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*** START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK THE DESERT AND THE SOWN ***

THE DESERT AND THE SOWN

By Mary Hallock Foote

CONTENTS

I. — A COUNCIL OF THE ELDERS

II. — INTRODUCING A SON-IN-LAW

III. — THE INITIAL LOVE

IV. — A MAN THAT HAD A WELL IN HIS OWN COURT

V. — DISINHERITED

VI. — AN APPEAL TO NATURE

VII. — MARKING TIME

VIII. — A HUNTER'S DIARY

IX. — THE POWER OF WEAKNESS

X. — THE WHITE PERIL

XI. — A SEARCHING OF HEARTS

XII. — THE BLOOD-WITE

XIII. — CURTAIN

XIV. — KIND INQUIRIES

XV. — A BRIDEGROOM OF SNOW

XVI. — THE NATURE OF AN OATH

XVII. — THE HIDDEN TRAIL

XVIII. — THE STAR IN THE EAST

XIX. — PILGRIMS AND STRANGERS

XX. — A STATION IN THE DESERT

XXI. — INJURIOUS REPORTS CONCERNING AN OLD HOUSE

XXII. — THE CASE STRIKES IN

XXIII. — RESTIVENESS

XXIV. — INDIAN SUMMER

XXV. — THE FELL FROST

XXVI. — PEACE TO THIS HOUSE

I. — A COUNCIL OF THE ELDERS

It was an evening of sudden mildness following a dry October gale. The colonel had miscalculated the temperature by one log—only one, he declared, but that had proved a pitchy one, and the chimney bellowed with flame. From end to end the room was alight with it, as if the stored-up energies of a whole pine-tree had been sacrificed in the consumption of that four-foot stick.

The young persons of the house had escaped, laughing, into the fresh night air, but the colonel was hemmed in on every side; deserted by his daughter, mocked by the work of his own hands, and torn between the duties of a host and the host's helpless craving for his after-dinner cigar.

Across the hearth, filling with her silks all the visible room in his own favorite settle corner, sat the one woman on earth it most behooved him to be civil to,—the future mother-in-law of his only child. That Moya was a willing, nay, a reckless hostage, did not lessen her father's awe of the situation.

Mrs. Bogardus, according to her wont at this hour, was composedly doing nothing. The colonel could not make his retreat under cover of her real or feigned absorption in any of the small scattering pursuits which distract the female mind. When she read she read—she never “looked at books.” When she sewed she sewed—presumably, but no one ever saw her do it. Her mind was economic and practical, and she saved it whole, like many men of force, for whatever she deemed her best paying sphere of action.

It was a silence that crackled with heat! The colonel, wrathfully perspiring in the glow of that impenitent stick, frowned at it like an inquisitor. Presently Mrs. Bogardus looked up, and her expression softened as she saw the energetic despair upon his face.

“Colonel, don't you always smoke after dinner?”

“That is my bad habit, madam. I belong to the generation that smokes—after dinner and most other times—more than is good for us.” Colonel Middleton belonged also to the generation that can carry a sentence through to the finish in handsome style, and he did it with a suave Virginian accent as easy as his seat in the saddle. Mrs. Bogardus always gave him her respectful attention during his best performances, though she was a woman of short sentences herself.

“Don't you smoke in this room sometimes?” she asked, with a barely perceptible sniff the merest contraction of her housewifely nostrils.

“Ah—h! Those rascally curtains and cushions! You ladies—women, I should say—Moya won't let me say ladies—you bolster us up with comforts on purpose to betray us!”

“You can say 'ladies' to me,” smiled the very handsome one before him. “That's the generation *I* belong to.”

The colonel bowed playfully. “Well, you know, I don't detect myself, but there's no doubt I have infected the premises.”

“Open fires are good ventilators. I wish you would smoke now. If you don't, I shall have to go away, and I'm exceedingly comfortable.”

“You are exceedingly charming to say so—on top of that last stick, too!” The colonel had Irish as well as Virginian progenitors. “Well,” he sighed, proceeding to make himself conditionally happy, “Moya will never forgive me! We spoil each other shamefully when we're alone, but of course we try to jack each other up when company comes. It's a great comfort to have some one to spoil, isn't it, now? I needn't ask which it is in your family!”

“The spoiled one?” Mrs. Bogardus smiled rather coldly. “A woman we had for governess, when Christine was a little thing, used to say: 'That child is the stuff that tyrants are made of!' Tyrants are made by the will of their subjects, don't you think, generally speaking?”

“Well, you couldn't have made a tyrant of your son, Mrs. Bogardus. He's the Universal Spoiler! He'll ruin my striker, Jephson. I shall have to send the fellow back to the ranks. I don't know how you keep a servant good for anything with Paul around.”

“Paul thinks he doesn't like to be waited on,” Paul's mother observed shrewdly. “He says that only invalids,

old people, and children have any claim on the personal service of others."

"By George! I found him blacking his own boots!"

Mrs. Bogardus laughed.

"But I'm paying a man to do it for him. It upsets my contract with that other fellow for Paul to do his work. We have a claim on what we pay for in this world."

"I suppose we have. But Paul thinks that nothing can pay the price of those artificial relations between man and man. I think that's the way he puts it."

"Good Heavens! Has the boy read history? It's a relation that began when the world was made, and will last while men are in it."

"I am not defending Paul's ideas, Colonel. I have a great sympathy with tyrants myself. You must talk to him. He will amuse you."

"My word! It's a ticklish kind of amusement when *we* get talking. Why, the boy wants to turn the poor old world upside down—make us all stand on our heads to give our feet a rest. Now, I respect my feet,"—the colonel drew them in a little as the lady's eyes involuntarily took the direction of his allusion,—"I take the best care I can of them; but I propose to keep my head, such as it is, on top, till I go under altogether. These young philanthropists! They assume that the Hands and the Feet of the world, the class that serves in that capacity, have got the same nerves as the Brain."

"There's a sort of connection," said Mrs. Bogardus carelessly. "Some of our Heads have come from the class that you call the Hands and Feet, haven't they?"

The colonel admitted the fact, but the fact was the exception. "Why, that's just the matter with us now! We've got no class of legislators. I don't wish to plume myself, but, upon my word, the two services are about all we have left to show what selection and training can do. And we're only just getting the army into shape, after the raw material that was dumped into it by the civil war."

"Weren't you in the civil war yourself?"

"I was—a West Pointer, madam; and I was true to my salt and false to my blood. But, the flag over all!—at the cost of everything I held dear on earth." After this speech the colonel looked hotter than ever and a trifle ashamed of himself.

Mrs. Bogardus's face wore its most unobservant expression. "I don't agree with Paul," she said. "I wish in some ways he were more like other young men—exercise, for instance. It's a pity for young men not to love activity and leadership. Besides, it's the fashion. A young man might as well be out of the world as out of the fashion. Blood is a strange thing," she mused.

The colonel looked at her curiously. In a woman so unfrank, her occasional bursts of frankness were surprising and, as he thought, not altogether complimentary. It was as if she felt herself so far removed from his conception of her that she might say anything she pleased, sure of his miscomprehension.

"He is not lazy intellectually," said the colonel, aiming to comfort her.

"I did not say he was lazy—only he won't do things except to what he calls some 'purpose.' At his age amusement ought to be purpose enough. He ought to take his pleasures seriously—this hunting-trip, for instance. I believe, on the very least encouragement, he would give it all up!"

"You mustn't let him do that," said the colonel, warming. "All that country above Yankee Fork, for a hundred miles, after you've gone fifty north from Bonanza, is practically virgin forest. Wonderful flora and fauna! It's late for the weeds and things, but if Paul wants game trophies for your country-house, he can load a pack-train."

Mrs. Bogardus continued to be amused, in a quiet way. "He calls them relics of barbarism! He would as soon festoon his walls with scalps, as decorate them with the heads of beautiful animals,—nearer the Creator's design than most men, he would say."

"He's right there! But that doesn't change the distinction between men and animals. He is your son, madam —and he's going to be mine. But, fine boy as he is, I call him a crank of the first water."

"You'll find him quite good to Moya," Mrs. Bogardus remarked dispassionately. "And he's not quite twenty-four."

"Very true. Well, *I* should send him into the woods for the sake of getting a little sense into him, of an every-day sort. He 'll take in sanity with every breath."

"And you don't think it's too late in the season for them to go out?"

There was no change in Mrs. Bogardus's voice, unconcerned as it was; yet the colonel felt at once that this simple question lay at the root of all her previous skirmishing.

"The guide will decide as to that," he said definitely. "If it is, he won't go out with them. They have got a good man, you say?"

"They are waiting for a good man; they have waited too long, I think. He is expected in with another party on Monday, perhaps, Paul is to meet the Bowens at Challis, where they buy their outfit. I do believe"—she laughed constrainedly—"that he is going up there more to head them off than for any other reason."

"How do you mean?"

"Oh, it's very stupid of them! They seem to think an army post is part of the public domain. They have been threatening, if Paul gives up the trip, to come down here on a gratuitous visit."

"Why, let them come by all means! The more the merrier! We will quarter them on the garrison at large."

"Wherever they were quartered, they would be here all the time. They are not intimate friends of Paul's. *Mrs.* Bowen is—a very great friend. He is her right-hand in all that Hartley House work. The boys are just fashionable young men."

"Can't they go hunting without Paul?"

"Wheels within wheels!" Mrs. Bogardus sighed impatiently. "Hunting trips are expensive, and—when young

men are living on their fathers, it is convenient sometimes to have a third. However, Paul goes, I half believe, to prevent their making a descent upon us here.”

“Well; I should ask them to come, or make it plain they were not expected.”

“Oh, would you?—if their mother was one of the nicest women, and your friend? Besides, the reservation does not cover the whole valley. Banks Bowen talks of a mine he wants to look at—I don't think it will make much difference to the mine! This is simply to say that I wish Paul cared more about the trip for its own sake.”

“Well, frankly, I think he's better out of the way for the next fortnight. The girls ought to go to bed early, and keep the roses in their cheeks for the wedding. Moya's head is full of her frocks and fripperies. She is trying to run a brace of sewing women; and all those boxes are coming from the East to be 'inspected, and condemned' mostly. The child seems to make a great many mistakes, doesn't she? About every other day I see a box as big as a coffin in the hall, addressed to some dry-goods house, 'returned by ——'”

“Moya should have sent to me for her things,” said Mrs. Bogardus. “I am the one who makes her return them. She can do much better when she is in town herself. It doesn't matter, for the few weeks they will be away, what she wears. I shall take her measures home with me and set the people to work. She has never been *fitted* in her life.”

The colonel looked rather aghast. He had seldom heard Mrs. Bogardus speak with so much animation. He wondered if really his household was so very far behind the times.

“It's very kind of you, I'm sure, if Moya will let you. Most girls think they can manage these matters for themselves.”

“It's impossible to shop by mail,” Mrs. Bogardus said decidedly. “They always keep a certain style of things for the Western and Southern trade.”

The colonel was crushed. Mrs. Bogardus rose, and he picked up her handkerchief, breathing a little hard after the exertion. She passed out, thanking him with a smile as he opened the door. In the hall she stopped to choose a wrap from a collection of unconventional garments hanging on a rack of moose horns.

“I think I shall go out,” she said. “The air is quite soft to-night. Do you know which way the children went?” By the “children,” as the colonel had noted, Mrs. Bogardus usually meant her daughter, the budding tyrant, Christine.

“Fine woman!” he mused, alone with himself in his study. “Splendid character head. Regular Dutch beauty. But hard—eh?—a trifle hard in the grain. Eyes that tell you nothing. Mouth set like a stone. Never rambles in her talk. Never speculates or exaggerates for fun. Never runs into hyperbole—the more fool some other folks! Speaks to the point or keeps still.”

II. — INTRODUCING A SON-IN-LAW

The colonel's papers failed to hold him somehow. He rose and paced the room with his short, stiff-kneed tread. He stopped and stared into the fire; his face began to get red.

“So! Moya's clothes are not good enough. Going to set the people to work, is she? Wants an outfit worthy of her son. And who's to pay for it, by gad? Post-nuptial bills for wedding finery are going to hurt poor little Moya like the deuce. Confound the woman! Dressing my daughter for me, right in my own house. Takes it in her hands as if it were her right, by——!” The colonel let slip another expletive. “Well,” he sighed, half amused at his own violence, “I'll write to Annie. I promised Moya, and it's high time I did.”

Annie was the colonel's sister, the wife of an infantry captain, stationed at Fort Sherman. She was a very understanding woman; at least she understood her brother. But she was not solely dependent upon his laggard letters for information concerning his private affairs. The approaching wedding at Bisuka Barracks was the topic of most of the military families in the Department of the Columbia. Moya herself had written some time before, in the self-conscious manner of the newly engaged. Her aunt knew of course that Moya and Christine Bogardus had been room-mates at Miss Howard's, that the girls had fallen in love with each other first, and with visits at holidays and vacations, when the army girl could not go to her father, it was easily seen how the rest had followed. And well for Moya that it had, was Mrs. Creve's indorsement. As a family they were quite sufficiently represented in the army; and if one should ever get an Eastern detail it would be very pleasant to have a young niece charmingly settled in New York.

The colonel drew a match across the top bar of the grate and set it to his pipe. His big nostrils whitened as he took a deep in-breath. He reseated himself and began his duty letter in the tone of a judicious parent; but, warming as he wrote, under the influence of Annie's imagined sympathy, he presently broke forth with his usual arrogant colloquialism.

“She might have had her pick of the junior officers in both branches. And there was a captain of engineers at the Presidio, a widower, but an awfully good fellow. And she has chosen a boy, full of transcendental moonshine, who climbs upon a horse as if it were a stone fence, and has mixed ideas which side of himself to hang a pistol on.

“I have no particular quarrel with the lad, barring his great burly mouthful of a name, Bo—gardus! To call a child Moya and have her fetch up with her soft, Irish vowels against such a name as that! She had a fond idea that it was from Beauregard. But she has had to give that up. It's Dutch—Hudson River Dutch—for something horticultural—a tree, or an orchard, or a brush-pile; and she says it's a good name where it belongs. Pity it

couldn't have stayed where it belongs.

“However, you won't find him quite so scrubby as he sounds. He's very proper and clean-shaven, with a good pair of dark, Dutch eyes, which he gets from his mother; and I wish he had got her business ability with them, and her horse sense, if the lady will excuse me. She runs the property and he spends it, as far as she'll let him, on the newest reforms. And there's another hitch!—To belong to the Truly Good at twenty-four! But beggars can't be choosers. He's going to settle something handsome on Moya out of the portion Madame gives him on his marriage. My poor little girl, as you know, will get nothing from me but a few old bits and trinkets and a father's blessing,—the same doesn't go for much in these days. I have been a better dispenser than accumulator, like others of our name.

“I do assure you, Annie, it bores me down to the ground, this humanitarian racket from children with ugly names who have just chipped the shell. This one owns his surprise that we *work* in the army! That our junior officers teach, and study a bit perforce themselves. His own idea is that every West Pointer, before he gets his commission, should serve a year or two in the ranks, to raise the type of the enlisted man, and chiefly, mark you, to get his point of view, the which he is to bear in mind when he comes to his command. Oh, we've had some pretty arguments! But I suspect the rascal of drawing it mild, at this stage, for the old dragon who guards his Golden Apple. He doesn't want to poke me up. How far he'd go if he were not hampered in his principles by the fact that he is in love, I cannot say. And I'd rather not imagine.”

The commandant's house at Bisuka Barracks is the nearest one to the flag-pole as you go up a flight of wooden steps from the parade ground. These steps, and their landings, flanked by the dry grass terrace of the line, are a favorite gathering place for young persons of leisure at the Post. They face the valley and the mountains; they lead past the adjutant's office to the main road to town; they command the daily pageant of garrison duty as performed at such distant, unvisited posts, with only the ladies and the mountains looking on.

Retreat had sounded at half after five, for the autumn days grew short. The colonel's orderly had been dismissed to his quarters. There was no excuse, at this hour, for two young persons lingering in sentimental corners of the steps, beyond a flagrant satisfaction in the shadow thereof which covered them since the lighting of lamps on Officers' Row.

The colonel stood at his study window keeping his pipe alive with slow and dreamy puffs. The moon was just clearing the roof of the men's quarters. His eye caught a shape, or a commingling of shapes, ensconced in an angle of the steps; the which he made out to be his daughter, in her light evening frock with one of his own old army capes over her shoulders, seated in close formation beside the only man at the Post who wore civilian black.

The colonel had the feelings of a man as well as a father. He went back to his letter with a softened look in his face. He had said too much; he always did—to Annie; and now he must hedge a little or she would think there was trouble brewing, and that he was going to be nasty about Moya's choice.

III. — THE INITIAL LOVE

“Let us be simple! Not every one can be, but we can. We can afford to be, and we know how!”

Moya was speaking rapidly, in her singularly articulate tones. A reader of voices would have pronounced hers the physical record of unbroken health and constant, joyous poise.

“Hear the word of your prophet Emerson!” she brought a little fist down upon her knee for emphasis, a hand several sizes larger closed upon it and held it fast. “Hear the word—are you listening? 'Only *two* in the Garden walked and with Snake and Seraph talked.'”

The young man's answer was an instant's impassioned silence. Too close it touched him, that vital image of the Garden. Then, with an effect of sternness, he said,—

“Have we the right to do as we please? Have we the courage that comes of right to cut ourselves off from all those calls and cries for help?”

“*I* have,” said the girl; “I have just that right—of one who knows exactly what she wants, and is going to get it if she can!”

He laughed at her happy insolence, with which all the youth and nature in him made common cause.

“I shouldn't mind thinking about your Poor Man,” she tripped along, “if he liked being poor, or if it seemed to improve him any; or if it were only now and then. But there is so dreadfully much of him! Once we begin, how should we ever think about anything else? He'd rise up and sit down with us, and eat and drink with us, and tell us what to wear. Every pleasure of our lives would be spoiled with his eternal 'Where do *I* come in?' It was simple enough in *that* garden, with only those two and nobody outside to feel injured. But we are those two, aren't we? Isn't everybody—once in a life, and once only?” She turned her face aside, slighting by her manner the excessive meaning of her words. “I ask for myself only what I think I have a right to give you—my absolute undivided attention for those first few years. They say it never lasts!” she hastened to add with playful cynicism.

Young Bogardus seemed incapable under the circumstances of any adequate reply. Free as they were in words, there was an extreme personal shyness between these proud young persons, undeveloped on the side of passion and better versed in theories of life than in life itself. They had separated the day after their sudden engagement, and their nearest approaches to intimacy had been through letters. Naturally the girl

was the bolder, having less in herself to fear.

“That is what *I* call being simple,” she went on briskly. “If you think we can be that in New York, let us live there. *I* could be simple there, but not with you, sir! That terrible East Side would be shaking its gory locks at us. We should feel that we did it—or you would! Then good-by to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness!”

“You are my life, liberty, and happiness, and I will be your almoner,” said Paul, “and dispense you”—

“Dispense *with* me!” laughed the girl. “And what shall I be doing while you are dispensing me on the East Side? New York has other sides. While you go slumming with the Seraph, I shall be talking to the Snake! Now, *do* laugh!” she entreated childishly, turning her sparkling face to his.

“Am I expected to laugh at that?”

“Well, what shall we do? Don't make me harden my heart before it has had time to soften naturally. Give my poor pagan sympathies a little time to ripen.”

“But you have lived in New York. Did you find it such a strain on your sympathies?”

“I was a visitor; and a girl is not expected to have sympathies. But to begin our home there: we should have to strike a note of some sort. How if my note should jar with yours? Paul, dear, it isn't nice to have convictions when one is young and going to be married. You know it isn't. It's not poetic, and it's not polite, and it's a dreadful bore!”

The altruist and lover winced at this. Allowing for exaggeration, which was the life of speech with her, he knew that Moya was giving him a bit of her true self, that changeful, changeless self which goes behind all law and “follows joy and only joy.” Her voice dropped into its sweetest tones of intimacy.

“Why need we live in a crowd? Why must we be pressed upon with all this fuss and doing? Doing, doing! We are not ready to do anything yet. Every day must have its dawn;—and I don't see my way yet; I'm hardly awake!”

“Darling, hush! You must not say such things to me. For you only to look at me like that is the most terrible temptation of my life. You make me forget everything a man is bound—that I of all men am bound to remember.”

“Then I will keep on looking! Behold, I am Happiness, Selfishness, if you like! I have come to stay. No, really, it's not nice of you to act as if you were under higher orders. You are under my orders. What right have we to choose each other if we are not to be better to each other than to any one else?—if our lives belong to any one who needs us, or our time and money, more than we need it ourselves? Why did you choose me? Why not somebody pathetic—one of your Poor Things; or else save yourself whole for all the Poor Things?”

“Now you are 'talking for victory,'” he smiled. “You don't believe we must be as consistent as all that. Hearts don't have to be coddled like pears picked for market. But I'm not preaching to you. The heavens forbid! I'm trying to explain. You don't think this whole thing with me is a pose? I know I'm a bore with my convictions; but how do we come by such things?”

“Ah! How do I come not to have any, or to want any?” she rejoined.

“Once for all, let me tell you how I came by mine. Then you will know just where and how those cries for help take hold on me.”

“I don't wish to know. Preserve me from knowing! Why didn't you choose somebody different?”

He looked at her with all his passion in his eyes. “I did not choose. Did you?”

“It isn't too late,” she whispered. Her face grew hot in the darkness.

“Yes; it is too late—for anything but the truth. Will you listen, sweet? Will you let the nonsense wait?”

“Deeper and deeper! Haven't we reached the bottom yet?”

“Go on! It's the dearest nonsense,” she heard him say; but she detected pain in his voice and a new constraint.

“What is it? What is the 'truth'?”

“Oh, it's not so dreadful. Only, you always put me in quite a different class from where I belong, and I haven't had the courage to set you right.”

“Children, children!” a young voice called, from the lighted walk above. Two figures were going down the line, one in uniform keeping step beside a girl in white who reefed back her skirts with one hand, the other was raised to her hair which was blowing across her forehead in bewitching disorder. Every gesture and turn of her shape announced that she was pretty and gay in the knowledge of her power. It was Chrissy, walking with Lieutenant Lane.

“Where are you—ridiculous ones? Don't you want to come with us?”

“'Now who were they?'” Paul quoted derisively out of the dark.

“We are going to Captain Dawson's to play Hearts. Come! Don't be stupid!”

“We are not stupid, we are busy!” Moya called back.

“Busy! Doing what?”

“Oh, deciding things. We are talking about the Poor Man.”

“The poor men, she means.” Christine's high laugh followed the lieutenant's speech, as the pair went on.

“He *is* a bore!” Moya declared. “We can't even use him for a joke.”

“Speaking of Lane, dear?”

“The Poor Man. Are you sure that you've got a sense of humor, Paul? Can't we have charity for jokes among the other poor things?”

Paul had raised himself to the step beside her. “You are shivering,” he said, “I must let you go in.”

“I'm not shivering—I'm chattering,” she mocked. “Why should I go in when we are going to be really serious?”

Paul waited a moment; his breath came short, as if he were facing a postponed dread. “Moya, dear,” he

began in a forced tone, "I can't help my constraints and convictions that bore you so, any more than you can help your light heart—God bless it—and your theory of class which to me seems mediaeval. I have cringed to it, like the coward a man is when he is in love. But now I want you to know me."

He took her hand and kissed it repeatedly, as if impressing upon her the one important fact back of all hypothesis and perilous efforts at statement.

"Well, are you bidding me good-by?"

"You must give me time," he said. "It takes courage in these days for a good American to tell the girl he loves that his father was a hired man."

He smiled, but there was little mirth and less color in his face.

"What absurdity!" cried Moya. Then glancing at him she added quickly, "*My* father is a hired man. Most fathers who are worth anything are!"

"My father was because he came of that class. His father was one before him. His mother took in tailoring in the village where he was born. He had only the commonest common-school education and not much of that. At eleven he worked for his board and clothes at my Grandfather Van Elten's, and from that time he earned his bread with his hands. Don't imagine that I'm apologizing," Paul went on rapidly. "The apology belongs on the other side. In New York, for instance, the Bogardus blood is quite as good as the Bevier or the Broderick or the Van Elten; but up the Hudson, owing to those chances or mischances that selected our farming aristocracy for us, my father's people had slipped out of their holdings and sunk to the poor artisan class which the old Dutch landowners held in contempt."

"We are not landowners," said Moya. "What does it matter? What does any of it matter?"

"It matters to be honest and not sail under false colors. I thought you would not speak of the Poor Man as you do if you knew that I am his son."

"Money has nothing to do with position in the army. I am a poor man's daughter."

"Ah, child! Your father gives orders—mine took them, all his life."

"My father has to take what he gives. There is no escaping 'orders.' Even I know that!" said Moya. A slight shiver passed over her as she spoke, laughing off as usual the touch of seriousness in her words.

"Why did you do that?" Paul touched her shoulder. "Is it the wind? There is a wind creeping down these steps." He improved the formation slightly in respect to the wind.

"Listen!" said Moya. "Isn't that your mother walking on the porch? Father, I know, is writing. She will be lonely."

"She is never lonely, more or less. It is always the same loneliness—of a woman widowed for years."

"How very much she must have cared for him!" Moya sighed incredulously. What a pity, she thought, that among the humbler vocations Paul's father should have been just a plain "hired man." Cowboy, miner, man-o'-war's man, even enlisted man, though that were bad enough—any of these he might have been in an accidental way, that at least would have been picturesque; but it is only the possession of land, by whatsoever means or title, that can dignify an habitual personal contact with it in the form of soil. That is one of the accepted prejudices which one does not meddle with at nineteen. "Youth is conservative because it is afraid." Moya, for all her fighting blood, was traditionally and in social ways much more in bonds than Paul, who had inherited his father's dreamy speculative habit of thought, with something of the farm-hand's distrust of society and its forms and shibboleth.

Paul's voice took a narrative tone, and Moya gave herself up to listening—to him rather more, perhaps, than to his story.

Few young men of twenty-four can go very deeply into questions of heredity. Of what follows here much was not known to Paul. Much that he did know he would have interpreted differently. The old well at Stone Ridge, for instance, had no place in his recital; and yet out of it sprang the history of his shorn generation. Had Paul's mother grown up in a houseful of brothers and sisters, governed by her mother instead of an old ignorant servant, in all likelihood she would have married differently—more wisely but not perhaps so well, her son would loyally have maintained. The sons of the rich farmers who would have been her suitors were men inferior to their fathers. They inherited the vigor and coarseness of constitution, the unabashed materialism of that earlier generation that spent its energies coping with Nature on its stony farms, but the sons were spared the need of that hard labor which their blood required. They supplied an element of force, but one of great corruption later, in the state politics of their time.

IV. — A MAN THAT HAD A WELL IN HIS OWN COURT

In the kitchen court called the "Airy" at Abraham Van Elten's, there was one of those old family wells which our ancestors used to locate so artlessly. And when it tapped the kitchen drain, and typhoid took the elder children, and the mother followed the children, it was called the will of God. A gloomy distinction rested on the house. Abraham felt the importance attaching to any supreme experience in a community where life runs on in the middle key.

A young doctor who had been called in at the close of the last case went prying about the premises, asking foolish questions that angered Abraham. It is easier for some natures to suffer than to change. If the farmer

had ever drunk water himself, except as tea or coffee, or mixed with something stronger, he must have been an early victim, to his own crass ignorance. He was a vigorous, heavy-set man, a grand field for typhoid. But he prospered, and the young doctor was turned down with the full weight and breadth of the Van Elten thumb, or the Broderick; Abraham's build was that of his maternal grandmother, Hillotje Broderick.

On the Ridge, which later developed into a valuable slate quarry, there was a spring of water, cold and perpetual, flowing out of the trap-formation. Abraham had piped this water down to his barns and cattle-sheds; it furnished power for the farm-work. But to bring it to the house, in obedience to the doctor's meddlesome advice, would be an acknowledgment of fatal mistakes in the past; would raise talk and blame among the neighbors, and do away with the honor of a special visitation; would cost no trifle of money; would justify the doctor's interference, and insult the old well of his father and his father's father, the fountain of generations. To seal its mouth and bid its usefulness cease in the house where it had ministered for upwards of a hundred years was an act of desecration impossible to the man who in his stolid way loved the very stones that lined its slimy sides. The few sentiments that had taken hold on Abraham's arid nature went as deep as his obstinacy and clung as fast as his distrust of new opinions and new men. The question of water supply was closed in his house; but the well remained open and kept up its illicit connection with the drain.

Old Becky, keeper of the widower's keys, had followed closely the history of those unhappy "cases;" she had listened to discussions, violent or suppressed, she had heard much talk that went on behind her master's back.

Employers of that day and generation were masters; and masters are meant to be outwitted. Emily, the youngest and last of the flock, was now a child of four, dark like her mother, sturdy and strong like her father. On an August day soon after the mother's funeral, Becky took her little charge to the well and showed her a tumbler filled, with water not freshly drawn.

"See them little specks and squirmy things?" Emmy saw them. She followed their wavering motion in the glass as the stern forefinger pointed. "Those are little baby snakes," said Becky mysteriously. "The well is full of 'em. Sometimes you can see 'em, sometimes you can't, but they're always there. They never grow big down the well; it's too dark 'n' cold. But you drink that water and the snakes will grow and wriggle and work all through ye, and eat your insides out, and you'll die. Your mother"—in a whisper—"she drunk that water, and she died. Your sister Ruth, and Dirck, and Jimmy, they drunk it, and they died. Now if Emmy wants to die"—Large eyes of horror fastened on the speaker's face. "No—o, she don't want to die, the Loveums! She don't want Becky to have no little girl left at all! No; we mustn't ever drink any of that bad water—all full of snakes, ugh! But if Emmy's thirsty, see here! Here's good nice water. It's going to be always here in this pail—same water the little lambs drink up in the fields. Becky 'll take Emmy up on the hill sometime and show where the little lambs drink."

Grief had not clouded the farmer's oversight in petty things. He noticed the innocent pail on the area bench, never empty, always specklessly clean.

"What is this water?" he asked.

Becky was surly. "Drinking water. Want some?"

"What's it doing here all the time?"

"I set it there for Emmy. She can't reach up to the bucket."

Abraham tasted the water suspiciously. The well-water was hard, with a tang of iron. The spring soft, and less cold for its journey to the barn.

"Where did you get this water?"

"Help yourself. There's plenty more."

"Becky, where did this water come from? Out o' the well?"

Becky gave a snort of exasperation. "Sam Lewis brought it from the barn! I'm too lame to be histin' buckets. I've got the rheumatiz' awful in my back and shoulders, if ye want to know!"

"Becky, you're lying to me. You've been listening to what don't concern you. Now, see here. You are not going to ask the men to carry water for you. They've got something else to do. *There's* your water, as handy as ever a woman had it; use that or go without."

Abraham caught up the pail and flung its contents out upon the grass, scattering the hens that came sidling back with squawks of inquiring temerity.

When next Emmy came for water, the old woman took her by the hand in silence and led her into the dim meat-cellar, a half-basement with one low window level with the grass. There was the pail, safe hidden behind the soft-soap barrel.

"I had to hide it from your pa," Becky whispered. "Don't you never let him know you're afraid o' the well-water. He drunk it when he was a little boy. He don't believe in the snakes. But *there wa'n't none then*. It's when water gets old and rotten. You can believe what Becky says. *She* knows! But you mustn't ever tell. Your father 'd be as mad as fire if he knowed I said anything about snakes. He'd send me right away, and some strange woman would come, and maybe she'd whip Emmy. Emmy want Becky to go?" Sobs, and little arms clinging wildly to Becky's aproned skirts. "No, no! Well, she ain't goin'. But Emmy mustn't tell tales or she might have to. Tattlers are wicked anyway. 'Telltale tit! Your tongue shall be slit, and all the little dogs'—There! run now! There's your poppy. Don't you never,—never!"

Emmy let her eyes be wiped, and with one long, solemn, secret look of awed intelligence she ran out to meet her father. She did not love him, and the smile with which she met him was no new lesson in diplomacy. But her first secret from him lay deep in the beautiful eyes, her mother's eyes, as she raised them to his.

"Ain't that wonderful!" said Becky, with a satisfied sigh, watching her. "Safe as a jug! An' she not five years old!" For vital reasons she had taught the child an ugly lesson. Such lessons were common enough in her experience of family discipline. She never thought of it again.

That year which took Emmy's mother from her brought to the child her first young companion and friend. Adam Bogardus came as chore-boy to the farm,—an only child himself, and sensitive through the clashing of

gentle instincts with rough and inferior surroundings; brought up in that depressed God-fearing attitude in which a widow not strong, and earning her bread, would do her duty by an only son. Not a natural fighter, she took what little combativeness he had out of him, and made his school-days miserable—a record of humiliations that sunk deep and drove him from his kind. He was a big, clumsy, sagacious boy, grave as an old man, always snubbed and condescended to, yet always trusted. Little Emmy made him her bondslave at sight. His whole soul blossomed in adoration of the beautiful, masterful child who ordered him about as her vassal, while slipping a soft little trustful hand in his. She trotted at his heels like one of the lambs or chickens that he fed. She brought him into perpetual disgrace with Becky, for wasting his time through her imperious demands. She was the burden, the delight, the handicap, the incentive, and the reward of his humble apprenticeship. And when he was promoted to be one of the regular hands she followed him still, and got her pleasure out of his day's work. No one had such patience to tell her things, to wait for her and help her over places where her tagging powers fell short. But though she bullied him, she looked up to him as well. His occupations commanded her respect. He was the god of the orchards and of the cider-making; he presided at all the functions of the farm year. He was a perfect calendar besides of country sports in their season. He swept the ice pools in the meadow for winter sliding, after his day's work was done. He saved up paper and string for kite-making in March. He knew when willow bark would slip for April's whistles. In the first heats of June he climbed the tall locust-trees to put up a swing in which she could dream away the perfumed hours. At harvest she waited in the meadow for him to toss her up on the hay-loads, and his great arms received her when she slid off in the barn. She knelt at his feet on the bumping boards of the farm-wagon while he braced himself like a charioteer, holding the reins above her head. He threshed the nut-trees and routed marauding boys from her preserves, and carved pumpkin lanterns to light her to her attic chamber on cold November nights, where she would lie awake watching strange shadows on the sloping roof, half worshiping, half afraid of her idol's ugliness in the dark.

