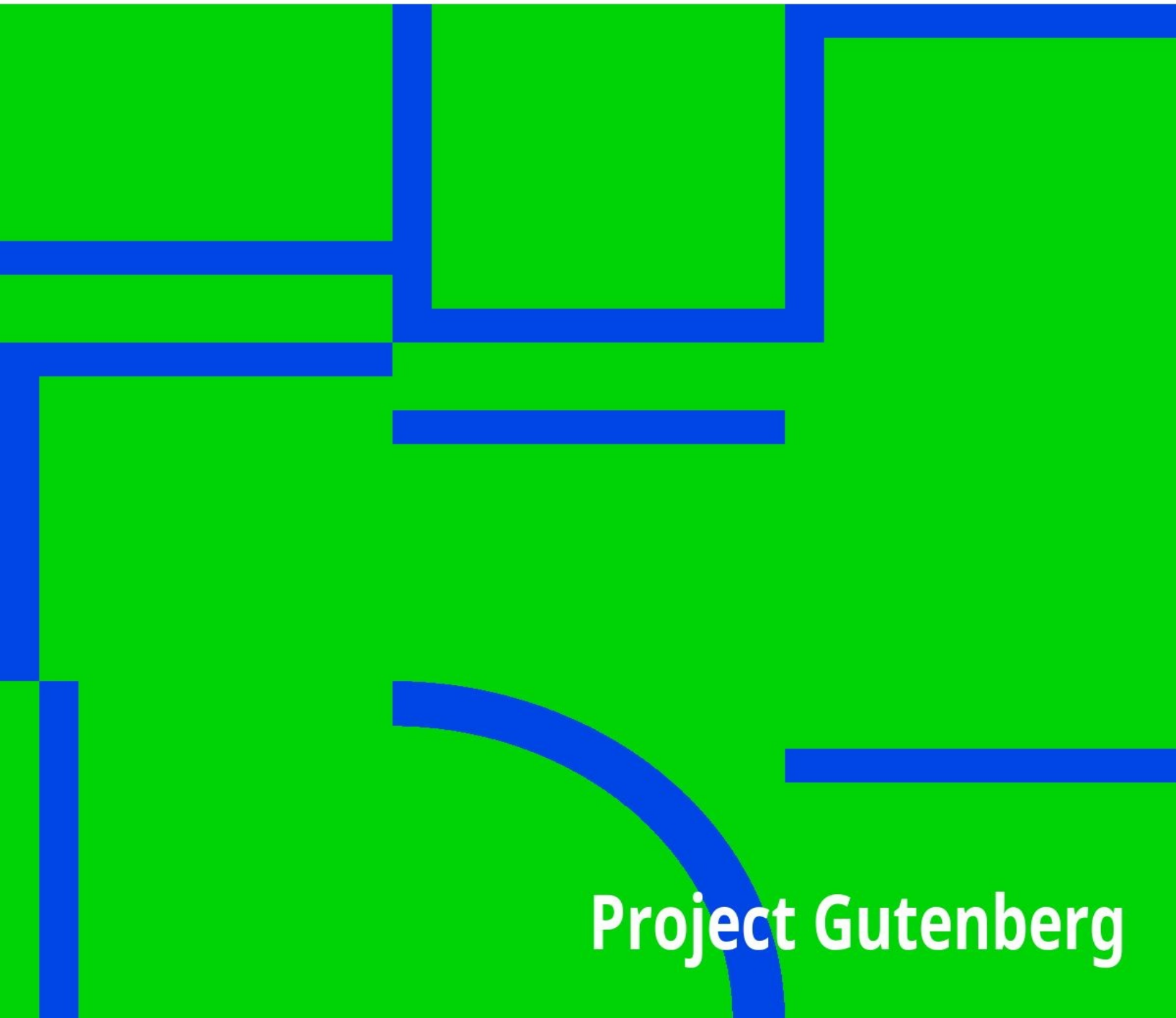
Flood Tide

Sara Ware Bassett



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"Delight's kinder bowled over by surprise, Tiny," Willie explained gently.

[Frontispiece: "Delight's kinder bowled over by surprise, Tiny," Willie explained gently.]

FLOOD TIDE

BY SARA WARE BASSETT

AUTHOR OF
"*The Harbor Road*," "*The Wall Between*,"
"*Taming of Zenas Henry*," etc.

WITH FRONTISPIECE BY
M. L. GREER

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CONTENTS

CHAPTER

I. THE WEAVER AND HIS FANCIES
II. WILLIE HAS AN IDEE
III. A NEW ARRIVAL
IV. THE GREEN-EYED MONSTER ENTERS
V. AN APPARITION
VI. MARRYING AND GIVING IN MARRIAGE
VII. A SECOND SPIRIT APPEARS
VIII. SHADOWS
IX. A WIDENING OF THE BREACH
X. A CONSPIRACY
XI. THE GALBRAITH HOUSEHOLD
XII. ROBERT MORTON MAKES A RESOLVE
XIII. A NEWCOMER ENTERS
XIV. THE SPENCES ENTER SOCIETY
XV. A REVELATION
XVI. ANOTHER BLOW DESCENDS
XVII. A GRIM HAND INTERVENES
XVIII. THE PROGRESS OF ANOTHER ROMANCE
XIX. WILLIE AS PILOT
XX. ONE MORE OF WILLIE'S SHIPS REACHES PORT
XXI. SURPRISES
XXII. DELIGHT MAKES HER DECISION
XXIII. FAME COMES TO THE DREAMER OF DREAMS

FLOOD TIDE

CHAPTER I

THE WEAVER AND HIS FANCIES

Willie Spence was a trial. Not that his personality rasped society at large. On the contrary his neighbors cherished toward the little old man, with his short-sighted blue eyes and his appealing smile, an affection peculiarly tender; and if they sometimes were wont to observe that although Willie possessed some common sense he was blessed with uncommon little of it, the observation was facetiously uttered and was offered with no malicious intent.

In fact had one scoured Wilton from end to end it would have been difficult to unearth a single individual who bore enmity toward the owner of the silver-gray cottage on the Harbor Road. It was impossible to talk ten seconds with Willie Spence and not be won by his kindliness, his optimism, his sympathy, and his honesty. Willie probably could not have dissembled had he tried, and fortunately his life was of so simple and transparent a trend that little lay hidden beneath its crystalline exterior. What he was he was. When baffled by phenomena he would scratch his thin locks and with a smile of endearing candor frankly admit, "I dunno." When, on the other hand, he knew himself to be master of a debated fact, no power under heaven could shake the tenacity with which he clung to his beliefs. There was never any compromise with truth on Willie's part. A thing was so or it was not.

This reputation for veracity, linked as it was with an ingenuous good will toward all mankind, had earned for Willie Spence such universal esteem and tenderness that whenever the stooping figure with its ruddy cheeks, soft white hair, and gentle smile made its appearance on the sandy roads of the hamlet, it was hailed on all sides with the loving and indulgent greetings of the inhabitants of the village.

Even Celestina Morton, who kept house for him and who might well have

lost patience at his defiance of domestic routine, worshipped the very soil his foot touched. There was, of course, no denying that Willie's disregard for the meal hour had become what she termed "chronical" and severely taxed her forbearance; or that since she was a creature of human limitations she did at times protest when the chowder stood forgotten in the tureen until it was of Arctic temperature; nor had she ever acquired the grace of spirit to amiably view freshly baked popovers shrivel neglected into nothingness. Try as she would to curb her tongue, under such circumstances, she occasionally would burst out:

"I do wish, Willie Spence, you'd quit your dreamin' an' come to dinner."

For answer Willie would rise hastily and stand arrested, a bit of string in one hand and the hammer in the other, and peering reproachfully over the top of his steel-bowed spectacles would reply:

"Law, Tiny! You wouldn't begretch me my dreams, would you? They're about all I've got. If it warn't fur the things I dream I wouldn't have nothin'."

The wistfulness in the sensitive face would instantly transform Celestina's irritation into sympathy and cause her to respond:

"Nonsense, Willie! What are you talkin' about? Ain't you got more friends than anybody in this town? Nobody's poor so long as he has good friends."

"Oh, 'taint bein' poor I mind," laughed Willie, now quite himself again. "It's knowin' nothin' an' bein' nothin' that discourages me. If I'd only had the chance to learn somethin' when I was a youngster I wouldn't have to be goin' it blind now like I do. There's times, Celestina," added the man solemnly, "when I really believe I've got stuff inside me that's worth while if only I knew what to do with it."

"Pshaw! Ain't you usin' what's inside you all the time to help the folks of this town out of their troubles? I'd like to know how they'd get along if it warn't fur you. Ain't you doctorin' an' fixin' up things for the whole of Cape Cod from one end to the other, day in and day out? I call that amountin' to somethin' in the world if you don't."

Willie paused thoughtfully.

"I do do quite a batch of tinkerin', that's true," admitted he, brightening, "an'

I'm right down glad to do it, too. Don't think I ain't. Still, I can't help knowin' there's better ways to go at it than blunderin' along as I have to, an' sometimes I can't help wishin' I knew what the right way is. There must be folks that know how to do in half the time what I do by makeshift an' fussin'. Sometimes it seems a pity there never was anybody to steer me into findin' out the kind of things I've always wanted to know."

Celestina began to rock nervously.

Being of New England fiber, and classing as morbid all forms of introspection, she always so dreaded to have the conversation drift into a reflective channel that whenever she found Willie indulging in reveries she was wont to rout him out of them, tartly reproaching herself for having even indirectly been the cause of stirrin' him up.

"Next time I'll set the chowder back on the stove an' say nothin'," she would vow inwardly. "I'd much better have waited 'til his dream was over an' done with. S'pose I am put out a bit—'twon't hurt me. If I don't care enough for Willie to do somethin' for him once in a while, good as he's always been to me, I'd oughter be ashamed of myself."

Hence it is easily seen that neither to Wilton in general nor to Celestina in particular was Willie Spence a trial.

No, it was to himself that Willie was the torment. "I plague myself 'most to death, Tiny," he would not infrequently confess when the two sat together at dusk in the little room that looked out on the reach of blue sea. "It's gettin' all these idees that drives me distracted. 'Tain't that I go huntin' 'em; they come to me, hittin' me broadside like as if they'd been shot out of a gun. There's times," ambled on the quiet voice, "when they'll wake me out of a sound sleep an' give me no peace 'til I've got up and 'tended to 'em. That notion of hitchin' a string to the slide in the stove door so'st you could open the draught without stirrin' out of your chair—that took me in the night. There warn't no waitin' 'til mornin'! Long ago I learned that. Once the idee has a-holt of me there's nothin' to do but haul myself out of bed, even if it's midnight an' colder'n the devil, an' try out that notion."

"The plan was a good one; it's saved lots of steps," put in Celestina.

"It had to be done, Tiny," Willie answered simply. "That's all there was to it.

Good or bad, I had to carry it to a finish if I didn't sleep another wink that night."

The assertion was true; Celestina could vouch for that. After ten years of residence in the gray cottage she had become too completely inured to hearing the muffled sound of saw and hammer during the wee small hours of the night to question the verity of the statement. Therefore she was quite ready to agree that there was no peace for Willie, or herself either, until the particular burst of genius that assailed him had been transformed from a mirage of the imagination to the more tangible form of tacks and strings.

For strings played a very vital part in Willie Spence's inspirational world. Indeed, when Celestina had first come to the weathered cottage on the bluff to keep house for the lonely little bachelor and had discovered that cottage to be one gigantic spider's web, her initial impression was that strings played far too important a part in the household. What a labyrinthine entanglement the dwelling was! Had a mammoth silkworm woven his airy filaments within its interior, the effect could scarcely have been more grotesque.

Strings stretched from the back door, across the kitchen and through the hallway, and disappeared up the stairs into Willie's bedroom, where one pull of a cord lifted the iron latch to admit Oliver Goldsmith, the Maltese cat, whenever he rattled for entrance. There was a string that hoisted and lowered the coal hod from the cellar through a square hole in the kitchen floor, thereby saving one the fatigue of tugging it up the stairs.

"A coal hod is such an infernal tote to tote!" Willie would explain to his listeners.

Then there was a string which in like manner swung the wood box into place. Other strings opened and closed the kitchen windows, unfastened the front gate, rang a bell in Celestina's room, and whisked Willie's slippers forth from their hiding place beneath the stairs; not to mention myriad red, blue, green, yellow, and purple strings that had their goals in the ice chest, the pump, the letter box, and the storm door, and in connection with which objects they silently performed mystic benefactions.

Probably, however, the most significant string of all was that of stout twine that reached from Willie's shop to the home of Janoah Eldridge, two fields beyond, just at the junction of the Belleport and Harbor roads. This string not

only linked the two cottages but sustained upon its taut line a small wooden box that could be pulled back and forth at will and convey from one abode to the other not only written communications but also such diminutive articles as pipes, tobacco, spectacles, balls of string, boxes of tacks, and even tools of moderate weight. By means of this primitive special delivery service Jan Eldridge could be summoned posthaste whenever an especially luminous inspiration flashed upon Willie's intellect and could assist in helping to make the dream a reality.

For it was always through Willie's plastic imagination that these creative visions flitted. In all his seventy years Jan had been beset by only one outburst of genius and that had pertained to whisking an extra blanket over himself when he was cold at night. How much pleasanter to lie placidly between the sheets and have the blanket miraculously appear without the chill and discomfort of arising to fetch it, he argued! But alas! the magic spell had failed to work. Instead the strings had wrenched the corners from the age-worn covering, thereby arousing Mrs. Eldridge's ire. Moreover, although Jan had not confessed it at the time, the blanket while in process of locomotion had for some unfathomable reason dragged in its wake all the other bedclothes, freeing them from their moorings and submerging his head in a smothering weight of disorganized sheets and counterpanes only to leave his poor shivering body a prey to the unfriendly elements. An attack of lumbago that rendered him helpless from January until March followed and had decided Jan that inventors were born, not made. Thereafter he had been content to abandon the realm of research to his comrade and allow Willie to furnish the inspiration for further creative ventures. Nevertheless his retirement from the spheres of discovery did not prevent him from zealously assisting in the mechanical details that rendered Willie's schemes material. Jan not only possessed a far more practical type of mind than did his friend but he was also a more skilful workman and therefore in the carrying out of any plan his aid was indispensable. He was, moreover, content to be the lesser power, looking up to Willie's ability with admiration and asserting with unfeigned sincerity to every one he met that Willie Spence had not only been born with the *injun* but he had the *newity* to go with it.

"Why," Jan would often declare with spirit, "in my opinion Willie has every whit as much call to write X, Y, Z, an' all them other letters after his name as any of those fellers that graduate from colleges! He's a wonder, Willie Spence is—a walkin' wonder! Some day he's goin' to make his mark, too, an' cause the folks in this town to set up an' take notice. See if he don't."

Willie's neighbors had long since tired of waiting for the glorious moment of his fame to arrive; and although they had too genuine a regard for the little old inventor to state publicly what they really thought of the strings, the nails, the spools, the wires, and the pulleys, in private they did not hesitate to denounce derisively the scientist's contrivances and assert that some fine day the house on the bluff would come to dire disaster.

"Somebody's goin' to get hung or strangled on one of them contraptions Willie's rigged up," Captain Phineas Taylor prophesied impressively to Zenas Henry as the two men sat smoking in the lee of the wood pile. "You watch out an' see if they don't."

Indeed there was no denying that Celestina was continually catching hairpins, hooks, and buttons in the strings; or that some such dilemma as had been predicted had actually occurred, for one day while alone in the house a pin fastening the back of her print gown had become inextricably entangled in the maze amid which she moved, and fearing Willie's wrath if she should sunder her fetters she had been forced to stand captive and helplessly witness a newly made sponge cake burn to a crisp in the oven. She had hoped the ignominious episode would not reach the outside world; but as Wilton was possessed of a miraculous power for finding out things the story filtered through the community, affording the village a laugh and the opportunity to affirm with ominous shakings of the head that it was only because the Lord looked out for fools and little children that a worse evil had not long ago befallen the Spence household.

Willie accepted the banter in good part. Born with a forgiving, noncombative disposition he seldom took offence and although Janoah Eldridge, who knew him better perhaps than anyone else on earth did, acclaimed that this tranquil exterior concealed, as did Tim Linkinwater's, unsuspected depths of ferocity, Wilton had yet to encounter its lionlike fury. Instead the mild little inventor, with his spools and his pulleys, his bits of wire and his measureless reaches of string, pursued his peaceful though tortuous way, and if his abode became transformed into a magnified cobweb only himself and Celestina were inconvenienced thereby.

To Celestina inconvenience was second nature since from the moment of her birth it had been her lot in life. Arriving in the world prematurely she had found nothing prepared for her coming and had been forced to put up with such makeshifts for comfort as could be hurriedly scrambled together. From that day

until the present instant the same fate had shadowed her path; perhaps it was in her stars. Her parents had been of dilatory habits and by the time a crib with the necessary pillows and bedding had been secured, and she had drawn a few peaceful breaths therein a new baby had arrived and she had been ousted from her resting place and compelled to surrender it to the more recent comer. Ever since she had been shunted from pillar to post, sleeping on cots, on couches, in folding beds and in hammocks, and keeping her meager possessions in paste-board boxes tucked away beneath tables and bureaus. Poised on the ragged edge of domesticity she continued throughout her girlhood to look forward with hope to an eventual state of permanence. When she was eighteen, however, her mother died and in the task of bringing up six brothers and sisters younger than herself all considerations for her personal ease were forgotten. Ten years passed and her father was no more; than gradually, one after another, the family she had so patiently reared took wing, leaving Celestina a lonely spinster of fifty, homeless and practically penniless.

This cruel lack of responsibility on the part of her relatives resulted less from a want of affection than from a supreme misunderstanding of their older sister. So completely had Celestina learned to efface her personality and her inclinations that they reasoned she was utterly without preferences; that she lacked the homing instinct; and was quite as happy in one place as in another. Having thus washed their hands of her they proceeded to sell the Morton homestead and each one pocket his share of the proceeds. Very scanty this inheritance was, so scanty that it compelled Celestina to begin a rotation around the village, where in return for shelter she filled in domestic gaps of various kinds. She helped here, she helped there; she took care of babies, nursed the sick, comforted the aged. On she moved from house to house, no enduring foundation ever remaining beneath her feet. No sooner would she strike her roots down into a congenial soil than she would be forced to pluck them up again and find new earth to which to cling.

She might have married a dozen times during her youth had not her conscience deterred her from deserting her father and the children left to her care. In fact one persistent swain who refused to take "No" for an answer had begged Celestina to wait and pray over the matter.

"I never trouble the Lord with things I can settle myself," replied she firmly. "I can't go marryin' an' that's all there is to it."

Other offers had been declined with the same characteristic firmness until now the golden season of mating-time was past, and although she was still a pretty little woman the stamp of spinsterhood was unalterably fixed upon her.

Wilton, in the meantime, had long ago lost sight of the uncomplaining self-sacrifice it had previously lauded and explained Celestina Morton's unwedded state by declaring that she was too "easy goin'" to make anybody a good wife. This criticism came, perhaps, more loudly from the female faction of the town than from the male. However that may be, the stigma, merited or unmerited, had become so firmly branded upon Celestina that it could not be effaced. She may to some extent have brought it upon herself, for certain it was that she never kicked against the pricks or tried to shape her circumstances more in accordance with her liking. Undoubtedly had she accepted her lot less meekly she might have commanded a greater measure of attention and sympathy; still, if she had not been of a more or less plastic nature and surrendered herself patiently to her destiny it is a question whether she would have survived at all.

It was this mutability, this power to detach herself from her environment and view it with the stoical indifference of a spectator that caused Wilton with its harsh New England standards, to characterize Celestina as "easy goin'." In fact, this popularly termed "flaw" in her make-up was what had acted as an open sesame to every door at which she knocked and had kept a roof above her head. She had been just sixty years of age when Willie Spence's sister had died and left him alone in the wee cottage on the Harbor Road, and all Wilton had begun to speculate as to what was to become of him. Willie was as dependent as an infant; the village gossips who knew everything knew that. From childhood he had been looked after,—first by his mother, then by his aunt, and lastly by his sister; and when death had removed in succession all three of these props, leaving the little old man at last face to face with life, his startled blue eyes had grown large with terror. What was to become of him now? Not only did Willie himself helplessly raise the interrogation but so did all Wilton.

Of course he could go and board with the Eldridges but that would mean renting or selling the silver-gray cottage where he had dwelt since birth and would be a tragic severing of all ties with the past; moreover, and a fact more potent than all the rest, it would mean dismantling the house of the web that for years he had spun, the symbols of dreams that had been his chief delight. Should he go to the Eldridges there could be no more inventing, for Jan's wife was a hard, practical woman who had scant sympathy with Willie's "idees."

Nevertheless one redeeming consideration must not be lost sight of—she was a famous cook, a very famous cook; and poor Willie, although he cared little what he ate, was incapable of concocting any food at all. But the strings, the strings! No, to go to live with Jan and Mrs. Eldridge was not to be thought of.

It was just at this psychological juncture, when Willie was choosing 'twixt flesh and spirit, that he saw Celestina Morton standing like a vision in the sunshine that spangled his doorway. She said she knew how lonely he must be and therefore she had come to make a friendly call and tidy up the house or mend for him anything that needed mending. With this simple introduction she had taken off her hat and coat, donned an ample blue-and-white pinafore, and set to work. Fascinated Willie watched her deft movements. Now and then she smiled at him but she did not speak and neither did he; nor, he noticed, did she disturb his strings or comment on their inconvenience. When twilight came and the hour for her departure drew near Willie stationed himself before the peg from which dangled her shabby wraps and stubbornly refused to have her hat and cloak removed from the nail. There, figuratively speaking, they had hung ever since, the inventor reasoning that life without this paragon of capability was a wretched and profitless adventure.

In justifying his sudden decision to Janoah Eldridge, Willie had merely explained that he had hired Celestina because she was so comfortable to have around, a recommendation at which Wilton would have jeered but which, perhaps, in the eyes of the Lord was quite as praiseworthy as that which her more hidebound but less accommodating sisters could have boasted. For disorder and confusion never kept Celestina awake nights or prevented her from partaking of three hearty meals a day as it would have Abbie Brewster or Deborah Howland. So long as things were clean, their being an inch or two, or even a foot, out of plumb did not worry the new inmate of the gray house an iota. And when Willie was balked in an "idee" that had "kitched him," and left half-a-dozen strings and wires swinging in mid-air for weeks together, Celestina would patiently duck her head as she passed beneath them and offer no protest more emphatic than to remark:

"Them strings hangin' down over the sink snare me every time I wash a dish. Ain't you calculatin' ever to take 'em down, Willie?"

The reply vouchsafed would be as mild as the suggestion:

"I reckon they ain't there for eternity, Tiny," the inventor would respond. "Like as not both you an' me will live to see 'em out of the way."

That was all the satisfaction Celestina would get from her feeble complaints; it was all she ever got. Yet in spite of the exasperating response she adored Willie who had been to her the soul of kindliness and courtesy ever since she had come to the bluff to live. He might forget to come to his meals,—forget, in fact, whether he had eaten them or not; he might venture forth into the village with one gray sock and one blue one; or when part way to the post-office become lost in reverie and return home again without ever reaching his destination. Such incidents had happened and were likely to happen again. Nevertheless, notwithstanding his absentmindedness, he was never too much absorbed to maintain toward Celestina an old-fashioned deference very appealing to one accustomed to being ignored and slighted.

The impulse, it was quite obvious, was prompted less by conventionality than by a knightliness of heart, and Celestina, who had never before been the recipient of such courtesies, found herself inexpressibly touched by the trifling attentions. Often she speculated as to whether this mental attitude toward all womanhood was one Willie himself had evolved or whether it was the result of standards instilled into his sensitive consciousness by the women who had been his companions through life,—his mother, his aunt, his sister. Whichever the case there was no question that the old man's bearing toward her placed her on a pinnacle where gossip was silenced, and transformed her humble ministrations from those of a hireling into acts of graciousness and beauty.

Moreover to live in the same house with such an optimist was no ordinary experience. Well Celestina remembered the day when at dinner the little old man had choked violently, turning purple in the face in his fight for breath. She had rushed to his side, terror-stricken, but between his spasms of coughing the inventor had gasped out:

"Why make so much fuss over what's gone down the wrong way, Tiny? Think—of—the—things—I've—swallered—all—these—years—that have—gone down—right!"

The observation was characteristic of Willie's creed of life. He never emphasized the exceptions but always the big, fine, elemental good in everything.

Even the name by which he went had been bestowed on him by the community as a term of endearment. There were, to be sure, other men in the hamlet whose names had passed into diminutives. There was, for example, Seth Crocker, whose wife explained that she called him Sethie "for short." But Sethie's name was never pronounced with the same affectionate drawl that Willie's was.

No, Willie had his peculiar niche in Wilton and a very sacred niche it was.

What marvel, therefore, that Celestina reverenced the very earth which he trod and cheerfully put up with the strings, the wires, the spools, the tacks, and the pulleys; that she shifted the meals about to suit his convenience; and that when she was awakened at midnight by a rhythmic hammering which portended that the inventor had once again "got kitched with a new idee" she smiled indulgently in the darkness and instead of cursing the echoes that disturbed her slumber whispered to herself Jan Eldridge's oft-repeated prediction that the day would come when Willie Spence would astonish the scoffers of Wilton and would make his mark.

CHAPTER II

WILLIE HAS AN IDEE

On a day in June so clear that a sea gull loomed mammoth against the sky; a day when a sail against the horizon was visible for miles; a day when the whole world seemed swept and garnished as for a festival, Zenas Henry Brewster drew rein before the Spence cottage, hitched the Admiral to the picket fence that bordered the highway, and ascending the bank which sloped abruptly to the road presented himself at the kitchen door from which issued the aroma of baking bread.

"Mornin', Tiny," called the visitor, poking his head across the threshold. "Willie anywheres about?"

Celestina, who was washing the breakfast dishes, glanced up at the lank

figure with a start.

"Law, Zenas Henry, what a turn you gave me!" she exclaimed. "I never heard a footfall. Yes, Willie's outside somewheres. He and Jan Eldridge have been tinkerin' with the pump since early mornin'. They've had it apart a hundred times, I guess, an' like as not they're round there now pullin' it to pieces for the hundred-an'-oneth."

Zenas Henry grinned.

"That's a queer to-do," he remarked. "What's got all the pumps? Bewitched, I reckon. Ours ain't workin' fur a cent either, an' I drove round thinkin' I'd fetch Willie home with me to have a look at it. He's got a knack with such things an' I calculate he'd know what's the matter with it. Darned if I do."

The man began to move away across the grass.

Celestina, however, who was in the mood for gossip, had no mind to let him escape so easily.

"How's your folks?" questioned she, dropping her dishcloth into the pan and following him to the door.

"Oh, we're all right," returned Zenas Henry with a backward glance. "Captain Benjamin's shoulder pesters him some about layin', but I tell him he can't expect rain an' fog not to bring rheumatism."

"That's so," agreed Celestina. "What a spell of weather we've had! I guess it's about over now, though. I'm sorry Benjamin's shoulders should hector him so. We're gettin' old, Zenas Henry, that's the plain truth of it, an' must cheerfully take our share of aches an' pains, I s'pose. Are Captain Phineas an' Captain Jonas well?"

"Oh, they're nimble as crabs."

"An' Abbie?"

"Fine as a clipper in a breeze!" responded the man with enthusiasm. "Best wife that ever was! The sun rises an' sets in that woman, Celestina. What she can't do ain't worth doin'! Turns off work like as if it was of no account an' grows

better lookin' every day a-doin' it."

Celestina laughed.

"I reckon you didn't make no mistake gettin' married, Zenas Henry," mused she.

"Mistake!" repeated Zenas Henry.

"An' no mistake takin' in the child, either," went on Celestina, unheeding the interruption.

She saw his face soften and a glow of tenderness overspread it.

"Delight was sent us out of heaven," he declared with solemnity. "'Twas as much intended that ship should come ashore here an' the three captains an' myself bring that little girl to land as that the sun should rise in the mornin'. The child was meant fur us—fur us an' fur nobody else on earth. Was she our own daughter we couldn't be fonder of her than we are. It's ten years now since the wreck of the *Michleen*. Think of it! How time flies! Ten years—an' the girl's most twenty. I can't realize it. Why, it seems only yesterday she was clingin' to my neck an' I was bringin' her home."

"She's grown to be a regular beauty," Celestina observed.

"I s'pose she has; folks seem to think so," replied Zenas Henry. "But it wouldn't make an ounce of difference to me how she looked; I'd love her just the same. I reckon she'll never seem to me anyhow like she does to other people. Still I ain't so blind that I don't know she's pretty. Her hair is wonderful, an' she's got them big brown eyes an' pink cheeks. I'm proud as Tophet of her. If it warn't fur Abbie I figger the three captains an' I would have the child clean spoilt. But Abbie's always kept a firm hand on us an' prevented us from puttin' nonsensical notions into Delight's head. Much of the way she's turned out is due to Abbie's common sense. Well, the girl's a mighty nice one," concluded Zenas Henry. "There's none to match her."

"You're right there!" Celestina assented cordially. "She's one in a hundred, in a thousand. She has the sweetest way in the world with her, too. A body couldn't see her an' not love her. I guess there's many a young feller along the Cape thinks so too, or I'm much mistaken," added she slyly. "She must have a score of

beaux."

"Beaux!" snapped Zenas Henry, wheeling abruptly about. "Indeed she hasn't. Why, she's nothin' but a child yet."

"She's most twenty. You said so yourself just now."

"Pooh! Twenty! What's twenty?" Zenas Henry cried derisively. "Why, I'm three times that already an' more too, an' I ain't old. So are you, Tiny. Twenty? Nonsense!"

"But Delight is twenty, Zenas Henry," persisted Celestina.

"What of it?"

"Well, you mustn't forget it, that's all," continued the woman softly. "Many a girl her age is married an'——"

"Married!" burst out the man with indignation. "What under heaven are you talkin' about, Celestina? Delight marry? Not she! She's too young. Besides, she's well enough content with Abbie an' the three captains an' me. Marry? Delight marry! Ridiculous!"

"But you don't mean to say you expect a creature as pretty as she is not to marry," said Celestina aghast.

"Oh, why, yes," ruminated Zenas Henry. "Of course she's goin' to get married sometime by an' by—mebbe in ten years or so. But not now."

"Ten years or so! My goodness! Why, she'll be thirty or thirty-five, an' an old maid by that time."

"No, she won't. I was forty-five before I married, an' it didn't do me no hurt or spoil my chances."

"You might have been livin' with Abbie all them years, though."

"I know it."

He paused thoughtfully.

"Yes," he reflected aloud, "I've often thought what a pity it was Abbie an' I didn't have our first youth together. It took me half a lifetime to find out how much I needed her."

"You wouldn't want Delight should do that," ventured Celestina.

"Delight? We ain't discussin' Delight," retorted Zenas Henry, promptly on the defensive. "Delight's another matter altogether. She's nothin' but a baby. There's no talk of her marryin' for a long spell yet."

Peevishly he kicked the turf with the toe of his boot.

Although he said no more, it was quite evident that he was much irritated.

"Well," he presently observed in a calmer tone, "I reckon I'll go round an' waylay Willie."

Celestina, leaning against the door frame, watched the gaunt, loose-jointed figure stride out into the sunshine and disappear behind the corner of the house.

What a day it was! From beneath the lattice that arched the entrance to the cottage and supported a rambler rose bursting into bloom she could see the bay, blue as a sapphire and scintillating with ripples of gold. A weather-stained scow was making its way out of the channel, and above it circled a screaming cloud of tern that had been routed from their nesting place on the margin of white sand that bordered the path to the open sea. Mingling with their cries and the rhythmic pulsing of the surf, the clear voices of the men aboard the tug reached her ear. It was flood tide, and the water that surged over the bar stained its reach of pearl to jade green and feathered its edges with snowy foam.

It was no weather to be cooped up indoors doing housework.

Idly Celestina loitered, drinking in the beauty of the scene. The languor of summer breathed in the gentle, pine-scented air and rose from the warm earth of the garden. Voluptuously she stretched her arms and yawned; then straightening to her customary erectness she went into the house, being probably the only woman in Wilton who that morning had abandoned her domestic duties long enough to take into her soul the benediction of the world about her.

It was such detours from the path of duty that had helped to win for Celestina

her pseudonym of "easy goin'." Perhaps this very vagrant quality in her nature was what had aided her in so thoroughly sympathizing with Willie in his sporadic outbursts of industry. For Willie was not a methodical worker any more than was Celestina. There were intervals, it is true, when he toiled steadily, feverishly, all day long and far into the night, forgetting either to eat or sleep; then would follow days together when he simply pottered about, or did even worse and remained idle in the sunny shelter of the grape arbor. Here on a rude bench constructed from a discarded four-poster he would often sit for hours, smoking his corncob pipe and softly humming to himself; but when genius went awry and his courage was at a low ebb, strings, wires, and pulleys having failed to work, he would neither smoke nor sing, but with eyes on the distance would sit immovable as if carved from stone.

To-day, however, was not one of his "settin' days." He had been up since dawn, had eaten no breakfast, and had even been too deeply preoccupied to fill and light the blackened pipe that dangled limply from his lips. Yet despite all his coaxings and cajolings, the iron pump opposite the shed door still refused to do anything but emit from its throat a few dry, profitless gurgles that seemed forced upward from the very caverns of the earth. Both Willie and Jan Eldredge looked tired and disheartened, and when Zenas Henry approached stood at bay, surrounded by a litter of wrenches, hammers, and scattered fragments of metal.

"What's the matter with your pump?" called Zenas Henry as he strolled toward them.

Willie turned on the intruder, a smile half humorous, half contemptuous, flitting across his face.

"If I could answer that question, Zenas Henry, I wouldn't be standin' here gapin' at the darn thing," was his laconic response. "It's just took a spell, that's all there is to it. It was right enough last night."

"There's no accountin' fur machinery," Zenas Henry remarked.

The observation struck a note of pessimism that rasped Willie's patience.

"There's got to be some accountin' fur this claptraption," retorted he, a suggestion of crispness in his tone. "I shan't stir foot from this spot 'til I find out what's set it to actin' up this way."

Zenas Henry laughed at the declaration of war echoing in the words.

"I've given up flyin' all to flinders over everything that gets out of gear," he drawled. "If I was to be goin' up higher'n a kite every time, fur instance, that the seaweed ketches round the propeller of my motor-boat, I'd be in mid-air most of the time."

Willie raised his head with the alertness of a hunter on the scent.

"Seaweed?" he repeated vaguely.

Zenas Henry nodded.

"Ain't there no scheme fur doin' away with a nuisance like that?"

"I ain't discovered any," came dryly from Zenas Henry. "We've all had a whack at the thing—Captain Jonas, Captain Phineas, Captain Benjamin, an' me—an' we're back where we were at the beginnin'. Nothin' we've tried has worked."

"U—m!" ruminated Willie, stroking his chin.

"I've about come to the conclusion we ain't much good as mechanics, anyhow," went on Zenas Henry with a short laugh. "In fact, Abbie's of the mind that we get things out of order faster'n we put 'em in."

Janoah Eldridge rubbed his grimy hands and chuckled, but Willie deigned no reply.

"This propeller now," he presently began as if there had been no digression from the topic, "I s'pose the kelp gets tangled around the blades."

"That's it," assented Zenas Henry.

"An' that holds up your engine."

"Uh-huh," Zenas Henry agreed with the same bored inflection.

"An' that leaves you rockin' like a baby in a cradle 'til you can get the wheel free."

"Uh-huh."

There was a moment of silence.

"It can't be much of a stunt tossin' round in a choppy sea like as if you was a chip on the waves," commented Jan Eldridge with a commiserating grin.

"'Tain't."

"What do you do when you find yourself in a fix like that?" he inquired with interest.

"Do?" reiterated Zenas Henry. "What a question! What would any fool do? There ain't no choice left you but to hang head downwards over the stern of the boat an' claw the eel-grass off the wheel with a gaff."

Janoah burst into a derisive shout.

"Oh, my eye!" he exclaimed. "So that's the way you do it, eh? Don't talk to me of motor-boats! A good old-fashioned skiff with a leg-o'-mutton sail in her is good enough fur me. How 'bout you, Willie?"

No reply was forthcoming.

"I say, Willie," repeated Jan in a louder tone, "that these new fangled motor-boats, with their noise an' their smell, ain't no match fur a good clean dory."

Willie came out of his trance just in time to catch the final clause of the sentence.

"Who ever saw a clean dory in Wilton?"

Jan faltered, abashed.

"Well, anyhow," he persisted, "in my opinion, clean or not, a straight wholesome smell of cod ain't to be mentioned in the same breath with a mix-up of stale fish an' gasoline."

Zenas Henry bridled.

"You don't buy a motor-boat to smell of," he said tartly. "You seem to forget

it's to sail in."

"But if the eel-grass holds you hard an' fast in one spot most of the time I don't see's you do much sailin'," taunted Jan. "'Pears to me you're just adrift an' goin' nowheres a good part of the time."

"No, I ain't" snapped Zenas Henry with rising ire. "It's only sometimes the thing gets spleeny. Most always—"

"Then it warn't you I saw pitchin' in the channel fur a couple of hours yesterday afternoon," commented the tormentor.

"No. That is—let me think a minute," meditated Zenas Henry. "Yes, I guess it was me, after all," he admitted with reluctant honesty. "The tide brought in quite a batch of weeds, an' they washed up round the boat before I could get out of their way; quicker'n a wink we were neatly snarled up in 'em. Captain Jonas an' Captain Phineas tried to get clear, but somehow they ain't got much knack fur freein' the wheel. So we did linger in the channel a spell."

"Linger!" put in Willie. "I shouldn't call bobbin' up an' down in one spot fur two mortal hours lingerin'. I'd call it nearer bein' hypnotized."

Zenas Henry was now plainly out of temper. He was well aware that Wilton had scant sympathy with his motor-boat, the first innovation of the sort that had been perpetrated in the town.

"Hadn't you better turn your attention from motor-boats to pumps?" he asked testily.

"I reckon I had, Zenas Henry," Willie answered, unruffled by the thrust. "As you say, if you chose to wind yourself up in the eel-grass it's none of my affair."

Turning his back on his visitor, he bent once more over the pump and adjusted a leather washer between its rusty joints.

"Now let's give her a try, Jan," he said, as he tightened the screws. "If that don't fetch her I'm beat."

By this time Jan's faith had lessened, and although he obediently raised the iron handle and began to ply it up and down, it was obvious that he did not

anticipate success. But contrary to his expectations there was a sudden subterranean groan, followed by a rumble of gradually rising pitch; then from out the stubbed green spout a stream of water gushed forth and trickled into the tub beneath.

"Hurray!" shouted Jan. "There she blows, Willie! Ain't you the dabster, though!"

The inventor did not immediately acknowledge the plaudits heaped upon him, but it was evident he was gratified by his success for, as he wiped the beads of perspiration from his forehead he sighed deeply.

"If I hadn't been such a blame fool I'd 'a' known what the matter was in the first place," he remarked. "Well, if we knew as much when we're born as we do when we get ready to die, what would be the use of livin' seventy odd years?"

In spite of his irritation Zenas Henry smiled.

"I don't s'pose you're feelin' like tacklin' another pump to-day," he ventured with hesitation. "Ours up at the white cottage has gone on a strike, too."

Instantly Willie was interested.

"What's got yours?" he asked.

"Blest if I know. We've took it all to pieces an' ain't found nothin' out with it, an' now to save our souls we can't put it together again," Zenas Henry explained. "I drove round, thinkin' that mebbe you'd go back with me an' have a look at it."

"Course I will, Zenas Henry," Willie said without hesitation. "I'd admire to. A pump that won't work is like a fishline without a hook—good for nothin'. Have you got room in your team for Jan, too?"

"Sure."

"Then let's start along," said the inventor, stooping to gather up his tools.

But he had reckoned without his host, for as he swept them into a jagged piece of sailcloth and prepared to tie up the bundle, Celestina called to him from the window.

"Where you goin', Willie?" she demanded.

"Up to Zenas Henry's to mend the pump."

"But you can't go now," objected she. "It's ten o'clock, an' you ain't had a mouthful of breakfast this mornin'."

The little man regarded her blankly.

"Ain't I et nothin'?" he inquired with surprise.

"No. Don't you remember you got up early to go fishin', an' then you found the pump wasn't workin', an' you've been wrestlin' with it ever since."

"So I have!"

A sunny smile of recollection overspread the old man's face.

"Ain't you hungry?"

"I dunno," considered he without interest. "Mebbe I am. Yes, now you speak of it, I will own to feelin' a mite holler. Can't you hand me a snack to eat as I go along?"

"You'd much better come in an' have your breakfast properly."

"Oh, I don't want nothin' much," the altruist protested. "Just fetch me out a slice of bread or a doughnut. We've got to get at that pump of Zenas Henry's. I'm itchin' to know what's the matter with it."

