when a hand was laid firmly on his left shoulder. Turning quickly he found himself gazing into the face of a stranger, fairly well dressed and not overly intelligent in appearance.

"Is that your basket, sir?" asked the stranger, calmly.

"Of course, it is," exclaimed Digby, hastily, a red flush flying to his now guilty cheek, fading away, as the snow goes before the sun, an instant later. Caught!

"I think this basket belongs to a lady, sir."

"My wife," interjected the culprit. "She was with me and went on to another store. Why, what do you mean!" he suddenly demanded, realising that it was high time to appear injured. "Do you think I'm a thief!"

"No, sir; but will you tell me your name—or your wife's name? Merely to satisfy me, you see; I'm a watchman here."

"Matthews is my name, sir—and so's my wife's—John P. Matthews. Is that satisfactory?"

The man slowly turned over the slip in the basket and read the name.

"Are you quite sure that it is your name?" he asked, deliberately, looking keenly at Digby.

"Certainly! Do you think I don't know my own name?" demanded Digby with an excellent show of asperity.

"Then this is not your basket, sir, and I am sorry to say that you will have to be detained until you can give a satisfactory explanation."

Digby's eyes fairly stuck from his head and his face was as white as the proverbial sheet.

"Not my—not Mrs. Matthews' basket!" he stammered, clutching the slip in his trembling fingers. His eyes grew blurred with amazement an instant later. He passed his hand before them and when he took it away there was a wild, half insane stare in them. He looked again at the slip and read: "Mrs. Digby Trotter, Voxburgh building."

His nerveless arm relinquished the basket to the hand of the stranger and his puzzled eyes sought the floor in a long stare, broken presently by the voice in his ear:

"Come along. Step back here with me."

Digby shook the man's hand from his arm and, as he turned to follow him, asked hoarsely:

"Where is she now?"

"Who?"

"My wife of course—Mrs. Trotter."

"Well, you're a bird!" exclaimed his guardian. "How about Mrs. Matthews?"

"Good Heavens, what have I done—I—I—look here, man. It's a mistake—"

"No, you don't—mistakes don't go. A man ought to know his own name."

Digby saw no one, heard no one but the man beside him as he stumbled along, pleading with his eyes, his mouth, his every expression. He did not observe the lady against whom he roughly jostled, but the lady turned in time to hear him say in piteous accents:

"Man, for God's sake, don't be too hasty—; I—-"

"Oh, let up; we're onto you! This ain't your basket and you took it, that's all there is about it. Come on!" gruffly jerked out the man at his elbow.

"But where is Mrs. Trotter? I want to—I must see her."

"Here I am, Digby. What is the matter?" cried a well known voice in his ear. That voice had never sounded so sweet to him, nor had its sweetness ever sounded so much like condemnation to his wretched soul.

"Kate!" he gasped.

"What is it?" she demanded hurriedly. "What does this man want?" The man was staring blankly at the pair, stock still with amazement.

"He says I—I have been trying to steal this basket. It's our—yours, I mean, isn't it? Tell him so, Kate—quick!" cried the miserable man with the plaintive coat collar turned up about his neck.

"This is our basket, sir," indignantly exclaimed Mrs. Trotter.

"I know it is yours, Mrs. Trotter; I saw you buying the stuff, but—"

"Don't haggle here any longer!" exclaimed Mr. Trotter, boldly now. "Let go of my arm!"

"I beg your pardon, sir. If the lady says it's all right, why, it is—but you know you said your name was—"

"You lie, sir!" said Digby, sternly. "I never said anything of the kind. Mrs. Trotter have you paid for this stuff?"

"No—I was not through ordering, but what does all this mean, Digby?" whispered the mystified saviour, feeling herself the shame-faced centre of a group of wondering people.

"Never mind now," said her husband, with dignity. "And you, sir, unpack this basket. We don't want a cent's worth of your goods."

"Oh, Digby—" began Kate.

"My dear Mr. Trotter,"—began the luckless attache, but Digby silenced them both by suddenly grasping his wife's arm and striding toward the door, he defiantly, conscience stricken, she bewildered beyond all hope of description.