These were some of Paul's illustrations of that pastoral beginning, and no doubt they were sympathetically close to the truth. He lingered over them, dressing up his mother's choice instinctively to the little aristocrat beside him.

When Emmy grew big enough to go to the Academy, three miles from the farm, it was all in the day's work that Adam should take her and fetch her home. He combined her with the mail, the blacksmith, and other village errands. Whoever met her father's team on those long stony hills of Saugerties would see his little daughter seated beside his hired man, her face turned up to his in endless confiding talk. It was a face, as we say, to dream of. But there were few dreamers in that little world. The farmers would nod gravely to Adam. “Abraham's girl takes after her mother; heartier lookin', though. Guess he'll need a set o' new tires before spring.” The comments went no deeper.

Abraham was now well on in years; he made no visits, and he never drove his own team at night. When his daughter began to let down her frocks and be asked to evening parties, it was still Adam who escorted her. He sat in the kitchen while she was amusing herself in the parlor. She discussed her young acquaintances with him on their way home. The time for distinctions had come, but she was too innocent to feel them herself, and too proud to accept the standards of others. He was absolutely honest and unworldly. He thought it no treachery to love her for herself, and he believed, as most of us do, that his family was as good as hers or any other.

It would be hard to explain the old man's obliviousness. Perhaps he had forgotten his own youth; or class prejudice had gone so deep with him as to preclude the bare thought of a child of his falling in love with one of his “men.” His imagination could not so insult his own blood. But when the awakening came, his passion of anger and resentment knew no bounds. To discharge his faithless employee out of hand would be the cripple throwing away his crutch. Though he called Adam *one* of his men, and though his pay was that of a common laborer, his duties had long been of a much higher order. Abraham had made a very good bargain out of the widow's son. Adam knew well that he could not be spared, and pitied the old man's helpless rage. He took his frantic insults as part of his senility, and felt it no unmanliness to appease it by giving his promise that he would speak no more of love to Emmy while he was taking her father's wages. But Emmy did not indorse this promise fully. To her it looked like weakness, and implied a sort of patience which did not become a lover such as she wished hers to be. The winter wore on uncomfortably for all. Towards spring, Becky's last illness and passing away brought the younger ones together again, and closer than before. Adam kept his promise through days and nights of sickroom intimacy; but though no word of love was spoken, each bore silent witness to what was loveliest in the other, and the bond between them deepened.

Then spring came, and its restlessness was strong upon them both. But it was Emmy to whom it meant action and rebellion.

They stood on the orchard hill one Sunday afternoon at the pause of the year. Buds were swelling and the edges of the woods wore a soft blush against the vaporous sky. The bare brown slopes were streaked with snow. A floe of winter ice, grinding upon itself with the tide, glared yellow as an old man's teeth in the setting sun. From across the river came the thunder of a train, bound north, two engines dragging forty cars of freight piled up by some recent traffic-jam; it plunged into a tunnel, and they waited, listening to the monster's smothered roar. Out it burst, its breath packed into clouds, the engines whooped, and round the curve where a point of cedars cut the sky the huge creature unwound itself, the hills echoing to its tread.

Emmy watched it out of sight, and breathed again. “Hundreds, hundreds going every day! It seems easy enough for everybody else. Oh, if I were a man!”

“What do you want I should do, Emmy?” Adam knew well what man she was thinking of.

“*I* want? Don't you ever want things yourself?”

“When I want a thing bad, I gen'ly think it's worth waiting for.”

“People don't get things by waiting. I don't know how you can stand it,—to stay here year after year. And now you've tied yourself up with a promise, and you know you cannot keep it!”

“I'm trying to keep it.”

“You couldn't keep it if you cared—really and truly—as some do!” She dropped her voice hurriedly. “To live

here and eat your meals day after day and pass me like a stick or a stone!"

The slow blood burned in Adam's face and hammered in his pulses. His blue eyes were bashful through its heat. "I don't feel like a stick nor a stone. You know it, Emmy. You want to be careful," he added gently. "Would going away look as if I cared?"

"Why—why don't you ask me to go with you?" The girl tried to meet his eyes. She turned off her question with a proud laugh.

"Be—careful, child! You know why I can't take you up on that. Would you want we should leave him here alone—without even Becky? You're only trying me for fun."

"No; I am not!" Emmy was pale now. Her breast was rising in strong excitement. "If we were gone, he would know then what you are worth to him. Now, you're only Adam! He thinks he can put you down like a boy. He won't believe I care for you. There's only one way to show him—that is, if we do care. In one month he would be sending for us back. Then we could come, and you would take your right place here, and be somebody. You would not eat in the kitchen, then. Haven't you been like a son to him? And why shouldn't he own it?"

"But if he won't? Suppose he don't send for us to come back?"

"Then you could strike out for yourself. What was Tom Madden, before he went away to Colorado, or somewhere—where was it? And now everybody stops to shake hands with him;—he's as much of a man as anybody. If you could make a little money. That's the proof he wants. If you were rich, you'd be all right with him. You know that!"

"I'd hate to think it. But I'll never be rich. Put that out of your mind, Emmy. It don't run in the blood. I don't come of a money-making breed."

"What a silly thing to say! Of course, if you don't believe you can, you can't. Who has made the money here for the last ten years?"

"It was his capital done it. It ain't hard to make money after you've scraped the first few thousands together. But it's the first thousand that costs."

"How much have you got ahead?"

Adam answered awkwardly, "Eleven hundred and sixty odd." He did not like to talk of money to the girl who was the prayer, the inspiration, of his life. It hurt him to be questioned by her in this sordid way.

"You earned it all, didn't you?"

"I've took no risks. Here was my home. He give me the chance and he showed me how. And—he's your father. I don't like to talk about his money, nor about my own, to you."

"Oh, you are good, good! Nobody knows! But it's all wasted if you haven't got any push—anything inside of yourself that makes people know what you are. I wish I could put into you some of my *fury* that I feel when things get in my way! You have held yourself in too long. You can't—*can't* love a girl, and be so careful—like a mother. Don't you understand?"

"Stop right there, Emmy! You needn't push no harder. I can let go whenever you say so. But—do *you* understand, little girl? Man and wife it will have to be."

Emmy did not shrink at the words. Her face grew set, her dark eyes full of mystery fixed themselves on the slow-moving ice-floe grinding along the shore.

"I know," she assented slowly.

"I can't give you no farm, nor horses and carriages, nor help in the kitchen. It's bucklin' right down with our bare hands—me outside and you in? And you only eighteen. See what little hands—If I could do it all!"

"Your promise is broken," she whispered. "I made you break it. You will have to tell him now, or—we must go."

"So be!" said Adam solemnly. "And God do so to me and more also, if I have to hurt my little girl,—Emmy—wife!"

He folded her in his great arms clumsily—the man she had said was like a mother. He was almost as ignorant as she, and more hopeful than he had dared to seem, as to their worldly chances. But the love he had for her told him it was not love that made her so bold. The first touch of such love as his would have made her fear him as he feared her. And the subtle pain of this instinctive knowledge, together with that broken promise, shackled the wings of his great joy. It was not as he had hoped to win the crown of life.

Paul, it may be supposed, had never liked to think of his mother's elopement. It had been the one hard point to get over in his conception of his father, but he could never have explained it by such a scene as this. It would have hampered him terribly in his tale had he dreamed of it. He passed over the unfortunate incident with a romancer's touch, and dwelt upon his grandfather's bitter resentment which he resented as the son of his mother's choice. The Van Eltens and Brodericks all fared hardly at the hands of their legatee.

It was not only in the person of a hireling who had abused his trust that Abraham had felt himself outraged. There were old neighborhood spites and feuds going back, dividing blood from blood—even brothers of the same blood. There was trouble between him and his brother Jacob, of New York, dating from the settlement of their father's, Broderick Van Elten's, estate; and no one knows what besides that was private and personal may have entered into it. It was years since they had met, but Jacob kept well abreast of his brother's misfortunes. A bachelor himself, with no children to lose or to quarrel with, it was not displeasing to him to hear of the breaks in his brother's household.

"What, what, what! The last one left him,—run off with one of his men! What a fool the man must be. Can't he look after his women folks better than that? Better have lost her with the others. Two boys, and Chrissy, and the girl—and now the last girl gone off with his hired man. Poor Chrissy! Guess she had about enough of it. Things have come out pretty much even, after all! There was more love and lickin's wasted on Abe. Father was proudest of him, but he couldn't break him. Hi! but I've crawled under the woodshed to hear him yell, and father would tan him with a raw-hide, but he couldn't break him; couldn't get a sound out of him. Big, and hard, and tough—Chrissy thought she knew a man; she thought she took the best one."

With slow, cold spite Jacob had tracked his brother's path in life through its failures. Jacob had no failures, and no life.

V. — DISINHERITED

Proud little Emmy, heiress no longer, had put her spirit into her farm-hand and incited him to the first rebellion of his life. They crossed the river at night, poling through floating ice, and climbed aboard one of those great through trains whose rushing thunder had made the girlish heart so often beat. This was long before the West Shore Line was built. Neither of them had ever seen the inside of a Pullman sleeper. Emmy could count the purchased meals she had eaten in her life; she had never slept in a hotel or hired lodging till after her marriage. Hardly any one could be so provincial in these days.

Adam Bogardus was a plodder in the West as he had been in the East. He was an honest man, and he was wise enough not to try to be a shrewd one. He tried none of the short-cuts to a fortune. Hard work suited him best, and no work was too hard for his iron strength and patient resolution. But it broke the spirit of a man in him to see his young wife's despair. Poverty frightened and quelled her. The deep-rooted security of her old home was something she missed every day of her makeshift existence. It was degradation to live in “rooms,” or a room; to move for want of means to pay the rent. She pined for the good food she had been used to. Her health suffered through anxiety and hard work. She was too proud to complain, but the sight of her dumb unacceptance of what had come to her through him undoubtedly added the last straw to her husband's mental strain.

“It is hard for me to realize it as I once did,” said Paul, as the story paused. “You make tragedy a dream. But there is a deep vein of tragedy in our blood. And my theory is that it always crops out in families where it's the keynote, as it were.”

“Never mind, you old care-taker! We Middletons carry sail enough to need a ton or two of lead in our keel.”

“But, you understand?”—

“I understand the distinction between what I call your good blood, and the sort of blood I thought you had. It explains a certain funny way you have with arms—weapons. Do you mind?”

“Not at all,” said Paul coldly. “I hate a weapon. I am always ashamed of myself when I get one in my hand.”

“You act that way, dear!”

“God made tools and the Devil made weapons.”

“You are civil to my father's profession.”

“Your father is what he is aside from his profession.”

“You are quite mistaken, Paul. My father and his profession are one. His sword is a symbol of healing. The army is the great surgeon of the nation when the time comes for a capital operation.”

“It grows harder to tell my story,” said Paul gloomily;—“the short and simple annals of the poor.”

“Now come! Have I been a snob about my father's profession?”

“No; but you love it, naturally. You have grown up with its pomp and circumstance around you. You are the history makers when history is most exciting.”

“Go on with your story, you proud little Dutchman! When I despise you for your farming relatives, you can taunt me with my history making.”

Paul was about two years old when his parents broke up in the Wood River country and came south by wagon on the old stage-road to Felton. Whenever he saw a “string-bean freighter's” outfit moving into Bisuka, if there was a woman on the driver's seat, he wanted to take off his hat to her. For so his mother sat beside his father and held him in her arms two hundred miles across the Snake River desert. The stages have been laid off since the Oregon Short Line went through, but there were stations then all along the road.

One night they made camp at a lonely place between Soul's Rest and Mountain Home. Oneman Station it was called; afterwards Deadman Station, when the keeper's body was found one morning stiff and cold in his bunk. He died in the night alone. Emily Bogardus had cause to hate the man when he was living, and his dreary end was long a shuddering remembrance to her, like the answer to an unforgiving prayer.

The station was in a hollow with bare hills around, rising to the highest point of that rolling plain country. The mountains sink below the plain, only their white tops showing. It was October. All the wild grass had been eaten close for miles on both sides of the road, but over a gap in the Western divide was the Bruneau Valley, where the bell-mare of the team had been raised. In the night she broke her hopples and struck out across the summit with the four mules at her heels. Towards morning a light snow fell and covered their tracks. Adam was compelled to hunt his stock on foot; the keeper refusing him a horse, saying he had got himself into trouble before through being friendly with the company's horses. He started out across the hills, expecting that the same night would see him back, and his wife was left in the wagon camp alone.

“I know this story very well,” said Paul, “and yet I never heard it but once, when mother decided I was old enough to know all. But every word was bitten into me—especially this ugly part I am coming to. I wish it need not be told, yet all the rest depends on it; and that such an experience could come to a woman like my mother shows what exposure and humiliation lie in the straightest path if there is no money to smooth the way. You hear it said that in the West the toughest men will be chivalrous to a woman if she is the right sort of a woman. I'm afraid that is a romantic theory of the Western man.

“That night, before his team stampeded, as he sat by the keeper's fire, father had made up his mind that the less they had to do with that man the better. He may have warned mother; and she, left alone with the brute, did not know the wisdom of hiding her fear and loathing of him. He may have meant no more than a low kind of teasing, but her suffering was the same.

“Father did not come. She dared not leave the camp. She knew no place to go to, and in his haste, believing he would soon be with her again, he had taken all their little stock of funds. But he had left her his gun, and with this within reach of her hand in the shelter of the wagon hood, without fire and without cooked food, she kept a sleepless watch.

“The stages came and went; help was within sound of her voice, but she dared make no sign. The passengers were few at that season, always men, on the best of terms with the keeper. He had threatened—well, no matter—such a threat as a more sophisticated woman would have smiled at. She was simple, but she was not weak. It was a moral battle between them. There were hours when she held him by the power of her eye alone; she conquered, but it nearly killed her.

“One morning a man jumped down from the stage whose face she knew. He had recognized my father's outfit and he came to speak to her, amazed to find her in that place alone. There was no need to put her worst fear into words; he knew the keeper. He made the best he could of father's detention, but he assured her, as she knew too well, that she could not wait for him there. He was on his way East, and he took us with him as far as Mountain Home. To this day she believes that if Bud Granger had led the search, my father would have been found; but he went East to sell his cattle, the snows set in, and the search party came straggling home. The man, Granger, had left a letter of explanation, inclosing one from mother to father, with the keeper. He bribed and frightened him, but for years she used to agonize over a fear that father had come back and the keeper had withheld the letter and belied her to him with some devilish story that maddened him and drove him from her. Such a fancy might have come out of her mental state at that time. I believe that Granger left the letter simply to satisfy her. He must have believed my father was dead. He could not have conceived of a man's being lost in that broad country at that season; but my father was a man of hills and farms, all small, compact. The plains were another planet to him.

“The letter was found in the keeper's clothing after his death; no one ever came to claim it of his successor. Somewhere in this great wilderness a tired man found rest. What would we not give if we knew where!

“And she worked in a hotel in Mountain Home. Can you imagine it! Then Christine was born and the multiplied strain overcame her. Strangers took care of her children while she lay between life and death. She had been silent about herself and her past, but they found a letter from one of her old schoolmates asking about teachers' salaries in the West, and they wrote to her begging her to make known my mother's condition to her relatives if any were living. At length came a letter from grandfather—characteristic to the last. The old home was there, for her and for her children, but no home for the traitor, as he called father. She must give him up even to his name. No Bogardus could inherit of a Van Elten.

“She had not then lost all hope of father's return, and she never forgave her father for trying to buy her back for the price of what she considered her birthright. She settled down miserably to earn bread for her children. Then, when hope and pride were crushed in her, and faith had nothing left to cling to, there came a letter from Uncle Jacob, the bachelor, who had bided his time. Out of the division in his brother's house he proposed to build up his own; just as he would step in and buy depreciated bonds to hold them for a rise. He offered her a home and maintenance during his lifetime, and his estate for herself and her children when he was through. There were no conditions referring to our father, but it was understood that she should give up her own. This, mainly, to spite his brother, yet under all there was an old man's plea. She felt she could make the obligation good, though there might not be much love on either side. Perhaps it came later; but I remember enough of that time to believe that her children's future was dearly paid for. Grandfather died alone, in the old rat-ridden house up the Hudson. He left no will, to every one's surprise. It might have been his negative way of owning his debt to nature at the last.

“That is how we came to be rich; and no one detects in us now the crime of those early struggles. But my father was a hired man; and my mother has done every menial thing with those soft hands of hers.” A softer one was folded in his own. Its answering clasp was loyal and strong.

“Is *this* the story you had not the courage to tell me?”

“This is the story I had the courage to tell you—not any too soon, perhaps you think?”

“And do you think it needed courage?”

“The question is what you think. What are we to do with Uncle Jacob's money? Go off by ourselves and have a good time with it?”

“We will not decide to-night,” said Moya, tenderly subdued. But, though the story had interested and touched her, as accounting for her lover's saddened, conscience-ridden youth, it was no argument against teaching him what youth meant in her philosophy. The differences were explained, but not abolished.

“It was spite money, remember, not love money,” he continued, reverting to his story. “It purchased my mother's compliance to one who hated her father, who forced her to listen, year after year, to bitter, unnatural words against him. I am not sure but it kept her from him at the last; for if Uncle Jacob had not

stepped in and made her his, I can't help thinking she would have found somehow a way to the soft place in his heart. Something good ought to be done with that money to redeem its history."

"You must not be morbid, Paul."

"That sounds like mother," said Paul, smiling. "She is always jealous for our happiness; because she lost her own, I think, and paid so heavily for ours. She prizes pleasure and success, even worldly success, for us."

"I don't blame her!" cried Moya.

"No; of course not. But you mustn't both be against me, and Chrissy, too. She is so, unconsciously; she does not know the pull there is on me, through knowing things she doesn't dream of, and that I can never forget."

"No," said Moya. "I am sure she is perfectly unconscious. We exchanged biographies at school, and there was nothing at all like this in hers. Why was she never told?"

"She has always been too strained, too excitable. Every least incident is an emotion with her. When she laughs, her laugh is like a cry. Haven't you noticed that? Startle her, and her eyes are the very eyes of fear. Mother was wise, I think, not to pour those old sorrows into her little fragile cup."

"So she emptied them all into yours!"

"That was my right, of the elder and stronger. I wouldn't have missed the knowledge of our beginnings for the world. What a prosperous fool and ass I might have made of myself!"

"Morbid again," said Moya. "You belong to your own day and generation. You might as well wear country shoes and clothes because your father wore them."

"Still, if we have such a thing in this country as class, then you and I do not belong to the same class except by virtue of Uncle Jacob's money. Confess you are glad I am a Bevier and a Broderick and a Van Elten, as well as a Bogardus."

"I shall confess nothing of the kind. Now you do talk like a *nouveau* Paul, dear," said Moya, with her caressing eyes on his—they had paused under the lamp at the top of the steps—"I think your father must have been a very good man."

"All our fathers were," Paul averred, smiling at her earnestness.

"Yes, but yours in particular; because *you* are an angel; and your mother is quite human, is she not?—almost as human as I am? That carriage of the head,—if that does not mean the world!"—

"She has needed all her pride."

"I don't object to pride, myself," said the girl, "but you dwell so upon her humiliations. I see no such record in her face."

"She has had much to hide, you must remember."

"Well, she can hide things; but one's self must escape sometimes. What has become of little Emily Van Elten who ran away with her father's hired man? What has become of the freighter's wife?"

"She is all mother now. She brought us back to the world, and for our sakes she has learned to take her place in it. Herself she has buried."

"Yes; but which is—was herself?"

"And you cannot see her story in her face?"

"Not that story."

"Not the crushing reserve, the long suspense, the silence of a sorrow that even her children could not share?"

"I know her silence. Your mother is a most reticent woman. But is she now the woman of that story?"

"I don't understand you quite," said Paul. "How much are we ourselves after we have passed through fires of grief, and been recast under the pressure of circumstances! She was that woman once."

"The saddest part of the story to me is, that your father, who loved her so, and worked so hard for his family, should have served you all the better by his death."

"Oh, don't say that, dear! Who knows what is best? But one thing we do know. The sorrow that cut my mother's life in two brought you and me together. It rent the stratum on which I was born and raised it to the level of yours, my lady!"

"I shall not forget," whispered Moya with blissful irony, "that you are the Poor Man's son!"

VI. — AN APPEAL TO NATURE

The autumn days were shortening imperceptibly and the sunsets had gained an almost articulate splendor: cloud calling unto cloud, the west horizon signaling to the east, and answering again, while the mute dark circle of hills sat like a council of chiefs with their blankets drawn over their heads. Soon those blankets would be white with snow.

Behind the Post where the hills climb toward the Cottonwood Creek divide, there is a little canon which at sunset is especially inviting. It hastens twilight by at least an hour during midsummer, and in autumn it leads up a stairway of shadow to the great spectacle of the day—the day's departure from the hills.

The canon has its companion rivulet always coming down to meet the stage-road going up. As this road is the only outlet hillward for all the life of the plain, and as the tendency of every valley population is to climb,

one thinks of it as a way out rather than a way in. Higher up, the stage-road becomes a pass cut through a wall of splintered cliffs; and here it leads its companion, the brook, a wild dance over boulders, and under culverts of fallen rock. At last it emerges on what is called The Summit; and between are green, deep valleys where the little ranches, fields and fences and houses, seem to have slid down to the bottom and lie there at rest.

A party of young riders from the post had gone up this road one evening, and two had come down, laughing and talking; but the other two remained in the circle of light that rested on the summit. Prom where they sat in the dry grass they could hear a hollow sound of moving feet as the cattle wandered down through folds of the hills, seeking the willow copses by the water. On the breast of her habit Moya wore the blossoms of the wild evening primrose, which in this region flowers till the coming of frost. They had been gathered for her on the way up, and as she had waited for them, sitting her horse in silence, the brown owls gurgled and hooted overhead from nest to nest in the crannies of the rocks.

“You need not hold the horses,” she commanded, in her fresh voice. “Throw my bridle over your saddle pommel and yours over mine.—There!” she said, watching the horses as they shuffled about interlinked. “That is like half the marriages in this world. They don't separate and they don't go astray, but they don't *get* anywhere!”

“I have been thinking of those 'two in the Garden,'” mused Paul, resting his dark, abstracted eyes on her. “Whether or no your humble servant has a claim to unchallenged bliss in this world, there's no doubt about your claim. If my plans interfere, I must take myself out of the way.”

“Oh, you funny old croaker!” laughed the girl. “Take yourself out of the way, indeed! Haven't you chosen me to show you the way?”

“Moya, Moya!” said Paul in a smothered voice.

“I know what you are thinking. But stop it!” she held one of her crushed blossoms to his lips. “What was this made for? Why hasn't it some work to do? Isn't it a skulker—blooming here for only a night?”

“'Ripen, fall, and cease!'” Paul murmured.

“How much more am I—are you, then? The sum of us may amount to something, if we mind our own business and keep step with each other, and finish one thing before we begin the next. I will not be in a hurry about being good. Goodness can take care of itself. What you need is to be happy! And it's my first duty to make you so.”

“God knows what bliss it would be.”

“Don't say 'would be.'”

“God knows it is!”

“Then hush and be thankful!” There was a long hush. They heard the far, faint notes of a bugle sounding from the Post.

“Lights out,” said Moya. “We must go.”

“You haven't told me yet where our Garden is to be,” he said.

“I will tell you on the way home.”

When they had come down into the neighborhood of ranches, and Bisuka's lights were twinkling below them, she asked: “Who lives now in the grandfather's house on the Hudson?”

“The farmer, Chauncey Dunlop.”

“Is there any other house on the place?”

“Yes. Mother built a new one on the Ridge some years ago.”

“What sort of a house is it?”

“It was called a good house once; but now it's rather everything it shouldn't be. It was one of the few rash things mother ever did; build a house for her children while they were children. Now she will not change it. She says we shall build for ourselves, how and where we please. Stone Ridge is her shop. Of course, if Chrissy liked it—But Chrissy considers it a 'hole.' Mother goes up there and indulges in secret orgies of economy; one man in the stable, one in the garden—'Economy has its pleasures for all healthy minds.'”

“Economy is as delicious as bread and butter after too much candy. I should love to go up to Stone Ridge and wear out my old clothes. Did any one tell me that place would some day be yours?”

“It will be my wife's on the day we are married.”

“That is where your wife, sir, would like to live.”

“It is a stony Garden, dear! The summer people have their places nearer the river. Our land lies back, with no view but hills. For one who has the world before her where to choose, it strikes me she has picked out a very humble Paradise.”

“Did you think my idea was to travel—a poor army girl who spends her life in trunks? Do we ever buy a book or frame a picture without thinking of our next move? As for houses, who am I that I should be particular? In the Army's House are many mansions, but none that we can call our own. Oh, I'm very primitive; I have the savage instinct to gather sticks and stones, and get a roof over my head before winter sets in.”

To such a speech as this there was but one obvious answer, as she rode at his side, her appealing slenderness within reach of his arm. It did not matter what thousands he proposed to spend upon the roof that should cover her; it was the same as if they were planning a hut of tules or a burrow in the snow.

“It is a poor man's country,” he said; “stony hillsides, stony roads lined with stone fences. The chief crop of the country is ice and stone. In one of my grandfather's fields there is a great cairn which Adam Bogardus, they say, picked up, stone by stone, with his bare hands, and carted there when he was fourteen years old. We will build them into the walls of our new house for a blessing.”

“No,” said Moya. “We will let sleeping stones lie!”

VII. — MARKING TIME

There was impatience at the garrison for news that the hunters had started. Every day's delay at Challis meant an abridgment of the bridegroom's leave, and the wedding was now but a fortnight away. It began to seem preposterous that he should go at all, and the colonel was annoyed with himself for his enthusiasm over the plan in the first place. Mrs. Bogardus's watchfulness of dates told the story of her thoughts, but she said nothing.

“Mamsie is restless,” said Christine, putting an arm around her mother's solid waist and giving her a tight little hug apropos of nothing. “I believe it's another case of 'mail-time fever.' The colonel says it comes on with Moya every afternoon about First Sergeant's call. But Moya is cunning. She goes off and pretends she isn't listening for the bugle.”

“'First Sergeant or Second,' it's all one to me,” said Mrs. Bogardus. “I never know one call from another, except when the gun goes off.”

“Mamsie! 'When the gun goes off!' What a civilian way of talking. You are not getting on at all with your military training. Now let me give you some useful information. In two seconds the bugle will call the first sergeant—of each company—to the adjutant's office, and there he'll get the mail for his men. The orderly trumpeter will bring it to the houses on the line, and the colonel's orderly—beautiful creature! There he goes! How I wish we could take him home with us and have him in our front hall. Fancy the feelings of the maids! And the rage on the noble brow of Parkins—awful Parkins. I should like to give his pride a bump.”

Mother and daughter were pacing the colonel's veranda, behind a partial screen of rose vines—October vines fast shedding their leaves. Every breeze shook a handful down, which the women's skirts swept with them as they walked. Mrs. Bogardus turned and clasped Christine's arm above the elbow; through the thin sleeve she could feel its cool roundness. It was a soft, small, unmuscular arm, that had never borne its own burdens, to say nothing of a share in the burdens of others.

“Get your jacket,” said the mother. “There is a chill in the air.”

“There is no chill in me,” laughed Christine. “You know, mamsie, you aren't a girl. I should simply die in those awful things that you wear. Did you ever know such a hot house as the colonel keeps!”

“The rooms are small, and the colonel is—impulsive,” Mrs. Bogardus added with a smile.

“There is something very like him about his fire-making. I should know by the way he puts on wood that he never would have “—Mrs. Bogardus checked herself.

“A large bank account?” Christine supplied, with her quick wit, which was not of a highly sensitive order.

“He has a large heart,” said her mother.

“And plenty of room for it, bless him! The slope of his chest is like the roof of a house. The only time I envy Moya is when she lays her head down on it and tries to meet her arms around him as if he were a tree, and he strokes her hair as if his hand was a bough! If ever I marry a soldier he shall be a colonel with a white mustache and a burnt-sienna complexion, and a sword-belt that measures—what is the colonel's waist-measure, do you suppose?”

Mrs. Bogardus listened to this nonsense with the smile of a silent woman who has borne a child that can talk. Moya had often noticed how uncritical she was of Christine's “unruly member.”

“It isn't polite to speak of waist-measures to middle-aged persons like your mother and the colonel,” she said placidly. “You like it very much out here?”

“Fascinating! Never had such a good time in my whole life.”

“And you like the West altogether? Would you like to live here?”

“Oh, if it came to living, I should want to be sure there was a way out.”

“There generally is a way out of most things. But it costs something.” Mrs. Bogardus was so concise in her speech as at times to be almost oracular.

“Army people are sure of their way out,” said Christine, “and I guess they find it costs something.”

“Why do they buy so many books, I wonder? If I moved as often as they do, I'd have only paper covers and leave them behind.”

“You are not a reader, mummy. You're a business woman. You look at everything from the practical side.”

“And if I didn't, who would?” Mrs. Bogardus spoke with earnestness. “We can't all be dreamers like Paul or privileged persons like you. There has to be one in every family to say the things no one likes to hear and do the things nobody likes to do.”

“We are the rich repiners and you are the household drudge!” Christine shouted, laughing at her own wit.

“Hush, hush!” her mother smiled. “Don't make so much noise.”

“I should like to know who's to be the drudge in Paul's privileged family. It doesn't strike me it's going to be Moya. And Paul only drudges for people he doesn't know.”

“Moya is a girl you can expect anything of. She is a wonderful mixture of opposites. She has the Irish quickness, and yet she has learned to obey. She has had the freedom and the discipline of these little lordly army posts. She is one of the few girls of her age who does not measure everything from her own point of view.”

“Is that a dig at me, ma'am?”

At that moment Moya came out upon the porch.

She was very striking with the high color and brilliant eyes that mail-time fever breeds. Christine looked at her with freshly aroused curiosity, moved by her mother's unwonted burst of praise. The faintest tinge of jealousy made her feel naughty. As Moya went down the board walk, the colonel's orderly came springing up the steps to meet her with the mail-bag. He saluted and turned off at an angle down the embankment not to present his back to the ladies.

“Did you see that! He never raised his eyes. They are like priests. You can't make them look at you.” Moya looked at Christine in amazement. The man himself might have heard her. It was not the first time this privileged guest had rubbed against garrison customs in certain directions hardly worth mentioning. Moya hesitated. Then she laughed a little, and said: “Only a raw recruity would look at an officer's daughter, or any lady of the line.”

“Oh, you horrid little aristocrat! Well, I look at them, when they are as pretty as that one, and I forgive them if they look at me.”

Moya turned and hovered over the contents of the mail-bag. In the exercise of one of her prerogatives, it was her habit to sort its contents before delivering it at the official door.

“All, all for you!” she offered a huge packet of letters, smiling, to Mrs. Bogardus. It was faced with one on top in Paul's handwriting. “All but one,” she added, and proceeded to open her own much fatter one in the same hand. She stood reading it in the hall.

Mrs. Bogardus presently followed and remained beside her. “Could I speak to your father a moment?” she asked.

“Certainly, I will call him,” said Moya.

“Wait: I hear him now.” The study door opened and Colonel Middleton joined them. Mrs. Bogardus leading the way into the sitting-room, the colonel followed her, and Moya, not having been invited, lingered in the hall.

“Well, have the hunters started yet?” the colonel inquired in his breezy voice, which made you want to open the doors and windows to give it room. “Be seated! Be seated! I hope you have got a long letter to read me.”

Mrs. Bogardus stood reflecting. “The day this letter was mailed they got off—only two days ago,” she said. “Could I reach them, Colonel, with a telegram?”

“Two days ago,” the colonel considered. “They must have made Yankee Fork by yesterday. Today they are deep in the woods. No; I should say a man on horseback would be your surest telegram. Is it anything important?”

“Colonel, I wish we could call them back! They have gone off, it seems to me, in a most crazy way—against the judgment of every one who knows. The guide, this man whom they waited for, refused, it appears, to go out again with another party so late in the fall. But the Bowens were determined. They insisted on making arrangements with another man. Then, when 'Packer John,' they call him, heard of this, he went to Paul and urged him, if he could not prevent the others from going, to give up the trip himself. The Bowens were very much annoyed at his interference, and with Paul for listening to him. And Paul, rather than make things unpleasant, gave in. You know how young men are! What silly grounds are enough for the most serious decisions when it is a question of pride or good faith. The Bowens had bought their outfit on Paul's assurance that he would go. He felt he could not leave them in the lurch. On that, the guide suddenly changed his mind and said he would go with them sooner than see them fall into worse hands. They were, in a way, committed to the other man, so they took *him* along as cook—the whole thing done in haste, you see, and unpleasant feelings all around. Do you call that a good start for a pleasure trip?”

“It's very much the way with young troops when they start out—everything wrong end foremost, everybody mad with everybody else. A day in the saddle will set their little tempers all right.”

“That isn't the point,” Mrs. Bogardus persisted gloomily. As she spoke, the two girls came into the room and stood listening.

“What is the point, then?” Christine demanded. “Moya has no news; all those pages and pages, and nothing for anybody or about anybody!”

“'Such an intolerable deal of sack to such a poor pennyworth of bread,'” the colonel quoted, smiling at Moya's bloated envelope.

“But what do you think?” Mrs. Bogardus recalled him. “Don't you think it's a mistake all around?”

“Not at all, if they have a good man. This flat-footed fellow, John, will take command, as he should. There is no danger in the woods at any season unless the party gets rattled and goes to pieces for want of a head.”

“Father!” exclaimed Moya. “You know there is danger. Often, things have happened!”

“Why, what could happen?” asked Christine, with wide eyes.

“Many things very interesting could happen,” the colonel boasted cheerfully. “That is the object of the trip. You want things to happen. It is the emergency that makes the man—sifts him, and takes the chaff out of him.”

“Take the chaff out of Banks Bowen,” Moya imprudently struck in, “and what would you have left?” She had met Banks Bowen in New York.

“Tut, tut!” said the colonel. “Silence, or a good word for the absent—same as the”—The colonel stopped short.

“You are so scornful about the other men, now you have chosen one!” Christine's face turned red.

“Why, Chrissy! You would not compare your brother to those men! Papa, I beg your pardon; this is only for argument.”