Celestina looked disappointed.

"I've been savin' your coffee fur you since seven o'clock," murmured she reproachfully.

"That was very kind of you, Tiny," Willie responded with an ingratiating glance into her eyes. "You just keep it hot a spell longer, an' I'll be back. Likely I won't be long."

"You've been workin' five hours on your own pump!"

"Five hours? Pshaw! You don't say so," mused the tranquil voice. "Think of that! An' it didn't seem no time. Well, it's a-pumpin' now, Celestina."

The mild face beamed with satisfaction, and Celestina had not the heart to cloud its brightness by annoying him further.

"That's capital!" she declared. "Here's your bread an' butter, Willie. An' here's some apple turnovers fur you, an' Jan, an' Zenas Henry. They'll be nice fur you goin' along in the wagon." Then turning to Jan she whispered in a pleading undertone:

"Do watch, Jan, that Willie don't lay that bread down somewheres an' forget it. Mebbe if he sees the rest of you eatin' he'll remember to eat himself. If he don't, though, remind him, for he's just as liable to bring it back home again in his hand. Keep your eye on him!"

Jan nodded understandingly, and climbing into the dusty wagon, the three men rattled off over the sandy road. Willie dropped his tools into the bottom of the carriage but the slice of bread remained untouched in his fingers. Now that triumph had brought a respite in his labors he seemed silent and thoughtful. It was not until the Admiral turned in at the Brewster gate that he roused himself sufficiently to observe with irrelevance:

"Speakin' about that propeller of yours, Zenas Henry—it must be no end of a temper-rasper."

Zenas Henry slapped the reins over the horse's flank and waited breathlessly, hoping some further comment would come from the little inventor, but as Willie remained silent, he at length could restrain his impatience no longer and ventured with diffidence:

"S'pose you ain't got any notion what we could do about it, have you, Willie?"

The old man shrugged his shoulders.

"No, not the ghost," was his terse reply.

That night, however, Celestina was awakened from her dreams by the ring of a hammer. She rose, and lighting her candle, tip-toed into the hall. It was one

o'clock, and she could see that Willie's bedroom door was ajar and the bed untouched.

With a little sigh she blew out the flame in her hand and crept back beneath the shelter of her calico comforter.

She knew the symptoms only too well.

Willie was once again "kitched by an idee!"

CHAPTER III

A NEW ARRIVAL

The new idea, whatever it was, was evidently not one to be hastily perfected, for the next morning when Celestina went down stairs, she found the jaded inventor seated moodily in a rocking-chair before the kitchen stove, his head in his hands.

"Law, Willie, are you up already?" she asked, as if unconscious of his nocturnal activities.

The reply was a wan smile.

"An' you've got the fire built, too," went on Celestina cheerily. "How nice!"

"Eh?" repeated he, giving her a vague stare. "The fire?"

"Yes. I was sayin' how good it was of you to start it up." The man gazed at her blankly.

"I ain't touched the fire," he answered. "I might have, though, as well as not, Tiny, if I'd thought of it."

"That's all right," Celestina declared, making haste to repair her blunder. "I've plenty of time to lay it myself. 'Twas only that when I saw you settin' up before it

I thought mebbe you'd built it 'cause you were cold."

"I was cold," acquiesced Willie, his eyes misty with thought. "But I warn't noticin' there was no heat in the stove when I drew up here."

Celestina bit her lip. How characteristic the confession was!

"Well, there'll be a fire now very soon," said she, bustling out and returning with paper and kindlings. "The kitchen will be warm as toast in no time. An' I'll make you some hot coffee straight away. That will heat you up. This northerly wind blows the cobwebs out of the sky, but it does make it chilly."

Although Willie's eyes automatically followed her brisk motions and watched while she deftly started the blaze, it was easy to see that he was too deep in his own meditations to sense what she was doing. Perhaps had his mood not been such an abstract one he would have realized that he was directly in the main thoroughfare and obstructing the path between the pantry and the oven. As it was he failed to grasp the circumstance, and not wishing to disturb him, Celestina patiently circled before, behind and around him in her successive pilgrimages to the stove. Such situations were exigencies to which she was quite accustomed, her easy-going disposition quickly adapting itself to emergencies of the sort. So skilful was she in effacing her presence that Willie had no knowledge he was an obstacle until suddenly the iron door swung back of its own volition and in passing brushed his knuckles with its hot metal edge.

"Ouch!" cried he, starting up from his chair.

"What's the matter?" called Celestina from the pantry.

"Nothin'. The oven door sprung open, that's all."

"It didn't burn you?"

"N—o, but it made me jump," laughed Willie. "Why didn't you tell me, Tiny, that I was in your way?"

"You warn't in my way."

"But I must 'a' been," the man persisted. "You should 'a' shoved me aside in the beginnin'."

Stretching his arms upward with a comfortable yawn, he rose and sauntered toward the door.

"Now you're not to pull out of here, Willie Spence," Celestina objected in a peremptory tone, "until you've had your breakfast. You had none yesterday, remember, thanks to that pump; an' you had no dinner either, thanks to Zenas Henry's pump. You're goin' to start this day right. You're to have three square meals if I have to tag you all over Wilton with 'em. I don't know what it is you've got on your mind this time, but the world's worried along without it up to now, an' I guess it can manage a little longer."

Willie regarded his mentor good-humoredly.

"I figger it can, Celestina," he returned. "In fact, I reckon it will have to content itself fur quite a spell without the notion I've run a-foul of now."

Celestina offered no interrogation; instead she said, "Well, don't let it harrow you up; that's all I ask. If it's goin' to be a long-drawn-out piece of tinkerin', why there's all the more reason you should eat your three good meals like other Christians. Next you know you'll be gettin' run down, an' I'll be havin' to brew some dandelion bitters for you." She came to an abrupt stop half-way between the oven and the kitchen table, a bowl and spoon poised in her hand. "I ain't sure but it's time to brew you somethin' anyway," she announced. "You ain't had a tonic fur quite a spell an' mebbe 'twould do you good."

A helpless protest trembled on Willie's lips.

"I—I—don't think I need any bitters, Celestina," he at last observed mildly.

"You don't know whether you do or not," Celestina replied with as near an approach to sharpness as she was capable of. "However, there's no call to discuss that now. The chief thing this minute is for you to sit up to the table an' eat your victuals."

Docilely the man obeyed. He was hungry it proved, very hungry indeed. With satisfaction Celestina watched every spoonful of food he put to his lips, inwardly gloating as one muffin after another disappeared; and when at last he could eat no more and took his blackened cob pipe from his pocket, she drew a sigh of satisfaction.

"There now, if you want to go back to your inventin' you can," she remarked, as she began to clear away the dishes. "You've took aboard enough rations to do you quite a while."

Notwithstanding the permission Willie did not immediately avail himself of it but instead lingered uneasily as if something troubled his conscience.

"Say, Tiny," he blurted out at length, "if you happen around by the front door and miss the screen don't be scared an' think it's stole. I had to use it fur somethin' last night."

"The screen door?" gasped Celestina.

"Yes."

"But—but—Willie! The door was new this Spring; there wasn't a brack in it."

"I know it," was the calm answer. "That's why I took it."

"But you could have got nettin' over at the store to-day."

"I couldn't wait."

Celestina did not reply at once; but when she did she had herself well in hand, and every trace of irritation had vanished from her tone.

"Well, we don't often open that door, anyway," she reflected aloud, "so I guess no harm's done. It's a full year since anybody's come to the front door, an' like as not 'twill be another before—"

A jangling sound cut short the sentence.

"What's that?" exclaimed she aghast.

"It's a bell."

"I never heard a bell like that in this house."

"It's a bell I rigged up one day when you were gone to the Junction," exclaimed Willie hurriedly. "I thought I told you about it."

"You didn't."

"Well, no matter now," he went on soothingly.

"I meant to."

"Where is it?" demanded Celestina.

"It's in the hall. It's a new front-door bell, that's what it is," proclaimed the inventor, his voice lost in a second deafening peal.

"My soul! It's enough to wake the dead!" gasped Celestina, with hands on her ears. "I should think it could be heard from here to Nantucket. What set you gettin' a bell that size, Willie? 'Twould scare any caller who dared to come this way out of a year's growth. I'll have to go an' see who's there, if he ain't been struck dumb on the doorsill. Who ever can it be—comin' to the front door?"

With perturbed expectancy she hurried through the passageway, Willie tagging at her heels.

The infrequently patronized portal of the Spence mansion, it proved, was so securely barred and bolted that to unfasten it necessitated no little time and patience; even after locks and fastenings had been withdrawn and the door was at liberty to move, not knowing what to do with its unaccustomed freedom it refused to stir, stubbornly resisting every attempt to wrench its hinges asunder. It was not until the man and woman inside had combined their efforts and struggled with it for quite an interval that it contrived to creak apart far enough to reveal through a four-inch crack the figure of a young man who was standing patiently outside.

One could not have asked for a franker, merrier face than that which peered at Celestina through the narrow chink of sunshine. To judge at random the visitor had come into his manhood recently, for the brown eyes were alight with youthful humor and the shoulders unbowed by the burdens of the world. He had a mass of wavy, dark hair; a thoughtful brow; ruddy color; a pleasant mouth and fine teeth; and a tall, erect figure which he bore with easy grace.

"Is Miss Morton at home?" he asked, smiling at Celestina through the shaft of golden light.

Celestina hesitated. So seldom was she addressed by this formal pseudonym that for the instant she was compelled to stop and consider whether the individual designated was on the premises or not.

"Y—e—s," she at last admitted feebly.

"I wonder if I might speak with her," the stranger asked.

"Why don't you tell him you're Miss Morton," coached Willie, in a loud whisper.

But the man on the steps had heard.

"You're not Miss Morton, are you?" he essayed, "Miss Celestina Morton?"

"I expect I am," owned Celestina nervously.

"I'm your brother Elnathan's boy, Bob."

Celestina crumpled weakly against the door frame.

"Nate's boy!" she repeated. "Bless my soul! Bless my soul an' body!"

The man outside laughed a delighted laugh so infectious that before Celestina or Willie were conscious of it they had joined in its mellow ripple. After that everything was easy.

"We can't open the door to let you in," explained Willie, peering out through the rift, "'cause this blasted door ain't moved fur so long that its hinges have growed together; but if you'll come round to the back of the house you'll find a warmer welcome."

The guest nodded and disappeared.

"Land alive, Willie!" ejaculated Celestina while they struggled to replace the dislocated bars and bolts. "To think of Nate's boy appearin' here! I can't get over it! Nate's boy! Nate was my favorite brother, you know—the littlest one, that I brought up from babyhood. This lad is so completely the livin' image of him that when I clapped eyes on him it took the gimp clear out of me. It was like havin' Nate himself come back again."

With fluttering eagerness she sped through the hall.

Robert Morton was standing in the kitchen when she arrived, his head towering into the tangle of strings that crossed and recrossed the small interior. Whatever his impression of the extraordinary spectacle he evinced no curiosity but remained as imperturbable amid the network that ensnared him as if such astounding phenomena were everyday happenings. Nevertheless, a close observer might have detected in his hazel eyes a dancing gleam that defied control. Apparently it did not occur either to Willie or to Celestina to explain the mystery which had long since become to them so familiar a sight; therefore amid the barrage of red, green, purple, pink, yellow and white strings they greeted their guest, throwing into their welcome all the homely cordiality they could command.

From the first moment of their meeting it was noticeable that Willie was strongly attracted by Robert Morton's sensitive and intelligent face; and had he not been, for Celestina's sake he would have made an effort to like the newcomer. Fortunately, however, effort was unnecessary, for Bob won his way quite as uncontestedly with the little inventor as with Celestina. There was no question that his aunt was delighted with him. One could read it in her affectionate touch on his arm; in her soft, nervous laughter; in the tremulous inflection of her many questions.

"Your father couldn't have done a kinder thing than to have sent you to Wilton, Robert," she declared at last when quite out of breath with her rejoicings. "My, if you're not the mortal image of him as he used to be at your age! I can scarcely believe it isn't Nate. His forehead was high like yours, an' the hair waved back from it the same way; he had your eyes too—full of fun, an' yet earnest an' thoughtful. I ain't sure but you're a mite taller than he was, though."

"I top Dad by six inches, Aunt Tiny," smiled the young man.

"I guessed likely you did," murmured Celestina, with her eyes still on his face. "Now you must sit right down an' tell me all about yourself an' your folks. I want to know everything—where you come from; when you got here; how long you can stay, an' all."

"The last question is the only really important one," interrupted Willie, approaching the guest and laying a friendly hand on his shoulder. "The doin's of

your family will keep; an' where you come from ain't no great matter neither. What counts is how long you can spare to visitin' Wilton an' your aunt. We ain't much on talk here on the Cape, but I just want you should know that there's an empty room upstairs with a good bed in it, that's yours long's you can make out to use it. Your aunt is a prime cook, too, an' though there's no danger of your mixin' up this place with Broadway or Palm Beach, I believe you might manage to keep contented here."

"I'm sure I could," Bob Morton answered, "and you're certainly kind to give me such a cordial invitation. I wasn't expecting to remain for any length of time, however. I came down from Boston, where I happened to be staying yesterday afternoon, and had planned to go back tonight. I've been doing some post-graduate work in naval engineering at Tech and have just finished my course there. So, you see, I'm really on my way home to Indiana. But Dad wrote that before I returned he wanted me to take a run down here and see Aunt Tiny and the old town where he was born, so here I am."

Willie scanned the stranger's face meditatively.

"Then you're clear of work, an' startin' off on your summer vacation."

"That's about it," confessed Bob.

"Anything to take you West right away?"

"N—o—nothing, except that the family have not seen me for some time. I've accepted a business position with a New York firm, but I don't start in there until October."

"You're your own master for four months, eh?"

"Yes, sir."

"Well, I ain't a-goin' to urge you to put in your time here; but I will say again, in case you've forgotten it, that so long as you're content to remain with us we'd admire to have you. 'Twould give your aunt no end of pleasure, I'll be bound, an' I'd enjoy it as well as she would."

"You're certainly not considerin' goin' back to Boston today!" chimed in Celestina.

"I was," laughed Bob.

"You may as well put that notion right out of your head," said Willie, "for we shan't let you carry out no such crazy scheme."

"But to come launching down on you this way—" began the younger man.

"You ain't come launchin' down," objected his aunt with spirit. "We ain't got nothin' to do but inventin', an' I reckon that can wait."

Glancing playfully at Willie she saw a sudden light of eagerness flash into his countenance. But Bob, not understanding the allusion, looked from one of them to the other in puzzled silence.

"All right, Aunt Tiny," he at last announced, "if you an' Mr. Spence really want me to, I should be delighted to stay with you a few days. The fact is," he added with boyish frankness, "my suit case is down behind the rose bushes this minute. Having sent most of my luggage home, and not knowing what I should do, I brought it along with me."

"You go straight out, young man, an' fetch it in," commanded Willie, giving him a jocose slap on the back.

Nevertheless, in spite of the mandate, Robert Morton lingered.

"Do you know, Aunt Tiny, I'm almost ashamed to accept your hospitality," he observed with winning sincerity. "We've all been so rotten to you—never coming to see you or anything. Dad's terribly cut up that he hasn't made a single trip East since leaving Wilton."

The honest confession instantly quenched the last smouldering embers of Celestina's resentment toward her kin.

"Don't think no more of it!" she returned hurriedly. "Your father's been busy likely, an' so have you; an' anyhow, men ain't much on follerin' up their relations, or writin' to 'em. So don't say another word about it. I'm sure I've hardly given it a thought."

That the final assertion was false Robert Morton read in the woman's brave attempt to control the pitiful little quiver of her lips; nevertheless he blessed her for her deception.

"You're a dear, Aunt Tiny," he exclaimed heartily, stooping to kiss her cheek. "Had I dreamed half how nice you were, wild horses couldn't have kept me away from Wilton."

Celestina blushed with pleasure.

Very pretty she looked standing there in the window, her shoulders encircled by the arm of the big fellow who, towering above her, looked down into her eyes so affectionately. Willie couldn't but think as he saw her what a mother she would have made for some boy. Possibly something of the same regret crossed Celestina's own mind, for a shadow momentarily clouded her brow, and to

banish it she repeated with resolute gaiety:

"Do go straight out an' bring in that suit case, Bob, or some straggler may steal it. An' put out of your mind any notion of goin' to Boston for the present. I'll show you which room you're to have so'st you can unpack your things, an' while you're washin' up I'll get you some breakfast. You ain't had none, have you?"

"No; but really, Aunt Tiny, I'm not—"

"Yes, you are. Don't think it's any trouble for it ain't—not a mite."

Willie beamed with good will.

"You've landed just in time to set down with us," he remarked. "We ain't had our breakfast, either."

Celestina wheeled about with astonishment. Willie's hospitality must have burst all bounds if it had lured him, who never deviated from the truth, into uttering a falsehood monstrous as this. One glance, however, at his placid face, his unflinching eye, convinced her that swept away by the interest of the moment the little old man had lost all memory of whether he had breakfasted or not.

She did not enlighten him.

"Mebbe it ain't honest to let him go on thinkin' he's had nothin' to eat," she whispered to herself, "but if all them muffins, an' oatmeal, an' coffee don't do nothin' toward remindin' him he's et once, I ain't goin' to do it. This second meal will make up fur the breakfast he missed yesterday. I ain't deceivin' him; I'm simply squarin' things up."

CHAPTER IV

THE GREEN-EYED MONSTER ENTERS

Before the morning had passed Bob Morton was as much at home in the little

cottage that faced the sea as if he had lived there all his days. His property was spread out in the old mahogany bureau upstairs; his hat dangled from a peg in the hall; and he had exchanged his "city clothes" for the less conventional outing shirt and suit of blue serge, both of which transformed him into a figure amazingly slender and boyish. For two hours he and Celestina had rehearsed the family history from beginning to end; and now he had left her to get dinner, and he and Willie had betaken themselves to the workshop where they were deep in confidential conversation.

"You see," the inventor was explaining to his guest, "it's like this: it ain't so much that I want to bother with these notions as that I have to. They get me by the throat, an' there's no shakin' 'em off. Only yesterday, fur example, I got kitched with an idee about a boat—" he broke off, regarding his listener with sudden suspicion.

Bob waited.

Evidently Willie's scrutiny of the frank countenance opposite satisfied him, for dropping his voice he continued in an impressive whisper:

"About a motor-boat, this idee was."

Glancing around as if to assure himself that no one was within hearing, he hitched the barrel on which he was seated nearer his visitor.

"There's a sight of plague with motor-boats among these shoals," he went on eagerly. "What with the eel-grass that grows along the inlets an' the kelp that's washed in by the tide after a storm, the propeller of a motor-boat is snarled up a good bit of the time. Now my scheme," he announced, his last trace of reserve vanishing, "is to box that propeller somehow—if so be as it can be done—an'—," the voice trailed off into meditation.

Robert Morton, too, was silent.

"You would have to see that the wheel was kept free," he mused aloud after an interval.

"I know it."

"And not check the speed of the boat."

"Right you are, mate!" exclaimed Willie with delight.

"And not hamper the swing of the rudder."

"You have it! You have it!" Willie shouted, rubbing his hands together and smiling broadly. "It's all them things I'm up against."

"I believe the trick might be turned, though," replied young Morton, rising from the nail keg on which he was sitting and striding about the narrow room. "It's a pretty problem and one it would be rather good fun to work out."

"I'd need to rig up a model to experiment with, I s'pose," reflected Willie.

"Oh, we could fix that easily enough," Bob cried with rising enthusiasm.

"*We*?"

"Sure! I'll help you."

The announcement did not altogether reassure the inventor, and Bob laughed at the dubious expression of his face.

"Of course I'm only a dry-land sailor," he went on to explain good-humoredly, "and I do not begin to have had the experience with boats that you have. I did, however, study about them some at Tech and perhaps—"

"Study about 'em!" repeated Willie, unable wholly to conceal his scepticism and scorn.

Again the younger man laughed.

"I realize that is not like getting knowledge first-hand," he continued with modesty, "but it seemed the best I could do. As to this plan of yours, two heads are sometimes better than one, and between us I believe we can evolve an answer to the puzzle."

"That'll be prime!" Willie ejaculated, now quite comfortable in his mind. "An' when we get the answer to the riddle, Jan Eldridge will help us. You ain't met Jan yet, have you? He's the salt of the earth, Janoah Eldridge is. Him an' me are the greatest chums you ever saw. He mebbe has his peculiarities, like the rest of

us. Who ain't? You'll likely find him kinder sharp-tongued at first, but he don't mean nothin' by it; and' he's quick, too—goes up like a rocket at a minute's notice. Folks down in town insist in addition that he's jealous as a girl, but I've yet to see signs of it. Fur all his little crochets you'll like Jan Eldridge. You can't help it. We're none of us angels—when it comes to that. Hush!" broke off Willie warningly. "I believe that's him now. Didn't you see a head go past the winder?"

"I thought I did."

"Then that's Jan. Nobody else would be comin' across the dingle. Now not a word of this motor-boat business to him," cautioned Willie, dropping his voice. "I never tell Jan 'bout my idees 'till I get 'em well worked out, for he's no great shakes at inventin'."

There was an instant of guilty silence, and then the two conspirators beheld a freckled face, crowned by a mass of rampant sandy hair, protrude itself through the doorway.

"Hi, Willie!" called the newcomer, unmindful of the presence of a stranger. "Well, how do you find yourself to-day? Ready to tackle another pump?"

With simulated indignation Willie bristled.

"Pump!" he repeated. "Don't you dare so much as to mention pumps in my hearin' fur six months, Janoah Eldridge. I've had my fill of pumps fur one spell."

The freckled face in the door expanded its smile into a grin that displayed the few scattered teeth adorning its owner's jaws.

"No," went on the inventor, "I ain't attackin' no pumps to-day. I'm sorter takin' a vacation. You see we've got company. Tiny's nephew, Bob Morton from Indiana, has come to stay with us. This is him on the nail keg."

Shuffling further into the room Jan peered inquisitively at the guest.

"So you're Tiny's nephew, eh?" he commented, examining the visitor's countenance with curiosity. "Well, well! To think of some of Tiny's relations turnin' up at last! Not that it ain't high time, I'll say that. Now which of the Mortons do you belong to, young man?"

"Elnathan."

"I might 'a' known first glance, for you're like him as his tintype."

Bob laughed.

"Aunt Tiny thinks I am, too."

"She'd oughter know," was the dry comment. "She had the plague of bringin' him up from the time he could toddle. I'm glad some of you have finally got round to comin' to see her. You've been long enough doin' it. I ain't so sure, though, but if I was in her place I'd—"

"There, there, Jan," interrupted Willie nervously, "why go diggin' up the past? The lad is here now an'—"

"But they have been the devil of a while takin' notice of Tiny," Janoah persisted, not to be coaxed away from his subject. "Why, 'twas only the other day when we was workin' out here that you yourself said the way her folks had neglected her was outrageous."

"And it was, too, Mr. Eldridge," confessed Bob, flushing. "Our whole family have treated Aunt Tiny shamefully. There is no excuse for it."

Before the honest admission of blame, Jan's mounting wrath grudgingly calmed itself.

"Well," he grumbled in a more conciliatory tone, "as Willie says, mebbe it's just as well not to go bringin' to life what's buried already. Like as not there may have been some good reason for your folks never comin' back to Wilton after once they'd left the place. Indiana's the devil of a distance away—'most at the other end of the world, ain't it? You might as well live in China as Indiana. I never could see anyway what took people out of Wilton. There ain't a better spot on earth to live than right here. Yet for all that, every one of the Mortons 'cept Tiny (who showed her good sense, in my opinion) went flockin' out of this town quick as they was growed, like as if they was a lot of swarmin' bees. I doubt myself, too, if they're a whit better off for it. Your father now—what does he make out to do in Indiana?"

"Father is in the grain business," replied Bob with a smile.

"The grain business, is he? An' likely he sets in an office all day long, in out of the fresh air," continued Jan with contempt. "Plumb foolish I call it, when he could be livin' in Wilton an' fishin', an' clammin', an' enjoying himself. That's the way with so many folks. They go kitin' off to the city to make money enough to buy one of them automobiles. You won't ketch me with an automobile—no, nor a motor-boat, neither; nor any other of them durn things that's goin' to set me livin' like as if I was shot out of the cannon's mouth. What's the good of bein' whizzed through life as if the old Nick himself was at your heels—workin' faster, eatin' faster, dyin' faster? I see nothin' to it—nothin' at all."

At the risk of rousing the philosopher's resentment, Bob burst into a peal of laughter.

"But ain't it so now, I ask you? Ain't it just as I say?" insisted Janoah Eldridge. "Argue as you will, what's the gain in it?"

To the speaker's apparent disappointment, the citizen from Indiana did not accept the challenge for argument but instead observed pleasantly:

"I'll wager you will outlive all us city people, Mr. Eldridge."

"Course I will," was the old man's confident retort. "I'll be a-sailin' in my dory when the whole lot of you motor-boat folks are under the sod. You see if I ain't! An' speakin' of motor-boats, Willie—I s'pose you ain't done nothin toward tacklin' Zenas Henry's tribulations with that propeller, have you?"

The question was unexpected, and Willie colored uncomfortably. He was not good at dissembling.

"'Twould mean quite a bit of thinkin' to get Zenas Henry out of his troubles," returned he evasively. "'Tain't so simple as it looks."

Moving abruptly to the work-bench he began to overturn at random the tools lying upon it.

Something in this unusual proceeding arrested Jan's attention, causing him to glance with suspicion from Robert Morton to the inventor, and from the inventor back to Robert Morton again. The elder man was whistling "Tenting To-night," an air that had never been a favorite of his; and the younger, with self-conscious zeal, was shredding into bits a long curl of shavings.

Jan eyed both of them with distrust

"I figger we're goin' to have a spell of fine weather now," remarked Willie with jaunty artificiality.

The offhand assertion was too casual to be real. Cloud and fog were not dealt with in this cursory fashion in Wilton. It clinched Jan's doubts into certainty. Something was being kept from him, something of which this stranger, who had only been in the town a few hours, was cognizant. For the first time in fifty years another had usurped his place as Willie's confidant. It was monstrous! A tremor of jealous rage thrilled through his frame, and he stiffened visibly.

"I reckon I'll be joggin' along home," said he, moving with dignity toward the door.

"But you've only just come, Jan," protested Willie.

"I didn't come fur nothin' but to leave this hammer," Jan answered, placing the implement on the long bench before which his friend was standing.

"Maybe there was something you wanted to see Mr. Spence about," ventured Bob. "If there was I will—"

"No, there warn't," snapped Janoah. "Mister Spence ain't got nothin' confidential to say to me—whatever he may have to say to other folks," and with this parting thrust he shot out of the door.

Bob gave a low whistle.

"What's the matter with the man?" he asked in amazement.

Willie flushed apologetically.

"Nothin'—nothin' in the world!" he answered. "Jan gets like that sometimes. Don't you remember I told you he was kinder quick. It's just possible it may have bothered him to see me talkin' to you. Don't mind him."

"Do you think he suspected anything?"

"Mercy, no! Not he!" responded Willie comfortably. "He's liable to fly off the

handle like that a score of times a day. Don't you worry 'bout him. He'll be back before the mornin's over."

Nevertheless, sanguine as this prediction was, the hours wore on, and Janoah Eldridge failed to make his appearance. In the meantime Bob and Willie became so deeply engrossed in their new undertaking that they were oblivious to his absence. They worked feverishly until noon, devoured a hurried meal, and returned to the shop again, there to resume their labors. By supper time they had made quite an encouraging start on the model they required, their combined efforts having accomplished in a single day what it would have taken Willie many an hour to perfect.

The inventor was jubilant.

"Little I dreamed when you came to the front door, Bob, what I was nettin'!" he exclaimed, clapping his hand vigorously on the young man's shoulder. "You're a regular boat-builder, you are. The moon might 'a' pogeed an' perigeed before I'd 'a' got as fur along as we have to-day. How you've learned all you have about boats without ever goin' near the water beats me. Now you ain't a-goin' to think of quittin' Wilton an' leavin' me high an' dry with this propeller idee, are you? 'Twould be a downright shabby trick."

Bob smiled into the old man's anxious face.

"I can't promise to see you to the finish for I must be back home before many days, or I'll have my whole family down on me. Besides, I have some business in New York to attend to," he said kindly. "But I will arrange to stick around until the job is so well under way that you won't need me. I am quite as interested in making the scheme a success as you are. All is you mustn't let me wear out my welcome and be a burden to Aunt Tiny."

"Law, Tiny'll admire to have you stay long as you can, if only because you drag me into the house at meal time," chuckled Willie.

"At least I can do that," Bob returned.

"You can do that an' a durn sight more, youngster," the inventor declared with earnestness. "I ain't had the pleasure I've had to-day in all my life put together. To work with somebody as has learned the right way to go ahead—it's wonderful. When me an' Jan tackle a job, we generally begin at the wrong end of

it an' blunder along, wastin' time an' string without limit. If we hit it right it's more luck than anything else."

Robert Morton, watching the mobile face, saw a pitiful sadness steal into the blue eyes. A sudden shame surged over him.

"I ought to be able to do far more with my training than I have done," he answered humbly. "Dad has given me every chance."

"Think of it!" murmured Willie, scrutinizing him with hungering gaze. "Think of havin' every chance to learn!"

For an interval he smoked in silence.

"Well," he asserted at length, "you've sure proved to-day that brains with trainin' are better'n brains without. Now if Jan an' me—" he broke off abruptly. "There! I wonder what in tunket's become of Jan," he speculated. "We've been so busy that he went clean out of my mind. It's queer he didn't show up again. He ain't stayed away for a whole day in all history. Mebbe he's took sick. I believe I'll trudge over there an' find out what's got him. I mustn't go to neglectin' Jan, inventin' or no inventin'."

He rose from his chair wearily.

"I reckon a note would do as well, though, as goin' over," he presently remarked as an afterthought. "I could send one in the box an' ask him to drop round an' set a spell before bedtime."

He caught up a piece of brown paper from the workbench, tore a ragged corner from it, and hastily scrawled a message.

Bob watched the process with amusement.

"There!" announced the scribe when the epistle was finished. "I reckon that'll fetch him. We'll put it in the box an' shoot it across to him."

Notwithstanding the dash implied in the term, it took no small length of time for the diminutive receptacle to hitch its way through the fields. The two men watched it jiggle along above the bushes of wild roses, through verdant clumps of fragrant bayberry, and disappear into the woods. Then they sat down to await

Jan's appearance.

The twilight was rarely beautiful. In a sky of palest turquoise a crescent moon hung low, its arc of silver poised above the tips of the stunted pines, whose feathery outlines loomed black in the dusk. From out the dimness the note of a vesper sparrow sounded and mingled its sweetness with the faintly breathing ocean.

The men on the doorstep smoked silently, each absorbed in his own reveries.

How peaceful it was there in the stillness, with the hush of evening descending like a benediction on the darkening earth!

Bob sighed with contentment. His year of hard study was over, and now that his well-earned rest had come he was surprised to discover how tired he was. Already the peace of Wilton was stealing over him, its dreamy atmosphere almost too beautiful to be real. From where he sat he could see the trembling lights of the village jewelling the rim of the bay like a circlet of stars. A man might do worse, he reflected, than remain a few days in this sleepy little town. He liked Willie and Celestina, too; indeed, he would have been without a heart not to have appreciated their simple kindliness. Why should he hurry home? Would not his father rejoice should he be content to stay and make his aunt a short visit? There was no need to bind himself for any definite length of time; he would merely drift and when he found himself becoming bored flee. To be sure, about the last thing he had intended when setting forth to the Cape was to linger there. He had come hither with unwilling feet solely to please his parents, and having paid his respects to his unknown relative he meant to depart West as speedily as decency would permit, reasoning that it would be a mutual relief when the visit was over.

But a single day in the cozy little house at the water's edge had served to convince him how erroneous had been his premises. Instead of being tiresome, his Aunt Celestina was proving a delightful acquisition, toward whom he already found himself cherishing a warm regard. And what a cook she was! After months of city food her bread, pies, and cookies were ambrosial.

As for Willie—Bob had never before beheld so gentle, ingenuous and lovable a personality. Undoubtedly the little inventor had genius. What a pity he had been cheated of the opportunity for cultivating it! There was something pathetic

in the way he reached out for the knowledge life had denied him; it reminded one of a patient child who asks for water to slake his thirst.

If, for some inscrutable reason, fortune had granted him, Robert Morton, the chance denied this groping soul, was it not almost an obligation that, in so far as he was able, he should place at the other's disposal the fruits of the education that had been his?

Presumably this motor-boat idea would not amount to much, for if such an invention were plausible and of value, doubtless a score of nautical authorities would have seized upon it long before now. But to work at the plan would give the gentle dreamer in the silver-gray cottage happiness, and after all happiness was not to be despised. If together he and Willie could make tangible the notion that existed in the latter's brain, the deed was certainly worth the doing. Moreover the process would be an entertaining one, and after its completion he might go away with a sense of having brightened at least one horizon by his coming.

Thus reasoned Robert Morton as in the peace of that June evening he casually shuffled the cards of fate, little suspecting that already a factor in his destiny stronger than any of his arguments was soon to make its influence felt and transform Wilton into a magnet so powerful that against its spell he would be helpless as a child.

He was aroused from his meditations by the voice of Willie.

"Didn't you hear a little bell?" demanded the inventor. "A sort of tinklin' noise?"

"I thought I did."

"It's the box comin' from Jan's," explained he. "Can you kitch a sight of it?"

"I see it now."

Rising, the old man tugged at the string, urging the reluctant messenger through the tangle of roses.

"By his writin' a note, I figger he ain't comin' over," he remarked, as the object drew nearer. "I wonder what's stuck in his crop! Mebbe Mis' Eldridge

won't let him out. She's something of a Tartar—Arabella is. Jan has to walk the plank, I can tell you."

By this time the cigar box swaying on the taut twine was within easy reach. Willie raised its cover and took from its interior a crumpled fragment of paper.

"Humph! He's mighty savin'!" he commented as he turned the missive over. "He's writ on the other side of my letter. Let's see what he has to say:

"'Can't come. Busy.'

"Well, did you ever!" gasped he, blankly. "*Busy*! Good Lord! Jan's never been known to be busy in all his life. He don't even know the feelin'. If Janoah Eldridge is busy, all I've got to say is, the world's goin' to be swallered up by another deluge."

"Maybe, as you suggested, Mrs. Eldridge—"

"Oh, if it had been Mis' Eldridge, he wouldn't 'a' took the trouble to send no such message as that," broke in Willie. "He'd simply 'a' writ *Arabella*; there wouldn't 'a' been need fur more. No, sir! Somethin's stepped on Jan's shadder, an' to-morrow I'll have to go straight over there an' find out what it is."

CHAPTER V

AN APPARITION

The next morning, after loitering uneasily about the workshop a sufficiently long time for Janoah Eldridge to make his appearance and finding that his crony did not make his appearance, Willie reluctantly took his worn visor cap down from the peg and drew it over his brows, with the remark:

"Looks like Jan ain't headed this way to-day, either." He cast a troubled glance through the dusty, multi-paned window of the shed. "Much as I'm longin'

to go ahead with this model, Bob, before I go farther I've simply got to step over to the Eldridges an' straighten him out. There's no help fur it."

"All right. Go ahead, Sir," reassuringly returned Bob. "I'll work while you're gone. Things won't be at a complete standstill."

"I know that," Willie replied with a pleasant smile. "'Tain't that that's frettin' me. It's just that I don't relish the notion of shovin' my job onto your shoulders. 'Tain't as if you'd come to Wilton to spend your time workin'. Celestina hinted last evenin' she was afraid you bid fair to get but mighty little rest out of your vacation. 'Twas unlucky, she thought, that you hove into port just when I happened to be kitched with a bigger idee than common."

"Nonsense!" Bob protested heartily. "Don't you and Aunt Tiny give yourselves any uneasiness about me. I'm happy. I enjoy fussing round the shop with you, Mr. Spence. I'd far rather you took me into what you're doing than left me out. Besides, I don't intend to work every minute while I'm here. Some fine day I mean to steal off by myself and explore Wilton. I may even take a day's fishing."

"That's right, youngster, that's right!" ejaculated Willie. "That's the proper spirit. If you'll just feel free to pull out when you please it will take a load off my mind, an' I shall turn to tinkerin' with a clear conscience."

"I will, I promise you."

"Then that's settled," sighed the inventor with relief. "I must say you're about the best feller ever was to come a-visitin', Bob. You ain't a mite of trouble to anybody."

With eyes still fastened on the bench with its chaos of tools, the old man moved unwillingly toward the door; but on the threshold he paused.

"I'll be back quick's I can," he called. "Likely I'll bring Jan in tow. I'd full as lief not tell him what we're doin' 'til next week if I had my choice; still, things bein' as they are, mebbe it's as well not to shut him out any longer. He gets miffed easy an' I wouldn't have his feelin's hurt fur a pot of lobsters."

With a gentle smile he waved his hand and was gone.

Left alone in the long, low-studded room, Bob rolled up his sleeves and to a brisk whistle began to plane down some pieces of thin board.

The bench at which he worked stood opposite a broad window from which, framed in a wreath of grapevine, he could see the bay and the shelving dunes beyond it. A catboat, with sails close-hauled, was making her way out of the channel, a wake of snowy foam churning behind her in the blue water. Through the door of the shed swept a breeze that rustled the shavings on the floor and blended the fragrance of newly cut wood with the warm perfume of sweet fern from the adjoining meadow.

For all its untidiness and confusion, its litter of boards, tools and battered paint pots, the shop was unquestionably one of the most homey corners of the Spence cottage. Its rough, unsheathed walls, mellowed to a dull buff tone, were here and there adorned with prints culled by Willie from magazines and newspapers. Likenesses of Lincoln and Roosevelt flanked the windows with an American flag above them, and a series of battleships and army scenes beneath. The inventor's taste, however, had not run entirely to patriotic subjects, for scattered along the walls, where shelves sagged with their burden of oilcans, putty, nails and fishing tackle, were a variety of nautical reproductions in color—a prize yacht heeling in the wind; a reach of rough sea whose giant combers swirled about a wreck; glimpses of marsh and dune typical of the land of the Cape dweller.

An air-tight stove, the solitary defence against cold and storm, stood in the corner, and before its rusty hearth a rickety chair and an overturned soap box were suggestively placed. But perhaps what told an observer more about Willie Spence than did anything else was a bunch of rarely beautiful sabbatia blooming in a pickle bottle and a wee black kitten who disported herself unmolested among the tools cluttering the deeply scarred workbench.

She was a mischievous kitten, a spoiled kitten; one who vented her caprice on everything that had motion. Did a curl of shavings drop to the ground, instantly Jezebel was at hand to catch it up in her diminutive paws; toss it from her; steal up and fall upon it again; and dragging it between her feet, roll over and over with it in a mad orgy of delight. A shadow, a string, a flicker of metal was the signal for a frolic. Let one's mood be austere as a monk's, with a single twist of her absurdly tiny body this small creature shattered its gravity to atoms. There was no such thing as dignity in Jezebel's presence. Already three times Bob

Morton had lifted the mite off the table and three times back she had come, leaping in the path of his gleaming plane as if its metallic whir and glimmering reflections were designed solely for her amusement. In spite of his annoyance the man had laughed and now, stooping, he caught up the tormentor and held her aloft.

"You minx!" he cried, shaking the sprite gently. "What do you think I am here for—to play with you?"

The kitten blinked at him out of her round blue eyes.

"You'll be getting your fur mittens cut off the next thing you know," went on Bob severely. "Scamper out of here!"

He set the little creature on the floor, aimed her toward the doorway and gave her a stimulating push.

With a coquettish leap headlong into the sunshine darted Jezebel, only to come suddenly into collision with a stranger who had crossed the grass and was at that instant about to enter the workshop.

The newcomer was a girl, tall and slender, with lustrous masses of dark hair that swept her cheek in wind-tossed ringlets. She had a complexion vivid with health, an undignified little nose and a mouth whose short upper lip lent to her face a half childish, half pouting expression. But it was in her eyes that one forgot all else,—eyes large, brown, and softly deep, with a quality that held the glance compellingly. Her gown of thin pink material dampened by the sea air clung to her figure in folds that accentuated her lithe youthfulness, and as she stumbled over the kitten in full flight she broke into a delicious laugh that showed two rows of pretty, white teeth and lured from hiding an alluring dimple.

"You ridiculous little thing!" she exclaimed, snatching up the fleeing culprit before she could make her escape and placing her in the warm curve of her neck. "Do you know you almost tripped me up? Where are your manners?"

Jezebel merely stared. So did Robert Morton.

The girl and the kitten were too disconcerting a spectacle. By herself Jezebel was tantalizing enough; but in combination with the creature who stood laughing on the threshold, the sight was so bewildering that it not only overwhelmed but

intoxicated.