A moment later they were on the pavement and Digby was racking his brain for an explanation. How was he to account to her for his possession of that basket, even though it was hers? It did not occur to him to wonder how she came to be the owner of the coveted basket—his penniless Kate.

"Digby, what did that man mean?" asked Kate, finally pulling her wits together. There was something like sternness in her voice, something like resentment, something like tears. He tried to look into her eyes; eyes which were upturned to his so anxiously, but he could not. There was something creeping up in his throat that compelled him to gulp suddenly. A rush of shamed degradation flashed over him, overwhelming him completely, and before he could prevent it his honest, contrite heart had spoken.

"Little girl—God forgive me—I was trying to steal that—that basket."

He felt her start and gasp and he could distinguish the horror, the shock in her eyes, although he did not see them. Her hand relaxed its clasp upon his arm and her trembling voice murmured:

"Oh, Digby! Oh, Digby!"

"Don't—Don't, for heaven's sake, don't, Kate! Don't blame me! I did it for you, for the baby—I—I couldn't see you hungry on Christmas"—and here the tears rolled down his cheeks and the words came thick and choking. "Kate, I don't think I committed a crime—do you? Say you don't think so, darling!"

"You were stealing," she whispered, numbly.

"For you, darling—please—please forget it—I—I—Oh, I can't say anything more." Her clasp tightened again on his arm and he felt the warm spirit of forgiveness, of love communicating with his own miserable self. No word came to either as they faced the cutting wind, bound they knew not whither, so distraught were they with the importance of the moment.

Suddenly he stopped as if struck by a great blow. A glare came to his eyes and his brain fairly reeled. Pushing her away at arm's length from him he gave expression to the sudden thought which had so strangely affected him.

"Where did you get the money to buy that stuff with?" he demanded, and there was anger, suspicion, almost terror in his voice. His ready brain had resumed the thoughts of an hour ago. He saw but one solution and it came rushing along with the reawakened thoughts, firing his soul with jealousy. Joe Delapere had been providing his wife with money—he could not be mistaken. Horrible! Horrible!

But back came her answer, equally severe, and if as from a sudden recollection, also:

"Where did you get it?"

"Get what? he demanded, harshly. Joe Delapere! Joe Delapere! Joe Delapere—that lover of old filled his brain like a raging fire.

"You know what I mean, Digby Trotter—what is it that you mean? Where did you get that ten dollars you had in your pocket today?"

"Oh, heaven!" gasped Digby, almost falling over. Then he burst into rapturous laughter, and, right there on the sidewalk, embraced her vigorously. Not all the riches in the world could have purchased the one moment of relief.

"What ten?" he cried. "Was that the ten! Oh, you dear, dear little Kate—did you do it? I thought I had lost it on the street. Oh, this is rich!" and he laughed heartier than ever.

"Stop!" she cried, her face flaming. "Where did you get it? Why did you tell me that you had no money? Have you been doing this all along—all these bitter years?"

He sobered up in an instant, for he saw the situation as she had seen it.

"Why, Kate, I—now, listen a minute! You probably won't believe me, but I swear to you I found that bill—"

"Found it!" she sneered. "That's very likely, isn't it?"

"I knew you'd say that—but I found it, just the same," he went on patiently. "Joe Delapere dropped it as he was getting into a carriage—yes, he did, now—and he drove off before I could pick it up and return it to him. I kept the money, intending to give it back to him. That's true, dear—so help me God. Don't you believe me?" He was very, very much in earnest, but she was woman enough to question further.

"Why didn't you tell me of this before?"

"Because I—well, I didn't get that place at Balling and Feet's and I didn't have the heart to tell you I had failed again. I kept the hill just to deceive you. Heaven is my witness that I intended to pay it back to Joe, but the temptation was too great—I couldn't resist. Don't you understand now, dear? I wanted it for you and Helen; you don't know how I prized it. It meant so much. Why, when I started down town to buy the little dinner that I afterwards tried to steal—"

"From me," she interrupted.

"Yes, from you—I felt so happy in that I was sinning gently for you. Then I missed the bill and—well, the other followed; you know what I mean. You don't think I'm a real thief, do you, Kate?"