“I don't compare him; but that's not to say all the other men are chaff!” Christine joined constrainedly in the laugh that followed her speech.

“You need not go fancying things, Moya,” she cried, in answer to a quizzical look. “As if I hadn't known the Bowen boys since I was so high!”

“You might know them from the cradle to the grave, my dear young lady, and not know them as Paul will, after a week in the woods with them.”

The colonel had missed the drift of the girls' discussion. He was considering, privately, whether he had not better send a special messenger on the young men's trail. His assurances to the women left a wide margin for personal doubt as to the prudence of the trip. Aside from the lateness of the start, it was, undoubtedly, an ill-assorted company for the woods. There was a wide margin also for suspense, as all mail facilities ceased at Challis.

VIII. — A HUNTER'S DIARY

Early in November, about a week before the hunters were expected home, a packet came addressed to Moya. It was a journal letter from Paul, mailed by some returning prospector chance encountered in the forest as the party were going in. Moya read it aloud, with asterisks, to a family audience which did not include her father.

“To-day,” one of the first entries read, “we halt at Twelve-Mile Cabin, the last roof we shall sleep under. There are pine-trees near the cabin cut off fifteen feet above the ground, felled in winter, John tells us, *at the level of the snow!*

“These cabins are all deserted now; the tide of prospecting has turned another way. The great hills that crowd one another up against the sky are so infested and overridden by this enormous forest-growth, and the underbrush is so dense, it would be impossible for a 'tenderfoot' to gain any clear idea of his direction. I should be a lost man the moment I ventured out of call. Woodcraft must be a sixth sense which we lost with the rest of our Eden birthright when we strayed from innocence, when we ceased to sleep with one ear on the ground, and to spell our way by the moss on tree-trunks. In these solitudes, as we call them, ranks and clouds of witnesses rise up to prove us deaf and blind. Busy couriers are passing every moment of the day; and we do not see, nor hear, nor understand. We are the stocks and stones. Packer John is our only wood-sharp;—yet the last half of the name doesn't altogether fit him. He is a one-sided character, handicapped, I should say, by some experience that has humbled and perplexed him. Two and two perhaps refused to make four in his account with men, and he gave up the proposition. And now he consorts with trees, and hunts to live, not to kill. He has an impersonal, out-door odor about him, such as the cleanest animals have. I would as soon eat out of his dry, hard, cool hand, as from a chunk of pine-bark.

“It is amusing to see him with a certain member of the party who tries to be fresh with him. He has a disconcerting eye when he fixes it on a man, or turns it away from one who has said a coarse or a foolish thing.

“'The jungle is large,' he seems to say, 'and the cub he is small. Let him think and be still!'”

“Who is this 'certain member' who tries to be 'fresh'?” Christine inquired with perceptible warmth.

“The cook, perhaps,” said Moya prudently.

“The cook isn't a 'member'!—Well, can't you go on, Moya? Paul seems to need a lot of editing.” Moya had paused and was glancing ahead, smiling to herself constrainedly.

“Is there more disparagement of his comrades?” Christine persisted.

“Christine, be still!” Mrs. Bogardus interfered. “Moya ought to have the first reading of her own letter. It's very good of her to let us hear it at all.”

“Oh dear, there's no disparagement. Quite the contrary! I'll go on with pleasure if you don't mind.” Moya read hurriedly, laughing through her words:—

“'If you were here, (Ah, *if* you were here!) You should lend me an ear—One at the least Of a pair the prettiest'—which is, within a foot or two, the rhythm of 'Wood Notes.' Of course you don't know it!”

“This is a gibe at me,” Moya explained, “because I don't read Emerson. 'It is the very measure of a marching chorus,' he goes on to say, 'where the step is broken by rocks and tree-roots;'—and he is chanting it to himself (to her it was in the original) as they go in single file through these 'haughty solitudes, the twilight of the gods!'”

“'Haughty solitudes'!” Christine derided.

Mrs. Bogardus sighed with impatience, and Moya's face became set. “Well, here he quotes again,” she haughtily resumed. “Anybody who is tired of this can be excused. Emerson won't mind, and I'm sure Paul won't!” She looked a mute apology to Paul's mother, who smiled and said, “Go on, dear. I don't read Emerson either, but I like him when Paul reads him for me.”

“Well, I warn you there is an awful lot of him here!” Moya's voice was a trifle husky as she read on.

“Old as Jove, Old as Love'”

“I thought Love was young!”—Christine in a whisper aside.

“'Who of me Tells the pedigree? Only the mountains old, Only the waters cold, Only the moon and stars, My coevals are.'”

Moya sighed, and sank into prose again. “There is a gaudy yellow moss in these woods that flecks the straight and mournful tree-trunks like a wandering glint of sunlight; and there is a crêpe-like black moss that

hangs funeral scarfs upon the boughs, as if there had been a death in the forest, and the trees were in line for the burial procession. The grating of our voices on this supreme silence reminds one of 'Why will you still be talking, Monsieur Benedick?—nobody marks you.'

“There are silences, and again there are whole symphonies of sound. The winds smites the tree-tops over our heads, a surf-like roar comes up the slope, and the yellow pine-needles fall across the deepest darks as motes sail down a sunbeam. One wearies of the constant perpendicular, always these stiff, columnar lines, varied only by the melancholy incline where some great pine-chieftain is leaning to his fall supported in the arms of his comrades, or by the tragic prostration of the 'down timber'—beautiful straight-cut English these woodsmen talk.

“Last evening John and I sat by the stove in the men's tent, while the others were in the cabin playing penny-ante with the cook (a sodden brute who toadies to the Bowens, and sulks with John because he objected to our hiring the fellow—an objection which I sustained, hence his logical spite includes me). John was melting pine gum and elk tallow into a dressing for our boots. I took a mean advantage of him, his hands being in the tallow and the tent-flap down, and tried on him a little of—now, don't deride me!—'Wood Notes.' It is seldom one can get the comment of a genuine woodsman on Nature according to the poets.'”

Moya read on perfunctorily, feeling that she was not carrying her audience with her, and longing for the time when she could take her letter away and have it all to herself. If she stopped now, Christine, in this sudden new freak of distrustfulness, would be sure to misunderstand.

“'For Nature ever faithful is
To such as trust her faithfulness.
When the forest shall mislead me,
When the night and morning lie,
When sea and land refuse to feed me,
Will be time enough to die.

Then will yet my Mother yield
A pillow in her greenest field;
Nor the June flowers scorn to cover
The clay of their departed lover.'”

“That is beautiful,” Mrs. Bogardus murmured hastily. “Even I can understand that.” Moya thanked her with a glance.

“And what did the infallible John say?” Christine inquired.

“John looked at me and smiled, as at a babbling infant”—

“Good for John!”

“Christine, be still!”

“John looked at me and smiled,” Moya repeated steadily. Nothing could have stopped her now. She only hoped for some further scattering mention of that “certain member” who had set them all at odds and spoiled what should have been an hour's pure happiness. “'You'll get the pillow all right,' he said. 'It might not be a green one, nor I wouldn't bank much on the flowers; but you'll be tired enough to sleep without rocking about the time you trust to Nature's tuckin' you in and puttin' victuals in your mouth. I never *see* nature till I came out here. I'd seen pretty woods and views, that a young lady could take down with her paints; but how are you going to paint that?'—he waved his tallow-stick towards the night outside. 'Ears can't reach the bottom of that stillness. That's creation before God ever thought of man. Long as I've been in the woods, I never get over the feeling that there's *something behind me*. If you go towards the trees, they come to meet you; if you go backwards, they go back; but you can't sit down and sit still without they'll come a-creeping up and creeping up, and crowding in'—

“He stirred his 'dope' awhile, and then he struck another note. 'I've wintered alone in these mountains,' he said, 'and I've seen snowslides pounce out of a clear sky—a puff and a flash and a roar; an' trees four foot across snappin' like kindlin' wood—not because it hit 'em; only the breath of it struck them; and maybe a man lying dead somewheres under his cabin timbers. That's no mother's love-tap. Pillows and flowers ain't in it. But it's good poetry,' he added condescendingly.

“I have not quoted him right, not being much of a snap-shot at dialect; and his is an undefined, unclassifiable mixture. Eastern farm-hand and Western ranchman, prospector, who knows what? His real language is in his eye and his rare, pure smile. And just as his countenance expresses his thoughts without circumlocution or attempt at effect, so his body informs his clothing. Wind and rain have moulded his hat to his head, his shoes grip the ground like paws; his buckskins have a surface like a cast after Rodin. They are repousséed by the hard bones and sinews underneath. I can think of nothing but the clothing of Millet's peasants to compare with this exterior of John's. He is himself a peasant of the woods. He has not the predatory instincts. If he could have his way, not a shot would be fired by any of us for the mere idle sport of killing. Shooting these innocent, fearless creatures, who have not learned that we are here for their destruction, is too like murder and treachery combined. Hunger should be our only excuse. My forbearance, or weakness, is a sort of unspoken bond between us. But I am a peasant, too, you know. I do not come of the lordly, arms-bearing blood. I shoot at a live mark always under protest; and when I fairly catch the look in the great eye of a dying elk or black-tail, it knocks me out for that day's hunt.”

“Paul is perfectly happy!” Christine broke in. “He has got one of his beloved People to grovel to. They can sleep in the same tent and eat from the same plate, if you like. Why, it's better than the East Side! He'll be blood brother to Packer John before they leave the woods.”

Moya blushed with anger.

“You have said enough on that subject, Christine.” Mrs. Bogardus bent her dark, keen gaze upon her daughter's face. “Come”—she rose. “Come with me!”

Christine sat still. “Come!” her mother repeated sternly. “Moya,”—in a different voice,—“your letter was lovely. Shall you read it to your father?”

“Hardly,” said Moya, flushing. “Father does not care for descriptions, and the woods are an old story to him.”

Mrs. Bogardus placed her hands on the girl's shoulders and gave her one of her infrequent, ceremonious kisses, which, like her finest smile, she kept for occasions too nice for words.

IX. — THE POWER OF WEAKNESS

Christine followed her mother to their room, and the two faced each other a moment in pale silence.

Mrs. Bogardus spoke first. “What does this mean?”—her breath came short, perhaps from climbing the stairs. She was a large woman.

“What does what mean? I don't understand you, mother.”

“Ah, child, don't repulse me! Twice you and Moya have nearly quarreled about those men. Why were you so rude to her? Why did you behave so about her letter?”

“Paul is so intolerant! And the airs he puts on! If he is my own brother I must say he's an awful prig about other men.”

“We are not discussing Paul. That is not the question now. Have you anything to tell me, Christine?”

“To tell you?—about what, mother?” Christine spoke lower.

“You know what I mean. Which of them is it? Is it Banks?—don't say it is Banks!”

“Mother, how can I say anything when you begin like that?”

“Have you any idea what sort of a man Banks Bowen really is? His father supports him entirely—six years now, ever since he left the law school. He does nothing, never will do anything. He has no will or purpose in life, except about trifles like this hunting-trip. As far as I can see he is without common sense.”

Christine stood by the dressing-table pleating the cover-frilling with her small fingers that were loaded with rings. She pinched the folds hard and let them go. “Why did no one ever say these things before?”

“We don't say things about the sons of our friends, unless we are compelled to. They were implied in every way possible. When have I asked Banks Bowen to the house except when everybody was asked! I would never in the world have come out in Mr. Borland's car if I had known the Bowens were to be of the party.”

“That made no difference,” said Christine loftily.

“It was all settled before then, was it?”

“Have I said it was settled, mother? He asked me if I could ever care for him; and I said that I did—a little. Why shouldn't I? He does what I like a man to do. I don't enjoy people who have wills and purposes. It may be very horrid of me, but I wouldn't be in Moya's place for worlds.”

“You poor child! You poor, unhappy child!”

“Why am I unhappy? Has Paul added so much to our income since he left college?”

“Paul does not make money; neither does he selfishly waste it. He has a conscience in his use of what he has.”

“I don't see what conscience has to do with it. When it is gone it's gone.”

“You will learn what conscience has to do with a man's spending if ever you try to make both ends meet with Banks Bowen. I suppose he will go through the form of speaking to me?”

“Mother dear! He has only just spoken to me. How fast you go!”

“Not fast enough to keep up with my children, it seems. Was it you, Christine, who asked them to come here?”

Christine was silent.

“Where did you learn such ways?—such want of frankness, of delicacy, of the commonest consideration for others? To be looking out for your own little schemes at a time like this!” Mrs. Bogardus saw now what must have been Paul's reason for doing what, with all her forced explanations of the hunting-trip, she had never until now understood. He had taken the alarm before she had, and done what he could to postpone this family catastrophe.

Christine retreated to a deep-cushioned chair, and threw herself into it, her slender hands, palm upwards, extended upon its arms. Total surrender under pressure of cruel odds was the expression of her pointed eyebrows and drooping mouth. She looked exasperatingly pretty and irresponsibly fragile. Her blue-veined eyelids quivered, her breath came in distinct pants.

“Perhaps you will not be troubled with my 'ways' for very many years, mother. If you could feel my heart now! It jumps like something trying to get out. It will get out some day. Have patience!”

“That is a poor way to retaliate upon your mother, Christine. Your health is too serious a matter to trifle with. If you choose to make it a shield against everything I say that doesn't please you, you can cut yourself off from me entirely. I cannot beat down such a defense as that. Anger me you never can, but you can make me helpless to help you.”

“I dare say it's better that I should never marry at all,” said Christine, her eyes closed in resignation. “You never would like anybody I like.”

“I shall say no more. You are a woman. I have protected you as far as I was able on account of your

weakness. I cannot protect you from the weakness itself."

Mrs. Bogardus rose. She did not offer to comfort her child with caresses, but in her eyes as she looked at her there was a profound, inalienable, sorrowing tenderness, a depth of understanding beyond words.

"I know so well," the dark eyes seemed to say, "how you came to be the poor thing that you are!"

The constraint which she felt towards her mother threw Chrissy back upon Moya. Being a lesser power, she was always seeking alliances. Moya had put aside their foolish tiff as unworthy of another thought; she was embarrassed when at bedtime Christine came humbly to her door, and putting her arms around her neck implored her not to be cross with her "poor pussy." It was always the other person who was "cross" with Christine.

"Nobody is cross with anybody, so far as I know," said Moya briskly. A certain sort of sentimentality always made her feel like whistling or singing or asserting the commonplace side of life in some way.

X. — THE WHITE PERIL

Mrs. Bogardus received many letters, chiefly on business, and these she answered with manlike brevity, in a strong, provincial hand. They took up much of her time, and mercifully, for it was now the last week in November and the young men did not return.

The range cattle had been driven down into the valleys, deer-tracks multiplied by lonely mountain fords; War Eagle and his brethren of the Owyhees were taking council under their winter blankets. The nights were still, the mornings rimy with hoarfrost. Fogs arose from the river and cut off the bases of the mountains, converting the valley before sunrise into the likeness of a polar sea.

"You have let your fire go out," said the colonel briskly. He had invaded the sitting-room at an unaccustomed hour, finding the lady at her letters as usual. She turned and held her pen poised above her paper as she looked at him.

"You did not come to see about the fire?" she said.

"No; I have had letters from the north. Would you step into my study a moment?"

Moya was in her father's room when they entered. She had been weeping, but at sight of Paul's mother she rose and stood picking at the handkerchief she held, without raising her eyes.

"Don't be alarmed at Moya's face," said the colonel stoutly. "Paul was all right at last accounts. We will have a merry Christmas yet."

"This is not from Paul!" Mrs. Bogardus fixed her eyes upon a letter which she held at arm's length, feeling for her glasses. "It's not for me—'*Miss* Bogardus.'"

"Ah, well. I saw it was postmarked Lemhi—Fort Lemhi, you know. Sit down, madam. Suppose I give you Mr. Winslow's report first—Lieutenant Winslow. You heard of his going to Lemhi?"

"She doesn't know," whispered Moya.

"True. Well, two weeks ago I gave Mr. Winslow a hunter's leave, as we call it in the army, to beat up the trail of those boys. I thought it was time we heard from them, but it wasn't worth while to raise a hue and cry. He started out with a few picked men from Lemhi, the Indian Reservation, you know. I couldn't have sent a better man; the thing hasn't got into the local papers even. My object, of course, has been to save unnecessary alarm. Mr. Winslow has just got back to Challis. He rounded up the Bowen youths and the cook and the helper, in bad shape, all of them, but able to tell a story. The details we shall get later, but I have Mr. Winslow's report to me. It is short and probably correct."

"Was Paul not with them?" his mother questioned in a hard, dry voice. "Where is he then?"

"He is in camp, madam, in charge of the wounded."

"Dear father! if you would speak plain!" Moya whispered nervously.

"Certainly. There is nothing whatever to hide. We know now that on their last day's hunt they met with an accident which resulted in a division of the party. A fall of snow had covered the ice on the trails, and the guide's horse fell and rolled on him—nature of his injuries not described. This happened a day's journey from their camp at Ten-Mile cabin, and the retreat with the wounded man was slow and of course difficult over such a trail. They put together a sort of horse-litter made of pine poles and carried him on that, slung between two mules tandem. A beastly business, winding and twisting over fallen timber, hugging the cañon wall, near a thousand feet down—'Impassable' the trail is marked, on the government military maps. This first day's march was so discouraging that at Ten Mile they called a council, and the packer spoke up like a man. He disposed of his own case in this way. If he were to live, they could send back help to fetch him out. If not, no help would be needed. The snows were upon them; there was danger in every hour's delay. It was insane to sacrifice four sound men for one, badly hurt, with not many hours perhaps to suffer."

A murmur from the mother announced her appreciation of the packer's argument.

"It was no more than a man should do; but as to taking him at his word, why, that's another question." The colonel paused and gustily cleared his throat. "They were up against it right then and there, and the party split upon it. Three of them went on,—for help, as they put it,—and Paul stayed behind with the wounded man."

"Paul stayed—alone?" Mrs. Bogardus uttered with hoarse emphasis. "Was not that a very strange way to divide? Among them all, I should think they might have brought the man out with them."

“Their story is that his injuries were such that he could not have borne the pain of the journey. Rather an unusual case,” the colonel added dryly. “In my experience, a wounded man will stand anything sooner than be left on the field.”

“I cannot understand it,” Mrs. Bogardus repeated, in a voice of indignant pain. “Such a strange division! One man left alone—to nurse, and hunt, and cook, and keep up fires! Suppose the guide should die!”

“Paul was not *left*, you know,” the colonel said emphatically. “He *stayed*. And I should be thankful in your place, madam, that my son was the man who made that choice. But setting conduct aside, for we are not prepared to judge, it is merely a matter of time our getting in there, now that we know where he is.”

“How much time?” Mrs. Bogardus opened her ashen lips to say.

The colonel's face fell. “Mr. Winslow reports heavy snows for the past week,—soft, clogging snow,—too deep to wade through and too soft to bear. A little later, when the cold has formed a crust, our men can get in on snowshoes. There is nothing for it but patience, Mrs. Bogardus, and faith in the boy's endurance. The pluck that made him stay behind will help him to hold out.”

Moya gave a hurt sob; the colonel stepped to the desk and stood there a moment turning over his papers. Behind his back the mother sent a glance to Moya expressive of despair.

“Do you know what happened to his father? Did he ever tell you?” she whispered.

Moya assented; she could not speak.

“Twice, twice in a lifetime!” said the older woman.

With a gesture, Moya protested against this wild prophecy; but as Paul's mother left the room she rushed upon her father, crying: “Tell *me* the truth! What do you think of it? Did you ever hear of such a dastardly thing?”

“It was a rout,” said the colonel coolly. “They were in full flight before the enemy.”

“What enemy? They deserted a wounded comrade, and a servant at that!”

“The enemy was panic,—panic, my dear. In these woods I've seen strong men go half beside themselves with fear of something—the Lord knows what! Then, add the winter and what they had seen and heard of that. Anyway, you can afford to be easy on the other boys. The honors of the day are with Paul—and the old packer, though it's all in the day's work to him.”

“And you are satisfied with Paul, father?”

“He didn't desert his command to save his own skin.” The colonel smiled grimly.

“When the men of the Fourth discovered those other fellows they had literally sat down in the snow to die. Not a man of them knew how to pack a mule. Their meat pack slipped, going along one of those high trails, and scared the mule, and in trying to kick himself free the beast fell off the trail—mule and meat both gone. They got tired of carrying their stuff and made a raft to float it down the river, and lost that! Paul has been much better off in camp than he would have been with them. So cheer up, my girl, and think how you'd like to have your bridegroom out on an Indian campaign!”

“Ah, but that would be orders! It's the uselessness that hurts. There was nothing to do or to gain. He didn't want to go. Oh, daddy dear, I made fun of his shooting,—I did! I laughed at his way with firearms. Wretched fool and snob that I was! As if I cared! I thought of what other people would say. You remember,—he went shooting up the gulch with Mr. Lane, and when he hit but didn't kill he wouldn't—couldn't put the birds out of pain. Jephson had to do it for him, and he told it in barracks and the men laughed.”

“How did you know that! And what does it all amount to! Blame yourself all you like, dear, if it does you any good, but don't make him out a fool! There's not much that comes to us straight in this world—not even orders, you'll find. But we have to take it straight and leave the muddles and the blunders as they are. That's the brave man's courage and the brave woman's. Orders are mixed, but duty is clear. And the boy out there in the woods has found his duty and done it like a man. That should be enough for any soldier's daughter.”

An hour passed in suspense. Moya was disappointed in her expectation of sharing in whatever the letter from Fort Lemhi might contain. Christine was in bed with a headache, her mother dully gave out, with no apparent expectation that any one would accept this excuse for the girl's complete withdrawal. The letter, she told Moya, was from Banks Bowen. “There was nothing in it of consequence—to us,” she added, and Moya took the words to mean “you and me” to the unhappy exclusion of Christine.

Mrs. Bogardus's face had settled into lines of anxiety printed years before, as the creases in an old garment, smoothed and laid away, will reappear with fresh wear. Her plan was to go back to New York with Christine, who was plainly unfit to bear a long siege of suspense. There she could leave the girl with friends and learn what particulars could be gathered from the Bowens, who would have arrived. She would then return alone and wait for news at the garrison. That night, with Moya's help, she completed her packing, and on the following day the wedding party broke up.

XI. — A SEARCHING OF HEARTS

Fine, dry snowflakes were drifting past the upper square of a window set in a wall of logs. The lower half was obscured by a white bulk that shouldered up against the sash in the likeness of a muffled figure stooping to peer in.

Lying in his bunk against the wall, the packer watched this sentinel snowdrift grow and become human and

bold and familiar. His deep-lined visage was reduced to its bony structure. The hand was a claw with which he plucked at the ancient fever-crust shredding from his lips: an occupation at once so absorbing and so exhausting that often the hand would drop and the blankets rise upon the arch of the chest in a sigh of retarded respiration. The sigh would be followed by a cough, controlled, as in dread of the shock to a sore and shattered frame. The snow came faster and faster until the dim, wintry pane was a blur. Millions of atoms crossed the watcher's weary vision, whirling, wavering, driven with an aimless persistence, unable to pause or to stop. And the blind white snowdrift climbed, fed, like human circumstance, from disconnected atoms impelled by a common law.

There were sounds in the cabin: wet wood sweating on hot coals; a step that went to and fro. Outside, a snow-weighted bough let go its load and sprang up, scraping against the logs. Some heavy soft thing slid off the roof and dropped with a *chug*. Then the door, that hung awry like a drooping eyelid, gave a disreputable wink, and the whole front gable of the cabin loomed a giant countenance with a silly forehead and an evil leer. Now it seemed that a hand was hurling snow against the door, as a sower scatters grain,—snow that lay like beach sand on the floor, or melted into a crawling pool—red in the firelight, red as blood!

These and other phantasms had now for an unmeasured time been tenants of the packer's brain, sharing and often overpowering the reality of the human step that went to and fro. To-day the shapes and relations of things were more natural, and the step aroused a querulous curiosity.

“Who's there?” the sick man imagined himself to have said. A croaking sound in his throat, which was all he could do by way of speech, brought the step to his bedside. A young face, lightly bearded, and gaunt almost as his own, bent over him. Large, black eyes rested on his; a hand with womanish nails placed its fingers on his wrist.

“You are better to-day. Your pulse is down. I wouldn't try to talk.”

“Who's that—outside?”

“There is no one outside,” Paul answered, following the direction of his patient's eyes. “That? That is only a snowdrift. It grows faster than I can shovel it away.”

The packer had forgotten his own question. He dozed off, and presently roused again as suddenly as he had slept. His utterance was clearer, but not his meaning.

“What—you want to fetch me back for?”

“Back?” Paul repeated.

“I was most gone, wa'n't I?”

“Back to life, you mean? You came back of yourself. I hadn't much to do with it.”

“What's been the matter—gen'ly speaking?”

“You were hurt, don't you remember? Something like wound fever set in. The altitude is bad for fevers. You have had a pretty close call.”

“Been here all the time?”

“Have I been here?—yes.”

“'Lone?”

“With you. How is your chest? Does it hurt you still when you breathe?”

The sick man filled his lungs experimentally. “Something busted inside, I guess,” he panted. “'Tain't no killing matter, though.”

Nourishment, in a tin cup, warm from the fire was offered him, refused with a gesture, and firmly urged upon him. This necessitated another rest. It was long before he spoke again—out of some remoter train of thought apparently.

“Family all in New York?”

“My family? They were at Bisuka when I left them.”

“You don't *live* West!”

“No. I was born in the West, though. Idaho is my native state.”

The patient fell to whimpering suddenly like a hurt child. He drew up the blanket to cover his face. Paul, interpreting this as a signal for more nourishment, brought the sad decoction,—rinds of dried beef cooked with rice in snow water.

“Guess that'll do, thank ye. My tongue feels like an old buckskin glove.”

“When I was a little fellow,” said the nurse, beguiling the patient while he tucked the spoonfuls down, “I was like you: I wouldn't take what the doctor ordered, and they used to pretend I must take it for the others of the family,—a kind of vicarious milk diet, or gruel, or whatever it was. 'Here's a spoonful for mother, poor mother,' they would say; and of course it couldn't be refused when mother needed it so much. 'And now one for Chrissy'”—

“Who?”

“My sister, Christine. And then I'd take one for 'uncle' and one for each of the servants; and the cupful would go down to the health of the household, and I the dupe of my sympathies! Now you are taking this for me, because it's nicer to be shut up here with a live man than a dead one; and we haven't the conveniences for a first-class funeral.”

“You never took a spoonful for 'father,'—eh?”

Paul answered the question with gravity. “No. We never used that name in common.”

“Dead was he?”

“I will tell you some time. Better try to sleep now.”

Paul returned the saucepan to the fire, after piecing out its contents with water, and retired out of his patient's sight.

Again came a murmur, chiefly unintelligible, from the bunk.

“Did you ask for anything?”

The sick man heaved a worried sigh. “See what a mis'rable presumptuous piece of work!” he muttered, addressing the logs overhead. “But that Clauson—he wa'n't no more fit to guide ye than to go to heaven! Couldn't 'a' done much worse than this, though!”

“He has done worse!” Paul came over to the bunk-side to reason on this matter. “They started back from here, four strong men with all the animals and all the food they needed for a six weeks' trip. We came in in one. If they got through at all, where is the help they were to send us?”

“Help!” The packer roused. “They helped themselves, and pretty frequent. I said to them more than once—they didn't like it any too well: 'We can't drink up here like they do down to the coast. The air is too light. What a man would take with his dinner down there would fit him out with a first-class jag up here, 'leven thousand above the sea!'”

“It's a waste of breath to talk about them—breath burns up food and we haven't much to spare. We rushed into this trouble and we dragged you in after us. We have hurt you a good deal more than you have us.”

The sick man groaned. He flung one hand back against the logs, dislodging ancient dust that fell upon his corpse-like forehead. It was carefully wiped away. Helpless tears stole down the rigid face.

“John,” said Paul with animation, “your general appearance just now reminds me of those worked-out placer claims we passed in Ruby Gulch, the first day out. The fever and my cooking have ground-sluiced you to the bone.”

John smiled faintly. “Don't look very fat yourself. Where'd you git all that baird on your face?”

“We have been here some time, you know—or you don't know; you have been living in places far away from here. I used to envy you sometimes. And other times I didn't.”

“You mean I was off my head?”

“At times. But more of the time you were dreaming and talking in your dreams; seeing things out loud by the flash-light of fever.”

“Talking, was I? Guess there wa'n't much sense in any of it?” The hazard was a question.

“A kind of sense,—out of focus, distorted. Some of it was opium. Didn't you coax a little of his favorite medicine out of the cook?”

Packer John apologized sheepishly, “I cal'lated I was going to be left. You put it up on me—making out you were off with the rest. *That* was all right. But I wa'n't going to suffer it out; why should I? A gunshot would have cured me quicker, perhaps. Then some critter might 'a' found me and called it murder. A word like that set going can hang a man. No, I just took a little to deaden the pain.”

“The whole discussion was rather nasty, right before the man we were talking about,” said Paul. “I wanted to get them off and out of hearing. Then we had a few words.”

At intervals during that day and the next, Paul's patient expended his strength in questions, apparently trivial. His eyes, whenever they were open, followed his nurse with a shrinking intelligence. Paul was on his guard.

“What day of the month do you make it out to be?”

“The second of December.”

“December!” The packer lay still considering. “Game all gone down?”

“I am not much of a pot-hunter,” said Paul. “There may be game, but I can't seem to get it. The snow is pretty deep.”

“Wouldn't bear a man on snowshoes?”

“He would go out of sight.”

“Snowing a little every day?”

“Right along, quietly, for I don't know how many days! I think the sky is packed with it a mile deep.”

“How much grub have we got?”

Paul gave a flattering estimate of their resources. The patient was not deceived.

“Where's it all gone to? You ain't eat anything.”

“I've eaten a good deal more than you have.”

“I was livin' on fever.”

“You can't live on fever any longer. The fever has left you, and you'll go with it if you don't obey your doctor.”

“But where's all the stuff *gone* to?”

“There were four of them, and they allowed for some delay in getting out,” Paul explained, with a sickly smile.

“Well, they was hogs! I knew how they'd pan out! That was why”—He wearied of speech and left the point unfinished.

On the evening following, when the two could no longer see each other's faces in the dusk, Paul spoke, controlling his voice:—

“I need not ask you, John, what you think of our chances?”

“I guess they ain't much worth thinking about.” The fire hissed and crackled; the soft subsidence of the snow could be heard outside.

“We are 'free among the dead,' how does it go? 'Like unto them that are wounded and lie in the grave.' What we say to each other here will stop here with our breath. Let us put our memories in order for the last reckoning. I think, John, you must, at some time in your life, have known my father, Adam Bogardus? He was lost on the Snake River plains, twenty-one years ago this autumn.”

Receiving no answer, the pale young inquisitor went on, choosing his words with intense deliberation as one feeling his way in the dark.

“Most of us believe in some form of communication that we can't explain, between those who are separated in body, in this world, but closely united in thought. Do I make myself clear?”

There was a sound of deep breathing from the bunk; it produced a similar conscious excitement in the speaker. He halted, recovered himself, and continued:—

“After my father's disappearance, my mother had a distinct presentiment—it haunted her for years—that something had happened to him at a place called One Man Station. Did you ever know the place?”

“I might have.” The words came huskily.

“Father had left her at this place, and to her knowledge he never came back. But she had this intimation—and suffered from it—that he did come back and was foully dealt with there—wronged in body or mind. The place had most evil associations for her; it was not strange she should have connected it with the great disaster of her life. As you lay talking to yourself in your fever, you took me back on that lost trail that ended, as we thought, in the grave. But we might have been mistaken. Is there anything it would not be safe for you and me to speak of now? Do you know any tie between men that should be closer than the tie between us? Any safer place where a man could lay off the secret burdens of his life and be himself for a little while—before the end answers all? I know you have a secret. I believe that a share of it belongs to me.”

“We are better off sometimes if we don't get all that belongs to us,” said John gratingly.

“It doesn't seem to be a matter of choice, does it? If you were not meant to tell me—what you have partly told me already—where is there any meaning in our being here at all? Let us have some excuse for this senseless accident. Do you believe much in accidents? How foolish”—Paul sighed—“for you and me to be afraid of each other! Two men who have parted with everything but the privilege of speaking the truth!”

The packer raised himself in his bunk slowly, like one in pain. He looked long at the listless figure crouching by the fire; then he sank back again with a low groan. “What was it you heared me say? Come!”

“I can't give you the exact words. The words were nothing. Haven't you watched the sparks blow up, at night, when the wind goes searching over the ashes of an old camp-fire? It was the fever made you talk, and your words were the sparks that showed where there had been fire once. Perhaps I had no right to track you by your own words when you lay helpless, but I couldn't always leave you. Now I'd like to have my share of that—whatever it was—that hurt you so, at One Man Station.”

“You ought to been a lawyer,” said the packer, releasing his breath. There was less strain in his voice. It broke with feeling. “You put up a mighty strong case for your way of looking at it. I don't say it's best. There, if you will have it! Sonny—my son! It—it's like startin' a snow-slide.”

The sick man broke down and sobbed childishly.

“Take it quietly! Oh, take it quietly!” Paul shivered. “I have known it a long time.”

Hours later they were still awake, the packer in his bunk, Paul in his blankets by the winking brands. The pines were moving, and in pauses of the wind they could hear the incessant soft crowding of the snow.

“When they find us here in the spring,” said the packer humbly, “it won't matter much which on us was 'Mister' and which was 'John.'”

“Are you thinking of that!” Paul answered with nervous irritation. “I thought you had lived in the woods long enough to have got rid of all that nonsense!”

“I guess there was some of it where you've been living.”

“We are done with all that now. Go to sleep,—Father.” He pronounced the word conscientiously to punish himself for dreading it. The darkness seemed to ring with it and give it back to him ironically. “Father!” muttered the pines outside, and the snow, listening, let fall the word in elfin whispers. Paul turned over desperately in his blankets. “Father!” he repeated out loud. “Do *you* believe it? Does it do you any good?”

“I wouldn't distress myself, one way or t' other, if it don't come natural,” the packer spoke, out of his corner in the darkness. “Wait till you can feel to say it. The word ain't nothing.”