It was evident the visitor was unconscious of his presence, for instead of addressing him, she continued to toy with the wisp of animation snuggled against her cheek.

"I do believe, Willie," she observed, without glancing up, "that Jezebel grows more fascinating every time I see her."

Bob did not answer. He was in no mood to discuss Jezebel. If he thought of her at all it was to contrast her inky fur with the white throat against which she nestled and speculate as to whether she sensed what a thrice-blessed kitten she was. It did flash through his mind as he stood there that the two possessed a bewitching, irresistible something in common, a something he was at a loss to characterize. It did not matter, however, for he could not have defined even the simplest thing at the moment, and this attribute of the kitten's and the girl's was very complex.

Perhaps it was the silence that at last caused the visitor to raise her eyes and look at him inquiringly. Then he saw a tremor of surprise sweep over her, and a wave of crimson surge into her face.

"I beg your pardon," she gasped. "I thought Willie was here."

"Mr. Spence has stepped over to the Eldredges'. I'm expecting him back every instant," Bob returned.

The girl's lashes fell. They were long and very beautiful as they lay in a fringe against her cheek, yet exquisite as they were he longed to see her eyes again.

"I'm Miss Morton's nephew from Indiana," the young man managed to stammer, feeling some explanation might bridge the gulf of embarrassment. "I am visiting here."

"Oh!"

Persistently she studied the toe of her shoe. If Bob had thought her appealing before, now, demure against the background of budding apple trees, with a shaft of sunlight on her hair, and the kitten cuddled against her breast, she put to rout

the few intelligent ideas remaining to the young man.

Wonderingly, helplessly, he watched while she continued to caress the minute creature in her arms.

"Are you staying here long?" she asked at length, gaining courage to look up.

"I—eh—yes; that is—I hope so," Bob answered with sudden fervor.

"You like Wilton then."

"Tremendously!"

"Most strangers think the place has great beauty," observed his guest innocently.

"There's more beauty here in Wilton than I ever saw before in all my life," burst out Bob, then stopped suddenly and blushed.

His listener dimpled.

"Really?" she remarked, raising her delicately arched brows. "You are enthusiastic about the Cape, aren't you!"

"Some parts of it."

"Where else have you been?"

The question came with disturbing directness.

"Oh—why—Middleboro, Tremont, Buzzard's Bay and Harwich," answered the man hurriedly. As he named the list he was conscious that it smacked rather too suggestively of a brakeman's, and he saw she thought so too, for she turned aside to hide a smile.

"You might sit down; won't you?" he suggested, eager that she should not depart.

Flecking the dust from the soap box with his handkerchief, he dragged it forward and placed it near the workbench.

As she bent her head to accept the crude throne with a queen's graciousness, Jezebel, roused into playful humor, thrust forth her claws and, encountering Bob as he rose from his stooping posture, fixed them with random firmness in his necktie.

Now it chanced that the tie was a four-in-hand of raw silk, very choice in color but of a fatally loose oriental weave; and once entangled in its meshes the task of extricating its delicate threads from the clutch that gripped them seemed hopeless. It apparently failed to dawn on either of the young persons brought into such embarrassingly close contact by the dilemma that the kitten could be handed over to Bob; or that the tie might be removed. Instead they drew together, trying vainly to liberate the struggling Jezebel from her imprisonment. It was not a simple undertaking and to add to its difficulties the ungrateful beast, irritated by their endeavors, began to protest violently.

"She'll tear your tie all to pieces," cried the stranger.

"No matter. I don't mind, if she doesn't scratch you."

"Oh, I am not afraid of her. If you can hold her a second longer, I think I can free the last claw."

As the girl toiled at her precarious mission, Bob could feel her warm breath fan his cheek and could catch the fragrant perfume of her hair. So far as he was concerned, Jezebel might retain her hold on his necktie forever. But, alas, the slim, white fingers were too deft and he heard at last a triumphant:

"There!"

At the same instant the offending kitten was placed on the floor.

"You little monkey!" cried the man, smiling down at the furry object at his feet.

"Isn't she!" echoed the visitor sympathetically. "There she goes, the imp! What is left of your tie? Let me look at it."

"It's all right, thank you."

"There is just one thread ruffed up. I could fix it if I had a pin."

From her gown she produced one, but as she did so a spray of wild roses slipped to the ground.

"You've dropped your flowers," said Bob, picking them up.

"Have I? Thank you. They are withered, anyway, I'm afraid."

Tossing the rosebuds on the bench, she began to draw into smoothness the silken loop that defaced the tie.

"There!" she exclaimed, glancing up into his eyes and tilting her head critically to one side. "That is ever so much better. You would hardly notice it. Now I really must go. I have bothered you quite enough."

"You have not bothered me at all," contradicted Bob emphatically.

"But I know I must have," she protested. "I've certainly delayed you. Besides, it doesn't look as if Willie was coming back."

"Isn't there something I can do for you?"

"No, thank you. It was nothing important. In fact, it doesn't matter at all. I just came to see if he could fix the clasp of my belt buckle. It is broken, and he is so clever at mending things that I thought perhaps he could mend this."

"Let me see it."

"Oh, I couldn't think of troubling you."

"But I should be glad to fix it if I could. If not, I could at least hand it over to Willie's superior skill."

She laughed.

"I'm not certain whether Willie's skill is superior," was her arch retort.

"Why not make a test case and find out?"

Still she hesitated.

"You're afraid to trust your property to me," Bob said, piqued by her

indecision.

"No, I'm not," was the quick response. "See? Here is the belt."

She drew from her pocket a narrow strip of white leather to which a handsome silver buckle was attached and placed it in his hand.

He took it, inspected its fastening and looked with beating pulse at the girdle's slender span.

"Do you think it can be mended?" she inquired anxiously.

"Of course it can."

"Oh, I'm so glad!"

"Give me a few days and you shall have it back as good as new."

"That will be splendid!" Her eyes shone with starry brightness. "You see," she went on, "it was given me on my birthday by my—my—by some one I care a great deal for—by my—" she stopped, embarrassed.

Robert Morton was too well mannered to put into words the interrogation that trembled on his lips, but he might as well have done so, so transparent was the questioning glance that traveled to her left hand in search of the telltale solitaire. Even though his search was not rewarded, he felt certain that the hand concealed in the folds of her dress wore the fatal ring. Of course, mused he, with a shrug, he might have guessed it. No such beauty as this was wandering unclaimed about the world. Well, her fiancé, whoever he might be, was a lucky devil! Without doubt, confound his impudence, his arm had traveled the pathway of that band of leather scores of times.

One couldn't blame the dog! For want of a better vent for his irritation, Bob took up the belt and again examined it. He had been quite safe in boasting that the bauble should be returned to its owner as good as new, for although he did not confess it, on its silver clasp he had discovered the manufacturer's name. If the buckle could not be repaired, another of similar pattern should replace it. Unquestionably he was a fool to go to this trouble and expense for nothing. Yet was it quite for nothing? Was it not worth while to win even a smile from this creature whose approval gave one the sense of being knighted? True, titles meant

but little in these days of democracy but when bestowed by such royalty— She broke in on his reverie by extending her hand. "Good-by," she said. "You have been very kind, Mr.—"

"My name is Morton—Bob Morton."

"Why! Then you must be the son of Aunt Tiny's brother?"

"*Aunt Tiny*!"

As she laughed he saw again the ravishing dimple and her even, white teeth.

"Oh, she isn't my real aunt," she explained. "I just call her that because I am so fond of her. I adore both her and Willie."

"Who is takin' my name in vain?" called a cheery voice, as the little inventor rounded the corner of the shed and entered the room. "Delight—as I live! I might 'a' known it was you. Well, well, dear child, if I'm not glad to see you."

He placed his hands on her shoulders and beamed into her blushing face while she bent and spread the loops of his soft tie out beneath his chin.

"How nice of you, Willie dear, to come back before I had gone!" she said, arranging the bow with exaggerated care.

"Bless your heart, I'd 'a' come back sooner had I known you were here," declared he affectionately. "What brings you, little lady?"

She pointed to the trinket dangling from Robert Morton's grasp.

"I snapped the clasp of my belt buckle, Willie—that lovely silver buckle Zenas Henry gave me," she confessed with contrition. "How do you suppose I could have been so careless? I have been heart-broken ever since."

"Nonsense! Nonsense!" cried the old man, patting her hand. "Don't go grievin' over a little thing like that. 'Tain't worth it. Break all the buckles ever was made, but not your precious heart, my dear. Like as not the thing can be mended."

"Mr. Morton says it can."

"If Bob says so, it's as good as done already," replied Willie reassuringly. "He's a great one with tools. Why, if he was to stay in Wilton, he'd be cuttin' me all out. So you an' he have been gettin' acquainted, eh, while I was gone? That's right. I want he should know what nice folks we've got in Wilton 'cause it's his first visit to the Cape, an' if he don't like us mebbe he'll never come again."

"I thought Mr. Morton had visited other places on Cape Cod," observed Delight, darting a mischievous glance at the abashed young man opposite.

"No, indeed!" blundered Willie. "He ain't been nowheres. Somebody's got to show him all the sights. Mebbe if you get time you'll take a hand in helpin' educate him."

"I should be glad to!"

Notwithstanding the prim response and her unsmiling lips, the young man had a discomfited presentiment that she was laughing at him, and even the farewell she flashed to him over her shoulder had a hectoring quality in it that did not altogether restore his self-esteem.

"Who is she?" he gasped, when he had watched her out of sight.

"That girl? Do you mean to say you don't know—an' you a-talkin' to her half the mornin'?" demanded the old man with amazement. "Why, it never dawned on me to introduce you to her. I thought of course you knew already who she was. Everybody in town knows Delight Hathaway, an' loves her, too," he added softly. "She's Zenas Henry's daughter, the one he brought ashore from the *Michleen* an' adopted."

"Oh!"

A light began to break in on Bob's understanding.

"It's Zenas Henry's motor-boat we're tinkerin' with now," went on Willie.

"I see!"

He waited eagerly for further information, but evidently his host considered he had furnished all the data necessary, for instead of enlarging on the subject he approached the bench and began to inspect the model.

"I s'pose, with her bein' here, you didn't get ahead much while I was gone," he ventured, an inflection of disappointment in his tone.

"No, I didn't."

"I didn't accomplish nothin', either," the little old man went on. "Jan warn't to home; he'd gone fishin'."

His companion did not reply at once.

"I don't quite get my soundin's on Jan," he at length ruminated aloud. "Somethin's wrong with him. I feel it in my bones."

"Perhaps not."

"There is, I tell you. I know Janoah Eldridge from crown to heel, an' it ain't like him to go off fishin' by himself."

"I shouldn't fret about it if I were you," Bob said in an attempt to comfort the disquieted inventor. "I'm sure he'll turn up all right."

Had the conversation been of a three-master in a gale; of buried treasure; or of the ultimate salvation of the damned, the speaker would at that moment have been equally optimistic.

The universe had suddenly become too radiant a place to harbor calamity. Wilton was a paradise like the first Eden—a garden of smiles, of dimples, of blushing cheeks—and of silver buckles.

He began to whistle softly to himself; then, sensing that Willie was still unconvinced by his sanguine prediction, he added:

"And even if Mr. Eldridge shouldn't come back, I guess you and I could manage without him."

"That's all very well up to a certain point, youngster," was the retort. "But who's goin' to see me through this job after you've taken wing?"

He pointed tragically to the beginnings of the model.

"Maybe I shan't take wing," announced Bob, looking absently at the cluster of withered roses in his hand. "You—you see," he went on, endeavoring to speak in off-hand fashion, "I've been thinking things over and—and—I've about come to the conclusion—"

"Yes," interrupted Willie eagerly.

"That it is perhaps better for me to stay here until we get the invention completed."

"You don't mean until the thing's done!"

"If it doesn't take too long, yes."

"Hurray!" shouted his host. "That's prime!" he rubbed his hands together. "Under those conditions we'll pitch right in an' scurry the work along fast as ever we can."

Robert Morton looked chagrined.

"I don't know that we need break our necks to rush the thing through at a pace like that," he said, fumbling awkwardly with the flowers. "A few weeks more or less wouldn't make any great difference."

"But I thought you said it was absolutely necessary for you to go home—that you had important business in New York—that—" the old man broke off dumbfounded.

Bob shook his head. "Oh, no, I think my affairs can be arranged," was the sanguine response. "A piece of work like this would give me lots of valuable experience, and I'm not sure but it is my duty to—"

The little old inventor scanned the speaker's flushed cheeks, his averted eye and the drooping blossoms in his hand; then his brow cleared and he smiled broadly:

"Duty ain't to be shunned," announced he with solemnity. "An' as for experience, take it by an' large, I ain't sure but what you'll get a heap of it by lingerin' on here—more, mebbe, than you realize."

CHAPTER VI

MARRYING AND GIVING IN MARRIAGE

That afternoon, after making this elaborate but by no means misleading explanation to Willie, Bob sent off to a Boston jeweler a registered package and while impatiently awaiting its return set to work with redoubled zest at the new invention.

What an amazingly different aspect the motor-boat enterprise had assumed since yesterday! Then his one idea had been to humor Willie's whim and in return for the old man's hospitality lend such aid to the undertaking as he was able. But now Zenas Henry's launch had suddenly become a glorified object, sacred to the relatives of the divinity of the workshop, and how and where the flotsam of the tides ensnared it was of colossal importance. Into solving the nautical enigma Robert Morton now threw every ounce of his energy and while at work artfully drew from his companion every detail he could obtain of Delight Hathaway's strange story.

He learned how the *Michleen* had been wrecked on the Wilton Shoals in the memorable gale of 1910; how the child's father had perished with the ship, leaving his little daughter friendless in the world; how Zenas Henry and the three aged captains had risked their lives to bring the little one ashore; and how the Brewsters had taken her into their home and brought her up. It was a simple tale and simply told, but the heroism of the romance touched it with an epic quality that gripped the listener's imagination and sympathies tenaciously. And now the waif snatched from the grasp of the covetous sea had blossomed into this exquisite being; this creature beloved, petted, and well-nigh spoiled by a proudly exultant community.

For although legally a member of the Brewster family, Willie explained, the girl had come to belong in a sense to the entire village. Had she not been cast an orphan upon its shores, and were not its treacherous shoals responsible for her misfortune? Wilton, to be sure, was not actually answerable for the crimes those hidden sand bars perpetrated, but nevertheless the fisherfolk could not quite

shake themselves free of the shadow cast upon them by the tragedies ever occurring at their gateway. Too many of their people had gone down to the sea in ships never to return for them to become callous to the disasters they were continually forced to witness. The wreck of the *Michleen* had been one of the most pathetic of these horrors, and the welfare of the child who in consequence of it had come into the hamlet's midst had become a matter of universal concern.

"'Tain't to be wondered at the girl is loved," continued Willie. "At first people took an interest in her, or tried to, from a sense of duty, for you couldn't help bein' sorry for the little thing. But 'twarn't long before folks found out 'twarn't no hardship to be fond of Delight Hathaway. She was livin' sunshine, that's what she was! Wherever she went, be it one end of town or t'other, she brought happiness. In time it got so that if you was to drop in where there was sickness or trouble an' spied a nosegay of flowers, you could be pretty sure Delight had been there. Why, Lyman Bearse's father, old Lyman, that's so crabbed with rhumatism that it's a cross to live under the same roof with him, will calm down gentle as a dove when Delight goes to read to him. As for Mis' Furber, I reckon she'd never get to the Junction to do a mite of shoppin' or marketin' but for Delight stayin' with the babies whilst she was gone. I couldn't tell you half what that girl does. She's here, there, an' everywhere. Now she's gettin' up a party for the school children; now makin' a birthday cake for somebody; now trimmin' a bunnit for Tiny or helpin' her plan out a dress."

Willie stopped to rummage on a distant shelf for a level.

"Once," he went on, "Sarah Libbie Lewis asked me what Delight was goin' to be. I told her there warn't no goin' to be about it; Delight was bein' it right now. She didn't need to go soundin' for a mission in life."

"I take it you are not in favor of careers for women, Mr. Spence," observed Robert Morton, who had been eagerly drinking in every word the old man uttered.

"Yes, I am," contradicted the inventor. "There's times when a girl needs a career, but there's other times when to desert one's plain duty an' go huntin' a callin' is criminal. Queer how people will look right over the top of what they don't want to see, ain't it? I s'pose its human nature though," he mused.

A soft breeze stirred the shavings on the floor.

"Tiny thinks," resumed the quiet voice, "that I mix myself up too much with other folks's concerns anyhow. Leastways, she says I let their troubles weigh on me more'n I'd ought. But to save my life I can't seem to help it. Don't you believe those on the outside of a tangle sometimes see it straighter than them that is snarled up in the mess?"

Robert Morton nodded.

"That's the way I figger it," rambled on the old man. "Mebbe that's the reason I can't keep my fingers out of the pie. You'd be surprised enough if you was to know the things I've been dragged into in my lifetime; family quarrels, will-makin's, business matters that I didn't know no more about than the man in the moon. Why, I've even taken a hand in love affairs!"

He broke into a peal of hearty laughter. "That's the beatereee!" he declared, slapping his thigh. "'Magine me up to my ears in a love affair! But I have been—scores of 'em, enough I reckon, put 'em all together, to marry off the whole of Cape Cod."

"You must be quite an authority on the heart by this time," Robert Morton ventured.

"I ain't," the other declared soberly. "You see, none of the snarls was ever the same, so you kinder had to feel your way along every time like as if you was navigatin' a new channel. Women may be all alike, take 'em in the main, but they're almighty different when you get 'em to the fine point, an' that's what raises the devil with makin' any general rule for managin' 'em."

The philosopher held the piece of wood he had been planing to the light and examined it critically.

"Once," he resumed, taking up his work again, "when Dave Furber was courtin' Katie Bearse, I drove over to Sawyer's Falls with him to get Katie a birthday present an' among other things we thought we'd buy some candy. We went into a store, I recollect, where there was all kinds spread out in trays, an' Dave an' me started to pick out what we'd have. As I stood there attemptin' to decide, I couldn't help thinkin' that selectin' that candy was a good deal like choosin' a wife. You couldn't have all the different kinds, an' makin' up your mind which you preferred was a seven-days' conundrum."

The little inventor took off his spectacles, wiped them, and replaced them upon his nose.

"Luckily, as we was fixed, there was a chance in the box for quite a few sorts, so that saved the day. But s'pose, I got to thinkin', you could only have one variety out of the lot—which would you take? That's the sticker you face when choosin' a wife. S'pose, for instance, I was pinned down to nothin' but caramels. The caramel is a good, square, sensible, dependable candy. You can see through the paper exactly what you're gettin'. There's nothin' concealed or lurkin' in a caramel. Moreover, it lasts a long time an' you don't get tired of it. It's just like some women—not much to look at, but wholesome an' with good wearin' qualities. Should you choose the caramel, you'd feel sure you was doin' the wise thing, wouldn't you?"

Robert Morton smiled into the half-closed blue eyes that met his so whimsically.

"But along in the next tray to the caramel," Willie went on, "was bonbons—every color of the rainbow they were, an' pretty as could be; an' they held all sorts of surprises inside 'em, too. They was temptin'! But the minute you put your mind on it you knew they'd turn out sweet and sickish, an' that after gettin' 'em you'd wish you hadn't. There's plenty of women like that in the world. Mebbe you ain't seen 'em, but I have."

"Yes."

"Besides these, there was dishes of sparklin' jelly things on the counter, that the girl said warn't much use—gone in no time; they were just meant to dress up the box. I called 'em brainless candies—just silly an' expensive, an' if you look around you'll find women can match 'em. An' along with 'em you can put the candied violets an' sugared rose leaves that only make a man out of pocket an' ain't a mite of use to him."

Willie scanned his companion's face earnestly.

"Finally, after runnin' the collection over, it kinder come down to a choice between caramels or chocolates. Even then I still stood firm for the caramel, there bein' no way of makin' sure what I'd get inside the chocolate. I warn't willin' to go it blind, I told Dave. A chocolate's a sort of unknowable thing, ain't it? There's no fathomin' it at sight. After you've got it you may be pleased to

death with what's inside it an' then again you may not. So we settled mostly on caramels for Katie. I said to Dave comin' home it was lucky men warn't held down to one sort of candy like they are to one sort of wife, an' he most laughed his head off. Then he asked me what kind of sweet I thought Katie was, an' I told him I reckoned she was the caramel variety, an' he said he thought so, too. We warn't fur wrong neither, for she's turned out 'bout as we figgered. Mebbe she ain't got the looks or the sparkle of the bonbons or jelly things, but she's worn almighty well, an' made Dave a splendid wife."

"With all your excellent theories about women, I wonder you never picked out a wife for yourself, Mr. Spence," Robert Morton remarked mischievously.

"Me get married?" questioned Willie, staring at the speaker open-eyed over the top of his spectacles.

"Why not?"

"Why, bless your heart, I never thought of it!" answered the little man naïvely. "It's taken 'bout all my time to get other folks spliced together. Besides," he added, "I've had my inventin'."

He glanced out of the window at a moving figure, then shot abruptly to the door and called to some one who was passing:

"Hi, Jack!"

A man in coast-guard uniform waved his hand.

"How are you, Willie?" he shouted.

"All right," was the reply. "How are you an' Sarah Libbie makin' out?"

"Same as ever."

"You ain't said nothin' to her yet?"

Robert Morton saw the burly fellow in the road sheepishly dig his heel into the sand.

"N—o, not yet."

"An' never will!" ejaculated the inventor returning wrathfully to the shop. "That feller," he explained as he resumed his seat, "has been upwards, of twenty years tryin' to tell Sarah Libbie Lewis he's in love with her. He knows it an' so does she, but somehow he just can't put the fact into words. I'm clean out of patience with him. Why, one day he actually had the face to come in here an' ask me to tell her—*me*! What do you think of that?"

Robert Morton chuckled at his companion's rage.

"Did you?"

"Did I?" repeated Willie with scorn. "Can you see me doin' it? No, siree! I just up an' told Jack Nickerson if he warn't man enough to do his own courtin' he warn't man enough for any self-respectin' woman to marry. An' furthermore, I said he needn't step foot over the sill of this shop 'till he'd took some action in the matter. That hit him pretty hard, I can tell you, 'cause he used to admire to come in here an' set round whenever he warn't on duty. But he saw I meant it, an' he ain't been since."

The old man paused.

"I kinder bit off my own nose when I took that stand," he admitted, an intonation of regret in his tone, "'cause Jack's mighty good company. Still, there was nothin' for it but firm handlin'."

"How long ago did you cast him out?" Bob asked with a chuckle.

"Oh, somethin' over a week or ten days ago," was the reply. "I thought he might have made some progress by now. But I ain't given up hope of him yet. He's been sorter quiet the last two times I've seen him, an' I figger he's mullin' things over, an' mebbe screwin' up his courage."

The room was still save for the purr of the plane.

"I suppose you will be marrying Miss Hathaway off some day," observed Bob a trifle self-consciously, without raising his eyes from his work.

"You bet I won't," came emphatically from the old inventor. "I've got some courage but not enough for that. You see, the man that marries her has got to have the nerve to face the whole village—brave Zenas Henry, the three captains,

an' Abbie Brewster, besides winnin' the girl herself. 'Twill be some contract. No, you can be mortal sure I shan't go meddlin' in no such love affair as that. Anyhow, I won't be needed, for any man that Delight Hathaway would look at twice will be perfectly capable of meetin' all comers; don't you worry."

With this dubious comfort Willie stamped with spirit out of the shop.

CHAPTER VII

A SECOND SPIRIT APPEARS

Days came and went, days golden and blue, until a week had passed, and although Robert Morton haunted the post-office, nothing was heard from the jeweler to whom he had sent the silver buckle. Neither did the eager young man catch even a fleeting glimpse of its owner. It was, he told himself, unlikely that she would come to the Spence house again. When her property was repaired she probably would expect some one either to let her know, or bring it to her. It was to the latter alternative that Bob was pinning his hopes. The errand would provide a perfectly natural excuse for him to go to the Brewster home, and once there he would meet the girl's family and perhaps be asked to come again. Until the trinket came back from Boston, therefore, he must bide his time with patience.

Nevertheless the logic of these arguments did not prevent him from turning sharply toward the door of the workshop whenever there was a footfall on the grass. Any day, any hour, any moment the lady of his dreams might appear once more. Had not Willie said that she sometimes trimmed bonnets for Tiny? And was it not possible, yea, even likely that his aunt might be needing a bonnet right away. Women were always needing bonnets, argued the young man vaguely; at least, both his mother and sister were, and he had not yet lived long enough in his aunt's household to realize that with Tiny Morton the purchase of a bonnet was not an equally casual enterprise. He even had the temerity to ask Celestina when he saw her arrayed for the grange one afternoon why she did not have a hat with pink in it and was chagrined to receive the reply that she did not like pink; and that anyway her hat was well enough as it was, and she shouldn't have

another for a good couple of years.

"I don't go throwin' money away on new hats like you city folks do," she said somewhat tartly. "A hat has to do me three seasons for best an' a fourth for common. I've too much to do to go chasin' after the fashions. I leave that to Bart Coffin's wife."

"Who is Bart Coffin?" inquired Bob, amused by her show of spirit.

"You ain't met Bart?"

"Not yet."

"Well, you will. He's the one who always used to stow all his catch of fish in the bow of the boat 'cause he said it was easier to row downhill. He ain't no heavyweight for brains as you can see, an' years ago he married a wife feather-headed as himself. He did it out of whole cloth, too, so he's got no one to blame if he don't like his bargain. At the time of the weddin' he was terrible stuck up about his bride, an' he gave her a black satin dress that outdid anything the town had ever laid eyes on. It was loaded down with ruffles, an' jet, an' lace, an' fitted her like as if she was poured into it. Folks said it was made in Brockton, but whether it was or not there's no way of knowin'. Anyhow, back she pranced to Wilton in that gown an' for a year or more, whenever there was a church fair, or a meetin' of the Eastern Star, or a funeral, you'd be certain of seein' Minnie Coffin there in her black satin. There wasn't a lay-out in town could touch it, an' by an' by it got so that it set the mark on every gatherin' that was held, those where Minnie's satin didn't appear bein' rated as of no account." Celestina paused, and her mouth took an upward curve, as if some pleasant reverie engrossed her. "But after a while," she presently went on, "there came an upheaval in the styles; sleeves got smaller, an' skirts began to be nipped in. Minnie's dress warn't wore a particle but it looked as out-of-date as Joseph's coat would look on Willie. The women sorter nudged one another an' said that now Mis' Bartley Coffin would have to step down a peg an' stop bein' leader of the fashions."

Celestina ceased rocking and leaned forward impressively.

"But did she?" declaimed she with oratorical eloquence. "Did she? Not a bit of it. Minnie got pictures an' patterns from Boston; scanted the skirt; took in the sleeves; made a wide girdle with the breadths she took out of the front—an' there

she was again, high-steppin' as ever!"

Robert Morton laughed with appreciation.

"Since then," continued Celestina, "for at least fifteen years she's been makin' that dress over an' over. Now she'll get a new breadth of goods or a couple of breadths, turn the others upside down or cut 'em over, an' by keepin' everlastingly at it she contrives to look like the pictures in the papers most of the time. It's maddenin' to the rest of us. Abbie Brewster knows Minnie well an' somewhere in a book she's got set down the gyrations of that dress. I wouldn't be bothered recordin' it but Abbie always was a methodical soul. She could give you the date of every inch of satin in the whole thing. Just now there's 1914 sleeves; the front breadths are 1918; the back ones 1911. Most of the waist is January, 1912, with a June, 1913, vest. Half the girdle is made out of 1910 satin, an' half out of 1919. Of course there's lights when the blacks don't all look the same; still, unless you got close up you wouldn't notice it, an' Minnie Coffin keeps on settin' the styles for the town like she always has."

The narrator paused for breath.

"She's makin' it over again right now," she announced, rising from her chair and moving toward the pantry. "You can always tell when she is 'cause she pulls down all her front curtains an' won't come to the door when folks knock. The shades was down when Abbie an' me drove by there last week an' to make sure Abbie got out an' tapped to' see if anybody'd come to let us in, but nobody did. We said then: '*Minnie's resurrectin' the black satin*.' You mark my words she'll be in church in it Sunday. It generally takes her about ten days to get it done. I was expectin' she'd give it another overhauling, for she ain't done nothin' to it for three months at least an' the styles have changed quite a little in that time. Sometimes I tell Willie I believe we'll live to see her laid out in that dress yet."

"You can bet Bart would draw a sigh of relief if we did," chimed in the inventor. "Why, the money that woman's spent pullin' that durn thing to pieces an' puttin' it together again is a caution. Bart said you'd be dumbfounded if you could know what he's paid out. If the coffin lid was once clamped down on the pest he'd raise a hallelujah, poor feller."

"Willie!" gasped the horrified Celestina.

"Oh, I ain't sayin' he'd be glad to see Minnie goin'," the little old man

protested. "But that black satin has been a bone of contention ever since the day it was bought. To begin with, it cost about ten times what Bart calculated 'twould; he told me that himself. An' it's been runnin' up in money ever since. When he got it he kinder figgered 'twould be an investment somethin' like one of them twenty-year endowments, an' that for nigh onto a quarter of a century Minnie wouldn't need much of anything else. But his reckonin' was agog. It's been nothin' but that black satin all his married life. Let alone the price of continually reenforcin' it, the wear an' tear on Minnie's nerves when she's tinkerin' with it is somethin' awful. Bart says that dress ain't never out of her mind. She's rasped an' peevish all the time plannin' how she can fit the pieces in to look like the pictures. It's worse than fussin' over the cut-up puzzles folks do. Sometimes at night she'll wake him out of a sound sleep to tell him she's just thought how she can eke new sleeves out of the side panels, or make a pleated front for the waist out of the girdle. I guess Bart don't get much rest durin' makin'-over spells. I saw him yesterday at the post-office an' he was glum as an oyster; an' when I asked him was he sick all he said was he hoped there'd be no black satins in heaven."

"I told you she was fixin' it over!" cried Celestina triumphantly. "So you was at the store, was you, Willie? You didn't say nothin' about it."

"I forgot I went," confessed the little man. "Lemme see! I believe 'twas more nails took me down."

"Did you get any mail?"

"No—yes—I dunno. 'Pears like I did get somethin'. If I did, it's in the pocket of my other coat."

Going into the hall he returned with a small white package which he gave to Celestina.

"It ain't for me," said she, after she had examined the address. "It's Bob's."

"Bob's, eh?" queried the inventor. "I didn't notice, not havin' on my readin' glasses. So it's Bob's, is it?"

"Yes," answered Celestina, eyeing the neat parcel curiously. "Whoever's sendin' you a bundle all tied up with white paper an' pink string, Bob? It looks like it was jewelry."

Quickly Willie sprang to the rescue.

"Oh, Bob's been gettin' some repairin' done for the Brewsters," explained he. "Delight's buckle was broke an' knowin' the best place to send it, he mailed it up to town."

"Oh," responded Celestina, glancing from one to the other with a half satisfied air.

"Let's have the thing out an' see how it looks, Bob," Willie went on.

Blushingly Robert Morton undid the box.

Yes, there amid wrappings of tissue paper, on a bed of blue cotton wool, rested the buckle of silver, its burnished surface sparkling in the light.

He took it out and inspected it carefully.

"It is all O. K.," observed he, with an attempt at indifference. "See what a fine piece of work they made of it."

The old man took from the table drawer a long leather case, drew out another pair of spectacles which he exchanged for the ones he was already wearing, and after scrutinizing the buckle and scowling at it for an interval he carried it to the window.

"What's the matter?" Bob demanded, instantly alert. "Isn't the repairing properly done?"

"'Tain't the repairin' I'm lookin' at," Willie returned slowly. "I've no quarrel with that."

Still he continued to twist and turn the disc of silver, now holding it at arm's length, now bringing it close to his eye with a puzzled intentness.

Robert Morton could stand the suspense no longer.

"What's wrong with it?" he at last burst out.

Willie did not look up but evidently he caught the note of impatience in the younger man's tone, for he drawled quizzically:

"Don't it strike you as a mite peculiar that a buckle should go to Boston with D. L. H. on it an' come home marked C. L. G.?"

"*What*!"

"That's what's on it—C. L. G. See for yourself."

"It can't be."

"Come an' have a look."

The inventor placed the trinket in Robert Morton's hand.

"C. L. G.," repeated he, as he deciphered the intertwined letters of the monogram. "You are right, sure as fate! Jove!"

"They've sent you the wrong girl," remarked Willie. "It's clear as a bell on a

still night. There must have been two girls an' two buckles, an' the jeweler's mixed 'em up; you've got the other lady's."

"That's a nice mess!" Bob ejaculated irritably. "Why, I'd rather have given a hundred dollars than have this happen. I'll wring that man's neck!"

"Easy, youngster! Easy!" cautioned Willie. "Don't go heavin' all your cargo overboard 'till you find you're really sinkin'. 'Tain't likely Miss C. L. G. will care a row of pins for Miss D. L. H.'s buckle. She'll be sendin' out an S. O. S. for her own an' will be ready to join you in flayin' the jeweler. Give the poor varmint time, an' he'll shift things round all right."

"But Miss Hathaway—"

"Delight's lived the best part of two weeks without that buckle, an' she don't look none the worse for not havin' it. I saw her in the post-office only yesterday an'—"

"Did you?" cried Bob eagerly, then stopped short, flushed, and bit his lip.

"Yes, she was there," Willie returned serenely, without appearing to have noticed his guest's agitation. "Young Farwell from Cambridge—the one that has all the money—was talkin' to her, an' she had that Harvard professor who boards at the Brewsters' along too; Carlton his name is, Jasper Carlton. He's a mighty good-lookin' chap." He stole a glance at the face that glowered out of the window. "Had you chose to stroll down to the store with me like I asked you to, you might 'a' seen her yourself."

"Oh, I—I—didn't need to see her," stammered Bob.

"Mebbe not," was the tranquil answer. "An' she didn't need to see you, neither, judgin' from the way she was talkin' an' laughin' with them other fellers. Still a young man is never the worse for chattin' with a nice girl. Now, son, if I was you, I wouldn't get stirred up over this jewelry business. We'll get a rise out of Miss C. L. G. pretty soon an' when she comes to the surface—"

"Who's that at the gate, Willie?" called Celestina from the kitchen.

"What?"

"There's somebody at the gate in a big red automobile. She's comin' in. You go an' see what she wants, 'cause my apron ain't fresh. Likely she's lost her way or else is huntin' board."

Although Willie shuffled obediently into the hall he was not in time to prevent the sonorous peal of the bell.

"Yes, he's here," they heard him say. "Of course you can speak to him. He's just inside. Won't you step in?"

Then without further ado, and with utter disregard of Celestina's rumpled apron, the door opened and the little inventor ushered into the string-entangled sitting room a dainty, city-bred girl in a sport suit of white serge. She was not only pretty but she was perfectly groomed and was possessed of a fascinating vivacity and charm. Everything about her was vivid: the gloss of her brown hair, the sparkle of her eyes, her color, her smile, her immaculate clothes—all were dazzling. She carried her splendor with an air of complete sureness as if she was accustomed to the supremacy it won for her and expected it. Yet the audacity of her pose had in it a certain fitness and was piquant rather than offensive.

The instant she crossed the threshold, Robert Morton leaped to meet her with outstretched hands.

"Cynthia Galbraith!" he cried. "How ever came you here?"

A ripple of teasing laughter came from the girl.

"You are surprised then; I thought you would be."

"Surprised? I can't believe it."

"If you'd written as you should have done, you wouldn't have been at all amazed to see me," answered the newcomer severely.

"I meant to write," the culprit asserted uneasily.

"Maybe you will inform me what you are doing on Cape Cod," went on the lady in an accusing tone.

"How did you know I was here?"

"You can't guess?"

"No, I haven't a glimmer."

From the pocket of her shell-pink sweater she drew forth a small white box of startlingly familiar appearance.

"Does this belong to you?" demanded she.

Beneath the mockery of her eyes Robert Morton could feel the color mount to his temples.

"Well, well!" he said, with a ghastly attempt at gaiety, "So you were C. L. G."

"Naturally. Didn't the initials suggest the possibility?"

"No—eh—yes; that is, I hadn't thought about it," he floundered. "It's funny how things come about sometimes, isn't it? I want you to meet my aunt, Miss Morton, and my friend Mr. Spence. I am visiting here."

Immediately the dainty Miss Cynthia was all smiles.

"So it is relatives that bring you to the Cape!" said she.

Robert Morton nodded. She seemed mollified.

"Didn't Roger write you that we had taken a house at Belleport for the season?" she asked.

"No," replied Bob. "I haven't heard from him for weeks."

"He's a brute. Yes, we came down in May just after I got back from California. We are crazy over the place. The family will be wild when I tell them you are here. My brother," she went on, turning with a pretty graciousness toward Celestina, "was Bob's roommate at Harvard. In that way we came to know him very well and have always kept up the acquaintance."

"Do you come from the West, same as my nephew does?" questioned Celestina when there was a pause.

The little lady raised her eyebrows deprecatingly.

"No, indeed! The East is quite good enough for us. We are from New York. The boys, however, were always visiting back and forth," she added with haste, "so we have quite an affection for Indiana even if we don't live there." She shot a conciliatory smile in Robert Morton's direction. "Couldn't you go back with me in the car, Bob," she asked turning toward him, "and spring a surprise on the household? Dad's down, Mother's here, and also Grandmother Lee; and the mighty and illustrious Roger, fresh from his law office on Fifth Avenue, is expected Friday. Do come."

"I am afraid I can't to-day," Bob answered.

"Why, Bob, there ain't the least reason in the world you shouldn't go," put in Celestina.

The young man fingered the package in his hand nervously.

"I really couldn't, Cynthia," he repeated, ignoring the interruption. "I'd like immensely to come another day, though. But to-day Mr. Spence and I have a piece of work on hand—"

He paused, discomfited at meeting the astonished gaze of Willie's mild blue eyes.

"Of course you know best," Cynthia replied, drawing in her chin with some hauteur. "I shouldn't think of urging you."

"I'd be bully glad to come another day," reiterated Robert Morton, fully conscious he had offended his fair guest, yet determined to stand his ground. "Tell the affluent Roger to slide over in his racer sometime when he has nothing better to do and get me."

"He will probably only be here for the week-end," retorted Cynthia coldly.

"Sunday, then; why not Sunday? Mr. Spence and I do not work Sundays."

"All right, if you positively won't come to-day. But I don't see why you can't come now and Sunday, too."

"I couldn't do it, dear lady."

"Well, Sunday then, if that is the earliest you can make it."

She smiled an adieu to Willie and Celestina, and with her little head proudly set preceded Bob to her car. But although the great engine throbbed and purred, it was some time before it left the gate and flashed its way down the high road toward Belleport.

After it had gone and Bob was once more in the house, Celestina had a score of questions with which to greet him. How remarkable it was that the owner of the missing jewelry should be some one he knew! The Galbraiths must be well-to-do. What was the brother like? Did he favor his sister?

These and numberless other inquiries like them furnished Celestina with conversation for the rest of the day. Willie, on the contrary, was peculiarly silent, and although his furtive glance traveled at frequent intervals over his young friend's face, he made no comment concerning Miss Cynthia L. Galbraith and her silver buckle.

CHAPTER VIII

SHADOWS

In the meantime the two men resumed their labors in the shop, touching shoulders before the bench where their tools lay. They planed and chiselled and sawed together as before, but as they worked each was conscious that a barrier of sudden reserve had sprung up between them, obstructing the perfect confidence that had previously existed. At first the old inventor tried to bridge this gulf with trivial jests, but as these passed unnoticed he at length lapsed into silence. Now and then, as he stole a look at his companion, he thought he detected in the youthful face a suppressed nervousness and irritation that found welcome vent in the hammer's vigorous blow. Nevertheless, as the younger man vouchsafed no information regarding the morning's adventure, Willie asked no questions.

He would have given a great deal to have satisfied himself about Cynthia

Galbraith. It was easily seen that her family were persons of wealth and position with whom Robert Morton was on terms of the greatest intimacy. It even demanded no very skilled psychologist to perceive the girl's sentiment toward his guest, for Miss Galbraith was a petulent, self-willed creature who did not trouble to conceal her preferences. Her attitude was transparent as the day. But with what feeling did Robert Morton regard her? That was the burning question the little man longed to have answered.

Wearily he sighed. Alas, human nature was a frail, incalculable phenomenon.

How was it likely a young man with his fortune to make would regard a girl as rich and attractive as Cynthia Galbraith, especially if her brother chanced to be his best friend and all her family reached forth welcoming arms to him.

Willie was not a matchmaker. Had he been impugned with the accusation he would have denied it indignantly: Nevertheless, he had been mixed up in too many romances not to find the relation between the sexes a problem of engrossing interest. Furthermore, of late he had been doing a little private castle-building, the foundations of which now abruptly collapsed into ruins at his feet. The cornerstone of this dream-structure had been laid the day he had first seen Robert Morton and Delight Hathaway together. What a well-mated pair they were! For years it had been his unwhispered ambition to see his favorite happily married to a man who was worthy of the priceless treasure.