"No, no, dear; forgive me!" she cried, with true wifely penitence. "I see it all and I love you for it, better than ever before." She squeezed his arm tightly and squeezed her eyelids vainly. "But you must never do it again," she cautioned, tenderly. He laughed again, that unwilling thief and pauper.

"Oh, by the way, while I think of it, how did you happen to have that ten?" he asked, with cruel glee.

She felt even guiltier than he and her voice was quite feeble as she answered:

"Well, you remember when I was mending your trousers," she began. He gave her arm a tremendous pressure and interrupted:

"But the hole wasn't in the pocket, dear, was it?"

"Oh, you'll forgive me, won't you truly, Digby?" she almost wailed.

"But you were stealing!" he said, solemnly, recalling her condemnatory words.

"Don't say it that way, Digby," she protested, so faintly that his heart smote him and he changed the subject with almost ridiculous haste.

"Hadn't we better go to another grocery and buy our Christmas dinner," he suggested.

"No, indeed!" she exclaimed. "With what could we buy it!"

"With my—your ten, I mean."

"Digby Trotter, we may carry on our nefarious robberies as individuals, but I don't intend to form a partnership in the business. I don't approve of doing it collectively."

"But what will we do with the money? Burn it?"

"I thought you wanted to give it back to its owner."

"But he won't miss it—not just yet, anyhow," he expostulated.

"Neither shall you; you are never to see it again," she said, firmly, clasping the little purse defiantly.

"Well, I guess you're right. We'll do without our turkey dinner. It's pretty rough, though, when we are nearer being millionaires than we have been in months," he said, regretfully.

"I couldn't eat a mouthful of turkey bought with Joe Delapere's money," she said, and he felt his heart throb joyfully for some strange cause.

Homeward they wended their disconsolate way, her arm through his, clinging fondly to him, he proud of

the honour she was bestowing upon him—poor, poor lovers! In spite of all, he felt better for that which had happened. He had begun what might have been a career of crime. Circumstance and her sweet influence had averted that career. She, too, had learned a lesson, deeper in its meaning than any logic could have been; she had distrusted him. Honour, love and duty bound them together again. They were going home to dine on dried beef, water and perhaps bread—Christmas day, too.

Firmly they turned their wistful eyes from the shop windows; they had nothing in common with them, save desire.

At last they came to the dingy entrance which led to the long halls and multigenerous stairways of their abiding place. Without a word they began to climb the steps, tired and with returning discouragement. They were thinking of the baby. Tears came to the father's eyes, but he turned his face away and attempted to whistle. She pressed his arm again in silence, but for the same reason she looked toward the wall. At the first landing he paused and drew her to his breast. As their lips met in one brave, compassionate kiss a sob fled from the heart of each.

Drawing nearer the top floor they heard strange sounds coming from their own room. A gruff, hoarse voice was prominent and they stopped to look into each other's eyes with hopeless alarm.

"It's the landlord," whispered Digby. "I might have known it would all come at once!"

"What shall we do?" asked Kate, with feminine dismay.

"Do? What do we usually do? Nothing! I don't know how I'm going to put him off again—we're over three weeks behind with the rent. Oh, Kate!" he almost sobbed.

"Well, dear!" She was trembling. So was he.

"What if he orders us to leave the place?" She could not reply and they stood silent, looking toward the door that they feared to enter.

"Where is the baby?" he finally asked.

"I left her with the woman across the hall."

"But I hear her voice in our room. What is she doing in there with that infernal old brute?" Digby's alert ear had caught the sound of the child's prattle, mingling with the discordant growls of the man.

"Oh, Digby, I'm so frightened! What can they be doing in there?"

"Don't be afraid. I'll chuck him out of there on his head if he has been tormenting that child with his compliments—and it would be just like the old scoundrel, too." He took several steps forward.

"Do be careful!" murmured his wife, following faithfully. Digby threw open the door defiantly and stood glaring into the little room.

A big, portly man was seated near the stove, little Helen on his knee. As the door opened he raised his chop-whiskered face and then, placing the child on the floor, drew himself erect and came hastily toward the pair in the doorway, exclaiming:

"My boy! At last I have got you! God knows I've searched the town over and over for you—and I find you in a hole like this! Come to my arms—oh, demme! demme! demme!"

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