“But do you feel it? Is it any comfort to you at all?”

“I ain't in any hurry to feel it. We'll get there. Don't worry. And s'pose we don't! We're men. Man to man is good enough for me.”

Paul spent some wakeful hours after that, trying not to think of Moya, of his mother and Christine. They were of another world,—a world that dies hard at twenty-four. Towards morning he slept, but not without dreams.

He was in the pent-road at Stone Ridge. It was sunset and long shadows striped the lane. A man stood, back towards him, leaning both arms on the stone fence that bounds the lane to the eastward,—a plain farmer figure, gazing down across the misty fields as he might have stood a hundred times in that place at that hour. Paul could not see his face, but something told him who it must be. His heart stood still, for he saw his mother coming up the lane. She carried something in her hand covered with a napkin, and she smiled, walking carefully as if carrying a treat to a sick child. She passed the man at the fence, not appearing to have seen him.

“Won't you speak to him, mother? Won't you speak to”—He could not utter the name. She looked at him bewildered. “Speak? who shall I speak to?” The man at the fence had turned and he watched her, or so Paul imagined. He felt himself choking, faint, with the effort to speak that one word. Too late! The moment passed. The man whom he knew was his father, the solemn, quiet figure, moved away up the road unquestioned. He never looked back. Paul grew dizzy with the lines of shadow; they stretched on and on, they became the ties of a railroad—interminable. He awoke, very faint and tired, with a lost feeling and the sense upon him of some great catastrophe. The old man was sleeping deeply in his bunk, a ray of white sunlight falling on his yellow features. He looked like one who would never wake again. But as Paul gazed at him he smiled, and sighed heavily. His lips formed a name; and all the blood in Paul's body dyed his face crimson. The name was his mother's.

XII. — THE BLOOD-WITE

A few hours seemed days, after the great disclosure. Both men had recoiled from it and were feeling the strain of the new relation. Three times since their first meeting the elder had adjusted himself quietly to a change in the younger's manner to him. First there had been respectful curiosity in the presence of a new type, combined with the deference due a leader and an expert in strange fields. Then indignant partisanship, pity, and the slight condescension of the nurse. This had hurt the packer, but he took it as he accepted his physical downfall. The last change was hardest to bear; for now the time was short, and, as Paul himself had said, they were in the presence of the final unveiling.

So when Paul made artificial remarks to break the pauses, avoiding his father's eye and giving him neither name nor title, the latter became silent and lay staring at the logs and picking at his hands.

“If I was hunting up a father,” he said to himself aloud one day, “I'd try to find a better lookin' one. I wouldn't pa'm off on myself no such old warped stick as I be.” The remark seemed a tentative one.

“I had the choice, to take or leave you,” Paul responded. “You were an unconscious witness. Why should I have opened the subject at all?”

Both knew that this answer was an evasion. By forcing the tie they had merely marked the want of ease and confidence between them. As “Packer John” Paul could have enjoyed, nay, loved this man; as his father, the sum and finality of his filial dreams, the supplanter of that imaginary husband of his mother's youth, the thing was impossible. And the father knew it and did not resent it in the least, only pitied the boy for his needless struggle. He was curious about him, too. He wanted to understand him and the life he had come out of: his roundabout way of reaching the simplest conclusions; his courage in argument, and his personal shying away from the truth when found. More than all he longed for a little plain talk, the exile's hunger for news from home. It pleased him when Paul, rousing at this deliberate challenge, spoke up with animation, as if he had come to some conclusion in his own mind. It could not be expected he would express it simply. The packer had become used to his oddly elaborate way of putting things.

“If we had food enough and time, we might afford to waste them discussing each other's personal appearance. *I* propose we talk to some purpose.”

“Talking sure burns up the food.” The packer waited.

“I wish I knew what my father was doing with himself, all those years when his family were giving him the honors of the dead.”

“I warned ye about this pumping out old shafts. You can't tell what you'll find in the bottom. I suppose you know there are things in this world, Boy, a good deal worse than death?”

“Desertion is worse. It is not my father's death I want explained, it is his life, your life, in secret, these twenty years! Can you explain that?”

The packer doubled his bony fist and brought it down on the bunk-side. “Now you talk like a man! I been waiting to hear you say that. Yes, I can answer that question, if you ain't afeard of the answer!”

“I am keeping alive to hear it!” said Paul in a guarded voice.

“You might say you're keeping me alive to tell it. It's a good thing to git off of one's mind; but it's a poor thing to hand over to a son. All I've got to leave ye, though: the truth if you can stand it! Where do you want I should begin?”

“At the night when you came back to One Man Station.”

“How'd you know I come back?”

“You were back there in your fever, living over something that happened in that place. There was a wind blowing and the door wouldn't shut. And something had to be lifted,”—the old man's eyes, fixed upon his son, took a look of awful comprehensions,—“something heavy.”

“Yes; great Lord, it was heavy! And I been carrying it ever since!” His chest rose as if the weight of that load lay on it still, and his breath expired with a hoarse “haugh.” “I got out of the way because it was *my* load. I didn't want no help from them.” He paused and sat picking at his hands. “It's a dreadful ugly story. I'd most as soon live it over again as have to tell it in cold blood. I feel sometimes it *can't be!*”

“You need not go back beyond that night. I know how my mother was left, and what sort of a man you were forced to leave her with. Was it—the keeper?”

“That's what it was. That was the hard knot in my thread. Nothing wouldn't go past that. Some, when they git things in a tangle, they just reach for the shears an' cut the thread. I wa'n't brought up that way. I was taught to leave the shears alone. So I went on stringin' one year after another. But they wouldn't join on to them that went before. There was the knot.”

“It was between you and him—and the law?” said Paul.

“You've got it! I was there alone with it,—witness an' judge an' jury; I worked up my own case. Manslaughter with extenuatin' circumstances, I made it—though he was more beast than man. I give myself the outside penalty,—imprisonment for life. And I been working out my sentence ever since. The Western country wa'n't home to me then—more like a big prison. It's been my prison these twenty-odd years, while your mother was enjoying what belonged to her, and making a splendid job of your education. If I had let things alone I might have finished my time out: but I didn't, and now the rest of it's commuted—for the life of

my son!"

"Don't put it that way! I am no lamb of sacrifice. Why, how can we let things alone in this world! Should I have stood off from this secret and never asked my father for his defense?"

"Do you mean to say a boy like you can take hold of this thing and understand it?"

"I can," said Paul. "I could almost tell the story myself."

"Put it up then!" said the packer. The fascination of confession was strong upon him.

"You had been out in the mountains—how long?"

"Two days and three nights, just as I left camp."

"You were crazed with anxiety for us. You came back to find your camp empty, the wife and baby gone. You had reason to distrust the keeper. Not for what he did—for what you knew he meant to do."

"For what he meant and tried to do. I seen it in his eye. The devil that wanted him incited him to play with me and tell me lies about my wife. She scorned the brute and he took his mean revenge. He kep' back her letter, and he says to me, leerin' at me out of his wicked eyes, 'Your livestock seems to be the strayin' kind. The man she went off with give me that,'—he lugged a gold piece out of his clothes and showed me,—'give me that,' he says, 'to keep it quiet.' He kep' it quiet! Half starved and sick's I was, the strength was in me. But vengeance in the hand of a man, it cuts both ways, my son! His bunk had a sharp edge to it like this. He fell acrost it with my weight on top of him and he never raised up again. There wasn't a mark on him. His back was broke. He died slow, his eyes mocking me.

"'You fool,' he says. 'Go look in that coat hangin' on the wall.' I found her letter there inside of one from Granger. He watched me read it and he laughed. 'Now, go tell her you've killed a man!' He knew I didn't come of a killin' breed. There was four hours to think it over. Four hours! I thought hard, I tell you! 'T was six of one and half a dozen of t' other 'twixt him and me, but I worked it back 'n' forth a good long while about her. First, taking her away from her father, an old man whose bread I'd eat. She was like a child of my own raising. I always had felt mean about that. We'd had bad luck from the start,—my luck,—and now disgrace to cap it all. Whether I hid it or told her and stood my trial, I'd never be a free man again. There he lay! And a sin done in secret, it's like a drop of nitric acid: it's going to eat its way out—and in!

"I knew she'd have friends enough, once she was quit of me. That was the case between us. The thing that hurt me most was to put her letter back where I found it, and leave it, there with him. Her little cry to me—and I couldn't come! I read the words over and over, I've said 'em to myself ever since. I've lived on them. But I had to leave the letter there to show I'd never come back. I put it back after he was dead.

"The sins of the parents shall be visited,—when it's in the blood! But I declare to the Almighty, murder wa'n't in my blood! It come on me like a stroke of lightning hits a tree, and I had a clear show to fall alone.

"That's the answer. Maybe I didn't see all sides of it, but there never was no opening to do different, after that night. Now, you've had an education. I should be glad to hear your way of looking at it?"

"I should think you might stand your trial, now, before any judge or jury, in this world or the next," Paul answered.

"There is only one Judge." The packer smiled a beautiful quiet smile that covered a world of meanings. "What a man re'ly wants, if he'd own up it, is a leetle shade of partiality. Maybe that's what we're all going to need, before we git through."

Paul was glad to be saved the necessity of speech, and he felt the swift discernment with which the packer resumed his usual manner. "Got any more of that stuff you call soup? Divide even! I won't be made no baby of."

"We might as well finish it up. It's hardly worth making two bites of a cherry."

"Call this 'cherry'! It's been a good while on the bough. What's it mostly made of?"

"Rind of bacon, snow water,—plenty of water,—and a tablespoonful of rice."

"Good work! Hungry folks can live on what the full bellies throw away."

"Oh, I can save. But there comes a time when you can't live by saving what you haven't got."

"That's right! Well, let's talk, then, before the bacon-rind fades out of us."

The packer's face and voice, his whole manner, showed the joy of a soul that has found relief. Paul was not trying now to behave dutifully; they were man to man once more. The quaint, subdued humor asserted itself, and the narrator's speech flowed on in the homely dialect which expressed the man.

"I stayed out all that winter, workin' towards the coast. One day, along in March, I fetched a charcoal burner's camp, and the critter took me in and nursed my frost-bites and didn't ask no questions, nor I of him. We struck up a trade, my drivin' stock, mostly skin and bone, for a show in his business. He wa'n't gettin' rich at it, that was as plain as the hip bones on my mules. I kep' in the woods, cuttin' timber and tendin' kiln, and he hauled and did the sellin'. Next year he went below to Portland and brought home smallpox with him. It broke out on him on the road. He was a terrible sick man. I buried him, and waited for my turn. It didn't come. I seemed kind o' insured. I've been in lots of trouble since then, but nothing ever touched me till now. I banked on it too strong, though. I sure did! My pardner was just such another lone bird like me. If he had any folks of his own he kep' still about them. So I took his name—whether it was his name there's no knowing. Guess I've took full as good care of it as he would. 'Hagar?' folk would say, sort o' lookin' me over. 'You ain't Jim Hagar.' No, but I was John, and they let it go at that.

"I heard of your mother that summer, from a prospector who came up past my camp. He'd wintered in Mountain Home. He told me my own story, the way they had it down there, and what straits your mother was in. I had scraped up quite a few dollars by then, and was thinking how I'd shove it into a bank like an old debt coming to Adam Bogardus. I was studying how I was going to rig it. There wasn't any one who knew me down there, so I felt safe to ventur' a few inquiries. What I heard was that she'd gone home to her folks and was as well off as anybody need be. That broke me all up at first. I must have had a sneakin' notion that maybe some day I could see my way to go back to her, but that let me out completely. I quit then, and I've stayed quit. The only break I made was showin' up here at the 'leventh hour, thinking I could be some use to my son!"

“It was to be,” said Paul. “For years our lives have been shaping towards this meeting. There were a thousand chances against it. Yet here we are!”

“Here we are!” the packer repeated soberly. “But don't think that I lay any of my foolishness on the Almighty! Maybe it was meant my son should close my eyes, but it's too dear at the price. Anybody would say so, I don't care who.”

“But aside from the 'price,' is it something to you?”

“More—more than I've got words to say. And yet it grinds me, every breath I take! Not that I wish you'd done different—you couldn't and be a man. I knew it even when I was kickin' against it. Oh, well! It ain't no use to kick. I thought I'd learned something, but I ain't—learned—a thing!”

XIII. — CURTAIN

A greater freedom followed this confession, as was natural. It became the basis for lighter confidences and bits of autobiography that came to the surface easily after this tremendous effort at sincerity. Paul found that he could speak even of the family past, into which by degrees he began to fit the real man in place of that bucolic abstraction which had walked the fields of fancy. He had never dared to actuate the “hired man,” his father, on a basis of fact. He knew the speech and manners of the class from which he came,—knew men of that class, and talked with them every summer at Stone Ridge; but he had brooded so deeply over the tragic and sentimental side of his father's fate as to have lost sight of the fact that he was a man.

Reality has its own convincing charm, not inconsistent with plainness or even with commonness. To know it is to lose one's taste for toys of the imagination. Paul, at last, could look back almost with, a sense of humor at the doll-like progenitor he had played with so long. But when it came to placing the real man, Adam Bogardus, beside that real woman, once his wife, their son could but own with awe that there is mercy in extinction, after all; in the chance, however it may come to us, for slipping off those cruel disguises that life weaves around us.

In the strange, wakeful nights, full of starvation dreams, he saw his mother as she would look on state occasions in the hostess's place at her luxurious table; the odor of flowers, the smell of meats and wines, tantalized and sickened him. Christine would come in her dancing frocks, always laughing, greedy in her mirth; but Moya, face to face, he could never see. It was torture to feel her near him, a disembodied embrace. Passionate panegyrics and hopeless adjurations he would pour out to that hovering loveliness just beyond his reach. The agony of frustration would waken him, if indeed it were sleep that dissolved his consciousness, and he would be irritable if spoken to.

The packer broke in, one morning, on these unnerving dreams. “You wouldn't happen to have a picture of her along with you?”

Paul stared at him.

“No, of course you wouldn't! And I'd be 'most afeard to look at it, if you had. She must have changed considerable. Time hasn't stood still with her any more than the rest of us.”

“I have no picture of my mother,” Paul replied.

The packer saw that his question had jarred; he had waited weeks to ask it. He passed it off now with one of his homely similes. “If you was to break a cup clean in two, and put the halves together again while the break was fresh, they'd knit so you wouldn't hardly see a crack. But you take one half and set it in the chainy closet and chuck the other half out on the ash-heap,—them halves won't look much like pieces of the same cup, come a year or two. The edges won't jine no more than the lips of an old cut that's healed without stitches. No; married folks they grow together or they grow apart, and they're a-doing of the one or the other every minute of the time, breaks or no breaks. Does she go up to the old place summers?”

“Not lately, except on business,” said Paul. “A company was formed to open slate quarries on the upper farm, a good many years ago. They are worth more than all the land forty times over.”

“I always said so; always told the old man he had a gold mine in that ridge. Was this before he died?”

“Long after. It was my mother's scheme mainly. She controls it now. She is a very strong business woman.”

“She got her training, likely, from that uncle in New York. He had the business head. The old man had no more contrivance than one of the bulls in his pastures. He could lock horns and stay there, but it wa'nt no trouble to outflank him. More than once his brother Jacob got to the windward of him in a bargain. He was made a good deal like his own land. Winters of frost it took to break up that ground, and sun and rain to meller it, and then't was a hatful of soil to a cartful of stone. The plough would jump the furrows if you drew it deep. My arms used to ache as if they'd been pounded, with the jar of them stones. They used to tell us children a story how Satan, he flew over the earth a-sowing it with rocks and stones, and as he was passing over our county a hole bu'st through his leather apron and he lost his whole load right slam there. I could 'a' p'inted out the very spot where the heft on it fell. Ten Stone meadow, so-called. Ten million stone! I was pickin' stone in that field all of one summer when I was fifteen year old. We built a mile of fence with it.

“Them quarries must have brought a mint of money into the country. Different sort of labor, too. Well, the world grows richer and poorer every year. More difference every year between the way rich folks and poor folks live. I wouldn't know where I belonged, 't ain't likely, if I was to go back there. I'd be way off! One while I used to think a good deal about going back, just to take a look around. It comes over me lately like hunger and thirst. I think about the most curious things when I'm asleep—foolish, like a child! I can smell all the good

home smells of a frosty morning: apple pomace, steaming in the barnyard; sausage frying; Becky scouring the brass furnace-kittle with salt and vinegar. Killin' time, you know—makes you think of boiling souse and head-cheese. You ever eat souse?” The packer sucked in his breath with a lean smile. “It ain't best to dwell on it. But you can't help yourself, at night. I can smell Becky's fresh bread, in my dreams, just out of the brick oven. Never eat bread cooked in a stove till I came out here. I never drunk any water like that spring on the ridge. Last night I was back there, and the maples were all yellow like sunshine. Once it was spring, and apple-blooms up in the hill orchard. And little Emmy, a-setting on the fence, with her bunnit throwed back on her neck. 'Addy!' she called, way across the lot; 'Addy, come, help me down!' She was a master hand for venturin' up on places, but she didn't like the gettin' down.

“Well, she 'a learned the ups and downs by this time. She don't need Addy to help her. I'd have helped a big sight more if I had kep' my distance. It's a thing so con-demned foolish and unnecessary—I can't be reconciled to it noway!”

“You see only one side of it,” said Paul. Unspeakable thoughts had kept pace with his father's words. “Nothing that happens, happens through us—or to us—alone. There was a girl I knew, outside. She was as happy, when I knew her first, as you say my mother used to be. Then she met some one—a man—and the shadow of his life crossed hers. He would have wrapped her up in it and put out her sunshine if he had stayed in the same world. Now she can be herself again, after a while. It cannot take long to forget a person you have known only a little over a year.”

The packer rose on one elbow. He reached across and shook his son.

“Where is that girl? Answer me! Take your face out of your hands!”

“At Bisuka Barracks. She is the commandant's daughter. I came out to marry her.”

“What possessed ye not to tell me?”

“Why should I tell you? We buried the wedding-day months back, in the snow.”

“Boy, boy!” the packer groaned.

“What difference can it make now?”

“*All* the difference—all the difference there is! I thought you were out here touring it with them fool boys and they were all the chance you had for help outside. You suppose her father is going to see her git left? *They*'ll get in here, if they have to crawl on their bellies or climb through the tree-limbs. They know how! And we've wasted the grub and talked like a couple of women!”

“Oh, don't—don't torment me!” Paul groaned. “It was all over. Can't you leave the dead in peace!”

“We are not the dead! I 'most wish we were. Boy, I've got a big word to say to you about that. Come closer!” The packer's speech hoarsened and failed. They could only hear each other breathe. Then it seemed to the packer that his was the only breath in the darkness. He listened. A faint cheer arose in the forest and a crashing of the dead underlimbs of the pines.

He turned frantically upon his son, but no pledge could be extorted now. Paul's lips were closed. He had lost consciousness.

XIV. — KIND INQUIRIES

The colonel's drawing-room was as hot as usual the first hour after dinner, and as usual it was full of kindly participant neighbors who had dropped in to repeat their congratulations on the good news, now almost a week old. Mrs. Bogardus had not come down, and, though asked after by all, the talk was noticeably freer for her absence.

Mrs. Creve, in response to a telegram from her brother, had arrived from Fort Sherman on the day before, prepared for anything, from frozen feet to a wedding. She had spent the afternoon in town doing errands for Moya, and being late for dinner had not changed her dress. There never was such a “natural” person as aunt Annie. At present she was addressing the company at large, as if they were all her promising children.

“Nobody talks about their star in these days. I used to have a star. I forget which it was. I know it was a pretty lucky one. Now I trust in Providence and the major and wear thick shoes.” She exhibited the shoes, a particularly large and sensible kind which she imported from the East. Everybody laughed and longed to embrace her. “Has Moya got a star?” she asked seriously.

“The whole galaxy!” a male voice replied. “Doesn't the luck prove it?”

“Moya has got a 'temperament,'” said Doctor Fleming, the Post surgeon. “That's as good as having a star. You know there are persons who attract misfortune just as sickly children catch all the diseases that are going. I knew that boy was sure to be found. Anything of Moya's would be.”

“So you think it was Moya's 'temperament' that pulled him out of the snow?” said the colonel, wheeling his chair into the discussion.

“How about Mr. Winslow's temperament? I prefer to leave a little of the credit to him,” said Moya sweetly.

A young officer, who had been suffering in the corner by the fire, jumped to his feet and bowed, then blushed and sat down again, regretting his rashness. Moya continued to look at him with steadfast friendliness. Winslow had led the rescue that brought her lover home. A glow of sympathy united these friends and neighbors; the air was electrical and full of emotion.

“I suppose no date has been fixed for the wedding?” Mrs. Dawson, on the divan, murmured to Mrs. Creve.

The latter smiled a non-committal assent.

“I should think they would just put the doctor aside and be married anyhow. My husband says he ought to go to a warmer climate at once.”

“My dear, a young man can't be married in his dressing-gown and slippers!”

“No! It's not as bad as that?”

“Well, not quite. He's up and dressed and walks about, but he doesn't come down to his meals,—he can eat so very little at a time, and it tires him to sit through a dinner. It isn't one of those ravenous recoveries. It went too far with him for that.”

“His mother was perfectly magnificent through it all, they say.”

“Have you seen much of Mrs. Bogardus?”

“No; we left them alone, poor things, when the pinch came. But I used to see her walking the porch, up and down, up and down. Moya would go off on the hills. They couldn't walk together! That was after Miss Chrissy went home. Her mother took her back, you know, and then returned alone. Perfectly heroic! They say she dressed every evening for dinner as carefully as if she were in New York, and led the conversation. She used to make Moya read aloud to her—history, novels—anything to pretend they were not thinking. The strain must have begun before any of us knew. The colonel kept it so quiet. What is the dear man doing with your bonnet?”

The colonel had plucked his sister's walking-hat, a pert piece of millinery froward in feathers, from the trunk of the headless Victory, where she had reposed it in her haste before dinner.

“Mustn't be disrespectful to the household Lar,” he kindly reminded her.

“Where am I to put my hats, then? I shall wear them on my head and come down to breakfast in them. Moya, dear, will you please rescue my hat? Put it anywhere, dear,—under your chair. There is not really a place in this house to put a thing. A wedding that goes off on time is bad enough, but one that hangs on from month to month—and doesn't even take care of its clothes! Forgive me, dear! The clothes are very pretty. I open a bureau-drawer to put away my middle-aged bonnet—a puff of violets! A pile of something white, and, behold, a wedding veil! There isn't a hook in the closet that doesn't say, 'Standing-room only,' and the standing-room is all stood on by a regiment of new shoes.”

“My dear woman, go light on our sore spots. We are only just out of the woods.”

“Isn't it bad to coddle your sore spots, Doctor? Like a saddle-gall, ride them down!” Mrs. Creve and Dr. Fleming exchanged a friendly smile on the strength of this nonsense. On the doctor's side it covered a suspicion: “'The lady, methinks, protests too much'!” The colonel, too, was restless, and Moya's sweet color came and went. She appeared to be listening for steps or sounds from some other part of the house.

The men all rose now as Mrs. Bogardus entered; one or two of the ladies rose also, compelled by something in her look certainly not intended. She was careful to greet everybody; she even crossed the room and gave her hand to Lieutenant Winslow, whom she had not seen since the night of his return. The doctor she casually passed over with a bow; they had met before that day. It was in the mind of each person present not of the family, and excepting the doctor, to ask her: 'How is your son this evening?' But for some reason the inquiry did not come off.

The company began suddenly to feel itself *de trop*. Mrs. Dawson, who had come under the doctor's escort, glanced at him, awaiting the moment when it would do to make the first move.

“I hear you lost a patient from the hospital yesterday?” said Lieutenant Winslow, at the doctor's side.

“*From*, did you say? That's right! He was to have been operated on to-day.” The doctor shrugged his shoulders.

“What!”

“Two broken ribs. One grown fast to the lung.”

“Wh-ew!”

“He just walked out. Said I had ordered him to have fresh air. There was a new hall-boy, a greenhorn.”

“He can't go far in that shape, can he?”

“Oh, there's no telling. The constitution of those men is beyond anything. You can't kill him. He'll suffer of course, suffer like an animal, and die like one—away from the herd. Maybe not this time, though.”

“Was he afraid of the operation?”

“I can't say. He did not seem to be either afraid or anxious for help. Not used to being helped. He would be taken to the Sisters' Hospital. Wouldn't come up here as the guest of the Post, not a bit! I believe from the first he meant to give us the slip, and take his chance in his own way.”

“Did you hear,”—Mrs. Creve spoke up from the opposite side of the room under that hypnotic influence by which a dangerous topic spreads,—“did you hear about the poor guide who ran away from the hospital to escape from our wicked doctor here? What a reputation you must have, Doctor!”

“All talk, my dear; town gossip,” said the colonel. “You gave him his discharge, didn't you, Doctor?” The colonel looked hard at the medical officer; he had prepared the way for a statement suited to a mixed company, including ladies. But Doctor Fleming stated things usually to suit himself.

“There was a man who left the Sisters' Hospital rather informally yesterday. I won't say he is not just as well off to-day as if he had stayed.”

“Who was it? Was it our man, father?”

“The doctor has more than one patient at the hospital.” Colonel Middleton looked reproachfully at the doctor, who continued to put aside as childish these clumsy subterfuges. “I think you ladies frightened him away with your attentions. He knew he was under heavy liabilities for all your flowers and fancy cookery.”

“Attentions! Are we going to let him die on the road somewhere?” cried Moya.

“Miss Moya?” Lieutenant Winslow spoke up with a mixture of embarrassment and resolution to be heard,

though every voice in the room conspired against him. “Those men are a big fraternity. They have their outfitting places where they put in for repairs. Packer John had his blankets sent to the Green Meadow corral. They know him there. They say he had money at one of the stores. They all have a little money cached here and there. And they *can't* get lost, you know!”

Moya's eyes shone with a suspicious brightness.

> *“'When the forest shall mislead me;*
> *When the night and morning lie.'”*

She turned her swimming eyes upon Paul's mother, who would be sure to remember the quotation.

Mrs. Bogardus remained perfectly still, her lips slightly parted. She grew very pale. Then she rose and walked quickly to the door.

“Just a breath of cold air!” she panted. The doctor, Moya, and Mrs. Creve had followed her into the hall. Moya placed herself on the settle beside her and leaned to support her, but she sat back rigidly with her eyes closed. Mrs. Creve looked on in quiet concern. “Let me take you into the study, Mrs. Bogardus!” the doctor commanded. “A glass of water, Moya, please.”

“How is she? What is it? Can we do anything?” The company crowded around Mrs. Creve on her return to the drawing-room. She glanced at her brother. There was no clue there. He stood looking embarrassed and mystified. “It is only the warm welcome we give our friends,” she said aloud, smiling calmly. “Mrs. Bogardus found the room too hot. I think I should have succumbed myself but for that little recess in the hall.”

The colonel attacked his fire. He thought he was being played with. Things were not right in the house, and no one, not the doctor, or even Annie, was frank with him. His kind face flushed as he straightened up to bid his guests good-night.

“Well, if it's not anything serious, you think. But you'll be sure to let us know?” said Mrs. Dawson. “Well, good-night, Mrs. Creve. *Good*-night, Colonel! You'll say good-night to Moya? Do let us know if there is anything we can do.”

Dr. Fleming was in the hall looking for his cape. The colonel touched him on the shoulder. “Don't be in a hurry, Doctor. Mrs. Dawson will excuse you.”

“I don't think you need me any more to-night. Moya is with Mrs. Bogardus. She is not ill. The room was a little close.”

“Never mind the *room*! Come in here. I want a word with you.”

The doctor laughed oddly, and obeyed.

“Annie, you needn't leave us.”

“Why, thank you, dear boy! It's awfully good of you,” Annie mocked him. “But I must go and relieve Moya.”

“I don't believe you are wanted in there,” said Doctor Fleming.

“It's more than obvious that I'm not in here.”

“Oh, do sit down,” said the teased colonel.

The fire sulked and smoked a trifle with its brands apart. Doctor Fleming leaned forward upon his knees and regarded it thoughtfully. The colonel sat fondling the tongs. In a deep chair Mrs. Creve lay back and shaded her face with the end of her lace scarf. By her manner she might have been alone in the room, yet she was keenly observant of the men, for she felt that developments were taking place.

“What is the matter with your patient upstairs, Doctor?” the colonel began his cross-examination. Doctor Fleming raised his eyebrows.

“He's had nothing to eat to speak of for six weeks, at an altitude”—

“Yes; we know all that. But he's twenty-four years old. They made an easy trip back, and he has been here a week, nearly. He's not as strong as he was when they brought him in, is he?”

“That was excitement. You have to allow for the reaction. He has had a shock to the entire system,—nerves, digestion,—must give him time. Very nervous temperament too much controlled.”

“Make it as you like. But I'm disappointed in his rallying powers, unless you are keeping something back. A boy with the grit to do what he did, and stand it as he did—why isn't he standing it better now?”

“We are all suffering from reaction, I think,” said Mrs. Creve diplomatically; “and we show it by making too much of little things. Tom, we oughtn't to keep the doctor up here talking nonsense. He wants to go to bed.”

“*I*'m not talking nonsense,” said the doctor. “I should be if I pretended there was anything mysterious about that boy's case upstairs. He has had a tremendous experience, say what you will; and it's pulled him down nervously, and every other way. He isn't ready or able to talk of it yet. And he knows as soon as he comes down there'll be forty people waiting to congratulate him and ask him how it was. I don't wonder he fights shy. If he could take his bride by the hand and walk out of the house with her I believe he could start to-morrow; but if there must be a wedding and a lot of fuss”—

Mrs. Creve nodded her head approvingly. The three had risen and stood around the hearth, while the colonel put the brands delicately together with the skill of an old campaigner. The flames breathed again.

“I don't offer this as a professional opinion,” said the doctor. “But a case like his is not a disease, it's a condition”—

“Of the mind, perhaps?” the colonel added significantly. He glanced at Mrs. Creve. “You've thought about that, Doctor? The letter his mother consulted you about?”

“Have you been worrying about that, Colonel? Why didn't you say so? There is nothing in it whatever. Why, it's so plain a case the other way—any one can see where the animus comes from!”

“Now you *are* getting mysterious, and I'm going to bed!” said Mrs. Creve.

“No; we're coming to the point now,” said the colonel.

“What is it you want Bogardus to do?” asked Doctor Fleming. “Want him to get up and walk out of the

house as my patient did at the hospital? Dare say he could do it, but what then? Will you let me speak out, Colonel? No regard to anybody's feelings? Now, this may be gossip, but I think it has a bearing on the case upstairs. I'm going to have it off my mind anyhow! When Mrs. Bogardus came to see the guide,—Packer John,—day before yesterday, was it?—he asked to see her alone. Said he had something particular to say to her about her son. We thought it a queer start, but she was willing to humor him. Well, she wasn't in there above ten minutes, but in that time something passed between them that hit her very hard, no doubt of that! Now, Bogardus holds his tongue like a gentleman as to what happened in the woods. He doesn't mention his comrades' names. And the packer has disappeared; so he can't be questioned. Seems to me a little bird told me there was an attachment between one of those Bowen boys and Miss Christine?

“Now we, who know what brutes brute fear will make of men, are not going to deny that those boys behaved badly. There are some things that can't be acknowledged among men, you know, if there is a hole to crawl out of. Cowardice is one of them. Well then, they lied, that's the whole of it. The little boys lied. They wrote Mrs. Bogardus a long letter from Lemhi,”—the doctor was reviewing now for Mrs. Creve's benefit,—“when they first got out. They probably judged, by the time they had had, that Paul and the packer would never tell their own story. Very well: it couldn't hurt Paul, it might be the saving of them, if they could show that something had queered him in the woods. They asked his mother if she had heard of the effects of altitude upon highly sensitive organizations. They recounted some instances—I will mention them later. One of the boys is a lawyer, isn't he? They are a pair of ingenious youths. Bogardus, they claim, avoided them almost from the time they entered the woods,—almost lived with the packer, behaved like a crank about the shooting. Whereas they had gone there to kill things, he made it a personal matter whenever they pursued this intention in a natural and undisguised manner. He had pangs, like a girl, when the creatures expired. He hated the carcases, the blood—forgive me, Mrs. Creve. In short, he called the whole business butchery.”

“Do you make *that* a sign of lunacy?” Mrs. Creve flung in.

“I am quoting, you know.” The doctor smiled indulgently. “They declare that they offered—even begged—to stay behind with him, one of them, at least, but he rejected their company in a manner so unpleasant that they saw it would only be courting a quarrel to remain. And so, treating him perforce like a child *or* a lunatic *pro tem.*, and having but little time to decide in, they cut loose and hurried back for help. This is the tale, composed on reflection. They said nothing of this to Winslow—to save publicity, of course! Mrs. Bogardus's lips are doubly sealed, for her son's sake and for the sake of the young scamp who is to be her son, by and by! I saw she winced at my opinion, which I gave her plainly—brutally, perhaps. And she asked me particularly to say nothing, which I am particularly not doing.

“This, I think, you will find is the bitter drop in the cup of rejoicing upstairs. And they are swallowing it in silence, those two, for the sake of the little girl and the old friends in New York. Of course she has kept from Paul that last shot in the back from those sweet boys! The packer had some unruly testimony he was bursting with, which he had sense enough to keep for her alone, and she doesn't want the case to spread. It is singular how a man in his condition could get out of the way as suddenly as he did. You might think he'd been taken up in a cloud.”

“Doctor, what do you mean by such an insinuation as that?”

“Colonel, have I insinuated anything? Did I say she had oiled the wheels of his departure?”

“Come, come! You go too far!”

“Not at all. That's your own construction. I merely say that I am not concerned about that man's disappearance. I think he'll be looked after, as a valuable witness should be.”

“Well,” the colonel grumbled uneasily, “I don't like mysteries myself, and I don't like family quarrels nor skeletons at the feasts of old friends. But I suppose there must be a drop in every cup. What were your altitude cases, Doctor?”