The Brewster household was aging fast. Captain Jonas, Captain Benjamin, and Captain Phineas were now old men; even Zenas Henry's hair had thinned and whitened above his temples, and Abbie, once so tireless, was becoming content to drop her cares on younger shoulders. Yes, Wilton was growing old, thought the inventor sadly, and he and Celestina were unquestionably keeping pace with the rest. In the natural course of events, before many years Delight would be deprived of her protectors and be left alone in the great world to fend for herself. She was well able to do so, for she was resourceful and capable and would never be forced to marry for a home as was many a lonely woman. Nor would she ever come to want; the village would see to that. Notwithstanding this certainty, however, he could not bear to think of a time when there would be no one to stand between her and the harsher side of life; no man who would count the championship a privilege, an honor, his dearest duty.

Wilton had never offered a husband of the type pictured in Willie's mind. The

hamlet could boast of but few young men, and the greater part of those who lingered within its borders had done so because they lacked the ambition and initiative to hew out for themselves elsewhere broader fields of activity. Those of ability had gravitated to the colleges, the business schools, or gone to test their strength in the city's marts of commerce. Who could blame them for not resting content with baiting lobster pots and dredging for scallops? Were he a young man with his path untrodden before him he would have been one of the first to do the same, Willie confessed. Did he not constantly covet their youth and opportunity? Nevertheless, praiseworthy as their motive had been, the fact remained that nowhere in the village was there a man the peer of Delight Hathaway. Rare in her girlish beauty, rarer yet in her promise of womanhood, what a prize she would be for him who had the fineness of fiber to appreciate the guerdon!

Willie was wont to attest that he himself was not a marrying man; yet notwithstanding the assertion, deep down within the fastness of his soul he had had his visions,—visions pure, exalted and characteristic of his sensitively attuned nature. They were the exquisite secrets of his life; the unfulfilled dreams that had kept him holy; a part of the divine in him; echoes of hungers and longings that reached unsatisfied into a world other than this. Earth had failed to consummate the loves and ambitions of the dreamer. His had been a flattened, warped, starved existence whose perfecting was not of this sphere. And as without bitterness he reviewed the glories that had passed him by, he prayed that these bounties might not also be denied her who, rounding into the full splendor of her womanhood, was worthy of the best heaven had to bestow.

From her childhood he had watched her virtues unfold and none of their potentialities had gone unobserved by the quiet little old man. Through the beauty of his own soul he had been enabled to translate the beauties of another, until gradually Delight Hathaway had come to symbolize for him universal woman, the prototype of all that was purest, most selfless, most tender; most to be revered, watched over, beloved. Yet for all his worship the girl remained for him very human, a creature with bewitching and appealing ways. In the same spirit in which he rejoiced in the tint of a rose's petal or the shell-like flush of a cloud at dawn did he find pleasure in the crimson that colored her cheek, in the perfection of her features, in the shadowy, fathomless depths of her eyes. Father, brother, lover, artist, at her shrine he offered up a composite devotion which sought only her happiness.

With such an attitude of mind to satisfy was it a marvel that in the matter of selecting a husband for his divinity Willie was difficult to please; or that he studied with a criticism quite as jealous as Zenas Henry's own every male who crossed the girl's path?

Yet with all his idealism Willie was a keen observer of life, and from the first moment of their meeting he had detected in Robert Morton qualities more nearly akin to his standards than he had discovered in any of the other outsiders who had come into the hamlet. There was, for example, the son of the Farwells who owned the great colonial mansion on the point,—Billy Farwell, with his racing car and his dogs and his general air of elegance and idleness. Delight had known him since she was a child. And there was Jasper Carlton, the scholarly scientist, years the girl's senior, who annually came to board with the Brewsters during the vacation months. Both of these men paid court to the village beauty, Billy with a half patronizing, half audacious assurance born of years of intimacy; and the professor with that old-fashioned reserve and deference characteristic of the older generation. There were days when the two caused Willie such perturbation of spirit that he would willingly have knocked their heads together or cheerfully have wrung their necks.

Delight unhesitatingly acknowledged that she liked both of them and harmlessly coquetted first with the one, then with the other, until the old inventor was at his wit's end to fathom which she actually favored or whether she seriously favored either of them. Yet irreproachable as were these suitors, to place a man of Bob Morton's attributes in the same category with them seemed absurd. Why, he was head and shoulders above them mentally, morally, physically,—from whichever angle one viewed him. Moreover, blood will tell, and was he not of the fine old Morton stock? Whatever the Carlton forbears might be, young Farwell's ancestry was not an enviable one. Yes, Willie had settled Delight's future to his entire satisfaction and for nights had been sleeping peacefully, confident that with such a husband as Robert Morton her happiness and good fortune would be assured.

And then, like a thunderbolt out of the heavens, had come this Cynthia Galbraith with her fetching clothes, her affluence and her air of proprietorship! By what right had she acquired her monopoly of Bob Morton, and was its exclusiveness gratifying or irksome to its recipient? Might not this strange young man, concerning whom Willie was forced to own he actually knew nothing, be playing a double game, and the frankness of his face belie his real nature? And

was it not possible that his annoyance and irritation were caused by having been trapped in it?

Well, avowed Willie, he would see that Delight encountered this Don Giovanni but seldom, at least until he gave a more trustworthy account of himself than he had vouchsafed up to the present moment. Contrary to the common law, the guest must be rated as guilty until he had proved himself innocent. Yet as he darted a glance at the earnest young face bending over the workbench Willie's conscience smote him and he questioned whether he might not be doing his comrade a dire injustice. The thought caused him to flush uncomfortably, and he flushed still redder when Bob suddenly straightened up and met his eye.

Both men stood alert, held tensely by the same sound. It was the low music of a girlish voice humming a snatch of song, and it was accompanied by the soft crackling of the needles that carpeted the grove of pine between the Spence and Brewster houses. In another instant Delight Hathaway strolled slowly out of the wood and entered the workshop. With her coming a radiance of sunshine seemed to flood the shabby room. She nodded a greeting to Bob, then went straight to Willie and, placing her hands affectionately on his shoulders, looked down into his face. They made a pretty picture, the bent old man with his russet cheeks and thin white hair, and the girl erect as an arrow and beautiful as a young Diana.

The little inventor lifted his mild blue eyes to meet the haunting eyes of hazel.

"Well, well, my dear," he said, as he covered one of her hands with his own worn brown one, "so you have come for your buckle, have you? It is all done, honey, an' good as the day when 'twas made. Bob has it in his pocket for you this minute."

By a strange magic the truth and sunlight of the girl's presence had for the time being dispelled all baser suspicions and Willie smiled kindly at the man beside him.

Holding out the crisp white package, Robert Morton came forward.

Delight looked questioningly from the box with its immaculate paper and neat pink string to its giver.

"He found he couldn't fix it himself," explained Willie, immediately interpreting the interrogation. "Neither him or I were guns enough for the job. So Bob got somebody he knew of to tinker it up."

"That was certainly very kind," returned Delight with gravity. "If you will tell me what it cost I—"

Again the old man stepped into the breach.

"Oh, I figger 'twarn't much," said he with easy unconcern. "The feller who did it was used to mendin' jewelry an' knew just how to set about it, so it didn't put him out of his way none."

"Yes," echoed Bob, with a grateful smile toward Willie. "It made him no trouble at all."

The two men watched the delicate fingers unfasten the package.

"See how nice 'tis," Willie went on. "You'd never know there was a thing the matter with it."

"It's wonderful!" she cried.

Her pleasure put to flight the old inventor's last compunction at his compromise with truth.

"I am so pleased, Mr. Morton!" she went on. "You are quite sure there was no expense."

"Nothing to speak of. I'm glad you like it," murmured the young man.

"Indeed I do!"

She stretched the band of white leather round her waist and Bob noticed how easily its clasp met.

"There!" exclaimed she, raising her hand in mocking imitation of a military salute, "isn't that fine?"

Willie laughed with involuntary admiration at the gesture, and as for Robert

Morton he could have gone down on his knees before her and kissed her diminutive white shoe.

The girl did not prolong the tableau. All too soon she relaxed from rigidity into gaiety and came flitting to the work bench.

"What are you doing, Willie dear?" she asked. "You know you never have secrets from me. What is this marvellous thing you are busy with?"

Before answering, Willie glanced mysteriously about.

"It's because I know you can keep secrets that I ain't afraid to trust you with 'em," said he. "Bob an' I are workin' on the quiet at an idee I was kitched with a day or two ago. It's a bigger scheme than most of the ones I've tackled, an' it may not turn out to be anything at all; still, Bob has studied boats an' knows a heap about 'em, an' he believes somethin' can be made of it. But 'til our fish is hooked we ain't shoutin' that we've caught one. If the contrivance works," went on the little old man eagerly, "it will be a bonanza for Zenas Henry. It's—" he lowered his voice almost to a whisper, "it's an idee to keep motor-boats from gettin' snagged."

The words were scarcely out of his mouth before his listeners saw him start and look apprehensively toward the door.

They were no longer alone. On the threshold of the workshop stood Janoah Eldridge.

CHAPTER IX

A WIDENING OF THE BREACH

"So," piped Janoah, "that's what you're doin', is it, Willie Spence? Well, you needn't 'a' been so all-fired still about it. I guessed as much all the time." There was an acid flavor in the words. "Yes, I knowed it from the beginnin' well as if I'd been here, even if you did shut me out an' take this city feller in to help you in

place of me. Mebbe he has studied 'bout boats; but how do you know what he's up to? How do you know, anyhow, who he is or where he came from? He says, of course, that he's Tiny's nephew, an' he may be, fur all I can tell; but what proof have you he ain't somebody else who's come here to steal your ideas an' get money for 'em?"

There was a moment of stunned silence, as the barbs from his tongue pierced the stillness.

Then Delight stepped in front of the interloper.

"How dare you, Janoah Eldridge!" she cried. "How dare you insult Willie's friend and—and—mine! You've no right to speak so about Mr. Morton."

Before her indignation Janoah quailed. In all his life he had never before seen Delight Hathaway angry, and something in her flashing eyes and flaming cheeks startled him.

"I—I—warn't meanin' to say 'twas actually so," mumbled he apologetically. "Like as not the young man's 'xactly what he claims to be. Still, Willie's awful gullible, an' there's times when a word of warnin' ain't such a bad thing. I'm sorry if you didn't like it."

"I didn't like it, not at all," the girl returned, only slightly mollified by his conciliatory tone. "If you are anything of a gentleman you will apologize to Mr. Morton immediately."

"Ain't I just said I was sorry?" hedged the sheepish Janoah.

"Indeed, there is no need for anything further," Robert Morton protested. "Perhaps, knowing me so little, it was only natural that he should distrust me."

"It was neither natural nor courteous," came hotly from Delight, "and I for one am mortified that any visitor to the village should receive such treatment."

Then as if clearing her skirts of the offending Mr. Eldridge, she drew herself to her full height and swept magnificently out the door. An awkward silence followed her departure.

Robert Morton hesitated, glancing uneasily from Willie to Janoah, scented a

storm and, slipping softly from the shop, went in pursuit of the retreating figure.

"For goodness sake, Janoah, whatever set you makin' a speech like that?" Willie demanded, when the two were alone. "Have you gone plumb crazy? The very notion of your lightin' into that innocent young feller! What are you thinkin' of?"

"Mebbe he ain't so innocent as he seems," the accuser sneered.

The little old man faced him sharply.

"Come," he persisted, "let's have this thing out. What do you know about him?"

"What do you?" retorted Janoah, evading the question.

The inventor paused, chagrined.

"You don't know nothin' an' I don't know nothin'," continued Janoah, seizing the advantage he had gained. "Each of us is welcome to his opinion, ain't he? It's a free country. You're all fur believin' the chap's an angel out of heaven. You've swallered down every word he's uttered like as if it was gospel truth, an' took him into your own house same's if he was a relation. There's fish that gobble down bait just that way. I ain't that kind. Young men don't bury themselves up in a quiet spot like Wilton without they've got somethin' up their sleeve."

Staring intently at his friend, he noted with satisfaction that Willie's brow had clouded into a frown.

"Is it to be expected, I ask you now, is it to be expected that a spirited young sprig of a college feller such as him relishes spendin' his time workin' away in this shop day in an' day out? What's he doin' it fur, tell me that? This world ain't a benevolent institution, an' the folks in it don't go throwin' their elbow-grease away unless they look to get somethin' out of it. This Morton boy has boned down here like a slave. What's in it fur him?"

"Why, it's his vacation an'—"

"Vacation!" interrupted Janoah scornfully. "You call it a vacation, do you, for him to be workin' away here with you? You honestly think he hankers after doin'

it?"

"He said he did."

"An' you believed it, I s'pose, same's you credited the rest of his talk," jeered Mr. Eldridge. "Look out the winder, Willie Spence, an' tell me, if you was twenty instead of 'most seventy, if you'd be stayin' indoors a-carpenterin' these summer days when you could be outside?"

He swept a hand dramatically toward the casement and in spite of himself the old man obeyed his injunction and looked.

A dome blue as larkspur arched the sky and to its farthest bound the sea, reflecting its azure tints, flashed and sparkled as if set with stars of gold. Along the shore where glittered reaches of hard white sand and a gentle breeze tossed into billows the salt grass edging the margin of the little creeks, fishermen launching their dories called to one another, their voices floating upward on the still air with musical clearness.

"Would you be puttin' in your vacation a-workin' all summer, Willie, if you was the age of that young man?" repeated Janoah.

"He ain't here for all summer," protested the unhappy inventor, catching at a straw. "He's only goin' to stay a little while."

"He was here fur over night at first, warn't he?" inquired the tormentor. "Then it lengthened into a week; an' the Lord only knows now how much longer he's plannin' to hang round the place. Besides, if he's only makin' a short visit, it's less likely than ever he'd want to put in the whole of it tinkerin' with you. He'd be goin' about seein' Wilton, sailin', fishin', swimmin' or clammin', like other folks do that come here fur the summer, if he was a normal human bein'. But has he been anywheres yet? No, sir! I've had my weather eye out, an' I can answer for it that the feller ain't once poked his head out of this shop. What's made him so keen fur stayin' in Wilton an' workin'?"

Willie did not answer, but he took a great bandanna with a flaming border of scarlet from his pocket and mopped his forehead nervously.

"That young chap," resumed Janoah, holding up a grimy finger which he shook impressively at the wretched figure opposite, "is here for one of two

reasons. You can like 'em or not, but they're true. He's either here to steal your ideas from you, or he's got his eye on Delight Hathaway."

He saw his victim start violently.

"Mebbe it's the one, mebbe it's the other; I ain't sayin'," announced Janoah with malicious pleasure. "It may even be both reasons put together. He's aimin' fur some landin' place, you can be certain of that, an' I'm warnin yer as a friend to look out fur him, that's all."

"I—I—don't believe it," burst out the little inventor, his benumbed faculties beginning slowly to assemble themselves. "Why, there ain't a finer, better-spoken young man to be found than Bob Morton."

Janoah caught up the final phrase with derision.

"The better spoken he is the more watchin' he'll bear," remarked he. "There's many a villain with an oily gift of gab."

"I'll not believe it!" Willie reiterated.

Mr. Eldridge shrugged his shoulders.

"Take it or leave it," he said. "You're welcome to your own way. Only don't say I didn't warn yer."

Flinging this parting shot backward into the room, Janoah Eldridge passed out into the rose-scented sunshine.

With a sad look in his eyes Willie let him go, watching the tall form as it strode waist-high through the brakes and sweet fern that patched the meadow. It was his first real quarrel with Janoah. Since boyhood they had been friends, the gentleness of the little inventor bridging the many disagreements that had arisen between them. Now had come this mammoth difference, a divergence of standard too vital to be smoothed over by a gloss of cajolery. Willie was angry through every fiber of his being. Slowly it seeped into his consciousness that Janoah's fundamental philosophy and his own were at odds; their attitude of mind as antagonistic as the poles. Against trust loomed suspicion, against generosity narrowness, against optimism pessimism. Janoah believed the worst of the individual while he, Willie, reason as he might, inherently believed the

best. One creed was the fruit of a jealous and envious personality that rejoiced rather than grieved over the limitations of our human clay; the other was a result of that charity *that beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things,* because of a divine faith in the God in man.

For a long time Willie stood there thinking, his gaze fixed upon the gently swaying plumage of the pines. The shock of his discovery left him suddenly feeling very sad and very much alone. It was as if he had buried the friend of half a century. Yet even to bring Janoah back he could not retract the words he had uttered or exchange the light he followed for Janoah's sinister beckonings. In spite of a certain reasonableness in the pessimist's logic; in spite of circumstances he was incapable of explaining; in spite, even, of Cynthia Galbraith, a latent belief in Robert Morton's integrity crystallized into certainty, and he rose to his feet freed of the doubts that had previously assailed him.

At the instant of this emancipation the young man himself entered.

What had passed during the interval since he had gone out of the workshop Willie could only surmise, but it had evidently been of sufficiently inspiring a character to bring into his countenance a radiance almost supernatural in its splendor. Nevertheless he did not speak but stood immovable before the little old inventor as if awaiting a judge's decree, the glory fading from his eyes and a half-veiled anxiety stealing into them.

Willie smiled and, reaching up, placed his hands on the broad shoulders that towered opposite.

"I'm sorry, Bob," he affirmed with a sweetness as winning as a woman's. "You mustn't mind what Jan said. He's gettin' old an' a mite crabbed, an' he's kinder foolish about me, mebbe. I wouldn't 'a' had him hurt your feelin's—"

Robert Morton caught the expression of pain in the troubled face and cut the apology short.

"It's all right, Mr. Spence," he cried. "Don't give it another thought. So long as you remain my friend I don't care what Mr. Eldridge thinks. We'll pass it off as jealousy and let it go at that."

The old man tried to smile, but the corners of his mouth drooped and he sighed instead. To have Janoah's weaknesses thus nakedly set forth by another

was a very different thing from recognizing them himself, and instinctively his loyalty rose in protest.

"Mebbe 'twas jealousy," he replied. "Folks have always stood out that Janoah was jealous. But somehow I'd rather think 'twas tryin' to look after me an' my affairs that misled him. S'pose we call it a sort of slab-sided friendliness."

"We'll call it anything you like," assented Bob, with a happy laugh.

This time Willie laughed also.

"So she stood by you, did she?" queried he with quick understanding.

"Yes."

"'Twas like her."

"It was like both of you."

The old man raised a hand in protest against the gratitude the remark implied.

"Delight ain't often wrong; she's a fair dealer." Then he added significantly, "Them as ain't fair with her deserve no salvation."

"Hanging would be too good for the man who was not square with a girl like that," came from Robert Morton with an emphasis unmistakable in its sincerity.

CHAPTER X

A CONSPIRACY

On Sunday morning, when a menacing east wind whipped the billows into foam and a breath of storm brooded in the air, the Galbraiths' great touring car rolled up to Willie's cottage, and from it stepped not only Robert Morton's old college chum, Roger Galbraith, but also his father, a finely built, middle-aged man whose decisive manner and quick speech characterized the leader and

dictator.

He was smooth-shaven after the English fashion and from beneath shaggy iron-gray brows a pair of dark eyes, piercing in their intensity, looked out. The face was lined as if the stress of living had drawn its muscles into habitual tensity, and except when a smile relieved the setness of the mouth his countenance was stern to severity. His son, on the other hand, possessed none of his father's force of personality. Although his features were almost a replica of those of the older man, they lacked strength; it was as if the second impression taken from the type had been less clear-cut and positive. The eyes were clear rather than penetrating, the mouth and chin handsome but mobile; even the well-rounded physique lacked the rugged qualities that proclaimed its development to have been the result of a Spartan combat with the world and instead bore the more artificial sturdiness acquired from sports and athletics.

Nevertheless Roger Galbraith, if not the warrior his progenitor had been, presented no unmanly appearance. Neither self-indulgence nor effeminacy branded him. In fact, there was in his manner a certain magnetism and warmth of sympathy that the elder man could not boast, and it was because of this asset he had never wanted for friends and probably never would want for them. Through the talisman of charm he would exact from others the service which the more autocratic nature commanded.

Yet in spite of the opposition of their personalities, Robert Morton cherished toward both father and son a sincere affection which differed only in the quality of the response the two men called forth. Mr. Galbraith he admired and revered; Roger he loved.

Had he but known it, each of the Galbraiths in their turn esteemed Robert Morton for widely contrasting reasons. The New York financier found in him a youth after his own heart,—a fine student and hard worker, who had fought his way to an education because necessity confronted him with the choice of going armed or unarmed into life's fray. Although comfortably off, Mr. Morton senior was a man of limited income whose children had been forced to battle for what they had wrested from fortune. Success had not come easily to any of them, and the winning of it had left in its wake a self-reliance and independence surprisingly mature. Ironically enough, this power to fend for himself which Mr. Galbraith so heartily endorsed and respected in Bob was the very characteristic of which he had deprived his own boy, the vast fortune the capitalist had rolled

up eliminating all struggle from Roger's career. Every barrier had been removed, every thwarting force had been brought into abeyance, and afterward, with an inconsistency typical of human nature, the leveler of the road fretted at his son's lack of aggressiveness, his eyes, ordinarily so hawklike in their vision, blinded to the fact that what his son was he had to a great extent made him, and if the product caused secret disappointment he had no one to thank for it but himself. Instead his reasoning took the bias that the younger man, having been given every opportunity, should logically have increased the Galbraith force of character rather than have diminished it, and very impatient was he that such had not proved to be the case.

Robert Morton was much more akin to the Galbraith stock, the financier argued. He had all the dog-like persistency, the fighter's love of the game, the courage that will not admit defeat. Although he would not have confessed it, Mr. Galbraith would have given half his fortune to have interchanged the personalities of the two young men. Could Roger have been blessed with Bob's attributes, the dream of his life would have been fulfilled. Money was a potent slave. In the great man's hands it had wrought a magician's marvels. But this miracle, alas, it was powerless to accomplish. Roger was his son, his only son, whom he adored with instinctive passion; for whom he coveted every good gift; and in whose future the hopes of his life were bound up. Long since he had abandoned expecting the impossible; he must take the boy as he was, rejoicing that Heaven had sent him as good a one. Yet notwithstanding this philosophy, Mr. Galbraith never saw the two young men together that the envy he stifled did not awaken, and the question rise to his lips:

"Why could I not have had such a son?"

The interrogation clamored now as he came up the walk to the doorway where Robert Morton was standing.

"Well, my boy, I'm glad to see you," exclaimed he with heartiness. "You are looking fit as a racer."

"And feeling so, Mr. Galbraith," smiled Bob. "You are looking well yourself."

"Never was better in my life."

As he stood still, sweeping his keen gaze over his surroundings, a telegraphic glance of greeting passed between the two classmates.

"How are you, old man?" said Roger.

"Bully, kipper. It's great to see you again," was the reply.

That was all, but they did not need more to assure each other of their friendship.

"You have a wonderful location here, Bob," observed Mr. Galbraith who had been studying the view. "I never saw anything finer. What a site for a hotel!"

Robert Morton could not but smile at the characteristic comment of the man of finance.

"You would have trouble rooting Mr. Spence out of this spot, I'm afraid," said he.

"Mr. Spence?"

"He is my host. My aunt, Miss Morton, is his housekeeper."

Robert Morton had learned never to waste words when talking with Mr. Galbraith.

"I see. I should be glad to meet your aunt and Mr. Spence."

"I know they would like to meet you too, sir. They are just inside. Won't you come in?"

Leading the way, Bob threw open the door into the little sitting room.

In anticipation of the visit Celestina had arrayed herself in a fresh print dress and ruffled apron and had compelled Willie to replace his jumper with a suit of homespun and flatten his locks into water-soaked rigidity. By the exchange both persons had lost a certain picturesqueness which Bob could not but deplore. Nevertheless the fact did not greatly matter, for it was not toward them that the capitalist turned his glance. Instead his swiftly moving eyes traveled with one sweep over the cobweb of strings that enmeshed the interior and without regard for etiquette he blurted out:

"Heavens! What's all this?"

The remark, so genuine in its amazement, might under other conditions have provoked resentment but now it merely raised a laugh.

"I don't wonder you ask, sir," replied Willie, stepping forward good-humoredly. '"Tain't a common sight, I'll admit. We get used to it here an' think nothin' about it; but I reckon it must strike outsiders as 'tarnal queer."

"What are you trying to do?" queried the capitalist, still too much interested to heed conventionalities.

Simply and with artless naïvete Willie explained the significance of the strings while the New Yorker listened, and as the old man told his story it was apparent that Mr. Galbraith was not only amused but was vastly interested.

"I say, Mr. Spence, you should have been an inventor," he exclaimed, when the tale was finished.

He saw a wistful light come into the aged face.

"I mean," he corrected hastily, "you should have a workshop with all the trappings to help you carry out your schemes."

"Oh, Mr. Spence has a workshop," Robert Morton interrupted. "The nicest kind of a one."

"Would you like to see it?" inquired Willie.

"I should, very much."

"I'm afraid it's no place to take you, sir," objected Celestina, horrified at the suggestion. "It ain't been swept out since the deluge. Willie won't have it cleaned. He says he'd never be able to find anything again if it was."

Mr. Galbraith laughed.

"Workshops do not need cleaning, do they, Mr. Spence?" said he. "I remember the chaos my father's tool-house always was in; it never was in order and we all liked it the better because it wasn't."

Celestina sighed and turned away.

"Ain't it just the irony of fate," murmured she to Bob, "that after slickin' up every room in the house so'st it would be presentable, Willie should tow them folks from New York out into the woodshed? I might 'a' saved myself the trouble."

Robert Morton slipped a comforting arm round her ample waist.

"Never you mind, Aunt Tiny," he whispered. "The Galbraiths have rooms enough of their own to look at; but they haven't a workshop like Willie's."

He patted her arm sympathetically and then, giving her a reassuring little squeeze to console her, followed his guests.

It had not crossed his mind until he went in pursuit of them that if they visited the shop they must perforce be brought face to face with Willie's latest invention still in its embryo state; and it was evident that in the pride of entertaining such distinguished strangers the little old man had also forgotten it, for as Bob entered he caught sight of him fumbling awkwardly with a piece of sailcloth snatched up in a hurried attempt to conceal from view this last child of his genius. He had not been quick enough, however, to elude the capitalist's sharp scrutiny, and before he could prevent discovery the eager eyes had lighted on the unfinished model on the bench.

"What are you up to here?" demanded Richard Galbraith.

There was no help for it. Willie never juggled with the truth, and even if he had been accustomed to do so it would have taken a quicker witted charlatan than he to evade such an alert questioner. Therefore in another moment he had launched forth on a full exposition of the latest notion that had laid hold upon his fancy.

Mr. Galbraith listened until the gentle drawling voice had ceased.

"By Jove!" he ejaculated. "You've got an idea here. Did you know it?"

The inventor smiled.

"Bob an' I kinder thought we had," returned he modestly.

"Bob is helping you?"

"Oh, I'm only putting in an oar," the young man hastened to say. "The plan was entirely Mr. Spence's. I am simply working out some of the details."

"Bob knows a good deal more about boats than perhaps he'll own," Mr. Galbraith asserted to Willie. "I fancy you've found that out already. You are fortunate to have his aid."

"Almighty fortunate," Willie agreed; then, glancing narrowly at his visitor, he added: "Then you think there's some likelihood that a scheme such as this might work. 'Tain't a plumb crazy notion?"

"Not a bit of it. It isn't crazy at all. On the contrary, it should be perfectly workable, and if it proved so, there would be a mine of money in it."

"You don't say!"

It was plain that the comment contained less enthusiasm for the prospective fortune than for the indorsement of the idea.

The New Yorker, however, said nothing more about the invention. He browsed about the shop with unfeigned pleasure, poking in among the cans of paint, oil, and varnish, rattling the nails in the dingy cigar-boxes, and examining the tools and myriad primitive devices Willie had contrived to aid him in his work.

"I was brought up in a shop like this," he at length exclaimed, "and I haven't been inside such a place since. It carries me back to my boyhood."

A strangely softened mood possessed him, and when at last he stepped out on the grass he lingered a moment beneath the arch of grapevine and looked back into the low, sun-flecked interior of the shop as if loath to leave it.

"I am glad to have seen you, Mr. Spence," he said, "and Miss Morton, too. Bob couldn't be in a pleasanter spot than this. I hope sometime you will let me come over again and visit you while we are in Belleport."

"Sartain, sartain, sir!" cried Willie with delight. "Tiny an' me would admire to have you come whenever the cravin' strikes you. We're almighty fond of Bob, an' any friends of his will always be welcome."

The little old man went with them to the car and loitered to watch them roll away.

"You'll see me back to-night," called Bob from the front seat.

"Not to-night, to-morrow," Roger corrected laughingly.

"Well, to-morrow then," smiled the young man.

The engine pulsed, there was a quick throb of energy, and off they sped. Almost without a sound the motor shot along the sand of the Harbor Road and whirled into the pine-shaded thoroughfare that led toward Belleport.

"A fine old fellow that!" mused Mr. Galbraith aloud. "What a pity he could not have had his chance in life."

Bob nodded.

"I suppose he hasn't a cent to carry out any of these schemes of his."

"No, I am afraid he hasn't."

The financier lit a cigar and puffed at it in thoughtful silence.

"That motor-boat idea of his now—why, if it could be perfected and boomed properly, it would make his fortune."

"Do you think so?"

"I know it."

Again the humming of the engine was the only sound.

"Do you know, Bob, I've half a mind to get Snelling down here and set him to work at that job. What should you say?"

"Snelling? You mean the expert from your ship-building plant?"

"Yes. Wouldn't it be a good plan?"

Robert Morton hesitated.

"There is no question that a man of Mr. Snelling's ability would be a tremendous asset in handling such a proposition," he agreed cautiously.

"Snelling could drop in as if to see you," went on the capitalist. "You could fix up all that so there would not be any need of the old fellow suspecting who he was. Once there he could pitch in and help the scheme along. It is going to be quite an undertaking before you get through with it, and the more hands there are to carry it out, the better, in my opinion."

"Yes, it is going to be much more of a job than I realized at first," Bob admitted. "It certainly would be a great help to have Mr. Snelling's aid. But could you spare him? And would he want to come and duff in on this sort of an enterprise?"

"If I telegraphed Snelling to come he would come; and when here he would do whatever he was told," replied Mr. Galbraith, bringing his lips sharply together.

"It's very kind of you!"

"Pooh! the idea amuses me. I'll provide any materials you may need, too. Snelling shall have an order to that effect so that he can call on the Long Island plant for anything he wants."

"That will be splendid, Mr. Galbraith; but where do you come in?"

"I'll have my fun, never you fear," returned the capitalist. "In the first place I'd like nothing better than to do that little old fellow a good turn. There is something pathetic about him. Sometimes it is hard to believe that life gives everybody a square deal, isn't it? That man, for instance. He has the brain and the creative impulse, but he has been cheated of his opportunity. I should enjoy giving him a boost. Occasionally I fling away a small sum on a whim that catches my fancy; now its German marks, now an abandoned farm. This time it shall be Mr. Willie Spence and his motor-boat idee."

He laughed.

"I appreciate it tremendously," Bob said.

"There, there, we won't speak of it any more," the elder man protested,

cutting him short. "I will telegraph Snelling and you may arrange the rest. The old inventor isn't to suspect a thing—remember."

"No, sir."

"That is all, then."

With a finality Robert Morton dared not transgress, the older man lapsed into silence and Bob had no choice but to suppress his gratitude and resign himself to listening to the rhythmic beat of the automobile's great engine.

CHAPTER XI

THE GALBRAITH HOUSEHOLD

The estate the Galbraiths had leased stood baldly upon a rise overlooking the sea in the midst of the fashionable colony adjacent to Wilton, and was one of those blots which the city luxury-lover affixes to a community whose keynote is simplicity. Its expanse of veranda, its fluttering green and white awnings, its giant tubs of blossoming hydrangeas, to say nothing of its Italian garden with rose-laden pergolas, were as out of place as if Saint Peter's itself had been dropped down into a tiny New England fishing hamlet.

The house, it is true, did not lack beauty, for it was well proportioned and gracefully planned, and there was no denying that one found, perhaps, more comfort on its screened and shaded piazzas than was to be enjoyed on Willie Spence's unprotected doorstep. Nevertheless, there was too much of everything about it: too many rambler roses, too many rustic baskets and mighty palms; too many urns, and stone benches, and sundials and fountains. Still, as the car stopped at the door, the great wicker chairs with their scarlet cushions presented a gay picture and so, too, did Mrs. Galbraith and Cynthia who immediately rose from a breezy corner and came forward.

The older woman was tall and handsome and in her youth must have possessed great beauty; even now she carried with a spoiled air almost girlish the

costly gowns and jewels that her husband, proud of her looks, lavished upon her. She had a languid grace very fascinating in its indifference and spoke with a pretty little accent that echoed of the South. For all her attractiveness, Cynthia could not compare in charm with her mother whose femininity lured all men toward her as does a magnet steel.

Bob leaped from the car almost before it had come to a stop and went to her side, bending low over her heavily ringed hand.

"We're so glad to see you, Bobbie!" she smiled. "The very nicest thing that could have happened was to find you here."

"It is indeed a delightful surprise for me," Robert Morton answered. "How are you, Cynthia?"

Cynthia, who was standing in the background, frowned.

"You've been long enough getting here," declared she petulantly. "Where on earth have you been? We decided you must have got stalled on the road."

"Oh, no," interrupted her father, coming up the steps. "We made the run over and back without a particle of trouble. What delayed us was that we stopped to visit with Bob's aunt and the old gentleman with whom he is staying. Such a quaint character, Maida! You really should see him. I had all I could do to tear myself away from the place."

His wife raised her delicately penciled brows.

"We do not often see you so enthusiastic, Richard."

"They are charming people, I assure you. I don't wonder Bob prefers staying over there to coming here," chuckled the financier.

"Oh, I say, Mr. Galbraith—" began Bob; but his host interrupted him.

"That is a rather rough accusation, isn't it?" declared he, "and it's not quite fair, either. To tell the truth, Bob's deep in some important work."

There was a light, scornful laugh from Cynthia.

"He is, my lady. You needn't be so incredulous," her brother put in. "Bob is busy with a boat-building project. Dad's got interested in it, too."

Cynthia pursed her lips with a little grimace.

"Ask him if you don't believe it," persisted Roger.

"Yes," went on Mr. Galbraith, "that old chap over at Wilton has an idea that may make all our fortunes, Bob's included."

There was a general laugh.

"Well," pouted Cynthia, glancing down at the toe of her immaculate buckskin shoe, "I call it very tiresome for Bob to have to work all his vacation."

"I don't have to," Robert Morton objected. "I am simply doing it for fun. Can't you understand the sport of—"

"No, she can't," her brother asserted. "Cynthia never sees any fun in working."

"Roger!" Mrs. Galbraith drawled gently.

"Well, I don't like to work," owned the girl with delicious audacity. "I detest it. Why should I pretend to like it when I don't?"

"Cynthia is one of the lilies of the field; she's just made for ornament," called Roger over his shoulder as he passed into the house.

"There is something in being ornamental, isn't there, daughter?" said Mr. Galbraith, dropping into a chair and lighting a fresh cigar.

She was decorative, there was no mistake about that. The skirt of heavy white satin clung to her slight figure in faultless lines, and her sweater of a rose shade was no more lovely in tint than was the faint flush in her cheeks. Every hair of the elaborate coiffure had been coaxed skilfully into place by a hand that understood the cunning, and wherever nature had been guilty of an oversight art had supplied the defect. Yes, Cynthia Galbraith was quite a perfect product, thought Bob, as he surveyed her there beneath the awning.

"I thought Madam Lee was here," the young man presently remarked, as he glanced about.

Mrs. Galbraith's face clouded.

"Mother is not well to-day," she answered. "Careful as we are of her she has in some way taken cold. She is not really ill, but we thought it wise for her to keep her room. She is heartbroken not to be downstairs and I promised that after she had had her luncheon and nap you would go up and see her."

"Surely!" Robert Morton cried emphatically.

"Mother is so devoted to you, Bobbie," went on Mrs. Galbraith. "Sometimes I think she cares much more for you than she does for her own grandchildren."

"Nonsense! Of course she doesn't."

"I'm not so certain," laughed the elder woman lightly. "You know she is tremendously strong in her likes and dislikes. All the Lees are. We're a headstrong family where our affections are concerned. You, Bob, are the apple of her eye."

"She has always been mighty kind to me," the young man affirmed soberly. "I never saw my own grandmothers; both of them died before I came into the world. So, you see, if it were not for borrowing Roger's and Cynthia's, I should be quite bereft."

The party rose and moved through the cool hall into the dining room.

A delicious luncheon, perfectly served by a velvet-footed maid and the old colored butler, followed, and there was a great deal of conversation, a great deal of reminiscing and a great deal of laughter.

Cynthia complained that the claret cup was too sweet and that the ices were not frozen enough and had much to say of the ice cream at Maillard's.

"But you are far from Maillard's now, my dear," her mother remarked, "and you must make the best of things."

"Being on Cape Cod you are almighty lucky to get any ice cream at all,"

announced Roger with brotherly zest.

"Roger, why will you tease your sister so? You hector Cynthia every moment you are in the house."

"Oh, she knows I don't mean it," grinned Roger. "I just have to take the starch out of her now and then, don't I, Cynthia Ann?"

"Roger!" fretted his sister. "I wish you wouldn't call me Cynthia *Ann*! I can't imagine why you've taken to doing so lately."

"Chiefly because you do not like it, my dear," was the retort. "If I were not so sure of getting a rise out of you every time, perhaps I might be tempted to stop."

"You children quarrel like a pair of apes," Mr. Galbraith said. "If I did not know that underneath you were perfectly devoted to each other, I should be worried to death about you."

"You needn't waste any worry on Cynthia Ann and me, Dad," Roger declared. "Bad as she is, she's the best sister I've got, and I rather like her in spite of her faults."

A smile passed between the two.

"You've some faults of your own, remember," observed the girl, with a grimace.

"Not a one, mademoiselle, not a one! I swear it," was the instant retort. "Coming into the family first, I picked the cream of the Lee and Galbraith qualities and gave you what was left."

"I command you two to stop your bickering," Mr. Galbraith said at last. "You are wasting the whole luncheon, squabbling. You'd much better be deciding what you are going to do with Bob for the rest of the day."

"I thought I'd take him out in the knockabout," Roger suggested. "That is, if he would like to go. The tide will be just right and there is a fine breeze."

"You may take him if you will get him home at tea time," Mrs. Galbraith said. "Your grandmother has set her heart on seeing him this afternoon and you know

she retires soon after dinner."

"You wouldn't have any time to sail at all, Roger," put in Cynthia. "Especially if you should get stuck on a bar as you did the other day."

"We should have two hours."

"Why don't you take the launch, Roger?" his mother inquired.

"And get snagged in the eel grass—not on your life!"

"Bob and Mr. Spence are going to do away with all that eel grass, you know," called his father, sauntering out of doors.

"I'll wait until they do, then," was the grim retort.

"I should think Bob would a great deal rather go for a motor-ride," Cynthia ventured, her eyes fixed impersonally on the landscape.

"I suppose you'd like to cart him off in your car."

"It doesn't make any difference whose car he goes in, does it?"

"Well, ra—*ther*! If he goes in yours there's no room for me; if he goes in mine there is no room for you. That's the difference."

"Children, do stop tearing Bob to fragments," lisped Mrs. Galbraith with some amusement. "If you keep on pulling him to pieces he won't go anywhere. Now Roger, you take Bob sailing and have a good visit with him, and bring him back so he can have tea with your grandmother at five; this evening the rest of us will have our chance to see him."

She did not look at Cynthia, but with a woman's forethought she remembered that the verandas were roomy and that the moon was full soon after dinner. Cynthia remembered it too and smiled.

"Yes, go ahead, Roger," she called. "Take Bob round the bay. It is a lovely sail and as he hasn't been here before he will enjoy it."

It was only a little past five when the two young men returned, a glow of health and pleasure on their faces.

"Now, Bobbie, do make haste," Mrs. Galbraith said, coming to meet him. "Mother's tea has already gone up, and you know how she detests waiting. Her maid is there in the hall to show you the way. Hurry along, dear boy."

Robert Morton needed no second bidding and at once followed the middle-aged English woman up the staircase and into a small, chintz-hung sitting room that looked out on the sea.

At the farther end of it, seated before a low tea table, was a stately, white-haired lady, very erect, very handsome and very elegantly dressed in a gown of soft black material. At the neck, which was turned away, she wore a fichu of filmy lace tinted by time to a creamy tone and held in place by an old-fashioned medallion of seed pearls. White ruffles at the wrists drooped over her delicately veined hands and showed only the occasional flash of a ring and her perfectly manicured finger tips. Summer or winter, fair weather or foul, Madam Lee never varied this costume, and it seemed to possess some measure of its owner's eternal youth, for it was always fresh and its lustrous folds always swept the ground in the same dignified fashion. Indeed for those who knew Madam Lee to think of her in any other guise would have been impossible. Her silvered hair was parted and rippled over her forehead to her ears where it was slightly puffed and caught back with combs of shell, and from beneath it two little black eyes peered out with a bird's alertness of gaze. Although age had claimed her strength, it was evident from the woman's vivacious expression that she had lost none of her interest in life and as she now sat before the silver-laden tea table there was a girlish anticipation in her eager pose.

"Ah, you scamp!" cried she, when she heard her visitor's footstep in the upper hall, "I have been waiting for you a full five minutes. I don't wait for every one, I would have you know. Come here and give an account of yourself."

The young man bent and softly touched her cheek with his lips.

She put out her hand and let it linger affectionately in his as he dropped into the chair beside her.

"I can't begin to tell you how glad I am to see you, Bob," she went on, in a voice soft and exquisitely modulated. "We had no idea you were on the Cape. But for that jeweler's stupidity we should have thought you had gone west long ago. Considering what good friends you and Roger are, you are the worst of correspondents; and you never write to me."

"I know it," owned Robert Morton with disarming honesty. "It's beastly of me."

"No, dear. On the contrary it is very like a man," contradicted Madam Lee with a pretty little laugh. "However, I am not going to scold you about it now. I have seen too many men in my day. First let me pour your tea. Then you shall tell me all that you have been doing. I hear you are visiting a new aunt whom you have just unearthed."

"Yes."

"How do you like her?"

Bob chuckled at the characteristic directness of the question.

"Very much indeed."

"That's nice. Since relatives are not of our choosing, it is pleasant to find they are not bores."

Again the young man smiled.

"And this old gentleman for whom she keeps house—what of him?"

It was plain Madam Lee had all the facts well in mind.

As best he could Bob sketched Willie in a few swift strokes.

"Humph! An interesting old fellow. I should like to see him," declared Madam Lee when the narrative was done. "And so you are working on this motor-boat with him?"

"Yes."

"How long have you been here?"

"Ten days."

"And when do you go back to your family?"

"I don't quite know," hesitated the big fellow. "There is still a great deal to do on this invention we are working at."

His companion eyed him shrewdly.

"And the girl—where does she live?" she asked, reaching for Bob's cup.

He colored with surprise.

"The girl?" he repeated, disconcerted.

"Of course there is a girl," went on the woman.

"What makes you think so?"

"Oh, Bob, Bob! Isn't there always a girl on every young man's horizon?"

"I suppose so—generally speaking," he confessed with a laugh.

"Suppose we abandon the abstract term and come down to this girl in particular," his interrogator said.

"Why are you so sure there is one?" he hedged teasingly.

"My dear boy, how absurd of you!" returned the sharp-eyed old lady with a twinkle of merriment. "In the first place, all the motor-boats in the world couldn't keep a young man like you chained up indefinitely in a sleepy little Cape Cod village. Besides, Cynthia told me."

"Cynthia? She doesn't know anything about it."

"That is precisely how I knew," piped Madam Lee triumphantly.

"What did she tell you?"

"She did not tell me anything," was the reply. "She simply came back from Wilton in a wretched humor and when I inquired of her whether she had her buckle back again, she answered with such spirit that there was no mistaking its cause. Of course she had the wit to know you were not wearing a belt of that pattern; nor your aunt nor Mr. Spence, either."

"The belt and buckle belong to a girl—"

"A girl! You surprise me," she murmured derisively.

Robert Morton waited a moment, then, without heeding her mischievous comment, added gravely:

"A friend of Mr. Spence's."

"I see."

The old lady smoothed the satin folds of her gown thoughtfully before she spoke, then continued with extreme gentleness:

"Tell me all about her."

"I couldn't do that," declared Robert Morton. "There aren't words enough to give you any idea how lovely she is or how good."

Nevertheless, because he had so eager and sympathetic a listener, he at length began shyly to unfold the story of Delight Hathaway's strange life. He told it reverently and with a lover's tenderness, touching on the girl's tragic advent into the hamlet of Wilton, on her beauty, and on her poverty.

"What a romance!" exclaimed Madam Lee meditatively, when the tale was done. "And they know nothing of the child's previous history?"

"Next to nothing. The girl's mother died when she was born and the little tot lived all her life aboard ship with her father."

"Had neither the father nor mother any relatives?"

"Apparently not. The mate of the ship said he had never heard the Captain mention any."

"Poor little waif! And these people who took her in have been kind to her? She is fond of them?"

"She adores them!"

The old lady stirred her tea absently.

"But, Bob dear, has the girl any education?" she inquired presently.

"That is the miracle of it!" ejaculated he. "When she was small, one of the summer residents, a Mrs. Farwell, who had a tutor for her son, suggested the two children have their lessons together. As a consequence the girl is a fine French scholar; has read broadly both foreign and English literature; is familiar with ancient and modern history and mathematics; and recently a professor from Harvard, who has boarded summers with the family, has instructed her in the natural sciences. She is much better educated than most of the society girls I've met."

"Than my granddaughter Cynthia, I dare say," was the quick comment.

"Oh—eh—"

"You need not try to be polite, Bob. I am not proud of Cynthia's education," asserted Madam Lee. "For all her wealth and all her opportunity to make herself accomplished she has never mastered one thing. If she could even sew well or keep house I should rejoice. But she can't. As for languages, music, art—bah! She is as ignorant as if she had been brought up in a home in the slums. A thin society veneer such as the typical fashionable boarding-school washes over the outside and a little helter-skelter reading and travel is all Cynthia has acquired. A real education entailed too much effort. So she is what we see her,—a thoughtless, extravagant, pleasure-seeking creature. She is a great disappointment to me, a great disappointment!"

Robert Morton did not reply.

"Come now, Bob. Why don't you agree with me?"

"I am fond of Cynthia," said the young man in a low tone.

"I know you are. Sometimes I have worried lest you were too fond of her."

There was no response.

"Cynthia is not the wife for you, my dear boy, and never was. I am older than you and I know life. Moreover, I love you very dearly. Were you of my own blood I believe I could not care more deeply for you than I do. It would break my heart to see you make a foolish marriage—to see you married to a girl like Cynthia. You never would be happy with her in the world. Why, it takes a small fortune even to keep her contented. It is money, money, money, all the time. She cares for little else, and unless a man kept her supplied with that there would be no peace in the house."

"Aren't you a little hard on her?"

"Not too hard," came firmly from Madam Lee. "You think precisely as I do, too, only you are too loyal and too chivalrous to own it."

There was a pause broken only by the tinkle of the teacups.

"No, Bob, you let Cynthia alone. She will get over it. And if you have found the jewel that you think you have, be brave enough to assert your freedom and marry her. You are not pledged to Cynthia," went on the musical voice. "Just because you two chanced to grow up together there is no reason any one should assume that the affair is settled. I suppose you are afraid of disappointing the family. Then there is your friendship for Roger—that worries you too. And of course there is Cynthia herself! Being a gentleman you shrink from tossing a girl's heart back into her lap. Isn't it so?"

"To some extent, yes."

"Would it help matters, do you think, for you to marry Cynthia if you did not love her?"

"But I care a lot for her."

"Not as you do for this other girl," said the shrewd old lady, with eyes fixed intently on his face.

"Oh, no!" was the instant reply.

"Then, as I said before, you much better let Cynthia alone," declared Madam Lee emphatically. "At her age disappointments are not fatal, and she will probably live to thank you for it. In any case it is better to blight one life than three."

Robert stared moodily down at the floor.

"This other girl is attractive, you say."

"She is very beautiful."

"You don't say so!" was the incredulous rejoinder.

"But she really is—she is the most beautiful thing I've ever seen."

"And she has all these other virtues as well?"

She took the teacup from his passive hand and set it on the table.

"I want to see her and judge for myself," affirmed she. "I know something of beauty—and of girls, too. Why don't you bring her over here?"

"*Here*?"

"Why not?"

"But—but—it would look so strange, so pointed," gasped the young man. "You see she doesn't even guess yet that I—"

He heard a low, infectious laugh.

"She knew it, you goose, from the first moment you looked at her," cried the old lady, "or she isn't the girl I think her. What do you imagine we women are—blind?"

"No, of course not," Robert Morton said, joining in the laugh. "What I meant was that I never had said anything that would—"

"You wouldn't need to, dear boy." His hostess put a hand caressingly on his

arm. "All you would have to do would be to look as foolish as you do now, and she would understand just as I did." Then, resuming a more serious manner, she continued: "It is a perfectly simple matter for you to bring one friend to meet another, isn't it? Tell the girl I have heard her story and have become interested in her. She will overlook an old lady's whims and be quite willing enough to come, I'm sure, if you wish it."

"I should like to have her meet you," admitted Bob, with a blush.

"You mean you would like me to meet her," answered Madam Lee, with a confiding pat on his arm. "It is sweet of you, Bob, whichever way you put it. And after I have met the charmer you shall know exactly what I think of her, too. Then if you marry her against my judgment, you will have only yourself to thank for the consequences. Now leave it all to me. I will arrange everything. In a day or two I will send the car over to Wilton to fetch you, your aunt, Mr. Spence and this Miss—what did you say her name was?"

"Hathaway."

"Hathaway! *Hathaway*!" echoed Madam Lee in an unsteady voice.

"Yes. Why?"

"Oh, nothing," quavered the old lady, making a tremulous attempt to regain her poise. "Only it is not a common name. I—I—knew a Hathaway once—very long ago—in the South."

CHAPTER XII

ROBERT MORTON MAKES A RESOLVE

Robert Morton returned from Belleport in a mood bordering on ecstasy, his path now clear before him. He would woo Delight Hathaway and win her, and with a strong mutual love and hope they would set forth in life together. He had, to be sure, no capital but his youth, his strength, and his education, but he did not

shrink from hard work and felt certain that he would be able not only to keep want in abeyance but place happiness within the reach of the woman he loved.

Until Madam Lee, with her keen-visioned knowledge of human nature, had ranged in perspective all the tangled circumstances that had so insidiously woven themselves about him, he had been unable to see his way. The fetters that held him were so delicate and intangible that with an exaggerated sense of honor he had magnified them into bonds of steel, never daring to believe that they might be snapped and leave no scar. But now the facts stood lucidly forth. There was no actual engagement between himself and Cynthia, nor had there ever been any talk of one. He simply had been thrown constantly into her society and had drifted, at first thoughtlessly and afterward indifferently, until there had been created not only in the mind of the girl but also in the minds of all her family a tacit expectation that ultimately their permanent union would be consummated.

From the Galbraiths' point of view such a marriage would have been a very gratifying one, for although Robert Morton was without money, in his sterling character and his potentalities for success they had every faith. A span of years of intimacy had tested his worth, and had this not been the case his friendship with Roger had proved the tough fiber of his manliness. Of all their son's college acquaintances there was none who had been welcomed into the Galbraith home with the cordiality that had greeted Robert Morton. At first they had received him graciously for their boy's sake, but later this initial sufferance had been supplanted by an affectionate regard existing purely because of his own merits. They had loaded him with favors, pressed their hospitality upon him, and but for a certain pride and independence that restrained them would have smoothed his financial difficulties with the same lavishness they had those of their son.

Many a time Mr. Galbraith, unable to endure the sight of Bob's rigid self-denial, had delicately hinted at assistance, only to have the offer as delicately declined. It hurt and piqued the financier to be so firmly kept at a distance and be obliged to witness privations which a small gift of money might have alleviated; moreover he liked his own way and did not enjoy being balked in it by a schoolboy. Yet beneath his irritation he paid tribute to the self-respecting determination that had prompted the rebuff. The world in which he moved held few men of such ideals. Rather he had repeatedly been courted by the grafter, the promoter, the social climber, each beneath a thinly disguised friendship working for his own selfish ends. But here at last was the novel phenomena of one who scorned pelf, who would not even allow his gratitude to be bought. The sight

was refreshing. It rejuvenated the New Yorker's jaded belief in human nature.

Forced to withdraw his bounty, he had sat back and watched while the academic career of the two young men wore on and at its close had seen the roads of the classmates divide, his own boy entering the law school, while Robert Morton, whose mind had always been of scientific trend, enrolled at Technology, there to take up post-graduate work in naval architecture. The choice of this subject reflected largely the capitalist's influence, for his own great fortune had been amassed in an extensive shipbuilding enterprise in which he saw the opportunity of placing advantageously a young man of Robert Morton's exceptional ability. The promised position was a variety of favor that Bob, proud though he was, saw no reason for declining. The opening, to be sure, would be his as a consequence of Mr. Galbraith's kindness, but the retention of the position would rest on his personal worth and hard work, a very satisfactory condition to one who demanded that he remain captain of his soul. Hence he had deliberately trained for the post and it was understood that the following October he would assume it. It was a flattering beginning for a novice, the salary guaranteed being generous and the chances for advancement alluring. Nor did the great man who had founded the business conceal from the ambitious neophyte that later he might be called upon to fill the niche left vacant by Roger's flight into professional life.

Such was the nicety with which Robert Morton had been dovetailed into the Galbraith plans, his welcome in every direction assured him. And now here he stood confronted by the probable overthrow of the whole delicately balanced structure. If he did not marry Cynthia and selected instead another bride, he risked forfeiting the regard of those who had become dear to him, imperilling his friendship with Roger, and sacrificing the brilliant and gratifying future for which he had so patiently labored. Never again, he knew beyond a question, would such an opportunity come within his grasp. He would be obliged to start out unheralded and painfully fight his way to recognition. That recognition would be his he did not doubt, for he never yet had failed in that to which he had set his hand. But, alas, the weary years before he would be able to make a hurrying universe sense that he was alive! He knew what struggle meant when stripped of its illusions, for had he not toiled for his education in the sweat of his brow? The triumph of the achievement had been sweet, but for the moment the courage to resume the weary, up-hill plodding deserted him. Why, it would be years before he could marry a girl who was accustomed to even as few luxuries as was Delight Hathaway!

And suppose a miracle happened and Mr. Galbraith was large-minded enough still to hold out to him the former offer? Should he wish to accept it? Would it not be almost charity? No, if he refused Cynthia's hand—and that was what, in bald terms, it would amount to—he must decline the other favor as well and be independent of the Galbraiths for good and all. Otherwise his position would be unendurable. It was an odious situation, the one in which he found himself. Only a cad cast a woman's heart back at her feet. The unchivalrousness of the act grated upon every fiber of his sensitively attuned, high-minded nature. Yet, as Madam Lee had reminded him, would he not be doing Cynthia a greater injustice if he married her without love. Friendship and brotherly affection were all he could honestly bestow, and although these he gave with all sincerity, as he now examined his heart in the light of the revelations real love had brought, he realized that beyond their confines existed a realm into which Cynthia Galbraith, fair though she was, had never set foot. No woman had crossed that magic threshold until now, when her presence stirred all the blended emotions of his manhood. Humility, tenderness, reverence possessed him; self descended from its throne of egoism and yielded its scepter to another; the hot blood of the primitive, untamed Viking raced in his veins. Soul, mind, heart, body were all awakened. He was a dolt who confused genuine passion with the milder preferences of callow youth.

Delight Hathaway was his mate, created for him before the hills in order stood. It was as inevitable that they should come together as that the river should sweep out to meet the sea, or the lily open to the kiss of the sunlight. All that this woman was in purity, in graciousness of heart, in brilliancy of intellect he loved, adored, approved; all that she was in physical beauty he reverenced and coveted. Her lot had been strangely cast and the scope of it limited to a very narrow vista. Oh, for success to place at her feet the riches of the earth! With such a goal to lure one on what was toil! Faugh! He laughed aloud at the word.

Madam Lee, with her unerring intuition, had probed his heart and read his destiny aright.

His future lay not with this pampered daughter of a great house whose selfishness he had repeatedly excused and refused to recognize; nor would he purchase worldly prosperity at the price of his soul. Casting aside the easier way, he would follow the rough path that mounted upward to the star of his desire. Before the waning of another moon both of these women who had come into his world should know his intentions and have the opportunity to accept or reject

that which he had to offer them. He hoped Cynthia would understand and forgive; he was fond of Cynthia. And he hoped, prayed, implored Heaven that Delight Hathaway would not turn a deaf ear to his entreaties, for without the prize on which his hopes were set life's race would not be worth the running.

Well, he would not allow the thought of failure any place in his mind. Victory should be his—it would be, *must* be! See how all the world smiled on the vow he registered. The sky had never stretched more cloudlessly above his head; the air had never been sweeter, the dancing ripples of the bay gladder in their golden scintillations. The whole universe throbbed with youth and its dauntless supremacy. Something told him he would conquer and with a high heart he alighted at the door of the dear, familiar gray cottage.

Willie came to meet him.

"Well, son," said he, reaching forth his hands, "If I ain't glad to see you flitting home again! I've missed you like as if the two days was two weeks. I reckon your aunt has, too. Anyhow, she took to her bed quick as you was out of sight an' ain't been seen since."

"Aunt Tiny ill!"

"No, not sick exactly," explained Willie, as arm in arm they proceeded up the walk. "She's just struck of a heap with a lame shoulder such as she has sometimes. She can't move a peg, poor soul!"

"Great Scott! That's hard luck! Then since you're short-handed, I shall be more bother than I'm worth round here. I'd better have stayed where I was. You won't want any extra people to look out for and feed now, I fancy."

"Oh, law, I ain't doin' the cookin'!" grinned the little inventor, as if the bare notion of such a thing amused him vastly. "Why, I could no more cook a dish that was fit to eat than a mariner could run a pink tea. I'd die of starvation if the victuals was left to me. Let alone the cookin', we'd 'a' had to have help anyhow, 'cause Tiny's too miserable to do much for herself. So we've got in one of the neighbors."

"It's a shame!"

"Oh, we'll pull through alive," smiled Willie, cheerfully. "We've piloted our

way through many a worse channel. This spell of Tiny's ain't nothin' she's goin' to die of, thank the Lord! She takes cold sudden sometimes, an' it always makes straight for that shoulder of hers, stiffenin' up every muscle in it. She'll admire to see you home again, I know. The sight of you will probably make her better right away. You can run up to her room now if you choose to. I'll be round in the shop when you want me."

With a beaming countenance the old man turned away.

Robert Morton opened the screen door diffidently, speculating as to whom he would confront in the kitchen; then he stopped, arrested on the doorsill.

At the wooden table near the pantry window stood Delight Hathaway, her sleeves rolled to the elbow, and her slender figure enveloped in a voluminous gingham pinafore that covered her from chin to ankle and was tied in place at the back by a pert bow. She was sifting flour into a mammoth yellow bowl, and as she stirred the mixture the sweep of her round white arm brought a flood of color into her cheeks and wreathed her brow with tiny, damp ringlets.

Bob held his breath, hungrily devouring her with his eyes, but a quick breeze brought the door to with a bang and the girl glanced over her shoulder.

"All hail!" she cried, the dimple darting out of hiding with her smile. "You have a new cook, monsieur."

"My word!" was all the young man could stammer.

"Is it as bad as all that?" she laughed.

"No—but—Great Hat—this is—is awful, you know."

"What is awful?" returned she, turning to face him.

"Why, having you come here and cook for us two men."

"Oh, I'm always cooking for somebody," was the matter-of-fact retort. "Why not you?"

"Well, it makes me feel like a—it doesn't seem right, somehow."

"It's as right as possible. I rather like it," said she, darting him a roguish look, then bending over the bowl before her.

"Well, you must let me help you, anyway. Can't I—I butter something?"

"Butter something!"

"Yes, things are always having to be buttered, aren't they—pans, and dishes, and cups—" he paused vaguely.

Her laugh echoed like a chime of miniature bells.

"I am sorry to say the pan is already buttered," replied she. "What other accomplishments have you?"

"Oh, I can do anything I am told," came eagerly from Bob.

"That's something, anyway. Then fetch me some flour, please."

"Flour?"

"It's in the barrel. No, that's the sugar bowl. The barrel under the shelf."

"The barrel! To be sure. Barrel ahoy! How could I have mistaken its sylph-like form? How much flour do you want?"

"Just a little."

She passed the sieve to him and went to inspect the oven.

Bob caught up the sifter, filled it to the brim, and came toward her, turning the handle as he approached.

"I say, this is great, isn't it?" he observed, so intent on the mechanism of the device that he did not notice the track of whiteness which he was leaving behind him. "It is like winding up a victrola."

Whistling a random strain from *Faust* he turned the handle faster.

"Oh, Bob!" burst out Delight. "Look what you're doing."

Obediently he looked but did not comprehend. Her slip of the tongue had banished every other idea from his mind.

"Say it again, please."

"What?"

"Say *Bob* again as you did just now."

"I—didn't know I did," faltered the girl. "I—I—forgot."

"Forgot."

He dropped the sifter into the bowl and his hand closed firmly over the one that now rested on its yellow rim.

"Oh, see what you've done!" cried she. "You have spilled all that flour into the cake."

"No matter." His eyes were on hers.

"But it does matter. Willie's cake will be spoiled."

She tried vainly to draw away from the grip that imprisoned her.

"Please let me go."

He bent across the table until he could almost feel the blood beating in her cheeks.

"Say it once more," he pleaded.

Again her hand fluttered in his strong grasp.

"Please!"

"Please what?" persisted Robert Morton.

"Please—please—Bob," she murmured.

He was at the other side of the table now, but she was no longer there. Instead

she stood at the screen door, shaking the flour from her apron.

"Don't move!" she cried severely. "You've walked all through that flour and are tracking it about every step you take. Look at the pantry! I shall have to sweep it all up."

"I'll do it," he answered with instant penitence.

"No. You sit right down there in that chair and don't you stir. I will go and get the dustpan and brush."

"I'm awfully sorry," called Bob, plunged into the depths of despair. "I didn't realize that when you turned the handle of the darn thing the stuff went through."

"What did you think a flour-sifter was for?" asked she, dimpling.

"I wasn't thinking of flour-sifters," declared he significantly.

He saw her blush.

"Mayn't I please get up?"

"No. Not until your shoes are brushed off," she replied provokingly.

"Let me take the brush then."

"Don't you see I am using it?"

"You could let me take it a second."

"I have been taught to complete one task before I began another," was the tantalizing reply, as she went on with her sweeping.

"The deuce!"

"You must not swear in my presence," she commanded, attempting to conceal a smile.

"Then stop dimpling that dimple."

"Don't you like dimples?" inquired she demurely. "Now Billy Farwell thinks

that my dimples—"

"Hang Billy Farwell!"

"How rude of you! Billy never consigns you to such a fate." She waited, then added, "All he ever says is '*Confound Morton*.'"

"I thought he had more spirit," was the ungrateful rejoinder.

"Oh, he has spirit enough," she explained. "He would say much more if he were allowed."

She saw Robert start forward.

"Of course," she went on in an even tone, "I shouldn't permit him to abuse a friend of Willie's."

"Oh, that's the reason you put the check on him, is it?"

"Aren't you Willie's friend?" she questioned evasively.

"Yes, but—"

"You don't seem to appreciate your luck. Now I adore Willie and believe that any one who has his friendship is the most fortunate person in the world."

He saw a grave and tender light creep into her wonderful eyes.

"I'm not arguing about Willie," said he. "You know how much I care for him. But I can't think of him now. It's you I'm thinking of—you—you."

She did not answer but bent her head lower over her sweeping.

"I don't believe there is any flour on my shoes, any way," grumbled the culprit presently, stooping to examine his feet with the air of a guilty child. He thought he heard her laugh.

"How much longer are you going to keep me in this infernal chair?" he fumed.

"Bob!" called a voice from upstairs.

"It's your aunt; she must have heard you come in."

He sprang up only to come into collision with the dustpan full of flour which lay near his chair. A second more and the fruits of the sweeping drifted broadcast in a powdery cloud.

"Delight! Dearest!" he cried, bending over the kneeling figure.

"You must go upstairs and see your aunt—please!" she begged. "She will think it so strange."

"All right, sweetheart. I'm coming, Aunt Tiny."

When Willie entered a few moments later in search of his co-laborer, Delight was alone. He glanced questioningly about the room,—at the girl's flushed cheeks, the half-made cake, the snowy floor.

"Bob—Mr. Morton spilled some flour," the young woman explained, evading his eye.

The little old man made no response. He studied the burning face, the drooping lashes; he also looked meditatively at some footprints on the floor. They may not have been as startling in their significance as were the famous marks Crusoe discovered in the sand, but they were quite as illuminating.

A trail of small ones led about the room and beside them, as if echoing to their light tread, was a series of larger ones. The inventor's gaze pursued them curiously to a spot before the stove where they became very much confused and afterward branched apart, the larger set trailing off toward the stairs, and the smaller moving back into the pantry.

The detective stroked his chin for an interval.

"U—m!" observed he thoughtfully.

CHAPTER XIII

A NEWCOMER ENTERS

The next day Mr. Howard Snelling made his appearance at the Spence workshop.

Bob was fitting wire netting to some metal uprights and struggling to focus his mind on what he was doing enough to forget that Delight Hathaway was on the other side of the partition when from the window above the bench he saw Cynthia Galbraith come rolling up to the gate in her runabout, accompanied by a strikingly handsome stranger.

He hurried out to meet them.

Her father and Roger, the girl said, had gone to a yacht race at Hyannis, so she had brought Mr. Snelling over. She introduced the two men but refused somewhat curtly to come in, explaining that she would be back, or some one else would, to fetch the guest home to Belleport for luncheon. Then, without a backward glance, she started the engine and disappeared around the curve of the Harbor Road.

Perhaps it was just as well, Robert Morton reflected, that she had not accepted his invitation to come in, for to bring her and Delight together at this delicate juncture might result in awkwardness; nevertheless, it certainly was something unprecedented for Cynthia to be so brusque and be in such a hurry. The enigma puzzled him, and he found it recurring to his mind persistently. However, he resolutely shook it off and turned his attention instead to his new acquaintance.

He was, he could not but admit, quite unprepared to find Mr. Howard Snelling, his future chief, possessed of so attractive a personality. Mr. Galbraith, when alluding to the expert craftsman, had never mentioned his age, and Bob had gleaned the impression that the man before whose ability the entire Galbraith shipbuilding plant bowed down was middle-aged, possibly even elderly. Therefore to be confronted by some one in the early forties was a distinct shock.

Snelling's hair was, to be sure, sprinkled lightly with gray, but this hint of maturity was given the lie by his ruddy, unlined countenance and the youthfulness with which he wore his clothes. A good tailor had evidently found a

model worthy of his skill and had tried to live up to the task set him, for everything in the stranger's attitude and appearance proclaimed smartness and the *savoir faire* of the man about town. Yet Howard Snelling was something far better than either a fashion plate or a society darling. He was energy personified. It spoke in every motion of his strong, fine hands, in the quick turn of his head, in the alert attention with which he listened. Nothing escaped his well-trained eye. One's very thoughts seemed to be at his mercy. Mingling, however, with these more astute qualities and counterbalancing them was a winning tact and courtesy which instantly put another at his ease. Without these characteristics Mr. Snelling would have been unbearable; but with them he was thoroughly charming.

"Well, Morton, I am glad to have a chance to meet you in the flesh," he said, as they still loitered at the gate. "The Galbraiths have sung your praises until I began to think you a sort of myth. You certainly have something to live up to if you are to reach the reputation they have painted of your virtues. Mr. Galbraith, in particular, thinks there is no obstacle that you cannot conquer."

He swept his eye curiously over the young man before him.

"You mustn't believe a word of what they've told you, Mr. Snelling," laughed Robert Morton. "Our friends are always over-indulgent to our faults. When I begin work under you, a thing I am greatly anticipating, you will find out what a duffer I really am."

The elder man smiled.

"I'm ready to take the chance," said he.

"Besides," Bob went on, "Mr. Galbraith has given you something of a character too. He has frightened me clean out of my life with his tales of your—"

"Pooh! Nonsense!" broke in Mr. Snelling deprecatingly. "I like my job, that's all; and Mr. Galbraith and I happen to hit it off." Nevertheless Bob could see that he was pleased by the flattery.

It was on his tongue's end to voice his thought and add that the man who could not get on with a person of Mr. Snelling's adroitness and diplomacy would be hard to please; but although he did not utter the words he felt them to be true.

"Now," began the New Yorker with a swift change of subject, "let us get down to business. How are we going to work this thing? You must coach me. I gather I am being employed on quite a delicate mission. My instructions are to come in here as a friend of yours and the Galbraiths, and without raising the suspicion that I have much of any knowledge about boats, I am to help get this invention into workable shape. Any parts we lack, any drawings we wish made, any materials we need I have authority to procure from our Long Island plant. There is to be no stint as to expense. The enterprise is to be carried through to the finish properly."

Robert Morton gasped.

"I had no idea Mr. Galbraith meant to go into it to such lengths," he murmured.

"Oh, Mr. Galbraith never does things by halves when once he is interested," was the reply. "Besides, he has a hunter's scent for the commercial. He says there is a live idea here that has money in it, and that's enough for him. Anyway, whether there is or not," Snelling added hurriedly, "we are to humor the old gentleman's whims and get his idea so he can handle it."

"It is tremendously generous of Mr. Galbraith."

Howard Snelling regarded his companion quizzically for a moment, then remarked with gravity:

"Oh, there is a kind heart in Mr. Galbraith, in spite of all his business instincts."

"Had you ever met the rest of the family before now?" questioned Bob more with a desire to turn the channel of conversation than because he had any interest in the matter.

The inquiry, idly made, produced an unexpected result, visibly throwing the expert out of his imperturbable composure; he flushed, stammered, and bit his lip before he successfully conquered his confusion:

"I—eh—oh, yes," was his reply. "I've been a dinner guest at the New York house several times; been sent for on a pinch to help out. Then Mr. Galbraith summons me there occasionally for consultation on business matters. The

Belleport place is attractive, isn't it?"

"It's corking!"

"I suppose you spend a lot of time over there," ventured Snelling, lighting a gold-tipped Egyptian cigarette and offering Bob one.

Something in the question, he could not have told what, caused Robert Morton to dart a quick, furtive glance at the speaker.

Mr. Snelling was smoking and blowing indifferently into the air filmy rings of smoke, but through it the disconcerted young man encountered his penetrating gaze.

"I don't get over there very often," said Bob. "This invention keeps me rather busy."

"Of course, of course!" was the cordial response. "And now as to our policy on this deal. I shall follow your lead, understand. Any assertion you see fit to make you can trust me to swear to. You may introduce me to the old chap as your college pal, even your long-lost brother, if you choose."

"I hardly think that will be necessary," Robert Morton answered, a hint of coldness in his voice. "I shall simply introduce you for what you are, Mr. Galbraith's friend—"

"And yours," smiled Mr. Snelling, graciously placing a hand on the young man's shoulder.

It was unaccountable, absurd, that Bob should have shrunk at the touch; nevertheless he did so.

"Don't you think," he replied abruptly, "that the sooner we go in and get to work the better? How long do you expect to be able to stay here?"

Again the color crept into Snelling's cheek, but this time he was quite master of himself.

"I cannot tell yet. It will depend to some extent on how we get on."

"I suppose you really can't be spared from the Long Island plant a great while."

"As to that, Mr. Galbraith is all-powerful," was his smiling answer. "What he wills must be arranged. Fortunately just now business is running slack, at least my part of it is. Most of our contracts are well on the way to completion and others can carry them out, so I can stay down here as long as is necessary. It can go as my vacation, if worst comes to worst. Hence you see," concluded he, pulling a spray of honeysuckle to pieces, "we don't need to rush things."

They entered the gate, passed the low, silvered house now almost buried in blossoming roses, and following the clam-shell path that led to the workshop found Willie, his spectacles pushed back from his forehead, dragging a pile of new boards down from the shelf.

"We have a visitor, Mr. Spence," Bob said. "Mr. Snelling, a friend of Mr. Galbraith's and—" he paused the fraction of a second, "and of mine. He has come over to spend the morning and wants to see what we're doing."

The little old inventor reached out a horny palm.

"I'm glad to see you, sir," affirmed he simply. "Any friend of Bob's won't want for a welcome here. Set right down an' make yourself to home, or stand up an' poke found, if it suits you better. That's what Mr. Galbraith did. I reckon there warn't a corner of this whole place he didn't fish into. 'Twas amusin' to see him. He said it took him back to the days when he was a boy. I couldn't but smile to watch him fussin' with the plane an' saw an' hammer like as if they was old friends he hadn't clapped eyes on for years."

"It does feel good to handle tools when you haven't done so for a long time," assented Mr. Snelling.

"Likely you yourself, sir, ain't had a hammer nor nothin' in your hands for quite a spell," went on Willie, with a benign smile. "They don't look as if you ever had had."

Howard Snelling glanced down at his slender, well-modelled hands with their carefully manicured nails.

"I haven't done much carpentry of late years," he confessed. "It would be

quite a novelty were I to be turned loose in a place like this. I should like nothing better."

"You don't say so!" responded Willie, with pleased surprise. "Well, well! Ain't that queer now? I'd much sooner 'a' put you down as a gentleman who wouldn't want to get into no dirt or clutter."

"You don't know me."

"Evidently not," the old man rejoined. "Well, you can have your wish fur's carpenterin' goes. You can putter round here much as you like."

Mr. Snelling moved toward the long workbench.

"This is a neat thing," remarked he, regarding the unfinished invention quite as if he had never heard of it before. "What are you doing here?"

A glow of satisfaction spread over the little fellow's kindly face.

"Why, me an' Bob," he explained, "are tinkerin' with a notion I got into my head a while ago. The idee kitched me in the night, an' I come downstairs an' commenced tacklin' it right away. But I didn't see my course ahead, an' 'twarn't 'til Bob hove in sight an' lent a helpin' hand that the contraption begun to take shape. But for him 'twould never have amounted to a darn thing, I reckon. I ain't much on the puttin' together, anyhow, an' this was such a whale of a scheme it had me floored. But it didn't seem to strike Bob abeam. He went at it like a dogfish for bait, an' he's beginnin' to tow the thing out of the fog now into clear water."

"It's quite a scheme," observed Snelling, with an assumed nonchalance. "How did you happen on it?"

"Them idees just come to me," was the ingenuous reply. "Some brains, like some gardens, grow one thing, some another. Mine seems to turn out stuff like this."

"It's pretty good stuff."

"It's a lot of bother to me sometimes," said the old man simply. "Still, I enjoy it. I'd be badly off if it warn't for the thinkin' I do. What a marvel thinkin' is, ain't

it? You can think all sorts of things; can travel in your mind to 'most every corner of the globe. You can think yourself rich, think yourself poor, think yourself young, think yourself happy. There's nothin' you want you can't think you have, an' dreamin' about it is 'most as good as gettin' it."

Mr. Snelling nodded.

"Sometimes I think myself an artist, sometimes a musician," went on the wistful voice. "Then again I think myself a great man an' doin' somethin' worth while in the world. Then there's times I've thought myself with a family of children an' planned how they should learn mor'n ever I did." He mused, then banishing the seriousness of his tone by an embarrassed laugh added, "I've waked up afterward to think how much less it cost just to imagine 'em."

The heart that would not have been won by the naïvete of the speaker would have been stony indeed!

Howard Snelling flashed a tribute of honest admiration into the gentle old face.

"Dreams are cheap things," rambled on the little inventor. "Sometimes I figger the Lord gave 'em to those who didn't have much else, so'st to make 'em think they are kings. If you can dream there ain't a thing in all the world ain't yours."

The conversation had furnished Snelling with the opportunity to study more minutely the object on the table, and he now said with a motion of his hand toward it:

"Wouldn't it be rather nice if you had some netting of coarser mesh and which wouldn't corrode?"

"Oh, this screenin' ain't what I'd choose," returned Willie, "but 'twas all I had. I ripped it off the front door. Tiny didn't fancy my doin' it very well. 'Tain't often she's ruffled, an' even this time she didn't say much; still, I could see it didn't altogether please her."

"Tiny?" interpolated Mr. Snelling.

"My aunt, Miss Morton, who keeps house for Mr. Spence," explained Bob

with proud directness.

"I wasn't aware you had relatives down here," the boat-builder observed, turning toward Robert Morton with interest. "I imagined you came to the Cape because of the Galbraiths."

"Oh, no. I didn't know the Galbraith's were here until the other day."

"Really!"

The single word was weighted with incredulousness.

"'Twas the funniest thing you ever knew how it happened," put in Willie.

Robert Morton tried to cut him short.

"A package for the Galbraiths was sent to me by mistake; that was how I secured their address," he said.

Snelling looked puzzled.

"That warn't it at all, Bob," persisted Willie. "You ain't tellin' it half as queer as 'twas."

It was useless to attempt to check the little old man now. Artlessly he babbled the story, and Howard Snelling, listening, constructed a good part of the romance interwoven with it from the young man's color and irritation.

"So there were two beauties in the case!" commented he, when the tale was finished.

"There were two silver buckles," came sharply from Bob.

"Which amounts to the same thing," smiled the New Yorker.

Robert Morton vouchsafed no reply.

"Have your friends the Galbraiths met this—other lady?" asked Snelling insinuatingly.

"No, not yet."

"I see."

There was something offensive in the observation; something, too, that compelled Robert Morton even against his will to add with dignity:

"I am expecting to take Miss Hathaway over to see them some day soon."

He told himself, as he uttered the words, that he owed Howard Snelling no explanation and that it was ridiculous of him to make one; nevertheless he felt impelled to do so.

Mr. Snelling smiled superciliously.

"That will be very pleasant, won't it?" he remarked.

One could not have quarreled with the sentiment, but its blandness conveyed an exasperating disbelief.

The young man bit his lip angrily.

At the same instant there was a sound at the door.

"Aunt Tiny wants to know—"

The three men glanced up simultaneously, and Mr. Snelling's jaw dropped with amazement.

"I beg your pardon," murmured Delight. "I did not know there was any one here."

"It's only Mr. Snelling, a friend of Bob's," Willie hastened to say.

"Mr. Snelling is also a friend of Mr. Galbraith's," interrupted Robert Morton, enraged that it fell to him to perform the introduction. "This is Miss Hathaway, Mr. Snelling."

"I am charmed to meet you, Miss Hathaway," Howard Snelling declared, bending low over the girl's outstretched hand. "I did not realize you were an inmate of the house." Then with a sidelong glance at Bob he added: "Wilton certainly abounds in beautiful surprises."

As with unveiled wonder he scanned the exquisite face, Robert Morton, looking on, could have strangled him with a relish.

CHAPTER XIV

THE SPENCES ENTER SOCIETY

For a week Howard Snelling came and went from the small, vine-covered cottage on the bay, making himself so useful and so delightful that the charm of his personality gradually obliterated the first unpleasant impression Bob had gained of him. He worked hard but worked with such unobtrusiveness that unless one scrutinized him closely the subtle power that lay behind his hand and brain might have passed unsuspected. Ever mindful that his role was that of the casual visitor, he listened with appreciation to Willie's harmless gossip and whenever the little old man advanced a theory as to the enterprise in which they were engaged he greeted it not only with respect but with cordiality. Now and then as the undertaking progressed, he ventured a tactful, almost diffident suggestion, the value of which the inventor was quick to detect. Also, in the same nonchalant fashion, he produced from time to time the necessary materials, weaving a fairy web of prevarication when questioned too closely as to their source.

"Oh, I have a friend in the boat-building business," said he, "who lets me have any small things I want. I have done some favors for him in the past and he is only too glad to square up the balance by sending me whatever I ask him for."

The explanation, given with off-hand candor, quite satisfied the artless Willie, who imagined all the world as truthful as himself and inquired no further, accepting with unfeigned joy the gifts the gods provided. His face glowed with almost beatific light as he saw his dream slowly take form. Nothing he had ever done equalled this masterpiece. The project was his first thought at waking, the last before closing his eyes at night. Sometimes, even, when all but the sea slept, he would tiptoe downstairs, candle in hand, just to steal a glance at the child of his fancy. So absorbed was he in its growth and progress that it never crossed his mind to marvel that two men of Howard Snelling's and Robert Morton's ability

should sacrifice to the invention the golden hours of the rare June days. Their interest was nothing miraculous. Who wouldn't have been interested in such a wonderful undertaking?

Indeed, Mr. Snelling's concern for the venture was almost as keen as his own. From morning until late noon he toiled. Occasionally the Galbraiths' chauffeur brought him over from Belleport, but more often it was Cynthia who made the trip with him. Mr. Galbraith, it appeared, had been called back to New York on urgent business; Roger had gone with friends on a yachting cruise; and Mrs. Galbraith was devoting her time to her mother who was still indisposed. Hence Cynthia was forced to fill the gaps and serve both as host and hostess. It was a natural situation, and Bob thought nothing about it except selfishly to exult that under the conditions Cynthia was kept too busy to invade the Spence home or bother him with invitations. And that was not the only boon that came with Snelling's presence, for with three workers in the shop Robert Morton found not infrequent chances to steal into the kitchen, where Delight was busy with household tasks, and enjoy the rapture of a word or two with her.