“The same old ones; poor Addison, you know. All those stories they tell an Easterner. As I pointed out to Mrs. Bogardus, in every case there was some predisposing cause. Addison had been too long in the mountains, and he was frightfully overworked; short of company officers. He came to me about an insect he said had got into his ear; buzzed, and bothered him day and night. The story got to the men's quarters. They joked about the colonel's 'bug.' I knew it was no joke. I condemned him for duty, but the Sioux were out. They thought at Washington no one but Addison could handle an Indian campaign. He was on the ground, too. So they sent him up higher where it was dry, with a thousand men in his hands. I knew he'd be a madman or a dead man in a month! There were a good many of the dead! By Jove! The boys who took his orders and loved the old fellow and knew he was sending them to their death! Well for him that he'll never know.”

“The 'altitude of heartbreak,'” sighed Mrs. Creve. The phrase was her own, for many a reason deeply known unto herself, but she gave it the effect of a quotation before the men.

“Then you think there is no 'altitude' in ours?”

“No; nor 'heartbreak' either,” said the doctor, helping himself to one of the colonel's cigars. “But I don't say there isn't enough to keep a woman awake nights, and to make those young men avoid the sight of each other for a time. Thanks, I won't smoke now. I'm going to take a look at Mrs. Bogardus as I go out.”

XV. — A BRIDEGROOM OF SNOW

The doctor had taken his look, feeling a trifle guilty under his patient's counter gaze, yet glad to have relieved the good colonel's anxiety. If he loved to gossip, at least he was particular as to whom he gossiped

with.

Moya closed the door after him and silently resumed her seat. Mrs. Bogardus helped herself to a sip of water. She was struggling with a dry constriction of the throat, and Moya protested a little, seeing the effort that it cost her to speak, even in the hoarse, unnatural tone which was all the voice she had left.

“I want to finish now,” she said, “and never speak of this again. It was I who accused them first—and then I asked him:—if there was anything he could say in their defense, to say it, for Chrissy's sake! 'I will never break bread with them again,' said he,—'either Banks or Horace. I will not eat with them, or drink with them, or speak with them again!' Think of it! How are we to live? How are they to inhabit the same city? He thinks I have been weak. I am weak! The only power I have is through—the property. Banks will never marry a poor girl. But that would be a dear-bought victory. Let her keep what faith in him she can. No; in families, the ones who can control themselves have to give in—to those who can't. If you argue with Christine she simply gives way, and then she gets hysterical, and then she is ill. It's a disease. Mothers know how their children—Christine was marked—marked with trouble! I am thankful she has any mind at all. She needs me more than Paul does. I cannot be parted from my power to help her—such as it is.”

“When she is Banks Bowen's wife she will need you more than ever!” said Moya.

“She will. I could prevent the marriage, but I am afraid to. I am afraid! So, as the family is cut in two—in three, for I—” Mrs. Bogardus stopped and moistened her lips again. “So—I think you and Paul had better make your arrangements and go as soon as you can wherever it suits you, without minding about the rest of us.”

Moya gave a little sobbing laugh. “You don't expect me to make the first move!”

“Doesn't he say anything to you—anything at all?”

“He is too ill.”

“He is not ill!” Mrs. Bogardus denied it fiercely. “Who says he is ill? He is starved and frozen. He is just out of the grave. You must be good to him, Moya. Warm him, comfort him! You can give him the life he needs. Your hands are as soft as little birds. They comfort even me. Oh, don't you understand!”

“Of course I understand!” Moya answered, her face aflame. “But I cannot marry Paul. He has got to marry me.”

“What nonsense that is! People say to a girl: 'You can't be too cold before you are married or too kind after!' That does not mean you and Paul. If you are not kind to him *now*, you will make a great mistake.”

“He is not thinking of marriage,” said Moya. “Something weighs on him all the time. I cannot ask him questions. If he wanted to tell me he would. That is why I come downstairs and leave him. But he won't come down! Is it not strange? If we could believe such things I would say a Presence came with, him out of that place. It is with him when I find him alone. It is in his eyes when he looks at me. It is not something past and done with, it is here—now—in this house! *What* is it? What do *you* believe?”

The eyes she sought to question hardened under her gaze. Here, too, was a veil. Mrs. Bogardus sat with her hands clasped in her lap. She was motionless, but the creaking of her silks could be heard as her bosom rose and fell. After a moment she said: “Paul's tray is on the table in the dining-room. Will you take it when you go up?”

Moya altered her own manner instantly. “But you?” she hesitated. “I must not crowd you out of all your mother privileges. You have handed over everything to me.”

“A mother's privilege is to see herself no longer needed. I can do nothing more for my son”—her smile was hard—“except take care of his money.”

“Paul's mother!”

“My dear, do you suppose we mind? It is a very great privilege to be allowed to step aside when your work is done.”

“Paul's *mother!*” Moya insisted.

Mrs. Bogardus rose. “You don't remember your own mother, my dear. You have an exaggerated idea of the —the importance of mothers. They are only a temporary arrangement.” She put out her hands and the girl's cheek touched hers for an instant; then she straightened herself and walked calmly out of the room. Moya remained a little longer, afraid to follow her. “If she would not smile! If she would do anything but smile!”

Paul was walking about his room, half an hour later, when Moya stopped outside his door. She placed the tray on a table in the hall. The door was opened from within. Paul had heard his mother go up before, heard her pause at the stairs, and, after a silence, enter her own room.

“She knows that I know,” he said to himself. “That knowledge will be always between us; we can never look each other in the face again.” To Moya he endeavored to speak lightly.

“It sounded very gay downstairs to-night. You must have had a houseful.”

“I have been with your mother the last hour,” answered Moya, vaguely on the defensive. Since Paul's return there had been little of the old free intercourse in words between them, and without this outlet their mutual consciousness became acute. Often as they saw each other during the day, the keenest emotion attached to the first meeting of their eyes.

Paul was unnerved by his sudden recall from death to life. Its contrasts were overwhelming to his starved senses: from the dirt and dearth and grimy despair of his burial hutch in the snow to this softly lighted, close-curtained room, warm and sweet with flowers; from the gaunt, unshaven spectre of the packer and his ghostly revelations, to Moya, meekly beautiful, her bright eyes lowered as she trailed her soft skirts across the carpet; Moya seated opposite, silent, conscious of him in every look and movement. Her lovely hands lay in her lap, and the thought of holding them in his made him tremble; and when he recalled the last time he had kissed her he grew faint. He longed to throw off this exhausting self-restraint, but feared to betray his helpless passion which he deemed an insult to his soul's worship of her.

And she was thinking: “Is this all it is going to mean—his coming home—our being together? And I was almost his wife!”

"So it was my mother you were talking to in the study? I thought I heard a man's voice."

"It was the doctor. Your mother was not quite herself this evening. He came in to see her, but he does not think she is ill. 'Rest and change,' he says she needs."

Paul gave the words a certain depth of consideration. "Are you as well as usual, Moya?"

"Oh, I am always well," she answered cheerlessly. "I seem to thrive on anything—everything," she corrected herself, and blushed.

The blush made him gasp. "You are more beautiful than ever. I had forgotten that beauty is a physical fact. The sight of you confuses me."

"I always told you you were morbid." Moya's happy audacity returned. "Now, how long are you going to sit and think about that?"

"Do I sit and think about things?" His reluctant, boyish smile, which all women loved, captured his features for a moment. "It is very rude of me."

"Suppose I should ask you what you are thinking about?"

"Ah! I am afraid you would say 'morbid' again."

"Try me! You ought to let me know at once if you are going to break out in any new form of morbidness."

"I wish it might amuse you, but it wouldn't. Let me put you a case—seriously."

Moya smiled. "Once we were serious—ages ago. Do you remember?"

"Do I remember!"

"Well? You are you, and I am I, still."

"Yes; and as full of fateful surprises for each other."

"I bar 'fateful'! That word has the true taint of morbidness."

"But you can't 'bar' fate. Listen: this is a supposing, you know. Suppose that an accident had happened to our leader on the way home—to your Lieutenant Winslow, we'll say"—

"*My* lieutenant!"

"Your father's—the regiment's—Lieutenant Winslow 'of ours.' Suppose we had brought him back in a state to need a surgeon's help; and without a word to any one he should get up and walk out of the hospital with his hurts not healed, and no one knew why, or where he had gone? There would be a stir about it, would there not? And if such a poor spectre of a bridegroom as I were allowed to join the search, no one would think it strange, or call it a slight to his bride if the fellow went?"

"I take your case," said Moya with a beaming look. "You want to go after that poor man who suffered with you."

"Who went with us to save us from our own headstrong folly, and would have died there alone"—

"Yes; oh, yes!—before you begin to think about yourself, or me. Because he is nobody 'of ours,' and no one seems to feel responsible, and we go on talking and laughing just the same!"

"Do they talk of this downstairs?"

"To-night they were talking—oh, with such philosophy! But how came you to know it?"

Paul did not answer this question. "Then"—he drew a long breath,—"then you could bear it, dear?—the comment, even if they called it a slight to you and a piece of quixotic lunacy? Others will not take my case, remember."

"What others?"

"They will say: 'Why doesn't he send a better man? He is no trailer.' It is true. Money might find him and bring him back, but all the money in the world could not teach him to trust his friends. There is a misunderstanding here which is too bitter to be borne. It is hard to explain,—the intimacy that grows up between men placed as we were. But as soon as help reached us, the old lines were drawn. I belonged with the officers, he with the men. We could starve together, but we could not eat together. He accepted it—put himself on that basis at once. He would not come up here as the guest of the Post. He is done with us because he thinks we are done with him. And he knows that I must know his occupation is gone. He will never guide nor pack a mule again."

"Your mother and my father, they will understand. What do the others matter?"

"I must tell you, dear, that I do not propose to tell them—especially them—why I go. For I am going. I must go! There are reasons I cannot explain." He sighed, and looked wildly at Moya, whose smile was becoming mechanical. "I hate the excuse, but it will have to be said that I go for a change—for my health. My health! Great God! But it's 'orders,' dear."

"Your orders are my orders. You are never going anywhere again without me," said Moya slowly. Her smile was gone. She stood up and faced him, pale and beautiful. He rose, too, and stooped above her, taking her hands and gazing into her full blue eyes arched like the eyes of angels.

"I thought she was a girl! But she is a woman," he said in a voice of caressing wonder. "A woman, and not afraid!"

"I am afraid. I will not be left—I will not be left again! Oh, you won't take me, even when I offer myself to you!"

"Don't—don't tempt me!" Paul caught her to him with a groan. "You don't know me well enough to be afraid of *me!*"

"You! You will not let me know you."

"Oh, hush, dear—hush, my darling! This isn't thinking. We must think for our lives. I must take care of you, precious. We don't know where this search may take us, or where it will end, or what the end will be." He kissed the sleeve of her dress, and put her gently from him, so that he could look her in the eyes. She gave him her full pure gaze.

“It is the poor man again. You said he would spoil our lives.”

“He is *our* poor man. You didn't go out of your way to find him. And your way is mine.”

“It is so heavenly to be convinced! Who taught you to see things at a glance,—things I have toiled and bungled over and don't know now if I am right! *Who* taught you?”

“Do you think I stood still while you were away! Oh, my heart was sifted out by little pieces.”

“You shall sift mine. You shall tell me what to do. For I know nothing! Not even if I may dare to take this angel at her word!”

“I knew you would not take me!” the girl whispered wildly. “But I shall go.”

XVI. — THE NATURE OF AN OATH

“Your tray! It is after ten o'clock. Your 'angel' is a bad nurse.” Moya brought the tray and set it on a little stand beside Paul's chair. He watched her shy, excited preparations as she moved about, conscious of his eyes. The saucepan staggered upon the coals and they both sprang to save the broth, and pouring it she burnt her thumb a little, and he behaved quite like any ordinary young man. They were ecstatic to find themselves at ease with each other once more. Moya became disrespectful to her charge; such sweet daring looked from her eyes into his as made him riotous with joy.

“Won't you take some with me?” He turned the cup towards her and watched her as she sipped.

“'It was roast with fire,'” he pronounced softly and dreamily, 'because of the dreadful pains. It was to be eaten with bitter herbs'”—

“What *are* you saying?”—

“'To remind them of their bondage.'”

“I object to your talking about bondage and bitter herbs when you are eating aunt Annie's delicious consommé.”

He gravely sipped in turn, still with his eyes in hers. “Can you remember what you were doing on the second of November?”

“Can I remember!”

“Yes; tell me. I have a reason for asking.”

“Tell *me* the reason first.”

“May we have a little more fire, darling? It gives me chills to think of that day. It was the last of my wretched pot-hunting. There was nothing to hunt for—the game had all gone down, but I did not know that. Somewhere in the woods, a long way from the cabin, it began to occur to me that I should not make shelter that night. A fool and his strength are soon parted. It was a little hollow with trees all around so deep that in the distance their trunks closed in like a wall. Snow can make a wonderful silence in the woods. I seemed to hear the thoughts of everybody I loved in the world outside. There had been a dullness over me for weeks. I could not make it true that I had ever been happy—that you really loved me. All that part of my life was a dream. Now, in that silence suddenly I felt you! I knew that you cared. It was cruel to die so if you did love me! It brought the 'pang and spur'! I fought the drowsiness that was taking away my pain. I had begun to lean on it as a comfortable breast. I woke up and tore myself away from that siren sleep. It was my darling,—her love that saved me. Without that thought of you, I never would have stirred again. Where were you, what were you thinking that brought you so close to me?”

“Ah,” said Moya in a whisper. “I was in that room across the hall, alone. They were good to me that day; they made excuses and left me to myself. In the afternoon a box came,—from poor father,—white roses, oh, sweet and cold as snow! I took them up to that room and forced myself to go in. It was where my things were kept, the trunks half packed, all the drawers and closets full. And my wedding dress laid out on the bed. We girls used to go up there at first and look at the things, and there was laughing and joking. Sometimes I went up alone and tried on my hats before the glass, and thought where I should be when I wore them, and—Well! all that stopped. I dreaded to pass the door. Everything was left just as it was; the shutters open, the poor dress covered with a sheet on the bed. The room was a death-chamber. I went in. I carried the roses to my dead. I drew down the sheet and put my face in that empty dress. It was my selfish self laid out there—the girl who knew just what she wanted and was going to get it if she could. Happiness I dared not even pray for—only remembrance—everlasting remembrance. That we might know each other again when no more life was left to part us—*my* life. It seemed long to wait, but that was my—marriage vow. I gave you all I could, remembrance, faith till death.”

“Then you are my own!” said Paul, his face transformed. “God was our witness. Life of my life—for life and death!” Solemnly he took a bridegroom's kiss from her lips.

“How do *you* know that it is life that parts?”

“Speak so I can understand you!” Moya cried. “Ah, if I might! A man must not have secrets from his wife. Secrets are destruction, don't you think?”

Moya waited in silence.

“Now we come to this bondage!” He let the words fall like a load from his breast. “This is a hideous thing to tell you, but it will cut us apart unless you know it. It compels me to do things.” He paused, and they heard a door down the passage open,—the door of his mother's room. A step came forward a few paces. Silence; it

retreated, and the door closed again stealthily.

“She has not slept,” Paul murmured. “Poor soul, poor soul! Now, in what I am going to say, please listen to the facts, Moya dear. Try not to infer anything from my way of putting things. I shall contradict myself, but the facts do that.

“The—the guide—John, we will call him, had a long fever in the woods. It would come on worse at night, and then—he talked—words, of a shocking intimacy. They say that nothing the mind has come in contact with under strong emotion is ever lost, no matter how long in the past. It will return under similar excitement. This man had kept stored away in his mind, under some such pressure, the words of a woman's message, a woman in great distress. Over and over, as his pulse rose, countless times he would repeat that message. I went out of the hut at night and stood outside in the snow not to hear it, but I knew it as well as he did before we got through. Now, this was what he said, word for word.

“'Do not blame me, my dear husband. I have held out in this place as long as I can. Don't wait for anything. Don't worry about anything. Come back to me with your bare hands. Come!—to your loving Emmy!'

“'Come, come!' he would shout out loud. Then in another voice he would whisper, 'Come back to me with your bare hands!' And he would stare at his hands and his face would grow awful.”

Moya drew a long sigh of scared attention.

“Those words were all over the cabin walls. I heard them and saw them everywhere. There was no rest from them. I could have torn the roof down to stop his talking, but the words it was not possible to forget. And where was the horror of it? Was not this what we had asked, for years, to know?”

“You need not explain to me,” said Moya, shuddering.

“Yes; but all one's meanest motives were unearthed in a place like that. Would I have felt so with a different man? Some one less uncouth? Was it the man himself, or his”—

“Paul, if anything could make you a snob, it would be your deadly fear of being one!”

“Well, if they had found us then, God knows how that fight would have ended. But I won it—when there was nothing left to fight for. I owned him—in the grave. We owned each other and took a bashful sort of comfort in it, after we had shuffled off the 'Mister' and 'John.' I grew quite fond of him, when we were so near death that his English didn't matter, or his way of eating. I thought him a very remarkable man, you remember, when he was just material for description. He was, he is remarkable. Most remarkable in this, he was not ashamed of his son.”

“Do please let that part alone. I want to know what he was doing, hiding away by himself all these years? I believe he is an impostor!”

“We came to that, of course; though somehow I forgave him before he could answer the question. In the long watch beside him I got very close to him. It was not possible to believe him a deserter, a sneak. Can you take my word for his answer? It was given as a death-bed confession and he is living.”

“I would take your word for anything except yourself!” Moya did not smile, or think what she was saying.

“That answer cleared him, in my mind, with something over to the credit of blind, stupid heroism. He is not a clever man. But, speaking as one who has teen face to face with the end of things, I can say that I know of no act of his that should prevent his returning to his family—if he had a family—not even his deserting them for twenty years. *If*, I say!

“When the soldiers found us we were too far gone to realize the issue that was upon us. He was the first to take it in. It was on the march home, at night, he touched me and began speaking low in our corner of the tent. 'As we came in here, so we go out again, and so we stay,' he said. I told him it could not be. To suppress what I had learned would make the whole of life a lie, a coward's lie. That knowledge belonged to my mother. I must render it up to her. To do otherwise would be to treat her like a child and to meddle with the purposes of God. 'No honest man robs another of his secrets,' he said. He was very much excited. She was the only one now to be considered—and what did I know about God's purposes? He refused to take my scruples into consideration, except such as concerned her. But, after a long argument, very painful, weak as we were and whispering in the dark, he yielded this much. If I were bent on digging up the dead, as he called it, it must be done in such a way as to leave her free. Free she was in law, and she must be given a chance to claim her freedom without talk or publicity. Absolute secrecy he demanded of me in the mean time. I begged him to see how unfair it was to her to bring her face to face with such a discovery without one word of preparation, of excuse for him. She would condemn him on the very fact of his being alive. So she would, he said, if she were going to judge him; not if she felt towards him as—as a wife feels to her husband. It was that he wanted to know. It was that or nothing he would have from her. 'Bring me face to face with her alone, and as sudden as you like. If she knows me, I am the man. And if she wants me back, she will know me—and that way I'll come and no other way.' Was not that wonderful? A gentleman could hardly have improved on that. Whatever feeling he might be supposed to have towards her in the matter we could never touch upon. But I think he had his hopes. That decision was hanging over us—and I trembled for her. Day before yesterday, was it, I persuaded her to see the sick guide. She wondered why I was faint as she kissed me good-by. I ought to have prepared her. It was a horrible snare. And yet he meant it all in delicacy, a passionate consideration for her. Poor fool. How could I prepare *him!* How could he keep pace with the changes in her! After all, it is externals that make us,—habits, clothes. Great God! Things you could not speak of to a naked soul like him. But he would have it 'straight,' he said—and straight he got it. And he is gone; broke away like an animal out of a trap. And I am going to find him, to see at least that he has a roof over his head. God knows, he may not die for years!”

“She has got years before her too.”

“She!—What am I saying! We have plunged into those damnable inferences and I haven't given you the facts. Wait. I shall contradict all this in a moment. I thought, she must have done this for her children. She must be given another chance. And I approached the thing on my very knees—not to let her know that I knew, only to hint that I was not unprepared, had guessed—could meet it, and help her to meet the problems it would bring into our lives. Help her! She stood and faced me as if I had insulted her. 'I have been your

father's widow for twenty-two years. If that fact is not sacred to you, it is to me. Never dare to speak of this to me again!'"

"Ah," said Moya in a long-drawn sigh, "then she did not"—

"Oh, she did, explicitly! For I went on to speak of it. It was my last chance. I asked her how she—we—could possibly go through with it; how with this knowledge between us we could look each other in the face—and go on living.

"'Put this hallucination out of your mind,' she said. 'That man and I are strangers.'"

"Was that—would you call that a lie?" asked Moya fearfully.

"You can see your answer in her face. I do not say that hers was the first lie. It must always be foolish, I think, to evade the facts of life as we make them for ourselves. He refused to meet his facts, from the noblest motives;—but now I'm tangling you all up again! Rest your head here, darling. This is such a business! It is a pity I cannot tell you his whole story. Half the meaning of all this is lost. But—here is a solemn declaration in writing, signed John Hagar, in which this man we are speaking of says that Adam Bogardus was his partner, who died in the woods and was buried by his hand; that he knew his story, all the scenes and circumstances of his life in many a long talk they had together, as well as he knew his own. In his delirium he must have confused himself with his old partner, and half in dreams, he said, half in the crazy satisfaction of pretending to himself he had a son, he allowed the delusion to go on; saw it work upon me, and half feared it, half encouraged it. Afterwards he was frightened at the thought of meeting my mother, who would know him for an impostor. His seeming scruples were fear of exposure, not consideration for her. This was why he guarded their interview so carefully. 'No harm's been done,' he says, 'if you'll act now like a sensible man. I'll be disappointed in you if you make your mother any trouble about this. You've treated me as square as any man could treat another. Remember, I say so, and think as kindly as you can of a harmless, loony old impostor'—and he signs himself 'John Hagar,'—which shows again how one lie leads to another. We go to find 'John Hagar.'"

"Have you shown your mother this letter? You have not? Paul, you will not rob her of her just defense!"

"I will not heap coals of fire on her head! This letter simply completes his renunciation, and he meant it for her defense. But when a man signs himself 'John Hagar' in the handwriting of my father, it shows that somebody is not telling the truth. I used to pore over the old farm records in my father's hand at Stone Ridge in the old account books stowed away in places where a boy loves to poke and pry. I know it as well as I know yours. Do you suppose she would not know it? When a man writes as few letters as he does, the handwriting does not change." Paul laid the letter upon the coals. "It is the only witness against her, but it loses the case."

"She never could have loved him. I never believed she did!" said Moya.

"She thinks she can live out this deep-down, deliberate—But it will kill her, Moya. Her life is ended from this on. How could I have driven her to that excruciating choice! I ought to have listened to him altogether or not at all. There is a hell for meddlers, and the ones who meddle for conscience' sake are the deepest damned, I think."

Moya came and wreathed her arm in his, and they paced the room in silence. At length she said, "If we go to find John Hagar, shall we not be meddling again? A man who respects a woman's freedom must love his own. It is the last thing left him. Don't hunt him down. I believe nothing could hurt him now like seeing you again."

"He shall not see me unless he wants to, but he shall know where I stand on this question of the Impostor. It shall be managed so that even he can see I am protecting her. No, call himself what he will, the tie between him and me is another of those facts."

"But do you love him, Paul?"

"Oh—I cannot forget him! He is—just as he used to be—'poor father out there in the cold.' We must find him and comfort him somehow."

"For our own peace of mind? Forgive me for arguing when everything is so difficult. But he is a man—a brave man who would rather be forever out in the cold than be a burden. Do not rob him of his right to *be* John Hagar if he wants to, for the sake of those he loves. You do not tell me it was love, but I am sure it was, in some mistaken way, that drove him into exile. Only love as pure as his can be our excuse for dragging him back. He did not want shelter and comfort from her. Only one thing. Have we got that to give him?"

"Well then, I go for my own sake—it is a physical necessity; and I go for hers. She has put it out of her own power to help him. It will ease her a little to know I am trying to reach him in his forlorn disguise."

"But you were not going to tell her?"

"In words, no. But she will understand. There is a strange clairvoyance between us, as if we were accomplices in a crime!"

Moya reflected silently. This search which Paul had set his heart upon would equally work his own cure, she saw. Nor could she now imagine for themselves any lover's paradise inseparable from this moral tragedy, which she saw would be fibre of their fibre, life of their life. A family is an organism; one part may think to deny or defy another, but with strange pains the subtle union exerts itself; distance cannot break the thread.

They kissed each other solemnly like little children on the eve of a long journey full of awed expectancy.

Mrs. Bogardus stood holding her door ajar as Moya passed on her way downstairs. "You are very late," she uttered hoarsely. "Is nothing settled yet?"

"Everything!" Moya hesitated and forced a smile, "everything but where we shall go. We will start—and decide afterwards."

"You go together? That is right. Moya, you have a genius for happiness!"

"I wish I had a genius for making people sleep who lie awake hours in the night thinking about other people!"

"If you mean me, people of my age need very little sleep."

“May I kiss you good-night, Paul's mother?”

“You may kiss me because I am Paul's mother, not because I do not sleep.”

Moya's lips touched a cheek as white and almost as cold as the frosted window-panes through which the moon was glimmering. She thought of the icy roses on her wedding dress.

Downstairs her father was smoking his bedtime cigar. Mrs. Creve, very sleepy and cosy and flushed, leaned over the smouldering bed of coals. She held out her plump, soft hand to Moya.

“Come here and be scolded! We have been scolding you steadily for the last hour.”

“If you want that young man to get his strength back, you'd better not keep him up talking half the night,” the colonel growled softly. “Do you see what time it is?”

Moya knelt and leaned her head against her father. She reached one hand to Mrs. Creve. They did not speak again till her weak moment had passed. “It will be very soon,” she said, pressing the warm hand that stroked her own. “You will help me pack, aunt Annie; and then you'll stay—with father? I know you are glad to have me out of the way at last!”

XVII. — THE HIDDEN TRAIL

Because they had set forth on a grim and sorrowful quest, it need not be supposed that Paul and Moya were a pair of sorrowful pilgrims. It was their wedding journey. At the outset Moya had said: “We are doing the best we know. For what we don't know, let us leave it and not brood.”

They did not enter at once upon the more eccentric stages of the search. They went by way of the Great Northern to Portland, descending from snow to roses and drenching rains. At Pendleton, which is at the junction of three great roads, Paul sent tracers out through express agents and train officials along the remotest slender feeders of these lines. Through the same agents it was made known that for any service rendered or expense incurred on behalf of the person described, his friends would hold themselves gratefully responsible.

At Portland, Paul searched the steamer lists and left confidential orders in the different transportation offices; and Moya wrote to his mother—a woman's letter, every page shining with happiness and as free from apparent forethought as a running brook.

They returned by the Great Northern and Lake Coeur d'Alene, stopping over at Fort Sherman to visit Mrs. Creve, who was giddy with joy over the wholesome change in Paul. She, too, wrote a woman's letter concerning that visit, to the colonel, which cleared a crowd of shadows from his lonely hearth.

Thence again to Pendleton came the seekers, and Paul gathered in his lines, but found nothing; so cast them forth again. But through all these distant elaborations of the search, in his own mind he saw the old man creeping away by some near, familiar trail and lying hid in some warm valley in the hills, his prison and his home.

It was now the last week in March. The travelers' bags were in the office, the carriage at the door, when a letter—pigeon-holed and forgotten since received some three weeks before—was put into Paul's hand.

I run up against your ad. in the Silver City Times [the communication began]. If you haven't found your man yet, maybe I can put you onto the right lead. I'm driving a jerky on the road from Mountain Home to Oriana, but me and the old man we don't jibe any too well. I've got a sort of disgust on me. Think I'll quit soon and go to mining. Jimmy Breen he runs the Ferry, he can tell you all I know. Fifty miles from Mountain Home good road can make it in one day. Yours Respecfully,

J. STRATTON.

It was in following up this belated clue that the pilgrims had come to the Ferry inn, crossing by team from valley to valley, cutting off a great bend of the Oregon Short Line as it traverses the Snake River desert; those bare high plains escarped with basalt bluffs that open every fifty miles or so to let a road crawl down to some little rope-ferry supported by sheep-herders, ditch contractors, miners, emigrants, ranchmen, all the wild industries of a country in the dawn of enterprise.

Business at the Ferry had shrunk since the railroad went through. The house-staff consisted of Jimmy Breen, a Chinese cook of the bony, tartar breed, sundry dogs, and a large bachelor cat that mooned about the empty piazzas. In a young farming country, hungry for capital, Jimmy could not do a cash business, but everything was grist that came to his mill; and he was quick to distinguish the perennial dead beat from a genuine case of hard luck.

“That's a good axe ye have there,” pointing suggestively to a new one sticking out of the rear baggage of an emigrant outfit. “Ye better l'ave that with me for the dollar that's owing me. If ye have money to buy new axes ye can't be broke entirely.” Or: “Slip the halter on that calf behind there. The mother hasn't enough to keep it alive. There's har'ly a dollar's wort' of hide on its bones, but I'll take it to save it droppin' on the road.” Or, he would try sarcasm: “Well, we'll be shuttin' her down in the spring. Then ye can go round be Walter's Ferry and see if they'll trust ye there.” Or: “Why wasn't ye workin' on the Ditch last winter? Settin' smokin' your poipe in the tules, the wife and young ones packin' sagebrush to kape ye warm!”

On the morning after their distinguished arrival, Jimmy's guests came down late to a devastated breakfast-table. Little heaps of crumbs here and there showed where earlier appetites had had their destined hour and

gone their way. At an impartial distance from the top and the foot of the table stood the familiar group of sauce and pickle bottles, every brand dear to the cowboy, including the “surrup-jug” adhering to its saucer. There was a fresh-gathered bunch of wild phlox by Moya's plate in a tumbler printed round the edge with impressions of a large moist male thumb.

“Catchee plenty,” the Chinaman grinned, pointing to the plain outside where the pale sage-brush quivered stiffly in the wind. “Bymbye plenty come. Pretty col' now.”

“You'll be getting a large hump on yourself, Han, me boy. 'T is a cash crowd we have here—and a lady, by me sowl!” Thus Jimmy exhorted his household. Times were looking up. They would be a summer resort before the Ditch went through; it should be mentioned in the Ditch company's prospectus. Jimmy had put his savings into land-office fees and had a hopeful interest in the Ditch.

A spur in the head is worth two in the heel. Without a word from “the boss” Han had found time to shave and powder and polish his brown forehead and put on his whitest raiment over his baggiest trousers. There was loud panic among the fowls in the corral. The cat had disappeared; the jealous dogs hung about the doors and were pushed out of the way by friends of other days.

Seated by the office fire, Paul was conferring with Jimmy, who was happy with a fresh pipe and a long story to tell to a patient and paying listener. He rubbed the red curls back from his shining forehead, took the pipe from his teeth, and guided a puff of smoke away from his auditor.

“I seen him settin' over there on his blankets,”—he pointed with his pipe to the opposite shore plainly visible through the office windows,—“but he niver hailed me, so I knowed he was broke. Some, whin they're broke, they holler all the louder. Ye would think they had an appointment wit' the Governor and he sint his car'iage to meet them. But he was as humble, he was, as a yaller dog.—Out! Git out from here—the pack of yez! Han, shut the dure an' drive thim bloody curs off the piazzy. They're trackin' up the whole place.—As I was sayin', sor, there he stayed hunched up in the wind, waitin' on the chanst of a team comin', and I seen he was an ould daddy. I stud the sight of him as long as I cud, me comin' and goin'. He fair wore me out. So I tuk the boat over for 'im. One of his arrums he couldn't lift from the shoulder, and I give him a h'ist wit' his bundle. Faith, it was light! 'Twinty years a-getherin',' he cackles, slappin' it. 'Ye've had harrud luck,' I says. ''T is not much of a sheaf ye are packin' home.' 'That's as ye look at it,' he says.

“I axed him what way was he goin'. He was thinking to get a lift as far as Oriana, if the stages was runnin' on that road. 'Then ye 'll have to bide here till morning,' I says, 'for ye must have met the stage goin' the other way.' 'I met nothing,' says he; 'I come be way of the bluffs,'—which is a strange way for one man travelin' afoot.

“The grub was on the table, and I says, 'Sit by and fill yourself up.' His cheeks was fallin' in wit' the hunger. With that his poor ould eye begun to water. 'Twas one weak eye he had that was weepin' all the time. 'I've got out of the habit of reg'lar aitin',' he says. 'It don't take much to kape me goin'.' 'Niver desave yourself, sor! 'T is betther feed three hungry men than wan “no occasion.”' His appetite it grew on him wit' every mouthful. There was a boundless emptiness to him. He lay there on the bench and slep' the rest of the evening, and I left him there wit' a big fire at night. And the next day at noon we h'isted him up beside of Joe Stratton. A rip-snorter of a wind was blowin' off the Silver City peaks. His face was drawed like a winter apple, but he wint off happy. I think he was warm inside of himself.”

“Did you ask him his name?”

“Sure. Why not? John Treagar he called himself.”

“Treagar? Hagar, you mean!”

“It was Treagar he said.”

“John Hagar is the man I am looking for.”

“Treagar—Hagar? 'T is comin' pretty close to it.”

“About what height and build was he?”

“He was not to say a tall man; and he wasn't so turrible short neither. His back was as round as a Bible. A kind of pepper and saltish beard he had, and his hair was blacker than his beard but white in streaks.”

“A *dark* man, was he?”

“He would be a *dark* man if he was younger.”

“The man I want is blue-eyed.”

“His eyes was blue—a kind of washed-out gray that maybe was blue wanst; and one of them always weepin' wit' the cold.”

“And light brown hair mixed with gray, like sand and ashes—mostly ashes; and a thin straggling beard, thinner on the cheeks? A high head and a tall stooping figure—six feet at least; hands with large joints and a habit of picking at them when”—

“Ye are goin' too fast for me now, sor. He was not that description of a man, nayther the height nor the hair of him. Sure't is a pity for ye comin' this far, and him not the man at all. Faith, I wish I was the man meself! I wonder at Joe Stratton anyhow! He's a very hasty man, is Joe. He jumps in wit' both feet, so he does. I could have told ye that.”

Moya, always helplessly natural, and now very tired as well, when Paul described with his usual gravity this anti-climax, fell below all the dignities at once in a burst of childish giggling. Paul looked on with an embarrassed smile, like a puzzled affectionate dog at the incomprehensible mirth of humans. Paul was certainly deficient in humor and therefore in breadth. But what woman ever loved her lover the less for having discovered his limitations? Humor runs in families of the intenser cultivation. The son of the soil

remains serious in the face of life's and nature's ironies.