Never were there such days of enchantment as these! He might, he often said to himself, have remained in Wilton an entire summer and his acquaintance with the lady of his heart never have reached the degree of intimacy that it attained during Celestina's illness. To behold the girl, fair as the new-blown rose, presiding at the wee breakfast table was to forget all else. How dainty she looked in her trim cotton gown, with its demure cuffs and collar of white, and how deftly her hands moved among the simple fittings of the table! The worn agate coffee-pot seemed transformed to classic outline, and the nectar it contained to ambrosia. And what a famous little cook she was! Surely such flaky biscuit could never have been made by other hands. Bob suddenly became surprisingly interested in kitchens and all that they contained. The glint of tin pans, the dull ebony of the stove, iridescent suds foaming fresh and hot,—all these took on a strange and homely beauty quite novel in its charm. He had never dreamed before what an incomparable Eden a kitchen was!

To slip in and fill the wood-box; to creep into the pantry and watch the beloved head as it bent over the baking table; to be permitted to wipe the dishes while *She* washed them made of the simple duties tasks for gods and goddesses. He loved the pretty way her fringed lashes lifted, the wave of color that swept her cheek when she was startled by his step; and there was something ravishingly confidential in her caution:

"Be careful, Bob, not to drop Aunt Tiny's china teacups."

It was all foolish and inconsequential—the sighs, the smiles, the silences—but they made a paradise of the grim old universe. Many a time he longed to press his lips to the white arm, to kiss the warm curve of her neck where soft curls clustered. But he did none of these things. By a gentle reserve the girl kept him at his distance, and although there was only Jezebel to see, he did not transgress the bounds Delight's sweet womanliness reared between them. Of course she knew he loved her. She could not but know. Even Jezebel from her round blue eyes proclaimed a complete understanding of the romance and drawing herself into a fluffy ball in Willie's great chair feigned sleep that she might not embarrass the lovers. The canary knew, and so did the impertinent crimson rambler that clambered up the window frame and spied in through the pane. It was no secret. The whole dazzling world shared in the exquisite mystery.

Were the tale to have been put into words half its delicate beauty would have been shattered. It was now a thing of clouds, of perfume, of sunshine. The waves whispered together of it; the birds trilled the story. A glance, a half-uttered sentence, the meeting of hands carried with them great throbbing reaches of emotion that went to make up the reality of the ephemeral drama. And then there was the tormenting, bewitching, wretched, alluring uncertainty of it all. One could never be sure, and in the spell of this disquietude lay half the magic.

Robert Morton speculated as to whether Willie, along with Jezebel and the canary, had fathomed the idyl. He wondered, too, how much Snelling suspected. The New Yorker had an irritating habit of waylaying Delight and making pretty speeches to her, as if for the wanton pleasure of watching the blush rise in her cheek. When it came to women there was no denying Howard Snelling was as great an authority as at building ships. He understood the sex and knew what pleased them, and with the subtle art of a courtier he breathed into their ears a flattery too delicate to be resented. Beside such an expert Bob, floundering in his first real love affair, felt but a blunderer. Perhaps Mr. Snelling realized this and rather enjoyed the amateur's chagrin. However that may have been, he certainly let no opportunity slip for the display of his proficiency. The discomfited lover fumed with jealous rage; yet on analyzing the causes of his wrath he discovered he actually had but scant ground for complaint. He was not engaged to Delight, and until he was he had no claim upon her and not the smallest right in the world to grumble if another man chose to pay her a compliment. And what were compliments anyway? Only empty words. Yet reason as he would, he wished

Snelling twenty fathoms deep in the sea before ever he had come to Wilton, there to haunt Willie's shop and make of himself a menace to all tranquillity.

So the days passed in a delirious alternation of ecstasy and despair until one morning when Mr. Snelling came bringing from Madam Lee the long-delayed note which she had promised Bob she would send. She was now quite strong again, she wrote, and she wished him to arrange for his aunt, Mr. Spence and Miss Hathaway to come and have tea with the Belleport family on the following afternoon, when both Roger and Mr. Galbraith would be at home. With beating heart Robert Morton took the letter into the house and showed it to Delight.

"How nice of them!" she exclaimed. "Oh, I do wish we could go! Willie would love it. He liked Mr. Galbraith and his son so much! And Aunt Tiny would be in the seventh heaven if only she were able to accept. She so seldom has an invitation out, poor dear!"

"And you?"

"Oh, I couldn't go anyway."

"Why not?"

"Well, in the first place, I have nothing to wear to a place like that."

"Delight!"

"And besides," she hurried on, "they are only asking me because I happen to be here in the house."

"Indeed they're not!"

"But I know they are," persisted the girl. "Everybody doesn't want to see me just because you—"

"Because I what?" demanded Bob, with an ominous stride in her direction.

"Because you—and Mr. Snelling like me," concluded she tranquilly.

"Confound Snelling!"

"Indeed, no. He is a charming gentleman, and I won't have him confounded."

"Hang him then."

"Nor hanged either," she protested.

"Of course if you prefer Mr. Snelling—" began Robert Morton stiffly.

She broke into a teasing laugh.

"I may not prefer him, but nevertheless I will own he is the most wonderful specimen of masculinity that my eyes have ever beheld. Remember Wilton is a small place, pitifully limited in its outlook, and that I have not traveled the wide world to view the wonders it contains. Hence Mr. Snelling is to me like the Eiffel Tower, the Matterhorn, the tomb of Napoleon, or Fifth Avenue at Easter—something illustrious and novel."

"He is nothing so fine as any of those," snapped Bob.

"Oh, I don't know," was the provoking answer.

Robert Morton bit his lip and moved toward the door, but he had not got further than the sill before she whispered:

"Bob!"

Resolutely he held his peace.

"Please be nice, Bob," she cooed.

Ah, he was back again, but she had retreated behind the tall rocker.

"I suppose," she observed, hurtling the words over Jezebel's sleeping form, "that your aunt will be heartbroken to miss this party. Why don't you run upstairs and let her read the note? Then we can send our regrets when Mr. Snelling goes back to Belleport this noon."

Obediently the young man sped to do her bidding, and soon Delight heard his voice calling from the upper hall.

"She won't send her regrets. She says she's going. I tell her they will ask her

another time, but she insists she feels lots better and was thinking of getting up, anyway. She wants to start putting fresh cuffs on her black cashmere this minute, and do I don't know what. You'd better come up and stop her."

But Celestina was not to be stopped. Go she would!

"My shoulder's 'most well anyhow," she affirmed, "an' I had planned to go down to supper. Do you think for one minute I'd miss a junket like this? Why, I'd go if it killed me! The Galbraiths are nice folks an' have been good to Bob and Willie. Besides," she added with ingratiating candor, "I want to see where they live. An' they're goin' to send the automobile for us, that great red one—imagine it! I ain't been in an automobile more'n six times in my whole life. Do you think I'd send my regrets? I'd go if I had to be carried on a stretcher!"

Delight and Robert Morton laughed at her enthusiasm.

"Now you trot straight down stairs, Bob," went on Celestina energetically, "an' write Mis' Lee we'll admire to come, all of us."

"But Aunt Tiny," put in Delight, "I'm not going. Somebody must stay here and look after the house."

"What for?" Celestina demanded. "The house won't run away, an' if thieves was to ransack it from attic to cellar they'd find nothin' worth carryin' away. Ridiculous!"

"She says she hasn't anything to wear," interrupted Bob.

"Delight Hathaway! For shame!" said the elder woman, raising a reproving finger. "You always look pretty as a picture in anything. Some folks need fine clothes to set 'em off but you don't. Don't be silly! Why, half the pleasure of Willie an' me would be wiped out if you didn't go, an' likely Bob would be disappointed, too."

"You bet I would!"

"W—e—ll," the girl yielded.

"There, that's right, my dear." Celestina reached out and patted the slender hand. "Now, Bob, you go along an' write your letter," commanded she. "An'

Delight, you bring me up some hot water an' fetch my clean print dress from the hall closet. I kinder think, come to mull it over, that there's fresh cuffs on my cashmere already, but you might look an' see. An' hadn't we better furbish up my bonnet this afternoon? It ain't been touched this season."

CHAPTER XV

A REVELATION

The morning of the pilgrimage to Belleport was a hectic one in the gray cottage on the bluff. Before breakfast Celestina began preparations, appearing in the kitchen without trace of invalidism and helping Delight hurry the housework out of the way, that the precious hours might be spent in retrimming the hat of black straw which already had done duty four seasons.

"Ain't it too vexatious," complained the irritated convalescent, "that I don't wear out nothin'? This hat, now—it's as good as the day it was bought, despite my havin' had it so long. I can't in conscience throw it away an' get another, much as I'd like to. The trimmin' was on the front the first summer, don't you remember? Then we tried it on behind a year; an' there was two seasons I wore it trimmed on the side. What are we goin' to do with it now, Delight? I've blacked it up an' can see no way for it this time but to turn it round hindside-before. What do you think?"

The amateur milliner shook her head.

"I've a plan," she smiled mysteriously. "Don't you worry, Aunt Tiny."

"Oh, I shan't worry, child, if you take it in hand. I know that when you get through with it it's goin' to look as if it had come straight out of Mis' Gates's store over at the Junction. It does beat all what a knack you have for such things. You could make your fortune bein' a milliner. I s'pose you wouldn't want to face it in with red, would you? Willie likes red, an' there's a scrap of silk in the trunk under the eaves that could be stretched into a facin' with some piecin'."

"I'm afraid you wouldn't like red, Aunt Tiny," the girl replied gently.

"Mebbe I wouldn't," was the prompt answer. "Well, do it as you think best. You never put me into anything yet that warn't becomin', an' I reckon I can risk leavin' it to you."

"Wouldn't you rather I helped you clear up the kitchen before I began hat trimming?"

"Mercy, no! Don't waste precious time sweepin' up an' washin' dishes; I can do that. Like as not 'twill take some of the stiffness out of me. Besides, the work an' the millinery ain't the worst ahead of us. There's Willie to get ready. To coax him out of that shop an' into his Sunday suit is goin' to take some maneuverin'. I know, 'cause I have it to do once in a while when there's a funeral or somethin'. It's like pullin' teeth. There's times when I wish all his jumpers was burned to ashes. An' as for his hair, he rumples it up on end 'till there's no makin' it stay down smooth an' spread round like other folks's."

"Oh, we mustn't try to dress Willie up too much," protested Delight. "I like him best just as he is."

"Mebbe you do," the elder woman grumbled, "but the Galbraiths ain't goin' to feel that way. Why, what do you s'pose they'd think if Willie was to come prancin' over there for a dish of tea lookin' as he does at home? They'd be scandalized! Besides, ain't you an' me goin' to be dressed up? Ain't I got my new hat?"

"Not yet," was the mischievous retort.

"But I am goin' to have. No, sir! If I begin indulgin' Willie by lettin' him go all wild to this party in his old clothes, the next time there's a funeral there'll be no reinin' him in. He'll hold it up forevermore that he went to the Galbraiths in his jumper. I know him better'n you do."

"I suppose so."

"An' I'm firmer with him, too," went on Celestina. "You'd have him clean spoiled. I ain't sure but you've spoilt him already past all help durin' these last ten days. Did you hear him at breakfast askin' me to open his egg? He knows perfectly well I never take off the shell. All I ever do for him is to put in the

butter, pepper, an' salt; an' I only do that 'cause he's squizzlin' so to get out in that shop that he ain't a notion whether there's fixin's on his egg or not. Let him get one of these ideas on his mind an' it's a wonder he don't eat the egg, shells an' all."

"Poor dear!" The girl's face softened.

"You pet him too much," said Celestina accusingly.

"Don't you pet Willie a little yourself, Aunt Tiny?" teased Delight. "You know you do. Everybody does. We can't help it. People just love him and like to see him happy."

"I know it," the woman admitted. "Why, there's folks in Wilton (I could name 'em right now) who would run their legs off for Willie. Look at Bob an' this Mr. Snellin' sweatin' in that shop like beavers over somethin' that ain't never goin' to do 'em an ounce of good—mebbe ain't never goin' to do anybody no good. There's somethin' in him that sorter compels people to stand on their heads for him like that. I often try to figger out just what it is," she mused. Then in a brisker tone she asked: "How's the hat comin'?"

"Beautifully."

"That's good. Hurry it right along, for I'm plannin' to have dinner at twelve an' get it out of the way."

"But the car isn't coming for us until three o'clock."

"'Twill take that time to wash up the dishes an' rig Willie up."

"Not three hours!"

"You don't know him. We'll have our hands full to head him away from that thing he's makin'. All I pray is no new scheme ketches him while he's dressin', for 'twill be all day with the party if it does."

Fortunately no such misadventure befell. Willie was corralled, his protests smothered, and he was led placidly away by Bob, to emerge after an interval resigned as a lamb for the slaughter. Even the homespun suit could not wholly banish his native charm, for after it was once on he forgot its existence and wore

it with an ease almost too oblivious to suit Celestina.

Not so she! On the contrary she issued from her chamber conscious of every article of finery adorning her plump person. She settled, unsettled, resettled her hat a dozen times, and tried no less than a score of locations for her large cameo pin. Her freshly washed lisle gloves had unfortunately shrunk in the drying and refused to go on at the finger tips, and from each digit projected a sharply defined glove end which kept her busy pushing and pulling most of the afternoon. So occupied was Delight with tying Willie's cravat and rearranging the spray of flowers on Celestina's bonnet that she had not a moment to consider her own toilet which was hastily made after everything else was done. Yet as Robert Morton looked at her, he thought that nothing could have graced her more completely than did her simple gown of muslin. There was in the frock a demureness almost Quaker-like which as a foil for her beauty breathed the very essence of coquetry. What lover could have failed to feel proud of such a treasure?

Nevertheless, Bob had his qualms about the prospective visit. He was not concerned for Willie or Celestina. They were what they were and any one of discrimination would recognize their worth. Nor did he entertain fears for Delight or the Galbraiths. All of them could be relied upon to meet the situation with ease and dignity. But Cynthia—what would be her attitude? Of late, when she had come over in the car with Mr. Snelling, she had maintained a distant politeness which would have been amusing had it not been ominous. He wondered how she would conduct herself today, not alone toward him but toward the girl whom she could not but regard as her rival. How much did she guess, he speculated, of the romance that was taking place in the rose-covered cottage on the bluff. And if she had guessed nothing, might not Snelling, leaping at conclusions, have gone back to Belleport there to spread idle gossip of the love-story? What would Howard Snelling know of the delicate situation 'twixt himself and Mr. Galbraith's daughter? And even though no rumors of the affair reached Cynthia at all, Robert Morton was old enough to sense the hazard of introducing one woman to another.

Well, the risk must be taken; there was no escape from it now. Even as these disquieting imaginings chased themselves through his mind, the car stopped before the door and Roger Galbraith, who had come to meet the guests, entered at the gate. No courtesy that would add to their comfort had been omitted. There were rugs and extra wraps, and a drive along the shore road had been planned as

an added pleasure.

Willie, his back actually turned on his beloved workshop, was in the seventh heaven.

"What you settin' on the peaked edge of the seat for, Celestina?" he asked when once they were in the automobile. "The thing ain't goin' to blow up or break down. Let your whole heft sink into the cushions an' enjoy yourself. 'Tain't often you get the chance to go a-ridin'."

His joy in the novel experience was as unalloyed and as transparent as a child's.

"My soul!" he ejaculated as the vehicle turned at last into the broad avenue leading to the Galbraith estate. "Ain't this a big place! Big's a hotel an' some to spare."

Even after the introductions had been performed and he had sunk into a wicker chair beside his host, with a great pillow behind him to keep him from being swallowed up and lost entirely, he abated not a whit of his gladness, admiring the flowers, the smoothly cut lawns, and the ocean view until he radiated good humor on all sides. But it was when the tea wagon was rolled out and placed before Madam Lee that his interest was not to be curbed.

"Ain't that cute now?" he commented, his eyes following the unaccustomed sight with alertness. "The feller that got a-holt of that idee found a good one. Trundles along like a little baby carriage, don't it?"

Nothing would satisfy him until he had examined every part of the invention, and Celestina trembled lest then and there his brain be stimulated to action and he make a bolt for home to complete without delay some sudden scheme the novelty had engendered. However, no such calamity occurred. He drank his tea with satisfaction and was presently borne off by Mr. Galbraith to inspect a recently purchased barometer. After he had gone the company broke up into little groups. Mrs. Galbraith and Celestina betook themselves to a shaded corner, there to exchange felicitations on Miss Morton's nephew; Roger, Cynthia, and Bob perched on the broad piazza rail and discussed the recent boat race; and Madam Lee was left alone with Delight. Robert Morton looked in vain for Mr. Snelling but he was nowhere to be seen, and presently he learned that that gentleman had taken one of the cars and gone for an afternoon's spin to Sawyer's Falls. Whether his absence was a contributory cause or not, certain it was that for the time being at least Cynthia lapsed into her customary friendly manner and quite outdid herself in graciousness.

Bob relaxed his tension. The afternoon was moving on with more serenity than he had dared hope, and inwardly he began to congratulate himself on the success of it. To judge from appearance every one was in the serenest frame of mind. Willie was beaming into his host's face, and both men were laughing immoderately; Celestina, from the snatches of conversation that reached him, was relating for Mrs. Galbraith's benefit the symptoms of her late illness; and Madam Lee was chatting with Delight as with an old-time friend. Bob longed to join them, but prudence forbade his leaving Cynthia's side. Moreover he suspected the tête-à-tête was of the old lady's arranging and he dared not break in on it. If Madam Lee desired his presence, she was quite capable of commanding it by one of those characteristically imperious waves of her hand. But she did not summon him. Instead she sat with her keen little eyes fixed on the girl opposite as if fascinated by her beauty. Once Bob heard her ask Delight of the Brewsters and caught fragments that indicated they were talking of the child's early life in the village.

It was Celestina who at length broke in on the conversation.

"I guess we must be thinkin' of goin', Delight, don't you? We have a long ride back, you know."

"Delight!" echoed Madam Lee, repeating the word with surprise.

"A queer name, ain't it?" Celestina put in. "So old-fashioned an' uncommon! When the child first come here folks couldn't believe but 'twas a pet name her dad had given her; but the little thing insisted 'twas what she was christened."

"Father said I was named for my mother and my grandmother, Delight Lee."

There was a gasp from the stately old lady in the chair. With convulsive grasp she caught and held the girl's wrist.

"Your father was Ralph Hathaway?"

"Yes," was the wondering reply. "How did you know?"

No answer came.

"Mother!" cried Mrs. Galbraith, coming swiftly to her side and bending over the form crumpled against the pillows.

Her face, too, was pale, and even Mr. Galbraith looked startled.

"Don't take on so, mother," her daughter whispered. "Control yourself if you can. There may be some mistake. It is unlikely that—"

"There is no mistake," came in a hollow voice from the woman huddled in the chair, who regarded Delight with frightened eyes. "She is my daughter's child, sent by the mercy of heaven that I might make amends before I went down into the grave."

Tense silence followed the assertion.

"Did your father never tell you anything, my dear, of his marriage?" went on Madam Lee in a tone that although firmer still trembled.

"No."

"Then I can tell you—I, who drove your mother from my house when she refused to wed a man she did not love."

Delight's great eyes widened with wonder.

"Yes," went on the elder woman with impetuous haste, "look at me. I have grown older and wiser since those days. But I was proud when I was young, and self-willed, and determined to have my way. I had three daughters: Maida, whom you see here, Delight and Muriel. We lived in Virginia and my children's beauty was the talk of the county. Maida married Richard Galbraith, a descendant of one of our oldest families, and I rejoiced in the alliance. For Delight, my second daughter, I chose as husband the son of one of my oldest friends, a rich young landholder who although older than she I knew would bring her name and fortune. But the girl, high-spirited like myself but lacking my ambition, would have none of him. All unbeknown to any of us, she had fallen in love with Ralph Hathaway, a handsome, penniless adventurer from the West. There was nothing against the man save that he was young, headstrong, and had his way to make, but he balked me in my plans and I hated him for it. In vain did I try to break off the match. It was useless. The pair loved one another devotedly and refused to be separated."

Madam Lee ceased speaking for an instant; then went on resolutely.

"When I say my daughter had all the Lee determination, you will guess the rest. She fled from home and although I spared no money to trace her, I never saw or heard of her again. The next year, as if in judgment upon me, Muriel, my youngest child, died and I had but one daughter remaining. It was then that, saddened and chastened by sorrow, I regretted my narrowness and injustice and prayed to God for the chance to wipe out my cruelty. But my prayers went unanswered, and all these years forgiveness has been denied me. Now I am old but God is merciful. He has not let me die with this weight upon my soul."

She bowed her head on Delight's shoulder and wept.

"Your mother?" she whispered, when she was able to enunciate the words.

"My mother died in California when I was born. Then my father took to the sea and carried me with him. We sailed until I was ten years old, when his ship —"

"I know," interrupted Madam Lee gently. She gave a long sigh. "We—we must speak more of this later," murmured she. "I am tired now."

As she dropped back against the cushions, Celestina rose softly and motioned the others to follow her; but when Delight attempted to slip away the hand resting on hers tightened.

"You are not leaving me!" pleaded the old lady faintly.

"I will come back again," answered the girl in a soothing tone.

"When? To-morrow?"

"If you wish it, Madam L—"

"Call me grandmother, my child," said the woman, a smile rare in its peace and beauty breaking over her drawn countenance.

CHAPTER XVI

ANOTHER BLOW DESCENDS

The ride home from Belleport was a subdued one, bringing to an afternoon that had been rich in sunshine a climax of shadow. The Galbraiths were far too stunned by the startling revelations of the day to wish to prolong a meeting that had lapsed into awkwardness, and until they had had opportunity to readjust themselves they were eager to be alone; nor did their delicacy of perception fail to detect a similar craving in the minds of their guests. Therefore they did not press their visitors to remain and tactfully arranged that one of the servants instead of Roger should drive the Spences back over the Harbor Road.

As the motor purred its way along, there was little conversation. Even had not the chauffeur's presence acted as a restraint, none of the party would have had the heart to make perfunctory conversation; the tragedy of the moment had touched them too deeply. What a strange, wonderful unraveling of life's tangled skeins had come with the few fleeting hours. Each turned the drama over in his mind, trying to make a reality of it and spin into the warp and woof of the tapestry time had already woven this thread of new color. But so startling was it in hue that it refused to blend, standing out against the duller tones of the past with appalling distinctness; and never was it more irreconcilable than when the familiar confines of the little fishing hamlet by the sea were reached and those who struggled to harmonize it saw it in contrast with this background of simplicity.

Each silently reconstructed Delight's life, now linking it with its ancestry and its romantic beginnings. She had, then, sprung from aristocratic stock; riches had been her right, and culture her heritage. She had been the single flower of a passionate love, and the hot-headed young father to whom she had been bequeathed when bereft of the woman he had adored had taken her with him when he had sought the sea's balm to assuage his sorrow. She was all that remained of that tender, throbbing memory of his youth. Where he went she followed, all unconscious of peril and with youth's God-given faith; and when the great moment came and the supreme sacrifice was demanded, the man voluntarily severed the bonds that bound them, leaving her to life while he himself went forth into the Beyond. What must not that heroic soul have suffered when he cast his child into the ocean's arms and upon the mercies of an unknown future! What blind trust led him; what unselfishness and courage lay in the choice he made! A smaller mind would have followed the easier path and kept them united to the end, happy in the thought that in their death they were not

divided, and that no years stretched ahead when she would be without his protection. Might he not be performing a kinder act to let her go down into the sea than to entrust her to the charity of strangers? He must have wrestled with all these problems and temptations as he stood lashed to the mast out there in the fateful storm.

Ah, his confidence in a fatherhood more omniscient than his own had not been misplaced. Loving hands had borne his darling safely through the waves to a home where, in an atmosphere of devotion, the beauty that had been in her from the beginning had perfected in its maturity. Even the homely surroundings of the environment into which she drifted could not stifle her native fineness of soul. Bred up a fisherman's daughter she had lived and moved among plain, kindly people, whom she had learned to cherish and revere as if they were of her blood, and to whom she had endeared herself to a corresponding degree.

And now what was her future to be? Was she suddenly to be snatched back into her rightful sphere, the ties that linked her with the present snapped asunder, and a new world with the myriad opportunities she had until now been denied placed within her reach? That was the query that agitated the minds of the silent thinkers who sped along the Harbor Road.

Sunset was gilding the water, kissing the sands into rosy warmth and casting glints of vermilion over the low buildings at the mouth of the bay, where windows flashed forth a flaming reflection of fire. The peace of approaching twilight brooded over the village. Little boats, like homing doves, came flying across the vast expanse of waves, their sails a splendor of copper in the fading light. With the hush of night the breeze died into stillness until scarce a leaf of the weather-beaten poplars stirred. From the tangle of roses, sweet fern and bayberry that overgrew the fields the note of a thrush rose clear on the quiet air. A whirling bevy of gulls circled the bar, left naked and opalescent by the receding tide. Peace was everywhere, divine peace, save in the breasts of those who gazed only to find a mockery in the surrounding tranquillity.

Robert Morton's face was stern in meditation. How was this mighty transformation in Delight's fortunes to affect the hopes he fostered? To wed the daughter of a humble fisherman was a different matter from offering a penniless future to the grand-daughter of the stately Madam Lee. Even when the possibility of marriage with Cynthia had loomed in his path, his pride had rebelled at the financial inequality of the match. He did not wish to be

patronized, to come empty-handed to a princess whose hands were full. The thought had been a galling one. And now once again he was in a similar position. Of course, Madam Lee and the Galbraiths would desire to make good the past; he knew them well enough for that. Delight would be elevated to the same plane with Cynthia, and he would be faced with the old irritating inferiority of fortune. Moreover, in her recently acquired station, the lady of his dreams might scorn such a humble suitor. Who could tell? Wealth worked great changes in individuals sometimes, and at best human nature was a frail, assailable, and incalculable factor. Furthermore the girl had never pledged him her love. There had been no spoken word between them. The vision that had made a Utopia of his world had been, he reflected, of his own creating.

He glanced at Delight, but she did not meet his eye.

Her gaze was vacantly following the rapidly shifting landscape.

Although the glory from the sky shone on her face the radiance that glowed there came only from without and was the result of no inward exultation. Even the gray cottage had assumed a false splendor in the rosy twilight and was lighted with a beauty not its own.

When the car stopped, Willie clambered stiffly out and he and Bob helped the women to alight. Then the motor rolled away and they were alone.

"Well!" burst out Celestina, her pent-up feeling taking vent, "did you ever know of such a to-do? I've been stiflin' to talk all the way home! Why, you're goin' to be rich, Delight! You'll be aunts, an' uncles, an' cousins with them Galbraiths—picture it! Likely they'll take you to New York with 'em an' to goodness knows where!"

The girl did not answer but moved to Willie's side and slipped her hand into his, as if certain of his understanding and sympathy.

"You don't seem much set up by your good luck," went on the breathless Celestina.

"Delight's kinder bowled over by surprise, Tiny," Willie explained gently. "It's took all our breaths away, I guess."

Tenderly he pressed the trembling fingers that clung to his.

"You ain't got to worry about it, dearie," whispered he in a caressing tone. "No power can make you do anything you don't choose to; an' what's more, nobody'll want to force you into what won't be for your happiness."

"I shall never leave Zenas Henry," Delight said with determination.

"An' nobody'll urge you to, dear heart. Don't fret, child, don't fret. To-morrow we'll straighten this snarl all out an' 'til then you've got nothin' to fear. Them as love you shall stay by, I give you my word on it."

"Hadn't I better go home to-night and tell them?"

The old inventor considered a moment.

"I don't believe I would," he answered at last. "They ain't expectin' you, an' if you was to go lookin' so white an' frightened as you do now, 'twould anger Zenas Henry an' upset 'em all. Wait an' see what happens to-morrow. 'Twill be time enough then. You're tired, sweetheart. Stay here an' rest to-night. What do you say, Bob?"

"I think it would be much wiser."

"Course 'twould," nodded Willie. "You stay right here, like as if nothin' had happened, an' think calmly about it a little while, child. You ain't got to decide a thing at present; furthermore, there may not be anything for you to decide. We've no way of figgerin' what your—your—relations mean to do. Just trust 'em a bit. They're Bob's friends an' I guess we can count on 'em to act as is fair an' right."

"They *are* Bob's friends, aren't they?" repeated the girl, her face brightening as if the fact, hitherto forgotten, gave her confidence.

"And splendidly loyal friends too," the young man put in eagerly.

"Then I will trust them," she said. "It isn't as if they were strangers."

How Robert Morton longed to go to her, to tell her in her sweet dependence how eager he was for the day when no friend of his should be a stranger to her; when their lives would be so closely intertwined that every interest, every hope, every thought of his should be hers also. Perhaps the unuttered wish that trembled on his lips was reflected in his eyes, for after looking up at him she

suddenly dropped her lashes and, turning away, followed Tiny into the house.

"I've cautioned Celestina not to go talkin' to her any more just now," announced the little old man when she had gone. "Your aunt's an awful good woman; no better lives. But there's times like today when things don't strike her as they do me an' Delight. She's so fond of the girl that her first thought would be for the money an' all that; but that would be the last consideration in the world in Delight's mind. She's awful loyal an' affectionate. Things go deep with her, an' she sets a heap of store by the folks she cares for. Why, Zenas Henry is like her own father. Since she was a wee tot she ain't known no other. While this old lady, her grandmother—what is she? Why, she don't mean nothin'—not a thing!"

They walked on toward the shop door, each occupied with his own reveries; then suddenly Willie roused himself.

"Why, if here ain't Janoah!" he exclaimed.

"What you doin', Jan? Was you after somethin'? I reckon you found the place pretty well deserted an' were wonderin' what had become of us all."

"I warn't doin' no wonderin', Willie Spence," the man replied. "I knowed where you'd gone 'cause I saw you ridin' away like a sheep bein' led to the sacrifice."

"Like a what?" repeated the inventor with a grin.

"An innocent lamb, or a rat in a trap," Janoah said with solemn emphasis.

"What are you drivin' at, anyhow?" questioned Willie.

"You didn't suspect nothin'?"

"Suspect anything? No, of course not. Why?"

"You hadn't a suspicion the whole thing was a decoy?"

"What whole thing?"

"The trip an' all."

Willie studied his friend's face in puzzled silence.

"Whatever are you tryin' to say?" demanded he at last.

Janoah swept his hand dramatically round the shop.

"You've been betrayed, Willie!" he announced with tragic intensity. "Betrayed by them as you thought was your friends, an' who you've trusted. I warned you, but you wouldn't listen, an' now the thing I told you would happen has happened." Triumphant pleasure gleamed in the sinister smile. "They tricked you into leavin'," went on the malicious voice, "an' then they came here an' stole what was yours—your invention. I caught 'em doin' it. I hid outside an' overheard 'em tell how they'd been waitin' days for the chance when everybody should be gone. 'Twas that Snelling an' another like him, a draughtsman. They laughed an' said that now the old man was out of the way they could do as they pleased. Then they took all the measurements of your invention, made some sketches, an' took its picter."

Willie listened, open-mouthed.

"You must be crazy, Janoah," he slowly observed.

"I ain't crazy," Janoah replied, with stinging sharpness. "The whole thing was just as I say. It was part of a plot that Snellin' an' Galbraith have been plannin' all along; an' either they've used this young feller here [he motioned toward Robert Morton] as a tool, or else he's in it with 'em."

Bob started forward, but Willie's hand was on his arm.

"Gently, son," he murmured. Then addressing Janoah he asked: "An' what earthly use could Mr. Galbraith have for—"

"'Cause he sees money in it," was the prompt response.

A thrill of uneasiness passed through Robert Morton's frame. Had not those very words been spoken both by the capitalist and Howard Snelling? They had uttered them as a laughing prediction, but might they not have rated them as true? With sudden chagrin he looked from Willie to Janoah and from Janoah back to Willie again.

"I've been inquirin' up this Galbraith," went on Janoah. "It 'pears he's a big New York shipbuilder—that's what he is—an' Snellin' is one of his head men."

If the mischief-maker derived pleasure from dealing out the fruit of his investigations he certainly reaped it now, for he was rewarded by seeing an electrical shock stiffen Willie's figure.

"It ain't true!" cried the little inventor. "It ain't true! Is it, Bob?"

Robert Morton's eyes fell before his piercing scrutiny.

"Yes," was his reluctant answer.

"You knew it all along?"

"Yes."

"An' Snellin'?"

"He is in Mr. Galbraith's employ, yes."

"An'—an'—you let 'em come here—" began the old man bewildered.

"You let 'em come here to steal Willie's idee," interrupted Janoah, wheeling on Bob. "You helped 'em to come, after his takin' you into his home an' all!"

"I didn't know what they meant to do," Robert Morton stammered. "I just thought they were going to lend us a hand at working up the thing."

"A likely story!" sniffed Janoah with scorn. "No siree! You came here as a tool—you were paid for it, I'll bet a hat!"

"You lie."

"Prove it," was the taunting response.

"I—I—can't prove it," confessed the young man wretchedly, "but Willie knows that what you accuse me of isn't so."

With face alight with hope he turned toward the old man at his elbow; but no denial came from the expected source. Willie had sunk down on a pile of boards

and buried his face in his hands.

"An' I thought they were my friends," they heard him moan.

Robert Morton hesitated, then bent over the bowed figure, and as he did so Janoah, casting one last look of gloating delight at the ruin he had wrought, slipped softly from the room.

As he went out he heard a broken murmur from the inventor:

"I'll—I'll—not—believe it," asserted he feebly.

But despite the brave words, the seed of suspicion had taken root, and Robert Morton knew that Willie's confidence in him had been shaken. Still the little old man clung with dogged persistence to his sanguine declaration:

"*I'll not believe it*!"

CHAPTER XVII

A GRIM HAND INTERVENES

The next morning saw a grave change in the household on the bluff. Delight, with violet-circled eyes and cheeks whose rose tints had faded to pallor, listened with dread for the sound of the Galbraith's motor. What the day would bring forth she feared to speculate. Willie and Bob also showed traces of a sleepless night. Although they had guarded from the others the happenings of the previous evening, between them loomed a barrier of mutual amazement and reproach. Beneath his attempted optimism Willie was wounded and indignant that he should have been deceived by those in whose kindness he had believed so whole-heartedly. He fought the facts with loyalty, obstinately trusting that some satisfactory explanation would be forthcoming, but he did not understand, and the dumb question that spoke in his eyes hurt Robert Morton more than any formulated reproach could have done. It was human, the young man owned, that the inventor should resent having been tricked. He himself, throughout the weary

watches of the night, had twisted and turned Janoah's damning testimony, struggling to explain it away by some simple and harmless interpretation; yet he was compelled to admit that the facts pointed in but one direction. And if he was baffled in his search for a way out, how much more so must Willie be? Why, he would be almost superman if he did not surrender his faith before such convincing evidence.

To the grief he experienced at forfeiting the little old man's trust, Robert Morton was also compelled to add the bitterness of discovering that those whose friendship was dearest to him had betrayed it and used him as a stool pigeon in a contemptible plot that he would have scorned to further had he been cognizant of it. He wondered, as he turned restlessly on his pillow, whether it was Mr. Galbraith with whom the duplicity originated or whether the conspiracy of yesterday was one of Snelling's hatching. Was it not possible the employee desired the invention for his own profit? That, to be sure, would be calamity enough, but it would at least clear Mr. Galbraith of theft and reinstate him in the young man's confidence. If only that could be the answer to the riddle, how thankful he would be!

Well, until he could be brought face to face with the capitalist, it was futile to attempt to unravel the enigma. How he longed in his bewilderment for the sympathy and counsel of a fresh perspective! But on Tiny's discretion he could place no reliance and even had he been able to do so, everything within him shrank from the disloyalty of voicing evil against his friends until he had proof. Delight was also an impossible confidant because of her recently discovered relationship to the Galbraith family. To breathe a word which might at this delicate juncture prejudice her against her new relatives would be contemptible. No, there was nothing to be done but be patient and maintain in the meantime as close a semblance to a normal attitude as was possible.

Fortunately the silence that settled down upon the silvered cottage caused no surprise to any of its occupants. Having been warned not to chatter, Celestina observed a welcome quietness perfectly understood. Nor was it strange that in view of the shock Delight had received she should be more thoughtful than usual. Nobody commented either on Willie's abandonment of his inventing, or gave heed that he and Robert Morton spoke little together. How could the Galbraiths, Bob's best friends, be discussed in his presence? There was abundant explanation, therefore, why a strained atmosphere should prevail and pass unnoticed without either Celestina or Delight suspecting that its cause was other

than the disclosures made by Madam Lee on the previous afternoon.

Nevertheless, eager as was each of the household to have speculation satisfied and the future with whatever it might contain unfold, there was a simultaneous start of apprehension when the Galbraiths' familiar red car stopped at the gate of the cottage. From it alighted neither Mr. Snelling nor any member of the family, but instead the chauffeur gravely delivered to Robert Morton a hastily scrawled note written in Mr. Galbraith's spreading hand. Marveling a little that it was he to whom the communication should be addressed, the young man broke the seal of the letter.

Madam Lee, he read, weary with excitement, had retired almost immediately after their departure, the maid attending her having left her sleeping like a tired child; but when they had gone to arouse her in the morning, it had been only to find that she had passed quietly away in her sleep without struggle or suffering. Snelling had gone over to New York to make the necessary funeral arrangements, and the family were to follow the next day. There was nothing Bob could do, but if he and Delight wished to accompany them, Mrs. Galbraith would be glad to have them. Madam Lee had been devoted to Bob, and it was Delight's unchallenged right to share in the final obsequies to her grandmother.

Awed, and in a low voice, Robert Morton read the communication aloud.

"I shall go, of course," he said, with a catch in his voice. "Madam Lee—was very dear to me. Had she been of my own people I could not have cared for her more deeply."

"And I—what shall I do?" questioned Delight. The appeal was to Bob, and the sense of dependence vibrating in it thrilled him with tender gladness.

"I suppose," he answered gently, "it would make your grandmother happy to know you were there. Wouldn't it be a token of forgiveness?"

"What do you think, Willie?" the girl asked.

"I agree with Bob that you should go, my dear," the old man replied. "Somehow it seems as if your grandmother would rest the sweeter for feelin' you were near by. An' anyhow, it's a mark of respect to the dead. You're bound to show that, no matter how you feel. I'm pretty sure that if you an' your grandmother had had the chance to get better acquainted, you would have loved

one another dearly. It was only that it all came too late for you to feel toward her the same as Bob does."

"Perhaps!" Delight returned with half-dazed seriousness.

So it was decided the two young persons would go with the Galbraiths to New York, and the next day they joined the Belleport family and followed the body of the fine, stately old Southern woman to its last resting place. There were no outside friends among the small group of mourners, and the two days of constant and intimate companionship drew them together with a closeness very vital in its results. Delight was received into the circle with a tact and affection that not only put her at her ease but won her heart; and Robert Morton, as Madam Lee's favorite, was as much a part of the family as if he had been born into it. For the time being, the common grief banished from his mind every other thought, and once again he and his old-time friends met without a shadow of distrust between them. Even Cynthia was in her most appealing mood, casting all caprice and artificiality aside and centering most of her attention on her newly acquired cousin. The silent benediction of peace the presence of the dead brought brooded over them all, and it was with no perfunctory tenderness that Delight bent and gently kissed her grandmother's cold forehead.

Then came the journey back to Belleport, and as Mr. Galbraith, Roger, and Howard Snelling were all detained in New York, it was Bob who brought the party home. In the meantime no opportunity had presented itself for broaching to the financier the subject of Willie's invention. The interval during the funeral rites was too inopportune, and Robert Morton had lacked both the inclination and the courage to break in upon such an occasion with an affair so sordid and unpleasant. He had hoped that during the return to the Cape some chance for a talk with the capitalist would be afforded him. But now there was no help for it but to go back to Willie Spence's with the weight still heavy on his heart. Mr. Galbraith, he learned, would have to remain in the city two weeks or more; and an important business deal would keep Mr. Snelling at the Long Island plant indefinitely. Hence for the present there was not a possibility of clearing up the mystery. It was, however, significant that Snelling evidently considered his part of the work done; and if Janoah's accusations were founded on fact, as they appeared to be, it was not surprising that he seized upon the confusion of the present as a fortunate cover for his exit from Wilton.

The more Robert Morton pondered on the train of events, the less willing he

became to connect Mr. Galbraith with the purloining of Willie's idea. The financier had intended to do precisely what he had specified, lend a friendly hand to the old man's scheme. It was Snelling who had seen in the circumstance something too promising to let pass and who, without his employer's knowledge, had made bold to secure the device for his personal profit. In the meanwhile, ignorant that Robert Morton was cognizant of his cupidity, he was as debonair as if he had nothing on his conscience. He made himself useful in every possible direction, and on parting from Bob at the train declared he should look forward with the greatest anticipation to their future business association together. How the young man longed to confront the knave with his crime! It seemed almost imperative that before the mischief proceeded farther steps should be taken to stop it. But what proofs had he to present?