XVIII. — THE STAR IN THE EAST

So the search paused, while the searchers rested and revised their plans. Spring opened in the valley as if for them alone. There were mornings “proud and sweet,” when the humblest imagination could have pictured Aurora and her train in the jocund clouds that trooped along the sky,—wind-built processions which the wind dispersed. Wild flowers spread so fast they might have been spilled from the rainbow scarf of Iris fleeting overhead. The river was in flood, digging its elbows into its muddy banks. The willow and wild-rose thickets stooped and washed their spring garments in its tide.

Primeval life and love were all around them. Meadow larks flung their brief jets of song into the sunlight; the copses rustled with wings; wood-doves cooed from the warm sunny hollows, and the soft booming of their throaty call was like a beating in the air,—the pulse of spring. They had found their Garden. Humanity in the valley passed before them in forms as interesting and as alien as the brother beasts to Adam: the handsome driver of the jerky, Joe Stratton's successor, who sat at dinner opposite and combed his flowing mustache with his fork in a lazy, dandified way; the darkened faces of sheep-herders enameled by sun and wind, their hair like the winter coats of animals; the slow-eyed farmers with the appetites of horses; the spring recruits for the ranks of labor footing it to distant ranches, each with his back-load of bedding, and the dust of three counties on his garments.

The sweet forces of Nature shut out, for a season, Paul's *cri du coeur*. One may keep a chamber sacred to one's sadder obligations and yet the house be filled with joy. Further ramifications of the search were mapped out with Jimmy's indifferent assistance. For good reasons of his own, Jimmy did little to encourage an early start. He would explain that his maps were of ancient date and full of misinformation as to stage routes. “See that now! The stages was pulled off that line five year ago, on account of the railroad cuttin' in on them. Ye couldn't make it wid'out ye took a camp outfit. There's ne'er a station left, and when ye come to it, it's ruins ye'll find. A chimbly and a few rails, if the mule-skinners hasn't burned them. 'Tis a country very devoid of fuel; sagebrush and grease-wood, and a wind, bedad! that blows the grass-seeds into the next county.”

When these camping-trips were proposed to Moya, she hesitated and responded languidly; but when Paul suggested leaving her even for a day, her fears fluttered across his path and wiled him another way. Vaguely he felt that she was unlike herself—less buoyant, though often restless; and sometimes he fancied she was pale underneath her sun-burned color like that of rose-hips in October. Various causes kept him inert, while strength mounted in his veins, and life seemed made for the pure joy of living.

The moon of May in that valley is the moon of roses, for the heats once due come on apace. The young people gave up their all-day horseback rides and took morning walks instead, following the shore-paths lazily to shaded coverts dedicated to those happy silences which it takes two to make. Or, they climbed the bluffs and gazed at the impenetrable vast horizon, and thought perhaps of their errand with that pang of self-reproach which, when shared, becomes a subtler form of self-indulgence.

But at night, all the teeming life of the plain rushed up into the sky and blazed there in a million friendly stars. After the languor of the sleepy afternoons, it was like a fresh awakening—the dawn of those white May nights. The wide plain stirred softly through all its miles of sage. The river's cadenced roar paused beyond the bend and outbroke again. All that was eerie and furtive in the wild dark found a curdling voice in the coyote's hunting-call.

In a hollow concealed by sage, not ten minutes' walk from the Ferry inn, unknown to the map-maker and innocent of all use, lay a perfect floor for evening pacing with one's eyes upon the stars. It was the death mask of an ancient lake, done in purest alkali silt, and needing only the shadows cast by a low moon to make the illusion almost unbelievable. Slow precipitation, season after season, as the water dried, had left the lake bed smooth as a cast in plaster. Subsequent warpings had lifted the alkali crust into thin-lipped wavelets. But once upon the floor itself the resemblance to water vanished. The warpings and Grumblings took the shape of earth as made by water and baked by fire. Moya compared it to a bit of the dead moon fallen to show us what we are coming to. They paced it soft-footed in tennis shoes lest they should crumble its talc-like whiteness. But they read no horoscopes, for they were shy of the future in speaking to each other,—and they made no plans.

One evening Moya had said to Paul: “I can understand your mother so much better now that I am a wife. I think most women have a tendency towards the state of being *un*married. And if one had—children, it would increase upon one very fast. A widow and a mother—for twenty years. How could she be a wife again?”

Paul made no reply to this speech which long continued to haunt him; especially as Moya wrote more frequently to his mother and did not offer to show him her letters. In their evening walks she seemed distrait, and during the day more restless.

One night of their nightly pacings she stopped and stood long, her head thrown back, her eyes fixed upon the dizzy star-deeps. Paul waited a step behind her, touching her shoulders with his hands. Suddenly she reeled and sank backwards into his arms. He held her, watching her lovely face grow whiter; her eyelids closed. She breathed slowly, leaning her whole weight upon him.

Coming to herself, she smiled and said it was nothing. She had been that way before. “But—we must go home. We must have a home—somewhere. I want to see your mother. Paul, be good to her—forgive her—for my sake!”

XIX. — PILGRIMS AND STRANGERS

Aunt Polly Lewis was disappointed in the latest of her beneficiaries. It was nine years since her husband had locked up his savings in the Mud Springs ranch, a neglected little health-plant at the mouth of the Bruneau. If you were troubled with rheumatism, or a crick in the back, or your “pancrees” didn't act or your blood was “out o' fix, why, you'd better go up to Looanders' for a spell and soak yourself in that blue mud and let aunt Polly diet ye and dost ye with yerb tea.”

When Leander courted aunt Polly in the interests of his sanitarium, she was reputed the best nurse in Ada County. The widow—by desertion—of a notorious quack doctor of those parts: it was an open question whether his medicine had killed or her nursing had cured the greater number of confiding sick folk. Leander drove fifty miles to catechise this notable woman, and finding her sound on the theory of packs hot and cold, and skilled in the practice of rubbing,—and having made the incidental discovery that she was a person not without magnetism,—he decided on the spot to add her to the other attractions of Mud Springs ranch; and she drove home with him next day, her trunk in the back of his wagon.

The place was no sinecure. Bricks without straw were a child's pastime to the cures aunt Polly and the Springs effected without a pretense to the comforts of life in health, to say nothing of sickness. Modern conveniences are costly, and how are you to get the facilities for “pay patients” when you have no patients that pay! Prosperity had overlooked the Bruneau, or had made false starts there, through detrimental schemes that gave the valley a bad name with investors. The railroad was still fifty miles away, and the invalid public would not seek life itself, in these days of luxurious travel, at the cost of a twelve hours' stage-ride. However, as long as the couple had a roof over their heads and the Springs continued to plop and vomit their strange, chameleon-colored slime, Leander would continue to bring home the sick and the suffering for Polly and the Springs to practice on. Health became his hobby, and in time, with isolation thrown in, it began to invade his common sense. He tried in succession all the diet fads of the day and wound up a convert to the “Ralston” school of eating. Aunt Polly had clung a little longer to the flesh-pots, but the charms of a system that abolished half the labor of cooking prevailed with her at last, and in the end she kept a sharper eye upon Leander at mealtime than ever he had upon her.

The ignorant gorgings of their neighbors were a head-shaking and a warning to them, and more than once Leander's person was in jeopardy through his zealous but unappreciated concern for the brother who eats in darkness.

He had started out one winter morning from Bisuka, a virtuous man. His team had breakfasted, but not he. A Ralstonite does not load up his stomach at dawn after the manner of cattle, and such pious substitutes for a cup of coffee as are permitted the faithful cannot always be had for a price. At Indian Creek he hauled up to water his team, and to make for himself a cinnamon-colored decoction by boiling in hot water a preparation of parched grains which he carried with him. This he accomplished in an angle of the old corral fence out of the wind. There is no comfort nor even virtue in eating cold dust with one's sandwiches. Leander sunk his great white tushes through the thick slices of whole-wheat bread and tasted the paste of peanut meal with which they were spread. He ate standing and slapped his leg to warm his driving hand.

A flutter of something colored, as a garment, caught his eye, directing it to the shape of a man, rolled in an old blue blanket, lying motionless in a corner of the tumble-down wall. “Drunk, drunk as a hog!” pronounced Leander. For no man in command of himself would lie down to sleep in such a place. As if to refute this accusation, the wind turned a corner of the blanket quietly off a white face with closed eyelids,—an old, worn, gentle face, appealing in its homeliness, though stamped now with the dignity of death. Leander knelt and handled the body tenderly. It was long before he satisfied himself that life was still there. Another case for Polly and the Springs. A man worth saving, if Leander knew a man; one of the trustful, trustworthy sort. His heart went out to him on the instant as to a friend from home.

It was closing in for dusk when he reached the Ferry. Jimmy was away, and Han, in high dudgeon, brought the boat over in answer to Leander's hail. He had grouse to dress for supper, inconsiderately flung in upon him at the last moment by the stage, four hours late.

“Huh! Why you no come one hour ago? All time 'Hullo, hullo'! Je' Cli'! me no dam felly-man—me dam cook! Too much man say 'Hullo'!”

The prospect was not good for help at the Ferry inn, so, putting his trust in Polly and the Springs, Leander pushed on up the valley.

When Aunt Polly's patients were of the right sort, they stayed on after their recovery and helped Leander with the ranch work. But for the most part they “hit the trail” again as soon as their ills were healed, not forgetting to advertise the Springs to other patients of their own class. The only limit to this unenviable popularity was the size of the house. Leander saw no present advantage in building.

But in case they ever did build—and the time was surely coming!—here was the very person they had been looking for. Cast your bread upon the waters. The winter's bread and care and shelter so ungrudgingly bestowed had returned to them many-fold in the comfortable sense of dependence and unity they felt in this last beneficiary, the old man of Indian Creek whom they called “Uncle John.”

“The kindest old creetur' ever lived! Some forgitful, but everybody's liable to forgit. Only tell him one thing at once, and don't confuse him, and he'll git through an amazin' sight of chores in a day.”

“Just the very one we'll want to wait on the men patients,” Aunt Polly chimed in. “He can carry up meals

and keep the bathrooms clean, and wash out the towels, and he's the best hand with poultry. He takes such good care of the old hens they're re'lly ashamed not to lay!"

It was spring again; old hopes were putting forth new leaves. Leander had heard of a capitalist in the valley; a young one, too, more prone to enthusiasm if shown the right thing.

"I'm going down to Jimmy's to fetch them up here!" Leander announced.

"Are there two of them?"

"He has brought his wife out with him. They are a young couple. He's the only son of a rich widow in New York, and Jimmy says they've got money to burn. Jimmy don't take much stock in this 'ere 'wounded guide' story—thinks it's more or less of a blind. He's feeling around for a good investment—desert land or mining claims. Jimmy thinks he represents big interests back East."

Aunt Polly considered, and the corners of her mouth moistened as she thought of the dinner she would snatch from the jaws of the system on the day these young strangers should visit the ranch.

"By Gum!" Leander shouted. "I wonder if Uncle John wouldn't know something about the party they're advertising for. That'd be the way to find out if they're really on the scent. I'll take him down with me—that's what I'll *do*—and let him have a talk with the young man himself. It'll make a good opening. Are you listening, Polly?" She was not. "I wish you'd git him to fix himself up a little. Layout one o' my clean shirts for him, and I'll take him down with me day after to-morrow."

"I'll have a fresh churning to-morrow," Aunt Polly mused. "You can take a little pat of it with you. I won't put no salt in it, and I'll send along a glass or two of my wild strawberry jam. It takes an awful time to pick the berries, but I guess it'll be appreciated after the table Jimmy sets. I don't believe Jimmy'll be offended?"

"Bogardus is their name," continued Leander. "Mr. and Mrs. Bogardus, from New York. Jimmy's got it down in his hotel book and he's showing it to everybody. Jimmy's reel childish about it. I tell him one swallow don't make a summer."

Uncle John had come into the room and sat listening, while a yellow pallor crept over his forehead and cheeks. He moved to get up once, and then sat down again weakly.

"What's the matter, Uncle?" Aunt Polly eyed him sharply. "You been out there chopping wood too long in this hot sun. What did I tell you?"

She cleared the decks for action. Paler and paler the old man grew. He was not able to withstand her vigorous sympathies. She had him tucked up on the calico lounge and his shoes off and a hot iron at his feet; but while she was hurrying up the kettle to make him a drink of something hot, he rose and slipped up the outside stairs to his bedroom in the attic. There he seated himself on the side of his neat bed which he always made himself camp fashion,—the blankets folded lengthwise with just room for one quiet sleeper to crawl inside; and there he sat, opening and clinching his hands, a deep perplexity upon his features.

Aunt Polly called to him and began to read the riot act, but Leander said: "Let him be! He gits tired o' being fussed over. You're at him about something or other the whole blessed time."

"Well, I have to! My gracious! He'd forgit to come in to his meals if I didn't keep him on my mind."

"It just strikes me—what am I going to call him when I introduce him to those folks? Did he ever tell you what his last name is?"

"I wouldn't be surprised," Aunt Polly lowered her voice, "if he couldn't remember it himself! I've heard of such cases. Whenever I try to draw him out to talk about himself and what happened to him before you found him, it breaks him all up; seemingly gives him a back-set every time. He sort of slinks into himself in that queer, lost way—just like he was when he first come to."

"He's had a powerful jar to his constitution, and his mind is taking a rest." Leander was fond of a diagnosis. "There wasn't enough life left in him to keep his faculties and his bod'ly organs all a-going at once. The upper story's to let."

"I wish you'd go upstairs, and see what he is doing up there."

"Aw, no! Let him be. He likes to go off by himself and do his thinking. I notice it rattles him to be talked to much. He sets out there on the choppin'-block, looking at the bluffs—ever notice? He looks and don't see nothin', and his lips keep moving like he was learning a spellin'-lesson. If I speak to him sharp, he hauls himself together and smiles uneasy, but he don't know what I said. I tell you he's waking up; coming to his memories, and trying to sort 'em out."

"That's just what *I* say," Aunt Polly retorted, "but he's got to eat his meals. He can't live on memories."

Uncle John was restless that evening, and appeared to be excited. He waited upon Aunt Polly after supper with a feverish eagerness to be of use. When all was in order for bedtime, and Leander rose to wind the clock, he spoke. It was getting about time to roll up his blankets and pull out, he said. Leander felt for the ledge where the clock-key belonged, and made no answer.

"I was saying—I guess it's about time for me to be moving on. The grass is starting"—

"Are you cal'latin' to live on grass?" Leander drawled with cutting irony. "Gettin' tired of the old woman's cooking? Well, she ain't much of a cook!"

Uncle John remained silent, working at his hands. His mouth, trembled under his thin straggling beard. "I never was better treated in my life, and you know it. It ain't handsome of you, Lewis, to talk that way!"

"He don't mean nothing, Uncle John! What makes you so foolish, Looander! He just wants you to know there's no begrudgers around here. You're welcome, and more than welcome, to settle down and camp right along with us."

"Winter and summer!" Leander put in, "if you're satisfied. There's nobody in a hurry to see the last of ye."

Uncle John's mild but determined resistance was a keen disappointment to his friends. Leander thought himself offended. "What fly's stung you, anyhow! Heard from any of your folks lately?"

The old man smiled.

"Got any money salted down that needs turning?"

“Looander! Quit teasing of him!”

“Let him have his fun, ma'am. It's all he's likely to get out of me. I have got a little money,” he pursued. “'T would be an insult to name it in the same breath with what you've done for me. I'd like to leave it here, though. You could pass it on. You'll have chances enough. 'T ain't likely I'll be the last one you'll take in and do for, and never git nothing out of it in return.”

There was a mild sensation, as the speaker, fumbling in his loose trousers, appeared to be seeking for that money. Aunt Polly's eyes flamed indignation behind her tears. She was a foolish, warm-hearted creature, and her eyes watered on the least excuse.

“Looander, you shouldn't have taunted him,” she admonished her husband, who felt he had been a little rough.

“Look here, Uncle John, d'you ever know anybody who wasn't by way of needing help some time in their lives? We don't ask any one who comes here”—

“He didn't come!” Aunt Polly corrected.

“Well, who was brought, then! We don't ask for their character, nor their private history, nor their bank account. I don't know but you're the first one for years I've ever took a real personal shine to, and we've h'isted a good many up them stairs that wasn't able to walk much further. I'd like you to stay as a favor to us, dang it!”

Leander delivered this invitation as if it were a threat. His straight-cut mustache stiffened and projected itself by the pressure of his big lips; his dark red throat showed as many obstinate creases as an old snapping-turtle's.

“I'm much obliged to you both. I want you to remember that. We—I—I'll talk with ye in the morning.”

“That means he's going all the same,” said Leander, after Uncle John had closed the outside door.

Sure enough, next morning he had made up his little pack, oiled his boots, and by breakfast-time was ready for the road. They argued the point long and fiercely with him whether he should set out on foot or wait a day and ride with Leander to the Ferry. It was not supposed he could be thinking of any other road. By to-morrow, if he would but wait, Aunt Polly would have comfortably outfitted him after the custom of the house; given his clothes a final “going over” to see everything taut for the journey, shoved a week's rations into a corn-sack, choosing such condensed forms of nourishment as the system allowed—nay, straining a point and smuggling in a nefarious pound or two of real miner's coffee.

Aunt Polly's distress so weighed with her patient that he consented to remain overnight and ride with Leander as far as the dam across the Bruneau, at its junction with the Snake. There he would cross and take the trail down the river, cutting off several miles of the road to the Ferry. As for going on to see Jimmy or Jimmy's “folks,” the nervous resistance which this plan excited warned the good couple not to press the old man too far, or he might give them the slip altogether.

A strangeness in his manner which this last discussion had brought out, lay heavy on aunt Polly's mind all day after the departure of the team for the Ferry. She watched the two men drive off in silence, Leander's bush beard reddening in the sun, his big body filling more than his half of the seat.

“Well, by Gum! If he ain't the blamedest, most per-sistent old fool!” he complained to his wife that night. Their first words were of the old man, already missed like one of the family from the humble place he had made for himself. Leander was still irritable over his loss. “I set him down with his grub and blankets, and I watched him footing it acrost the dam. He done it real handsome, steady on his pins. Then he set down and waited, kind o' dreaming, like he used to, settin' on the choppin'-block. I hailed him. 'What's the matter?' I says. 'Left anything?' No: every time I hailed he took off his hat and waved to me real pleasant. Nothing the matter. There he set. Well, thinks I, I can't stay here all day watching ye take root. So I drove on a piece. And, by Gum! when I looked back going around the bend, there he went a-pikin' off up the bluffs—just a-humping himself for all he was worth. I wouldn't like to think he was cunning, but it looked that way for sure,—turning me off the scent and then taking to the bluffs like he was sent for! Where in thunder is he making for? He knows just as well as I do—you have heard me tell him a dozen times—the stages were hauled off that Wood River road five year and more ago. He won't git nowhere! And he won't meet up with a team in a week's walking.”

“His food will last him a week if he's careful; he's no great eater. I ain't afraid his feet will get lost; he's to home out of doors almost anywhere;—it's his head I'm afraid of. He's got some sort of a skew on him. I used to notice if he went out for a little walk anywhere, he'd always slope for the East.”

XX. — A STATION IN THE DESERT

That forsworn identity which Adam Bogardus had submitted to be clothed in as a burial garment was now become a thing for the living to flee from. He had seen a woman in full health whiten and cower before it;—she who stood beside his bed and looked at him with dreadful eyes, eyes of his girl-wife growing old in the likeness of her father. Hard, reluctant eyes forced to own the truth which the ashen lips denied. Are we responsible for our silences? He had not spoken to her. Nay, the living must speak first, or the ghostly dead depart unquestioned. He asked only that he might forget her and be himself forgotten. If it were that woman's right to call herself Emily Bogardus, then was there no Adam her husband. Better the old disguise which left him free to work out his own sentence and pay his forfeit to the law. He had never desired that one

breath of it should be commuted, or wished to accept an enslaving pardon from those for whose sake he had put himself out of the way. If he could have taken his own comparative spiritual measurement, he might have smiled at the humor of that forgiveness promised him in the name of the Highest by his son.

For many peaceful years solitude had been the habit of his soul. Gently as he bore with human obligations, he escaped from them with a sense of relief which shamed him somewhat when he thought of the good friends to whom he owed this very blessed power to flee. It was quite as Leander had surmised. He could not command his faculties—memory especially—when a noise of many words and questions bruised his brain.

The stillness of the desert closed about him with delicious healing. He was a world-weary child returned to the womb of Nature. His old camp-craft came back; his eye for distance, his sense of the trail, his little pet economies with food and fire. There was no one to tell him what to eat and when to eat it. He was invisible to men. Each day's march built up his muscle, and every night's deep sleep under the great high stars steadied his nerves and tightened his resolve.

He thought of the young man—his son—with a mixture of pain and tenderness. But Paul was not the baby-boy he had put out of his arms with a father's smile at One Man station. Paul was himself a man now; he had coerced him at the last, neither did he understand.

The blind instinct of flight began after a while to shape its own direction. It was no new leaning with the packer. As many times as he had crossed this trail he never had failed to experience the same pull. He resisted no longer. He gave way to strange fancies and made them his guides.

At some time during his flight from the hospital, in one of those blanks that overtook him, he knew not how, he had met with a great loss. The words had slipped from his memory—of that message which had kept him in fancied touch with his wife all these many deluding years. Without them he was like a drunkard deprived of his habitual stimulant. The craving to connect and hold them—for they came to him sometimes in tantalizing freaks of memory, and slipped away again like beads rolling off a broken thread—was almost the only form of mental suffering he was now conscious of. What had become of the message itself? Had they left it exposed to every heartless desecration in that abandoned spot?—a scrap of paper driven like a bit of tumble-weed before the wind, snatched at by spikes of sage, trampled into the mire of cattle, nuzzled by wild beasts? Or, had they put it away with that other beast where he lay with the scoff on his dead face? Out of dreams and visions of the night that place of the parting ways called to him, and the time was now come when he must go.

He approached it by one of those desert trails that circle for miles on the track of water and pounce as a bird drops upon its prey into the trampled hollow at One Man station—a place for the gathering of hoofs in the midst of the plain.

He could trace what might have been the foundation of a house, a few blackened stones, a hearthstone showing where a chimney perhaps had stood, but these evidences of habitation would never have been marked except by one who knew where to look. He searched the ground over for signs of the tragedy that bound him to that spot—a smiling desolation, a sunny nothingness. The effect of this careless obliteration was quieting. Nature had played here once with two men and a woman. One of the toy men was lost, the other broken. She had forgotten where she put the broken one. There were mounds which looked like graves, but the seeker knew that artificial mounds in a place like this soon sink into hollows; and there were hollows like open graves, filled with unsightly human rubbish, washed in by the yearly rains.

He spent three days in the hollow, doing nothing, steeped in sunshine, lying down to rest broad awake in the tender twilight, making his peace with this place of bitter memory before bidding it good-by. His thoughts turned eastward as the planets rose. Time he was working back towards home. He would hardly get there if he started now, before his day was done. He saw his mother's grave beside his father's, in the southeast corner of the burying-ground, where the trees were thin. All who drove in through the big gate of funerals could see the tall white shafts of the Beviers and Brodericks and Van Eltens, but only those who came on foot could approach his people in the gravelly side-hill plots. “I'd like to be put there alongside the old folks in that warm south corner.” He could see their names on the plain gray slate stones, rain-stained and green with moss.

On the third May evening of his stay the horizon became a dust-cloud, the setting sun a ball of fire. Loomed the figure of a rider topping the heaving backs of his herd. All together they came lumbering down the slopes, all heading fiercely for the water. The rider plunged down a side-draw out of the main cloud. Clanking bells, shuffling hoofs, the “Whoop-ee-youp!” came fainter up the gulch. The cowboy was not pleased as he dashed by to see an earlier camp-fire smoking in the hollow. But he was less displeased, being half French, than if he had been pure-bred American.

The old man, squatting by his cooking-fire, gave him a civil nod, and he responded with a flourish of his quirt. The reek of sage smoke, the smell of dust and cattle rose rank on the cooling air. It was good to Boniface, son of the desert; it meant supper and bed, or supper and talk, for “Bonny” Maupin (“Bonny Moppin,” it went in the vernacular) would talk every other man to sleep, full or empty, with songs thrown in. To-night, however, he must talk on an empty stomach, for his chuck wagon was not in sight.

“W'ich way you travelin'?” he began, lighting up after a long pull at his flask. The old man had declined, though he looked as if he needed a drink.

“East about,” was the answer.

“Goin' far?”

“Well; summer's before us. I cal'late to keep moving till snow falls.”

“Shucks! You ain' pressed for time. Maybe you got some friend back there. Goin' back to git married?” He winked genially to point the jest and the old man smiled indulgently.

“Won't you set up and take a bite with me? You don't look to have much of a show for supper along.”

“Thanks, very much! I had bully breakfast at Rock Spring middlin' late this morning. They butcherin' at that place. Five fat hog. My chuck wagon he stay behin' for chunk of fresh pig. I won' spoil my appetide for that tenderloin. Hol' on yourself an' take supper wis me. No?—That fellah be 'long 'bout Chris'mas if he don' git los'! He always behin', pig or no pig!”

Bonny strolled away collecting fire-wood. Presently he called back, pointing dramatically with his small-toed boot. “Who's been coyotin' round here?” The hard ground was freshly disturbed in spots as by the paws of some small inquisitive animal. There was no answer.

“What you say? Whose surface diggin's is these? I never know anybody do some mining here.”

“That was me”—Bonny backed a little nearer to catch the old man's words. “I was looking round here for something I lost.”

“What luck you have? You fin' him?”

“Well, now, doos it reely matter to you, sonny?”

“Pardner, it don' matter to me a d—n, if you say so! I was jus' askin' myself what a man *would* look for if he los' it here. Since I strike this 'ell of a place the very groun' been chewed up and spit out reg'lar, one hundred times a year. 'T'is a gris' mill!”

“I didn't gretly expect to find what I was lookin' for. I was just foolin' around to satisfy myself.”

“That satisfy me!” said Bonny pleasantly; and yet he was a trifle discomfited. He strolled away again and began to sing with a boyish show of indifference to having been called “sonny.”

“Oh, Sally is the gal for me! Oh, Sally's the gal for me! On moonlight night when the star is bright—Oh”—

“Halloa! This some more your work, oncle? You ain' got no chicken wing for arm if you lif' this.—Ah, be dam! I see what you lif' him with. All same stove-lid.” Talking and swearing to himself cheerfully, Bonny applied the end of a broken whiffletree to the blunt lip of the old hearthstone which marked the stage-house chimney. He had tried a step-dance on it and found it hollow. More fresh digging, and marks upon the stone where some prying tool had taken hold and slipped, showed he was not the first who had been curious.

“There you go, over on you' back, like snap' turtle; I see where you lay there before. What the dev'! I say!” Bonny, much excited with his find, extracted a rusty tin tobacco-box from the hole, pried open the spring lid and drew forth its contents: a discolored canvas bag bulging with coin and whipped around the neck with a leather whang. The canvas was rotten; Bonny supported its contents tenderly as he brought it over to the old man.

“Oncle, I ask you' pardon for tappin' that safe. Pretty good lil' nest-egg, eh? But now you got to find her some other place.”

“That don't belong to me,” said the old man indifferently.

“Aw—don't be bashful! I onderstan' now what you los'. You dig here—there—migs up the scent. I just happen to step on that stone—ring him, so, with my boot-heel!”

“That ain't my pile,” the other persisted. “I started to build a fire on that stone two nights ago. It rung hollow like you say. I looked and found what you found—”

“And put her back! My soul to God! An' you here all by you'self!”

“Why not? The stuff ain't mine.”

“Who *is* she? How long since anybody live here?”

“I don't know,—good while, I guess.”

“Well, sar! Look here! I open that bag. I count two hondre' thirteen dolla'—make it twelve for luck, an' call it you' divvee! You strike her first. What you say: we go snac'?”

“I haven't got any use for that money. You needn't talk to me about it.”

“Got no h'use!—are you a reech man? Got you' private car waitin' for you out in d' sagebrush? Sol' a mine lately?”

“I don't know why it strikes you so funny. It's no concern of mine if a man puts his money in the ground and goes off and leaves it.”

“Goes off and die! There was one man live here by himself—he die, they say, 'with his boots on.' He, I think, mus' be that man belong to this money. What an old stiff want with two hondre' thirteen dolla'? That money goin' into a live man's clothes.” Bonny slapped his chappereros, and the dust flew.

“I've no objection to its going into *your* clothes,” said the old man.

“You thing I ain' particular, me? Well, eef the party underground was my frien', and I knew his fam'ly, and was sure the money was belong to him—I'd do differend—perhaps. Mais,—it is going—going—gone! You won' go snac'?”

The old man smiled and looked steadily away.

“Blas' me to h—l! but you aire the firs' man ever I strike that jib at the sight of col' coin. She don' frighten me!”

Bonny always swore when he felt embarrassed.

“Well, sar! Look here! You fin' you'self so blame indifferend—s'pose you *so* indifferend not to say nothing 'bout this, when my swamper fellah git in. I don' wish to go snac' wis him. I don' feel oblige'. See?”

“What you want to pester me about this money for!” The old man was weary. “I didn't come here, lookin' for money, and I don't expect to take none away with me. So I'll say good-night to ye.”

“Hol' on, hol' on! Don' git mad. What time you goin' off in the morning?”

“Before you do, I shouldn't wonder.”

“But hol'! One fine idea—blazin' good idea—just hit me now in the head! Wan' to come on to Chicago wis me? I drop this fellah at Felton. He take the team back, and I get some one to help me on the treep. Why not you? Ever tek' care of stock?”

“Some consid'able years ago I used to look after stock. Guess I'd know an ox from a heifer.”

“Ever handle 'em on cattle-car?”

“Never.”

“Well, all there is, you feed 'em, and water 'em, and keep 'em on their feets. If one fall down, all the others

they have too much play. They rock"—Bonny exhibited—"and fall over and pile up in heap. I like to do one turn for you. We goin' the same way—you bring me the good luck, like a bird in the han'. This is my clean-up, you understand. You bring me the beautiful luck. You turn me up right bower first slap. Now it's goin' be my deal. I like to do by you!"

The packer turned over and looked up at the cool sky, pricked through with early stars. He was silent a long time. His pale old face was like a fine bit of carving in the dusk.

"What you think?" asked Moppin, almost tenderly. "I thing you better come wis me. You too hold a man to go like so—alone."

"I'll have to think about it first;—let you know in the morning."

XXI. — INJURIOUS REPORTS CONCERNING AN OLD HOUSE

A Rush of wheels and a spatter of hoofs coming up the drive sent Mrs. Dunlop to the sitting-room window. She tried to see out through streaming showers that darkened the panes.

"Isn't that Mrs. Bogardus? Why, it is! Put on your shoes, Chauncey, quick! Help her in 'n' take her horse to the shed. Take an umbrella with you." Chauncey the younger, meekly drying his shoes by the kitchen fire, put them on, not stopping to lace them, and slumped down the porch steps, pursued by his mother's orders. She watched him a moment struggling with a cranky umbrella, and then turned her attention to herself and the room.

Mrs. Bogardus made her calls in the morning, and always plainly on business. She had not seen the inside of Cerissa's parlor for ten years. This was a grievance which Cerissa referred to spasmodically, being seized with it when she was otherwise low in her mind.

"My sakes! Can't I remember my mother telling how *her* mother used to drive over and spend the afternoon, and bring her sewing and the baby—whichever one was the baby. They called each other Chrissy and Angevine, and now she don't even speak of her own children to us by their first names. It's 'Mrs. Bowen' and 'Mr. Paul;' just as if she was talking to her servants."

"What's that to us? We've got a good home here for as long as we want to stay. She's easy to work for, if you do what she says."

Chauncey respected Mrs. Bogardus's judgment and her straightforward business habits. Other matters he left alone. But Cerissa was ambitious and emotional, and she stayed indoors, doing little things and thinking small thoughts. She resented her commanding neighbor's casual manners. There was something puzzling and difficult to meet in her plainness of speech, which excluded the personal relation. It was like the cut and finish of her clothes—mysterious in their simplicity, and not to be imitated cheaply.

When the two met, Cerissa was immediately reduced to a state of flimsy apology which she made up for by being particularly hot and self-assertive in speaking of the lady afterward.

"There is the parlor, in perfect order," she fretted, as she stood waiting to open the front door; "but of course she wouldn't let me take her in there—that would be too much like visiting."

The next moment she had corrected her facial expression, and was offering smiling condolences to Mrs. Bogardus on the state of her attire.

"It is only my jacket. You might put that somewhere to dry," said the lady curtly. Raindrops sparkled on the wave of thick iron-gray hair that lifted itself, with a slight turn to one side, from her square low brow. Her eyes shone dark against the fresh wind color in her cheeks. She had the straight, hard, ophidian line concealing the eyelid, which gives such a peculiar strength to the direct gaze of a pair of dark eyes. If one suspects the least touch of tenderness, possibly of pain, behind that iron fold, it lends a fascination equal to the strength. There was some excitement in Mrs. Bogardus's manner, but Cerissa did not know her well enough to perceive it. She merely thought her looking handsomer, and, if possible, more formidable than usual.

She sat by the fire, folding her skirts across her knees, and showing the edges of the most discouragingly beautiful petticoats,—a taste perhaps inherited from her wide-hipped Dutch progenitresses. Mrs. Bogardus reveled in costly petticoats, and had an unnecessary number of them.

"How nice it is in here!" she said, looking about her. Cerissa, with the usual apologies, had taken her into the kitchen to dry her skirts. There was a slight taint of steaming shoe leather, left by Chauncey when driven forth. Otherwise the kitchen was perfection,—the family room of an old Dutch farmhouse, built when stone and hardwood lumber were cheap,—thick walls; deep, low window-seats; beams showing on the ceiling; a modern cooking-stove, where Emily Bogardus could remember the wrought brass andirons and iron backlog, for this room had been her father's dining-room. The brick tiled hearth remained, and the color of those century and a half old bricks made a pitiful thing of Cerissa's new oil-cloth. The woodwork had been painted—by Mrs. Bogardus's orders, and much to Cerissa's disgust—a dark kitchen green,—not that she liked the color herself, but it was the artistic demand of the moment,—and the place was filled with a green golden light from the cherry-trees close to the window, which a break in the clouds had suddenly illumined.