No, a middle course was the only thing possible, Bob decided. He must return to Willie's roof with the atmosphere uncleared and finish the little that still remained to be done on the invention as if no shadow clouded his sky. He could not leave Willie in the lurch. Furthermore, it was out of the question for him to depart from Wilton until he had come to an understanding with Delight Hathaway. The intimacy of the past week, with its lights and shadows, had only served to render stronger the bonds that bound him to her. In every issue the network of strange events had developed her character, and displayed facets of such unsuspected force and splendor that where beauty had at first fascinated it was now the soul behind it that called to him. Truly Madam Lee had in this grandchild a worthy descendant, and it brought an added joy to his heart to thus link together the two beings he loved most deeply.

Therefore he made the journey back to Wilton, bravely resolved to bear Janoah's taunts and Willie's silent reproaches until the moment came when he could acquaint Mr. Galbraith with Snelling's perfidy and see the injustice righted. It was not an enviable position, the one in which he stood. He felt it to be only human that in the face of this acid test the old inventor's affection and allegiance toward him should waver, and that Janoah would detect and rejoice in its unsteadiness. But as Bob relied upon ultimately solving the conundrum, he felt he could endure a short interval of unmerited distrust. It was in Delight and Tiny, who were unconscious of any false note in his relation to the household, that he placed his hopes for aid. Hence it was with no small degree of consternation that on reaching Wilton he learned that the girl had resolved now to return to her own home.

"I have been here over two weeks already," she said to Bob, "and I really am needed by my own family. They miss me dreadfully when I am gone. Zenas Henry goes down like a plummet, Abbie says. And then I have so much to tell them! Besides, now that Aunt Tiny is well again, there is no use in my remaining."

"There is a great deal of use in it for me!" asserted the young man moodily.

"Nonsense! You and Willie have your work, and in a day or two you will be so buried in it you won't know whether I am here or not."

"Delight!"

A warning echo in the word and a quick forward movement caused her to add hurriedly:

"And—and—anyway, you can come up to our house and see me there. You will like the three captains and Abbie, you simply can't help it; they are dears! And you will worship Zenas Henry—at least you will if he is—I mean sometimes he doesn't—well, you know how older men feel when younger ones appear. He is very devoted to me and he is always afraid— But I am sure he will understand, and that you and he will get on beautifully together," she concluded with scarlet cheeks.

The clumsy explanation had a dubious ring and Bob frowned.

"You see, your being Aunt Tiny's nephew will help some; he likes her very much. And of course any friend of Willie's and—and—of mine—"

With every word the formidable Zenas Henry increased in formidableness. She saw the scowl deepen.

"You will come and see me, won't you?" she pleaded timidly. "I should be sorry if—"

Robert Morton caught the slender hand and held it firmly.

"I'll come were there a thousand Zenas Henrys!"

"That's nice!" she answered with a nervous laugh. "There won't be a

thousand, though. There never can be but one as good and as dear as he is! Only remember, you mustn't come right away. I shall have a great deal to tell them at home, and it won't be easy for Zenas Henry to face the fact that the Galbraiths have any claims on me. It has always been his pride that I had no relatives and belonged entirely to him. And I do, you know," she went on quickly. "Nothing on earth shall take me from Zenas Henry! I worried a good deal lest Madam L—lest my grandmother should insist that I spend part of my time with her. But that is all settled now. I can keep up my friendship with the Galbraith family by calls and short visits, and everything will go on as before. I don't want anything changed."

The young man saw her draw in her chin proudly. "Of course I have forgiven my grandmother," she went on, "but I never can forget that she made my mother's life unhappy and that she was unkind to my father. So I never wish to accept any favors from any of them."

"But the Galbraiths are not to blame for the past," ventured Bob, his loyalty instantly in arms.

"No. But they are Lees."

"Your grandmother was sorry—bitterly sorry," urged the young man in a persuasive tone. "It was probably her regret that caused her death."

The girl nodded sadly.

"I know," she said. "I realize she lived to regret what she had done. I am not blaming her. But for all that, she never can mean to me what she might have meant. Rather I shall always think of her as a handsome, stately old lady who was your friend and loved you."

She turned to leave him, but he refused to let her go.

"Delight," he cried, drawing her closer, "will your grandmother be dearer to you because she loved me? Tell me, sweetheart! Do I mean anything in your life? You are the only thing that matters in mine."

He saw a radiance flash into her wonderful eyes, and in another instant her head was against his breast.

"It is only because of you, Bob," she whispered, clinging to him, "that I can forgive the Lees at all."

CHAPTER XVIII

THE PROGRESS OF ANOTHER ROMANCE

The ecstasy that came to Robert Morton with his new-found happiness swept before it the clouds that had overcast his sky, until his horizon was almost as radiant as it had been on the day of his arrival at Wilton. Janoah Eldridge came no more to the Spence cottage; Snelling had vanished; the Galbraiths were occupied with their own affairs; and the barrier between Bob and Willie began slowly to wear away. The little old man was of far too believing and charitable a nature to hold out long against his own optimism; moreover, he detested strife and was much more willing to endure a wrong than to harbor ill feeling; hence he was only too ready to reconstruct Janoah's venomous story into terms of his native blind faith. He did not, to be sure, understand, and for days and nights he puzzled ceaselessly over the problem events presented; but as no light was forthcoming, his zest in the enigma cooled until the mystery took on the unfathomable quality of various other mysteries he had wrestled with and finally shelved as unanswerable. There was the invention to finish, and so eager was he to see it completed that to this interest every other thought was subordinated. Therefore, although misgivings assailed him, they gradually receded into his subconsciousness, leaving behind them much of the good will he had formerly cherished toward Robert Morton.

The olive branch Willie tacitly extended Bob seized with avidity. Had not the world suddenly become too perfect to be marred by discord? Why, in the exuberance of his joy he would have forgiven anybody anything! He did own to bruised feelings, but time is a great healer of both mental and of physical pain, and the hurts he had received soon dimmed into scars that carried with them no acute sensation. His mind was too much occupied with Delight Hathaway and the wonder of their love for him to think to any great extent of himself. The romance still remained a secret between them, for so vehement had been the turmoil into which Zenas Henry had been thrown by the tidings of the girl's past

history that it seemed unwise to follow blow with blow and acquaint him just at present with the news of the lovers' engagement. Moreover, there was Cynthia Galbraith to consider. Robert Morton was too chivalrous to be brutal to any woman, much less an old friend like Cynthia.

Hence he and Delight moved in a dream, the full beauty of which they alone sensed. Their secret was all the more delicious for being a secret, and with all life before them they agreed they could afford to wait. Nevertheless concealment was at variance with the character of either, and although they derived a certain exhilaration from their clandestine happiness they longed for the time when their path should lie entirely in the open, when Zenas Henry's consent should be obtained, and their betrothal acknowledged before all the world. Until such a moment came an irksome deception colored their love and left them in constant danger of discovery. Indeed, had the observer been keen enough to interpret psychic phenomena, there was betrayal in the soft light of Delight's eyes and in the grave tenderness of her face; and as for Bob, he felt his great good-fortune must be emblazoned on every feature of his countenance.

In point of fact, no such condition prevailed. The girl returned to her home and took her place there, bringing with her her customary buoyancy of spirit; and if her light-heartedness was more exaggerated than was her wont, those who loved her attributed it to her joy at being once more beneath her own roof-tree. Zenas Henry and the three captains fluttered about her as if her absence had been one of years rather than of days; and even Abbie, less demonstrative than the others, showed by a quiet satisfaction her deep contentment at having the girl back again.

Of course Robert Morton let no great length of time elapse before he climbed the hill and invaded the Brewster home. As Celestina's nephew and Willie's guest he had credentials enough to assure him of a welcome, and for an interval these sufficed to give him an enviable entrée; but after a few calls, his winning personality secured for him a place of his own. He inspected Captain Phineas Taylor's broken compass and set it right; he discussed rheumatism and its woes with Captain Benjamin Todd; he lent an attentive ear to the nautical adventures of Captain Jonas Baker. Abbie, who was a systematic housekeeper, approved of his habit of wiping his feet before he entered the door and the careful fashion he had of replacing any chair he moved; most men, she averred, were so thoughtless and untidy. But it was with Zenas Henry that the young man won his greatest triumph, the two immediately coming into harmony on the common

ground of motor-boating. Most of the male visitors who dropped in at the white cottage came only to see Delight, but here was one who came to call on the entire family. How charming it was! They liked him one and all; how could they help it? And soon, so eagerly did they anticipate his coming, any lapse in his visits caused keen disappointment.

"I kinder thought that Morton feller might be round this evenin'," Captain Phineas would yawn in a dispirited tone, when twilight had deepened and the familiar figure failed to make its appearance above the crest of the hill. "Ain't it Tuesday? He most always comes Tuesdays."

"Tuesdays, Thursdays, an' Saturdays you can pretty mortal sure bank on him," Captain Benjamin would reply. "If he's comin' to-night, he better be heavin' into sight, for it's damp an' I'll have to be turnin' in soon."

"Mebbe he was delayed by somethin'," suggested Captain Jonas. "We'll not give him up fur a spell longer. He told me he'd fetch me some tobacco, an' he always does as he promises."

Zenas Henry smoked in silence.

"I sorter wish he would appear," he presently put in, between puffs at his pipe. "There was somethin' I wanted to ask him about that durn motor-boat."

"You don't mean to say that boat's out of order again, do you, Zenas Henry?" questioned Abbie.

"No, oh, no! 'Tain't out of order exactly. But the pesky propeller is kickin' up worse'n ordinary. It's awful taxin' on the patience. I'd give a man everything I possess if he'd think up some plan to rid me of that eel grass."

"Why don't you set Willie on the job?" asked Captain Benjamin.

"Ain't I told Willie over an' over again about it?" Zenas Henry replied, turning with exasperation on the speaker. "Ain't I hinted to him plain as day—thrown the bait to him times without number? An' ain't he just swum round the hook an' gone off without so much as nibblin' it? The thing don't interest him, it's easy enough to see that. He don't like motor-boats an' ain't got no sympathy with 'em, an' he don't give a hang if they do come to grief. In fact, I think he rather relishes hearin' they're snagged. I gave up expectin' any help from him long

ago."

With a frown he resumed his smoking.

"Where's Delight?" Captain Phineas asked, scenting his friend's mood and veering tactfully to a less irritating topic.

"That's so! Where is the child?" rejoined Captain Jonas. "She was round here fussin' with them roses a minute ago."

"That ain't her over toward the pine grove, is it?" queried Captain Benjamin. "I thought I saw somethin' pink a-movin' among the trees."

"Yes, that's her an' Bob Morton with her, sure's you're alive!" Captain Phineas ejaculated with pleasure. "You'll get your tobacco now, Jonas, an' Zenas Henry can ask him about the boat."

"Can you see has he got a bundle?" piped the short-sighted Captain Jonas anxiously.

"Yep!"

"Then he ain't forgot the tobacco," was the contented comment. "He don't generally forget. He's a mighty likely youngster, that boy!"

"An' friendly too, ain't he?" put in Captain Benjamin. "There's nothin' he wouldn't do for you."

"He's the nicest chap ever I see!" Captain Phineas echoed. "Don't you think so, Zenas Henry?"

The answer was some time in coming, and when it did it was deliberate and was weighted with telling impressiveness:

"There's few young fry can boast Bob Morton's common sense," he said. "His headpiece is on frontside-to, an' the brains inside it are tickin' strong an' steady."

Abbie failed to join in the laugh that followed this announcement. Either she did not catch the remark, or she was too deeply engrossed with her own thoughts to heed it. Her eyes were fixed wistfully on the two figures that were

approaching,—the girl exquisite with youth and happiness and the man who leaned protectingly over her. Yet whatever the reveries that clouded her pensive face, she kept them to herself, and if a shadow of dread mingled with her scrutiny no one noticed it.

Perhaps it was only Willie Spence who actually guessed the great secret,—Willie, who having been starved for romance of his own, was all the quicker to hear the heart-throbs of others. It chanced that just now he was deeply involved in several amorous affairs and because of them was experiencing no small degree of worry. The tangle between Bob, Delight, and Cynthia Galbraith kept him in a state of constant speculation and disquietude; then Bart Coffin and Minnie were perilously near a rupture because of another rejuvenation of the time-honored black satin; and although weeks had passed, Jack Nickerson had not yet mustered up nerve enough to offer his heart and hand to Sarah Libbie Lewis.

"Next you know, both you an' Sarah Libbie will be under the sod," Willie had tauntingly called after the lagging swain, as he passed the house one afternoon on his way from the village. "What on earth you're waitin' for is mor'n I can see."

The discomfited coast guard hung his head sheepishly.

"It's all right for you to talk, Willie Spence," he replied over his shoulder. "You ain't got the speakin' to do. It's I that's got to ask her."

Then as he sped out of sight, he added as an afterthought:

"By the way, Bart an' Minnie Coffin have come to a split at last over that 'ere dress. After gettin' it fixed, an' promisin' him 'twas fur the last time, she's ripped it all up again 'cause she's seen some picter in a book she liked better. Bart's that mad he's took his sea chest in the wheelbarrow an' set out for his mother's. I met him goin' just now."

"Bless my soul!" gasped Willie in consternation. "How far had he got?"

"He was about quarter way to the Junction," was the response. "He sung out he was headed where he'd be sure of gettin' three meals a day, an' where somebody'd pay some attention to him."

"H—m!" Willie reflected, scratching his thin locks. "Sorter looks as if it was

time I took a hand, don't it?"

"I figger if anybody's goin' to interfere, now's the minute. Bart's got his sails set an' is clearin' port fur good an' all this time, no mistake. 'Twas sure to come sooner or later."

Their roads parted and Willie turned toward the town, while Jack Nickerson, with rolling gait, pursued his way to the beach where at the tip of a slender bar of sand jutting out into the ocean the low roofs of the life-saving station lay outlined against a somber sky. Great banks of leaden clouds sagging over the horizon had dulled the water to blackness, and a stiff gale was whistling inshore. Already the billows were mounting angrily into caps of snarling foam and dashing themselves on the sands with threatening echo. It promised to be a nasty night, and Jack remembered as he looked that he was on patrol duty. Yet although the muscles of his jaw tightened into grimness, it was not the prospective tramp along a lonely beach in the darkness and wind that caused the stern tensity of his countenance. Storms and their perils were all in the day's work, and he faced their possible catastrophes without a tremor. It would have been hard to find anywhere along the Massachusetts coast a braver man than Jack Nickerson. Not only was he ready to lead a crew of rescuers to succor the perishing, fearlessly directing the surfboat in its plunge through a seething tide, but many a time he had dashed bodily into the breakers, despite the hazard of a powerful undertow, and dragged some drowning creature to a place of safety. The fame of his many deeds of heroism had spread from one end of the Cape to the other, and as he was native-born the community never tired of relating his feats to any sojourner who strayed into the locality.

Yet courageous as was Jack Nickerson, there was one thing he was afraid of and that was a woman. Not that he trembled in the presence of all women—no, indeed! He had brought far too many of them to land for that. Women as a class did not appall him in the least. He had seen them in the agony of terror, in the throes of despair, and undismayed had offered them sympathy and cheer. It was one woman only who disconcerted him, the woman who for years had routed him out of his habitual poise and left him as discomfited as a guilty schoolboy caught in raiding the jam-pot.

Yes, he who inspired his associates with both respect and admiration was forced to acknowledge to himself that when face to face with Sarah Libbie Lewis he was nothing better than a faltering ten-year-old whose collar is too

tight for him, and whose hands and feet are sizes too large. The paradox was too humiliating to be endured! Nevertheless, he had endured the ignominy of it for five-and-twenty years, and there seemed to be every prospect that he would continue to endure it. Periodically, it is true, he would rise in his wrath, resolving that another sun should not go down on his vacillation and timidity; nay, more, he would even stride forth to Sarah Libbie's home, vowing as he went that before he slept he would speak the decisive words that had for so long trembled on his tongue.

Confronted by the lady of his choice, however, his courage, like that of the immortal Bob Acres, would ooze away, and after basking for a wretched interval in the glory of her smile, he would retrace his steps with the declaration still unuttered. As far back as Jack could remember, this woman had tyrannized over him and humbled his self-esteem. In childhood she had leveled with a blow the sand castles he built on the beach for her delight, and ever since she had contrived to raze to the ground his less tangible castles,—dream-castles where he saw her the mistress of his lonely fireside. Yet despite her exasperating capriciousness, Jack had never wavered in his allegiance, not a whit. Long ago he had made up his mind that Sarah Libbie was the one woman in the world for him, and he had never seen cause to alter that verdict. Nor did he entertain any doubt that Sarah Libbie's sentiments coincided with his own, even though she did cloak her preference beneath so many intricate and misleading devices of femininity. It was not fear of the thundering *No* that hindered Jack from proclaiming his affection; it was merely the physical impossibility of putting his heart into intelligible and coherent phraseology when Sarah Libbie's bewitching gaze was upon him. He could meet all comers in a political argument, could hold his own against the banter of the village gossips; he could even defy Willie and his counsel; but to address Sarah Libbie on a matter so tender and of such vital import was an ordeal so overwhelming that it caused his tongue to cleave to the roof of his mouth, and his pulse almost to cease to beat. Unlucky Jack!

Many were the evenings he tramped the dunes, rehearsing in the darkness the momentous declaration that was to work a miracle in his solitary life. Like an actor committing his lines, he would repeat the words, hurling them upon the blackness of the night where, to the accompaniment of the booming surf, they echoed with a majesty and dignity astonishingly impressive. But in the light of day and Sarah Libbie's presence, his sonorous philippic would dwindle away into a jargon of garbled phrases too disjointed and meaningless to carry weight with any woman, let alone the peerless Sarah Libbie Lewis.

Thus for more than a quarter of a century Jack Nickerson had silently worshiped at the shrine of his divinity, and in the meantime the roses in Sarah Libbie's cheeks had grown fainter, and tendrils of silver had found their way into the soft curls that shadowed her brow. Still Jack could not speak the words that were on his lips. Of course the little woman could not do it for him, although she did venture by many a subtle device to aid him in his dilemma. She baked for him pies, cookies, and doughnuts of a delicious russet tint and sent them to the station, that their aroma might gently prod into action her lover's faintness of heart; these visible tokens of her devotion would disappear, however, leaving behind them only a tranquil sense of enjoyment; and as this lessened the fervor of her admirer's determination would evaporate. Then Sarah Libbie would resort to less ephemeral offerings,—scarves, wristers, mittens, patiently knitted from blue wool and representing such an endless number of stitches that Jack never viewed them without elation.

And as if these proofs of her regard were not sufficient, every evening just at sundown she would light a lantern and flash a good-night to him across the waters that estranged them. It was a pretty custom that had had its beginning when the boy and girl had lived as neighbors on the deserted highway that followed the horseshoe curve of the Belleport shore. They had evolved a code whereby, with much labor it must be admitted, they were able to spell out messages that flickered their way through the night with the beauty of a firefly's revel; but when Jack had taken up work with the coast guard, this old-time substitute for speech had been abandoned, giving place to the briefer method of three nightly flashes. Neither toil nor illness, rain, snow or tempest had in all the years prevented Sarah Libbie from being at her post at twilight, there to watch for the gleam of Jack's lantern, whose rays she answered with the light from her own. Even when fogs obscured the Bar so that the distant headland was cut off from view, Sarah Libbie would go through the little ceremony and after it was over return to her knitting with a quiet gladness, although the presence of the other factor in the drama was a mere matter of conjecture.

Thus the romance had drifted on, and Jack Nickerson now faced his fiftieth year and was no nearer bringing the love story to a culmination than he had been when as a boy in his teens he had gazed into Sarah Libbie's blue eyes and registered the vows he had never yet dared utter. Nevertheless lonely and disappointed as was Sarah Libbie, Jack was a thousand times more miserable. To-night, especially, as he tramped the coast in the teeth of the gale, he thought of Willie Spence's ridicule and one of his periodic moods of self-abasement

came upon him. What a wretched cur he was! How lacking in nerve! Any woman, he muttered to himself, was better off without such a feeble-willed, spineless husband!

The fierce winds and whirling sands that stung his cheeks and buffeted him seemed a merited castigation, a castigation that amounted to a penance. He welcomed their punishment. As he stumbled on through the pitch black of the night, he asked himself what he was going to do. Was he always to go on loving Sarah Libbie and letting her love him and never in manly fashion bring the affair to a climax? If he did not mean to make her his wife, had he the right to stand in the way and prevent her from marrying some one else? The baldness of the question brought him up with a turn, and as he paused breathlessly awaiting his own verdict, his eye was caught by the lantern dangling from his hand. He regarded it with slow wonder as if he had never seen it before. Why had he never thought until now of this method of communication? Not only was it simple and direct, but it also obviated the difficulty that had always been the stumbling-block in his path,—the necessity of confronting Sarah Libbie in the flesh. He grasped the inspiration with zeal. Fate was with him. His watch was up, and he was free to make his way back to the station, if he so willed, and put his remarkable scheme into execution.

Away he sped through the howling tempest.

As he flew up the steps of the lookout tower, he could detect the twinkling lights from his lady's home gemmed against the background of velvet darkness. Perhaps her fluttering little heart was uneasy about her lover, and she was peering out into the gale. However that may be, he had no difficulty in summoning her to the window when he raised his lantern. Then, with the talisman held high, he paused. What should he say? Of course he could send no lengthy message. Even a few words meant a laborious amount of spelling. Perhaps *Will You Marry Me?* was as simple and direct a way as he could put it. Firmly he gripped the lantern. Then, instead of the customary three flashes, he began the involved liftings, dippings, and circlings which in luminous waves were to spell out his destiny.

Will You Marry—

Ah, there was no need for him to go on! Sarah Libbie had waited too long for those magic words to doubt their purport. Nor did she hesitate for an answer. In

an instant she caught up the unique avowal, and across the turbulent waters signalled to her beloved the three mystic letters that should make her his forever. With the faint, blinking flashes, the weight of years fell away from Jack Nickerson. No longer was he a trembling, tongue-tied captive, scorning himself for his want of will. He was a free man, the affianced husband of the most wonderful creature in the world. In his exultation he raised his lantern aloft and swung it round and round with the abandon of a boy who tosses his cap in the air. Then he bounded down the iron staircase like a child let out of school, dashing round their spiral windings with reckless velocity.

The deed was done! Sarah Libbie was his!

It might have been half an hour later, as he sat smoking in blissful meditation in the living room of the station, that the door was wrenched open and Willie Spence burst into the room. Every hair on the old inventor's head was upright with anxiety, and he puffed breathlessly:

"What's ashore? I saw your signal an' knew straight off somethin' terrible was up, for you've never called for help from the town before. I've raised all the folks I could get a-holt of an' Bob Morton's gone to get more. They'll be here on the double quick!"

The boast was no idle one. Even as he spoke there was a tramping, a rush of feet, and a babel of confused, frightened voices, and into the room flocked the dwellers of the hamlet,—men, women, and children, all with wind-tossed hair and strained, terrified faces.

"What is it?"

"What's the matter?"

"Where's the wreck?"

As they stood there tragic in the dim light, there was a stir near the door and Sarah Libbie Lewis pushed her way through the crowd.

She had stopped only to toss a black shawl over her head and in contrast to its sable folds her cheeks and lips were ashen.

"They told me there was a wreck," she cried, rushing to Jack's side and

seizing his arm wildly. "Oh, you won't go—you won't go and leave me now, Jack—not so soon—not after to-night!"

Already sobs were choking the words and her hands were clinging to his.

With the supreme defiance of a man prepared to defend his dearest possession against the universe, Jack Nickerson circled her in his embrace and faced the throng. No longer was he the shrinking, timorous supplicant. Victorious love had set her crown upon his brows, bestowing dignity upon his years and glory upon his manhood. His explanation came fearlessly to his lips.

"There ain't no wreck," he said quietly. "All the same I'm glad you saw my lantern an' came, 'cause I've got somethin' to tell you all. Me an' Sarah Libbie are goin' to get married."

For a moment there was an incredulous hush. Then Willie Spence came to the rescue.

"Well, I will say, Jack," he drawled, "you had a pretty good nerve to get us out on a night like this to tell us that! You might at least have waited 'til mornin'. Still, I reckon if I'd been nigh on to a quarter of a century gettin' my spunk together to ask a woman to marry me an' had finally done it, I'd a-wanted somebody to know it."

The words were not unkindly spoken and Jack joined in the general laugh. Nothing mattered to him now. Oblivious to the spectators, he was bending down over the woman he loved and murmuring:

"I love you, Sarah Libbie. I've always loved you."

The little old inventor watched the radiant pair a moment then motioned to the villagers to slip away. But Bartley Coffin could not be restrained from lagging behind and whispering confidentially in Jack's ear:

"If you want to be truly happy, mate, an' live clear of a life of pesterin', don't you never buy Sarah Libbie a satin dress! Minnie an' I have made it up, thanks to Willie Spence, but 'twas a tussle. I'd come to the jumpin'-off place."

The statement was but too true. Willie had indeed intervened and averted a tragedy, but the feat had demanded ruthless measures, and he had trudged home

from the Coffins with the bone of contention clutched rigidly beneath his arm.

That night Celestina heard muffled sounds in the workshop.

"Oh, my land!" she murmured. "If Willie ain't hitched again! I did hope nothin' new would come to him 'til he got rested up from this other idee."

But Willie's inspiration was not of the inventive type. Instead the little old man was standing before the stove, kindling a fire, and into its crackling blaze he was bundling the last remnants of Minnie Coffin's far-famed black satin. The light played on his face which was set in grim earnestness.

"It seems a wicked shame," he observed in a whisper, as he viewed the funeral pyre, "but it's the only way. Long's that dress remained on earth there'd be no peace for Bart nor his wife either. It had to go."

The flames danced higher, flashing in and out of the trimmings of jet and charring the beads to dullness. In the morning only a heap of gray ashes marked the flight of Minnie Coffin's social ambitions.

"*Requiescat in pace*!" murmured Willie as with lips firm with Puritan stoicism he passed by the stove. There he added gently: "Poor Minnie! Poor foolish Minnie!"

CHAPTER XIX

WILLIE AS PILOT

The invention was finished! The last rivet was in place, the last screw secure, and before the fulfilment of his dream the little old man stood with glowing face. It was a gentle, happy face with misty blue eyes that carried at the moment a serene contentment.

"I couldn't 'a' done it but for you, Bob," he was saying. "The idea was all well enough, but 'twould 'a' been of no use without other brains to carry it out. So you

must remember a big slice of the credit is yours."

Robert Morton shook his head.

"Oh, the thing is yours, Willie—every bit yours," protested he. "I only did some of the mechanical part, and that any fool could do."

"The mechanical part, as you call it, is full as important as the notion," Willie persisted. "I shall tell Zenas Henry it's our invention when I turn it over to him."

The pronoun thrilled Bob with pleasure. It meant the sweeping aside of the last film of distrust and the restoration of the old man's former confidence and friendship. For days Willie had slowly been reaching the conviction that if fraud had been practised Tiny's nephew had been only an innocent party to it—the tool of more designing hands. How was the lad to know he was being so artfully made use of? And anyway, perhaps there may have been no conspiracy at all. Might not Janoah have been mistaken about Snelling raiding the workshop? Why, a score of reasons might have brought him there! He might have left behind him something he needed; or there might have been something he wanted to do. It was absurd to accuse him of a secret and deliberately planned visit.

Willie was a simple, single-minded soul and now that Janoah and his malicious influence had been removed, he dropped comfortably back into a tranquillity from which, when viewed in perspective, his former suspicions seemed both unjust and ridiculous. Suppose Mr. Galbraith did happen to be a boat-builder? Was he not Bob's friend and Delight's uncle, a gentleman of honor who had money enough without stooping to secure more by treachery? And did it not follow that since Mr. Snelling was in his employ he must be a person of reputable character? A fig for Janoah Spence's accusations!

Willie blew a contemptuous whiff of smoke into the air. How had he ever dropped to being so base as to credit them for an instant? He was ashamed for having done so.

Therefore whole-heartedly he gave his hand to Robert Morton, and if the act were a mute petition for forgiveness it was none the less sincere in its intent and was met with an equal spirit of good will.

"I suppose now that everything is complete, there is no reason why we can't present the thing to Zenas Henry right away, is there?" questioned Bob, who

with hands thrust deep in his trousers' pockets contemplated with satisfaction the product of their joint toil.

"Not the least in the world," Willie answered. "If we was to keep it here a week there ain't nothin' more we could do to it, an' since you've tried it out over at Galbraith's we know it works."

"Oh, it works all right!" laughed Bob.

The eyes of the little inventor softened and into them crept a glint of pensiveness.

"Yes," he repeated, "we can deliver it up to Zenas Henry 'most anytime now." He paused. "Queer, ain't it, how kinder attached you get to anything you've fussed over so long? It gets to be 'most a part of you. You'll think it funny, I guess, but do you know I'll be sorter sorry to see this thing goin'."

It was the regret of the parent compelled to part from his child and with an effort at comfort Robert Morton said cheerfully:

"Oh, you'll be having a new scheme before long."

"Mebbe I will," Willie answered, brightening. "I never can tell when the sun rises in the mornin' what idee will kitch me before night. Still, I somehow feel there'll be no idee like this one. You know they say every artist creates one masterpiece," he smiled shyly. "This, I reckon, is my masterpiece."

"It is a bully one, anyhow!" ejaculated Bob. "Aren't you curious to hear what Zenas Henry will say when he sees it?"

"I am sorter itchin' to," admitted Willie in less meditative tone. "Only last night I was thinkin' after I got to bed how would be the best way of givin' it to him. I've sorter set my heart on springin' it on him as a surprise. What's your notion?"

"I think that would be a fine plan," replied Bob, eager to humor the gentle dreamer. "If we could get him and the captains out of the way, it would be good sport simply to fasten the attachment to the boat and wait and see what happened."

"Wouldn't that be the beateree!" chimed in Willie excitedly. His face glowed and he rubbed his hands with honest pleasure. "Wouldn't it, though? We could manage it, too, for Delight could arrange to get Zenas Henry an' the three captains out of the way. She's an almighty good one at keepin' a secret, as I reckon you've found out already."

He stole a sly glance at the young man at his elbow who flushed uncomfortably.

"Yes," he rambled on, "Delight can shut her mouth on occasions like as if it was a scallop shell. The only trouble is she'd oughter close her eyes too, for they talk 'most as well as her tongue does. Likely you've noticed that," he added innocently.

"I—eh—"

"Fur's that goes, your own eyes do somethin' in the speakin' line," affirmed Willie, bending to fleck a bit of dust from the appliance before them.

"What!" Robert Morton exclaimed with alarm.

The old inventor nodded gravely.

"Yes," continued he, "now I come to think of it, you've got among the most speakin' eyes I ever see. They kinder bawl things right out."

"What—what—have they—" stammered Bob, crumpling weakly down upon the rickety chair before the stove.

"Bawled? Oh, a lot of things," was the provokingly ambiguous retort.

His companion eyed him narrowly.

"I'm—I'm—in a horrible mess, Willie," he suddenly blurted out quite irrelevently.

"I know it."

Robert Morton gasped, then lapsed into stunned silence.

"Without goin' into any details or discussin' any ladies we know, my advice would be to make a clean breast of the whole thing," the little old man announced, avoiding Robert Morton's eyes and blowing a ring of smoke from his pipe impersonally toward the low ceiling. "Have it out with Zenas Henry an' set yourself right with the Belleport folks. You don't want to do nothin' under cover."

"No, I don't," rejoined the younger man quickly. "The reason I didn't do so in the first place was because Zenas Henry was so upset when he heard about Madam Lee that we—I thought—"

"He's calmed down now, ain't he?"

"Yes, he seems to have accepted the facts, especially as the Galbraiths have not been near him and have let the whole matter drop. Of course that is only a temporary condition, however. Mr. Galbraith has been in New York attending to important matters ever since Madam Lee's death. What will be done when he returns I do not know; but he will do something—you may be sure of that."

"That ain't no special business of yours or mine, is it?" Willie remarked. "All that concerns you is to let both those men know where you stand—Zenas Henry first, 'cause he's been like a father to Delight; an' Mr. Galbraith afterwards, 'cause —" he hesitated for the fraction of a second, "'cause the Galbraiths are the girl's nearest of kin an' legally, I s'pose, have a right—"

"Yes," interrupted Robert Morton hastily.

"When you get things all squared up, we'll talk more about it," continued Willie. "But 'til you do the affair ain't open an' above board, an' I don't want nothin' to do with it. The top of the ocean is good enough for me; I never was much on swimmin' under water."

He broke off abruptly to refill his pipe.

"Now about this motor-boat," he went on crisply, veering to a less delicate subject. "S'pose you fix it up with Delight to keep Zenas Henry an' the three captains away from the beach for a couple of days so'st to give us time to get our invention securely rigged to the *Sea Gull*. She could find somethin' for 'em to do up at the house for that long, couldn't she?"

"I guess so."

"If she can't, Abbie can," chuckled Willie, with a grin. "Abbie Brewster's the most famous woman in the world for settin' folks to work. She's made Zenas Henry clean over since his marriage. Why, I remember the time when you could no more have got him to do a day's work than you could have lined up the fish of the sea in a Sunday-school. But with trainin', Zenas Henry now does his plowin', plantin' an' harvestin' in somethin' approachin' alarm-clock fashion. Of course, he backslides if he ain't constantly held to it; but knowin' his past it's a miracle what Abbie's made of him. She ain't never wholly reformed his temper, though. There's plenty of cayenne in that still. I reckon if you was to amputate Zenas Henry's temper you'd find you had took away the most interestin' part of him."

His listener smiled.

"Now you go ahead an' arrange things with Delight, Bob," continued Willie. "An interview with her won't be no great hardship for you, will it? I thought not. An' any fillin' in I can do, I'll do—any fillin' in," he repeated significantly. "You can count on me to plug any gaps that come anywheres—remember that."

"It's bully of you, Willie!" cried Bob, seizing his hand.

"Not a mite," protested the little man, with a deprecating gesture. "Now that I've got Bart Coffin an' Minnie livin' like turtle doves, an' Jack Nickerson as good as married to Sarah Libbie Lewis, two of my ships seem to have dropped anchor safe an' sound. I reckon I shan't need to do no more pilotin' there."

The little old inventor stopped a moment, then added:

"Sometimes I figger what I was put in the world for was to do pilot duty. You know there's folks that never own a ship of their own but just spend their days towin' other people's ships into port. They ain't so bad off neither," he went on in a merrier tone, "'cause there's a heap of joy in helpin' some other vessel to make a landin'."

More moved by the words than he would have confessed, Robert Morton watched the bent figure move through the door and out into the sunshine; and afterward, banishing the seriousness of his mood, he climbed the hill to the white cottage, there to evolve with Delight a plot that should hold the men of the Brewster household captive long enough for Willie and himself to attach to Zenas Henry's motor-boat the new invention.

CHAPTER XX

ONE MORE OF WILLIE'S SHIPS REACHES PORT

Three feverish days passed, days of constant hard work and myriad trivial annoyances. A train of misadventures had attended the transference of Willie's "idee" to Zenas Henry's boat. Parts had failed to fit, and much wearisome toil had been demanded before the device was actually in place. At last, however, all was ready, and Abbie Brewster, a party to the conspiracy, had on a sunny morning urged her reluctant spouse and the three captains to make a trip out to the Bar for clams. They were none too keen about the proposed expedition, for the weather was warm and their course lay through shallow waters which after the recent storm were turbid with seaweed. Nevertheless, ignoring their

unwillingness, Abbie declared she must have the clams, and was not her word law?

Therefore, without enthusiasm, the four fishermen had set forth with their buckets and their clam forks, and it was now a full three hours since the motor-boat that carried them had disappeared around the point of sand jutting into the sparkling waters of the bay.

Bob and Willie, secreted in the workshop, had breathlessly watched the *Sea Gull* thread her way through the channel and make the curving shelter of the dunes, and ever since the old inventor had sat alert on an overturned nail keg, his binoculars in one hand and his great silver watch in the other, counting the moments until the little craft should return from its momentous cruise. The vigil had been long and tedious, with only the ticking of the mammoth timepiece and the far-off rumble of the surf to break the stillness.

Presently Celestina came from the kitchen into the shop.

"I'm bringin' you a dish of hot doughnuts," she said, a kindly sympathy in her face. "Oughtn't them men to be comin' pretty soon now?"

For the hundredth time Willie raised the glasses and scanned the shimmering golden waters.

"We should sight 'em before long," he nodded.

"You don't see nothin' of 'em?"

"Not yet."

There was an anxious frown on his forehead.

"Why don't you eat somethin'?" suggested she. "It might take your mind off worryin'."

"I ain't worryin', Tiny," was the confident reply. "The boat's all right."

"S'pose it should be snagged or somethin' outside the bay?" she ventured. "I wish to goodness they'd come back. Look, here's Delight an' Abbie comin' through the grove. Likely they've been gettin' uneasy, too."

Sure enough, moving among the low pines that shaded the slope between the Spence and Brewster houses they saw the two women.

Abbie was stouter now than when she had come as a bride to Zenas Henry's white cottage, but there was a serenity in her mien that softened her expression into charming womanliness. As she neared the shed she glanced at Willie with an uneasiness she could not wholly conceal.

"Don't it seem to you, Willie, that it's gettin' most time for 'em to be gettin' home?"

"You ain't nervous, Abbie," smiled the little old man.

"N—o, not really. Of course, I know they're all right. Still, they ain't never stayed clammin' so long before."

"I wouldn't worry, Auntie," Delight put in, taking her hand reassuringly. "A thousand things may have delayed them. I am sure—"

"They're comin'!" broke in Willie with sudden excitement. "The boat's comin'. Ain't that her makin' the point, Bob? She's clippin' along like a race horse, too. Lord! Watch her go."

"That's the *Sea Gull*!" cried Abbie. "I don't need no glasses to make her out. That's her! How foolish I was to go fussin'. Still, I always have a kind of dread —"

"I know, I know," interrupted the inventor gently. "But there warn't no call for worry this time. I felt mortal certain they'd be heavin' into sight pretty soon."

"I guess likely now we know they're on the way, we'd better slip home again," Abbie smiled. "I'd feel silly enough to have 'em find us here."

"Nonsense, Abbie!" said Celestina. "They needn't know you was worried. Ain't it possible you might have come down here on an errand? Wait 'til they pass and walk back with 'em. What difference does it make if your dinner is late?"

Abbie hesitated. Her dinner never was late; yet, for that matter, she never was out visiting her neighbors in the middle of the day, either. Perhaps, as she had

followed one demoralizing impulse and transgressed all her domestic traditions, the breaking of another did not matter.

"I—s'pose I might wait," she answered. "I'd love dearly to hear what they'll have to say."

"Oh, do wait, Auntie!" Delight begged. "It won't be long now before they get here."

"Better stay, Abbie," put in Willie. "Bob an' I won't be inventin' every day."

"Well," was the half unwilling answer.

"Don't you wonder how it worked?" cried Delight, addressing Bob, her cheeks scarlet with excitement. "See, here they come! Did you ever hear such a chatter! Zenas Henry is swinging that clam bucket as if there wasn't a thing in it. He will spill them all out if he isn't careful."

On strode the four men. With a bound they cleared the bank before the Spence cottage and crowded in at the narrow gate.

"Whar is he? Whar's Willie?" demanded Zenas Henry. Then, catching sight of the old inventor half concealed behind his workbench, he shouted:

"Here, Willie, you rascal, out with you! Don't go hidin' there behind that table. Man alive, why didn't you tell us what you was up to?"

"Did it work, Zenas Henry?" queried the little fellow eagerly.

"Did it work!" mimicked Zenas Henry with a guffaw. "Say, Phineas, did it?"

The fishermen gave an exuberant roar of laughter.

"Did it work?" repeated Zenas Henry so out of breath that he could scarcely articulate the words. "Good Lord, don't it just! Why, we clipped along through that seaweed as if it warn't there."

"You didn't get snagged then?"

"Snagged? Not much! Ain't we been ridin' in an' out every little eel grass

cove along the shore just for the sheer deviltry of seein' if we could get snagged?" piped Captain Benjamin. "There'll be no more rockin' in the channel for us. My eye! Think of that!"

"How ever did you manage it, Willie?" Zenas Henry questioned.

"What makes you so sure it was me?"

"Oh, Lord! Who else would it be?"

"Well, it warn't all me," protested the little inventor modestly. "Most of it was Bob. I got the idee an' he did the rest—him an' Mr. Galbraith's friend, Mr. Snellin'."