"You keep it beautifully," said Mrs. Bogardus, her eyes shedding compliments as she looked around. "I should not dare go in my own kitchen at this time of day. There are no women nowadays who know how to work in the way ladies used to work. If I could have such a housekeeper as you, Cerissa."

Cerissa flushed and bridled. “What would Chauncey do!”

“I don't expect you to be my housekeeper,” Mrs. Bogardus smiled. “But I envy Chauncey.”

“She has come to ask a favor,” thought Cerissa. “I never knew her so pleasant, for nothing. She wants me to do up her fruit, I guess.” Cerissa was mistaken. Mrs. Bogardus simply was happy—or almost happy—and deeply stirred over a piece of news which had come to her in that morning's mail.

“I have telephoned Bradley not to send his men over on Monday. My son is bringing his wife home. They may be here all summer. The place belongs to them now. Did Chauncey tell you? Mr. Paul writes that he has some building plans of his own, and he wishes everything left as it is for the present, especially this house. He wants his wife to see it first just as it is.”

“Well, to be sure! They've been traveling a long time, haven't they? And how is his health now?”

“Oh, he is very well indeed. You will be glad not to have the trouble of those carpenters, Cerissa? Pulling down old houses is dirty work.”

“Oh, dear! I wouldn't mind the dirt. Anything to get rid of that old rat's nest on top of the kitchen chamber. I hate to have such out of the way places on my mind. I can't get around to do every single thing, and it's years—years, Mrs. Bogardus, since I could get a woman to do a half-day's cleaning up there in broad daylight!”

Mrs. Bogardus stared. What was the woman talking about!

“I call it a regular eyesore on the looks of the house besides. And it keeps all the old stories alive.”

“What stories?”

“Why, of course your father wasn't out of his head—we all know that—when he built that upstairs room and slep' there and locked himself in every night of his life. It was only on one point he was a little warped: the fear of bein' robbed. A natural fear, too,—an old man over eighty livin' in such a lonesome place and known to be well off. But—you'll excuse my repeating the talk—but the story goes now that he re'ly went insane and was confined up there all the last years of his life. And that's why the windows have got bars acrost them. Everybody notices it, and they ask questions. It's real embarrassin', for of course I don't want to discuss the family.”

“Who asks questions?” Mrs. Bogardus's eyes were hard to meet when her voice took that tone.

“Why, the city folks out driving. They often drive in the big gate and make the circle through the grounds, and they're always struck when they see that tower bedroom with windows like a prison. They say, 'What's the story about that room, up there?'”

“When people ask you questions about the house, you can say you did not live here in the owner's time and you don't know. That's perfectly simple, isn't it?”

“But I do know! Everybody knows,” said Cerissa hotly. “It was the talk of the whole neighborhood when that room was put up; and I remember how scared I used to be when mother sent me over here of an errand.”

Mrs. Bogardus rose and shook out her skirts. “Will Chauncey bring my horse when it stops raining? By the way, did you get the furniture down that was in that room, Cerissa?—the old secretary? I am going to have it put in order for Mr. Paul's room. Old furniture is the fashion now, you know.”

Cerissa caught her breath nervously. “Mrs. Bogardus—I couldn't do a thing about it! I wanted Chauncey to tell you. All last week I tried to get a woman, or a man, to come and help me clear out that place, but just as soon as they find out what's wanted—'You'll have to get somebody else for that job,' they say.”

“What is the matter with them?”

“It's the room, Mrs. Bogardus; if I was you—I'm doing now just as I'd be done by—I would not take Mrs. Paul Bogardus up into that room—not even in broad daylight; not if it was my son's wife, in the third month of her being a wife.”

“Well, upon my word!” said Mrs. Bogardus, smiling coldly. “Do you mean to say these women are afraid to go up there?”

“It was old Mary Hornbeck who started the talk. She got what she called her 'warning' up there. And the fact is, she was a corpse within six months from that day. Chauncey and me, we used to hear noises, but old houses are full of noises. We never thought much about it; only, I must say I never had any use for that part of the house. Chauncey keeps his seeds and tools in the lower room, and some of the winter vegetables, and we store the parlor stove in there in summer.”

“Well, about this 'warning'?” Mrs. Bogardus interrupted.

“Yes! It was three years ago in May, and I remember it was some such a day as this—showery and broken overhead, and Mary disappointed me; but she came about noon, and said she'd put in half a day anyhow. She got her pail and house-cloths; but she wasn't gone not half an hour when down she come white as a sheet, and her mouth as dry as chalk. She set down all of a shake, and I give her a drink of tea, and she said: 'I wouldn't go up there again, not for a thousand dollars.' She unlocked the door, she said, and stepped inside without thinkin'. Your father's old rocker with the green moreen cushions stood over by the east window, where he used to sit. She heard a creak like a heavy step on the floor, and that empty chair across the room, as far as from here to the window, begun to rock as if somebody had just rose up from them cushions. She watched it till it stopped. Then she took another step, and the step she couldn't see answered her, and the chair begun to rock again.”

“Was that all?”

“No, ma'am; that wasn't all. I don't know if you remember an old wall clock with a brass ball on top and brass scrolls down the sides and a painted glass door in front of the pendulum with a picture of a castle and a lake? The paint's been wore off the glass with cleaning, so the pendulum shows plain. That clock has not been wound since we come to live here. I don't believe a hand has touched it since the night he was carried feet foremost out of that room. But Mary said she could count the strokes go tick, tick, tick! She listened till she could have counted fifty, for she was struck dumb, and just as plain as the clock before her face she could see the minute-hand and the pendulum, both of 'em dead still. Now, how do you account for that!

"I told Chauncey about it, and he said it was all foolishness. Do all I could he would go up there himself, that same evening. But he come down again after a while, and he was almost as white as Mary. 'Did you see anything?' I says. 'I saw what Mary said she saw,' says he, 'and I heard what she heard.' But no one can make Chauncey own up that he believes it was anything supernatural. 'There is a reason for everything,' he says. 'The miracles and ghosts of one generation are just school-book learning to the next; and more of a miracle than the miracles themselves.'"

"Chauncey shows his sense," Mrs. Bogardus observed.

"He was real disturbed, though, I could see; and he told me particular not to make any talk about it. I never have opened the subject to a living soul. But when Mary died, within six months, folks repeated what she had been saying about her 'warning.' The 'death watch' she called it. We can't all of us control our feelings about such things, and she was a lonely widow woman."

"Well, do you believe that ticking is going on up there now?" asked Mrs. Bogardus.

Cerissa looked uneasy.

"Is the door locked?"

"I re'ly couldn't say," she confessed.

"Do you mean to say that all you sensible people in this house have avoided that room for three years? And you don't even know if the door is locked?"

"I—I don't use that part for anything, and cleaning is wasted on a place that's never used, and I can't *get* anybody"—

"I am not criticising your housekeeping. Will you go up there with me now, Cerissa? I want to understand about this."

"What, just now, do you mean? I'm afraid I haven't got the time this morning, Mrs. Bogardus. Dinner's at half-past twelve. It's a quarter to eleven"—

"Very well. You think the door is not locked?"

"If it is, the key must be in the door. Oh, don't go, please, Mrs. Bogardus. Wait till Chauncey conies in"—

"I wish you'd send Chauncey up when he does come in. Ask him to bring a screw-driver." Mrs. Bogardus rose and examined her jacket. It was still damp. She asked for a cape, or some sort of wrap, as her waist was thin, and the rain had chilled the morning air.

For the sake of decency, Cerissa escorted her visitor across the hall passage into the loom-room—a loom-room in name only for upwards of three generations. Becky had devoted it to the rough work of the house, and to certain special uses, such as the care of the butchering products, the making of soft soap and root beer. Here the churning was done, by hand, with a wooden dasher, which spread a circle of white drops, later to become grease-spots. The floor of the loom-room was laid in large brick tiles, more or less loose in their sockets, with an occasional earthy depression marking the grave of a missing tile. Becky's method of cleaning was to sluice it out and scrub it with an old broom. The seepage of generations before her time had thus added their constant quota to the old well's sum of iniquity.

Mrs. Bogardus had not visited this part of the old house for many years. After her father's death she had shrunk from its painful associations. Later she grew indifferent; but as she passed now into the gloomy place —doubly dark with the deep foliage of June on a rainy morning—she was afraid of her own thoughts. Henceforth she was a woman with a diseased consciousness. "What can't be cured must be *seared*," flashed over her as she set her face to the stairway.

These stairs, leading up into the back attic or "kitchen chamber," being somewhat crowded for space, advanced two steps into the room below. As the stair door opened outward, and the stairs were exceedingly steep and dark, every child of the house, in turn, had suffered a bad fall in consequence; but the arrangement remained in all its natural depravity, for "children must learn."

Little Emmy of the old days had loved to sit upon these steps, a trifle raised above the kitchen traffic, yet cognizant of all that was going on, and ready to descend promptly if she smelled fresh crullers frying, or baked sweet apples steaming hot from the oven. If Becky's foot were heard upon the stairs above, she would jump quick enough; but if the step had a clumping, boyish precipitancy, she sat still and laughed, and planted her back against the door. Often she had teased Adam in this way, keeping him prisoner from his duties, helpless in his good nature either to scold her or push her off. But once he circumvented her, slipping off his shoes and creeping up the stairs again, and making his escape by the roof and the boughs of the old maple. Then it was Emmy who was teased, who sat a foolish half hour on the stairs alone and missed a beautiful ride to the wood lot; but she would not speak to Adam for two days afterward.

Becky's had been the larger of the two bedrooms in the attic, Adam's the smaller—tucked low under the eaves, and entered by crawling around the big chimney that came bulking up to the light like a great tree caught between house walls. The stairs hugged the chimney and made use of its support. Adam would warm his hands upon it coming down on bitter mornings. From force of habit, Emily Bogardus laid her smooth white hand upon the clammy bricks. No tombstone could be colder than that heart of house warmth now.

The roof of the kitchen chamber had been raised a story higher, and the chimney as it went up contracted to quite a modern size. This elevation gave room for the incongruous tower bedroom that had hurt the symmetry of the old house, spoiled its noble sweep of roof, and given rise to so much unpleasant conjecture as to its use. It was this excrescence, the record of those last unloved and unloving years of her father's life, which Mrs. Bogardus would have removed, but was prevented by her son.

"You go back now, Cerissa," she said to the panting woman behind her. "I see the key is in the lock. You may send Chauncey after a while; there is no hurry."

"Oh!" gasped Cerissa. "Do you see *that!*"

"What?"

"I thought there was something—something behind that slit."

“There isn't. Step this way. There, can't you see the light?”

Mrs. Bogardus grasped Cerissa by the shoulders and held her firmly in front of a narrow loophole that pierced the partition close beside the door. Light from the room within showed plainly; but it gave an unpleasantly human expression to the entrance, like a furtive eye on the watch.

“He would always be there,” Cerissa whispered.

“Who?”

“Your father. If anybody wanted to see him after he shut himself in there for the night, they had to stand to be questioned through that wall-slit before he opened the door. Yes, ma'am! He was on the watch in there the whole time like a thing in a trap.”

“Are you afraid to go back alone?” Mrs. Bogardus spoke with chilling irony.

Cerissa backed away in silence, her heart thumping. “She's putting it on,” she said to herself. “I never see her turn so pale. Don't tell *me* she ain't afraid!”

There was a hanging shelf against the chimney on which a bundle of dry herbs had been left to turn into dust. Old Becky might have put them there the autumn before she died; or some successor of hers in the years that were blank to the daughter of the house. As she pushed open the door a sighing draught swept past her and seemed to draw her inward. It shook the sere bundle. Its skeleton leaves, dissolving into motes, flickered an instant athwart the light. They sifted down like ashes on the woman's dark head as she passed in. Her color had faded, but not through fear of ghost clocks. It was the searing process she had to face. And any room where she sat alone with certain memories of her youth was to her a torture chamber.

“She's been up there an awful long time. I wouldn't wonder if she's fainted away.”

“What would she faint at? I guess it's pretty cold, though. Give me some more tea; put plenty of milk so I can drink it quick.”

Chauncey's matter of fact tone always comforted Cerissa when she was nervous. She did not mind that he jeered or that his words were often rude; no man of her acquaintance could say things nicely to women, or ever tried. A certain amount of roughness passed for household wit. Chauncey put the screw-driver in his pocket, his wife and son watching him with respectful anxiety. He thought rather well of his own courage privately. But the familiar details of the loom-room cheered him on his way, the homely tools of his every-day work were like friendly faces nodding at him. He knocked loudly on the door above, and was answered by Mrs. Bogardus in her natural voice.

“Bosh—every bit of it bosh!” he repeated courageously.

She was seated by the window in the chair with the green cushions. Her face was turned towards the view outside. “What a pity those cherries were not picked before the rain,” she observed. “The fruit is bursting ripe; I'm afraid you'll lose the crop.”

Chauncey moved forward awkwardly without answering.

“Stop there one moment, will you?” Mrs. Bogardus rose and demonstrated. “You notice those two boards are loose. Now, I put this chair here,”—she laid her hand on the back to still its motion. “Step this way. You see? The chair rocks of itself. So would any chair with a spring board under it. That accounts for *that*, I think. Now come over here.” Chauncey placed himself as she directed in front of the high mantel with the clock above it. She stood at his side and they listened in silence to that sound which Mary Hornbeck, deceased, had deemed a spiritual warning.

“Would you call that a 'ticking'? Is that like any sound an insect could make?” the mistress asked.

“I should call it more like a 'ting,'” said Chauncey. “It comes kind o' muffled like through the chimbly—a person might be mistaken if they was upset in their nerves considerable.”

“What old people call the 'death-watch' is supposed to be an insect that lives in the walls of old houses, isn't it? and gives warning with a ticking sound when somebody is going to be called away? Now to me that sounds like a soft blow struck regularly on a piece of hollow iron—say the end of a stove-pipe sticking in the chimney. When I first came up here, there was only a steady murmur of wind and rain. Then the clouds thinned and the sun came out and drops began to fall—distinctly. Your wife says the ticking was heard on a day like this, broken and showery. Now, if you will unscrew that clock, I think you will find there's a stove-pipe hole behind it; and a piece of pipe shoved into the chimney just far enough to catch the drops as they gather and fall.”

Chauncey went to work. He sweated in the airless room. The powerful screws blunted the lips of his tool but would not start.

“I guess I'll have to give it up for to-day. The screws are rusted in solid. Want I should pry her out of the woodwork?”

“No, don't do that,” said Mrs. Bogardus. “Why should we spoil the panel? This seems a very comfortable room. My son is right. It would be foolish to tear it down. Such a place as this might be very useful if you people would get over your notions about it.”

“I never had no notions,” Chauncey asserted. “When the women git talkin' they like to make out a good story, and whichever one sees the most and hears the most makes the biggest sensation.”

Mrs. Bogardus waited till he had finished without appearing to have heard what he was saying.

“Where is the key to this door?” she laid her hand over a knob to the right of the stairs.

“I guess if there is one it's on the other side. Yes, it's in the key-hole.” Chauncey turned the knob and shoved and lifted. The door yielded to his full strength, and he allowed Mrs. Bogardus to precede him. She stepped into a room hardly bigger than a closet with one window, barred like those in the outer room. It was

fitted up with toilet conveniences according to the best advices of its day. Over all the neat personal arrangements there was the slur of neglect, a sad squalor which even a king's palace wears with time.

Chauncey tested the plumbing with a noise that was plainly offensive to his companion, but she bore with it —also with his reminiscences gathered from neighborhood gossip. “He wa'n't fond of spending money, but he didn't spare it here: this was his ship cabin when he started on his last voyage. It looked funny—a man with all his land and houses cooped up in a place like this; but he wanted to be independent of the women. He hated to have 'em fussin' around him. He had a woman to come and cook up stuff for him to help himself to; but she wouldn't stay here overnight, nor he wouldn't let her. As for a man in the house,—most men were thieves, he thought, or waiting their chance to be. It was real pitiful the way he made his end.”

“Open that window and shut the door when you come out,” said Mrs. Bogardus. “I will send some one to help you down with that secretary. Cerissa knows about it. It is to be sent up on the Hill.”

XXII. — THE CASE STRIKES IN

Christine's marriage took place while Paul and Moya were lingering in the Bruneau, for Paul's health ostensibly. Banks and Horace had been left to the smiling irony of justice. They never had a straight chance to define their conduct in the woods; for no one accused them. No awkward questions were asked in the city drawing-rooms or at the clubs. For a tough half hour or so at Fort Lemhi they had realized how they stood in the eyes of those unbiased military judges. The shock had a bracing effect for a time. Both boys were said to be much improved by their Western trip and by the hardships of that frightful homeward march.

Mrs. Bogardus had matched her gift of Stone Ridge to her son, which was a gift of sentiment, with one of more substantial value to her daughter,—the income from certain securities settled upon her and her heirs. Banks was carefully unprovided for. The big house in town was full of ghosts—the ghosts that haunt such homes, made desolate by a breach of hearts. The city itself was crowded with opportunities for giving and receiving pain between mother and daughter. Christine had developed all the latent hardness of her mother's race with a sickly frivolity of her own. She made a great show of faith in her marriage venture. She boomed it in her occasional letters, which were full of scarce concealed bravado as graceful as snapping her fingers in her mother's face.

Mrs. Bogardus leased her house in town, and retired before the ghosts, but not escaping them; Stone Ridge must be put in order for its new master and mistress, and Stone Ridge had its own ghosts. She informed her absentees that, before their return, she should have left for Southern California to look after some investments which she had neglected there of late. It was then she spoke of her plan for restoring the old house by pulling down that addition which disfigured it; and Paul had objected to this erasure. It would take from the house's veracity, he said. The words carried their unintentional sting.

But it was Moya's six lines at the bottom of his page that changed and softened everything. Moya—always blessed when she took the initiative—contrived, as swiftly as she could set them down, to say the very words that made the home-coming a coming home indeed.

“Will Madam Bogardus be pleased to keep her place as the head of her son's house?” she wrote. “This foolish person he has married wants to be anything rather than the mistress of Stone Ridge. She wants to be always out of doors, and she needs to be. Oh, must you go away now—now when we need you so much? It cannot be said here on paper how much *I* need you! Am I not your motherless daughter? Please be there when we come, and please stay there!”

“For a little while then,” said the lonely woman, smiling at the image of that sweet, foolish person in her thoughts. “For a little while, till she learns her mistake.” Such mistakes are the cornerstone of family friendship.

It was an uneventful summer on the Hill, but one of rather wearing intensity in the inner relations of the household, one with another; for nothing could be quite natural with a pit of concealment to be avoided by all, and an air of unconsciousness to be carefully preserved in avoiding it. Moya's success in this way was so remarkable that Paul half hated it. How was it possible for her to speak to his mother so lightly; never the least apparent premeditation or fear of tripping; how look at her with such sweet surface looks that never questioned or saw beneath? He could not meet his mother's eyes at all when they were alone together, or endure a silence in her company.

Both women were of the type called elemental. They understood each other without knowing why. Moya felt the desperate truth contained in the mother's falsehood, and broke forth into passionate defense of her as against her husband's silence.

He answered her one day by looking up a little green book of fairy tales and reading aloud this fragment of “The Golden Key.”

“'I never tell lies, even in fun.' (The mysterious Grandmother speaks.)

“'How good of you!' (says the Child in the Wood.)

“'I couldn't if I tried. It would come true if I said it, and then I should be punished enough.'”

Moya's eyes narrowed reflectively.

“How constantly you are thinking of this! I think of it only when I am with you. As if a woman like your mother, who has done *one thing*, should be all that thing, and nothing more to us, her children!”

Moya was giving herself up, almost immorally, Paul sometimes thought, to the fascination Mrs. Bogardus's personality had for her. In a keenly susceptible state herself, at that time, there was something calming and strengthening in the older woman's perfected beauty, her physical poise, and the fitness of everything she did and said and wore to the given occasion. As a dark woman she was particularly striking in summer clothing. Her white effects were tremendous. She did not pretend to study these matters herself, but in years of experience, with money to spend, she had learned well in whom to confide. When women are shut up together in country houses for the summer, they can irritate each other in the most foolish ways. Mrs. Bogardus never got upon your nerves.

But, for Paul, there was a poison in his mother's beauty, a dread in her influence over his impressionable young wife, thrilled with the awakening forces of her consonant being. Moya would drink deep of every cup that life presented. Motherhood was her lesson for the day. “She is a queen of mothers!” she would exclaim with an abandon that was painful to Paul; he saw deformity where Moya was ready to kneel. “I love her perfect love for you—for me, even! She is above all jealousy. She doesn't even ask to be understood.”

Paul was silent.

“And oh, she knows, she knows! She has been through it all—in such despair and misery—all that is before me, with everything in the world to make it easy and all the beautiful care she gives me. She is the supreme mother. And I never had a mother to speak to before. Don't, don't, please, keep putting that dreadful thing between us now!”

So Paul took the dreadful thing away with him and was alone with it, and knew that his mother saw it in his eyes when their eyes met and avoided. When, after a brief household absence, he would see her again he wondered, “Has she been alone with it? Has it passed into another phase?”—as of an incurable disease that must take its time and course.

Mrs. Bogardus did not spare her conscience in social ways all this time. It was a part of her life to remember that she had neighbors—certain neighbors. She included Paul without particularly consulting him whenever it was proper for him to support her in her introduction of his wife to the country-house folk, many of whom they knew in town.

All his mother's friends liked Paul and supposed him to be very clever, but they had never taken him seriously. “Now, at last,” they said, “he has done something like other people. He is coming out.” Experienced matrons were pleased to flatter him on his choice of a bride. The daughters studied Moya, and decided that she was “different,” but “all right.” She had a careless distinction of her own. Some of her “things” were surprisingly lovely—probably heirlooms; and army women are so clever about clothes.

Would they spend the winter in town?

Paul replied absently: they had not decided. Probably they would not go down till after the holidays.

What an attractive plan? What an ideal family Christmas they would have all together in the country! Christine had not been up all summer, had she? Here Moya came to her husband's relief, through a wife's dual consciousness in company, and covered his want of spirits with a flood of foolish chatter.

The smiling way in which women the most sincere can posture and prance on the brink of dissimulation was particularly sickening to Paul at this time. Why need they put themselves in situations where it was required? The situations were of his mother's creation. He imagined she must suffer, but had little sympathy with that side of her martyrdom. Moya seemed a trifle feverish in her acceptance of these affairs of which she was naturally the life and centre. A day of entertaining often faded into an evening of subtle sadness.

Paul would take her out into the moonlight of that deep inland country. The trees were dark with leaves and brooded close above them; old water-fences and milldams cast inky shadows on the still, shallow ponds clasped in wooded hills. No region could have offered a more striking contrast to the empty plains. Moya felt shut in with old histories. The very ground was but moulding sand in which generations of human lives had been poured, and the sand swept over to be reshaped for them.

“We are not living our own life yet,” Paul would say; not adding, “We are protecting her.” Here was the beginning of punishment helplessly meted out to this proud woman whose sole desire was towards her children—to give, and not to receive.

“But this is our Garden?” Moya would muse. “We are as nearly two alone as any two could be.”

“If you include the Snake. We can't leave out the Snake, you know.”

“Snake or Seraph—I don't believe I know the difference. Paul, I cannot have you thinking things.”

“I?—what do I think?”

“You are thinking it is bad for me to be so much with her. You, as a man and a husband, resent what she, as a woman and a wife, has dared to do. And I, as another woman and wife, I say she could do nothing else and be true. For, don't you see? She never loved him. The wifehood in her has never been reached. She was a girl, then a mother, then a widow. How could she”—

“Do you think he would have claimed her as his wife? Oh, you do not know him;—she has never known him. If we could be brave and face our duty to the whole truth, and leave the rest to those sequences, never dreamed of, that wait upon great acts. Such surprises come straight from God. Now we can never know how he would have risen to meet a nobler choice in her. He had not far to rise! Well, we have our share of blessings, including piazza teas; but as a family we have missed one of the greatest spiritual opportunities,—such as come but once in a lifetime.”

“Ah, if she was not ready for it, it was not *her* opportunity. God is very patient with us, I believe.”

XXIII. — RESTIVENESS

Mothers and sons are rarely very personal in their intimacy after the son has taken to himself a wife. Apart from certain moments not appropriate to piazza teas, Paul and his mother were perhaps as comfortable together as the relation averages. It was much that they never talked emotionally. Private judgments which we have refrained from putting into words may die unfruitful and many a bitter crop be spared.

“This is Paul's apology for being happy in spite of himself—and of us!” Moya teased, as she admired the beautifully drawn plans for the quarrymen's club-house.

“It doesn't need any apology; it's a very good thing,” said Mrs. Bogardus, ignoring double meanings. No caps that were flying around ever fitted her head. Paul's dreams and his mother's practical experience had met once more on a common ground of philanthropy. This time it was a workingmen's club in which the interests of social and mental improvement were conjoined with facilities for outdoor sport. Up to date philanthropy is an expensive toy. Paul, though now a landowner, was far from rich in his own right. His mother financed this as she had many another scheme for him. She was more openhanded than heretofore, but all was done with that ennuyéd air which she ever wore as of an older child who has outgrown the game. It was in Moya and Moya's prospective maternity that her pride reinstated itself. Her own history and generation she trod underfoot. Mistakes, humiliations, whichever way she turned. Paul had never satisfied her entirely in anything he did until he chose this girl for the mother of his children. Now their house might come to something. Moya moved before her eyes crowned in the light of the future. And that this noble and innocent girl, with her perfect intuitions, should turn to *her* now with such impetuous affection was perhaps the sweetest pain the blighted woman had ever known. She lay awake many a night thinking mute blessings on the mother and the child to be. Yet she resisted that generous initiative so dear to herself, aware with a subtle agony of the pain it gave her son.

One day she said to Paul (they were driving home together through a bit of woodland, the horses stepping softly on the mould of fallen leaves)—“I don't expect you to account for every dollar of mine you spend in helping those who can be helped that way. You have a free hand.”

“I understand,” said Paul. “I have used your money freely—for a purpose that I never have accounted for.”

“Don't you need more?”

“No; there is no need now.”

“Why is there not?”

Paul was silent. “I cannot go into particulars. It is a long story.”

“Does the purpose still exist?” his mother asked sharply.

“It does; but not as a claim—for that sort of help.”

“Let me know if such a claim should ever return.”

“I will, mother,” said Paul.

There came a day when mother and son reaped the reward of their mutual forbearance. There was a night and a day when Paul became a boy again in his mother's hands, and she took the place that was hers in Nature. She was the priestess acquainted with mysteries. He followed her, and hung upon her words. The expression of her face meant life and death to him. The dreadful consciousness passed out of his eyes; tears washed it out as he rose from his knees by Moya's bed, and his mother kissed him, and laid his son in his arms.

The following summer saw the club-house and all its affiliations in working order. The beneficiaries took to it most kindly, but were disposed to manage it in their own way: not in all respects the way of the founder's intention.

“To make a gift complete, you must keep yourself out of it,” Mrs. Bogardus advised. “You have done your part; now let them have it and run it themselves.”

Paul was not hungry for leadership, but he had hoped that his interest in the men's amusements would bring him closer to them and equalize the difference between the Hill and the quarry.

“You have never worked with them; how can you expect to play with them?” was another of his mother's cool aphorisms. Alas! Paul, the son of the poor man, had no work, and hence no play.

It was time to be making winter plans again. Mrs. Bogardus knew that her son's young family was now complete without her presence. Moya had gained confidence in the care of her child; she no longer brought every new symptom to the grandmother. Yet Mrs. Bogardus put off discussing the change, dreading to expose her own isolation, a point on which she was as sensitive as if it were a crime. Paul was never entirely frank with her: she knew he would not be frank in this. They never expressed their wills or their won'ts to each other with the careless rudeness of a sound family faith, and always she felt the burden of his unrelenting pity. She began to take long drives alone, coming in late and excusing herself for dinner. At such times she would send for her grandson in his nurse's arms to bid him good-night. The mother would put off her own good-night, not to intrude at these sessions. One evening, going up later to kiss her little son, she found his crib empty, the nurse gone to her dinner. He was fast asleep in his grandmother's arms, where she had held him for an hour in front of the open fire in her bedroom. She looked up guiltily. “He was so comfortable! And

his crib is cold. Will he take cold when Ellen puts him back?”

“I am sure he won't,” Moya whispered, gathering up the rosy sleeper. But she was disturbed by the breach of bedtime rules.

In the drawing-room a few nights later she said energetically to Paul.

“One might as well be dead as to live with a grudge.”

“A good grudge?”

“There are no good grudges.”

“There are some honest ones—honestly come by.”

“I don't care how they are come by. Grudges 'is p'ison.'” She laughed, but her cheeks were hot.

“Do you know that Christine has been at death's door? Your mother heard of it—through Mrs. Bowen! Was that why you didn't show me her letter?”

“It was not in my letter from Mrs. Bowen.”

“I think she has known it some time,” said Moya, “and kept it to herself.”

“Mrs. Bowen!”

“Your mother. Isn't it terrible? Think how Chrissy must have needed her. They need each other so! Christine was her constant thought. How can all that change in one year! But she cannot go to Banks Bowen's house without an invitation. We must go to New York and make her come with us—we must open the way.”

“Yes,” said Paul, “I have seen it was coming. In the end we always do the thing we have forsworn.”

“*I* was the one. I take it back. Your work is there. I know it calls you. Was not Mrs. Bowen's letter an appeal?”

Paul was silent.

“She must think you a deserter. And there is bigger work for you, too! Here is a great political fight on, and my husband is not in it. Every man must slay his dragon. There is a whole city of dragons!”

“Yes,” smiled Paul; “I see. You want me to put my legs under the same cloth with Banks and ask him about his golf score.”

“If you want to fight him, have it out on public grounds; fight him in politics.”

“We are on the same side!”

Moya laughed, but she looked a little dashed.

“Banks comes of gentlemen. He inherited his opinions,” said Paul.

“He may have inherited a few other things, if we could have patience with him.”

“Are you sorry for Banks?”

“I shall be sorry for him—when he meets you. He has been spared that too long.”

“Dispenser of destinies, I bow as I always do!”

“You will speak to your mother at once?”

“I will.”

“And do it beautifully?”

“As well as I know how.”

“Ah, you have had such practice! How good it would be if we could only dare to quarrel in this family! You and I—of course!”

“*We* quarrel, of course!” laughed Paul.

“I *love* to quarrel with you!”

“You do it beautifully. You have had such practice!”

“I am so happy! It is clear to me now that we shall live down this misery. Christine will love to see me again; I know she will. A wife is a very different thing from a girl—a haughty girl!”

“I should think the wife of Banks Bowen might be.”

“And we'll part with our ancient and honorable grudge! We are getting too big for it. *We* are parents!”

Paul made the proposition to his mother and she agreed to it in every particular save the one. She would remain at Stone Ridge. It was impossible to move her. Moya was in despair. She had cultivated an overweening conscience in her relations with Mrs. Bogardus. It turned upon her now and showed her the true state of her own mind at the thought of being Two once more and alone with the child God had given them. Mrs. Bogardus appeared to see nothing but her own interests in the matter. She had made up her mind. And in spite of the conscientious scruples on all sides, the hedging and pleading and explaining, all were happier in the end for her decision. She herself was softened by it, and she yielded one point in return. Paul had steadily opposed his mother's plan of housekeeping, alone with one maid and a man who slept at the stables. The Dunlops, as it happened, were childless for the winter, young Chauncey attending a “commercial college” in a neighboring town. After many interviews and a good deal of self-importance on Cerissa's part, the pair were persuaded to close the old house and occupy the servants' wing on the Hill, as a distinct family, yet at hand in case of need. It was late autumn before all these arrangements could be made. Paul and Moya, leaving the young scion aged nineteen months in the care of his nurse and his grandmother, went down the river to open the New York house.

XXIV. — INDIAN SUMMER

The upper fields of Stone Ridge, so the farmers said, were infested that autumn by a shy and solitary vagrant, who never could be met with face to face, but numbers of times had been seen across the width of a lot, climbing the bars, or closing a gate, or vanishing up some crooked lane that quickly shut him from view.

“I would look after that old chap if I was you, Chauncey. He'll be smoking in your hay barns, and burn you out some o' these cold nights.”

Chauncey took these neighborly warnings with good-humored indifference. “I haven't seen no signs of his doin' any harm,” he said. “Anybody's at liberty to walk in the fields if there ain't a 'No Trespass' posted. I rather guess he makes his bed among the corn stouks. I see prints of someone's feet, goin' and comin'.”

Mrs. Bogardus was more herself in those days than she had been at any time since the great North-western wilderness sent her its second message of fear. Old memories were losing their sting. She could bear to review her decision with a certain shrinking hardihood. Had the choice been given her to repeat, her action had been the same. In so far as she had perjured herself for the sake of peace in the family, she owned the sacrifice was vain; but her own personality was the true reason for what she had done. She was free in her unimpeachable widowhood—a mother who had never been at heart a wife. She feared no ghosts this keen autumn weather, at the summit of her conscious powers. Her dark eye unsheathed its glance of authority. It was an eye that went everywhere, and everywhere was met with signs that praised its oversight. Here was an out-worn inheritance which one woman, in less than a third of her lifetime, had developed into a competence for her son. He could afford to dream dreams of beneficence with his mother to make them good. Yes, he needed her still. His child was in her keeping; and, though brief the lease, that trust was no accident. It was the surest proof he could have given her of his vital allegiance. In the step which Paul and Moya were taking, she saw the first promise of that wisdom she had despaired of in her son. In the course of years he would understand her. And Christine? She rested bitterly secure in her daughter's inevitable physical need of her. Christine was a born parasite. She had no true pride; she was capable merely of pique which would wear itself out and pass into other forms of selfishness.

This woman had been governed all her life by a habit of decision, and a strong personality rooted in the powers of nature. Therefore she was seldom mistaken in her conclusions when they dealt with material results. Occasionally she left out the spirit; but the spirit leaves out no one.

Her long dark skirts were sweeping the autumn grass at sunset as she paced back and forth under the red-gold tents of the maples. It was a row of young trees she had planted to grace a certain turf walk at the top of the low wall that divided, by a drop of a few feet, the west lawn at Stone Ridge from the meadow where the beautiful Alderneys were pastured. The maples turned purple as the light faded out of their tops and struck flat across the meadow, making the grass vivid as in spring. Two spots of color moved across it slowly—a young woman capped and aproned, urging along a little trotting child. Down the path of their united shadows they came, and the shadows had reached already the dividing wall. The waiting smile was sweet upon the grandmother's features; her face was transformed like the meadow into a memory of spring. The child saw her, and waved to her with something scarlet which he held in his free hand. She admired the stride of his brown legs above their crumpled socks, the imperishable look of health on his broad, sweet glowing face. She lifted him high in her embrace and bore him up the hill, his dusty shoes dangling against her silk front breadths, his knees pressed tight against her waist, and over her shoulder he flourished the scarlet cardinal flower.

“Where have you been with him so long?” she asked the nursemaid.

“Only up in the lane, as far as the three gates, ma'am.”

“Then where did he get this flower?”

“Oh,” said the pretty Irish girl, half scared by her tone, and tempted to prevaricate. “Why—he must have picked it, I guess.”

“Not in the lane. It's a swamp-flower. It doesn't grow anywhere within four miles of the lane!”

“It must have been the old man gev it him then,” said the maid. “Is it unhealthy, ma'am? I tried to get it from him, but he screamed and fussed so.”

“What old man do you mean?”

“Why, him that was passin' up the lane. I didn't see him till he was clean by—and Middy had the flower. I don't know where in the world he could have got it, else, for we wasn't one step out of the lane, was we, Middy! That's the very truth.”

“But where were you when strangers were giving him flowers?”

“Why, sure, ma'am, I was only just a step away be the fence, having a word with one o' the boys. I was lookin' in the field, speakin' to him and he was lookin' at me with me back to the lane. 'There's the old man again,' he says, shiftin' his eye. I turned me round and there, so he was, but he was by and walkin' on up the lane. And Middy had the flower. He wouldn't be parted from it and squeezed it so tight I thought the juice might be bad on his hands, and he promised he'd not put it to his mouth. I kep' my eye on him. Ah, the nasty, na-asty flower! Give it here to Katy till I throw it!”

“There's no harm in the flower. But there is harm in strangers making up to him when your back is turned. Don't you know the dreadful things we read in the papers?”

Mrs. Bogardus said no more. It was Middy's supper-time. But later she questioned Katy particularly concerning this old man who was spoken of quite as if his appearance were taken for granted in the heart of the farm. Katy recalled one other day when she had seen him asleep as she thought in a corner of the fence by the big chestnut tree when she and the boy were nutting. They had moved away to the other side of the tree, but while she was busy hunting for nuts Middy had strayed off a bit and foregathered with the old man, who was not asleep at all, but stood with his back to her pouring a handful of big fat chestnuts into the child's little skirt, which he held up. She called to him and the old man had stepped back, and the nuts were spilled.

Middy had cried and made her pick them up, and when that was done the stranger was gone quite out of sight.

Chauncey, too, was questioned, and testified that the old man of the fields was no myth. But he deprecated all this exaggerated alarm. The stranger was some simple-minded old work-house candidate putting off the evil day. In a few weeks he would have to make for shelter in one of the neighboring towns. Chauncey could not see what legal hold they had upon him even if they could catch him. He hardly came under the vagrancy law, since he had neither begged, nor helped himself appreciably to the means of subsistence.

“That is just the point,” Mrs. Bogardus insisted. “He has the means—from somewhere—to lurk around here and make friends with that child. There may be a gang of kidnappers behind him. He is the harmless looking decoy. I insist that you keep a sharp lookout, Chauncey. There shall be a hold upon him, law or no law, if we catch him on our ground.”

A cold rain set in. Paul and Moya wrote of delays in the house preparations, and hoped the grandmother was not growing tired of her charge. On the last of the rainy days, in a burst of dubious sunshine, came a young girl on horseback to have tea with Mrs. Bogardus. She was one of that lady's discoverers, so she claimed, Miss Sallie Remsen, very pretty and full of fantastic little affectations founded on her intense appreciation of the picturesque. She called Mrs. Bogardus “Madam,” and likened her to various female personages in history more celebrated for strength of purpose than for the Christian virtues. Mrs. Bogardus, in her restful ignorance of such futilities, went no deeper into these allusions than their intention, which she took to be complimentary. Miss Sallie hugged herself with joy when the rain came down in torrents for a clear-up shower. Her groom was sent home with a note to inform her mother that Mrs. Bogardus wished to keep her overnight. All the mothers were flattered when Mrs. Bogardus took notice of their daughters,—even much grander dames than she herself could pretend to be.

They had a charming little dinner by themselves to the tune of the rain outside, and were having their coffee by the drawing-room fire; and Miss Sallie was thinking by what phrase one could do justice to the massive, crass ugliness of that self-satisfied apartment, furnished in the hideous sixties, when the word was sent in that Mrs. Dunlop wished to speak with Mrs. Bogardus. Something of Cerissa's injured importance survived the transmission of the message, causing Mrs. Bogardus to smile to herself as she rose. Cerissa was waiting in the dining-room. She kept her seat as Mrs. Bogardus entered. Her eyes did not rise higher than the lady's dress, which she examined with a fierce intentness of comparison while she opened her errand.

“I thought you'd like to know you've got a strange lodger down to the old house. I don't seem to ever get moved!” she enlarged. “I'm always runnin' down there after first one thing 'n' another we've forgot. This morning 't was my stone batter-pot. Chauncey said he thought it was getting cold enough for buckwheat cakes. I don't suppose you want to have stray tramps in there in the old house, building fires in the loom-room, where, if a spark got loose, it would blaze up them draughty stairs, and the whole house would go in a minute.” Cerissa stopped to gain breath.

“Making fires? Are you sure of that? Has any smoke been seen coming out of that chimney?”

“Why, it's been raining so! And the trees have got so tall! But I could show you the shucks an' shells he's left there. I know how we left it!”

“You had better speak—No; I will see Chauncey in the morning.” Mrs. Bogardus never, if she could avoid it, gave an order through a third person.

“Well, I thought I'd just step in. Chauncey said 't was no use disturbing you to-night, but he's just that way—so easy about everything! I thought you wouldn't want to be harboring tramps this wet weather when most anybody would be tempted to build a fire. I'm more concerned about what goes on down there now we're *out* of the house! I seem to have it on my mind the whole time. A house is just like a child: the more you don't see it the more you worry about it.”

“I'm glad you have such a home feeling about the place,” said Mrs. Bogardus, avoiding the onset of words. “Well, good-evening, Cerissa. Thank you for your trouble. I will see about it in the morning.”

Mrs. Bogardus mentioned what she had just heard to Miss Sallie, who remarked, with her keen sense of antithesis, what a contrast *that* fireside must be to *this*.

“Which fireside?”

“Oh, your lodger upon the cold ground,—making his little bit of a stolen blaze in that cavern of a chimney in the midst of the wet trees! What a nice thing to have an unwatched place like that where a poor bird of passage can creep in and make his nest, and not trouble any one. Think what Jean Valjeans one might shelter”—

“Who?”

“What 'angels unawares.'”

“It will be unawares, my dear,—very much unawares,—when I shelter any angels of that sort.”

“Oh, you wouldn't turn him out, such weather as this?”

“The house is not mine, in the first place,” Mrs. Bogardus explained as to a child. “I can't entertain tramps or even angels on my son's premises, when he's away.”

“Oh, he! He would build the fires himself, and make up their beds,” laughed Miss Sallie. “If he were here, I believe he would start down there now, and stock the place with everything you've got in the house to eat.”

“I hope he'd leave us a little something for breakfast,” said Mrs. Bogardus a trifle coldly. But she did not mention the cause of her uneasiness about this particular visitor. She never defended herself.

Miss Sallie was delighted with her callousness to the sentimental rebuke which had been rather rubbed in. It was so unmodern; one got so weary of fashionable philanthropy, women who talked of their social sympathies and their principles in life. She almost hoped that Mrs. Bogardus had neither. Certainly she never mentioned them.

“What did she say? Did she tell you what I said to her last night?” Cerissa questioned her husband feverishly after his interview with Mrs. Bogardus.

“She didn't mention your name,” Chauncey took some pleasure in stating. “If you hadn't told me yourself, I shouldn't have known you'd meddled in it at all.”

“What's she going to do about it?”

“How crazy you women are! 'Cause some poor old Sooner-die-than-work warms his bones by a bit of fire that wouldn't scare a chimbly swaller out of its nest! Don't you s'pose if there'd been any fire there to speak of, I'd 'a' seen it? What am I here for? Now I've got to drop everything, and git a padlock on that door, and lock it up every night, and search the whole place from top to bottom for fear there's some one in there hidin' in a rathole!”

“Chauncey! If you've got to do that I don't want you to go in there alone. You take one of the men with you; and you better have a pistol or one of the dogs anyhow. Suppose you was to ketch some one in there, and corner him! He might turn on you, and shoot you!”

“I wish you wouldn't work yourself up so about nothin' at all! Want me to make a blame jackass of myself raisin' the whole place about a potato-peel or a bacon-rind!”

“I think you might have some little regard for my feelings,” Cerissa whimpered. “If you ain't afraid, I'm afraid for you; and I don't see anything to be ashamed of either. I wish you *wouldn't* go *alone* searching through that spooky old place. It just puts me beside myself to think of it!”

“Well, well! That's enough about it anyhow. I ain't going to do anything foolish, and you needn't think no more about it.”

Whether it was the effect of his wife's fears, or his promise to her, or the inhospitable nature of his errand founded on suspicion, certainly Chauncey showed no spirit of rashness in conducting his search. He knocked the mud off his boots loudly on the doorsill before proceeding to attach the padlock to the outer door. He searched the loom-room, lighting a candle and peering into all its cobwebbed corners. He examined the rooms lately inhabited, unlocking and locking doors behind him noisily with increasing confidence in the good old house's emptiness. Still, in the fireplace in the loom-room there were signs of furtive cooking which a housekeeper's eye would infallibly detect. He saw that the search must proceed. It was not all a question of his wife's fears, as he opened the stair-door cautiously and tramped slowly up towards the tower bedroom. He could not remember who had gone out last, on the day the old secretary was moved down. There had been four men up there, and—yes, the key was still in the lock outside. He clutched it and it fell rattling on the steps. He swung the door open and stared into the further darkness beyond his range of vision. He waved his candle as far as his arm would reach. “Anybody *in* here?” he shouted. The silence made his flesh prick. “I'm goin' to lock up now. Better show up. It's the last chance.” He waited while one could count ten. “Anybody in here that wants to be let free? Nobody's goin' to hurt ye.”

To his anxious relief there was no reply. But as he listened, he heard the loud, measured tick, tick, of the old clock, appalling in the darkness, on the silence of that empty room. Chauncey could not have told just how he got the door to, nor where he found strength to lock it and drag his feet downstairs, but the hand that held the key was moist with cold perspiration as he reached the open air.

“Well, if that's rain I'd like to know where it comes from!” He looked up at the moon breaking through drifting clouds. The night was keen and clear.

“If I was to tell that to Cerissa she'd never go within a mile o' that house again! Maybe I was mistaken—but I ain't goin' back to see!”

Next morning on calmer reflection he changed his mind about removing the lawn-mower and other hand-tools from the loom-room as he had determined overnight should be done. The place continued to be used as a storeroom, open by day.

At night it was Chauncey's business to lock it up, and he was careful to repeat his search—as far as the stair-door. Never did the silent room above give forth a protest, a sound of human restraint or occupation. He reported to the mistress that all was snug at the old house, and nobody anywhere about the place.

XXV. — THE FELL FROST

After the rain came milder days. The still white mornings slowly brightened into hazy afternoons. The old moon like a sleep walker stood exposed in the morning sky. The roads to Stone Ridge were deep in fallen leaves. Soft-tired wheels rustled up the avenue and horses' feet fell light, as the last of the summer neighbors came to say good-by.

It was a party of four—Miss Sallie and a good-looking youth of the football cult on horseback, her mother and an elder sister, the delicate Miss Remsen, in a hired carriage. Their own traps had been sent to town.

Tea was served promptly, as the visitors had a long road home before their dinner-hour. In the reduced state of the establishment it was Katy who brought the tea while Cerissa looked after her little charge. Cerissa sat on the kitchen porch sewing and expanding under the deep attention of the cook; they could see Middy a little way off on the tennis-court wiping the mud gravely from a truant ball he had found among the nasturtiums. All was as peaceful as the time of day and the season of the year.

“Yes,” said Cerissa solemnly. “Old Abraham Van Elten was too much cumbered up with this world to get quit of it as easy as some. If his spirit is burdened with a message to anybody it's to *her*. He died unreconciled to her, and she inherited all this place in spite of him, as you may say. I've come as near believin' in such things since the goings on up there in that room”—

“She wants Middy fetched in to see the comp'ny,” cried Katy, bursting into the sentence. “Where is he, till I clean him? And she wants some more bread and butter as quick as ye can spread it.”

“Well, Katy!” said Cerissa slowly, with severe emphasis. “When I was a girl, my mother used to tell me it wasn't manners to”—

“I haven't got time to hear about yer mother,” said Katy rudely. “What have ye done with me boy?” The tennis-court lay vacant on the terrace in the sun; the steep lawn sloped away and dipped into the trees.

“Don't call,” said the cook warily. “It'll only scare her. He was there only a minute ago. Run, Katy, and see if he's at the stables.”

It was not noticed, except by Mrs. Bogardus, that no Katy, and no boy, and no bread and butter, had appeared. Possibly the last deficiency had attracted a little playful attention from the young horseback riders, who were accusing each other of eating more than their respective shares.

At length Miss Sallie perceived there was something on her hostess's mind. “Where is John Middleton?” she whispered. “Katy is dressing him all over, from head to foot, isn't she? I hope she isn't curling his hair. John Middleton has such wonderful hair! I refuse to go back to New York till I have introduced you to John Middleton Bogardus,” she announced to the young man, who laughed at everything she said. Mrs. Bogardus smiled vacantly and glanced at the door.

“Let me go find Katy,” cried Miss Sally. Katy entered as she spoke, and said a few words to the mistress. “Excuse me.” Mrs. Bogardus rose hastily. She asked Miss Sallie to take her place at the tea-tray.

“What is it?”

“The boy—they cannot find him. Don't say anything.” She had turned ashy white, and Katy's pretty flushed face had a wild expression.

In five minutes the search had begun. Mrs. Bogardus was at the telephone, calling up the quarry, for she was short of men. One order followed another quickly. Her voice was harsh and deep. She had frankly forgotten her guests. Embarrassed by their own uselessness, yet unable to take leave, they lingered and discussed the mystery of this sudden, acute alarm.

“It is the sore spot,” said Miss Sally sentimentally. “You know her husband was missing for years before she gave him up; and then that dreadful time, three years ago, when they were so frightened about Paul.”

Having spread the alarm, Mrs. Bogardus took the field in person. Her head was bare in the keen, sunset light. She moved with strong, fleet steps, but a look of sudden age stamped her face.

“Go back, all of you!” she said to the women, who crowded on her heels. “There are plenty of places to look.” Her stern eyes resisted their frightened sympathy. She was not ready to yield to the consciousness of her own fears.

To the old house she went, by some sure instinct that told her the road to trouble. But her trouble stood off from her, and spared her for one moment of exquisite relief; as if the child of Paul and Moya had no part in what was waiting for her. The door at the foot of the stairs stood open. She heard a soft, repeated thud. Panting, she climbed the stairs; and as she rounded the shoulder of the chimney, there, on the top step above her, stood the fair-haired child, making the only light in the place. He was knocking, with his foolish ball, on the door of the chamber of fear. Three generations of the living and the dead were brought together in this coil of fate, and the child, in his happy innocence, had joined the knot.

The woman crouching on the stairs could barely whisper, “Middy!” lest if she startled him he might turn and fall. He looked down at her, unsurprised, and paused in his knocking. “Man—in there—won't 'peak to Middy!” he said.

She crept towards him and sat below him, coaxing him into her lap. The strange motions of her breast, as she pressed his head against her, kept the boy quiet, and in that silence she heard an inner sound—the awful pulse of the old clock beating steadily, calling her, demanding the evidence of her senses,—she who feared no ghosts,—beating out the hours of an agony she was there to witness. And she was yet in time. The hapless creature entrapped within that room dragged its weight slowly across the floor. The clock, sole witness and companion of its sufferings, ticked on impartially. Neither is this any new thing, it seemed to say. A life was starved in here before—not for lack of food, but love,—love,—love!

She carried the child out into the air, and he ran before her like a breeze. The women who met them stared at her sick and desperate face. She made herself quickly understood, and as each listener drained her meaning the horror spread. There was but one man left on the place, within call, he with the boyish face and clean brown hands, who had ridden across the fields for an afternoon's idle pleasure. He stepped to her side and took the key out of her hand. “You ought not to do this,” he said gently, as their eyes met.

“Wednesday, Thursday, Friday,” she counted mechanically. “He has been in there six days and seven nights by my orders.” She looked straight before her, seeing no one, as she gave her commands to the women: fire and hot water and stimulants, in the kitchen of the old house at once, and another man, if one could be found to follow her.

The two figures moving across the grass might have stepped out of an illustration in the pages of some current magazine. In their thoughts they had already unlocked the door of that living death and were face to face with the insupportable facts of nature.

The morbid, sickening, prison odor met them at the door—humanity's helpless protest against bolts and bars. Again the young man begged his companion not to enter. She took one deep breath of the pure outside air and stepped before him. They searched the emptiness of the barely furnished room. The clock ticked on to itself. Mrs. Bogardus's companion stood irresolute, not knowing the place. The fetid air confused his senses. But she went past him through the inner door, guided by remembrance of the sounds she had heard.

She had seen it. She approached it cautiously, stooping for a better view, and closing in upon it warily, as one cuts off the retreat of a creature in the last agonies of flight. Her companion heard her say: “Show me your face!—Uncover his face,” she repeated, not moving her eyes as he stepped behind her. “He will not let me near him. Uncover it.”

The thing in the corner had some time been a man. There was still enough manhood left to feel her eyes and to shrink as an earthworm from the spade. He had crawled close to the baseboard of the room. An old man's ashen beard straggled through the brown claws wrapped about the face. As the dust of the threshing floor to the summer grain, so was his likeness to one she remembered.

“I must see that man's face!” she panted. “He will die if I touch him. Take away his hands.” It was done, with set teeth, and the face of the football hero was bathed in sweat. He breathed through tense nostrils, and a sickly whiteness spread backward from his lips. Suddenly he loosed his burden. It fell, doubling in a ghastly heap, and he rushed for the open air.

Mrs. Bogardus groaned. She raised herself up slowly, stretching back her head. Her face was like the terrible tortured mask of the Medusa. She had but a moment in which to recover herself. Deliberately she spoke when her companion returned and stood beside her.

“That was my husband. If he lives I am still his wife. You are not to forget this. It is no secret. Are you able to help me now? Get a blanket from the women. I hear some one coming.”

She waited, with head erect and eyes closed and rigid tortured lips apart, till the feet were heard at the door.

XXVI. — PEACE TO THIS HOUSE

Mrs. Remsen and her delicate daughter had driven away to avoid excitement and the night air.

Chauncey hovered round the piazza steps, talking, with but little encouragement, to Miss Sallie and the young man who had become the centre of all eyes.

“I don't see how anybody on the face of the earth could blame her, nor me either!” Chauncey protested. “If the critter wanted to git out, why couldn't he say so? I stood there holdin' the door open much as five minutes. 'Who's in there?' I says. I called it loud enough to wake the dead. 'Nobody wants to hurt ye,' says I. There want nothing to be afraid of. He hadn't done nothing anyway. It's the strangest case ever I heard tell of. And the doctor don't think he was much crazy either.”

“Can he live?” asked Miss Sallie.

“He's alive now, but doctor don't know how long he'll last. There he comes now. I must go and git his horse.”

The doctor, who seemed nervous,—he was a young local practitioner,—asked to speak with Miss Sallie's hero apart.

“Did Mrs. Bogardus say anything when she first saw that man? Did you notice what she said?—how she took it?”

The hero, who was also a gentleman, looked at the doctor coolly.

“It was not a nice thing,” he said. “I saw just as little as I could.”

“You don't understand me,” said the doctor. “I want to know if Mrs. Bogardus appeared to you to have made any discovery—received any shock not to be accounted for by—by what you both saw?”

“I shouldn't attempt to answer such a question,” said the youngster bluntly. “I never saw Mrs. Bogardus in my life before to-day.”

The doctor colored. “Mrs. Bogardus has given me a telegram to send, and I don't know whether to send it or not. It's going to make a whole lot of talk. I am not much acquainted with Mrs. Bogardus myself, except by hearsay. That's partly what surprises me. It looks a little reckless to send out such a message as that, by the first hand that comes along. Hadn't we better give her time to think it over?” He opened the telegram for the other to read. “The man himself can't speak. But he just pants for breath every time she comes near him: he tries to hide his face. He acts like a criminal afraid of being caught.”

“He didn't look that way to me—what was left of him. Not in the least like a criminal.”

“Well, no; that's a fact, too. Now they've got him laid out clean and neat, he looks as if he might have been a very decent sort of man. But *that*, you know—that's incredible. If she knows him, why doesn't he know her? Why won't he own her? He's afraid of her. His eyes are ready to burst out of his head whenever she comes near him.”

“Did Mrs. Bogardus write that telegram herself?”

“She did.”

“And what did she tell you to do with it?”

“Send it to her son.”

“Then why don't you send it?”

This was the disputed message: “Come. Your father has been found. Bring Doctor Gainsworth.”

In the local man's opinion, the writer of that dispatch was Doctor Gainsworth's true patient. What could induce a woman in Mrs. Bogardus's position to give such hasty publicity to this shocking disclosure, allowing it were true? The more he dwelt on it the less he liked the responsibility he was taking. He discussed it openly; and, with the best intentions, this much-impressed young man gave out his own counter-theory of the case, hoping to forestall whatever mischief might have been done. He put himself in the place of Mr. Paul Bogardus, whom he liked extremely, and tried to imagine that young gentleman's state of mind when he

should look upon this new-found parent, and learn the manner of his resurrection.

This was the explanation he boldly set forth in behalf of those most nearly concerned. [He was getting up his diagnosis for an interesting half hour with the great doctor who had been called in consultation.] The shock of that awful discovery in the locked chamber, he attested, had put Mrs. Bogardus temporarily beside herself. Outwardly composed, her nerves were ripped and torn by the terrible sight that met her eyes. She was the prey of an hallucination founded on memories of former suffering, which had worn a channel for every fresh fear to seek. There was something truly noble and loyal and pathetic in the nature of her possession. It threw a softened light upon her past. How must she have brooded, all these years, for that one thought to have ploughed so deep! It was quite commonly known in the neighborhood that she had come back from the West years ago without her husband, yet with no proof of his death. But who could have believed she would cling for half a lifetime to this forlorn expectancy, depicting her own loss in every sad hulk of humanity cast upon her prosperous shores!

Every one believed she was deceiving herself, but great honor was hers among the neighbors for the plain truth and courage of her astonishing avowal. They had thought her proud, exclusive, hard in the security of wealth. Here she stood by a pauper's bed in the name of simple constancy, stripping herself of all earthly surplusage, exposing her deepest wound, proclaiming the bond—herself its only witness—between her and this speechless wreck, drifting out on the tide of death. She had but to let him go. It was the wild word she had spoken in the name of truth and deathless love that fired the imagination of that slow countryside. It was the touch beyond nature that appeals to the higher sense of a community, and there is no community without a soul.

The straight demands of justice are frequently hard to meet, but its ironies are crushing. Mrs. Bogardus had fallen back on the line of a mother's duty since that moment of personal accountability. She read the unspoken reverence in the eyes of all around her, but she put in no disclaimer. Her past was not her own. She could not sin alone. Only those who have been honest are privileged under all conditions to remain so.

On his arrival with the doctor, Paul endeavored first to see his mother alone. For some reason she would not have it so. She took the unspeakable situation as it came. He was shown into the room where she sat, and by her orders Doctor Gainsworth was with him.

She rose quietly and came to meet them. Placing her hand in her son's arm, and looking towards the bed, she said:—

"Doctor—my husband."

"Madam!" said Doctor Gainsworth. He had been Mrs. Bogardus's family physician for many years.

"My husband," she repeated.

The doctor appeared to accept the statement. As the three approached the bed Mrs. Bogardus leaned heavily upon her son. Paul released his arm and placed it firmly around her. He felt her shudder. "Mother," he said to her with an indescribable accent that tore her heart.

The doctor began his examination. He addressed his patient as "Mr. Bogardus."

"Mistake," said a low, husky voice from the bed. "This ain't the man."

Doctor Gainsworth pursued his investigations. "What is your name?" he asked the patient suddenly.

The hunted eyes turned with ghastly appeal upon the faces around him.

"Paul, speak to him! Own your father," Mrs. Bogardus whispered passionately.

"It is for him to speak now," said Paul. "When he is well, Doctor," he added aloud, "he will know his own name."

"This man will never be well," the doctor answered. "If there is anything to prove, for or against the identity you claim for him, it will have to be done within a very few days."

Doctor Gainsworth rose and held out his hand. He was a man of delicate perceptions. His respect at that moment for Mrs. Bogardus, though founded on blindest conjecture, was an emotion which the mask of his professional manner could barely conceal. "As a friend, Mrs. Bogardus, I hope you will command me—but you need no doctor here."

"As a friend I ask you to believe me," she said. "This man *is* my husband. He came back here because this was his home. I cannot tell you any more, but this we expect you and every one who knows"—

The dissenting voice from the bed closed her assertion with a hoarse "No! Not the man."

"Good-by, Mrs. Bogardus," said the doctor. "Don't trouble to explain. You and I have lived too long and seen too much of life not to recognize its fatalities: the mysterious trend in the actions of men and women that cannot be comprised in—in the locking of a door."

"It is of little consequence—what was done, compared to what was not done." This was all the room for truth she could give herself to turn in. The doctor did not try to understand her: yet she had snatched a little comfort from merely uttering the words.

Paul and the doctor dined together, Mrs. Bogardus excusing herself.

"There seems to be an impression here," said the doctor, examining the initials on his fish-fork, "that your mother is indulging an overstrained fancy in this melancholy resemblance she has traced. It does not appear to have made much headway as a fact, which rather surprises me in a country neighborhood. Possibly your doctor here, who seems a very good fellow, has wished to spare the family any unnecessary explanations. If you'll let me advise you, Paul, I would leave it as it is,—open to conjecture. But, in whatever shape this impression may reach you from outside, I hope you won't let it disturb you in the least, so far as it describes your mother's condition. She is one of the few well-balanced women I have had the honor to know."

Paul did not take advantage of the doctor's period. He went on.

"Not that I do know her. Possibly you may not yourself feel that you altogether understand your mother? She has had many demands upon her powers of adaptation. I should imagine her not one who would adapt herself easily, yet, once she had recognized a necessity of that sort, I believe she would fit herself to its

conditions with an exacting thoroughness which in time would become almost, one might say, a second, an external self. The 'lendings' we must all of us wear."

"There will be no explanations," said Paul, not coldly, but helplessly.

"Much the best way," said the doctor relieved, and glad to be done with a difficult undertaking. "If we are ever understood in this world, it is not through our own explanations, but in spite of them. My daughters hope to see a good deal of your charming wife this winter. I hear great pleasure expressed at your coming back to town."

"Thank you, Doctor. She will be up this evening. We shall stay here with my mother for a time. It will be her desire to carry out this—recognition—to the end. We must honor her wishes in the matter."

The talk then fell upon the patient's condition. The doctor left certain directions and took shelter in professional platitudes, but his eyes rested with candid kindness upon the young man, and his farewell hand-clasp was a second prolonged.

He went away in a state of simple wonderment, deeply marveling at Paul's serenity.

"Extraordinary poise! Where does it come from? No: the boy is happy! He hides it; but it is the one change in him. He has experienced a great relief. Is it possible"—

On his way down the river the doctor continued to muse upon the dignity, the amazingly beautiful behavior of this rising family in whose somewhat commonplace city fortunes he had taken a friendly interest for years. He owned that he had sounded them with too short a line.

Watching with the dying man hours when she was with him alone, Emily Bogardus continued to test his resolution. He never retracted by a look—faithful to the word she had spoken which made them strangers.

It was the slightest shell of mortality that ever detained a soul on earth. The face, small like the face of an old, old child, waxed finer and more spiritual, yet ever more startlingly did it bear the stamp of that individuality which the spirit had held so cheap—the earthly so impenetrated with the spiritual part that the face had become a sublimation. As one sees a sheet of paper covered with writing wither in flame and become a quivering ash, yet to the last attenuation of its fibre the human characters will stand forth, till all is blown up chimney to the stars.

Still, peaceful, implacable in its peace, settling down for the silence of eternity. Still no sign.

The younger ones came and went. The little boy stole in alone and pushed against his grandmother's knee,—she seated always by the bed,—gazed, puzzled, at the strange, still face, and whispered obediently, "Gran'faver." There was no response. Once she took the boy and drew him close and placed his little tender hand within the dry, crumpled husk extended on the bedclothes. The eyes unclosed and rested long and earnestly on the face of the child, who yawned as if hypnotized and flung his head back on the grandmother's breast. She bent suddenly and laid her own hand where the child's had been. The eyes turned inward and shut again, but a sigh, so deep it seemed that another breath might never come, was all her answer.

Past midnight of the fourth night's watch Paul was awakened by a light in his room. His mother stood beside him, white and worn. "He is going," she said. It was the final rally of the body's resistance. A few moments' expenditure, and that stubborn vitality would loose its hold.—The strength of the soil!

The wife stood aside and gave up her place to the children. Her expression was noble, like a queen rebuked before her people. There was comfort in that, too. A great, solemn, mutual understanding drew this death-bed group together. Within the sickle's compass so they stood: the woman God gave this man to found a home; the son who inherited his father's gentleness and purity of purpose; the fair flower of the generations that father's sacrifice had helped him win; the bud of promise on the topmost bough. Those astonished eyes shed their last earthly light on this human group, turned and rested in the eyes of the woman, faded, and the light went out. He died, blessing her in one whispered word. Her name.

Before daybreak on the morning of the funeral, Paul awoke under pressure of disturbing dreams. There were sounds of hushed movements in the house. He traced them to the door of the room below stairs where his father lay. Some one had softly unlocked that door, and entered. He knew who that one must be. His place was there alone with his mother, before they were called together as a family, and the mask of decency resumed for those ironic rites in the presence of the unaccusing dead.

The windows had been lowered behind closed curtains, and the air of the death chamber, as he entered, was like the touch of chilled iron to the warm pulse of sleep. Without, a still dark night of November had frosted the dead grass.

The unappeasable curiosity of the living concerning the Great Transition, for the moment appeared to have swept all that was personal out of the watcher's gaze, as she bent above the straightened body. And something of the peace there dawning on the cold, still face was reflected in her own.

"You have never seen your father before. There he is." She drew a deep sigh, as if she had been too intent to breathe naturally. All her self-consciousness suddenly was gone. And Paul remembered his dream, that had goaded him out of sleep, and vanished with the shock of waking. It gave him the key to this long-expected moment of confidence.

"The old likeness has come back," his mother repeated, with that new quietness which restored her to herself.

"I dreamed of that likeness," said Paul, "only it was much stronger—startling—so that the room was full of whispers and exclamations as the neighbors—there were hundreds of them—filed past. And you stood there, mother, flushed, and talking to each person who passed and looked at him and then at you; you said—you"—

Mrs. Bogardus raised her head. "I know! I have been thinking all night. Am I to do that? Is that what you

wish me to do? Don't hesitate—to spare me."

"Mother! I could not imagine you doing such a thing. It was like insanity. I wanted to tell you how horrible, how unseemly it was, because I was sure you had been dwelling on some form—some outward"—

"No," she said. "I know how I should face this if it were left to me. But you are my only earthly judge, my son. Judge now between us two. Ask of me anything you think is due to him. As to outsiders, what do they matter! I will do anything you say."

"*I* say! Oh, mother! Every hand he loved was against him—bruising his gentle will. Each one of us has cast a stone upon his grave. But you took the brunt of it. You spoke out plain the denial that was in my coward's heart from the first. And I judged you! I—who uncovered my father's soul to ease my own conscience, and put him to shame and torture, and you to a trial worse than death. Now let us think of the whole of his life. I have much to tell you. You could not listen before; but now he is listening. I speak for him. This is how he loved us!"

In hard, brief words Paul told the story of his father's sin and self-judgment; his abdication in the flesh; what he esteemed the rights to be of a woman placed as he had placed his wife; how carefully he had guarded her in those rights, and perjured himself at the last to leave her free in peace and honor with her children. She listened, not weeping, but with her great eyes shining in her pallid face.

"All that came after," said Paul, taking her cold hands in his—"after his last solemn recantation does not touch the true spirit of his sacrifice. It was finished. My father died to us then as he meant to die. The body remained—to serve out its time, as he said. But his brain was tired. I do not think he connected the past very clearly with the present. I think you should forget what has happened here. It was a hideous net of circumstance that did it."

"There is no such thing as circumstance," said Mrs. Bogardus with loftiness. Her face was calm and sweet in its exaltation. "I cannot say things as you can, but this is what I mean. I was the wife of his body—sworn flesh of his flesh. In the flesh that made us one I denied him, and caused his death. And if I could believe as I used to about punishment, I would lock myself in that room, and for every hour he suffered there, I would suffer two. And no one should prevent me, or hasten the end. And the feet of the young men that carried out my husband who lied to save me, should wait there for me who lied to save myself. All lies are death. But what is a made-up punishment to me! I shall take it as it comes—drop by drop—slowly."

"Mother—my mother! The fashion of this world does not last; but one thing does. Is it nothing to you, mother?"

"Have I my son—after all?" she said as one dreaming.

The night lamp expired in smoke that tainted the cold air. Paul drew back the curtains one by one, and let in the new-born day.

"'Peace to this house,'" he said; "'not as the world giveth,'" his thought concluded.

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