"Well, I'm clean beat—that's all I can say," observed Zenas Henry, mopping his brow. "I tell you what, it's made a new thing of that motor-boat. There's no thankin' you. All is, Willie, if you want anything of mine it's yours for the askin'. Just speak up an' you can have it."

A radiant smile spread over the face of the spinner of cobwebs.

"You ain't got nothin' I covet, Zenas Henry," he answered slowly, "but you've got somethin' Bob Morton wants powerful bad."

He saw a mystified expression steal into Zenas Henry's face.

"Happiness didn't come to you early in life, Zenas Henry," went on Willie, his voice taking on a note of gentle persuasion, "an' often I've heard you lament you was cheated out of spendin' your youth with Abbie. Of course, marryin' late is better than not marryin' at all, though. Some of the rest of us—" he motioned toward the three captains and Celestina, "have got passed by altogether. But Delight an' Bob have found love early, while the bloom is still on it. You wouldn't wish to keep 'em from their birthright, would you, Zenas Henry?"

In the hush that followed the plea, Abbie crept up to her husband and slipped her hand into his.

"The child loves him, dear," she said, looking up into the man's stern face. "I read it in her eyes long ago. You want her to be happy, don't you?"

Her voice trembled. Only the mother instinct, supreme in its selflessness, gave her the strength to continue: "We must not think of ourselves. Real love is heaven-sent. It is ours neither to give nor to deny."

How still the room was. Suddenly it had been transformed into a battle ground on which a soul waged mortal combat. There was no question in the minds of those who viewed the struggle that the issue presented had come as a shock, and that to meet it taxed every ounce of forbearance and control that the man possessed. He looked as one stricken, his face a turmoil of jealousy, grief, despair, and disappointment. But gradually a gentler light shone in his eyes,—a light radiant, and triumphant; love was conqueror and raising his head he murmured:

"Where is the child?"

She sped to his side.

"So you love him, do you, little girl?" he asked, smiling faintly down at her as he encircled her with his great arm.

"Yes, Zenas Henry," she whispered.

For a moment he held her close as if he could never let her go.

"Well, Tiny," he said, "I don't know as we have anything to say against it. He's your nephew an' she's my daughter—yes, my daughter," he added fiercely, "in spite of the Lees and the Galbraiths." With a swift gesture he turned toward Robert Morton. "Young man, I am payin' you a heavy fee for that motor-boat. I'm handin' over to you the most precious thing I have in the world. See you value it as you should or, by God, your life won't be worth a straw to Willie, the three captains, or me."

They saw him wheel abruptly and stride alone into the shadow of the low pines. Silently the others drifted from the room and Delight was left alone with her lover.

As Bob caught the girl in his arms, a great wave of passion surged through his body, causing its every fiber to vibrate in tune with the mad beating of his heart. He kissed her hair, her cheeks, the white curve of her exquisite throat; he buried his face in her hair and let his hands wander over its silky ripples.

"I love you," he panted,—"I love you with all my heart. Tell me you love me, Delight."

"You know I do," was the shy answer.

Again he kissed her soft lips.

"I mustn't stay, Bob," she said at last, trying to draw herself from his embrace. "Zenas Henry is alone somewhere, almost broken-hearted; I must find and comfort him."

But the arms that held her did not loosen their hold.

"Please let me go, Bob dear," she coaxed. "We mustn't be selfish."

Her request struck the right note and instantly she was free.

Robert Morton followed her to the door and stood watching as she hurried along the copper-matted path of the woods sunflecked and mottled with shadow.

What a sweet miracle it was, he mused! She was his now before all the world, thanks to Willie's skilful pilotage. Where was the little old man—that dreamer of dreams, who with Midas-like touch left upon everything with which he came in contact the golden impress of his heart? He must seek him out and thank him for his aid.

Perhaps the thought carried with it a potent charm of magic, for no sooner had Robert Morton framed it than the inventor himself appeared on the threshold.

"Well, another of my ships has made port!" cried he triumphantly.

His delicate face was illumined with a joy so transcendent that one might easily have believed that it was to him love's touchstone had been given.

"I never can thank you, Willie!" burst out the young man.

"Be good to Delight, my boy, an' make her happy; that's all the thanks I want," was the grave response.

A pause fell between them. Perhaps Willie was thinking of the days that must inevitably come when the girl he had loved since childhood would be far away. How dull the gray house would be when she no longer flitted in and out its doors! Try as he would to banish the selfish reflection, it returned persistently. Then suddenly something quite outside himself put the reverie to rout.

It was the querulous voice of Janoah Eldridge.

"I was right about them Galbraiths," he cried exultantly, standing in the doorway and hurling the words into the room where the two men lingered. ""Twas exactly as I said. Lyman Bearse's boy went up on the Boston train one afternoon in front of Snelling an' that other feller who was here, an' he heard every word they uttered. He said they talked the whole way about gettin' a patent out on your invention. Now, Willie Spence, was I right or warn't I? Mebbe you'll believe me the next time I warn you against folks."

CHAPTER XXI

SURPRISES

The next morning Robert Morton awoke with the fixed determination that another sun should not go down until he had acquainted Mr. Galbraith with Janoah's accusations. The misgivings, the suspicions, the fears he entertained must be cleared up at any cost or further residence beneath Willie's roof would be impossible. If necessary he would go to New York to see the financier. But he must know where the blame for Snelling's treachery lay, whether with the capitalist or with his employee. Accordingly he arose early, and having breakfasted went down to the store where the nearest telephone was and called up the Belleport residence. He was fortunate in getting Parker, the old butler, on the wire.

"Mr. Galbraith, Mr. Bob?" came the voice of the servant. "Yes, sir, he arrived home last night. I think he is going over to Wilton to-day to see you. I heard him saying something about it. Wait a minute. I hear him on the stairs now."

There was a pause; then after a delay another voice that Bob instantly recognized to be that of the master of the house called:

"Bob? Well, hello, boy! I guess you thought we had all left you and your affairs high and dry, didn't you? I've been in New York, you know—am just back. I want to see you as soon as I can about several important matters. Suppose I run over in the car this morning? Will you be there? Good! I'll see you later, then."

Robert Morton hung up the receiver and walked meditatively along the sandy road to the gray cottage. The die was cast. Whatever happened, it could not be worse than had been the days of suspense and anxiety that he had endured.

The morning was close and humid, a land breeze wafting across the fields perfumes of sun-scorched pine and blossoming roses. Scarce a ripple marred the glittering surface of the bay that stretched like a sheet of burnished brass as far as one could see. Now and then a faint zephyr, rising from the wooded slopes, swept down the hill, swirling into billows of vivid emerald the coarse salt grass that swayed on the marshes. So still it was that every whisper of the surf lapping the edge of the bar could be heard; over and over the waters stole up on the shore, fretted into foam and receded, each wave creeping rhythmically back into the deep to a song of shifting sand and pebbles. How silvery the tiny houses of the hamlet looked against the azure of the sky! The few scattered trees that had braved the onslaughts of repeated gales listed landward, but the pines sheltered in the hollows of the dunes stood erect and darkly mysterious, their plumes bending idly in the soft wind.

It was all a part of the idyl, the daydream, Robert Morton thought,—too flawless a thing to last. Willie, so childlike and simple, his kindly aunt, Delight with her rare beauty, and even the romance of his love seemed a part of its unreality. Was it not to be expected that sooner or later man with his blundering touch would destroy the loveliness, making prose of the poem? The Galbraiths, Snelling, the greed for money, Janoah's jealousy and evil suspicions—ah, it did not take long for such influences to mar the peace of a heaven and smear the grime of earth upon its fairness! Only glimpses of perfection were granted the dwellers of this planet,—quick, transient flashes that mirrored a future free from finite limitations. He who expected to remain on the heights in this world was doomed to disappointment.

Slowly he skirted the curving beach and reached the weathered cottage where the sun beat hotly down, kissing into flower every bud of the clinging roses that festooned its gray doorway. Willie welcomed him but a glory had passed from the old man's face since the conversation of the night before. How could it be otherwise? Sleepless hours had left behind them weary, careworn lines; and in the troubled depths of the blue eyes the old interrogation had once more awakened. Bob knew not how to meet its silent combat between hope and disappointment, and he hailed as a glad relief the beating echo of the Galbraiths' motor-car as it swept the horseshoe outline of the harbor and came to a stop before the gate.

Mr. Galbraith, who was alone, beckoned to him, and as the younger man climbed to the seat beside him said:

"I thought perhaps you might like to go for a spin along the shore. It is warm to-day and we shall get more breeze; besides, we can talk more freely in the automobile than here or at the Belleport house. Roger has just arrived and also Howard Snelling."

In spite of himself, Robert Morton betrayed his surprise.

"Mr. Snelling back again!" he exclaimed.

"Yes, he is down," was the laconic answer.

For all his boasted eagerness to talk, however, Richard Galbraith did not immediately avail himself of the privilege of conversation. On the contrary, as Bob shot a questioning glance toward him, he thought he detected for the first time in his life a strange uneasiness in the capitalist's habitually self-contained manner. He seemed to be framing an introduction for what he wished to say.

"I have several matters to talk over with you, Bob," he began at last in a resolute tone. "Some of them are pleasant and some of them may not, I fear, prove to be so. But we must take them as they come, and pleasant or unpleasant, I want you to believe that I have no choice but to place them before you. I have always felt for you a warm friendship, my boy, and that friendship has in no way lessened. Therefore if any word I speak causes you unhappiness, I want you to remember that I only say it because I must. We are not always permitted to readjust life according to our inclinations. Duty maps out many of our paths and we must close our lips and travel them."

He stopped as if considering how to proceed.

"While in New York," he presently resumed, "I probated Madam Lee's will. She was possessed of a large estate and knew very definitely what she wanted done with it. The will was made several years ago, and no document that I have ever seen was more specifically and conscientiously drawn up. Although she left jewels and heirlooms to my family, she left none of her other property to the Galbraiths, explaining that her daughter had all she needed and that both Cynthia and Roger had more already than was good for them." He smiled humorously. "I guessed pretty accurately what she intended to do, as some time ago we talked the matter over, and I heartily approved of her proposed bequest."

He cleared his throat and in wondering silence Robert Morton waited.

"The property was left in bulk to an old friend whom Madam Lee had known for years—some one entirely outside the family."

Bob did not speak.

"I would gladly see the Lee money administered as its owner desired to have it," Mr. Galbraith went on. "Her ideas were wise, kind, and just, and the fulfilment of her wishes would have brought to me—to us all—the greatest happiness. But since that will was made a new condition has arisen. Delight Hathaway, the child of her favorite daughter, has appeared. Had the old lady lived, I feel certain that in view of this fact she would have altered the document that this girl might inherit at least a portion of the fortune in which her mother never had any share. You knew Madam Lee very intimately, Bob—probably better than any of the rest of us. What do you think?"

The reply came without hesitation.

"I am certain Madam Lee would have seen to it that her granddaughter was provided for."

"So it seems to me," rejoined Mr. Galbraith with evident relief. "I am glad that our code of ethics agrees thus far. Now the question is, Bob, how strong are you for the right? If honorable action meant sacrifice, would you be ready to meet it?"

"I hope so," was the modest response.

"I know so," Mr. Galbraith declared earnestly, "and it is because I am so sure of it that I came to you to-day. Bob, it was to you that Madam Lee left her fortune. It was to be used for the furthering of your dearest wish because—to quote her own words—*because I love the boy as if he were of my own blood*."

As he listened, Robert Morton's eyes grew cloudy, and emotion choked his utterance until he could not speak.

Apparently Mr. Galbraith either expected no reply or tactfully interpreted his silence, for without waiting he continued:

"You can understand now, Bob, feeling toward you as we all do, that this recent family development has not been easy for us to confront. Delight Hathaway is a beautiful girl who possesses, no doubt, admirable qualities. We expect to become warmly attached to her in time. But for all her kinship she is a stranger to us while you are of our own—a brother, friend." For the first time the kind voice faltered. "I have even cherished a hope," it went on in a lower tone, "that perhaps in the future a closer bond might bind you to us. Nothing in the world would have given me greater satisfaction."

Bob suddenly felt the blood leap to his face in a crimson flood. He gasped out an incoherent word or two, hoping to check Mr. Galbraith's speech, but no intelligible phrases came to his tongue.

"Life is a strangely perverse game, isn't it?"' mused the capitalist. "We build our castles, build them not alone for ourselves but for others, and those we love shatter the structure we have so painstakingly reared and on its ruined site make for themselves castles of their own."

His eyes were fixed on the narrowing ribbon of sand over which the car sped.

"I—I—have another surprise for you, Bob," he said in a lower tone, without lifting his gaze from the reach of highway ahead. "Cynthia is to be married."

"Cynthia!" A chaos of emotions mingled in the word.

"Her engagement has been an overwhelming shock to her mother and me," the elder man continued steadily, still without shifting his eyes from the road over which he guided the car, "I don't know why the possibility never occurred to us; but it never did. She is to marry Howard Snelling."

A quick wave of revulsion swept over Robert Morton. This, then, was the reason Snelling had filched from Willie his invention,—that he might have greater riches to lay at the feet of his fiancée, and perhaps reach more nearly a financial equality with her family. He saw it all now. And probably it was Snelling's jealousy of himself that had led him to retaliate by heaping his unwelcome attentions on Delight. At last it was clear as day,—Cynthia's growing coldness and her continual trips to and from Belleport in the boatbuilder's company. Robert Morton could have laughed aloud at his own stupidity. The engagement explained, too, Mr. Snelling's confusion and embarrassment at every mention of the Galbraith family. Why, a child might have fathomed the romance!

Again Mr. Galbraith was speaking.

"And now, Bob, for the last surprise of all. At first, I thought I would delay telling you until the papers were all in shape and ready for signature; but on second thought it seemed a pity to shut you out of the fun. We have all the data prepared to take out a patent on Mr. Spence's motor-boat."

Bob felt a sudden sinking of his heart, a stifling of his breath.

"The afternoon you all came over to Belleport," explained the financier, "I got Snelling and a draughtsman from our company to go to the shop and in the old gentleman's absence secure measurements and the necessary information. These we took to New York and put into proper hands, and when the affidavits are sworn to and everything is in legal form I see no reason why the government should not grant the patent. If it does, there should be a little fortune in the appliance."

Robert Morton did not move. He felt as if he had been turned to stone.

"I thought you would be interested," observed Mr. Galbraith, a suggestion of disappointment in his voice. "I did not consult you at first because I felt so sure that the idea would please you. I'm sorry if it doesn't. It seemed to me that if we could help Mr. Spence to patent his device, he might do quite a little with it. I thought he might not know how to go at the matter himself. So we are preparing all the papers for him to file an application in his own name. Afterward I propose either to purchase from him the rights to use it, or to buy the thing outright at a reasonable figure. In either case, the deal will net him quite an income and place him beyond the possibility of financial worry so long as he lives."

Oh, the relief that surged over Robert Morton! Joy rioted with shame, happiness with self-reproach. How feeble his faith had been. He hoped Mr. Galbraith did not read in his eyes the suspicions he had cherished.

Apparently he did not, for in the same kindly manner he asked:

"Do you think it would be better to keep the secret from the little old chap a bit longer or tell him now?"

"Oh, tell him now! Tell him now!" cried Bob. "Tell him right away when we get back!"

His companion laughed at his eagerness and for the first time their eyes met.

"And now, sir," began Robert Morton, a ring of buoyancy and light-heartedness in his voice such as had not sounded in it for weeks, "I have a surprise for you. I, too, am going to be married."

The car swerved suddenly as if a tremor had passed through the hands on the wheel.

"I am engaged to your niece, Mr. Galbraith."

"To my—my niece!" repeated the great man blankly. "I don't think I quite—"

"To Delight Hathaway."

Bob saw a dull brick-red flush color the neck of the capitalist and steal up into his face. For a moment he seemed at a loss for words. Then presently, as if he had succeeded in readjusting his ideas, he ejaculated:

"My word, Bob! Well, you young people have mixed yourselves up nicely! However, if you all are happy, that is the main thing; you are the ones to be suited. We shall still have you in the family, anyway." He laughed. "And about the property," he went on thoughtfully,—"this simplifies matters greatly, for it won't make much difference now which of you has it—you or the girl."

But Bob stopped him with a quick protest.

"I don't want Delight to know Madam Lee's money has previously been

willed to me," he said. "If she suspected that, she would never take it. You are not to tell her—promise me you will see to that."

"Of course I will arrange the affair any way you wish," Mr. Galbraith agreed, with a dubious frown. "But if you are to marry her, I really can't see what difference it would make."

"It will make a great deal of difference," declared the younger man. "In the one case the fortune will be hers to use as she pleases. She will have the independent right to hand it over to the Brewsters if she so desires. Our entire relation will be placed on another basis; for if I marry her under those conditions I marry an heiress, not the ward of a poor fisherman."

"I hadn't thought of that."

"On the other hand, if she refuses the money, it will be mine to lay at her feet. Can't you see what a vast contrast there will be in my position?"

Mr. Galbraith nodded thoughtfully as if considering the matter from a new angle.

"That's the only reason the fortune would mean anything to me—that I might have something to offer her," continued Robert Morton. "Of course, as you said, she would have the benefit of the money in either case; but it makes a difference whether it comes to her by the mere right of inheritance, or whether she takes it from her—husband."

"There is a distinction," admitted the elder man. "Now that you call my attention to it, I can see that readily. It is a delicate one, but its consequences are far-reaching. Well, you shall have your way! A proportion of the legacy shall be offered to Delight, and the secret regarding it shall be yours to keep or divulge as you see fit. You are a noble fellow, Bob. I only wish—" He checked the impulsive phrase that rose to his lips but not before the listener had caught its import.

"Mr. Snelling is a fine man, Mr. Galbraith," broke in Bob instantly, dreading the words that might follow.

"Oh, I know it—there is no question about that," the capitalist assented with haste. "Success is written all over his future, and I know he will be a son-in-law

to be proud of. He and Cynthia are royally happy too, and no doubt know better than I what they want. After all, none of us can live other people's lives; each must work out his own."

"You've said it, Mr. Galbraith."

The financier smiled and his eyes twinkled beneath the shaggy brows that arched them.

"You will have to be getting used to calling me by another name, young man," he said. "Remember I am to be your uncle."

CHAPTER XXII

DELIGHT MAKES HER DECISION

Zenas Henry Brewster sat on the edge of his veranda, his long legs crossed before him with a certain angular grace and his corncob pipe held rigidly between his teeth. Beside him, ranged like sparrows on a telegraph wire, were Captain Phineas Taylor, Captain Jonas Baker, and Captain Benjamin Todd. From the row of pipes a miniature cloud of smoke ascended, but save for the distant pulsing of the sea and the murmur of the wind in the linden near the door not a sound was to be heard through the afternoon stillness. Yet in spite of the tranquillity of the day and the apparent peace of the four figures that gazed so immovably out upon the reach of blue, an electrical current of suspense was evident in the four tense forms. They were not looking at the bay, exquisite as it was in its cerulean beauty. Instead, the head of each man was turned toward the road that skirted the harbor and wound its way between the pines at the foot of the hill where the white cottage stood.

"He'd oughter be comin' pretty soon, hadn't he?" Captain Phineas ventured at last, unable longer to restrain his impatience. "He said four o'clock in his letter. It must be 'most that, don't you think?"

"Mighty nigh unto it," replied Captain Benjamin. "As I reckon it, havin' made

the necessary allowances for my watch losin' three-an'-a-quarter minutes an hour, it should be about four now."

"It ain't but a quarter of four," sniffed Captain Jonas with an air of superiority. "That timepiece of yours, Benjamin, ain't worth the silver that was put into it. What's the use of havin' a watch that keeps you figgerin' backwards an' forards, an' doin' sums all day? I wouldn't be bothered with it."

Captain Benjamin bridled with indignation.

"I don't see but my watch is good as yours," retorted he. "The only difference is I'm addin' from mornin' 'til night while you're substractin'."

The discomfited Captain Baker frowned.

"Mine comes out even minutes, anyhow," announced he. "If it does shoot ahead some, it don't keep me reckonin' in fractions like yours does. I'd see myself in Davie Jones's locker 'fore I'd go addin' three-quarter minutes together from sunrise to sunset."

"Oh, addin' fractions is mighty good trainin' for Benjamin," put in the peace-loving Captain Phineas, with a chuckle. "It keeps his arithmetic brushed up. I'll bet you he could beat you at a sum, Jonas."

The triumphant Captain Benjamin observed a complacent silence.

"Let Benjamin an' his watch alone, Jonas," drawled Zenas Henry, speaking for the first time. "Somebody in the house has got to be up on mathematics, an' it may as well be Benjamin as another. I'm only sorry his ticker holds him just to addin'; if it would only make him multiply an' divide some, an' take him into square root 'twould give him a liberal all-round education. Still, there's always hopes it may take a new turn. The last time it went overboard there was indications that 'twouldn't be long before 'twould be leadin' him into algebra an' the fourth dimension."

Captain Benjamin grinned at the sally.

"It won't be goin' overboard no more now, Zenas Henry," responded he serenely, "'cause since the *Sea Gull's* got that eel-grass-proof contrivance hitched to her, there won't be no call for me to be lyin' head down'ards astern. I'll be

settin' up like a Christian in future—all of us will. My soul, but Bob Morton an' Willie Spence did a good job on that boat! It's somethin' to have a young chap with brains like that marryin' into the family! I'll bet there's 'most nothin' on earth he couldn't tackle."

"You're right!" Captain Phineas chimed in. "If Delight's got to get married—an' we'd be a lot of selfish brutes not to want her to—she certainly has picked a promisin' husband. You can lose money—fling it away or have it stolen from you—but you can't lose brains."

"That's so, Phineas! That's so!" Zenas Henry said. "Besides, 'tain't as if he was takin' her to Indiana. New York ain't fur. Why, I'll stake a catch of mackerel we could fetch up at that Long Island place in the *Sea Gull*."

"Of course we could, Zenas Henry," agreed Captain Jonas, flashing a glance of affection into his friend's face. "There's no question about it. Take a good clear day an' the sea runnin' right, we could make it without a mite of trouble. Long Island wouldn't be anything of a cruise. No place that we can sail to in our own boat is fur away."

A listener of discrimination might have detected in the dialogue a note of assumed optimism and suspected that the four old men seated like images on the piazza rail were trying to buoy up one another's courage, and in the assumption he would not, perhaps, have been far wrong.

"What do you s'pose this Galbraith has up his sleeve, Zenas Henry, that he should be comin' over here?" Captain Benjamin Todd speculated, during a lapse in the conversation. "He has some scheme in mind, you can be sure of that."

"Why do you always go rootin' up evil like as if you was diggin' fur clams, Benjamin?" inquired Captain Phineas impatiently, "All Mr. Galbraith said was he wanted to see Zenas Henry. There surely is no harm in that. Delight bein' his niece, it's only to be expected he'd want to get sight of the folks she is livin' with. Most natural thing in the world, it seems to me. 'Twould be queerer if he didn't show no interest in the people who have brought her up."

"That's so, Phineas," Captain Jonas echoed. "Nothin's likelier than that he's comin' to sorter thank Zenas Henry."

"Thank us!" Zenas Henry burst out. "Thank us for bringin' up our own child!

What business is it of his? Do we go traipsin' to Belleport to thank him for bein' good to his children?"

"No, no, Zenas Henry," Captain Phineas replied soothingly. "Of course he ain't comin' here to thank us. That would be plumb ridiculous. More probable he's comin' as I said, to make a friendly call since he's a relative."

But in spite of this reassurance, the ripple of misgiving had not entirely died away before the well-known touring-car with the New York financier in its tonneau made its appearance at the foot of the hill.

"He's comin', Zenas Henry!"

"There he is!"

"That's him!" was the excited comment.

But Zenas Henry maintained a grim silence. He had risen to his full height and now stood braced to meet an ordeal which he dreaded far more than he would have been willing to admit. His gaunt figure was stiff with resolution, his jaw set, his lips compressed. It was the same expression his countenance had worn the night he had gone forth into the storm to rescue the sinking crew of the *Michleen* from probable death; it was the expression his companions dreaded and feared,—the fighter ready for combat. Yet his antagonist, as he alighted from the motor-car and crossed the grass in leisurely fashion, appeared to be anything but a formidable adversary. He came toward Delight, who had hurried out to meet him, with easy friendliness, his hands extended and a smile of genuine affection on his face.

"I am glad to see you, my dear," he said, "—and in your own home, too. I fancy you must have thought me a great while in coming. I was detained in New York much longer than I expected; otherwise you would have seen me days ago."

She smiled up into the kindly gray eyes.

"And my, my, my! What a lot of mischief you and Bob have been getting into in my absence! You sly little puss! You may well blush. The bare idea of your springing a surprise like that on your new uncle! Bob has told me all about it," he suddenly became grave, "and I am very glad for you both. You could not have

chosen a finer husband, little girl. Robert Morton is one man in a thousand. We'll talk more of him by and by. Just now I wish to meet all your family. You must present each one, so that I shall not get all these many captains confused."

How simply and naturally he bridged the awkwardness of the moment! Before they realized it, Abbie and the three veteran seafarers were chatting gaily with the visitor, and even Zenas Henry was venturing out of his reserve and unbending into geniality when the words "*and now to business*" chilled the warmth of his mood and sent him back into his shell, thrilling with vague forebodings.

With every eye fixed expectantly upon him, Mr. Galbraith took off his Panama and fanned himself.

"Now that we have put together a few of the links that bind our two families," he began, "and laid the foundation for a friendship which I hope the future will foster, there are a few intimate matters of which I wish to speak. First there is Bob Morton, and if you want any reassuring as to his character, I can give it to you. Your own wise and shrewd discrimination has led you to accept him at his face value and your estimate of him has not been a mistaken one. I do not think there is a young man in the world of greater sterling worth than the one your daughter has chosen for a husband."

At the firm emphasis on the word *daughter*, Zenas Henry's jaw relaxed.

"Of course, you feel the same anxiety for your child that I feel for mine, and realize how much a woman's happiness depends on the man into whose hands she puts her life. In giving up Cynthia I know what it means to you to give up Delight. We parents cannot expect to have all the joy and none of the suffering that comes with having children, however." He looked at Zenas Henry and a quiet sympathy passed from one man to the other. "But we should be selfish indeed were we to deny to those we love the best gift heaven has to bestow. It is making others happy in their way, not in ours, that tests our real affection for them. And so I know that underneath all your personal regrets you rejoice in the prospect of Delight's marriage as I rejoice in Cynthia's. We shall not always be in this world to safeguard our daughters. How much better to see their future in the protection of younger and stronger men than ourselves!"

"Yes, yes!" murmured Zenas Henry.

"And now I want to speak to Delight, although I am sure she will wish you to hear what I have to say to her. It is a matter of business about which she alone can decide. When Madam Lee, her grandmother, died, she left a large property in real estate and securities which she willed outright to an old friend of whom she was devotedly fond. She felt the Galbraiths were amply provided for and therefore, with the exception of certain jewels and heirlooms that were to be retained in the family, she bequeathed them nothing. We understood the motives that governed her in thus disposing of her property and were in full accord with them. The document, however, was drawn up before she knew of the existence of this other granddaughter, and in view of this fact, the person to whom the property is willed feels that it is only just that the whole or a part of it should be relinquished in Delight's favor."

There was an instant's pause.

"This the beneficiary does of his own accord, not alone as a matter of duty or as a matter of honor, but because his affection was so deep for Madam Lee that it is a pleasure to him to act as he thinks she would have desired. Had not her end come so suddenly, she would without doubt have made a new will and done this herself."

"You mean that without courts or lawyers askin' him to, this man just wants to hand over the money?" gasped Captain Jonas.

"Yes."

"Well, I dunno who he is, but I'll say this much for him—he's an honest cuss!" ejaculated the fisherman.

In spite of his earnestness Mr. Galbraith smiled.

Delight, however, had risen during the interval of silence and with nervously clasped hands had gone to Zenas Henry's side, where she now stood, her eyes large with thought.

Her uncle turned toward her.

"Well, my dear, what have you to say?" he asked.

"It is—is very kind of a stranger to be so noble, so generous," she declared

gently. "He mustn't think that I do not appreciate it. But I couldn't take a cent of the money," she went on with quick decision. "Even had it been willed to me in the first place, it would have made no difference. I don't want to be unkind or to hurt anybody's feelings. But can't you see that Madam Lee was really nothing in my life? She came in and went out of it like a phantom, and she did not begin to mean to me what she did to this old friend of hers. Just because at the close of her days it was discovered that I was of her kin, it established no bond of affection between us—nothing but a legal claim. If she had lived and we had grown dear to one another, and she had given the fortune to me out of her heart, then I should have accepted it gladly. But to have it bestowed on me merely by right of succession—I couldn't think of touching a penny of it!"

She caught her breath, and her chin rose a trifle higher.

"And besides," she continued, "I would rather just be indebted to Zenas Henry and my own family. My grandmother was unjust to my parents, unkind. Although she lived to be sorry for it and would, doubtless, have done differently when she was older, she was harsh and cruel to them. I have forgiven but I never can forget it. I don't want the Lee money. Zenas Henry and the three captains give me all I need, and I have no fears but that in the future Bob can look out for me."

There was something in the proudly poised figure, so slender and erect, so firm and self-respecting in its calm decision, that roused every hearer's admiration and drew from the New York financier an involuntary homage. Nevertheless with a fear that impulse might have prompted the girl's verdict, he felt impelled to explain:

"But you are tossing away a large sum—thousands, child! You and your people would be rich."

"We don't want to be rich!" cried Delight, with quivering nostril. "Do we, Zenas Henry?" she slipped an arm about his neck as he collapsed into his seat on the piazza rail. "We are happy just as we are! You don't want me to take the Lee money, do you?" she asked, putting her cheek against his.

"No, honey, no! You shan't be beholden to any one but me," he answered. "I hoped you'd decide as you have. 'Twould take half the pleasure out of my life if it warn't us that was to do for you. Just the same, Mr. Galbraith, we thank you

kindly for bringin' the offer, an' your friend for makin' it; an' though we refuse it, 'tain't done in no unfriendly spirit."

"I understand that," nodded the financier.

Nevertheless he gazed with no small amount of awe and respect at these poor fisherfolk who could so lightly fling aside a fortune.

"Mebbe," resumed Zenas Henry, "you'll tell this friend of Madam Lee's that we've took note of his squareness."

"Oh, yes, do tell him that it was splendid of him, splendid!" interrupted Delight.

"He's a gentleman, whoever he is," Captain Phineas added. "Tell him so from all of us."

"You might like to tell him so yourselves," returned Mr. Galbraith slowly.

"Eh?" Zenas Henry questioned. "Oh, we might write him, you mean. That's so. Likely it would be more decent. We'd be surer of his knowin' how we felt if 'twas put down in black an' white. What's his name?"

"Robert Morton."

"Robert Morton! Robert Mor—not our—not *Bob*!"

"Yes."

He saw Delight flush, and her eyes suddenly fill with tears.

"Bob!" she whispered half-aloud. "Bob!"

Zenas Henry drew her closer.

"What does the girl want with money," he demanded, "when she's got a man like that? He's better than all the money on earth."

"But she'll get the money just the same, Zenas Henry," piped Captain Jonas. "She'll get it. Have you thought of that?"

"It will be Bob's money, not mine," returned Delight with shy dignity.

CHAPTER XXIII

FAME COMES TO THE DREAMER OF DREAMS

Richard Galbraith returned thoughtfully over the Harbor Road not sorry at the turn affairs had taken. The honorable and magnanimous thing had been done with the Lee fortune, and it had been firmly and proudly refused. Now it could go unreservedly to Robert Morton for whom the financier had a particular regard and in whose wisdom to make a sensible use of it he felt every confidence. The money would not only place the young man in a position to marry without delay, but indirectly its benefits would reach the two individuals that Madam Lee would most earnestly have desired to help. Nor did the capitalist's regard for Delight, which had steadily been growing, decrease when viewed from this new angle. The Lees were a proud race and the girl came justly by the attribute. He was not sure, now that he reflected on the matter, but that he himself would have scorned the legacy in the same high-handed fashion. Nevertheless he had not expected this termination of the interview, had not expected it at all. His recently acquired relatives were proving themselves interesting persons. Who would have dreamed that a penniless fisherman's daughter would have tossed the Lee ducats back into his face?

He laughed to himself when he thought of the paradox. He had always admired spirit in a woman.

The car rolled on, flashing past swamps of swaying iris bedded deep in the salt marsh-grass, past tangles of fragrant honeysuckle and garlands of clinging clematis, and presently shot out into the sunny stretch of road that like a white ribbon bound the blue waters of the bay. When it reached the bluff where the sand mounted into green-capped dunes, patched in their hollows with shadows of violet, it slowed down and came to a stop before Willie Spence's weathered cottage.

The old inventor and Bob were seated idly on the workshop steps. No longer

did the vibrant hammer and purring plane blend their metallic notes with the music of the surf. Their work was done, and until he was "kitched with a new idee" Willie had nothing to do but smoke beneath the shade of the grapevine and rambler rose and watch the vast reach of water to the line where it melted into the blue of the sky.

Since his interview with Mr. Galbraith, Robert Morton had had all he could do to keep from Willie the assurance that Janoah's accusations were false and that instead of misfortune good luck was winging its way toward the low gray house on the bay. Bob was a generous fellow and it added tenfold to his present happiness to know that joy was also coming to one toward whom he cherished an abiding affection. The secret, however, was Mr. Galbraith's, and until the New Yorker saw fit to impart it he must maintain silence. Therefore, with smiles wreathing his face and the wonderful story locked tightly in his possession, he tried to be patient until the final revelation should be made.

And now with the approach of the capitalist he knew that at last the great moment had arrived. The dream of years was to come true and the darling of Willie's brain, his greatest and most ambitious idea, was to be made a potent factor in the broad universe. So perfectly did he understand the quaint, half-shrinking inventor that he knew well no money, no fame, no praise could mean to him what this recognition would. Persons were to use the thing he had thought out,—to use it neither because of friendship nor interest, but because it was a practical, indispensable article which no mind had previously given to the world. In the days and weeks Bob had spent in the Spence cottage it was impossible not to read all this and more in the sensitive, hungering nature of the man who had worked beside him. Love and parenthood in its smaller and more specific sense had passed Willie Spence by, but in their place there had sprung into life a broader altruism and a larger creative impulse. The children his mind begot were as much of his blood and marrow as if they had actually been born of his own flesh; and to have one of them go victoriously forth into that moving current that reached so far beyond his own humble door would be like sending a child into battle. It transformed the father to one of the elect.

Surely, thought Robert Morton, great and unexpected issues had centered about his visit to Wilton. When confronted by the present unfoldings, who would have the temerity to boast that one's destinies were matters of chance?

"Well," called Mr. Galbraith as he came up the walk, "you two people look

comfortable. Is there room on that doorstep for one more?"

"Certainly, sir! Certainly!" Willie replied. "But wouldn't you rather we heaved a box or something out of the shop for you to set on? You'll find these steps a good way down, I'm afraid."

"Not a bit of it," the New Yorker answered, dropping into the welcome shade of the trellis. "You have deserted the shop, I see. Does that mean your work is done?"

"Done an' delivered," smiled Willie. "We've discharged our cargo an' ain't took nothin' else aboard yet. We're just kinder ridin' at anchor."

"How did your friend, Mr. Brewster, like your handiwork?"

In spite of his native modesty Willie's bronzed face lighted with pride.

"Say, you'd oughter seen him!" exclaimed he, forgetting everything else in his pleasure. "He was struck clean abeam! He never suspected nothin' about it an' the surprise took him broadside. An' it works!" continued the little man with enthusiasm. "Yes, siree! It works! That cockleshell of a *Sea Gull* goes rippin' along through the eel grass, her propeller clear and free as if she had twenty fathoms of water under her. It's as pretty a sight as you'd care to look on."

Mr. Galbraith watched the shining eyes of the inventor.

"Mr. Spence," he said, "that idea of yours is going to be a very useful and valuable one. Have you thought of that?"

Willie flushed.

"Well," replied he with hesitation, "yesterday when I was shuckin' clams it did come to me that mebbe there'd be other folks besides Zenas Henry would like it."

"A great many folks!" rejoined the capitalist. "I am in a position to know, because shipbuilding chances to be my business."

"So I was told," his listener remarked quietly. An expression of quick surprise passed over the other's countenance.

"Yes," he went on, "both Mr. Snelling and I are interested in boats in our way."

"It's a fine job," Willie observed evasively.

"Yes, it is. Not only is shipbuilding a fascinating occupation but it is a patriotic one as well, for I believe the resurrection of our merchant marine to be one of the most important duties of our nation. Everything that works toward that end is a service to the country, in my estimation."

"You're right, sir," was the rejoinder. "I'm terrible fond of ships myself. They're human as people an' as different. You can turn 'em out from the same model, but no two of 'em will ever be alike. I've got a little yawl down on the shore I wouldn't take a thousand dollars for. She's knowin' as if she was alive. I can tell to an inch how much sail she'll stand an' how much water she'll draw. She answers to the tiller quick as a child to your voice, too—quicker'n most children. I've had her for years, an' smooth weather or foul she ain't never gone back on me. Folks disappoint you sometimes; but a boat never does." As if sensing that he was venturing on dangerous ground, he stopped abruptly. "So you build boats, do you?" he commented to change the subject.

Richard Galbraith nodded.

"That's my calling," he assented. "And since it is, I am in a position to handle things that have to do with boats of all kinds. That is why your motor-boat idea has interested me so deeply. I saw its possibilities from the moment I first laid eyes on it, and I wish to congratulate you on having given the public such a useful invention."

"It ain't got far toward the public," objected Willie, with a deprecating shrug of his shoulders.

"But it is going to," Mr. Galbraith declared with promptness. "Bob, Mr. Snelling and I have taken matters into our own hands and have ventured to have an application for a patent prepared—description, claims and all; and after you have sworn to the affidavit and affixed your signature, we will send it off to Washington, where I haven't a doubt it will be granted. I thought this would save you the bother of attending to it yourself."

Poor Willie was too amazed to speak.

"Now Galbraith and Company will want the monopoly of that patent, Mr. Spence," hurried on the financier. "We are going to make you a proposition either for the purchase of it outright, or for its use on a royalty basis."

With a supreme disregard for business, Willie wheeled on him before he could go further and said simply:

"Law, Mr. Galbraith, you can use the thing an' welcome. Turn out as many of 'em as you like. It won't make no odds to me. But the patent—think of havin' a real patent on somethin' I've thought out! Just you picture it!"

He repeated the words in a soft, musing voice that hushed his hearers into stillness.

"I never thought to live to see the day anything of mine would be patented. That means that nobody else anywhere in the world ever was kitched by that same idee before, don't it? It's sorter—sorter wonderful an' gratifyin'. But if it hadn't been for the rest of you that's helped me, the claptraption would never have been in any kind of shape. 'Twould 'a' been just a hit-or-miss contrivance like the rest of the idees I've got indoors. You see, I never had the schoolin' to manage my notions, even when once I'd got 'em. I know that well enough. So if I should get a patent on this thing, 'twould be mostly due to you that's helped me, an' I thank you most humble." His voice trembled with feeling. "After all you've done—the three of you—you wouldn't expect me to take money from you for usin' the scheme, would you? Take it an' welcome, an' may it bring luck to your business! But there's one thing I would like," he added timidly. "If we should get them patent papers from the government an' they ain't no particular use to you, I'd like to keep 'em by me to read over now an' again. 'Twould sorter make it all seem more real some way, an' less as if I'd dreamed it. I've imagined this happenin' so many times an' woke up to find 'twas only imaginin's."

The blue eyes softened into mistiness.

"To think of gettin' a patent! To think of it! Celestina will be glad. I'm afraid, by an' large, I've bothered her quite considerable with my strings, an' spools, an' tacks, an' such. She'll like to know some of 'em went for somethin', after all. The Brewsters an' Delight will be pleased, too. An' there's Janoah! Oh, Janoah must be told right away, Bob, quick's ever we can fetch it. 'Twill clear the air 'twixt him an' me, an' make us both happier. I ain't never been able to convince him

that if you put your trust in folks they seldom betray it. Who knows but when he finds out what's happened he'll kitch *that* idee? If he should, 'twould be worth all the inventions and patents in the world put together. Look for the best, I say, an' you get it every time," continued the little old man, with a smile of exquisite serenity. "The universe is full of kindly souls with hearts a-beatin' inside 'em same's yours. Meet 'em with your hands out, an' their hands will come the other halfway."

"It is a pity you can't take out a patent on that notion, Mr. Spence, and sow it broadcast," returned the New Yorker soberly.

Willie's gaze traveled with wistful and reverent faith across the other's face to the sky above him.

"Somehow," he murmured, "I like to believe that idee was patented centuries ago by One who put it right to work by believin' the best of all us poor sinners. Folks ain't used the notion yet, much as they might, but they're gettin' round to, an' the day'll come when not to believe in the other feller's soul will be like—well, like havin' a motor-boat without our attachment," concluded he whimsically.

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